

Gandhi's Sarvodaya Thoery

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Abstract

A transformational philosophy based on truth (*Satya*), non-violence (*Ahimsa*), self-reliance (*Swadeshi*) and inclusiveness, Sarvodaya philosophy closely parallels to the philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi whose philosophy is Sarvodaya or Welfare for all. Sarvodaya, which traces its origins from its interpretation of John Ruskin's *Unto This Last*, is a society where dignity is respected, equality is observed and harmony prevails. The philosophy is a belief in decentralized governance through *Gram Swaraj*, (the place of the people), community development and empowering marginalized groups. Critical to understanding modern challenges such as poverty, income inequality, and environmental degradation is that Gandhi emphasized local production, ethical consumption, and minimalism. Sarvodaya stretches beyond limits of historic reality and becomes a formative force in the social justice and environmental stewardship and pacifist movements of the world. Principles of NMTA's are consistent with modern paradigms as embodied by the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and promote a well balanced view attending both to individual and collective well being. Sarvodaya is a timeless philosophy that frames a way of organizing inclusive and sustainable societies all over the globe.

Keywords: Sarvodaya, Gandhi, Non-violence, Sustainability, Self-reliance, Social Justice

1. Introduction

A symbol of his country's struggle against colonial rule and a world leader of peace, non-violence, human dignity, Mahatma Gandhi with his philosophy of Sarvodaya ('welfare of all'), left a permanent impression in the society. However, his building up of this idea from his translation of John Ruskin's *Unto This Last* (Termed Gandhi's Village Swaraj) is the cornerstone of Gandhi's idea of a society of a harmonious and equitable state. Sarvodaya transcends the mere political aspiration to the total development of individual and communities. This ideal of inclusive is an ideal of including all irrespective of class, caste or creed that extends dignity, prosperity, and well being of each person without any discrimination (Joseph, 2017). For the heart of Sarvodaya was Gandhi's unshakeable commitment to the very values of truth (*Satya*) and non-violence (*Ahimsa*), values exceptional as tools for social change. For Gandhi, truth is ideas of justice and fair play to those around you and non-violence defined love, feelings of empathy and peaceful coexistence (Bondurant, 1958). Such values also defined the manner in which he conducted his personal and political affairs and the theoretical and practical frameworks around which Sarvodaya as a living philosophy sought to tackle the complex problems of human society (Nanda, 1989).

Sarvodaya of Gandhi stresses over self reliance and grassroots power of development. *Swadeshi* principle, emphasizing the reliance on local industries, crafts and talents signals to the intrinsic need of the local industries, crafts and talents to build self sufficient communities (Kumarappa, 1997). As part of his belief that true progress could only start when villages, the backbone of Indian society, were revitalised, economically, educationally and socially, Gandhi also wanted to stress the connection between the quality of the environment in villages and the

progress of the Indian democracy. *Gram Swaraj*, or village self rule as he called it, was his concept for decentralized and participatory governance, where collective good of all the citizens was at the top of all priorities (Das, 1994). Hence, Sarvodaya does not confine itself to a particular region or to the period, it is an authentic universal philosophy of justice and sustainable development. Gandhi's principles are still fundamentally relevant in an era of greater economic inequalities and environmental degradation. A timeless blueprint for building a compassionate, equitable, and thrifty society is proffered by Saiyadiraja Sarvodaya as an advocate of a balance between the progress of material and moral (Mathai, 2000). Though twenty years past his death, Gandhi's vision remains a powerful force in efforts to ease poverty, advance social justice and preserve the environment across the globe (Sarvodaya Foundation, n.d.).

2. Core Principles of Sarvodaya

The main elements of the Sarvodaya theory of Mahatma Gandhi consist of a whole set of principles, which characterize his idea of a righteous and fair society. *Ahimsa* (non violence), *Satya* (truth), *swadish* (self dependence) and *Grahakshem* (welfare of the community) are the bed rock of his philosophy, which underlines importance of individual and community welfare. Taken together, and mutually reinforcing each one of these principles were designed to address the socio-economic, political, and cultural challenges of his time and resonate now as never before.

