
UNIT-6 GANDHIAN PERSPECTIVE

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6.0 LEARNING OUTCOME

After reading this Unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss Gandhi’s critique of the modern State
- Understand Gandhi’s model of polity
- Analyse Gandhian polity in relation to some core areas of Liberalism; and
- Throw light on Gandhi’s theory of Trusteeship

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Gandhian perspective on the theory of the State questions, at the theoretical plane, the very basis of the modern State. At the methodological plane, it reflects a growing dissatisfaction with the working of the State and contends its unsuitability for India. Together these features make possible a model of polity whose guiding principles and functional doctrine constitute an innovative system known as ‘Swaraj’. In our earlier Units on Liberal, Marxist and Neo-liberal perspective of State, we have read about the different dimensions and viewpoints on the nature, scope and evolution of the State. The perspectives define the State as ‘necessary evil’, ‘interim transitory phase, and ‘welfare promoter’. Gandhi’s views differ significantly from these perspectives even though some traces of basic liberal thought can be seen in his vision. This Unit will examine Gandhi’s viewpoints on State and Indian polity.

Gandhi talks about 'Swaraj' in the framework of a code that would determine the Constitutional formulation of Indian home rule. Its clear exposition can be found in *Hind Swaraj* written in 1909. *Hind Swaraj*, with its succinct remarks on the Western ideals of techno-modernism and its expression of the elements of 'Swaraj' (Indian Home Rule-translated by Gandhi himself), provides valuable insights into Gandhian thought and his vision of Indian nation.

There has been a marked proclivity in recent years, to turn to creative writings in order to obtain insights into societal processes. It reflects a growing dissatisfaction with the conventional source material and reveals an urge for a 'dynamic view' of cognitive fields questioning the autonomy of specific Social Science disciplines. Together these trends make possible an operational innovativeness, which is going to help us in our objective of outlining the Gandhian perspective on the State.

Hind Swaraj is not a narrative text, but a critical dialogue addressing problems of understanding and explanation. Unlike the documentary conception of a text, it is an imaginative reconstruction of lived experience, which is suggestive of some of the most significant and subtle processes at work in the transformation of Indian society and polity under colonial dispensation. It is here that, among several other notions, are unfolded Gandhi's precepts of 'true civilisation' and his delineation of the individual and collective conduct for attaining 'home-rule' for the Indian polity of his vision.

Hind Swaraj signals the need for an alternative approach to civil society beyond modernism. This approach is a combination of theoretical framework of 'Swaraj' and the practical tenets of a non-violent, self-contained, grass roots level society. The organising mechanism of this society within the coordinates of 'Swaraj' unravels a perspective of State that can be legitimately termed as Gandhian perspective. This Unit discusses some of the principles concerning the theory of State in consonance with the Gandhian perspective. It also takes recourse to the other Gandhian literature for empirical-analytic purposes and makes use of a good deal of contested material. This Unit also addresses several related issues concerning the Gandhian perspective without arguing one dominant thesis: the complex nature of the theory of trusteeship and its use as a bedrock for raising the edifice of a model polity. It deals with the 'constructive programme' as a creative response to, and the theoretical underpinning of, 'Swaraj'. This Unit also reflects on the 'Draft Constitution of Congress' as an action blueprint for setting up a model polity for independent India.

In his editorial in *Harijan* (28 July 1946), Gandhi wrote that his vision of independent India might have been Euclidean yet worthy of being striven for: "if Euclid's point, though incapable of being drawn by human agency, has an imperishable value, my picture has its own for mankind to live. Let India live for this true picture, though never realisable in its completeness. We must have a proper picture of what we want before we can have something approaching it." Given his preference for action, there might seem initially a paradox here. But familiarity with the larger canvas of Gandhian ideology would quickly show that this theme pervades most of his writings. The maxim is his statement: We must have a proper picture of what we want before we can have something approaching it." It engenders a self-reflexive and probing programme of action based on an ideal, closely approaching the "proper picture". The cardinal points of Gandhian ideology cover a careful examination of the tenets of modern State, a scrutiny of their suitability for independent India and an enunciation of the guiding principles and functional doctrine of 'Swaraj', portrayed as a kind of model polity.

