
UNIT 3 SOCIAL EGALITARIANISM AND GANDHI

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3.0 OBJECTIVES

Egalitarianism is a belief that favors equality of some sort. Its general premise is that people should be treated as equals on certain dimensions such as race, religion, ethnicity, political affiliation, economic status, social status, and cultural heritage. Egalitarian doctrines maintain that all humans are equal in fundamental worth and all people should have the same rights. The Unit discusses Gandhi's concerns as an ardent social reformer committed to such egalitarian vision of the society. He was very much against social injustices, tyrannies and oppressions. He fought against the evils of racism, imperialism, communalism, gender injustice, communalism and social segregation. His ideas on equality continue to generate interest among the admirers as well as critics. The Unit examines his efforts especially in the areas of annihilating untouchability, empowerment of women, the principle of *Sarvodaya* and diversity and dialogue between religions.

Thus by the end of this Unit you should be able:

- to have a basic understanding of Gandhian idea of social equality;
- to appreciate his ideas on complex social issues like caste, gender and *sarvodaya*;
- to understand his nuanced position on religion.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Gandhi's genius as a social reformer lay in his intuitive ability to fuse timeless principles with evolving strategies. Throughout his life, Gandhi gradually shifted the emphasis of his political endeavours from non-violent resistance to constructive schemes for the social good. For him, non-violent resistance (*satyagraha*) and *sarvodaya* were logical corollaries of the same philosophical perspective. Non-violent resistance, however, aimed to set right entrenched abuses or to abolish some patently unfair laws or practices. But persisting non-cooperation with perceived evils cannot by itself create a egalitarian society. He believed that everybody must earn his bread with the sweat of his brow. This

was the crux of his theory of ‘bread labour’. His concept of egalitarianism was centred on the preservation of human dignity rather than material development. He visualised a society based on the principles of non-violence and truth. His ideal social order was not a sort of platonic myth of ‘Republic’. He built strong bridges between theory and practice. His goal of life was to live in a non-exploitive society. His ‘*Hind Swaraj*’ was anchored on trusteeship and anti-machine and technology that displace men from livelihoods. He exploited indigenous (*swadeshi*) resources and shunned foreign goods. He emphasised on the purity of end and means. He respected diversities and pluralities. According to him, religion and politics are inseparable, whereas politics is inspired by morality and spirituality. His experiments with truth are aimed at a new moral and societal order.

3.2 GANDHI AND THE PROBLEM OF UNTOUCHABILITY

Untouchability in India, as the race and colour problems in the West, rested upon the idea of the superiority of one section of people over another on account of their birth. Eradication of untouchability was one of the central concerns of Gandhi. The disease of untouchability permeated in our society was seriously diagnosed at various levels by Gandhi and his numerous associates dedicated to the cause of eradication of this evil. The long-drawn struggle for more than three decades had initial difficulties on account of serious opposition from orthodox Hindus. The customs of treating untouchables by our society had greatly lowered their social status. Their dwellings were outside the villages and were not permitted to use public tanks, ponds, wells and other places. The very ‘touch’ of an untouchable was hateful. Untouchability, in practice, has been almost a total negation of fundamental rights as well as of all criteria of civilized and decent existence. It may appear shocking to people to imagine that in many parts of India, some decades back, a higher caste Hindu could touch a cow, a goat, a dog and a cat without being contaminated but the touch of a human being of the untouchable community could pollute him.

Gandhi fought against these social practices and advised the status-conscious people to behave in a decent way towards untouchables. He opened schools for them, afforded them an honourable place in his Ashram, fought for their temple entry at numerous places, lived amongst them and participated in their social and religious functions. In a society like ours, where religion and social status play dominant role, Gandhi found numerous obstacles in his mission. But his practical examples were eye-opener to millions of people who still did not wish to come out of the dilemma of religious thoughts. His efforts, however, paved the way for promoting their cause and afforded them a social status which was somewhat improved than what was in the past.

