

## **MAHATMA GANDHI (1869-1948)**

Mohandas Karachand Gandhi, popularly known as Mahatma Gandhi continues to provoke interest even after more than half a century after his assassination in 1948. It is true that Richard Attenborough's film on Gandhi immensely popularised Gandhi all over the world though Gandhi remains an important topic of research and discussion among those interested in exploring alternative ideological traditions. Gandhi's own writings on various themes are plenty and less ambiguous. His articulation is not only clear and simple but also meaningful in similar contexts in which he led the most gigantic nationalist struggle of the 20th century. He wrote extensively in Indian opinion, young India, and Harijan, the leading newspapers of the era where he commented on the issues of contemporary relevance. Writing for the ordinary people he usually employed metaphors to teach Indians about their abilities and also their strong traditions. This was one of the ways in which he involved Indians in non violent struggles against British imperialism, untouchability and communal discord.

### **CONTRIBUTION TO INDIAN NATIONALISM**

The contribution of Gandhi to Indian national movement was unparalleled. He made the Indian National Congress a people's congress and the national movement a mass movement. He made people fearless and bold and taught them the non violent methods for fighting against the evils of caste system and injustice. He had a strong passion for individual liberty which was closely bound with his understanding of truth and self-realisation. That Gandhiji was evident from his erstwhile nationalist colleagues was evident when he launched his satyagraha movements in remote areas of Champaran (Bihar), Kheda and Ahmadabad (Gujarat) instead of towns and cities that had so far remained the hub of the nationalist activities. His political strategies brought about radical change in the Congress that now expanded its sphere of influence even in the villages. These three movements projected Gandhi as an emerging leader with different kinds of mobilizing

tactics. While explaining the rise of Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru thus argued, Gandhiji knew India for better than we did, and a man who could command such tremendous devotion and loyalty must have something in him that corresponded to the needs and aspirations of the masses. Besides these local movements Gandhi led three major pan Indian movements. The 1919 Non-co-operation Movement was the first one that gained significantly with the merger of the Khilafat agitation of the Muslim against the dismantling of the Khalif in Turkey. The Civil Disobedience movement in which Gandhi reigned supreme. The 1942 quit India movement, also known as the open rebellion, was the last of the three Pan – Indian campaigns that Gandhi spearheaded.

### **FOUNDATION OF GANDHIAN PRINCIPLES**

Gandhi's social and political thought is multidimensional. His political ideology was a radical departure from the past in the sense that it was neither constitutional loyalist of the Moderates nor extremism of the revolutionary terrorists. In his articulation of Indian nationalism he sought to incorporate the emerging constituencies of nationalist politics that remained peripheral in the bygone era. Gandhi was perhaps the only effective nationalist leader who truly attempted to transcend the class conflicts by devising a method which for the first time, brought about the national aggregation of an all India character. His social and political ideas were the outcome of his serious engagement with issues reflective of India's peculiar socio-economic circumstances. Gandhi simultaneously launched movements not only against the British rule but also against the atrocious social structures, customs, norms and values, justified in the name of Indian's age-old traditions. Hence, Gandhian thought is neither purely political nor absolutely social, but a complex mix of the two.

Gandhian philosophy was a profound engagement with modernity and its pitfalls. Against the evils of industrialisation, materialism and selfish pursuits, Gandhiji suggested swaraj, swadeshi, trusteeship and a minimal state vested only with co-coordinative powers. He was a deeply a religious man. This perspective shaped his politics his economic ideas and his view of society. However, the religious approach that he imbibed was markedly different from other religious man. He

accepts the inner oneness of all existence in the cosmic spirit, and saw all living beings as representatives of the eternal divine reality. Gandhiji believed that man's ultimate goal in life was self-realisation. Self-realisation, according to him, meant seeing God face to face, i.e., realising the absolute truth or, knowing oneself. He believed that it could not be achieved unless man identified himself with the whole of mankind. This necessarily involved participation in politics.