6.2 GANDHI AND THE MODERN STATE

The middle of the 19th century had seen the British become in effect the rulers of India. Their control was organised in a bureaucracy that boasted of a tradition of justice and fair dealing in the matters concerning the State and its subjects. From the standpoint of administrative theories, there had emerged a modern State with claims to democracy in India. In the tumult of the events of 1857, the true implications of this State had perhaps not become clearly manifest. The basic framework of this modern State was provided by a rule of law for the maintenance of public order and a political arrangement, the real motives of which were, however, commercial in nature. A workable basis for this State was provided by a taxation method that was essentially a combination of tax assessment and tax collection. At a deeper level of causation, the State with its stress on commerce and industry and its emphasis on demonstrable competence projected a contradictory picture in which the privileged seemed to be favoured further and the new Indian bourgeoisie representing commercial and professional classes felt alienated.

It was in this political climate that Gandhi emerged on the Indian scene and found the modern State a system considerably difficult to come to terms with. His exposure to law by training and his study of the functioning of British State in England and in the colonial territory of South Africa seemed to have given him a deep understanding of the theoretical framework of the modern State and its actual working in a variety of situations. Therefore, the professed adherence of the State to the rule of law and its actual interlocking with the dominant interests in the society were matters that were very disquieting to Gandhi. Consequently, he developed an understanding of the modern State that was profoundly original in its approach and refreshingly analytical in its assessment.

6.2.1 Critique of the Modern State

Gandhi's critique of 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. The moral dimensions of the modern State too were not agreeable to him. The moral compromises required to be made by individuals weakened the sense of responsibility and diluted personal integrity. Gandhi had incessantly combated this abnegation all his life. He was also of the view that the structuring of the modern State was such that its contact with the people was so obscured or even snapped as to make the acts of the State impersonal yet rendering people as accomplices to its immoral acts. He wrote in *Young India* (1931): "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 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 selections. "Gandhi" writes R.J. Terchek, (2000) "Combines aspects of both civil Republicanism and Liberalism in his theory of autonomy in which he weaves together commitments to equality, non-domination, and personal responsibility". Gandhian autonomy thus meant a set of moral principles as a guide to action and the

necessity on the part of the individuals constituting the State to be self-reflective and responsible for their conduct. He advocated self-rule as a practice of non-domination for everyone. He also found modernity as an obstacle to autonomy since it introduced and justified new forms of domination based on a predetermined, external process of economic productivity. Simply stated, he found the autonomous person absent from the modern State; hence the objective of self-governance also missing from the modern State.

He also critiqued the impersonal character of the modern State, as he found it too rigidly rule-driven. In his opinion the modern State could be equated with a 'machine' without anyone being apparently in control of it. Gandhi was so neatly organised in his thought that opposition to the rigidity of rules would not have originated unless something really detestable was associated with it. His personal experience in South Africa in dealing with English law had shown him the real character of the haloed modern State. Its over-reliance on a rule-bound institutional framework in effect stifled humans forgetting that the State itself was an association of human beings.

"The State for Gandhi represented a cooperative of people sustained by the acts of its citizens. Each of them was therefore partly responsible for what the State did in their name. However, the modern State was so structured and run that it appeared to exist independently of them, obscured the links between its acts and theirs, and dulled their conscience. Without their realising it, they were morally compromised and rendered accomplices to its sometimes immoral deeds" (Parekh, 1989).

Another noteworthy feature of Gandhi's critique related to the intrinsic homogenising tendency of the modern State. The uniform rules and bureaucratic management were the two principal tools of the State with the help of which a pliable society was converted into an amenable homogenous material. A major consequence of this was 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 communities lest they should become centres of independent initiative and dissent." This impersonal character of the State prodded it to rely on fear and force.

In a write-up published in *The Modern Review* in the year 1935, Gandhi had 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. The State represents violence in a concentrated and organised 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. What I disapprove of is an organisation based on force which a State is. Voluntary organisation there must be".

