

**Trusteeship : Gandhi's idea of economic morality**

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Abstract

Gandhi intended to bring about radical changes in society by encouraging voluntary renunciation of surplus by the miniscule propertied class of any civil society. Unlike Marx and his followers he was convinced that this can be achieved without any blood bath through nonviolence and aparigraha . The research paper is an argumentative articulation of his spiritual voice on the virtues of the moral prescription of Trusteeship.

Trusteeship in the pragmatic philosophy of Gandhi was one of the critical components of his ideal state or Ramrajya which is based on the basic premise of an egalitarian Society whereby owners of the capital should act as a trustee of the capital which should be used in collaboration with the owners of the labour power for progress and prosperity of the society as a whole.

Economic disparities are present in any society and the Indian society is no exception to it and its presence is unhealthy as it contributes to controversial social issues , conflicts and disharmony . Minor disparities of income can be considered legitimate but if the inequality exists in its obtrusive form .ie if there is a large gap between the starving millions and a small number of land owners and capitalists it becomes a matter of great concern . When Gandhi was striving for India's independence he confronted this harsh reality and developed his concept of trusteeship which was based on an economic order based on equitable distribution

His concept of Trusteeship was most original and revolutionary socio economic philosophy with the basic objective of establishing a just society where the affluent as trustees would look into the well being of the masses. It was an attempt to eliminate both capitalism and bureaucratic statism He believed that his doctrine trusteeship was one that would survive the ravages of time and history because it dealt basically with the question of economic structure and organisation which other systems have failed to answer.

The fundamental principles which triggered the concept of trusteeship was that private property gives way to disparity in distribution of wealth giving way to the accumulation of wealth in hands of few . So the people who have amassed huge wealth should be deprived of unwarranted accumulated wealth and should be left with certain reasonable wealth which can suffice their basic needs . The remaining wealth will be used by the society and he will act as the trustee .

Gandhi opined that trusteeship in absolute form cannot be attained but if we struggle for it the goal of state of equality can be realized to a great extent .Trusteeship has both theoretical as well as practical implication as it will not only have an impact on the ownership and the distribution of income but will also affect the labour disputes and

Trusteeship reflected Gandhi's spiritual journey , his profound association with the theosophical literature and the impact of the concept of "aparigraha" in Bhagawad Gita . His views had close resemblance to that of Marx but unlike Max did not believe in overthrowing the capitalists forcibly and at the same time did not believe in provoking the proletariat against the capitalists class Like Marx he believed change in property relations is required for transforming capitalism . But unlike Marx who believed that change is sufficient condition for their system , for Gandhi it was a necessary condition He believed in a society based on harmony and not on struggle amongst the masses . Trusteeship was synonymous to the belief of Thomas Aquinas who believed that the not only the state but the individuals in the society are responsible for bringing justice in the society and for this the individuals should try to be empathetic , compassionate and altruistic .

His profound belief in the law of non –possession ,i.e everything is from God and everything belongs to God ,was the core philosophy from which Gandhi's idea of Trusteeship culminated So entire resources available on this earth is for each and every individual and not for a particular class or individual and if an individual has more than the portion which he should possess he becomes trustee

It was derived from 3 basic concept of Gandhi –Non Violence , Swaraj, and Equality . All these concepts are interrelated. More we are committed to Non Violence , the easier it will be to achieve the goal of equal distribution . Satyagraha is the objective and trusteeship is the method of achieving it .

For Gandhi Trusteeship would culminate into a non violent state and ultimately will become the key vehicle for the devolution of power . J.D.Seth writes "of all Gandhiji's ideas and concepts, trusteeship was the most original as it was also the most tentative since he did not have time to experiment with it on a scale that would match the grandeur of the concept. He did not have time enough even to define it precisely, not to speak of spelling out its implications in concrete terms"¹.

Since Gandhi did not have enough time to develop this concept many scholars devoted time on it and attempted to develop it into a doctrine of great socio-ethico-economic significance. However, these attempts did not materialize in the form of a good thesis or treatise on Gandhian doctrine of trusteeship. Hence the necessity of the present study incorporating all aspects of all what Gandhi thought, discussed and wrote on trusteeship.

