
UNIT 9 **GANDHI’S CRITIQUE OF MODERN CIVILISATION**

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9.1 INTRODUCTION

All of you, who have seen Gandhi, in pictures obviously, agree that in his dress and appearance he belonged to the Indian ascetic tradition. As a mass leader and iron hearted campaigner against the British imperialism, he consciously chose such an image. His philosophy too contained symbols and words which were, in look and meaning, essentially Eastern in general and Hindu in particular. He used these words and symbols as weapons not only against the British colonisers, but also against the modern civilisation they represented, and in a sense, against modernity itself. Khadi, about which we will discuss more in the course of this chapter has been one such symbol and Ram Rajya, Sanatan Dharma, Satyagraha, Swaraj are some more in the long list. In a sense most of the words and symbols Gandhi invented and used in his long political and philosophical struggle against the British and the Western materialism were symbols of Indian tradition on the one hand and a critique of modern Western civilisation on the other. These words and symbols have more than one meaning. They also present multiple messages and the most important among them was a critique of modernity. These essentially Indian words and symbols were used by Gandhi as critiques of and counter to the three important concepts of nationalism, industrialism and western education, which form the very core of modernity in India. All these suggest that Gandhi declined to accept “modern civilisation” which he designates and describes as “Western civilisation” and most of the values it stood for. He actively countered them with words, symbols, concepts, traditions, values and in all, the very philosophy which is essentially Indian.

Aims and Objectives

After studying this Unit, you will be able to understand:

- Gandhi's ideas and perspectives on modern western and Indian civilisations.
- His perception of modern civilisation as a bane for India.
- His use of Indian symbols like Khadi to counter modern civilisation.
- His ideas of education that best suited India.

9.2 GANDHI'S IDEA OF CIVILISATION

Gandhi explains in detail his ideas and concepts of civilisation, positive and negative features of Western civilisation i.e., modern civilisation, and comparison and contrast between Indian and Western civilisations in many speeches and writings especially in *Hind Swaraj* which he wrote in Gujarati in 1909 on his return voyage from London to South Africa. It was serialised in two installments in the same year in the Gujarati edition of *Indian Opinion*, the weekly published by Gandhi in South Africa. It was issued as a booklet in Gujarati in 1910 and was banned by the British authorities on the charges of seditious content. Undaunted by this move of the imperial authorities, Gandhi later developed the ideas he expressed in *Hind Swaraj* further and enriched them by new contributions throughout his life. When we try to assess Gandhi's view on the then existing civilisation, we must take a note of these in the context of the impact of his work on his total philosophy. His views emanated mainly from his reaction to events and his attempt to give a lead to many social reforms and political movements. However, the existence of a uniformity underlying his thoughts will make our task of connecting, understanding and analysing them relatively easy. This uniformity in Gandhian thoughts arose from a moral approach and a desire to lead active and creative life not for the sake of himself but for the sake of his countrymen.

Gandhi regarded violence un-Indian, something alien to Indian civilisation and he makes his opinions amply clear in *Hind Swaraj*. In a sense, the aim of *Hind Swaraj* was to confront the anarchist and violence-prone Indian nationalism with an alternative to violence derived from Gandhi's earliest experiments with *Satyagraha*. Gandhi mentioned that *Hind Swaraj* was written in order to show that his countrymen were following a suicidal policy of violence, and that if they but revert to their own glorious civilisation, either the English would adopt the latter and become Indianised or find their occupation in India gone.

Furthermore, in *Hind Swaraj* Gandhi depicted "the dichotomy between the spiritual, moral superiority of Indian society, and the violent, politically corrupt nature of European states" even more dramatically than any of his predecessors. While condemning the 'brute force' of Western power, Gandhi distances himself from the militant nationalists for their support to violence which he considered a suicidal strategy as it would provoke 'an organised violence' by the ruling authority.

Hind Swaraj was a detailed commentary on Western civilisation that thrived on material power. According to Gandhi, modern Western civilisation is characterised by the many negative features like greed, aggression, colonialism, imperialism, war technology, inequity, exploitation, poverty, extravagance and luxury, bodily comforts, unbridled individualism and vulgar materialism, immorality, valueless and commercial education, alienation and so on.

These are thoroughly criticised by Gandhi. Before explaining these features in detail and their impact on social, economic, political and moral aspects of modern human life, and Gandhi's overall critique of Western civilisation scattered throughout his extensive works, it is better to know what Gandhi meant by civilisation -both Western and Indian- by quoting himself elaborately.

According to Gandhi, "Civilisation is that mode of conduct which points out to man the path of duty. Performance of duty and observance of morality are convertible terms. To observe morality is to attain mastery over our mind and our passions. So doing, we know ourselves" (Gandhi, 1938: 53).

In the chapter titled "Civilisation" in *Hind Swaraj*, he provides an elaborate explanation about his ideas on modern (western) civilisation:

Let us first consider what state of things is described by the word "civilisation". Its true test lies in the fact that people living in it make bodily welfare the object of life... The people of Europe today live in better-build houses than they did a hundred years ago. This is considered an emblem of civilisation, and this is also a matter to promote bodily happiness. Formerly, they wore skins, and used spears as their weapons. Now, they wear long trousers, and, for embellishing their bodies, they wear a variety of clothing, and, instead of spears, they carry with them revolvers containing five or more chambers. If people of a certain country, who have hitherto not been in the habit of wearing much clothing, boots, etc., adopt European clothing, they are supposed to have become civilized out of savagery. Formerly, in Europe, people ploughed their lands mainly by manual labour. Now, one man can plough a vast tract by means of steam engines and can thus amass great wealth. This is called a sign of civilisation. Formerly, only a few men wrote valuable books. Now, anybody writes and prints anything he likes and poisons people's minds. Formerly, men traveled in wagons. Now, they fly through the air, in trains at the rate of four hundred and more miles per day. This is considered the height of civilisation. It has been stated that, as men progress, they shall be able to travel in airship and reach any part, of the world in a few hours. Men will not need the use of their hands and feet. They will press a button, and they will have their clothing by their side. They will press another button, and they will have their newspaper. A third, and a motor-car will be in waiting for them. They will have a variety of delicately dished up food. Everything will be done by machinery. Formerly, when people wanted to fight with one another, they measured between them their bodily strength; now it is possible to take away thousands of lives by one man working behind a gun from a hill. This is civilisation. Formerly, men worked in the open air only as much as they liked. Now thousands of workmen meet together and for the sake of maintenance work in factories or mines. Their condition is worse than that of beasts. They are obliged to work, at the risk of their lives, at most dangerous occupations, for the sake of millionaires. Formerly, men were made slaves under physical compulsion. Now they are enslaved by temptation of money and of the luxuries that money can buy. There are now diseases of which people never dreamt before, and an army of doctors is engaged in finding out their cures, and so hospitals have increased. This is a test of civilisation. Formerly, special messengers were required and much expense was incurred in order to send letters; today, anyone can abuse his fellow by means of a letter for one penny. True, at the same cost, one can send one's thanks also. Formerly, people had two or three meals consisting of home-made bread and vegetables; now, they require something to eat every two hours so that they have hardly leisure for anything else...

This civilisation takes note neither of morality nor of religion... Civilisation seeks to increase bodily comforts, and it fails miserably even in doing so... This civilisation is irreligion, and it has taken such a hold on the people in Europe that those who are in it appear to be half mad...

This civilisation is such that one has only to be patient and it will be self-destroyed. According to the teaching of Mohammed this would be considered a Satanic Civilisation. Hinduism calls it a Black Age... (ibid, pp. 31-33).

Gandhi reasoned why western writers were not critical of the civilisations they lived in:

...We rarely find people arguing against themselves. Those who are intoxicated by modern civilisation are not likely to write against it. Their care will be to find out facts and arguments in support of it, and this they do unconsciously, believing it to be true. A man whilst he is dreaming, believes in his dream. He is undeceived only when he is awakened from his sleep. A man laboring under the bane of civilisation is like a dreaming man. What we usually read are the works of defenders of modern civilisation, which undoubtedly claims among its votaries very brilliant and even some very good men. Their writings hypnotize us. And so, one by one, we are drawn into the vortex (ibid, pp.30-31).

Now, let us get an idea of his opinion on Indian civilisation. In this regard, he wrote:

I believe that the civilisation India has evolved is not to be beaten in the world. Nothing can equal the seeds sown by our ancestors. Rome went, Greece shared the same fate; the might of the Pharaohs was broken; Japan has become Westernized; of China nothing can be said; but India is still, somehow or, other, sound at the foundation. The people of Europe learn their lessons from the writings of the men of Greece or Rome, which exist no longer in their former glory... In the midst of all this India remains immovable and that is her glory. It is a charge against India that her people are so uncivilized, ignorant and stolid that it is not possible to induce them to adopt any changes. It is a charge really against our merit. What we have tested and found true on the anvil of experience, we dare not change. Many thrust their advice upon India, and she remains steady. This is her beauty: it is the sheet-anchor of our hope.

...We have retained the same kind of cottages that we had in former times and our indigenous education remains the same as before. We have had no system of life corroding competition. Each followed his own occupation or trade and charged a regulation wage. It was not that we did not know how to invent machinery, but our forefathers knew that, if we set our hearts after such things, we would become slaves and lose our moral fiber. They therefore, after due deliberation decided that we should only do what we could with our hands and feet. They saw that our real happiness and health consisted in a proper use of our hands and feet... They saw that kings and their swords were inferior to the sword of ethics, and they, therefore, held the sovereigns of the earth to be inferior to the Rishis and the Fakirs. A nation with a constitution like this is fitter to teach others than to learn from others (ibid, pp. 52-54).

While admiring the Indian civilisation, Gandhi was not unaware of the fact that India of his days was not exactly like he described it. He was quite aware of the darker side-child marriage, child widows, teenaged mothers and housewives, women practising polyandry, existence of the practice of Niyoga, where, girls dedicate themselves to prostitution in the name of religion, goats and sheep killed in the name of religion. He candidly regarded those defects as defects. He declared that nobody mistook evils of

Indian civilisation for ancient civilisation. He recognised the attempts that have always been made in the past to remove those evils and believed that such attempts would be made to remove them in future too. He said:

We may utilize the new spirit that is born in us for purging ourselves of these evils. But what I have described to you as emblems of modern civilisation are accepted as such by its votaries. The Indian civilisation, as described by me, has been so described by its votaries. In no part of the world, and under no civilisation, have all men attained perfection. The tendency of the Indian civilisation is to elevate the moral being, that of the Western civilisation is to propagate immorality. The latter is godless, the former is based on a belief in God. So understanding and so believing, it behooves every lover of India to cling to the Indian civilisation even as a child clings to the mother's breast (ibid, p.55).