The violence of the modern State, in his view required a greater caution to be exercised, as it was not a violence that would be easily manifested. It was hidden behind the fabric of rules, never crudely flaunted but nevertheless subtly displayed at regular intervals, officialised such that no specific individual could be blamed for committing it, parceled out to a number of agencies to administer it on its behalf so that the citizens never grasped its scale and magnitude. All this created the dangerous illusion that the modern State had eliminated violence when in fact it had intensified it. (Cf Parekh, 1989, op.cit.).

Here it is important to understand that the doctrine of non-violence has been of seminal value to Gandhian ideology. Therefore violence of all kind that seemed to violate this doctrine was always held incompatible with the Gandhian way. The ethics of non-violence gave a mighty message – message of freedom from moral culpability and freedom from all intentions to harm another living being. The modern State was inconsistent with Gandhian non-violence because it followed the principle of *raison*

d'Etat – reason for the State, pursuing policies on the basis of an allegedly autonomous national interest.

The modern State, Gandhi concluded was not compatible with the essential moral values associated with humanity. It was therefore not desirable to have it. An alternative must be developed for organising the society. Gandhi had comprehensive suggestions on this alternative as delineated in 'Hind Swaraj' and other writings. But before we take up views on the alternative polity, it would be appropriate to discuss the applicability of Gandhian critique of modern State specifically in relation to India.

6.2.2 Modern State and India

The usefulness of modern State for 'independent' India was an issue that had ceaselessly occupied Gandhi's thought. A close contact with modern State and its allied institutions during Gandhi's South Africa days had opened his mind to various cross-currents. Since there was no dearth of votaries for such a State apparatus to be replicated in India, Gandhi had to offer views that would help see the real nature of State and the flux and turbulence generated by its operations. The following comparative positions may be taken as a quick reader of Gandhi's case for the incongruity of modern State for India.

Indian Civilization	Modern State
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indian civilization was spiritual in essence. Non-violence was deeply ingrained in Indian culture and was cherished by its people generally. Civilization in India was plural in character, was tolerant and had a rich diversity of customs and ways of life. India was basically a rural country. Stratified Indian society had autonomous and self-governing castes, sects and ethnic groups as its constituent units which required a variegated system of governance. Indian society valued and was based on direct and unmediated relations between human beings. Independent India's foremost need was for a decentralised power structure that would take care of its diversity. The decentralised model was conceived on the principle that political power would vest in the rural people so that an equitable society would come into being. 	<p>State was uniquely a product of materialist civilization.</p> <p>The violent character of the State was an unquestioned reality.</p> <p>The modern State promoted homogeneity and was quite impersonal in nature.</p> <p>Modern State was based on and promoted an urban civilization</p> <p>A uniform system of laws and a set of rules and procedures that ironed out variations was modern State's unequivocal commitment.</p> <p>The modern State was a highly abstract institution.</p> <p>In order to undertake the massive task of social reconstruction, the State would acquire enormous amount of power posing a threat to people's liberties.</p> <p>As noted above, the modern State was most likely to be dominated by the urbanised elite committed to values profoundly at odds with the values of rural masses. Such a State was bound to be exploitative as its colonial predecessor and alienated from the common person.</p>

Gandhi had by 1904 read the Ref. *Unto This Last* and had begun to seriously formulate ideas regarding the 'common good'. Uppermost in the thoughts was the doctrine of governance that would be essentially focused on the people and would attempt to ensure the promotion of a system for the betterment of all. Various conceptualisations of this doctrine were made by Gandhi without ever losing sight of the central concern – 'common good'. We can cite the following passage from his writings, that had appeared in the December issue of *Young India* (9 December, 1926), as illustrative of this process: "A votary of 'Ahimsa' cannot subscribe to the utilitarian formula (of the greatest good of the greatest number). He will strive for the greatest good of all and die in the attempt to realise the idea. He will, therefore, be willing to die, so that the others may live. He will serve himself with the rest, by himself dying. The greatest good of all inevitably includes the good of the greatest number, and therefore, he and the utilitarian will converge in many points in their career, but there does come a time when they must part company, and even work in opposite directions. The utilitarian to be logical will never sacrifice himself. The absolutist will even sacrifice himself".