Gandhi sought to revolutionize the entire Hindu society. For him, the interdependence of Dalit and Hindu society is crucial. The two societies are organically linked with each other. He uses this as a knife that cuts both ways. There is no point in changing ‘myself’, excluding the ‘other’. The ‘other’ also should experience a process of change. The inseparability of ‘the self’ and the ‘other’, which was the philosophical mainstay of the *Bhakti* movement, was invested by Gandhi with a new kind of radical militancy. The upper caste liberals

romanticise the poor and the untouchables. For them, guilt is the only authentic emotion vis a vis untouchability. Gandhi transformed the notion of historical guilt into a concrete model of action for the present. He sought to convince and convert the caste Hindus and mobilise their energies by means of moral and religious appeals. He aimed to awaken them to the moral enormity of untouchability and to inspire them both individually and collectively to do all in their power to eradicate it. He encouraged them to undertake welfare activities among the untouchables in a spirit of remorse and guilt. He thought that this would have desirable effects on both. It would 'cleanse' the caste Hindus, redeem their guilt and draw them physically, morally and emotionally closer to the untouchables. It would also give the latter a measure of pride and dignity, increase their self-confidence and improve their habits and ways of life, thereby removing some of the causes of caste Hindu prejudices against them

He shocked the Hindu orthodoxy by his repeated declaration that untouchability was not a vital part of Hinduism, but was, as he used to say, only an excrescence and a plague. He claimed to be the devout follower of the spiritual and moral teachings of the Hindu scriptures. He refused to accept any interpretation of the religious scriptures including even the *Vedas* if it conflicted with the commands of conscience. Even if a religious and scriptural source would be quoted in support of untouchability he would brush it aside as an interpolation. Thus in his own gentle but terrifically powerful way, Gandhi tried to demolish the religious foundation of untouchability. By so doing not only did he bring the criteria of conscience and right reason to bear their impact on this institution but he damaged its centuries old scriptural support. Untouchability in its extreme form always caused him so much pain, because he considered himself to be a Hindu.

Gandhi maintained that in Hinduism there was no sanction for treating a single human being as untouchable. The *Bhagavad Gita* has never taught that a *chandala* was in any way inferior to a *Brahmana*. He regarded himself a *Sanatan* Hindu, because he obeyed the eternal precepts of the faith as embodied in the *Shastras* as he understood them. He had no doubt that there are many interpolations in the *Smritis* and the other scriptural books. He rejected as interpolations everything in the *Smritis* or other writings that was inconsistent with Truth and Non-violence or other fundamental and universal principles of ethics. He argued that the "idea of superiority and inferiority is repugnant to the most elementary principles of morality. A *Brahmana* who considers himself superior to any single creature of God ceases to be a *Brahmana*. If we are children of the same God, how can there be any rank among us? What will happen to the body, if these members begin to quarrel about rank? The verses in the *Smritis* about *Sudras* deserve to be summarily rejected as being contrary to the spirit of humanity." (Gandhi, M. K., September 1934)

He felt that if religious equality was provided to the Dalits, their political and economic conditions would quickly improve. His view of the problem of untouchability is basically a religious and spiritual one. He refused to recognise any separate entity for the untouchables. As an advocate of the Varna system, he wanted only four divisions. He did want the untouchables to have "all the rights common to the four Varnas." It must be reiterated here that in the Gandhian scheme, the four divisions did not signify any sense of superiority or domination, but were simply functional divisions.

Gandhi remarked, “Hinduism has sinned in giving sanction to Untouchability. It has degraded us, made us pariahs.” He argued, that the *shastras* “cannot be above reason and morality.” He also said, “ ... if it is proved to me that it is an essential part of Hinduism I for one would declare myself an open rebel against Hinduism itself.” (Fischer, L., 1997. p.185)

Gandhi believed that *varnashrama* and the caste system in ancient India had a constructive role to play. It helped to integrate the different ethnic groups under Hindu society. Further, it gave rise to a practicable system of social division of labour. But subsequently the caste system became oppressive and exploitative. This is where Gandhi brings his modern ideas of truth, justice, equality dignity of the individual etc., to the very corpus of traditional values. In view of this he urges people to see or to realize the inhuman and irrational nature of caste system. Gandhi is convinced that unless people realize this, untouchability cannot be removed by force or law.

Gandhi-Ambedkar Controversy

A few words are in order regarding the very important Gandhi-Ambedkar discussion on the issue of caste and untouchability; their difference of opinions and the mutual influence on each other. Gandhi and Ambedkar looked at the problem of untouchability from two very different perspectives. Gandhi had a very keen sense of justice and human dignity, but it was conditioned by his religious convictions. Ambedkar’s views were shaped by personal experience of the inequities of the caste system; he had personally suffered the humiliations and insults meted out to an untouchable by a caste ridden society.