According to Gandhi, man's ultimate aim is the realisation of God and all his activities social political religious have to be guided by the ultimate aim of the vision of God. It is only through the means of self-purification that self-realisation can be attained. The fasts, prayers and works of service that he undertook were all directed towards such an end. In his autobiography, Gandhiji says that self-realisation required self-purification as its ethical foundation. Men's moral life flows from such a search into this own self and express itself in outward activity of fellowship and concern to others. This ethical outlook is backbone of Gandhiji's political philosophy even as his ethics has for its foundation in his metaphysical principles. To him the moral discipline of the individual is the most important means of social construction. Gandhiji invoked the five-fold moral principles: truth, nonviolence, non-stealing, non possession and celibacy. The observance of these moral principles would purify man and enable him to strive after self-realisation.

### **TECHNIQUES OF POLITICAL STRUGGLE: SATYAGRAHA AND NON-VIOLENCE**

The basic principles of Gandhian techniques are the Satyagraha and Non-violence or ahimsa. Most authors on Gandhi seem to conflate the two. What is rather relatively less known is the fact that during the period between his South African experiment and the agitation against the Rowlatt Act, it was Satyagraha that held the key to his entire campaign. Only in the aftermath of the 1919 antiRowlatt Satyagraha, was non-violence included as integral to Gandhi's Satyagraha campaign. There is no doubt that ahimsa always remained a significant influence in the conceptualisation of satyagraha, but it was not projected as crucial a component as it later became. As a technique or method, Satyagraha

was always informed by ahimsa, though its role was not vividly articulated till their 1919 campaign against the Rowlatt Act. From 1919 onwards, Gandhiji paid enormous attention to both conceptualising and justifying the importance of ahimsa in political mobilisation by referring to the ancient scriptures in his defence. Gandhiji was preparing for a pan-Indian non-cooperation movement in the Satyagraha format in which ahimsa was to play a significant role in political mobilisation. The micro experiments of Satyagraha in Champaran, Kheda and Ahmadabad where ahimsa was constitutive of Gandhian model of anti imperialism, therefore, became decisive in Gandhi's social and political thought.

### **GANDHIAN DOCTRINE OF SATYAGRAHA**

Satyagraha was a formidable weapon in the hands of Gandhiji. It is a natural outcome from the supreme concept of truth. Satyagraha is literally holding on to truth, and it means, therefore, Truth force. Satyagraha means the exercise of the purest soul-force against all injustice, oppression and exploitation. Suffering and trust are attributes of soul-force. Truth is soul or spirit, it is there for e known as soul force. It excludes the use of violence because man is not capable of knowing the absolute truth. Truth or satya, for Gandhiji, is go himself. He, therefore, changed the statement, ' God is truth' later in his life into ' Truth is God ' and suggested that it was one of the fundamental discoveries of his life's experiments. The life of man, for Gandhiji, is a march of his pursuit in search of Truth or God.

Satyagraha is not merely the insistence on truth, it is, in fact, holding on to truth through ways which are moral and non-insolent; it is not the imposition of one's will over others, but it is appealing to the reasoning of the opponent, it is not coercion but is persuasion It means urge for satya or Truth. Gandhi highlights several attributes to Satyagraha. It is a moral weapon and does not entertain ill-feeling towards the adversary, it is a non violent device and calls upon its user to love his enemy, it does not weaken the opponent but strengthens him morally; it is a weapon of the brave and is constructive in its approach. For Gandhiji , a satyagrahi is always truthful, morally imbued, non violent

and a person without any malice, he is one who is devoted to the service of all.

Gandhiji firmly believed that truth can be attained only through non-violence which was not negative, meaning absence of violence, but was a positive condition of love. Resort to non-violence is recourse to love. In its positive sense, it seeks non-injury to others, both in words as well as deeds.