At this stage in our Unit then we find ourselves located at a point from where we can clearly see a rejection of the modern State as a viable model for independent India and an urge on the part of Gandhi to develop a model of polity that would grow from the historical basis of India and would at the same time take on the developed world in terms of parity.

6.3 MODEL OF POLITY: 'SWARAJ'

Gandhian perspective on the theory of State can be best reasoned on the basis of a model that he aspired for independent India. This polity, the model polity, was embedded in 'Swaraj'. Self-governance or self-rule at a general level carried the meaning of 'Swaraj'. Thus Swaraj was a collective goal of the Indians as well as their individual goal; and it did not necessarily mean an alternative State that is some kind of a reformed structure against the structure of the modern State. Gandhi had forcefully agued for the abolition of English rule which was based on the apparatus of a modern State along with the banishment of all the other vestiges of colonialism and had viewed that certain dangers had resided in any State including a democratic State (Terchek, *op.cit.*). An autonomous, free, self-governing individual and a collectivity of such individuals constituted the elemental units of 'Swaraj'. As Stated in the introduction above, 'Hind Swaraj' is a text where clear-sighted formulation of the idea of 'Swaraj' can be seen. This has to be supplemented by his other writings from *Young India* and *Harijan* and those published elsewhere.

6.3.1 Guiding Principles

Gandhi had envisioned for independent India a polity that would be based on the principle of democratic self-government or self-rule. In this polity transcendence of self-centeredness and selfish interests would be an automatic process. Socially responsible and morally disciplined citizens of such a polity may not ideally require a State. Thus a non-statal polity was what was closest to Gandhi's view of 'Swaraj'. Since this proposition was "Like the Euclidean straight line, inherently unrealisable but to be constantly approximated, Gandhi opted for 'ordered anarchy' under which citizens enjoyed maximum freedom consistent with minimum necessary order" (Parekh, 1989, *op.cit.*).

The guiding principles of such a polity were clear and may be detailed as below:

- Since non-violence was the bedrock of Gandhian ideology it was obvious that polity would be firmly rooted in it
- The autonomy of the individual was equally important. Hence recovery of moral and social powers, surrendered to the State under colonial dispensation, was another primal requirement
- The new polity was expected to build up courage, and a sense of power among its people
- It was also expected of the new polity to honour the diversity of Indian society by fostering strong and vibrant local communities
- Regeneration of Indian culture was another important requirement
- The new polity was urgently required to end ethnic and religious strife and establish national unity
- The new polity would be constituted by self-governing local communities organised in the form of a central government but not creating a centralised structure of authority.

In this scheme, negation of a centralised structure of authority was quite contentious. Gandhi dilated on this aspect (as to whether in an ideal society, there should be any or no government) in his editorial in *Harijan* in 1946 (15 September): “I do not think, we need worry ourselves about this at the moment. If we continue to work for such a society, it will slowly come into being to an extent, such that the people can benefit by it. Euclid’s line is one without breadth but no one has so far been able to draw it and never will. All the same it is only by keeping the ideal line in mind that we have made progress in geometry. What is true here is true of every ideal...”

He adds further, it must be remembered that nowhere in the world, does a State without government exist. If at all it could ever come into being, it would be in India; for, ours is the only country where the attempt has, at any rate, been made. We have not yet been able to show that bravery to the degree, which is necessary and for the attainment of which there is only one way. Those who have faith in the latter, have to demonstrate it”.

Gandhi thought that the real basis of the new polity was cooperation of the people. He was clear in his perception that neither the consent and will of the people nor any coercion would provide any firm basis. It was only the cooperation of the people whether active or passive, that would lay the foundation of the new polity. This cooperation consisted in rendering various services such as paying taxes, executing orders, abiding by laws and regulations. In other words, citizens were self-conscious moral agents in the new polity.

