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Anatomy Of Gandhian Principle Of Socialism In Indian Context

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Abstract:

M.K. Gandhi was the greatest leader of Indian freedom movement. The Gandhian socialism is the branch of socialism based on the National interpretation of the philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi. He advocates for a decentralized, self-reliant, egalitarian society, prioritizing truth, non-violence and trusteeship in his socialism. This socialism generally centers on “Hind Swaraj”, “Sarvodaya” or Indian Home Rule authored by Gandhi. It emphasizes village level self-governance, economic self-sufficiency and social justice, often with tradition approach to modernization and industrialization. The key aspects of the economic policies of this socialism are based on ethics. The idea of Sarvodaya or universal uplift is based upon an optimistic interpretation of human nature. At the heart of the Gandhian socialism is the belief in achieving social and political change through peaceful and truthful means.

Key Word: Egalitarian society, Hind Swaraj, Trusteeship, Sarvodaya.

1. Introduction:

Mahatma Gandhi the pioneer of non-violence was born on the 2nd October, 1869. His prominent role in the Indian freedom movement fetches him the title of “Bapu” (Father of the Nation). Gandhi was a critic of capitalism. He condemned the 19th century doctrine of laissez faire. To him, the accumulation of capital was an evil and immoral act. Today, unfortunately, the word 'socialism' has become a controversial one. Socialism is often compared with a hat which has lost its shape because everybody wears it. However, if socialism is defined as a political and economic theory according to which the means of production, distribution and exchange should be owned and controlled by the people, where everyone should be given an equal opportunity to develop his talents and the wealth of the community should be fairly distributed then Gandhi may be called a socialist. Gandhi visualized a social structure in which every attempt needed to be made to ensure a rise of all. Let us now examine the basic tenets of Gandhian socialism.

2. Objectives of the Study:

The main objectives of the study of the proposed research work are as follows:

- To highlight the concept of Gandhian Socialism.
- To study how the Gandhi's concept of Socialism can play a role to solve the problems relating to present day society.
- To justify the relevance of Gandhian Socialism.

3. Methodology of the Study:

The present study is basically based on secondary data collected from different books, magazines, newspaper, journals, web pages and other printed materials etc. While the analytical methods employed to analyze the facts pertaining to the study.

4. Core Principles of Socialism:

There are some core principles behind the Gandhian Socialism.

4.1 Equitable Distribution of Wealth and Commitment of Aparigraha (Non possession):

Gandhi believed in the concept of economic equality and advocated, "A wise regulation of riches and absolute social justice." He once wrote, "Socialism is a beautiful word and so far as I am aware, in socialism, all the members of the society are equal, none low, none high. In the individual body, the head is not high, because it is the top of the body, nor are the soles of the feet low because they touch the earth Even as parts of the individual body are equal, so are the members of the society." This is socialism. This statement clearly reveals the concept of equality as embodied in Gandhian socialism. On another occasion he wrote, "I am working for winning Swaraj for those toiling and unemployed millions, who do not even a square meal a day and have to scratch along with a piece of a stale roti and a pinch of salt." At the same time, Gandhi was practical man. He realized that complete equality was a chimera. Hence, he pleaded for equitable distribution. As he stated, "My ideal is equal distribution but so far as I can see, it is not to be realized. I therefore work for equitable distribution of wealth."

4.2 Theory of Trusteeship:

Gandhian concept of Trusteeship theory is an important component of socialism. It means that the rich man will be left in possession of his wealth of which he will use what he reasonably requires for his personal needs and will act as a trustee for the remainder to be used for the rest of the society.

Gandhi was not altogether in favour of abolishing private property. He believed in the principle of trusteeship under which the rich class could possess all their wealth in trust for the good of the people. This theory of trusteeship was a cardinal point of the economic policy which Gandhi had advocated for independent India. Gandhi strongly believed in the conception of "Aparigraha" (non-possession) and contended that 'a thing not originally stolen must nevertheless be classified as stolen property if we possess without need for it. When in 1929 Gandhi advocated his theory of trusteeship, he expected a good response from the elites in India. However, the response was extremely poor. Therefore, he revised his view and accepted the idea of 'statutory trusteeship'. In the beginning he assumed that trusteeship would be inherited by the son, but later on, in 1938 he declared that a trustee has no heir but the public. In fact trusteeship is a way of life, society and rule rather than mere a method to achieve a particular noble end.