Gandhiji recommends several techniques of Satyagraha. The techniques of Satyagraha may take the form of non-cooperation, civil disobedience, Hijrat, fasting and strike. Gandhiji believes that oppression and exploitation were possible only on account of the cooperation of the people. If the people refused to cooperate with the government, the latter could not function properly. Noncooperation may manifest itself in the form of hartals, Picketing etc. Hartal involved the stopping of work as a measure of protest and its objective was to strike the imagination of the people and the government. According to Gandhiji, hartals in order to be effective were to be voluntarily organized and non-violent method could be used. In the case of picketing also, no force was to be used. Picketing should avoid coercion, intimidation, discourtesy, burning of effigies and hunger strike.

Civil disobedience was another effective method recommended by Gandhiji for the realisation of satyagraha. It was regarded as a 'complete effective and bloodless substitute of armed revolt'. There can be individual as well as mass civil disobedience. According to Gandhiji, complete civil disobedience implying a refusal to render obedience to every single state made law can be a very powerful movement. It can become 'more dangerous than an armed rebellion' because the stupendous power of innocent suffering undergone on a great scale has great potency.

Another form of satyagraha suggested by Gandhiji was Hijrat which implied voluntary exile from the permanent place of residence. This was to be done by those who feel oppressed cannot live without loss of self-

respect in a particular place and lack the strength that comes from true nonviolence of the capacity to defend themselves violently.

Fasting was another method of Satyagraha. This method was considered by Gandhiji as a fiery weapon but it has to be applied only against those who are bound by ties of close personal affection. It required purity of mind, discipline, humility and faith. Gandhiji's views was that fasting stirred the sluggish conscience and fired the loving hearts to action.

Another method of Satyagraha was in the form of strike. Gandhiji's view of strike was different from that advocated by the socialists and communists. According to Gandhiji, strike was a voluntary, purificatory suffering undertaken to convert the erring opponent. He did not believe in the theory of class war. His view was that industry was a joint enterprise of labour and capital, and both of them were trustees. The strikers were required to put forward their demands in very clear terms.

Some scholars have tried to connect and identify the Gandhian doctrine of Satyagraha with passive resistance. While identifying the features of satyagraha in his Hind swaraj, Gandhi was of the opinion that passive resistance fails to convey what he meant. It describes a method, but no hint of the system of which it is only a part. In other words, the similarity between satyagraha and passive resistance was just peripheral since both of them were clearly defined methods of political resistance which were opposed to violence. Gandhi may certainly have drawn on passive resistance conceptually, but when he defined satyagraha he underlined its unique nature and characteristics. As he elaborated in Hind swaraj, passive resistance is a method of securing rights by personal suffering; it is reverse of repugnant to my conscience, I use social-force.'

Passive resistance can never be equated with satyagrah for the simple reason that it involved application of force as well, Hence he was most categorical by saying that passive resistance is an all sided sword, it can be used anyhow, it blesses him who uses at and him against

whom it is used without drawing a drop of blood, it produced for reaching results. Satyagraha was not physical force but soul force that drew on the spontaneous sacrifice of self by the participants, which according to Gandhi constituted the core of his campaign. Gandhi associated passive resistance with internal violence. It unleashed forces of prejudice and separatism rather than compassion and incisiveness. Gandhiji's Satyagraha was not only a political doctrine directed against the state, it had also social and economic trusts relevant to and drawn on human natures. In contrast with the constitutional and extremist methods of political mobilisation, satyagraha was highly original and creative conceptualisation of social change and political action. The principles governing satyagraha and its participants are illustrative of his endeavour to organise mass protest within a strict format that clearly stipulates the duties and responsibilities of the individual satyagraha. It is beyond dispute that satyagraha was to be a continuous process seeking to transform the individuals by appreciating the human moral values that remained captive due to colonialism and various social prejudices, and justified in the name of religion. NON – VIOLENCE

Gandhiji cannot be regarded as the inventor and propounder of this principle. He discovered the principle of non-violence from the pages of history and his greatness lies in the fact that he made it on the basis of his life and adopted to serve the needs of time. He transformed it into social and political technique. He regards it as the supreme concept for the reformation of politics.

