

Gandhian Approach to Trusteeship and It's Relevance

Bindu Sharma

**Research scholar, Deptt. of Gandhian and Peace, Studies centre, Panjab
University, Chandigarh, India.**

Abstract

Gandhi strongly advocated the concept of trusteeship which is an effort towards "spiritualization of economics". Although Gandhi was not an economist but throughout his life he formulated many concepts in order to achieve an equitable economic society. His economic ideas were deeply rooted in the dignity of the man. The existing socio-economic issues can be solved with the pragmatic approach of Gandhi. The protection of human dignity is the ultimate aim of the concept of trusteeship. Truly speaking, the demand and desire of the modern man is to be free from any kind of exploitation. In the present scenario of economic unrest and exploitation, the Gandhian concept of trusteeship is really relevant. In this paper, an attempt has been made to analyse and understand the concept of trusteeship and its relevance.

Key words: Gandhi, Trusteeship, Economics, Human Dignity.

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"My theory of 'trusteeship' is no make-shift, certainly no camouflage. I am confident that it will survive all other theories. It has the sanction of philosophy and religion behind it. That possessors of wealth have not acted up to the theory does not prove its falsity; it proves the weakness of the wealthy. No other theory is compatible with non-violence. In the non-violent method wrongdoer compasses his own end, if he does not undo the wrong. For, either through non-violent non-co-operation he is made to see the error, or he finds himself completely isolated."

Mahatma Gandhi

Introduction

Gandhi strongly advocated the concept of Trusteeship¹ which is an effort towards "spiritualization of economics". The doctrine of Trusteeship was advocated by Gandhi which emphasised on the human dignity. Gandhi always desired of a world free of exploitation which prompted him to formulate many novel concepts and trusteeship is one among them. He always aimed at the upliftment and welfare of all. The core of Gandhian economic thought is to establish harmonious relations among all strata of society by using accumulated wealth of few rich people for common good of all. The main concern of Gandhi was the upliftment and welfare of the poorest of the poor. The common poverty-stricken man was his priority. Gandhi aimed at the upliftment, welfare and equitable economic society. He was against the economic evils like exploitation, poverty, economic injustice and above all deteriorating moral standards. He was not against the higher standard of living but he always criticized the fetish for materialism. Thus Gandhi's economic ideas were dominated by fundamental ethical values. Gandhi's concept of trusteeship was based on religious and philosophic aspect. After reading The Gita, The Bible, books of jurisprudence, Snell's Principles of Equality and Ruskin's Unto

This Last, He came up with the concept of Trusteeship in 1903. He based his concept of trusteeship on the first sloka of Isopanisad, according to which one is asked to dedicate everything to God and then use it only what is required. The main condition laid down in it is that one must not covet what belongs to others. Whatever is left after using according to one's necessity must be surrendered to the God. Detachment and service are the spirit of trusteeship. Law of non-possession was dominant in Gandhi's idea of trusteeship. It was founded on his religious belief that everything belonged to God and was from God. Therefore the bounties of the world were for His people, as a whole, not for any particular individual. When an individual had more than his respective portion, he became a trustee of that portion for God's people. God who is all-powerful has no need to store. He creates things afresh every day. Therefore man should also live his life from day to day without trying to store things for the future. If this principle was imbibed by people in general, it would have become legalised and trusteeship would have become a legalised institution.² Basically Gandhi advocated the doctrine of trusteeship as a solution to the economic disparities of ownership and income. Trusteeship is a kind of nonviolent way to resolve all socio-economic conflicts which arise due to growing inequalities of the current social order. Gandhi remained a firm believer of trusteeship throughout his life although the method was proving ineffective towards the later part of life. He tried to convert the privileged classes into trustees through the adoption of non-violence, non-cooperation and Satyagraha. For him violence was the last resort to dispossess property-possessors of their wealth. Gandhi's whole idea of trusteeship revolves around the dignity of an individual and not his material prosperity. Thus Gandhian economics is purely based on the moral values.