Gandhi’s take-off point was that the problem of untouchability was a problem of the self, in this case the collective Hindu self. He had transformed the notion of individual self and the necessity of clearing the cobwebs of the caste ego was shifted to the level of the larger notion of the collective self. But he maintained the importance of internalizing these values at the personal level too. The Untouchable is a part of the Self. He saw the movement to eradicate untouchability as a sacred ritual of self-purification. He discredited and undermined the intellectual and moral basis of untouchability, but he did not concentrate on its social, economic and political roots. Ambedkar has defined the problem in terms of building an independent political identity for Dalits in the structures of social, economic, and political powers, whereas for Gandhi it was purely a religious question, that too an internal one for Hinduism.

D R Nagaraj in his article “Self-purification versus Self-respect” argued that while Ambedkar and Gandhi were political adversaries, in the India of today we need both. We need Ambedkar to remind ourselves that while criticism and even anger are sometimes necessary, so are action and reconstruction. Both Ambedkar and Gandhi were not the same persons they were when they had set out on a journey of profound engagement with each other. They were deeply affected and transformed by each other.

Ambedkar and Gandhi transformed each other. The latter extended the very scope and definition of the dalit cause. It was no more a question of mere untouchability. It had become a larger holistic understanding of the untouchables. Because of the debate between them both had changed their emphasis, to put it crudely, Gandhi had taken over economics from Ambedkar, Ambedkar had internalized

the importance of religion. Both Gandhi and Ambedkar can and should be made complementary to each other.

3.3 EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

Gandhi respected traditions of the society, but not at the cost of loss of individual dignity. He never hesitated to criticize the evils which had gripped the Indian society, and tried to mobilize public opinion against such evils. He realised that there were deep-rooted customs hampering the development of women, and women's freedom from such shackles was necessary for the emancipation of the nation. He assumed a pioneering role in attempting to eradicate the social wrongs committed against the women of the country through ages. When Gandhi emerged on to the political scenario, social evils like child marriage and dowry system were rampant. The percentage of women with basic education was as low as two percent. The patriarchal nature of the society confined women to the status of an inferior sex subordinate to their male counterparts. The *purdah* system was in full vogue in Northern India. Unless accompanied by their male guardians, the women were not permitted to venture out on their own. Only a handful few could avail of education and attend schools. It was in such a dismal milieu that Gandhi took the responsibility of shouldering a social crusade that led to a major reorientation of the common notion of women in the Indian society.

According to Gandhi, social reforms were essential for the restructuring of the societal values that had so far dominated the perception of Indian women. He realized that certain customs and traditions of the Indian society were antithetical to the spirit of development of the women of the nation. His practical and dynamic advice was, "It is good to swim in the waters of tradition, but to sink in them is suicide". The system of *purdah* came under Gandhi's attacks and he questioned the very foundation of this practice. For him, the *purdah* system was no less than a "vicious, brutal and barbarous" practice. The predicaments of the *devadasis*, a part of the lower, untouchable segment of the society, had an indelible effect on the sensitive mind of the Gandhi. The pathetic conditions of the child prostitutes disturbed him immensely. He left no stone unturned for rehabilitating this segment of the society, as for him guarding the honour of women was no less than protecting cows. According to Gandhi, one of the first tasks that need to be accomplished as soon as the country won freedom was to abolish the system of *devadasis*. Gandhi throughout his life waged a crusade for the upliftment of the socially downtrodden, making significant contributions for the enhancement of the status of women in India. Women under his aegis, took a milestone step towards re-establishing their identity in the society. Gandhi's inspiring ideologies boosted their morale and helped them to rediscover their self esteem.