According to Gandhiji, Non-violence or Ahimsa is the heart of all religions. Non-violence is truth itself; it's very soul, and its fruit. Truth and non-violence are two sides of a smooth unstamped metallic disc and are so intervened that it is very difficult to separate them. Gandhiji put more emphasis on truth than non-violence because he believed that truth existed beyond and unconditioned by space and time, but non-violence existed only on the part of all finite beings.

Non-violence is, in fact, the acceptance of spiritual metaphysics. It is not merely the negative act of refraining from doing offence, injury and harm to others but really it represents the ancient law

of positive self-sacrifice and constructive suffering. Gandhiji interpreted it as signifying utter selflessness and universal love. The ultimate aim of non-violence is even to love the so-called enemies or opponents.

According to Gandhiji, there are three levels of non-violence. The highest form was the enlightened non-violence of resourcefulness or the non-violence of the brave. It was the non-violence of one who adopted it not by painful necessity but by inner conviction based on moral considerations. Non-violence was not merely political but embraces every sphere of life. The second kind of nonviolence was adopted as a measure of expediency and sound policy in some spheres of life. That was the non-violence of the weak or the passive non-violence of the helpless. It is weakness rather than moral conviction which rules out the use of violence. It pursued honestly with real courage so long as it is accepted as a policy. It is capable of achieving results to a certain extent. However, it is not as effective as non-violence.

The third level of non-violence is the passive violence of the coward. As Gandhiji has rightly pointed out, cowardice and ahimsa(non-violence) do not go together and more than water and fire'. The coward seeks to avoid the conflict and flies from the danger. Cowardice is an impotent worse than violence. Gandhiji believes that non-violence cannot be taught to a person who fears to die and has no power of resistance. There is a hope for violent man to be some day non-violent, but there is none for cowardice. This sound principle is based on the fact that despotism, could never have existed if it did not have fear as its foundation.

Gandhiji believed that self-suffering is an indispensable part of the struggle for the attainment of truth through non-violence. Self-suffering which he regarded as non-violence in its dynamic condition, had to be conscious. Conscious suffering means pitting of one's whole soul against the will of the tyrant. Ahimsa or non-violence, therefore, means infinite love. Gandhiji wrote thus: 'Nonviolence is the first article of my faith. It is also the last article of my creed.' It is the imperative duty of 'satyagrahi to make endless endeavours for the realization of truth through non-violence. Gandhiji used this technique of non-violent



resistance not only in combating the British occupation in India but also in dealing with India's internal problems.

For Gandhi, ahimsa or Non-violence meant both passive and active love, refraining from causing harm and destruction to living beings as well as positively promoting their well being. Gandhi defined ahimsa in two contrasting ways: On the one hand, in its narrow sense, it simply meant avoidance of acts harming others, while in its positive sense, it denoted promoting their well being, based on infinite love. Jawaharlal Nehru characterized Gandhian principle of Ahimsa as 'a positive and dynamic method of action and it was not meant for those who meekly accept the status quo'. Ahimsa, in its positive connotation, was based on highest moral values, epitomized in the unselfish self".

Ahimsa was complementary to Gandhi's model of conflict resolution that was certainly the most original and creative model of social change and political action even under most adverse circumstances. This was a theory of politics that gradually became the dominant ideology of a national political movement in which Gandhi reigned supreme.

### **A CRITIQUE OF WESTERN CIVILISATION HIND SWARAJ**

Gandhiji was highly critical of both western civilisation and western democracies. He challenged the foundations of modern western civilisation. The sophisticated, aggressive and lustful aspects of modern western civilisation repelled him. The modern civilisation was equivalent to darkness and disease. He condemned bitterly western democratic politics because they were infected with threefold contradiction. They believed in limitless expansion of capitalism and this resulted in exploitation of the weaker sections of society. Some of them even took recourse to fascist or totalitarian techniques. At best it is merely a cloak to hide the Nazi and the fascist tendencies of imperialism. He frankly stated that it was not through democratic methods that Great Britain had conquered India. He also criticised the policy of racialism followed in South Africa and the southern parts of the USA. Gandhi

stressed that non-violence could lead to true democracy. Democracy and violence could not be reconciled.