Having such a high regard and respect for nonviolence, for the most powerful tool on our part, not just of resistance, but for for social transformation, Gandhi extended a long way in application. While Gandhi certainly viewed nonviolence as the avoidance of physical violence, for him it meant positive action, rooted in compassion, empathy and understanding. He contended that violence begets more violence, but non-violence brings to the minds that we are seeking true welfare for all (Bondurant, 1958). Gandhi's campaigns like the Salt March and Quit India movement demonstrated that peaceful resistance could be a force that could change and unite people from all walks of life towards their goal of justice and freedom. For Gandhi truth is inseparable from non-violence. According to him, moral and ethical principles had to be followed through, even if they were met with adversity. This synergy of truth and non-violence embodied in Gandhi's concept of *Satyagraha*—the force born of truth—show what individuals and communities armed with these principles could do to fight measures of oppression without engaging in hostility (Nanda, 1989). To Gandhi truth was not an abstract ideal, the eternal consistent with the historical and existential realities of what he chose to confront; it was, rather, a practical guide for good conduct in all situations, personal and political.

This is because Gandhi made *Swadeshi* (self reliance) as a central theme. And he knew that colonial exploitation had ravaged India's traditional industries and brought poverty to many in its wake. As a remedy against this, Gandhi promoted the revival of indigenous crafts and industries, particularly hand spinning and weaving, as a way to promote economic independence and conserve cultural heritage (Kumarappa, 1997). Production and consumption of locally could limit reliance on external resources and carry out sustainable livelihoods to eradicate unemployment and economic irregularity. The moral essence of the *Swadeshi* principle was also to lead a simple life, and to minimise wasteful consumption. Gandhi's espousal of simplicity was an economic matter as much as a religious one: simplicity was a matter of contentment and ethical living. He thought that such a society based on self reliance and minimalism would be better able to attain collective and ecological wellbeing (Mathai,

2000). For that reason, *Swadeshi* is an integrated form of development that encompasses economic self sufficiency with ecological sustainability and ethical values.

Gandhian Sarvodaya was built around the idea that community development is the way forward to the ideal of progress; a progress that could not have been achieved without the upliftment of villages, the very foundation and spine of Indian society. This vision crystallized in *Gram Swaraj* or village self rule, which aimed at decentralized governance and participatory decision making. Das (1994) argued that better democracy could emerge through; empowering villages to run their own affairs by enforcing greater accountability and more equity and inclusivity in governance. *Gram Swaraj* aimed to establish self sufficient and likeminded communities with the strength of the local institutions and the spirit of unity. Gandhi's community development initiatives incorporated education and sanitation. Gandhi's idea of Nai Talim (Basic Education) combined vocational training while doing academic learning so that the people could learn practical skills along with moral and ethical values. Hygiene and cleanliness, too, were considered to be of prime importance for the well being of person and community. He campaigned tirelessly for improvement in sanitation and an end to the practice of untouchability, which he made one element in his broader range of social equality and human dignity (Joseph, 2017).

3. Sarvodaya and Constructive Programs

Sarvodaya philosophy of Gandhi went beyond theoretical ideals and we found the outright expression of them in series of constructive programs aimed to remedy the socio-economic ills of rural India. One of these programmes was about promoting self-reliance, empowering disprivileged communities and laying the foundation for an equitable and sustainable society. Gandhi's vision of Sarvodaya was made everyday in practical terms by prioritizing grassroots initiatives, especially local empowerment.