With the emergence of Gandhian Philosophy, a new conception of women gradually gained currency. For Gandhi, women were not mere toys in the hands of men, neither their competitors. Men and women are essentially endowed with the same spirit and therefore have similar problems. Women are at par with men, one complementing the other. According to Gandhi, education for women was the need of the time that would ensure their moral development and make them capable of occupying the same platform as that of men. In Gandhi's views, women can never be considered to be the weaker sex. In Gandhi's words, "To call women the weaker sex is a libel; it is man's injustice to women." In fact, women for

Gandhi were embodiments of virtues like knowledge, humility, tolerance, sacrifice and faith. These qualities were essential prerequisites for imbibing the virtue of *Satyagraha*. The capability of enduring endless suffering can be witnessed only in the women, according to the *Mahatma*. The doctrine of *ahimsa* as preached by Gandhi incorporates the virtue of suffering as is evident in the women. Therefore, Gandhi envisaged a critical role for women in establishing non-violence. Gandhi invoked the instances of ancient role models who were epitomes of Indian womanhood, like *Draupadi*, *Savitri*, *Sita* and *Damayanti*, to show that Indian women could never be feeble. Women have equal mental abilities as that of men and equal right to freedom. To sum up in Gandhi's words; "The wife is not the husband's slave but his companion and his help-mate and an equal partner in all his joys and sorrows - as free as the husband to choose her own path." Gandhi's reformist spirit seasoned the role that he played in uplifting the status of women in India.

In order to improve the condition of women and to carry out the social reforms effectively, social reformers felt the need for providing education to girls. Gandhi strongly criticized "excessive subordination" of the women to the men. Education, though is the key to progress in women's rights, has been sadly neglected. Tradition and custom played important parts in determining women's position in the social life. Women are deprived of equal status both in opportunities and also under law. Gandhi called upon women to join national movement with the idea that there can be no national awakening without the awakening of women. He was of the view that once the women of India were awakened, national awakening would not be delayed.

Gandhi had great faith in the Indian women about their potentialities. Women in India have suffered from numerous oppressive social customs, traditions, laws, and values, norms and deprivations that are sanctioned by various religious scriptures besides being a part of everyday essential life. Even today, an overwhelming majority of them are suppressed because of being women. From the final *non-violence* campaign in South Africa in 1913 until his death in 1948, Gandhi was supported, and was inspired by and also inspired women to a degree incomparable in Indian history. Gandhi brought women to the frontline of the national fight. Never before in Indian history women joyfully participated in public activities as they did under the charismatic call of Gandhi

In various *ashrams* and other educational and social work organizations including *Sewa Ashram*, *Sabaramati Ashram*, *Hitakarini Sabha* carried on Gandhian lines, where the women's various social problems were discussed. Girls and women were treated on par with boys and men and were paid equal attention. Gandhi was keen that women should be given equal responsibilities as men not only in the national struggle but also in the building up of the nation. Gandhi observed that the general condition of women in India was distressing due to several oppressive social practices, values, norms and laws. Their condition was miserable both in the public and private sphere, i.e. in the family as well as in the society.

Not only there was a general awakening among the women, but under Gandhi's leadership, they entered into the national mainstream, taking parts in the National Movements. According to Gandhi, the role of women in the political, economic and social emancipation of the country was of overriding importance. Gandhi had immense faith in the capability of women to carry on a non violent crusade.

Under his guidance and leadership, women shouldered critical responsibilities in India’s struggle for freedom. Gandhi’s urge to women to join India’s struggle for independence was instrumental in transforming the outlook of women. *Swaraj* uprooted age old taboos and restrictive customs. Through their participation in Indian struggle for freedom, women of India broke down the shackles of oppression that had relegated them to a secondary position from time immemorial.

Gandhi made women into a subject, making her realize that she had freedom, qualities and attributes which are crucial to contemporary society. In a radical reconstruction, he gave her confidence in herself and in her essence. He made woman realize that she has a significant and a dominant role to play in the family, that both she and her husband are equal, and that within the family they both have similar rights. In a path-breaking intervention, he made it possible not only the involvement of women in politics, but made them realize that the national movement could not succeed without their involvement in the struggle. Gandhi ultimately empowered woman in the family and in marriage.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) How did Gandhi attack the problem of Untouchability?

2) What is the role played by Gandhi towards empowering women?

3.4 SECULARISM AND RELIGION

Religion as an Idea and as an Institution:

Gandhi used the word religion in two different senses: one in its denominational or sectarian sense, that is, in terms of Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, etc., and the other in the traditional Indian sense of Dharma, that is, the moral code which guides a person’s life and the social order. Religion as an idea is timeless whereas religion as an institution is time-bound. Without the Institutional religions the idea of religion would not find actual expression in time and place; without the idea of religion, institutional religions would lack the specifically religious element in them.