As an idea and strategy, swaraj gained remarkably in the context of the nationalist articulation of the freedom struggle and the growing democratisation of the political processes that already brought in hitherto socio-economic and cultural differences. Underlying its role in a highly divided society like India, swaraj was defined in the following ways:-

- A. National independence;
- B. Political freedom of the individual
- C. Economic freedom of the individual and
- D. Spiritual freedom of the individual or self-rule.

Although these four definitions are about for different characteristics of Swaraj, they are nonetheless complementary to each other. Of these, the first three are negative in character while the fourth one is positive one in its connotation. While elaborating on Swaraj, Gandhiji linked it with swadeshi in which his theory of Swaraj was articulated. If Swaraj was a foundational theory of Gandhi's social and political thought, swadeshi was the empirical demonstration of those relevant social, economic and political steps for a society different from what exists.

According to Gandhi swaraj was not merely political liberation; it means human emancipation as well. In his own words, 'mere withdrawal of the English is not independence. It means the consciousness in the average villages that he is the maker of his own destiny, that he is his own legislator through his own representatives'. The real swaraj, he felt, will come not by the acquisition of authority by a few but by the acquisition of the capacity by all to resist authority when abused. Swaraj is the power of the people to determine their lot by their own efforts and shape their destiny the way they like. Swaraj is to be attained by educating the masses to a sense of their capacity to regulate and control authority. Political freedom is the second important feature of swaraj.

For moderates, political freedom meant autonomy within the overall control of the British administration. Even the most militant of the moderates like Surendranth Banerji always supported constitutional means to secure political rights for Indians within the constitutional framework of British India. Unlike the moderates, the extremists did not care much about the methods and insisted on complete independence, which meant complete withdrawal of the British government from India.

Economic freedom of the individual is the third dimension of swaraj. Economic swaraj stands for social justice, it promotes the good of all equally including the weakest, and is indispensable for decent life. For Gandhiji, India's economic future lay in charkha (Spinning Wheel) and Kadhi (Homespun cotton textile) 'If India's villages are to live and prosper, the charkha must become universal'. Rural civilisation, argued Gandhiji, "is impossible without the charkha and all it implies, i.e., revival of village crafts".

Fourth, self-rule is probably a unique dimension of Swaraj indicating its qualitative difference with political freedom. As a concept it denotes a process of removing the internal obstacles to freedom. Unlike the first three characteristics where Swaraj is conceptualised in a negative way, self rule as an important ingredient clearly indicates the importance of moral values which are relative to society. Gandhian idea of Swaraj as self rule seems to be based on the philosophical notion of advaita which is etymologically the kingdom or order or dispensation of self, myself or the truth. So Gandhian struggle for swaraj was rooted in Indian metaphysics and spirituality. He opposed large scale industrialism and mechanization, and condemned western commercialism, imperialism and secularism as disease.'

## **IDEAL STATE**

Gandhian concept of ideal state or society was a non-violent and stateless society. He repudiated state on ethical, historical and economic grounds. A man is moral when he acts freely and voluntarily. According to Gandhi, the state represents violence in a concentrated and organized form. The individual has a soul but as the state is a soulless machine; it

can never be weaned from violence to which it owes its very existence. Although he regarded the state as rooted in violence, he differed from anarchists. Unlike anarchists, Gandhi put emphasis on moral force and on the realisation of one's own self and his technique of establishing a stateless society free from violence. Hence there was no place for violence in Gandhi's ideal society. Further, Gandhi also did not want to abolish the state completely as did the anarchists. He admitted that his ideal state or society would have representative institutions and government. His ideal society would be a stateless society consisting of self-sufficing, self-regulating and self-governing village communities joined together in a voluntary federation, the maintenance of federation involved the necessity of government. Thus his ideal state is predominantly a non-violent state, and not a non-violent and stateless society as it is generally thought. He was only opposed to the oppressive authority and to the theory of absolute sovereignty of the state, but not to the ideal state itself.

