



Gandhian Concept of Common Good: An Analysis through Sarvodaya and Trusteeship

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the Gandhian conception of the Common Good through his interconnected principles of Sarvodaya and Trusteeship. Opposing Utilitarianism's principle; "greatest happiness of the greatest number," Gandhi advocated an inclusive vision where the welfare of even the last person is essential. No one's interest can be sacrificed for the benefit of the majority. Inspired by John Ruskin's *Unto This Last*, Sarvodaya represents the moral and material upliftment of all, with special concern for the weakest sections of society. Trusteeship, drawing from the Isha Upanishad and Gandhian ethics of non-possession (*aparigraha*) and non-stealing (*asteya*), urges the wealthy to view their property as a social trust to be used for the common welfare rather than personal greed. The study demonstrates that Sarvodaya and Trusteeship are inseparable: the former provides the ethical ideal of universal well-being, while the latter offers a non-violent, practical economic path to achieve it. Together, they promote a "change of heart" that transforms potential class conflict into cooperation without coercion. In today's context of rising inequality, ecological crisis, and moral decline, Gandhian Common Good offers a compelling alternative to both unchecked capitalism and forced collectivism. It calls for an ethical, inclusive, and sustainable model of development centered on human dignity and social justice.

**Introduction:**

M. K. Gandhi, modern socio-political Philosopher, articulated the doctrines of Sarvodaya and Trusteeship which was the core theme of Common Good (Gandhi, 1960; Iyer, 1973). He believed that the common good points to a goal which does not give precedence to the interest of a class, party or faction but gives due regard to the interest of all members of society. Unlike Utilitarianism 'greatest happiness of the greatest number', he believes in an inclusive approach (Lal, 1973). For him, true common good could never be built by sacrificing the interests of even a single person for the benefit of the majority. Gandhian vision of common good is most clearly reflected in the principles of Sarvodaya (welfare of all) and Trusteeship, which together provide the moral and economic framework for achieving an inclusive and just society.

In the contemporary context of rising economic inequality and moral crisis, the idea of the Common Good has gained renewed significance. In this context, a critical re-examination of Gandhian philosophy becomes necessary. This study seeks to examine how Sarvodaya as an ethical ideal and Trusteeship as an economic principle together contribute to Gandhi's concept of the Common Good (Gandhi, 1960; Bhave, 1957).

Sarvodaya:

The idea behind Sarvodaya was inspired by John Ruskin's *Unto This Last* (1860). Gandhi came across this work in the midst of passive resistance against the racist regime of South Africa. This contained a message of uplift of the last man or the most neglected lot. Gandhi was so impressed by this work that he published its summary in his Gujarati articles under the title of Sarvodaya. Ruskin's teachings are very close to Gandhian philosophy. Ruskin rejected the cult of machinery and consumerism as well as the idea of economic man and mercantile economy (Ruskin, 1860). Instead, he advocated simple technology, manual labour, communal enterprise and measurement of value in terms of quality of life. Gandhi relied on these teachings to sharpen his own thinking on various issues of social reform.

The term 'sarvodaya' may be rendered as 'uplift of all', 'rise of all' or 'awakening of all'. All the meanings of this term closely correspond to each other. In a society where only the few are endowed with knowledge, power, prestige and wealth, and a very large number are languishing, Sarvodaya wants them to rise above. But since it believes in upliftment of all, it does not envisage a conflict between the high and the low, between the rich and the poor. As a votary of purity of means as well as end, Gandhi was convinced that violent means cannot be used to achieve a non-violent end (Lal, 1973).



Whereas the principle of Sarvodaya seeks material upgradation of the deprived and the underprivileged sections, it also envisages moral upgradation of the rich who would offer their riches for the welfare of the poor and service of the community. Thus, they will not only give a proof of self-control and magnanimity, but also raise their own spiritual level.

The Gandhian concept of Sarvodaya rejects the utilitarian view of ‘greatest happiness of the greatest number’ in favour of ‘greatest good of all’ (Gandhi, 2009).

Trusteeship:

Gandhian doctrine of Trusteeship draws significant inspiration from the Isha Upanishad, particularly the idea that all property belongs to God and human beings are merely trustees who must use it for the welfare of all (Radhakrishnan, 1953). It is addressed to the conscience of the rich and resourceful members of society, particularly landlords and capitalists. It urges them not to consider themselves as the sole proprietors of their possessions, but only ‘trustees’ of a gift bestowed upon them by God for the service of humanity (Gandhi, 1960; Datta, 1960).. This view is in consonance with the basic philosophy of Gandhi. His principle of non-possession (aparigraha) implies that worldly possessions make you morally depraved. Hence, one should not take more than his immediate needs. To maintain one's moral strength, material things should be used with a spirit of renunciation.