Gandhi declared that "India is unique. Its strength is immeasurable." He also draws our attention to the historical fact that when other civilisations succumbed, the Indian civilisation has survived many a shock.

9.3 MODERN CIVILISATION AND LOSS OF INDIA'S FREEDOM

It is quite possible that one wonders if Indian civilisation was superior to Western civilisation, then what caused the subjugation and colonisation of India by Western nations. Gandhi declares in unequivocal terms that the English did not take India, we Indians gave it to them. He said: "They (the British) are not in India because of their strength, but because we keep them." Analysing the loss of India's freedom to the West, Gandhi wrote:

They (the British) came to our country originally for purposes of trade. Recall the Company Bahadur. Who made it Bahadur? They had not the slightest intention at the time of establishing a kingdom. Who assisted the Company's officers? Who was tempted at the sight of their silver? Who bought their goods? History testifies that we did all this. In order to become rich all at once we welcomed the Company's officers with open arms. We assisted them. If I am in the habit of drinking bhang and a seller thereof sells it to me, am I to blame him or myself? By blaming the seller shall I be able to avoid the habit? And, if a particular retailer is driven away will not another take his place?

...English merchants were able to get a footing in India because we encouraged them. When our Princes fought among themselves, they sought the assistance of Company Bahadur. That corporation was versed alike in commerce and war. It was unhampered by questions of morality. Its object was to increase its commerce and to make money. It accepted our assistance, and increased the number of its warehouses. To protect the latter it employed an army which was utilized by us also (ibid, pp. 34-35).

Gandhi opined that Indians distancing themselves from their civilisation which was essentially spiritual and, instead, moving towards the material richness on which the Western civilisation was based on was the inner and fundamental cause for India losing its freedom. He condemns the fratricidal attitude of Indian princes that gave an opportunity for the British to enhance their military presence here. He also cites the animosity between Hindus and the Muslims of India who were at daggers drawn at each other, also as a potential opportunity the East India Company got and thus the Indians created the circumstances that gave the Company its control over India. And Gandhi concludes that, "hence it is truer to say that we gave India to the English than that India was lost."

Gandhi was of the opinion that the Indian civilisation was unquestionably the best, but that all civilisations had been on their trial and it was Indian civilisation's turn during the British period. During this period, Gandhi rued, that because the sons of India were found wanting, its civilisation had been placed in jeopardy. Gandhi, however, sounded quite positive when he 'recognised' that the whole of India was not touched by the slavery and those alone who had been affected by modern civilisation had become enslaved.

Gandhi begins laying down his plan for freeing India by quoting the maxim "that the removal of the cause of a disease results in the removal of the disease itself." Similarly, he declares, "if the cause of India's slavery be removed, India can become free." He also makes an interesting point that "the whole of India is not touched. Those alone who have been affected by Western civilisation have become enslaved. We measure the universe by our own miserable foot-rule. When we are slaves, we think that the whole universe is enslaved. Because we are in an abject condition, we think that the whole of India is in that condition. As a matter of fact, it is not so, yet it is as well to impute our slavery to the whole of India" (ibid, p. 56). Having given this picture of India he makes the soothing remark that "if we bear in mind the above fact, we can see that if we become free, India is free" (ibid.).

Gandhi saw Indian freedom movement as "India's contribution to peace." He defined his version of nationalism in terms of Swadeshi and Swaraj. He declared that his Swaraj was to keep intact the genius of our civilisation.

9.4 MODERN CIVILISATION: BANE FOR INDIA

Gandhi blamed certain inseparable aspects of modern civilisation like railways, lawyers and doctors for the impoverishment of India. He even warned that if we did not wake up in time, we "shall be ruined." It appears to us that he unjustly attacked the very institutions which we consider to be good and essential for comfortable living in today's world. Gandhi, however, justified his argument with confidence. He begins his argument against the symbols of modern civilisation by stating that the "true inwardness of the evils of civilisation you will understand with difficulty" (ibid, p.39). He continues: "Doctors assure us that a consumptive clings to life even when he is about to die. Consumption does not produce apparent hurt it even produces a seductive color about a patient's face so as to induce the belief that all is well. Civilisation is such a disease and we have to be very wary" (ibid.).

Regarding railways he says that but for the railways, the English could not have such a hold on India as they had. He blames the railways as carriers to the length and breadth of India, of virus that caused epidemics like bubonic plague and caused untold misery to the Indian masses. He says: "the railways... have spread the bubonic plague. Without them the masses could not move from place to place. They are the carriers of plague germs. Formerly we had natural segregation" (ibid, pp. 39-40). He identifies Railways as a cause of famine by noting that these modern means of rapid transportation "have also increased the frequency of famines because, owing to facility of means of locomotion people sell out their grain and it is sent to the dearest markets. People become careless and so the pressure of famine increases." He also says that railways have robbed the holy places of their holiness as with the help of railways bad men "fulfill their evil designs with greater rapidity. The holy places of India have become unholy. Formerly, people went to these places with very great difficulty. Generally, therefore, only the real devotees visited such places. Nowadays rogues visit them in order to practice their roguery." He

concludes that “the railways can become a distributing agency for the evil one only” (ibid, p.40). Gandhi does not accept the notion that it was due to railways that the spirit of nationalism bloomed in India. He cautions us that attributing our spirit of nationalism for the railways is a mistake. He vehemently argues that we were a nation before railways were introduced, even before the British came. He says that the “English have taught us that we were not one nation before and that it will require centuries before we become one nation. This is without foundation. We were one nation before they came to India. One thought inspired us. Our mode of life was the same. It was because we were one nation that they were able to establish one kingdom. Subsequently they divided us” (ibid.).

Explaining his argument further he says that “I do not wish to suggest that because we were one nation we had no differences, but it is submitted that our leading men traveled throughout India either on foot or in bullock-carts. They learned one another’s languages and there was no aloofness between them and questions his reader- “What do you think could have been the intention of those farseeing ancestors of ours who established Setubandha (Rameshwar) in the South, Jagannath in the East and Hardwar in the North as places of pilgrimage?” (ibid, pp.40-41). Gandhi insists that in doing so our ancestors were not fools and he recognises the root cause behind their above mentioned actions in the following words:

They knew that worship of God could have been performed just as well at home. They taught us that those whose hearts were aglow with righteousness had the Ganges in their own homes. But they saw that India was one undivided land so made by nature. They, therefore, argued that it must be one nation. Arguing thus, they established holy places in various parts of India, and fired the people with an idea of nationality in a manner unknown in other parts of the world. And we Indians are one as no two Englishmen are. Only you and I and others who consider ourselves civilized and superior persons imagine that we are many nations. It was after the advent of railways that we began to believe in distinctions... (ibid, p.41).

9.5 KHADI AS A CRITIQUE OF MODERN CIVILISATION

As mentioned earlier, Khadi has a complex and different appellation. Gandhi sought to convey multiple messages through Khadi, arguably the focal one among them was a critique of modernity. Khadi was an apt symbol of long Indian tradition on the one hand and a critique of modern Western civilisation on the other.

Khadi is essentially Indian and traditionally Indians have not only been weavers, but also exporters of cotton fabric since time immemorial. In the more recent history, British themselves imported huge quantities of clothes from India, before they introduced machine-made textiles. At the time of arrival of the British in India, next to cultivation, weaving was the commonest economic activity in the Indian countryside. In fact, weaving has been a common metaphor, even in the spiritual discourse of many saints and philosophers of India, the most notable among them was Kabir, himself a weaver. The saga of the economic exploitation of British colonial imperialism is replete with reference to the decline of cotton weavers.

Khadi, the theme of hand-woven fabric, was brought up and invested with new meaning by Gandhi. While not exactly forsaking the spiritual content Kabir and other saints had introduced, Gandhi reinvented the mundane human endeavour, no less complex though. Innumerable songs were composed during the years of freedom struggle or afterwards on

how Gandhi would or did drive out the British with the help of his charkha. It became symbol of freedom struggle and also a means of economic regeneration of the villages and much more. Gandhi declared in unequivocal terms that his Swadeshi chiefly centred on the hand-spun Khaddar and extended to everything that could be and is produced in India. In this sense, Khadi was reversion to that glorious civilisation which India had nurtured before the Europeans arrived. Gandhi urged the fellow Indians to spin and weave Khadi on the ground that Khadi linked them with the downtrodden. He pleaded to his countrymen to spin only thirty minutes everyday as sacrifice. In Gandhi's world of charkha and Khadi, there is no room for machines that would displace human labour or concentration of power in a few hands.

During the years of his withdrawal from active politics in mid-1920s, Gandhi devoted himself to the propagation of Khadi turning it into a cult, as a strategy of nation-building from the grassroots. He suggested a Khadi franchise for the organisation and even envisaged a "yarn currency." Gandhi's almost emotional attachment to the spinning wheel should have baffled both the British and Western educated town-bred Indians. It was obvious as they were unable to grasp the incredible poverty of Indian villages.

9.6 EDUCATION AS CRITIQUE OF MODERNITY

Basic education was arguably the most important arena for the introduction of modernity in India. Designed as it was by the colonial masters, besides remaining generally detached from Indian tradition, it was also oblivious to the needs and problems of the teeming millions in the countryside. Gandhi's basic education scheme was primarily a system of rural education and handicrafts constituted the medium of instruction. Spinning and weaving was Gandhi's preference among the crafts and so his entire pedagogy and educational philosophy was intermeshed with his khadi-based approach to life.

Gandhi was critical of the Western system of education for much of what it stood for. He felt that it was wholly unsuited to India's needs, and was a bad copy of the Western model. He further said that the then education system had, by reason of the medium of instruction being a foreign language, sapped the energy of the youths who had passed through our schools and colleges and had produced an army of clerks and office-seekers. He was of strong opinion that it had dried up all originality, impoverished the vernaculars and had deprived the masses of the benefit of higher knowledge which would otherwise have percolated through the intercourse of the education classes with them. This education system created a gulf between educated India and the masses; it stimulated the brain but starved the spirit for want of a religious basis for education and emaciated the body for want of training in handicrafts. He alleged that this system criminally neglected the greatest need of agricultural training.

It is difficult to appreciate quite how radical and harsh Gandhi would have sounded to the educated Indians as he castigated their educational training and their values and told them they were traitors to their motherland by being willing victims of the education system in vogue. It is an interesting fact that, despite their opposition to British rule, most of the nationalists did not reject the British rule. At the same time most other nationalists did not reject the British system of education outright, since they viewed it as a means by which India could become a materially advanced nation. Gandhi, however, thought differently from the beginning of his political career.