6.3.2 Functional Doctrine

The functional doctrine of new polity was provided by the famous village republics of Gandhian conception. These ‘republics’ were made up of small regenerated and well-organised village communities that were also self-determining in nature. The village communities were supposed to manage their affairs through panchayats elected annually by every literate adult. In Gandhi’s opinion, the literacy requirement was not unduly harsh. He advocated a form of political power, where the citizens could legitimately be asked to acquire a minimum educational qualification. The village panchayat in the mode of republic were to have legislative, executive and judicial powers. In so far as

police powers were concerned, these republics were expected to exercise a moral authority and the weight of public opinion to bring order and ensure harmony.

Gandhi wrote in *Harijan* (1 September, 1940). “The police of my conception will, however, be of a wholly different pattern from the present-day force. Its ranks will be composed for believers in non-violence. They will be servants, not masters, of the people. The people will instinctively render them every help, and through mutual co-operation they will easily deal with the ever-decreasing disturbances. The police force will have some kind of arms, but they will be rarely used, if at all. In fact the policemen will be reformers.”

He believed that the village community would over time build up a ‘strong sense of local strength and solidarity’, provide ‘meaningful’ interpersonal relationships, encourage a sense of social responsibility and the spirit of cooperation, and act as a nursery of civil virtues’. Beyond the relatively self-sufficient villages the country was organised in terms of ‘expanding circles.’ The villages were grouped into talukas, the latter into districts, these into provinces, and so on, each governed by representatives elected by its constituents units. All the different levels were autonomous yet bound by a strong sense of community. Thus, every province had the option of drawing up its own constitution in conformity with the country as a whole. (Cf Parekh, 1995).

In an interview given by Gandhi on 28 July 1946 this theme was discussed in detail: “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 village, the latter ready to perish for the circle of villages, till at last the whole becomes one 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.

Therefore, the outermost circumference will not wield power to crush the inner circle but will give strength to all within and derive its own strength from it. I may be taunted with the retort that this is all Utopian and, therefore, not worth a single thought. If Euclid’s point, though incapable of being drawn by human agency, has an imperishable value, my picture has its own for mankind to live. Let India live for this true picture, though never realisable in its completeness. We must have a proper picture of what we want, before we can have something approaching it. If there ever is to be a republic of every village in India, then I claim verity for my picture in which the last is equal to the first or, in other words, no one is to be the first and none the last.

In this picture every religion has its full and equal place. We are all leaves of a majestic tree whose trunk cannot be shaken off its roots, which are deep down in the bowels of the earth. The mightiest wind cannot move it.

6.3.3 Understanding ‘Swaraj’

The guiding principles and functional doctrine of Gandhian polity described above together constitute Gandhi’s ‘Swaraj’ the most forthright exposition of which is in *‘Hind Swaraj’*. It is emphasised that Gandhi’s Statements on ‘Swaraj’ are not couched in coded or esoteric language. But this great merit of Gandhi’s language does not screen from view of a complex theoretical proposition enshrined in his writing – ‘Hind Swaraj’ in our case. We shall attempt an elaboration of this complexity without indulging into too much of semiotics.

The political philosophy of Gandhi rests primarily on the concept of 'Swaraj'. In the opinion of several scholars 'Swaraj' is a more basic concept than non-violence since non-violence is only a means to 'Swaraj' whereas 'Swaraj' is an individual's State of being (Cf Parel, 2000). We find Gandhi invoking the concept of 'Swaraj' in varied senses in different situations. We can summarise this usage, for extending our discussion further, into the following categories:

- 'Swaraj' carrying the context of independence of the country from alien rule
- Assertion of the political freedom of the individual
- Assurance of the economic freedom of the individual, and
- Attainment of spiritual freedom or autonomy of the individual.

In the political sphere the notion of sovereign independence gives meaning to Gandhi's 'Swaraj'. However, qualifications were attached by him to this independence. He wrote in *Young India* (6 August, 1925): "Self-government means continuous effort to be independent of government control, whether it is foreign government or whether it is national. Swaraj government will be a sorry affair if people look up to it for the regulation of every detail of life". Gandhi strongly advocated the use of pure means for attaining sovereign independence. He was unequivocal in his recommendation of only the non-violent means "Violent means will give violent swaraj. That would be a menace to the world and India herself" (Gandhi in *Young India*, 17 July 1924).