Gandhian conception of ideal state was a non-violent democratic state where social life would remain self-regulated. In a democratic state everyone is his own ruler. According to Gandhiji, democracy lies not in the number of persons who vote, but in the sense to what extent masses imbibe the spirit of non-violence, and society service. In an ideal democratic state, the powers are to be decentralised and equality is to prevail in every sphere of life. Every individual is to be given fullest freedom to devote himself to social service according to his capacity. The structure of the state that is to emerge as a result of non-violent revolution is to be a compromise between the ideal non-violent society and the facts of human nature. He believed that democratic government was a distant dream so long as non-violence was not recognised as a living force, an inviolable creed, not a mere policy.

According to Gandhi, State is necessary due to the anti-social tendencies of certain individuals and groups. But the functions of the state are to be reduced to the minimum. Like Bertrand Russell, G.K. Chesterton, G.D.H.Cole and other guild socialists, Gandhiji admitted that most of the functions of the state were to be transferred to the

voluntary associations in order to have a real self-government in the country. There are certain things which cannot be done without political power, but there are also numerous other things which do not at all depend upon political power, and hence they should be left to the voluntary associations. When people come into possession of political and economic power, the interference with the freedom of the people is reduced to a minimum. He remarked thus: 'A nation that runs its affairs smoothly and effectively without much state interference is truly democratic. When such condition is absent the form of government is democratic in name.'

Gandhiji considered the state as an organisation 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 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.

### **VIEWS ON STATE**

According to Gandhi, the state represents violence in a concentrated and organised form. Gandhi's critique of the modern state emanated from its coercive aspect and its anti-human thrust. At a basic level, the mode of operation of the modern state constituted an infringement with his concept of non-violence. As early as 1931, Gandhi wrote in *Young India*, '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. Political power means capacity to regulate national life through national representatives. If national life becomes so perfect as to become self-regulated, no representation becomes necessary. There is then a state of enlightened Anarchy. In such a state everyone is his own ruler. He rules himself in such a manner that he is never a hindrance to his neighbour. In the ideal state, therefore, there is no political power because there is no state. But the ideal is never fully realised in life.'

Hence the classical statement of Thoreau that government is best which governs the least.

One of the key elements in his critique was the concept of autonomy, which was made up of two distinct ideas. One was the idea that citizens should neither be dominated by others nor by the state. The other idea held that individuals should be self-governing, should bear moral standards for a self-evaluative assessment and accept responsibility for individual selection. He also criticised the impersonal character of the modern state. In his opinion the modern state could be equated with a machine without any one being apparently in control of it. Another noteworthy feature of Gandhi's critique related to the intrinsic homogenising tendency of the modern state. Gandhiji believes that the state would not accept individual differences and diversity of opinions and attitudes. It would become 'Hostile to strong and independent-minded citizens groups and community lest they should become centers of independent initiative and dissent. In a write-up published in Modern Review in the year 1935, Gandhi has made this point forcefully; " I look upon an increase in the power of the state with the greatest fear, because although while apparently doing good by minimising exploitation, it does the greatest harm to mankind by destroying individuality, which lies at the root of all progress'. Thus it is clear from the above observations that the modern state was not compatible with the essential moral values associated with humanity.

### **TRUSTEESHIP**

The theory of trusteeship is Gandhiji's novel contribution in the sphere of political philosophy. The main thrust is on treating resources as a public trust with man being the trustee, so that the riches of nature and society are equitably used. The theory was intended to combine the advantages of both capitalism and communism, and to socialise property without nationalising it.