Gandhi launched his experiment in education alongside Champaran Satyagraha, his earliest foray into local politics. In November 1917 the first school was opened in Barharwa and the experiment grew mature. It was fully developed in 1937, after the Wardha Conference. In June 1921, writing in *Young India*, Gandhi had outlined his views on education with a great deal of clarity:

I can see nothing wrong in the children, from the very threshold of their education, paying for it in work. The simplest handicraft, suitable for all, required for the whole of India undoubtedly spinning along with the previous processes. If we introduced this in our educational institutions, we should fulfill three purposes: make education self-supporting, train the bodies of the children as well as their minds and pave the way for a complete boycott of foreign yarn and cloth. Moreover, the children thus equipped will become self-reliant and independent.

9.7 NATION STATE AND MODERN INDUSTRIALISATION

Among the borrowings from the modern West, and willingly accepted by most of the western educated Indians, two crucial ones are the idea of nation state and modern industrialisation. Gandhi had a different concept of both. Gandhi asserted that violent nationalism, otherwise known as imperialism, was the curse; non-violent nationalism was a necessary condition for civilised life.

Against mechanistic and aggressive concept of nationalism in the West, Gandhi proposed a concept of People's Swaraj based on truth and non-violence for which Khadi was an apt symbol. Moreover, this symbol also linked the concept of Swaraj with the concern for the poor- the last man, and village, the supposed bastion of backwardness. Prior to Gandhi, the nationalist leaders had acquiesced in by and large to a western concept of nationalism. Gandhi not only critiqued that but also provided an alternative concept, more deeply rooted in the tradition and encompassing all Indians, rich and poor alike. He gave a moral perspective to the national movement for which a set of new symbols were created by him- Khadi, Ramarajya, and Satyagraha. He was designing a new framework of ideology more appropriate for the teeming millions of India, 85% of them residing in the countryside. His critique was not merely an alternative ideology. It was a plan of mass action that he visualised for the political, social and economic regeneration of India.

9.8 SUMMARY

It is not correct to conclude that Gandhi was against all the currents of modern civilisation and that he wanted to return to the past, essentially Indian. Often he made an exaggerated attack on modern civilisation for its ills. As far as the social organisation was concerned, Gandhi was a religious and social reformer. He fought against such practices as hereditary priesthood, untouchability against the low castes and the denial of entry to temples to them. He conducted many campaigns, based on social equality and scientific spirit for the cause of these social reforms. The socio-economic changes that took place in Gandhi's times and later in India and the emergence of new social classes helped the popularisation of modern ideas which Gandhi tried to spread in his times. With regard to the negation of violence and the prospects of conducting social and political movement, Gandhi was ahead of his times and was referred as the "Prophet of the Atomic Era."

Gandhi was critical of pursuit of materialism, opposed machines and centralisation of production, and favoured, on the contrary, a life of labour for everyone in the society,

concisely contained in his concept of “bread-labour.” He believed in the ideal of economic self-sufficiency of the villages. He describes his idea of an ideal socio- economic order in these words: “Independence must begin at the bottom, thus every village will be a republic or Panchayat having full powers.” There were occasions when Gandhi remarked on modern western civilisation being yet ‘a good idea.’ He was not against modern civilisation in total, but had a deep suspicion of the material progress in the West and in concept of modernity.

It would be erroneous to think that Gandhi rejected ideas from the modern West and remained uninfluenced by it altogether. It may be pertinent to note that he viewed his life as “experiments with truth,” ostensibly a tribute to science, to which he was sufficiently exposed as a student. Of course, he was both selective and innovative when it came to borrowing from the West. He was aware that there were elements in modern civilisation, like democratic political philosophy, that could be useful to India. In the preface to the English edition of *Hind Swaraj*, he even urged his countrymen to adopt such positive aspects of modern civilisation to drive out the English.

9.9 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Critically evaluate Gandhi’s arguments against modern civilisation.
2. Elucidate Gandhi’s use of Indian symbols to counter modern civilisation.
3. Do you agree with Gandhi’s description of modern civilisation as a bane for India and also a cause for the loss of Indian freedom?
4. Examine Gandhi’s perception on western concepts of nation state and modern Industrialisation.

SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT 10 CRITICAL UNDERSTANDING OF INDIAN CIVILISATION

Structure

- 10.1 Introduction
 - Aims and Objectives
- 10.2 The Idea of Civilisation
- 10.3 The Renaissance and Indian Intellectuals
- 10.4 Tradition and Reform: Social Reformers
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10.1 INTRODUCTION

It is good to swim in the waters of tradition, but to sink in them is suicide

- M. K. Gandhi, 28 June, 1925 (Collected Works, vol. 27, p.308)

Gandhi is a well-known critic of modern western civilisation. He saw modern colonialism as an outgrowth of this modern civilisation. Through his writings, he examines the 'civilisation' out of which modernity has emerged. The western modernity mostly identified with 'bodily welfare as the object of life and the resource of entire civilisation are put in the service of the good of 'bodily happiness'. Its pillars are insatiable possessiveness, machinery, mechanisation of every aspect of human life, rejection of virtue of religion, and coercive power. Gandhi's criticism of modern western civilisation is equally critical about the science and technology, colonialism, capitalism, consumerism and market. The propaganda of western mode of civilisation is carried with the power, dominance and colonialism and market. Gandhi stands against it from the moral worthiness of human beings.

At the same time, Gandhi is critical about Indian civilisation of contemporary times for adopting modern western civilisation and its deviation from the glorious ancient Indian civilisation. In this he is critical about Indian religious tradition on certain aspects. He considers that a once creative and vibrant civilisation had become degenerated, diseased and feeble, and fallen prey to foreign invasions of which British was the latest. Gandhi reflected deeply on the nature and causes of its degeneration and concluded that, unless radically revitalised and reconstituted on the foundation of a new *yugadharma*, it was

doomed. Gandhi's project of regeneration of Indian civilisation brought him into conflict with the Hindu tradition. Gandhi is critical of Hindu tradition on the issues pertaining to women, untouchability, peasants, and poverty. Gandhi has creatively used the resources of the Hindu tradition and also wielded a unique moral and political authority. Gandhi equates religion with spirituality, spirituality with morality and defined morality in terms of self-purification and social service.

Aims and Objectives

After reading this Unit, you would be able to understand:

- The idea of civilisation
- The ideas of tradition and reform and the role of social reformers
- The critical understanding of Indian civilisation with reference to its practices

10.2 THE IDEA OF CIVILISATION

As Mathew Arnold (1879) said, Civilisation is the humanisation of man in society. The term denotes a 'developed or advanced state of human society'. Raymond Williams (1973) in his 'Key words' traces the association of civilisation with 'the general spirit of enlightenment, with its emphasis on secular and progressive human self-development', as well as its 'associated sense of modernity'. According to the liberal thinker J. S. Mill, civilisation stands for a 'whole modern social process', including an increase in knowledge and physical comfort, the decline of superstition, the rise of forward moving nations, the growth of freedom, and also 'loss of independence, the creation of artificial wants, monotony, narrow mechanical understanding, inequality and hopeless poverty.' In the discourse of anthropology, the concept is associated with evolutionary distinctions contrasting civilisation with savagery and barbarism. Civilisation has an explicit influence in world-making in the period when Europeans established world hegemony. European project justified as a project of civilisation. European powers claimed civilisation as the reason for their far-flung conquests. Non-European elite made civilisation their own, reshaping the concept to forge anti-colonial and nationalist struggles. As written in the earlier Unit, the defenders of modern civilisation include some brilliant and even some very good men, who are not likely to write against it but support it.

The modern conception of life is based on the principle of scientific rationality by keeping away from the religious world view. The 17th century conceptions of natural sciences and fundamental philosophy are, through practice, associated with Newtonian physics, Descartes philosophy and Hobbesian liberalism. By 18th century modern view of knowing and knowledge helped to define what came to be known as enlightenment. Scientific reasoning and scientific knowledge would increasingly displace religious thinking and spiritual knowledge. Modernity as defined by 17th and 18th century lineage is epitomised by the view that scientific thinking yields objective knowledge and universal truth. Gandhi is critical of the trajectory of modern western civilisation, which often cuts off from the religious tradition. Gandhi considers the western civilisation which is predominantly based on technology, as the disease of civilisation. According to him, it was the very speed and power of Western society that was at the root of its problem and these were all a sign of its moral decay. The supporters of the west believed in illusion built on confusing power with civilisation and biology with culture. For Gandhi, 'the distinguishing characteristic of modern civilisation is an indefinite multiplicity of wants'; where as ancient civilisations

were marked by an ‘imperative restriction upon, and a strict regulating of these wants’ (Young India, 2 June 1927). Gandhi solemnly states, *“If India copies England, it is my firm conviction that she will be ruined”*. Yet Gandhi does not damn England entirely for her faulty government; it is modern civilisation that is to blame. *“Civilisation is not the infinite multiplication of human wants but their deliberate limitation to essentials that can be equitably shared by”*. Gandhi critically evaluates the idea of civilisation and rejects this kind of western notion of civilisation. He argued that any civilisation has to be flourished on the cultural life of its people. Gandhi’s civilisation is based on its moral worthiness rather than material progress, and practical possibility of moral swaraj. Gandhi argues for the moral possibility of Swaraj while addressing the British colonialism, violence and modernisation. He projects the view point that *“The tendency of the Indian civilisation is to elevate the moral being that of western civilisation is to propagate immorality”* (Gandhi, 1908). Gandhi popularised the possibility of another civilisation—a non-Western, non-technological civilisation.

Gandhi’s ideas on civilisation have to be understood in the context of the struggle for ‘Swaraj’ of India against the colonial western empire. For him, swaraj means individual discipline, restraint from passion and indulgence and, acceptance of responsibility. He considers modern Western civilisation as corrupt and weak that lacks morality; bodily welfare is the object of British civilisation, where as Indian life is spiritual. England should not be a model or source of inspiration to follow by the rest but be replaced by the pride of tradition and spirit. At the same time, Gandhi is critical about the oppressive tradition, social practices and religious dogmas. He argued for the reformation of tradition and called for universal and humanistic religion.

10.3 THE RENAISSANCE AND INDIAN INTELLECTUALS

Modern way of life claims superiority over the ancient ways. It is believed that all the material progress is possible only through modernity. It considers that the ancient thought of India spiritually consisted in a destruction of desires, in the final realisation of a painless self, of a pure consciousness for which all worldly prosperity has to be sacrificed. The dominant thought of west discourages these as silly fancies and propagates the scientific progress for the material good of the humanity.