An important element of his notion of sovereign independence related directly with the character of the new polity. The manner in which the national movement was organised in India before Gandhi's entry in the movement suggested that the principal objective of the movement was gaining an administrative control of the country. The pitfalls of this position had been more than clear to Gandhi even before he had come to India to actually participate in the movement. He had written in *Hind Swaraj*: "In effect it means this: that we want English rule without the Englishman. You want the tiger's nature, but not the tiger; that is to say, you would make India English, and, when it becomes English, it will be called not Hindustan but Englistan. This is not the Swaraj that I want". The image of sovereign independent India for Gandhi approximated the picture of village republics. It certainly was rooted in India tradition and had only meaningful things to assimilate from outside. In his editorial to *Young India* in 1931 (10 September).

Gandhi had articulated this vision: "I shall strive for a Constitution, which will release India from all thralldom and patronage, and give her, if need be, the right to sin. I shall work for an India, in which the poorest shall feel that it is their country in whose making they have an effective voice; an India in which there shall be no high class and low class of people; an India in which all communities shall live in perfect harmony. There can be no room in such an India for the curse of untouchability or the curse of the intoxicating drinks and drugs. Women will enjoy the same rights as men. Since we shall be at peace with all the rest of the world, neither exploiting, nor being exploited, we should have the smallest army imaginable. All interests not in conflict with the interests of the dumb millions will be scrupulously respected, whether foreign or indigenous. Personally, I hate distinction between foreign and indigenous. This is the India of my dreams. ... I shall be satisfied with nothing less".

The autonomy of the individual completes the Gandhian sketch of 'Swaraj'. We have discussed it even earlier and would like to reiterate a few distinctive features here. The idea that individuals should be self-governing and should be carriers of moral standards for self-evaluation too was unique. Such autonomous persons were also central to his scheme of 'Swaraj'. He wrote in *Harijan* (1 February, 1942): "If the individual ceases to

count, what is left of society?” His weariness of the modern State was also on the count that in it the individual was completely replaced by an abstract complexity – the State, which was therefore impersonal to individual members of society. This autonomy, however, was not an unbridled license for individual will to prevail in all matters. He was eloquent in explaining this in *Hind Swaraj*: “... we can see that, if we become free, India is free. And in this thought you have a definition of Swaraj. It is Swaraj when we learn to rule ourselves. It is, therefore, in the palm of our hands. Do not consider this Swaraj to be like a dream. Here there is no idea of sitting still. The Swaraj that I wish to picture before you and me is such that, after we have once realised it, we will endeavour to the end of our lifetime to persuade others to do likewise. But such Swaraj has to be experienced by each one for himself.”

6.4 LIBERALISM AND GANDHIAN POLITY

On the basis of the details given above, it should become clear that Gandhian theory of State, if we may call it so, holds a ground that is unique. It may neither be equated with Liberal perspective nor with Marxist perspective which are the two other critiques of modern State. Yet at times Gandhian perspective appears running closer to some of the core areas of Liberalism. We propose to examine this proximity or otherwise in the following discussion. Gandhi differed in his understanding of democratic polity from the parlance in which democracy is generally understood. In his view only a federally – constituted polity based on vigorous and self-governing local communities was truly democratic. The fundamental fact of democracy was the recognition that citizens were self-determining moral agents. The principal objective of democracy was to organise the conduct of collective affairs without any governmental domination.

Unlike the practice of democracy in Liberalism where it was an arrangement of institutions and rules and procedures, in Gandhian mode it was a way of life geared to developing and actualising popular power. Gandhi preferred the term ‘Swaraj’ to describe what he called ‘true democracy’ as against the liberal democracy. In Gandhi’s view liberal democracy remained imprisoned within the restrictive and centralised framework of the modern State and could never be truly democratic. It abstracted power from the people, concentrated it in the State and then returned it to them in their new incarnation as citizens. The result was a triple disaster:

- First, a good deal of people’s power seeped away into or was deliberately usurped by the institutions of the State;
- Second, people, the ultimate source of all political power, now received it as a gift from the State and became its creature;
- Third, political power was given to people on the condition that they would only exercise it as citizens or members of the State. By citizen they meant abstract and truncated men guided by values relevant to and permitted by the State and not as concrete and whole human beings giving expression to the full range of their moral concerns (Cf Parekh).