Many people criticized Gandhi for mixing religion and politics, however, these critics did not fully understand what Gandhi meant by religion. There can be no religion devoid of morality. A pure life, unruffled by passions and prejudices, is an essential prerequisite for religious experience. He emphasized that the institutional religion, or religion in its organized, denominational form, not as Dharma or a code of morality, but in the form of Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism, etc. should be kept separate and that religion should be treated as a private or personal concern of the individual.

Secularism

Gandhi had a modern understanding of secularism. According to him, religion should not intrude into politics; there should be separation of religion from politics, economy, education and large areas of social life and culture. In a multi-religious society, secularism also means the state should show equal regard for all faiths including atheism. Secularism has emerged as a uniting force of Indian people against colonialism and also meant an opposition to communalism.

He was not bothered by the western idea of separation of church and state. He felt, in India religion is so powerful in the social order that the western concept of secularism did not make sense in the geo-cultural context. In deviance to the western concept of secularism, he suggested *Sarvadhrama Samabhava*, to prevent conflicts caused by religious bigotry. He believed that God is ethics and morality. He had deduced a simple but significant logic: people lived by a set of beliefs whether they are rooted in atheism, secularism or spiritualism and these need to be accommodated in secular polity. He opens up the avenues of interreligious understanding and of a spiritually justified limitation of the role of religious institutions and symbols in certain areas of contemporary life. Inter-religious harmony can be secured without requiring the people to become irreligious or anti-religious.

His idea of secularism is informed with a sense of history, tradition and is sensitive to religion. There is a scope for inclusion and accommodation in his characterization and it is normatively different from the received understanding from the West. He believed that religion and the state are inseparable, that irreligiosity encouraged by the state leads to demoralization of the people and that, therefore, the state's religious policy should be pluralistic with equal respect to all religions.

Gandhi pioneered a way of moral-political experimentation in which the relative autonomy (or, in other words, the non-absolute separation) of religion and politics from each other is used for the reconstruction of both the religious traditions and the modern state. The reformist intervention of the modern democratic state in the socio-religious sphere had to have as its complementary side some form of moral-political intervention for transforming the modern state by integrating its institutions and practices with the principles of *satya* and *ahimsa*.

While resisting religious fundamentalism, he is also skeptical about the hyper-secularism of the Western type. Some of the characteristics which are unique can be identified in his alternative are: He is committed to the idea of principled distance between religion and state which is different from one-sided exclusion or mutual exclusion or strict neutrality. He has conceptual space for community specific political rights- the right of religious communities to establish and

maintain institutions for the survival and sustenance of their religious traditions. His idea of secularism entails a conceptual distinction between depublicization and depoliticization -not hostile to the public presence of religion but does not aim to de-publicize it. He is concerned as much with inter-religious as well as intra-religious domination. He combines active hostility to some aspects of religion (a ban on untouchability) with active respect for other dimensions as he believes religion has multiple values. His vision combines critique of the religion with respect consistently.

Pluralism and Co-existence of Religions

Religious Pluralism means in principle all institutional religions are legitimate. Gandhi believes all religions have their origin in divine revelation. The one true religion subsequently became many “as it passed through human medium”. In other words, God had revealed himself to the humanity at the same time humanity expressed the meaning of the received revelation differently, depending on language and culture. The unities of religious truths are guaranteed because of their divine sources but their diversity becomes unavoidable. Diverse philosophical and theosophical systems, dogmas, cults and codes reflect this diversity. He used number of metaphors to convey the ideas of religious pluralism: that all institutional religions were roads that led to the same destination; they were the branches of the same tree. Further, he believed that there is a core and a periphery to all religions. The core reflects the eternal essence which is by and large common across all faiths.