¹ J.D. Sethi "The Grand Aternative" Trusteeship edited by R.K. Bharathan (Madras, Sriniketan Publishers, 1979), p.63.

A wrong impression was created that a capitalist would convert himself into a trustee. In fact once he surrendered his wealth he is no longer a sole trustee rather a joint trustee with others who were engaged in productive activity.

Gandhi realised the conflict between the interest of worker and capitalist. He wanted to avoid violent class war, but not by collaboration of classes. Therefore the basic concept of trusteeship was that both the class will be one rather than owner.

Trusteeship is not a unilateral affair rather bi lateral. Therefore to safeguard our interest we must safeguard the interest of others. It was a mechanism by which Gandhi attempted to establish an egalitarian society in which the wealthy as trustees would look after the welfare of the people.

Those who run the industries should be sufficiently kept away from political power but not politics. However if the capitalist refuses to become a trustee or if there is no trustee to take over from another trustee what will be the role of state. According to Gandhi they must be deprived of their wealth. More than what is considered to be socially necessary will have to be surrendered by the owner.

To be applied in the entire economy rather than to the industry only. In fact Gandhi's concept of trusteeship is a part of his struggle against the exploitation of one by another. However trusteeship in land does not mean only surrender of surplus land but also the system of creation of Panchayats. What will happen if capitalist tries to regain their surrendered property? Capitalist can't do it since he would be regulated by the state. In other words the state fix the rate of commission for them. Their children will receive the stewardship only, if they are found qualified for it.

Gandhi summed up the concept of trusteeship in terms of 6 principles.

- a. Trusteeship means egalitarianism which even gives the present owning class a chance of reforming itself.
- b. It does not recognize any right of private property
- c. It does not exclude legislative regulation of ownership and use of wealth
- d. In trusteeship an individual will not be free to hold his wealth for self satisfaction
- e. A limit should be fixed for the minimum income that would be allowed to anybody in the society
- f. The production will be determined by social necessity and not by personal greed.

So, Trusteeship is supposed to be an alternative to the 4 different contemporary systems – corporation, state capitalism, socialist bureaucracies system of industrial democracy, mixed economy models.

Trusteeship is different from corporation society relationship. It rejects both consumer sovereignty and producer sovereignty. It is against all types of concentration of power.

Trusteeship not only differs from capitalist class which has been exploiting basic human values of economic objectivity, Trusteeship is also a negation of public sector run by state bureaucracy.

It also rejects industrial democracy . Because of narrowness of trade unions . Moreover , the tripartite elite arrangements between state bureaucracy , trade unions and capitalists also created an obstacle in the way of developing an industrial democracy .

Attempts may be made to sabotage the partial trusteeship system by rest of the business elites Therefore the system of trusteeship must keep on expanding

The struggle for establishing Trusteeship can't be isolated for transforming society and for the emancipation of the masses . This is how and why the Gandhian approach becomes revolutionary .

Gandhi being fully aware of the problem of nation building pointed out that it can't be achieved by greed therefore he suggested trusteeship for total equality and segregation in the society . Thus option for Indians are clearcut either accept alienation or achieve 'Moksha' by realizing trusteeship

Basically Gandhi suggested this doctrine as an answer to the economic inequalities of ownership and income – a kind of nonviolent way of resolving all social and economic conflicts which grew out of inequalities and privileges of the present social order.

For the present Indian society where mixed economy operates in industrial sector the agricultural sector is totally private , concentration of private property and means of production is increasing in a few monopoly houses . Social tensions are mounting due to increasing gulf between haves and have nots , unemployment etc , The remedy lies in the application of Gandhi's concept of Trusteeship

Gandhi's Trusteeship was criticized and critiques say Gandhi was trying to obliterate capitalism and promote socialism. But during contemporary times capitalism has proved incredibly effective throughout the world. So they argue that Trusteeship will slow down a society's economic development.

Even though, till the end, Gandhi maintained that the ideas expressed by him in Hind Swaraj as far back as 1909 still held good, in actual fact, he made many compromises over the years mainly because he was a pragmatist and believed in making compromises without sacrificing fundamental principles.

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