In Gandhi’s view, liberal democracy was State-centred. There was therefore a serious limitation imposed on it as it could achieve only as much democracy as was possible within the overall structure of the State. For liberal democracy, it was not possible to be fully democratic. The true democracy, Gandhi contended, would come only in a polity in which the people would themselves conduct their affairs. He wrote: “True democracy cannot be worked by twenty men sitting at the centre. It has to be worked from below by the people of every village” (*Harijan*, 18 January, 1948).

In an earlier essay he had elaborated his concept of democracy and demonstrated where did liberal democracy err: “My notion of democracy is that under it the weakest should have the same opportunity as the strongest. That can never happen except through non-violence. No country in the world today shows any but patronising regard for the weak...Western democracy, as it functions today, is diluted Nazism or Facism. At best it is merely a cloak to hide the Nazi and the Fascist tendencies of imperialism...India is trying to evolve true democracy, i.e. without violence. Our weapons are those of ‘satyagraha’ expressed through the ‘charkha’, the village industries, removal of untouchability, communal harmony, prohibition, and non-violent organisation of labour as in Ahmedabad. These mean mass effort and mass education. We have big agencies for conducting these activities. They are purely voluntary, and their only sanction is service of the lowliest” (*Harijan*, 18 May 1940).

Gandhi’s firm belief in the power to the lowliest in a democracy made him adopt a strategic programme of building Indian society from the grass-root level. In a letter to Jawaharlal Nehru (dated 5 October, 1945) he wrote: “The village of my dreams is still in my mind. After all every man lives in the world of his dreams. My ideal village will contain intelligent human beings. They will not live in dirt and darkness as animals. Men and women will be free and able to hold their own against any one in the world. There will be neither plague, nor cholera nor smallpox; no one will be idle, no one will wallow in luxury. Everyone will have to contribute his quota of manual labour. I do not want to draw a large-scale picture in detail. It is possible to envisage railways, post and telegraph offices etc. For me it is material to obtain the real article and the rest will fit into the picture afterwards. If I let go the real thing, all else goes”.

Gandhi’s ‘Constructive Programme’ was part of his larger strategy. This programme was originally addressed to the members of the Indian National Congress. “The value of this document lies in the fact that it illustrates the point that according to Gandhi every sound political philosophy ought to have its corresponding constructive programme – one that contributes to the betterment of the lives of members of civil society” (Parel, 1997). In order to promote and implement the programme, he set up several organisations and kept a constant and careful eye on their activities. He persuaded a large number of Congressmen to go to the villages and devote themselves to the ‘silent’ and ‘invisible’ but vital task of ‘leavening’ the ‘inert mass’. He thought of them as his ‘army for swaraj’, quietly working behind the back and corroding the basis of the colonial State and preparing for its eventual replacement by a distinctively Indian polity under their leadership (Cf Parekh, 1989).

6.5 TRUSTEESHIP

The theory of trusteeship is Gandhi’s novel contribution in the sphere of political philosophy. It is in fact an economic extension of his political philosophy. The main thrust is on treating resources, as a public trust 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.

Gandhi had a view that all material property was a social trust. The owner therefore 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* (3 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. I enunciated this theory when the Socialist theory was placed before the country in respect to the possessions held by zamindars and ruling chiefs. They would do away with these privileged classes. I want them to outgrow their greed and sense of possession, and to come down in spite of their wealth to the level of those who earn their bread by labour. The labourer has to realise that the wealthy man is less owner of his wealth than the labourer is owner of his own, viz. the power to work.