Gram Swaraj, or village self-rule, was central to Gandhi's Sarvodaya; for him, villages were to be self reliant, self governing units. Kumarappa (1997) rightly pointed out that Gandhi was firm about the importance of the revival of traditional village industries like hand spinning (charkha) and weaving for facing unemployment, poverty and economic disparity. During the colonial era, the spinning wheel became the symbol of economic independence and struggle against industrial exploitation. Gandhi aimed to establish sustainable communities through promoting local production and consumption, efficient utilization of resources and equitable distribution of wealth. Gandhi's principle of *Swadeshi*, as the use of native resources to augment dependence upon foreign products, was also uplifted in the promotion of village industries. Instead, Gandhi believed that self sufficient villages individually could provide the base for a strong national economy independent from the exploitative ways of the colonial rule (Das, 1994). It not only rejuvenated local economies but invoked a sense of dignity and purpose in rural populations, who are now given a reason to feel they can control their own development.

Gandhi's constructive programs included education and sanitation. In his thinking of Nai Talim (Basic Education), Gandhi conceptualized education as an integrated, holistic approach which the education was both vocational and academic. Education should not only arm individuals with theoretical knowledge, but the training should also provide them with practical and moral values to live by, and be able to contribute meaningfully to their communities also (Joseph, 2017). Nai Talim centred towards the dignity of labour to strip off the social hierarchies and create the equality amongst all communities of society. His sanitation initiatives, too, proved as transformative. Cleanliness was personal and communal

responsibility in his view; in fact he associated it with health, dignity and social harmony more broadly. Toilets were constructed, hygienic practice is promoted and cleanliness is educated about. Bondurant (1958) notes that Gandhi persistently preached the untouchability must be ended in India by doing away with the beliefs of superiority of those higher castes and making it Ok for the upper castes to do tasks associated with the Dalits, i.e. the people who are traditionally untouchables. Sanitation, according to Gandhi was not cleanliness of the body but of a society, cleansed and free from discrimination and indignity.

Gandhi also included in his constructive programmes women's empowerment and that of remaining marginalized communities, including Dalits and tribal people. He actively participated to bring women to social and economic activity, esp. in the spinning and weaving industries, which gave them an income and independency. His campaigns for uplift of Dalits whom he called as Harijans or (children of God) included campaigns for giving them education, employment, social recognition. In an effort to make a society in which everyone could grow no matter the caste or gender, Gandhi integrated marginalized communities into the more general Sarvodaya framework. Gandhi's constructive programs also dealt with the problems of the immediate social and economic situation, and in addition, advocated for environmental sustainability and ethical living. By his advocacy for minimalism, local production and organic farming, he advocated for the need of human-nature harmony (Mathai, 2000). Gandhi's ideas on sustainable living based on the tenets of Sarvodaya continue to be relevant in our discussions on climate change, environmental conservation.

4. Sarvodaya in the Freedom Movement

Sarvodaya philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi had been the motivational and practical resource in India's freedom struggle which not only made India to fight against oppression of colonial but also helping in making people of the country united on ideological and practical grounds. Whose movement provides the variables to explain the directions taken by movements like Non-Cooperation and Civil Disobedience as well as the pursuit of the direction of eradicating system inequalities in Indian society, is rooted in principles of truth non violence and inclusivity, this is Sarvodaya. Gandhi's use of Sarvodaya principles in the freedom movement reflected the potency of ethical and non violent methods of tackling transforming change.

In Sarvodaya Gandhi applied his principles to mass mobilization against colonial rule through two movements, namely, the Non-Cooperation Movement (1920–1922) and the Civil Disobedience Movement (1930–1934). These movements, guided by ideals of truth (*Satya*) and non-violence (*Ahimsa*), did not resort to violence as a mode of resistance, but used peaceful means of protest such as boycotts of British goods, institutions and laws. Gandhi's ability to appeal to millions of Indians of differing caste, class, and religion, to participate in acts of civil resistance (Bondurant, 1958) was made possible through the moral authority the Sarvodaya principles could bring. The ethical underwriting of the freedom struggle was reinforced by Gandhi's insistence that truth and non violence were an essential part of these movements. The Salt March (1930) marked both the defiance of colonial economic policies and the endurance of ordinary men and women brought together in solidarity for the cause of justice and equality. The inclusiveness assigned to Sarvodaya prevented these movements from being political independence only, but an awakening of mentality regarding the transformation in the society (Joseph, 2017).