In the early decades, the British contended that India was a great civilisation that had fallen on bad times because of their despotic form of government, which denied its subjects basic liberties. Therefore, the British engaged in the mission of civilising the natives in the line of liberal rationalist views and justified their rule in terms of the increasingly fashionable concept of civilisation. They believed that India lacks scientific and rationalistic approach to life and needs civilising in the cultural and social practices. Colonialism spawned intense rationalism and undermined tradition both as a mode of discourse and as a form of knowledge. They engaged in the enterprise of initiating their subjects into new ways of life and thought. The British approached Indians in an aggressive and confrontational mood with a conviction of superiority of their civilisation. They were convinced that they have nothing to learn from the natives. Responding to this context, Indian intellectuals are constantly challenged to show what in their civilisation was worth preserving.

At this historical juncture, the age old Indian philosophical traditions and the values associated with civilisation are revisited in modern times by various scholars in the backdrop of Western colonialism. The response may be broadly classified into three

categories- Sanskrit Punditic circle, anglicised circle and western educated Indian liberal circle. The anglicised people are only nominally connected themselves with traditional faiths, but the problems of religion and philosophy, which are so much valued by their ancestors, have ceased to have any charm with them. The scholars in the punditic circle are carrying on their work in a stereotyped fashion not for the intrinsic interest of philosophy and religion but merely as a learned occupation or for living. The influence of western education on some Indian people instilled new ideals of nationalism, politics and patriotism; new goals and new interests of philosophy, life, social relations, social values and religious values are now appearing before us which are submerging as it were all the older, cultural and philosophical tendencies of the country.

The context explains that some of the Indian intellectuals are very strongly intoxicated with western view of life, whereas others are strongly loyal to traditional faiths. There emerged the new liberal intellectuals of western educated Indians, those who moved away from both the positions. They were convinced that we cannot bind our faith to our traditional past nor can we heartily welcome the western outlook of life. They had started introspection of their tradition in a changed atmosphere. So it is believed that the bed-rock of the old Indian culture and civilisation which formed the basis of our philosophy is past slipping off our feet. Our real chance of life, therefore, is neither to hold fast to the submerged rock, nor to allow ourselves to be washed away, but to build an edifice of our own, high and secure enough to withstand the ravages of all inundations. They proposed the greatness of their spiritual tradition against the modern western view. They had interpreted spirituality with new meanings rather than carrying with typical traditional view. For instance, they argue that it would be wrong to restrict the meaning of the word spiritual merely to a sense of God-intoxication or an ethical or religious inspiration. By spiritual therefore as determining the meaning of philosophy, it means the entire harmonious assemblage of the inner life of man, as all that he thinks, feels, values and wishes to create. They wish to keep away from the decayed and dead tradition and its values of civilisation. Indeed, these English educated liberal intellectuals played a major role in shaping the Indian culture, philosophy and history in modern times.

10.4 TRADITION AND REFORM: SOCIAL REFORMERS

Tradition and reform are the essential features of any human society. No society is immune to change. At the same time every society finds ways of preserving, transmitting and reforming its own traditions, of retaining its links with the past and getting ready to respond to the future. Many of the 19th century Hindu leaders are able to successfully challenge unacceptable social practices. Social reformers like Rajaram Mohan Roy argued against sati and polytheism, K. C. Sen and Lala Lajpat Rai against child marriage, Ishwar Chandra Vidya Sagar against kulinism and the ban on widow remarriages and Dayanand Saraswati against image worship. Most of these are appealed to the scriptures, hospitable to their cause, invoked universal principles of morality, the need to change in the changed socio-cultural context, and warning the consequences of social practices that followed. They invoked glorious past of the nation for a solution of the contemporary problems. However, traditionalists and reformers have different view point on the Hindu tradition.

The Hindu leaders discussed colonial rule in the wider context of the betterment of their society and civilisation. The response has been varied. As Bhikhu Parekh suggested, the response may be broadly classified under the categories of traditionalists, modernists, critical modernists and critical traditionalists. While the traditionalists viewed nothing wrong with their cultural past and argued for upholding the tradition, others are disturbed by the

state of their society and keen to find alternatives. Among them the modernists argued that their salvation lay in radically restructuring it along modern or European lines. The critical modernists pleaded for a creative synthesis of the two civilisations. And the critical traditionalists preferred to mobilise their own indigenous resources, borrowing from Europe whatever was likely to supplement and enrich them. Both traditionalists and modernists are targeted for constant criticism. The critical modernists like Rammohan Roy, K.C.Sen and Gokhale are popular among this section. They agreed with modernists that India needed to modernise itself, but insisted that despite all its limitations, the central principles of Indian civilisation were sound and worth preserving. Though they never specified these principles, they had in mind such things as the spiritual view of the universe and the doctrine of the unity of man and of life, the emphasis on duties rather than rights, on altruism rather than self-interest, on society rather than the state, on the *atmic* rather than atomic view of man and on self-sacrifice rather than self-indulgence; the centrality of the family, the regulation of *artha* and *kama* by dharma. They pointed out that the Europeans had made a mistake of indiscriminately modernising themselves and rejecting their Greco-roman and especially Christian heritage. As a result their civilisation lacked moral and religious depth and a sense of meaning and purpose. For India, it had an opportunity to combine the old with the new, to integrate spirituality with modernity, and to undertake a unique civilisational experiment capable of becoming a source of universal inspiration. Unlike the traditionalists who were content to live by the values of their allegedly superior civilisation and had no interest in turning India into a spiritual laboratory of the world, and unlike the modernists who were content to adopt the superior European civilisation, the critical modernists aspired to synthesise the two and become world teachers. Rajaram Mohan Roy's *Brahmsamaj* was intended to be a synthesis of the doctrines of the European enlightenment with the philosophic views of Upanishads, for K.C. Sen for reconciliation of ancient faith and modern science and asceticism and civilisation. Gokhale pleaded for a harmonious blend of the European spirit of science and the Hindu science of the spirit. These Hindu leaders had an imagination of the Indian civilisation, that was to provide the foundation upon which was to be constructed the structure of eastern ideas and institutions. Western natural sciences were to be combined or integrated with the Hindu metaphysics, the western state with Hindu society, liberal-democratic ideas with Hindu political philosophy, large-scale industrialisation with Hindu cultural values and western moral values with the Hindu theory of *purusharthas*.

The traditionalists, the modernists and the critical modernists were convinced that civilisations could be compared and assessed on the basis of some universal criteria. The critical traditionalists including Bankimchandra, Vivekananda, B.C. Pal and Aurobindo rejected this assumption. For them, civilisation was an organic whole and could not be judged in terms of criteria derived from outside it. All such criteria were themselves ultimately derived from another civilisation and thus lacked universality. Further, values and institutions were an integral part of the way of life of a specific community. The critical modernist aimed at preserving what was valuable in Indian civilisation; the critical traditionalists were content to eliminate the evil.

10.5 GANDHI'S REFORMIST PROGRAMME

Gandhi's reformist programme is more comprehensive and radical than that of his predecessors. He argued for the moral regeneration of Hindu society based on new system of ethics, and *yugadharma*. He defined Hindu tradition in his own way, by borrowing moral insights from other religious traditions such as Buddhism, Jainism,

Judaism, Islam and Christianity. He was also influenced by the writers such as Tolstoy, Ruskin and Thoreau. Gandhi's philosophy both continued and broke with the tradition of discourse developed by his predecessors. Unlike them, Gandhi's explanation and critique of colonial rule was essentially cultural. Gandhi insisted that the colonial encounter was not between Indian and European but ancient and modern civilisations. Like his predecessors, Gandhi considered Indian civilisation as spiritual and the European as materialist, but defined the terms differently. Though Gandhi's critique of modern materialist civilisation was similar to that of his predecessors, it did contain novel elements. It had a strong moralistic content. For Gandhi, Indian civilisation was essentially plural and non-dogmatic. From the very beginning it had realised that the ultimate reality was infinite and inexhaustible and that different individuals grasped different aspects of it. None was wholly wrong and none wholly right. Indian civilisation was not only plural but pluralist, that is, committed to plurality as a desirable value, not just a collection of different ethnic, religious and cultural groups but a unity-in-diversity. In this sense, his conception of Hinduism is more inclusive than sectarian.

In Gandhi's view, every civilisation had its own distinctive natural and social basis. Modern civilisation was born and could only survive in the cities, and carried all over the world by the commercial class. Indian civilisation had, by contrast, been cradled and nurtured in the villages, and only the rural masses were its natural custodians. So long as their way of life was intact, its integrity and survival was guaranteed. Since the civilisations that had so far come to India were all rural and thus posed no threat to it, it was easily able to accommodate and enter a dialogue with them. For Gandhi, every tradition is a resource, a source of valuable insights into human condition, and part of a common human heritage. Gandhi considers that tradition has a source of values and provides moral insights for humanity, rather than blindly negating the tradition. In that sense tradition is the valid source of knowledge since it survives the test of collective social experience. He argues that every tradition contained an internal principle of self-criticism in the form of its constitutive values. He believes that India had a tradition of negotiating through dialogue. Further he believed that dialogue between different traditions is both possible and necessary. This may facilitate for the progress of mankind and it should be open minded rather than imposing one over other. In this sense he opposed the values of the western imposition on non-European traditions. As an Indian, he was proud of being an inheritor of rich diverse religious and cultural traditions.

Gandhi made an attempt to reform Hindu tradition based on his conception of *yugadharma*. He has concern for reinterpretation of central principles of Hinduism in the light of the needs of the modern age. He challenges the orthodox Hindu conception of tradition and sought to replace it with an alternative view of his own. As Bhikhu Parekh explains, though Gandhi valued tradition, he was not a traditionalist. He reduced tradition to a resource, located its essence in its general moral values which commanded respect but left room for critical evaluation, and gave every individual the freedom to draw upon the insights of other traditions. Similarly, though he stressed the role of reason, he was not a rationalist. He respected 'cultivated reason', one 'ripened' by a deep acquaintance with wisdom embodied in tradition, especially, but not exclusively, one's own. And though an individual remained free to revise traditional values, he was to do so only after making a 'respectful' study of them and giving them the benefit of doubt (p.23). Gandhi saw no hostility or contrast between reason and tradition. Reason was not a transcendental or natural faculty, but a socially acquired capacity presupposing and constantly shaped and nurtured by tradition. Tradition was not a mechanical accumulation of precedents but a

product of countless conscious and semi-conscious experiments by rational men over several generations. The reformer's task was to elucidate the historical rationale of unacceptable practices and to expose their irrationality. He required both sympathetic understanding and critical spirit, both patience and indignation. This was how Gandhi went about reforming the Hindu ways of thought and life.