The concept of Trusteeship is not absolute but relative in space and time to the needs of the society. Absolute trusteeship is unattainable but if we work for it, we shall achieve the state of equality. There is of course scope for charity. The dignity of man cannot be preserved on charity if those who live in acute misery are condemned to live on the sufferance of those who are well-off, and then it is really difficult to preserve human dignity. Charity is used as a weapon by capitalists to preserve capitalism and safeguard their property. Therefore Gandhiji advocated and preached trusteeship, as a technique of social change. He considered it, the technique of change of heart. The Gandhian theory of trusteeship had its differences with Marxian economic philosophy too. Gandhian theory had its origin and also best understood in context of certain basic spiritual values of the Indian tradition whereas Marxism is the child of the Industrial Revolution. Gandhian approach is towards reforming and realignment of the system and not towards destruction and uprooting of system whereas Marxian socialism approach is more towards the destruction and uprooting of the capitalists class. Gandhian socialism has ethical core at its helm and considers man being ethical first and social later pole apart from Marxian socialism. The starkest difference between Gandhian socialism and Marxian socialism lies in the methodology they recommend to achieve it. Gandhian socialism is oriented more towards transformation of inner feelings and heart change on the part of rich and landowners, Whereas Marxian socialism is more inclined towards violence. Gandhian socialism has no place for violence, but only trust. In trusteeship there is trust between common man and his trustee and common man latter plays the role of a custodian. Hence Gandhian socialism radically departs from both socialism and capitalism and can be considered as trusteeship socialism. Though socialism of this kind is hard to achieve, Gandhi believed in the strength of morals and goodness of humans therefore he advocated such socialism. All the others such as capitalism, Marxism etc. look at the problem from superficial point of view, whereas trusteeship is the only one which strikes at its root. Protecting human dignity is the core of concept of trusteeship. Human dignity, equity and justice have been the main reasons for the revolutions that have arisen since ages. Notion of trusteeship is relevant today as it aims to eliminate the elements of class-struggle in society and along with it consider political, economic and social changes occurring in the society to achieve justice, dignity and equity.

The Gandhian concept of trusteeship does not aim at destroying any particular class, but it seeks to reduce the class gap which has been prevalent in the society. The idea of Gandhian trusteeship

manifestation could be found in Indian government's community development projects, progressive taxation policy (rich heavily taxes whereas poor are given substantial relief), and cooperative policies, even our constitution DPSP (Directive Principles of State Policy) exhibits and are based on model of trusteeship. Even every democratic country, directly or indirectly tries to follow Gandhian concept by bringing uniformity among classes and decrease the rich and poor gap.

Relevance of Trusteeship in Present Era

The concept of Trusteeship has been evaluated by many scholars who have pointed out the significance of this particular theory. The relevance of trusteeship in the current times has posed many questions. The views regarding its significance are diverse. Some of the scholars feel that the concept of trusteeship is somehow utopian and does not fit to the present world of industrialization where people are basically materialistic and acquisitive by nature. But there are some who really believe that not only during the lifetime of Gandhi but even in the ages to come the significance of the theory of trusteeship would continue to be the same. Gandhi always desired for a classless society and now in the current scenario elimination of the class struggle in the society is the pressing need of India. Though the notion of Trusteeship does not aim at the destruction of any particular class but it provides the way to narrow down the ever-widening class gap. The current economic policies are inefficient in reducing the gap between the rich and the poor. The concept of trusteeship in the contemporary Indian Society is relevant, though its forms have to be adapted to our changed circumstances. Trusteeship stands for radical change of structure, economic equality and distributive justice. All of which are the need of the hour. Only if we adhere to the peaceful methods of Gandhian ideas then only we can attain the ideals of trusteeship. Gandhian theorists view, trusteeship, as of utmost relevance for achieving cooperation and for resolving conflicts in the organisational setting. Better understanding of each other with respect for responsibilities and mutual rights is the surest way to settle problems. The correct path of industrial relations can be discovered by Gandhian philosophy of Ahimsa, positive cooperation and peaceful conduct of relations. Concept of Aparigraha³ means non possession, compassion, appreciation, understanding and mutual respect which make the Gandhian philosophy of trusteeship in the relevant situation. Gandhiji believed that love, unity and cooperation were the basic tenets of human life and thus of the universe and he disagreed with the social theorists who regarded struggle and conflict as the laws of the universe. Gandhiji recognized the possibility of conflict and repulsion in nature, and to overcome such hurdles Gandhiji proposed theory of social relations involving the concepts of **Sarvodaya** ⁴, **Satyagraha** ⁵, **Aparigraha** and trusteeship. These concepts are considered as systems in the Gandhian theory of social relations. ⁶