Inclusion and uplifting of marginalised communities was a defining feature of the Sarvodaya's influence over the freedom movement. Gandhi never wavered in his advocacy of

the rights and dignity of Dalits (whom he called Harijans, 'children of God') for a free India. He tirelessly campaigned against untouchability through public campaigns, promoted inter caste dining and encouraged Dalits as well as others to enter temples and educational institutions. These were efforts which instantiate the Sarvodaya ideal of universal welfare and social harmony (Nanda, 1989). Gandhi also stressed the need of women's role in freedom movement. He recognized women potential as agent of change and so urged women actively to take part in spinning, weaving and other constructive as well as in non-violent protest. Sarojini Naidu and Kasturba Gandhi became iconoclastic leaders in this movement, showing the leadership of women for which Sarvodaya was intended (Mathai, 2000). Building on Sarvodaya, Radha Krishna Gupta and other activists set about pursuing a long list of initiatives to combat economic injustices and better rural areas. Hand-spinning (charkha) revival, and boycott of imported textiles were not only acts of resistance but also programmes to reduce unemployment and empower rural craftsmen. In order to associate the freedom struggle with socio-economic reform, Gandhi provided the contours to what would constitute a just and equal society (Kumarappa, 1997).

One of the other important contributions of Sarvodaya to the freedom movement was its effort for the decentralized governance and the participatory democracy expressed in the term *Gram Swaraj* (village self rule). Gandhi envisaged a post independence India where villages would be self sufficient units of governance, with its own local decision making and accountability. The object of this model was to give ordinary people the power to make their own destiny, liberating themselves from the central and hierarchical structures of colonial rule (Das, 1994). Additionally, efforts by Gandhi to bridge the rural / urban gap were in the realm of participatory governance. Sarvodaya attempted to lay down a balanced and sustainable national framework given its emphasis on the interconnectivity of the towns and rural economies and its effort to develop the rural India. Even today such thinking permeates conversations surrounding decentralization of governance from the bottom (Sarvodaya Foundation, n.d.). By being integrated into the freedom movement, Sarvodaya has shown that non violence, truth and inclusivity in action have the transformative power at a societal level. The moral and the social in independence that Gandhi insisted upon was a way of making the struggle for freedom not only a political struggle but also a real and interesting attempt to re imagine society in its entirety. Sarvodaya paved the way for the India that would become liberated, built on the foundation justice, equity and harmony, by addressing systemic inequalities and fostering unity within and across diverse communities. And that legacy remains to sneak movements for social change and political change around the globe.

5. Modern Relevance of Sarvodaya

The philosophy of Sarvodaya, which calls for welfare of all through principles of truth, non violence, self reliance and community development, is poignantly relevant in addressing the relevant challenge of the modern world. Gandhi's vision is timeless in an era of rampant poverty, widening inequalities, environmental crises, moral dilemmas — his solutions are ethical and sustainable. Sarvodaya can rearticulate its ideals in relation to the unfolding of the contemporary contexts and then help the societies attain the rate of equitable growth, social justice, and ecological balance.

Sarvodaya's contribution remains one of the most important in its ability to address systemic poverty and economic inequality. This problem is made possible through self reliance and sharing of resources equally as advocated by Gandhi. Kumarappa (1997) also stresses the importance of the local economies in generating sustainable livelihoods and reducing our dependence on exploitative global systems through *Swadeshi*, which means using what we