Gandhi engages in a creative dialogue with tradition. He tries to find out truth in tradition and emphasises it. He attached new meanings to traditional symbols. He believes that religion and scriptures need to be understood in the light of conscience and morality. Wherever scriptures contradict conscience, religion demands that conscience should be followed. Gandhi's critical dialogue with Hindu tradition and his struggle to reform Hindu tradition occurred within the colonial context. Gandhi tries to uphold the authority of Hindu tradition and protect it from the distortions of colonial rule. At the same time, he was much aware of the uncritical and mindless traditionalism of the orthodox, both unwise and impractical. Gandhi reconstructed the tradition in a creative mode to suit his context.

10.6 CRITICAL UNDERSTANDING OF INDIAN CIVILISATION

Gandhi was proud of the great Indian civilisation but was also critical of some of its dogmatic and inhuman practices in modern times. He questioned the immoral practices tagged with the name of religion and tradition and relentlessly fought against such practices. He points out the moral decay of Indian civilisation in contemporary times. He argues that the British have conquered India not because of their strength, or superiority but due to the moral failure of Indians. The modern civilisation of the British is responsible for the sustenance of the British rule. The Indians simply carried with this without any introspection. Gandhi argues that modern civilisation made man a prisoner of his craving for luxury and self-indulgence, release the forces of unbridled competition, and thereby bringing upon society the evils of poverty, disease, war and suffering. The modern civilisation looks at human-being as mere consumers and opens up to the industrial production and it becomes a source of inequality, oppression and violence. The idea of civilisation is central to his philosophy and political struggles. On one hand, Gandhi finds the problems with the very ideal of modern western civilisation and the Indian engagements with it, and on the other he is critical of the Indians for deviating from the very moral foundations of their age old civilisation. As a result one may find novel and pragmatic interpretation of the Indian civilisation as propounded by Gandhi.

10.6.1 Religion

Gandhi's idea of civilisation is spiritual and religious. He comments the modern western civilisation as irreligion. In materialistic society, regardless of its religious or humanistic professions, the entire system becomes corrupt. He aimed at spiritualising the political life and political institutions. He insisted that politics cannot be isolated from the deepest things of life. Gandhi was concerned more about religious values than religious beliefs. He believes that religious dogmas are hurdles for religious experience. For him, religion does not mean sectarianism. Sectarian religion is purely personal matter and has no place in politics. Gandhi argues against the compartmentalisation of human life that had been brought about in the name of segregation of politics from religion. Religion means a belief in the ordered moral government of the universe.

Religion is central to Gandhi's thought. He regarded politics as applied religion. His ideas

on religion are complex and varied from time to time. He derives all his moral resource from Hinduism. His idea of Hinduism is different from the traditionalist view and is tolerant of other faiths and assimilates the differences into its fold.

'It (Hinduism) was the most tolerant of all religions. Its freedom from dogma gave the votary the largest scope for self-expression. Not being an exclusive religion it enabled the followers not merely to respect all the other religions, but admire and assimilate whatever may be good in the other faiths. Non-violence (ahimsa) is common to all religions, but it has found highest expression and application in Hinduism. Hinduism believes in the oneness not only of merely all human life but in the oneness of all other lives' (Young India, October 21, 1927).

He was proud of Hinduism but it did not prevent him from rejecting and criticising several institutions, ideas and beliefs which Hindus ordinarily regard as part of their religion. His Hinduism is not the one conventionally practiced. He attacks what he considers to be defective like the practice of untouchability. He views contemporary Hinduism as departing from its core principles. 'Gandhi's attitude was liberal and radical rather than conservative towards religious as well as political social and political institutions. He therefore invoked religion against all authority and not in support of church or state. He combined an absolutist sense of sanctity toward religious values with flexible and critical attitude toward religious institutions, and he was wholly critical toward existing social ideals, though less toward traditional social institutions' (Iyer, p.44).

He condemns some of the texts of scriptures because they are contrary to universal truths and morals or are in conflict with reason, such as child marriages sanctioned in the smritis. He insists that the defective additions must be rejected as interpolations. On his account, 'the texts of a tradition must be elastic and open to new readings today, just as they have in the past.' The interpretation of accepted texts has undergone evaluation and is capable of indefinite evolution.

Gandhi condemns the discords that take place in the name of religion, for instance, Hindus against Muslims. This kind of cruelty, he considers as irreligious. They are not part of religion, although they have been practised in its name. However, Gandhi argues that these hardships are far more bearable than those of civilisation. Gandhi writes, *'when its full effect is realized, we will see that religious superstition is harmless compared to that of modern civilisation. I am not pleading for a continuance of religious superstition. We will certainly fight them tooth and nail, but we can never do so by disregarding religion. We can only do by appreciating and conserving later'* (Gandhi, Hind Swaraj, p.43).

The higher religion was universal, and transcended particular religions. 'Religion does not mean sectarianism. It means belief in ordered moral government of the universe'. This religion transcends Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, etc. Such universal religion was in harmony with his ideas of truth and non-violence. Gandhi's religion was simply an ethical framework for the conduct of daily life. As a religious man, he aimed at perfection or self-realisation.

10.6.2 Untouchability

"Untouchability is not only not a part and parcel of Hinduism, but a plague, which is the burden of every Hindu to combat." (Gandhi, From Yervada Mandir, 1935, p.47). The issue of the caste system is central to Indian society and even a threat to the very idea of civilisation. The practice of untouchability is very much embedded in the Hindu social

structure and, has existed for several centuries. There are many interpretations of the caste system, both from its supporters and its opponents. Since the caste system connected to the Hinduism, there are various attempts to reform Hinduism. The practice of untouchability is an important issue for both social reform and nationalist movements. Gandhi not only brought this issue to the larger public but also fought against this inhuman practice in his own style. He dared to fight against the orthodox Hindus and tried to convince them as an internal critic. The sanatanists argued that untouchability was enjoined by the scriptures. In response to this, Gandhi demanded for evidence. He insisted that a religious text was not a theoretical treatise composed by a philosopher or a pundit given to weighing every word, but the work of a spiritual explorer containing insights too deep and complex to be adequately expressed in a discursive language. Gandhi believes that religious texts propounded eternally valid and, values and principles and were intended to guide all men everywhere. Religious text is both transcended and were conditioned by time. 'Untouchability as it is practiced today in Hinduism in my opinion, is a sin against God and man and is, therefore like a poison slowly eating into the very vitals of Hinduism. There are innumerable castes in India. They are social institutions and at one time they served a very useful purpose, as perhaps, they are even doing now to a certain extent...there is nothing sinful about them. They retard the material progress of those who are labouring under them. They are no bar to the spiritual progress. The difference, therefore, between caste system and untouchability is not one of degree, but of kind' (Gandhi, Harijan, vol.1, 1933, p.2)

Gandhi argued that caste has nothing to do with Hindu religion. He focused on the practice of untouchability rather than caste system. He reduced the problem of untouchability to a matter of self-purification. He even supported *varnashramadharma* by providing new interpretation. For him, it is the *guna* that matters than one's caste/varna. Sudra becomes a Brahmin based on *guna* or his/her worthiness. In varna system, people are unequal only on functional terms. Gandhi thought that in principle, Sudras and Brahmins are of equal status. The critics argue that caste practices are sanctioned by the shastras. In response to this, he said, 'nothing in the shastras which is manifestly contrary to universal truths and morals can stand.' For him, *True principles of religion or morality are universal and unchanging*. 'Caste has nothing to do with religion. It is a custom whose origin I do not know and do not need to know for the satisfaction of my spiritual hunger. But I do know that it is harmful both to spiritual and national growth.' Further he argues that, 'The true dharma is unchanging, while tradition may change with time. If we were to follow some of the tenets of manusmriti, there would be moral anarchy. We have quietly discarded them altogether.' For Gandhi the problem of untouchability was the problem of the self, the collective Hindu self. He saw the movement to eradicate untouchability as a sacred ritual of self-purification. 'The movement for the removal of untouchability is one of self-purification' (Harijan, 15 April, 1933).

For Gandhi, Swaraj is unattainable without the removal of the sins of untouchability as it is without Hindu-Muslim unity. Gandhi claimed that the heart of the caste Hindu could be changed by applying moral pressures within the framework of the Hindu tradition. As Bhikhu Parekh rightly pointed out, 'Untouchability was both moral and political problem. Gandhi's campaign was conducted only at the moral and religious level. He concentrated on caste Hindus rather than on untouchables, appealed to their feelings of shame and guilt, and succeeded in achieving his initial objections of discrediting untouchability and raising the level of Hindu and, to a limited extent, Harijan conscience. Since he did not organise and politicise the untouchables, stress their rights and fight for a radical reconstruction of

the established social and economic order, Gandhi's campaign was unable to go further. It gave untouchables dignity but not power; moral and to some extent, social but not political and economic equality; self respect but not self-confidence to organize and fight their own battles. It integrated them into the Hindu social order but did little to release them from the cumulative cycle of deprivation'.

10.6.3 Women's Oppression

Women are often victims of religious tradition. It is argued that the practices of patriarchy are internalised in the tradition. No civilised society sanctifies the oppression of women. The issue of women's oppression is central to the agenda of social reformers and the leaders of later struggles. Against the age old tradition, Gandhi brought a large number of women into the forefront of nationalistic struggle and provided courage and source of inspiration for struggles of women emancipation. Of all the evils for which man has made himself responsible, writes Gandhi, 'none is so degrading, so shocking or so brutal as his abuse of women'. Gandhi's views on women are different from the earlier reformers. By commenting on child marriage, widow remarriage, dowry, sati, he exposes and challenges the Hindu orthodoxy while simultaneously reformulating and, thus, emphasising marriage as the only regulator of man-woman relationship in the society. He considers these acts as against swaraj. Gandhi links up the question of oppression to social and national health. In Gandhi's view the glaring abuse of Indian womanhood was the custom of childhood marriages. He saw evil as intimately related to that of child widowhood. It is irreligion, not religion. Gandhi saw education as an essential means for enabling women to uphold their natural rights. Gandhi realised that the identification of manliness with violence was likely to lead humanity to destruction. Men needed to emulate women's quiet strength and their resistance of injustice without resorting to violence. For Gandhi, the women who have the strength, courage, patience and a capacity for suffering can become a symbol of non-violence and peace. Women should be self-reliant. Gandhi often invoked the traditional symbols to mark the strength of women. If women were to get justice, scriptures needed to be revised and all religious texts biased against the rights and dignity of women should be expurgated. For this Indian women had to produce from amongst themselves new Sitas, Draupadis and Damyantis 'pure, firm and self-controlled'. Their words will have the same authority as the shastras, and command the same respect as those of their prototype yore. Gandhi argues for the personal dignity and autonomy for women in family and society. Rules of social conduct had to be framed by mutual cooperation and consultation, and not forcibly imposed on women from outside.