Gandhi once said "I am quite prepared to say for the sake of argument that the Zamindars are guilty of many crimes and of omissions and commissions. But that is no reason for the peasant and the labourer who are the salt of the earth to copy crime. If salt loses its savour, wherewith can it be salted? To the landlords I say that, if what is said against you is true, I will warn you that your days are numbered. You can no longer continue as lords and masters. You have a bright future if you become trustees of the poor Kisans. I have in mind not trustees in name but in reality. Such trustees will take nothing for themselves that their labour and care do not entitle them to. They then will find that no law will be able to reach them. The Kisans will be their friends."⁷ Gandhi wanted to solve the major economic and agricultural problems of an independent India to be, through the lens of trusteeship. He urged Zamindars to become trustees of their owned lands and its usage should be given to tenants, through this he wanted to implement socialist collective agricultural system in India. The movement led by Vinoba Bhave is an apt example of Gandhi's idea of trusteeship. Absence of will of people to implement socialist model was major cause of its failure, so Gandhi relentlessly made efforts to bring synergy between Zamindars and tenants through the concept of trusteeship.

Gandhi believes that 'true economics stands for social justice as it promotes the good of all equally including the weakest and is indispensable for a decent life'. This has implications at the economic levels of macro and micro. as it talks of equitable distribution of wealth being a measure of success, rather than the present form which has high disparity of income. It also constructs the case for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) being embedded within the values of business of the private sector as Gandhi clearly states that distribution of wealth is not about charity but about ensuring basic dignity of individual. Re-runs of corporate scandals, and aftermath, cosmetic changes in corporate governance practices follow and new regulations are brought just like old wine in new bottle. These changes are devoid of morality and ethicality. So along with legal and economic, morality should also be inalienable part of our organisations. Gandhi's concept of trusteeship can acts as moral lighthouse for the organisations and can become basis of philosophical foundation for businesses. Gandhi distinguished between capitalism and capitalists. Thus, "Should the wealthy be dispossessed of their possessions? Society will be the poorer, for it will lose the gifts of a man who knows how to accumulate wealth. The rich man will be left in possession of his wealth, of which he will use what he reasonably needs and act as a trustee for the remainder to be used for society.⁸ Thus, our current thinking framework finds it hard to resolve the problem of role of business unless another element - **'The element of Trusteeship'** is added. Even the rationalist thinkers of affluent and developed countries have accepted the Gandhian idea of trusteeship. At the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) which was held in New Delhi, it was expressed that the developed and richer countries should act as trustees and shares their surplus resources for the development of poorer nations.