have, preferably local materials, even for industrial processes. Using decentralized production and consumption to promote economic autonomy and resilience, primarily in rural and marginalized places, Sarvodaya promotes economic autonomy and resilience. Another important weapon against inequality is participatory governance which underlies Sarvodaya. According to Gandhi, *Gram Swaraj* (village self rule) involves promoting empowering local communities to exercise control over their resources, to take decisions. The decentralised approach not only ensures that development initiatives develop with the particular necessities of communities but also ensures that government is accountable and inclusive (Das, 1994). This principle is modern in application, it noted that successful models of community development based on the application of this principle have created wealth, empowerment, and sustained economic independence for women, farmers, and artisans (Joseph, 2017). The social dimensions of poverty alleviation are further underlaid by Gandhi's emphasis on the dignity of labor and eradication of untouchability. Sarvodaya advocates for integrated marginalization of marginal groups, such as Dalits in the mainstream economy and the social fabric to achieve a comprehensive development which emphasizes on human dignity and equity (Nanda 1989). It is partly to the credit of these principles that they resonate with contemporary global movements for social justice and reformed rights for marginalized populations.

Socio-economic though not the only, or even the main focus, Sarvodaya also speaks to environmental sustainability and ethical living. In an age scarred and defeated by a world seemingly inhumane to the human species as a result of climate change, economic strain and environmental deterioration, Gandhi's cry for the peaceful compatibility of the human and the nature manifests itself as a lasting lesson for sustainability. His support of minimalism, local production, and organic farming mirrors closely the modern conservation oriented practices (Mathai, 2000). Gandhi focuses on reducing material wants and his notion of *Aparigraha* (non possession) reflect the importance of ethical consumption and waste reduction. Sarvodaya is focused on needs over greed and is encouraging a move from the consumerism to sustainability through its practical solutions on how to mitigate the environment impact of modern living (Sarvodaya Foundation, n.d.). But contemporary manifestations of these Gandhian ideals are the rise of movements promoting zero waste living, circular economies and renewable energy. This holistic approach of Sarvodaya gives valuable lessons for all those issues like urbanization and migration. Gandhi's vision offers strategies that will revitalise rural economies, counter urban rural disparities and achieve balanced and inclusive growth. This approach is particularly important to developing countries where unchecked urbanization results in overcrowding, pollution and social disintegration (Bondurant 1958). It is also relevant that Gandhi stressed the importance of education and sanitation as transformative instruments in the area of social reform. Based on his idea of *Nai Talim* (basic education) where vocational training combines morality and ethics with practical learning, his concept of skill based education is a model to overcome workforce employability crisis. Also, considering his campaigns for hygiene and sanitation, public health is demonstrated to be both an important means for promoting individual and communal well being (Joseph 2017).

Sarvodaya has inspired movements for peace, justice and sustainability all over the globe. Figures like Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr. in the civil rights movement in the United States, or Wangari Maathai around environmental activism, his ideals continue to serve as the guiding philosophy of transformative change. Echoes of Sarvodaya manifest themselves in international policy frameworks, namely the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (USDG), which focus on poverty eradication, gender equality, and environmental sustainability (Das, 1994). At the same time, Sarvodaya offers a moral thinking that helps us to navigate through our ethical dilemmas under the impact of technological progress and

globalization. Gandhi's philosophy seeks to encourage the ethical innovation and the inclusive growth of societies by advocating for harmony between progress and compassion and responsibility. Sarvodaya is not a vision of the past, but an approach to solving the problems of the modern world. It's not easy to chart one's way in the sea of complexities of the contemporary world, its one that Sarvodaya gives us a blueprint to.

So, in the field of providing solutions to contemporary challenges, Sarvodaya is still of importance. Through teaching its principles of self reliance, inclusivity and sustainability Sarvodaya brings a timeless approach to building just and harmonious societies that address poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation. Its potential to influence global movements and policy discourses signifies a capacity to elevate collective action towards a better future. The ethical and pragmatic wisdom behind his vision has already become a beacon of hope in an increasingly integrated, unequal world.

6. Gandhi's Sarvodaya as a Timeless Philosophy

The idea that Gandhi's Sarvodaya philosophy is transcendent, universal, and multigenerational, exists beyond time, place and culture. Based on the values of truth (*Satya*), non violence (*Ahimsa*) and the inclusion of all life (Sarvodaya), Sarvodaya is an all encompassing way of perceiving and living the good life as an individual and as a collective. Although derived in the context of India's sociopolitical problems, these principles have served to motivate global movements for social justice, peace and environmentalism, signifying their continuing applicability to problems of near and far modernity.