10.6.4 Modern Institutions

Gandhi was not only critical towards traditional institutions and social practices, but also critical of the modern institutions and its professional practices. For instance, railways, lawyers and doctors have impoverished the country. Gandhi could foresee the effects of these modern institutions and explained it in his *Hind Swaraj*. He finds the grip of modern western civilisation through the institutions of railways, legal system and hospitals. Gandhi explains that railways are a distributing agency for the evil one. It may be a matter of debate whether railways spread famines, but it is beyond dispute that they propagate evil. Railways increased the frequency of famines, because, owing to facility of means of locomotion, people sell out their grains, and it is sent to the dearest markets. People become careless, and so the pressure of famine increases. They accentuate the evil nature of man. Bad men fulfil their evil designs with greater rapidity. The holy places of India have become unholy.

Gandhi was critical of the legal system which had become the handmaid of colonial rule. The lawyers tightened the English grip. Gandhi argues thus, 'do you think that it would be possible for English to carry on their government without law courts? It is wrong to consider that courts are established for the benefits of the people. Those who want to perpetuate their power, do so through the courts. If people were to settle their own quarrels, a third party would not be able to exercise any authority over them. Without lawyers, courts could not have been established or conducted, and without the latter the English could not rule.'

Gandhi considers hospitals as institutions for propagating sin. Men take less care of their bodies, immorality increases. The moral basis of modern medicine is that it is taking a purely bodily view of health, ignores need for the health of the soul, which is necessary for the maintenance of even physical health. Men pretend to be civilised, call religious prohibitions a superstition and wantonly indulge in what they like. The fact remains that the doctors induce us to indulge, and the result is that we become deprived of self-control. In these circumstances, we are unfit to serve the country. To study European medicine is to deepen our slavery. Gandhi was critical of modern knowledge systems of the west and its practices and argues for the indigenous knowledge systems and its practices.

10.7 SUMMARY

Gandhi considers modern civilisation as a greater threat to Indians than colonialism. Colonialism itself is a product of modern civilisation. Gandhi was critical of modern civilisation from the religious and ethical point of view as it neither takes note of morality nor religion. Through his writings, he made an attempt to redefine Hinduism and the concept of dharma. In the past dharma was tied to a hierarchical system of duties and obligations and to preservation of status. Gandhi was critical of Indian civilisation for its deviance from the spirit of age old tradition. His criticism of Indian civilisation on the issues of women, untouchability, and religious orthodoxy are in tune with the *yugadhama*. In *Hind Swaraj*, he made a conscious attempt to actualise the real potential of Indian civilisation. He believed that Indian society has not fully actualised its age old civilisation in practice. Only an innovated Indian civilisation can help India to attain swaraj.

10.8 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Critically analyse the Indian intellectuals' response to western colonialism.
2. Discuss Gandhi's critique of Indian civilisation in the back drop of British Colonialism.
3. How did Gandhi redefine Hindu tradition and its dharma?
4. How is the caste system a hindrance to the progress of civilisation?

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UNIT 11 TOWARDS A NEW CIVILISATION

Structure

11.1 Introduction

Aims and Objectives

11.2 Basic Foundations of New Civilisation

11.3 Overcoming Tradition-Modernity Dichotomy

11.4 Universal Religion: Unity in Diversity

11.5 Truth is God

11.5.1 Satya

11.5.2 Ahimsa

11.6 Swaraj

11.7 Sarvodaya

11.8 Contemporary Relevance

11.9 Summary

11.10 Terminal Questions

Suggested Readings

11.1 INTRODUCTION

‘Civilisation is that mode of conduct which points to man the path of duty. Performance of duty and observance of morality are convertible terms. To observe morality is to attain mastery over our mind and our passion. So doing, we know ourselves... The Gujarati equivalent means ‘good conduct’. If this definition be correct, then India, as so many writers have shown, has nothing to learn from anybody else, and this is as it should be.’ **Gandhi in Hind Swaraj (p.61)**

Civilisation, in its broader sense, means culture shared by large part of humanity, across countries and nations and throughout vast span of time. In fact, it consists in the social worthiness of man. Gandhi is inspired by the rich cultural diversity of India and convinced that Indian culture represents the ideal or true civilisation, for it rests on the firm foundation of eternal values of life. Against the technological and materialistic oriented modern western civilisation, Gandhi brings man into the core of the process of civilisation, and in so doing he also reflects on the whole gamut of circumstances and situations that concerns man. He views man as integral entity in whom all dimensions of human existence-economic, moral and spiritual-blend inseparably. Human advancement is possible only when man stands well-integrated into the very fabric of the world. Gandhi’s concept of true civilisation is a value concept to be realised universally. Gandhi’s idea of civilisation is typically indigenous and provides new meaning to it. It is based on religion, and is universal, tolerant, humanistic and inclusive. The religion he proposes is laid down on the foundation of morality. This morality is very much internalised in the principles of truth, non-violence and human dignity. His idea of civilisation is a realisation of one’s self and

freedom. It is the regulation of mind over body. It is spiritualistic rather than materialistic. It has many implications in the contemporary times.

Generally in western philosophy, modernity is based on the cognitive idea of truth as the foundation of a scientific world view. Thus truth is a cognitive and not a moral notion. With truth as a cognitive being replaced by truth as moral and spiritual, Gandhi has turned the modern civilisation on its head. Gandhi's vision of nationhood is one based on decentralised local control, assimilation and tolerance of cultural differences, and above all, nonviolence. He sought a political system founded on *satya* and *ahimsa*, without separation of *dharmic* obligation from political and social organisation. In other words, the philosophical thought of Gandhi has a connection between truth, *swaraj*, the moral vision of the human good, technology and economic development. Gandhi's concern for modern civilisation and *swaraj* expressed itself in his deep interest in the revitalisation of India's villages.

Gandhi was in favour of appropriate technology that is well informed by the moral vision of human good. That vision can be found in dharma, which is rooted in truth itself and discovered by the natural power of the soul. That truth stipulates that the technology that is appropriate for India should meet the needs of the masses of India. He believes that the modern technology does not stipulate this. Historically, it has tended to reward the skilled and the powerful and to marginalise the poor and weak. He wants to modify this trend. He wants a technology for India that would improve the material welfare of all, not just that of the rich and the highly educated, and improve it without undermining the process of self-rule. He is concerned more about what kind of technology that India needs rather India needs technology or not.

Aims and Objectives

After reading this Unit, you would be able to understand:

- Basic foundations of new civilisation
- Gandhi's philosophy of new civilisation based on the principles of *satya* and *ahimsa*

11.2 BASIC FOUNDATIONS OF NEW CIVILISATION

Gandhi views the western civilisation as predominantly materialistic, destructive, and violent and exploitative. He is critical about the modern western civilisation and the ideologies born out of this phenomenon. He considers this civilisation as the one that is cut off from its roots. He adds new dimension to the civilisation by redefining dharma and relocating it in the Indian context. Gandhi opposes the western notion of rationality and science which is a product of industrial revolution. He equates this kind of rationality with the power of western colonialism. Gandhi develops an elaborate refutation of the colonial 'civilising process.' He redefines rationality and science from Indian point of view, as a victim of western imperialism. As Partha Chatterjee argues, Gandhi counteracts the material/outer domain of western superiority by relocating both national and individual sovereignty in an inner spiritual domain (*Nation and its Fragments*). As Raghavan Iyer rightly observed, Gandhi argues that western civilisation has invented 'the most terrible weapons of destruction....the frightful disputes between labour and capital and the wanton and diabolical cruelty inflicted on innocent dumb, living animals in the name of science' (Raghavan Iyer, *The Moral and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi*, pp.288-89). Bhikhu Parekh argues that distinctive human powers such as self-determination, autonomy,

self-knowledge, self-discipline and social cooperation are requirement for any great civilisation. According to Gandhi, all these qualities are threatened by the modern civilisation. The emphasis of the first two is of distinctively modern and Euro-American and they are weak and vulnerable in last three qualities. In fact these qualities are imbibed very much in the European tradition beginning with Greek and Christian philosophers. The modern western society lost its balance and the contemporary culture became unstable and violence-prone. For Gandhi, *Swaraj* is the battle cry for civilisational self-sufficiency. He postulates ahimsa as the high water mark of India's civilisational superiority.

Gandhi's civilisation is based on virtues and the dharma. He believes that good society and good way of living is one that follows ethics of virtues. Gandhi's ethical programme replaces the ritualistic, dogmatic and inhuman religion with the traditional virtues of courage, justice, compassion and love. As Gandhi states; '*morality means acquisition of virtues such as fearlessness, truth, chastity, etc. Service is automatically rendered to the country in this process of cultivating morality.*' Gandhi's civilisation goes in tune with dharma. He interprets dharma differently from traditional conceptions of dharma. In view of Gandhi, dharma has no meaning apart from *loksangraha*, the welfare of the whole world. Self-conquest is not just a means to self-realisation as they both must be valued in terms of their contribution to the common good of humanity. The crucial point for Gandhi, as for some traditional Indian philosophical schools, was that dharma must not be taken in a formal sense, as laid down by scripture or by custom, but rather as object of discovery, the self-chosen means of self-discipline of every human being who wishes to qualify as moral agent.

According to Gandhi, there are three chief ingredients of true civilisation based on truth and non-violence. First of these is a quest for truth and non-violent way of living and thinking. The goal of true civilisation is spiritual longing and moral upliftment of man and not the satisfaction of or obsession with external riches and fascinations. Secondly true civilisation is simplicity which naturally follows from the first ingredient and is regarded as the essence of civilisation. Simple living and high thinking is the real motto of Gandhi's life. Simplicity generally means a life based not on luxurious use of things but based on simple wants. Gandhi believed that the true mark of ideal civilisation is not the multiplication but the deliberate and voluntary reduction of wants. This alone can enable us to attain real happiness and contentment. His essential protest was directed, not against industrialism as such, but against social disruption that may accompany it. The third ingredient of civilisation is the principle of synthesis which has been one of the chief characteristics of Indian culture and which Gandhi so well articulates in his idea of cultural rootednesses or the principle of *swadeshi*. He is well aware that no civilisation can live and flourish in exclusion. Gandhi's principle of synthesis has its own distinctive quality. It is neither eclectic adaptation nor indiscriminate borrowing or copying of any other culture; it meant to assimilate and adopt whatever may be good and capable of assimilation by us. This view is well in accord with the Indian spirit of synthesis, that is, the principle of unity in diversity. This is prompted by the philosophy of Vedanta.