4.3 Bread Labour:

Gandhi's idea of bread labour is based on the principle of dignity and sanctity of labour. According to Gandhi, the real wealth of the nation consists of labour. The idea that man should earn his bread by the sweat of his labour greatly influenced him. The theory of bread labour postulates that every healthy individual must labour enough for his good and his intellectual faculties must not be exercised in order to amass a fortune but only in the service of mankind. According to Gandhi, "If all laboured for their bread and no more, then there would be enough food and enough leisure for all. There will then be no rich and no poor, none high, or low, no touchable and no untouchable." Gandhi rightly realized that labour has its unique place in any civilized nation. Although he did not blindly support the Ricardian or Marxian theory or labour, yet he adhered to the moral idea of the sanctification of labour. He not only preached it but also practiced it during his days in South Africa. Gandhi stated, "Everyone should deem it a dishonour to eat a single meal without honest labour."

4.4 Decentralisation and Self Reliance:

Gandhian socialism favour a decentralized political and economic system with power developed local communities and individuals. When Gandhi talked about self-sufficient village units, what he had mind was that village community should not depend on the higher government for those needs which it could satisfy with local resources and local efforts. Gandhi advocated decentralization both in the political and economic sphere. For him, centralization is a form of regimentation and authoritarianism and it 'makes the world so complex that the common man fails to understand the forces that are working in his life and society. Gandhi wanted to evolve a decentralized structure of power and economy based on the effective reconstruction of self-reliant and self-sufficient village communities. Hence Gandhi advocated for powerful village Panchayats and the promotion of small-scale and cottage industries. As J.B. Karipalani writes, "Decentralization in industry and devolution of power in politics are the only means by which humanity can hope to establish a social order based upon equality and justice and free from economic and political exploitation."

4.5 Democratic Non-Violent Socialism:

Gandhi has left the world richer with a renewed faith in the dictates of non-violence. Gandhi was a socialist at heart. However, his socialism was not a blind imitation of the West. Gandhi once wrote, "I have claimed that I was a socialist long before those I know in India avowed their creed. My socialism was natural to me and not adopted from book. It came out of any unshakeable belief in non-violence. No man could be actively non-violent and not rise against social injustice, no matter where it occurred, unfortunately. Western socialist have so far as I know believed in the necessity of violence for enforcing socialistic doctrines" which is absence of the desire to kill or harm. Gandhi was not prepared to sacrifice the individual at the altar of the State and was opposed to dictatorship of any kind, either capitalist or proletarian. What makes Gandhian socialism practically different from Socialism is its faith in Ahimsa. That is why Gandhism is often called 'Marxism minus the violence. Gandhi was convinced that social justice could never be achieved by the means of force. He wanted to bring social revolution through non-violent ways. He wanted to convert human nature by persuasion, not by coercion. He wrote, "Some have called me the greatest revolutionary of my time. It may be false, but I believe myself to be a revolutionary-a non-violent revolutionary."

4.6 Truth and Non-Violence or Moral and Spiritual Socialism:

At the heart of Gandhian socialism is the belief in achieving social and political change through peaceful and truthful means. Gandhian socialism is not only non-violent, but also moral and spiritual. Gandhi believed in the purification of means and ends. He was convinced that noble ends cannot be achieved by evil means and contended that 'our progress towards the goal will be in exact proportion to the purity of our means.' "This socialism", he wrote, "is as pure as crystal. It requires crystal-like means to achieve it." Gandhi fundamentally believed that love is better than hate, peace is better than war, cooperation is better than conflict and persuasion is better than coercion. While Marx put emphasis on matter, Gandhi put emphasis on the spirit or life. To Marx religion was 'the opinion of the people' but to Gandhi, 'the existence of world in a broad sense depends on religion.'

4.7 Critique of Industrialization by establishing Indigenous Socialism:

Gandhi developed his socialism against the background of Indian life. It is wrong to charge Gandhi of having diluted the meaning of socialism, Gandhi's humanism inevitably leads him to be a socialist. Gandhi is a socialist because he wants to put an end to exploitation, injustice and inequality in society where the poorest of the poor should feel that it is his country and in which people would be guided by devotion to social ends and social service instead of private gains and selfishness.

The Gandhian socialist edifice was built, as far as possible, through indigenous materials. Being influenced by the exalted life of abnegation of Buddha and the doctrine of sacrifice embedded in Hindu philosophy, Gandhi put emphasis on non-accumulation, non-stealing and non-possession. Believing in the conception of 'Aparigraha', meaning non-possession, Gandhi contended that 'a thing not originally stolen must nevertheless be classified as stolen property, if we possess it without need for it.' Thus, Gandhian socialism is essentially Indian in character and was not a blind imitation of Western or orthodox Marxism.

5. Conclusion:

In essence, Gandhian Socialism offers unique perspectives on socialism, blending traditional values with a commitment to social justice and economic equality while also critiquing the potential pitfalls of unchecked industrialization and centralized power. So Gandhian concept of socialism was relevant in the past, it is relevant in the present and will relevant in the future.

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