Religious Pluralism provides objective basis for religious toleration within the state and also supplies the foundation for the dialogue between religions. Since all religions have a common origin, humans had a moral obligation to respect them. The Gujarati term he uses for toleration was *Sahishnuta*, which is a more positive term than toleration. It means respect and sympathy for religions different from one’s own, whereas toleration can imply an assumption of inferiority of the other. He was convinced that the future of peace between religions lay in the dialogue between religious. Dialogue was not a process of superimposing one’s own religious views on the other but of understanding the other as a different religious being. To have a genuine dialogue, the participants had to maintain their own identities and beliefs. In a dialogue, one speaks from one’s position. One need not hope to discover what one’s position would be at the end of the dialogue, but one has to have a position grounded in truth. Such being the case dialogue can become an exercise in joint search for truth, tolerance being only means to truth. The outcome of such openness would not be the fusion or the uniting of the religions concerned but it would enable an orthodox Hindu to remain what he was and to yet to respect an orthodox Muslim. The outcome would be towards assimilation as much as possible, of the truths that were in the religion of the other. This would lead towards harmony and peace between diverse beliefs, faiths and communities.

3.5 SARVODAYA

Gandhi lived in an age of colonialism and imperialism. During his life span, two world wars were fought causing great devastation, and threatening human existence and civilization. In his own country he witnessed poverty, hunger, destitution and deprivation of millions along with many social evils. In such a

scenario he was very much skeptical of the prevailing political and economic ideologies to fare better for a peaceful world. His primary concern was to build a non-violent, peaceful and progressive society with a humanistic agenda; under the above historical compulsion he imagined a socio-economic alternative with the greatest stress on moral elevation. Gandhi visualizes an integral development in society through *Sarvodaya*. It consists of the welfare of all beings. It is a spiritual and moral approach to the problems of mankind. As Gandhi claims, it is not a new approach that he is offering; it is on the other hand rooted in the ancient Indian thinking. It is not only stand for the welfare of all but visualizes a world order based on equality. The merger of one in all is based on self-sacrifice and selfless service.

The greatest good for all living beings is the goal of *Sarvodaya*. While rejecting the principles of the greatest good of the greatest number, it upholds the maximum welfare of every individual on the basis of sharing goods and services regardless of one's own contribution. By providing sufficient opportunities to every individual for their personal initiatives and capacities *Sarvodaya* aims at the total and integral development of every individual in the human society. Gandhi states: "I want to save time and labour, not for a section of mankind, but for all; I want the concentration of wealth not in the hands of a few, but in the hands of all." No individual or group will be left out suppressed in the *Sarvodaya* society. Gandhi firmly believed that the individual has to work for the welfare of all. There is no growth of the individual without the growth of the society and vice-versa. Both are inter-related. Further he advocates economic equality in the sense that both intellectual work and bodily work are equal in status. He also advocates dignity of labor.

Gandhi firmly believed that economic equality is the master key to removal of conflict. Working for economic equality means abolishing the eternal conflict between capital and labour. It means leveling down of the few rich in whose hands is concentrated the bulk of the nation's wealth, on the one hand; and the leveling up of the semi starved naked millions, on the other. A nonviolent system of government is clearly an impossibility so long as the wide gulf between the rich and the hungry millions persists. *Sarvodaya* then is the application of the principle of nonviolence in the transformation of societies: from their present forms which are mostly exploitative and disfavour the most disadvantaged, towards more balanced, inclusive and equalitarian forms in which there is Social Justice for All. Thus Gandhian concept of *Sarvodaya* advocates a casteless society in the social realm, in politics it shares a democratic vision of the power of the people, in economics it promotes the belief that small is beautiful and in religion it asks for tolerance for all faiths and its final goal is to promote peace for all mankind.

Trusteeship

Gandhi evolved the theory of trusteeship not only on his deep religious conviction that everything belongs to God and therefore, a human being can hold either his property or talent only as a trustee, but also on a number of practical considerations. He knew that to dispossess the men of property or of talent by force was bound to involve class war, hatred, proletarian dictatorship, an all powerful and coercive State, and the consequent elimination of all hope of creating a non-violent society. He also felt that many men who had acquired property had