Jamnalal, a successful businessman was considered by Gandhi as among the first convert to follow his socialistic vision of society which is based on Gandhi idea of trusteeship. Jamnalal contributed heavily to corporate social responsibility, business ethics and idea of trusteeship. ⁹Other names includes JRD Tata, G.D. Birla whose organisation are based around the idea of trusteeship. Gandhi claimed frequently about the role of businessman as being that of a steward or a trustee for what you hold. Gandhi's notion of trusteeship was based on the belief that one does not really 'own' his wealth but are only trustees of it. He meant that one has to administer his wealth for the welfare and benefit of the community. In the model of trusteeship, wealth does not automatically transferred to the members of the family but only to those who can act as its trustees. Thus, this concept of trusteeship challenged the principles of a capitalist society. In the present time, the concept of trusteeship is making a steady comeback as absence of moral values and challenges of sustainable development face the world today. It was fading away in the 50's and 60's. However, this concept is making a steady comeback as economic collapse, absence of values and challenges of sustainable growth face the world today. While there are varied aspects to trusteeship in its pure form, the fundamental and core concepts of trusteeship are about sustainable growth and equity. When viewed from this perspective, approach to Trusteeship emphasises on business and social structures reconfiguration to make people feel both empowered individually and inclined to act in the common interest of society.¹⁰ If the business houses and organisations could be designed around the Trusteeship principle, most of the issues and problems around the role of business would get resolved. Recently, organisations around the world are observing fundamental changes and most of the senior executives in these organisations are aware of it. If we analyse the role of business in this and apply the principles of Trusteeship to the present day's corporations, we can make a new way of integrating social responsibility within the DNA of the business.¹¹

Conclusion

The Gandhian approach is far more relevant today than it was ever before. The main objective of Gandhi was to ensure distributive justice by ensuring that business act as a trustee to its stakeholders and specified that economic activities cannot be separated from other activities. Economics is part of the way of life which has relationship with collective values. There is a need to implement the key

principles of trusteeship in the present context. Without implementing the principles of trusteeship we can't even think of attaining its objectives. There is a need to keep the surplus wealth in a trust for the welfare and common good of others. If people act as trustees then economically viable yet benign institutions can be developed and thus absolute trusteeship can be attained. The approach of non violence has to be implemented in order to fully execute the idea of trusteeship. Equal distribution of wealth will be ensured only through economic equality through trusteeship. If a person does everything in an ethical and economically viable manner, then a sustainable livelihood for all should be ensured. Inherent in the philosophy of trusteeship are entrenched solutions to many of the challenges which are being faced at the global level in the present era. The idea of trusteeship promotes sustainable consumption which means using natural resources in a sustainable way. An individual is a trustee and whatever has been freely provided by nature should be taken care of by him. Equitable distribution of wealth and dignity of labour are also the objectives of the idea of trusteeship which ensures the well-being of the people. The notion of trusteeship also ensures dignity, satisfaction and growth of an individual which are required in the contemporary world.

With the growing conditions of conflict at various levels, there is a need to follow-up step towards trusteeship. Economic policies need to be seen through the lens of trusteeship. The relevance of the Gandhian concept of trusteeship is never going to fade away with time. Gandhian perspective of trusteeship is the solution even for the generations to come. The doctrine of trusteeship may well turn out to be what humanity is looking for.

REFERENCES

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2. ² Kesavulu, Y. *Gandhian Trusteeship As An Instrument of Human Dignity, A comprehensive site by National Gandhi Museum New Delhi, India.* <http://www.gandhiashramsevagram.org/gandhi-articles/gandhian-trusteeship-as-an-instrument-of-human-dignity.php> accessed on 22 September, 2016
3. ³ Aparigraha means non- possession.
4. ⁴ Sarvodaya is Gandhiji's most important socio-political movement. It is a combination of two terms, Sarva meaning one and all, and Uday meaning welfare or uplift. The conjunction thus implies Universal uplift or welfare of all as the meaning of Sarvodaya.
5. ⁵ The term satyagraha was coined and developed by Mahatma Gandhi. It is translated as "insistence on truth" (*satya* "truth"; *agraha* "insistence" or "holding firmly to") or *holding onto truth*¹¹ or *truth force* — is a particular form of nonviolent resistance or civil resistance. The term *satyagraha* was coined and developed by Mahatma Gandhi .
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