11.3 OVERCOMING TRADITION-MODERNITY DICHOTOMY

The modern world is characterised by universalism, rationalism and secularism. Modernity is opposed to the religious worldview which is traditional. Tradition involves uncritical acceptance of the past which is in the form of dogmas, beliefs and scriptural authorities.

It is argued that, contrary to tradition, modernity brings change in the attitudes, values and orientation of thinking and mental makeup of the individual so as to make him/her rational, secular, liberal, self-conscious and self-confident in a changing world. Reason plays a predominant role to evaluate beliefs, opinions, dogmas, etc. Modernity assumes that scientific thinking should have precedence over emotions and non-rational thought. Modernity also involves changes in the socio-economic and political structures facilitating industrialisation, urbanisation, and democratisation. From the economic point of view, modernity involves reorientation of the social structure bringing about material prosperity through increasing expansion of the productive forces of society and by equitable distribution of wealth. In short, the modern world view is based on empirical and scientific knowledge, and is incompatible with tradition on all important aspects of life. It is argued by many that scientific understanding and domination of nature would secure freedom to man from scarcity and want. Besides, transformation of the individual and control over nature, rational forms of social organisation and modes of thought would bring liberation from the irrationalities of myths, religion, superstition, arbitrary use of power and human frailties. As a result, the universal, eternal and immutable qualities of humanity will be revealed.

It is argued by some thinkers that there is a dichotomous opposition between tradition and modernity. Modernity is considered to be the anti-thesis to tradition. But many scholars, for different reasons, contested the view that there is any dichotomy between tradition and modernity. Also some nationalist thinkers questioned the dichotomy between tradition and modernity. They attempted to construct the idea of modernity differently. They challenged the hitherto dominant perspectives on modernity. Nationalist thinkers argued that modernity, which is equated with industrialisation, scientific and technological advancement was limited to western countries. The so-called modernity suited colonial interests at the expense of the colonised. Keeping this view in mind, the rationale of modernity, which was put forward by western colonial countries, was questioned. Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* contested the above view. We can see in the thought of Gandhi a blend of tradition and modernity. He tried to integrate new patterns of thought and action on traditional culture. He attempted a merger of three levels of Indian social system, viz., social stratification, culture and polity into a pattern so that the break down of Indian tradition could be averted. Gandhi's critique of western civilisation was critique of modernity and his central argument is that no enduring alternative can be pursued unless that alternative negotiated to the skills, capacities and wisdom of people.

For Gandhi, tradition was not a repository inviolable norm but a place of considerable criticism, change and development. As Thomas Pantham rightly observed, '*Gandhi's project is one of overcoming modernism without regressing to traditionalism. In his approach, there is a merging of the reconstruction of Indian tradition and reconstruction of western modernity*'. He finds that tradition is sound when it celebrates the dignity of all persons and provides the moral materials for the good life and the good community. Gandhi seeks to democratise tradition in the most basic sense.

Gandhi sees western modernity addressing a person's interests or wealth (*artha*) and desires (*kama*), but ignoring questions about person's responsibilities in the wider world (*dharma*). As rationality is the hallmark of modernity, the increased productivity and technological innovations are the emblems of modernisation. Gandhi finds that many of the apparent successes of modernity are not real successes at all because many of their purported benefits come at terrible costs. As against the greediness of modern material civilisation, Gandhi posed the Indian, in which the tendency is 'to elevate the moral being. If culture is the way people conduct their life activities, then its primary quality is morality.

Instead of the greedy pursuit of material good, which he thought characterized, the modern civilisation, a civilisation like the quintessential Indian would 'point out man the path of duty', by pursuing us attaining' mastery over our mind and our passions. So doing we know ourselves.' This must be the reason why Gandhi tended to invest so much in tradition. Tradition, or rather the purified tradition, seems to be, for him, the cure for modern civilisation.

Science and technology of the west which have shaken the spiritual foundations of human civilisation are pursuing an amoral goal. Modern has been associated with material progress and the consequent loss of human values. Gandhi's critique of modernity is based on the pursuit of truth and non-violence. A spiritually enlightened human society will be far more non-violent and wedded to truth than any civilisation. The foundation of this new society will lie in our total dedication to truth and non-violence.

However, Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* is not a rejection of the liberating elements of modernity: civil liberties, religious tolerance, equality and poverty alleviation. Rather his efforts could be interpreted as an attempt to integrate these positive elements with a liberating reinterpretation of tradition, even as some see him as radical and others as reactionary. With his critique from within the tradition, Gandhi becomes the great synthesiser of contraries, if not of contradictions, within and across traditions. In *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi equates modernism with sensual self-gratification and condemns it primarily for this reason. The modern world view of west not only alienates us from nature, but also alienates our desires from any moral end. The teleology of the ancients, that which gave their life its ultimate meaning and purpose, has been eliminated in modernism.

11.4 UNIVERSAL RELIGION: UNITY IN DIVERSITY

Religion is central to Gandhi's idea of Civilisation. He defines religion in his own way. He projects the true Indian religion (Hindu religion) as universal in appeal and most tolerant, value-oriented and non-violent. Gandhi's interest was to recover the values of a traditional Hindu civilisation that represented genuine pluralism. Further he believed that all religions are equal and all are to be tolerated. According to Bhikhu Parekh, Gandhi's Hinduism had a secularized content but a spiritual form and was at once both secular and non-secular (Bhikhu Parekh, 1995, p.109)

Religion, for Gandhi, signifies spiritual commitment which is total but intensely personal, and which pervades every aspect of life. He had firm belief in the fundamental unity of life. He rejected any distinction between public and private, between secular and sacred, and ultimately between politics and religion. The principle of unity in diversity is one of the key components of his philosophy. He argues for assimilation of all cultures in the religion. In that sense, his reading of religion is universal in character rather than sectarian. It opens for a dialogue. As Rudolf observed, Gandhi wanted all cultures to be enriched by each other without losing their identity. But such cultural assimilation was opposed by political revivalists and religious nationalists. Yet for Gandhi, open and understanding dialogue must precede, not follow, a free and adoptive assimilation. Thus, an enriched diversity would then contribute to a more invigorated pluralism and an enhanced unity. This was precisely Gandhi's understanding of Indian culture and civilisation (Rudolf, Economic and Political Weekly, 1999, p.1500)

Ravinder Kumar identified the potential of creative political community in Gandhi's thought. India is marked for its diversity in terms of caste, religion, language and region. Gandhi

managed to derive a romantic political community which embraces many caste groups and religions into a common shared tradition. The structure of Indian society, as understood by Gandhi, is characterised by social groups with diverging instead of converging social loyalties. But it was possible, Gandhi argued, to devise a focus of loyalty that could knit such social groups into a creative political society. The nationalist movement he launched against British has operated on this loyalty principle.

11.5 TRUTH IS GOD

Gandhi equates truth with God keeping in view the primacy of truth as an ontological category. He says that Truth is God, rather than God is Truth. Gandhi's concepts of *satya* and *ahimsa* are the core values of his social and political philosophy. Indeed, Gandhi's idea of new civilisation ultimately stands on these values. He developed his own vision of radical transformation of existing social order and political system based on these two principles. As Raghavan Iyer explains, 'his concept of *satya*, with *ahimsa* as the means, determined his doctrine of *satyagraha* or active resistance to authority, while the concept of *ahimsa*, with *satya* as the common end, enabled him to formulate his doctrine of *sarvodaya* or non-violent socialism.' Gandhi challenged the conventional notions of authority, law and obligation by appealing to his conception of dharma and self-suffering. He believes that *satya* and *ahimsa* alone can secure an enduring basis for social consensus and political loyalty. There is no external authority that can claim a higher status than *satya* either in religious or in political arena. There is also no political or social sanction that can be assigned a legitimacy superior to *ahimsa*. Gandhi visualised the new civilisation based on the idea of universal harmony in nature. The new social order could be provided only by the collective pursuit of truth and the general acceptance of nonviolence. Gandhi condemned the values and structures of modern civilisation as a system of untruth and coercion, injustice and mutual exploitation and looks for new method and legitimising principles. The doctrine of *Satyagraha* was an attempt to raise the deliberate suffering of a man of outraged conscience to a moral sanction that compels respect and secures result. Gandhi equates Truth with God or Self and Self-realisation is the ultimate goal of human life. In his own words, "To me God is Truth and Love; God is ethics and morality; God is fearlessness. God is the source of Light and Life and yet He is above and beyond all these. God is conscience. He is even the atheism of the atheist. For in His boundless love God permits the atheist to live. He is the searcher of hearts. He transcends speech and reason. He knows us and our hearts better than we do ourselves. He does not take us at our word, for He knows that we often do not mean it, some knowingly and others unknowingly." The ideas of truth-based religion and truth-based metaphysics dominate Gandhi's philosophy. The formulation of Truth as the God has its own implications. By claiming this, Truth has a spiritual dimension in addition to the moral dimension. Truth is a metaphysical category as it characterises the fundamental nature of reality. And, Truth is the Absolute Reality which is the source of all existence. Further, Gandhi acknowledges that God is all things to all men, which enables him to support the *dvaita* and *vishishtadvaita* positions as well as maintaining his own preference for *advaita*. Gandhi envisages the idealist view of human culture and civilisation. According to this view, universe has not only a casual but also a moral order that life has a value and meaning.

11.5.1 Satya

Gandhi regards *satya* as the highest value. It is identical with dharma or the moral law. According to him, the real test for civilisation is that which stands for truth. His notion

of truth is different from conventional categories of western philosophy. Gandhi's epistemology is rooted in 'truth in action', a concept that locates truth in the facts and circumstance of a particular situation. Truth has to be understood in relation to tradition which determines one's way of life. As Akeel Bilgrami says, 'Truth for Gandhi is not a cognitive notion at all. It is an experiential notion. It is not propositions purporting to describe the world of which truth is predicated, it is only our own moral experience which is capable of being true. This was of utmost importance for him. It is what an end underlies his opposition to the enlightenment, despite the undeniably enlightenment elements in his thought including his humanism and the concern that our moral judgments be relevant to all people' (Akeel Bilgrami, Gandhi, The Philosopher, Economic and Political Weekly, September 27, 2003, p.4164).