Truth, Non Violence are the cornerstone of Sarvodaya and these transformative tools are used to bring about change in the society. Truth was a universal principle for Gandhi and was not defined by religious, cultural or ideological boundaries. To the Bondurant (1958), the pursuit of truth was a moral obligation of courage, integrity and deep, unthinking commitment to justice. This truth applicability to all has made Sarvodaya the guiding philosophy for movements seeking transparency, accountability and fairness in governance and public life. Gandhi's concept of non-violence was equally, although not only, non physical aggression; but also contained compassion, understanding and reconciliation. Since then non violence has been a cornerstone of peace movements, and has influenced leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr, Nelson Mandela and the Dalai Lama on their pursuit of justice and equality (Nanda, 1989). Inclusive approach of Sarvodaya to development has been for the development of all sections of the society particularly the people who are marginalized and impoverished. These commitments to social justice were best exemplified by Gandhi's tireless efforts to end the practice of untouchability, ensure gender equality, and build up the strength of rural communities. Sarvodaya constructs a stronger sense of shared humanity (Joseph, 2017) by prioritizing the dignity and well-being of every individual, in a way that challenges systemic inequalities. It is such an inclusive ethos that inspired contemporary movements for the rights of minorities, women and the indigenous peoples; it is so inclusive an ethos that it not only adapted to changing social dynamics, but has also awakened contemporary movements for the rights of minorities, women and the indigenous peoples.

Drawing upon a politicization of the environment to argue against the worldview of the West, Gandhi's Sarvodaya continues to advance useful practices for environmental sustainability in this era of ecological crisis. He promotes minimalism, local production and ethical consumption, and they match modern principles of sustainable development. The need of the hour is striking a balance between economic growth and ecological preservation as Gandhi focuses his socio religious intent on harmonious coexistence with nature (Mathai,

2000). The principles of Sarvodaya reverberate in the world through the likes of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aimed at eliminating poverty, take action on climate, and responsible production of goods (Sarvodaya Foundation, n.d.). We see the timeless nature of Sarvodaya in the ability for Sarvodaya to inspire and lead contemporary social and environmental reform movements. Gandhi's principles continue to influence attempts to create a just and equitable world from campaigns for nonviolent resistance abroad to grassroots movements calling for community self reliance. By carrying over the philosophy of Sarvodaya in the modern context of growing participatory and decentralization, it finds mirroring in the increasing zeal for participatory governance, decentralization to empower local communities to participate more actively in the process of decision making (Das, 1994).

Sarvodaya goes beyond its practical applications to serve as an ethical compass to help navigate the complexities of the modern world. At a time when the world is rapidly becoming oversaturated with electronics and fully intertwined with globalization and social polarization, Gandhi's philosophy is one that encourages that same humanity to focus on compassion, equality, and accountability. Sarvodaya offers such a blueprint: creating a moral and social space where such dilemmas can be grappled, and from which can grow a future of harmony and equity (Kumarappa 1997).

7. Conclusion

The sarvodaya theory of Gandhi provides a broad vision for a society that is well-perfumed with equality, non-violence and sustainability. Sarvodaya focuses on *Gram Swaraj*, the upliftment of marginalized communities, self reliance, and on the socio economic and ecological challenges of Gandhiji's era as well as of the modern world. These principles are heard planet wide, inspiring movements for civil rights, gender equality, and environmental protection. At a time when the world is becoming ever more unequal, environmentally crisis ridden, and ethically contentious, Sarvodaya provides a formula for sustainable development and collective welfare. Gandhi's philosophy of integration of moral integrity with practical action offers enduring solutions to present problems and recommends harmonious combination of material progress with moral responsibility. Such is its universal usefulness that it lends itself as a way to laying the proper groundwork for justice, equity, and peace. Sarvodaya serves as a point of a distant yearning humanity redirects towards a kinder and more sustainable destiny.

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