

Trusteeship: The Gandhian tool of socio-economic emancipation.

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Abstract

Gandhi, the activist with a mission of liberation- social, economic and political- was not only a prolific writer but an active practitioner of his socio- economic and political prescriptions. In the course of his nationwide interactive engagement with the masses he realised that political emancipation/ decolonisation would remain meaningless without economic upliftment of the people who were subjected to exploitative economic relations. Thus emerged his concept of Trusteeship ; an innovative non-violent idea of ensuring equity without direct interventions of the state.

Key Words

Economic, Emancipation, Non- violent, Equity, State.

Introduction

Gandhi, though not a system builder/ philosopher in an academic sense, was aware of the contextual realities of the political economy of not only India but the similarly placed colonial economy throughout the world. Moreover, he was neither willing to accept/ approve the exploitative capitalism not its ideological antidote of Marxism. In other words, being opposed to both the prevailing Politico -economic models - Capitalism and Socialism- he intended to formulate/prescribe/ articulate a non- violent / Non- competitive alternative route of emancipatory economic relationship between the owners of the material resources and the owners of individual skill/labour. This led to his conceptualisation of the socio-economic idea of trusteeship. Based on his approach of integrating political, economic and ethical/ moral elements of sustainable development his conceptualisation of trusteeship aims at creating a new socio-

economic order through peaceful transformation which requires positive voluntary contribution by investor/ owners of the capital and the producer/ working class. In fact he believes that without dispossessing the propertied class an equitable society is possible by converting the propertied class into the trustees of the capital who would not claim holding of the wealth beyond his reasonable necessary needs.

The basic tenet/ Idea of trusteeship rests on the assumption that it may prevent inequalities and promote equitable distribution of the fruits of growth// development. However, his concern for equitable distribution does not imply that every individual would be able to possess equal wealth/ property. In order to ensure successful implementation of the concept he has suggested adoption of certain conditions, like, equality of opportunity, abolition of disparities in wages and decentralisation of political and economic power. He emphasised that fulfillment of essential needs rather than satiation of individual wants is the hallmark of the trusteeship as it aims at welfare of all and exploitation of none. In such an endeavour if the economically dominant/ privileged class of society does not comply voluntarily then non- violent mass movement and legal routes must be initiated within the democratic framework of the state.

The basic pillars of his ideal type of trusteeship is based on five principles which may be referred as pentagonal arch. The first of these is known as the right means. His concern for a just and humane society implies that in his ideal state/ Ram Rajya trusteeship will ensure that people in general would be free from the agonising contrast of plenty amidst rampant poverty. Infact his ideal society would not have any place for exploitative uneven socio-economic development rather it will be based on dignity/ decency and equity coupled with equity and brotherhood. In such a society the government would launch Programmes and policies of Sarvodaya which will ensure that none of the members of the society will suffer from the ill effects of any handicap whether physical, mental or otherworldly. In order words there will be no unjust treatment in favour of the haves/ powerful few rather each and every individual would have equal opportunity to shape and development his resources - both mental and material.

The second critical component of the pentagonal arch of Gandhian trusteeship is envisioned in his idea of Sarvodaya which believes in appropriate assistance to the needy by the

government and helping the rich in attaining liberation from the worldly pleasures. According to him appropriation of disproportionate assets by the haves/ propertied is nothing but exceptionally untrustworthy, corrupt and ethically deviant from which they need to be liberated. It can be ensured by making them realise that their liberation is dependent on voluntary giving up their excess material resources for the upliftment of the dispossessed/ disadvantaged sections of the society.

The third component of Gandhian trusteeship is related to his conceptualisation of bread labour. According to him individuals must not claim any right/ entitlement unless adequate manual / physical labour is performed by the individuals concerned. In other words without manually toiling no one should be allowed to to enjoy the right to have bread. According to his own submission his idea of bread labour is influenced by Bible and Bhagwad Gita as both the texts have emphasised the need to perform labour for making any claim on food/ bread/ material resources for living.

Another important dimension of his conceptualisation of trusteeship is based on the human nature of the individual. He believes in transforming the nature of the individual in the interest of the social good. He therefore does not accept the Marxian doctrine of violent revolution as the only remedial recourse to an unjust social order. He believes that it can be realised by non-violent means of persuading individuals which may transform their soul in the larger interest of the society. In other words violent methods should be replaced by reformist non violent revolution for the long lasting socio-economic change.

And finally his idea of trusteeship is based on pragmatism. As a pragmatic thinker he touched upon the basic requirements of the individual as well. He therefore advised that each individual must have well-ventilated and well - lit house . Furthermore he advised the kind of nutritional food to be made available to each individual. According to him such essential needs can be realised only through rigorous trusteeship as it will ensure socio-economic equity.

Unlike Marxian doctrine Gandhi believed in bringing about radical socio-economic change through non- violent means of trusteeship. Infact he believed that conflict between the owners of capital and the sellers of labour can be resolved and socio-economic equality/ justice

can be realised through trusteeship. Ruskin's idea of goodness of individual may probably influenced his thought process about the good of the individual. Thus his idea of equality is not only economic centric conceptualisation of having same amount of control over the economic resources by each individual rather it meant that each individual should have enough to meet his needs and a dignified life.

He understood that vulgar economic disparities contain the seeds of violent and bloody transformations. Hence, he affirmed that this possibility can be resolved permanently by motivating the owners of capital to follow the remedial recourse as propounded in the concept of trusteeship. The mechanism of trusteeship was easier to appreciate but difficult to practice. It does not deny possession of capital in abundance but at the same time it exhorts the owners of capital to keep only that much of capital for himself that is required to meet his bare minimum needs of a dignified life and become trustee of the rest of the capital for the well being of the society. However it must be made categorically clear that Gandhi's idea of trusteeship does not support the unethical and exploitative means of accumulation. In fact he exhorted the poor to carry out non-violent revolutionary methods, like non-cooperation and civil disobedience against those who do not wish to follow trusteeship in letter and spirit.

Gandhi's idea of trusteeship, no doubt, was enunciated as the positive critique and antidote of unjust socio-economic development of capitalist society in general and a preventive measure for the emerging de-colonised society like India in particular. However, having realised the impossibility of ensuring economic equality he preferred to have equitable distribution of the resources through adoption of trusteeship.

The critiques, however, are of the opinion that his Idea of trusteeship is completely utopian and impractical. It is criticised further as antithetical to innovativeness as it would have demotivating impact on creativity. It certainly would demotivate the people from working hard to generate capital as there is no positive incentive for the same. It is attacked by some scholars as detrimental to the development of entrepreneurship. The Marxian critique are of the opinion that his Idea of trusteeship is nothing but an attempt to legitimise the existing capitalist society.

Conclusion:



The Gandhian trusteeship is a remedial recourse to protect the interests of the disadvantaged individuals in a class divided society. Unlike Marxian receipt of violent social change trusteeship emerged as an idea of non-violent social change. No doubt it is not easy to transform the expected change/ reforms of the heart and soul of the targeted sections of the society but that does not mean that this is an irrelevant conceptualisation. Its relevance can be seen in many programs and policies of the government through out the world in general and India in particular which is based on the thematic ideals of trusteeship.

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