some special abilities for increasing production and many men of talent had exceptional contributions to make, and, therefore, to destroy them by force, may lead to much less of production and would be like killing the goose that lays the golden eggs. Hence his emphasis on persuading them to function as trustees rather than dispossessing them, by force, of their income or wealth. At the same time, knowing human nature as he did, he knew that mere persuasion may not be enough. He, therefore, conveyed the warning that the alternative to their being amenable to persuasion would be the triumph of forces that would dispossess them by violence. At the same time, he reminded both tenants and workers that their exploitation was possible only because of their failure to recognise their own strength and the consequent passive acceptance of their exploitation. He wanted the poor to know that the rich cannot accumulate wealth without the co-operation of the poor in society; and he recommended non-violent non-cooperation and civil disobedience as the right and infallible means for getting the rich to change their attitude and become trustees in the public interest instead of continuing as exploiters. He was prepared to advocate the implementation of ameliorative measures through the legislative channel, give trusteeship a statutory form, and make it a legalised institution. Appeal to the better instincts in the rich, persuasion, education regarding the inevitability of change and the greater unattractiveness of the alternative of change by violence, non-violent, non-cooperation by the exploited that would make the exploiter's functioning impossible, and finally legislative action were the series of measures that he contemplated for his programme in bringing about the change that he desired in property relations and the use of personal talents in the public interest.

Gandhi also claimed for his socialism of *Sarvodaya* and Trusteeship the ability to survive on a self-sustaining and permanent basis which, he held, was not possible in the case of the socialism or communism of the Marxian conception. This was not only because the latter used violence as its means but also because socialism through violence only destroyed possession. According to Gandhi, nothing secured by violence could survive on a permanent basis.

The theory of trusteeship, elimination of exploitation in every shape or form; a classless society which offers no privileges by the birth or wealth or talent; mutual cooperation being the driving force of motivation and behavior; and above all, securing the welfare of all without any distinction of race, religion, sex, political affiliation: these may be said to be the highlights of the *Sarvodaya* society envisioned by Gandhi. Further human values, individual development that's always consistent with its use for the development of society; promotion of altruism to the highest degree; integration of the individual with society; lifting the whole human society to the highest level of existence where love and fair play will have the most crucial roles to play; these are the most predominant characteristics of the *Sarvodaya* ideal. *Sarvodaya* then is the application of the principle of nonviolence in the transformation of societies: from their present forms which are mostly exploitative and disfavour the most disadvantaged, toward more balanced, inclusive and equalitarian forms.

Trusteeship as a viable revolutionary force can be seen in the *Bhoodan- Gramdan* Movement initiated by Vinoba Bhave during 1950s. Bhave relentlessly pursued voluntary contributions from all land owners whether of wealthy or moderate means to be redistributed to the landless. Bhave was once criticized for accepting a land donation from someone who had barely enough to sustain his family. The

man donated it to the village elders to redistribute to the landless. Bhave commented that such an act shows that the spirit of sacrifice has no limits. He pointed out that such acts inspire gratitude on the part of those receiving the gift and shame those who are reluctant to share.

Sarvodaya makes it absolutely clear that *Swaraj* cannot be identified only with economic prosperity and political power. As Gandhi thinks even if India gets free and achieves economic prosperity it would still not a real *Swaraj*. Real *Swaraj*, for Gandhi, means not only political power and economic prosperity but more importantly it means a certain moral development among people. A man who is having a moral life can alone have this attitude. He is the man, as he puts it, “does not cheat anyone, does not forsake truth and does his duty.”

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) In Gandhian framework, what is the relationship between religion and state?

2) How Trusteeship contributes to egalitarian ideals?

3.6 LET US SUM UP

We have looked at the views of Gandhi on various unjust aspects of society and examined his efforts regarding some of the aspects. Gandhi believed in egalitarian ideals of a society which has basic economic, social and political equity as ingredients and supported a fundamental equality amongst all citizens. He doubted that the centralized state could serve these ends unless it had actually arisen from a people already dedicated to them. The social transformation of a nation could not be achieved in purely social terms, if for no other reason than that social action and political authority cannot be wholly disentangled. Gandhi was deeply convinced that political power could be brought to bear on institutionalized practices which subvert social and economic ends, but just as his radical ideas of social and economic reform require that these arenas be purified and understood in a new light, politics too must be purified and understood anew.

3.7 KEY WORDS

- Varnas** : Four divisions of traditional Hindu society.
- Sarvodaya** : It means welfare of all beings, ‘good of all’, ‘service to all’ and ‘welfare of all’.
- Trusteeship** : Human beings holding their property or talent only as a trustee.

3.8 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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