Gandhian principle of non-stealing (asteya) implies that amassing of wealth, or even the possession of more than one's immediate needs amounts to theft because it is meant to fulfil others’ needs. In Gandhi's words: “Earth has enough resources to satisfy everybody's needs but not their greed.” Any attempt to satisfy one's greed means theft. It reminds us of nineteenth-century French philosopher, P.J. Proudhon's famous dictum: “Property is theft.”

The Upanishadic injunction ‘Tena tyaktena bhun̄jīthā’ forms the moral basis of Gandhi’s Trusteeship, emphasizing enjoyment through renunciation rather than ownership (Radhakrishnan, 1953). Gandhi does not favour overthrowing the existing economic system. This system has become oppressive because of the moral decline. If the organizers of agriculture and industry could be persuaded to act as public servants, they will win wide public esteem instead of the existing hatred. The feeling of class conflict will be replaced by the sentiment of class cooperation. Gandhi wants ‘change of heart’ of the rich and resourceful persons to enable the society to have full benefit of their talents and efforts without suffering injustice caused by the exploitation of the poor by the rich (Kripalani, 1964). Thus Trusteeship attempts to reconcile economic inequality with moral responsibility without resorting to coercion or violence.



Interrelation between Sarvodaya and Trusteeship

Sarvodaya and Trusteeship are not two separate ideas; they're deeply connected and depend on each other. Sarvodaya sets the final goal for the each-round welfare and quality of every person (Iyer, 1973; Parel, 2006). Trusteeship, on the other hand, shows the practical way to reach that goal. Without Trusteeship, Sarvodaya would remain only a beautiful dream. And without the larger ethical vision of Sarvodaya, Trusteeship could effortlessly come to be mere token charity. Gandhi noticed economics and ethics as thick. When fat people freely accept the part of trustees, they help produce the conditions for genuine Sarvodaya (Bhave, 1957). The moral growth of the rich and the material upliftment of the poor also move forward together. Both principles are strongly embedded in non-violence. Gandhi refused to achieve welfare through force or class war rather, he emphasised voluntary change and collective respect. This harmonious approach is what makes his idea of Common Good so distinctive. In his viharas and formative programmes similar as khadi, village industries, and Harijan welfare we see this beautiful blending of Sarvodaya and Trusteeship in action. Contemporary Relevance in our time, when a sprinkle of people enjoy the utmost of the world's wealth while millions still struggle for introductory requirements, Gandhi's ideas speak with renewed power. The growing gap between rich and poor, environmental destruction, and moral decline in public life all point to the need for a different kind of development. Sarvodaya challenges the present obsession with GDP growth and asks us to concentrate on the well being of the weakest sections (Gauba, 2011). Numerous government schemes in India and welfare models in other countries show its circular influence, however much further requirements have to be done. Trusteeship offers a humane volition to both unbounded capitalism and forced illiberalism. It calls upon moment's billionaires and pots to see their wealth as a social trust rather than particular property. Above each, in the age of climate extremity and careless consumerism, Gandhi's emphasis on simple living and responsible use of resources feels more important than ever. His gospel reminds us that real progress must be ethical, inclusive, and sustainable.

Conclusions:

This study has shown that Gandhian conception of the Common Good made upon the twofold pillars of Sarvodaya and Trusteeship, presents a profoundly humane and immorally predicated volition to dominant socio-profitable doctrines. By declining the utilitarian greatest happiness principle, Gandhi offered a vision where the welfare of every existent, especially the weakest, remains central (Lal, 1973). Sarvodaya provides the moral ideal of universal upliftment, while Trusteeship supplies the practical, non-violent profitable means to realise it through voluntary sharing and a "change of heart." Interrelations between



these two principles show that genuine social justice can not be achieved through coercion or class struggle, but only through the harmonious blending of ethical responsibility with economic restructuring. Gandhian approach effectively connects individual freedom with collaborative well-being without destroying mortal dignity or social balance. In the present time of extreme inequality, environmental downfall, and moral corrosion, Gandhian study retains remarkable relevance. It challenges both aggressive capitalism and authoritarian socialism, advocating rather for a sustainable, compassionate, and inclusive model of development. Gandhi reminds us that true progress must be measured not by material accumulation but by the well-being of the most disadvantaged person. The Gandhian Concept Common Good is n't simply a political or profitable programme, but it is a civilisational metamorphosis embedded in non-violence, simplicity, and moral courage. Its successful operation depends on our collaborative goodwill to rethink our values and review substance in mortal terms. In a gradually divided world, Gandhi's message provides a renewed stoppage of the gap for building a just and peaceful society.

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