The question how many can be real trustees according to this definition is beside the point. If the theory is true, it is immaterial whether many live up to it or only one man lives up to it. The question is of conviction. If you accept the principle of 'Ahimsa', you have to strive to live up to it, no matter whether you succeed or fail. There is nothing in this theory which can be said to be beyond the grasp of intellect, though you may say it is difficult of practice".

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 implications. The result was the writing of a draft. This draft was also amended by Gandhi to strengthen its egalitarian thrust. The final text of the draft was as follows:

- Trusteeship provides a means of transforming the present capitalist order or society into an egalitarian one. It gives no quarter to capitalism, but gives the present owning class a chance of reforming itself. It is based on the faith that human nature is never beyond redemption.
- 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.
- It does not exclude legislative regulation of the ownership and use of wealth
- Under State-regulated trusteeship an individual will thus not be free to hold or use wealth for selfish satisfaction or in disregard of the interests of society.
- 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. The difference between such minimum incomes should be reasonable and equitable and variable from time to time, so much so that the tendency would be towards obliteration of the difference.
- Under the Gandhian economic order the character of production will be determined by social necessity and not by personal whim or greed. (Cf Parekh, 1989)

This text approximates Gandhi's trusteeship principle best. He was to write: "You may say that trusteeship is a legal fiction. But if people mediate over it constantly and try to act up to it, then life on earth would be governed far more by love than it is at present"(*The Modern Review*, 1935).

6.6 CONCLUSION

Gandhi can be best concluded in his own words. As we incorporate his perspective on a theory of State, we paraphrase him in the following manner:

As an ordinary man I do not have a tall claim about giving any theory of State. For me the basis of a State as that of all its constituent units and ultimately the individual as the core component of the units is that it should be based on truth. I have myself been only a humble seeker of truth. Therefore the only things that I can say about it is that since truth pervades the essence of every individual it should guide all the actions of the individual. A truthful State would therefore be a set up that would be composed of village republics, each autonomous in its working yet a part of a large circle in a group of concentric circles. The outermost circle in this scheme would wield power to strengthen all the inner circles and would derive its own strength from them.

“Gandhi”, in the words of Raghavan Iyer, (1973) “seems to stand almost alone among social and political thinkers in his firm rejection of the rigid dichotomy between ends and means and in his extreme moral preoccupation with the means to the extent that they, rather than the ends, provide the standard of reference”.

6.7 KEY CONCEPTS

Euclid

A Greek mathematician (lived circa 300 BC), whose chief work *The Elements* is a comprehensive treatise on Mathematics in 13 volumes on subjects such as plane geometry, proportion, solid geometry etc. *The Elements commences* with definitions on five postulates. The postulates deal with geometrical construction, implicitly assuming points, lines, circles and the other geometrical objects. His most famous postulate is often cited as the “parallel postulate”. It states that one, and only one line can be drawn through a point parallel to a given line

alepho.clarku.edu/ndjoyce/java/elements/elements.htm

Ram Rajya

It refers to Hindu Lord Rama’s rule. It is a reference to the ideal conditions that upheld and nurtured the qualities of honesty, truthfulness, trust, respect, cooperation, sacrifice and service at the time when Rama ruled his Kingdom. This ideal Hindu Society was projected sharply by Mahatma Gandhi during India’s struggle for freedom.

6.8 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Parekh, Bhikhu, 1995, *Gandhi’s Political Philosophy: A Critical Examination*, Ajanta, New Delhi.

Parekh, Bhikhu, 1989, *Colonialism, Tradition and Reform: An Analysis of Gandhi’s Political Discourse*, Sage, New Delhi.

Parel, Anthony J, (Ed.), 1997, *Hind Swaraj and Other Writings*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi.

Terchek, Ronald J, 2000, “Gandhian Autonomy in the Late Modern World” in Anthony J. Parel (Ed.), *Gandhi, Freedom and Self Rule*, Vistaar, New Delhi.

6.9 ACTIVITIES

1. Visit your nearby library and try to go through some book by or on Mahatma Gandhi. Try to pen down your observations on Gandhi's views on State, society and modernity.
2. Think of different situations where Gandhian methods can provide solutions. Write a paragraph on it.