According to Gandhi, all material property was a social trust. The owner was not required to take more than what was needed for a moderately comfortable life. The other members of society who were

associated with the property were jointly responsible with the owner for its management and were to provide welfare schemes for all. The owner and the rest of the people were to regard themselves as trustees of the property. In his editorial in Harijan (3rd June, 1939,) the concept of trusteeship was elaborately stated.: 'Suppose I have come by a fair amount of wealth either by way of legacy, or by means of trade and industry I must know that all that wealth does not belong to me, what belongs to me is the right to an honourable livelihood, no better than that enjoyed by millions of others, the rest of my wealth belongs to the community and must be used for the welfare of the community.

It is reported that the theory of trusteeship had excited the attention of a group of socialists who had a long discussion with Gandhi regarding its nature and implication. The result was the writing of a draft on trusteeship. This draft was amended by Gandhi to strengthen its egalitarian thrust. The main principles of trusteeship are as follows.

1. Trusteeship provides a means of transforming the present capitalist order or society into an egalitarian;
2. It does not recognise any right of private ownership of property except in so far as it may be permitted by society for its own welfare.
3. It does not exclude legislative regulation of the ownership and use of wealth.
4. Under state-regulated Trusteeship an individual will not be free to hold or use wealth for selfish satisfaction or in disregard of the interest of society.
5. Just as it is proposed to fix a decent minimum living wage, even so a limit should be fixed for the maximum income that would be allowed to any person in society.
6. under the Gandhian economic order the character of production will be determined by social necessity and not by selfish interest.

## **DECENTRALISATION**

Gandhiji had envisioned for independent India a polity that would be based on the principle of democratic self government or self-rule. Democracy can function smoothly and according to the concept of swaraj only if it is decentralised. According to him, 'centralisation as a system is inconsistent with non-violent structure of society.' He wanted the centre of power to move from cities to villages. While conceptualising the decentralised system of rule, Gandhi advanced this theory of oceanic circle, which he explained in the following words: "In this structure composed of innumerable villages, there will be ever-widening never ascending circles. Life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. But it will be an oceanic circle whose centre will be the individual always ready to perish for the circle of villages till at last the whole becomes a life composed of individuals, never aggressive in their arrogance but ever humble, sharing the majesty of the oceanic circle of which they are integral units.

The building blocks of democracy have to be villages. Gandhiji wanted each village to have an annually elected Panchayat to manage the affairs of the village. Each village following the oceanic circle theory would be autonomous yet independent. As Gandhiji argued "My idea of village swaraj is that it is a complete republic, independent of its neighbours for its own vital wants and yet inter-dependent for many others in which dependence is a necessity.

Gandhiji strongly believed that decentralisation of power was a key concept in his theory of democracy. However, he laid down certain conditions for the realisation of true democracy in India. He regarded it wholly wrong and undemocratic for individuals to take the law into their hands.

## **VIEWS ON SOCIALISM**

Gandhiji was critical of the path both capitalist and socialist economies had taken. He was critical of capitalism because the institution of capitalism was a negation of ahimsa. He championed the revolutionary doctrine of equal distribution. There should be no



accumulation and no useless possession. He also accepted the theory of spiritual socialism and said that swaraj could not be complete unless the lowest and humblest sections got 'all the ordinary amenities of life that a rich man enjoys'.

In the Gandhian conception of socialism the prince and the peasant, the poor and the rich, the employer and employee were to be treated equally. But this socialism was not to be attained by conquest of political power by an organised party. It was of the utmost importance that socialists should be truthful, non-violent and pure-hearted. They could affect a genuine transformation. Hence the emphasis in the Gandhian doctrine of socialism and politics is always on individual purification. The spiritual socialism which Gandhiji wanted was to begin with the moral regeneration of the individual. But this does not mean that Gandhiji was unmindful of changes in the political economic and social structure. His career offers the momentous example of a lone individual challenging the union of South Africa and the empire of Great Britain.

While he looked at socialism positively, he felt that it was deeply enmeshed in violence. He wrote in his Harijan thus: socialism was not born with the discovery of the misuse of capital by capitalists. .... I accepted the theory of socialism even while I was in South Africa. My opposition to socialists and others consists in attacking violence as a means of affecting any lasting reform'. Further, Socialism has only one aim that is material progress. I want freedom for full expression of my personality..... Under the other socialism, there is no individual freedom. You own nothing, not even your body".

From the Gandhian application of socialism, however it must not be thought that Gandhi was a mystic or his socialism was only a matter of the mind. He was intensely practical and his principle was that the life of the individual should get all possible expression only in the context of society. The most particular and significant aspect of Gandhian socialism is the emphasis which a Gandhi laid on the internal aspect of life. Even in the case of the theory of sarvodaya and the sarvodaya samaj, Gandhi did not give much importance to external forces to organise the

institutions. He did not believe that revolution or evolution when imposed from outside would bring about any fundamental change in human nature or in society. The entire responsibility of reconstruction in social, economic and political aspects must start with the individual himself; without the individual's consistent and constant attempt for reorientation no amount of effort will bring the socialistic order. The Gandhian idea of sarvodaya is the apex of Gandhian socialism.

Gandhian doctrine of Sarvodaya does not mean that majority alone is enough, the growth and upliftment of everyone is vitally necessary. In this respect, Gandhian socialism thinks of society as an organic whole where differences do not exist. The concept of organic unity, where all individuals have equal importance and the rise of everyone is dependent on the rise of every other, is a fundamental contribution to socialistic theory and practice. It opens a new approach in socialistic thought. The previous socialist thinkers had the belief that without a sizeable majority no social change can be effective. Gandhian socialism puts enormous emphasis on the capacity of the individual.

Gandhiji was not only a great individualist and a practical idealist but he was also a first-rate egalitarian and a socialist. He firmly believed that his ideal of non-violence could be achieved only if the gulf dividing the rich and the poor was made as small as possible. His idea of economic equality was that everyone would have a proper house to live in, sufficient and balanced food to eat, and sufficient khadi with which to cover himself.' He also said that the cruel inequality that obtained today would be removed by purely non-violent means. To achieve this goal, Gandhiji did not suggest any wholesale confiscation of property of the landlords and capitalists. Like Christian socialists he wanted to achieve his goal of economic equality by changing their mentality through love and persuasion.

There is a remarkable consistency and continuity in the political ideas of Gandhiji. He considered man as embodying the spiritual principle in him which is divine. He argued that the divine nature of man makes religion to engage itself positively with the world. He did not agree that religion should be separated from politics. Politics devoid of

religion, according to him, is meaningless. He thought that politics offers great opportunities to serve others and such service is an essential attribute of religion. He considered that ends and means are integral to each other. He applied this principle to the pursuit of truth as well, which he considered as God himself. Truth as end and non-violence as means are inseparable.

Gandhiji was a saint and a moral revolutionary. He believed that violence interrupted the real revolution of the social structure. He sincerely believed that violence would spell the doom of mankind. He thought that a peaceful solution of our problems was not only possible but was the only way to have a real solution.

Gandhism is not a systematic, well worked out political philosophy in the western sense. It does not claim to apply purely logical procedure and scientific methodology as the positivists do. There is, however, a pronounced realism in Gandhis' economic ideas. He regarded the villages as the centre of Indian economic organisation. His economic radicalism is brought out in his championship of the concept of equality of wages for the lawyer, the doctor and the scavengers. His idea of Panchayat raj remained a distant dream till recently, but his arguments for people's participation in governance provoked and also consolidated movements for what is suggested as deepening of democracy in India.

Gandhism is not merely a political creed, it is a message. His philosophy wants to bring about a transformation in human life by the supremacy of self-suffering love. He stressed peace, modesty, gentleness and a sense of devout respect for the religious views of others. This comprehensive orientation of Gandhian teachings makes it the moral foundation of socialism and democracy. Gandhi has been hailed as the greatest Indian since Gautama Budha. He made Indian liberation movement into a mass movement. His teachings of non-violence is greatly relevant to the modern world infected with militarism, terrorism, and power politics.