For Gandhi, truth did not lie in history, nor did science have any privileged access to it. Truth was moral: unified, unchanging, and transcendental. It was not an object of critical inquiry or philosophical speculation. It could only be found in the experience of one's own life, by the unflinching practice of moral living. Gandhi's concept of truth is to undermine the external authority and to reaffirm the moral autonomy of the individual. Truth qualifies to be a moral law as it shows how moral values are possible at all. The presupposition of truth as the fundamental moral principle makes it into a moral law in the sense that truth prevails as the principle of good life in the world. Gandhi's realisation of the truth is the practice of non-violence brought to a high level of self-consciousness through self-practice. Truth is the sovereign principle, the ultimate dharma from which springs all virtues. For Gandhi non-violence is the only means to realise truth; non-violence is the highest virtue to be observed by man. Gandhi rationally justifies non-violence as a supreme reality, value or duty.

11.5.2 Ahimsa

Non-violence had always been the founding principle of Gandhian spirituality and bedrock of his political philosophy. It was through an assimilation of various concepts and philosophical tenets that Gandhi derived his own understanding of non-violence. Jainism and Buddhism were the most important influences behind his theory of non-violence. These religions preached non-violence as the basic principle of existence. Non-violence is the greatest force at the disposal of mankind. It is mightier than the mightiest weapon of destruction devised by the ingenuity of man. Non-violence is the greatest force man has been endowed with and his strongest weapon. Gandhi considers violence is antithetical to democracy, because social system based on the former cannot provide for or protect the weak. Ahimsa is a functional good on the way to absolute truth. For Gandhi, ahimsa was the expression of the deepest love for all humans, including one's opponents; this non-violence included not only a lack of physical harm to them, but also a lack of hatred or ill-will towards them. The first principle of non-violence is the non-compliance with everything that is humiliating. Belief in non-violence is based on the assumption that human nature in its essence is one and therefore unfailingly responds to the advances of love. Mankind has to get out of violence only through non-violence. Hatred can be overcome by love. Human dignity is best preserved only through love and not by destruction. In India, ahimsa was essential to Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism in different ways. It was regarded as equivalent to *dharma* or moral law. *Ahimsa requires deliberate self suffering, not a deliberate injuring of the supposed wrong doer... In its primitive form, ahimsa means the largest love, the greatest charity* (Raghavan Iyer, The Essential Writings of Mahatma Gandhi, p.180).

11.6 SWARAJ

Gandhi's notion of civilisation is very much linked up to his struggle for independence of India through Satyagraha. Complete independence through truth and non-violence means the independence of every unit, be it a humblest of the nation, without distinction of race, colour and creed. This independence is never exclusive. Real swaraj is self-rule or self-control. Swaraj would harmonise rights and duties, head and heart, individual and community, faith and reason, economic development and spiritual progress, religious commitment and religious pluralism, self-realisation and political action. He brings together philosophical discourse and popular culture in enlightened renewal and social reform. Gandhi interpreted '*swaraj*' as self-rule, i.e. also self-control exercised by the individual. For Gandhi, individual is the focus of the nation and interpreting the nation as essentially consisting of individuals who feel that they belong to it. Further by emphasising the spiritual unity of all individuals, Gandhi could presuppose an immanent solidarity which was much stronger than abstractly conceived national sovereignty. This spiritual unity and self-control is attained by right action, restraint and discipline. Self-control can be attained only if there is complete freedom from all passions such as anger, hatred and selfishness which may arouse violent action that leads the self into bondage.

11.7 SARVODAYA

Sarvodaya stands for human society in which the freedom of each individual is recognised and man is not treated either as a machine or any assemblage of matter. The *Sarvodaya* society is based on pure justice where each man is recognised as equal and where there is no hierarchy of equals and unequals. Further, Gandhi's *Sarvodaya* keeps craft civilisation alive and works as an ideal of self-sufficiency. Decentralisation is an important aspect of *sarvodaya* and paves way for freedom. Gandhi argues for *sarva dharma samabhava*, which is inclusive of every religion rather than being sectarian and fundamentalist.

Sarvodaya implies the welfare of all, not associated with the utilitarian philosophy of maximum welfare for maximum people. It rejects the utilitarian principle of greatest good of the greatest possible number. It lays emphasis on sacrifice and social harmony. Gandhi charges that the west takes too narrow a view of happiness. The price of industrialism in non-economic terms was too high. He did not regard large-scale enterprise as the means to India's economic salvation; when it was needed, he wanted it to be owned or controlled by the state. He is not against economic progress, machine or market. The village was to be self-sufficient as regards basic needs. Gandhi's essential insight was that the Indian village has power of recuperation; his programme was to help that process and not to hinder it. Gandhi's new civilisation is concerned about the ills of industrialisation and argues in favour of self-sustained village economy.

Gandhi has a utopian idea of nation-state, idealised as Ramarajya. Rama is a hero of the Hindu mythological scripture *Ramayana*. Gandhi used symbols of particular Hindu culture as a strategy to mobilise people by giving altogether a different meaning. His use of symbols specific to a distinct culture is pragmatic, not essentialist. He uses Rama not as a king of Ramayana or an incarnation of Vishnu, but the name simply means 'purity of conduct' and the 'search for truth'. He talked of Ramarajya, where the 'moral authority' is the basic foundation of the sovereignty of people. He suggests that the content of the democratic state is expressed by the term Ramarajya, which he explains as follows:

‘Ramarajya’ is the kingdom of Righteousness. By Ramarajya I do not mean Hindu Raj. I mean by ‘Ramarajya’ divine raj, the kingdom of God....the ancient ideal of Ramarajya is undoubtedly one of true democracy.’

11.8 CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE

Gandhi’s criticism of western mediated modern civilisation has a significant relevance in contemporary times. He is the source of inspiration for many contemporary struggles all over the world. He stands as a symbol of non-violent protest against colonialism and imperialism. He provides alternative model of development through the local self-governance. Against the liberal theory of possessive and abstract individualism, he argues in favour of reflexive individualism. His notion of individual is located in the social and cultural context. The individual has source in religion. For him, religion acts as a moral community. He developed his theory of politics on moral autonomy of individual rather than abstract individual. Gandhi was neither an uncritical traditionalist nor a dogmatic opponent of all aspects of modernity. The way he drew upon tradition in formulating his worldview was creative and owed much to his exposure to western values and institutions. Gandhi’s philosophy helps in mediating the liberal and communitarian political theories of the West.

In the era of globalisation, the market economy is commanding nations and establishing the authority of the developed nations over the world. In this context, Gandhi’s development philosophy is often recalled by the political and social movements of different parts of the world. As Ronald J. Terchek interprets, Gandhi warns about the globalisation of the modernised economy because of its economic effects, accompanied with globalisation of culture. He continually celebrates the diversity he sees in India and fears that such globalisation is reducing what is distinctive and fostering what is uniform. Local cultures are crucial to Gandhi’s project because he sees each providing a concrete, not abstract sense of identity and meaning apart from productivity and consumption. Gandhi’s philosophy seems to be an anti-state and anti-market; anti-state because he wants a real transfer of power from the state which is ‘soulless machinery’ to small local communities, typically villages having more human face. It is anti-market as it recommends production to be organised, as far as practicable, with locally available labour and resources for the satisfaction of local needs. The market-oriented competitive economy is often dominated by big business that looks for profit and exploits the labour. Gandhi’s model of decentralisation is more radical as it starts from the roots, the basic units of society where individuals live face-to-face with one another. Decentralisation of political power is the key principle. He pleads for humanising the technology for its appropriate use. As Ramachandra Guha observed, Gandhi’s philosophical critique of modern civilisation has profound implications for the way we live and relate to environment. Gandhi’s philosophy is a leading force for the struggles of ecological movements. For the peace movements against the war and dominance, Gandhi’s philosophy always commands respect all over the world.

11.9 SUMMARY

Gandhi’s ‘new civilisation’ has evolved from his conception of man, society and the notion of good. He views man as integral entity in whom all dimensions of human existence—economic, moral and spiritual—blend inseparably. Gandhi’s notion of good is spiritually progressive rather than materialistic. His idea of welfare or sarvodaya is a composite of material, moral and spiritual welfare, not just material welfare. Gandhi foresees the

consequences-social and ecological of industrialisation and urbanisation on which the very idea of western modernity is based. He offers an alternative model of development. Gandhi maintained that machines must not be allowed to displace the necessary human labour. Technology must be appropriate for the local needs and livelihoods of the people. It must be humanised and contribute to the equitable development and progress of humanity rather than generating inequalities, dominance, power and violence. Precisely, Gandhi wants a technology which is labour-intensive in nature for producing necessities of life. He believes that real progress means moral progress and the progress in economy and technology must be subservient to moral progress. In conclusion, Gandhi's concept of true civilisation is a value concept to be realised universally. As a value, civilisation is identical with 'good culture' based on equality, integrity, synthesis of science and spirituality and *sarvodaya*. It is the blossoming of the universal law of love. Gandhi aimed at a new non-violent global community within the reach of human capacity. Truth and non-violence are two fundamental key principles in realising his concept of the new civilisation.

11.10 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. What are the basic features of Gandhi's new civilisation?
 2. How does Gandhi overcome the dichotomy of tradition and modernity?
 3. Critically analyse Gandhi's formulation of 'Truth is God'.
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UNIT 12 SARVODAYA

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12.1 INTRODUCTION

“I will give you a talisman. Whenever you are in doubt, or when the self becomes too much for you, apply the following test. Recall the face of the poorest and weakest man whom you may have seen, and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him. Will he gain anything by it? Will it restore him to a control over his own life and destiny? In other words, will it lead to Swaraj for the hungry and spiritually starving millions? Then you will find your doubt and yourself melting away”.

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12.1 INTRODUCTION

“I will give you a talisman. Whenever you are in doubt, or when the self becomes too much for you, apply the following test. Recall the face of the poorest and weakest man whom you may have seen, and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him. Will he gain anything by it? Will it restore him to a control over his own life and destiny? In other words, will it lead to Swaraj for the hungry and spiritually starving millions? Then you will find your doubt and yourself melting away”.

(The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, vol. 89, p. 125)

These words of Mahatma Gandhi depict his outlook towards the plight of the poor and weaker sections of the society and his philosophy of sarvodaya, aimed at universal welfare.

The rule of the European colonial masters brought in a totally new phenomenon, as it witnessed the shifting of the political and economic decision-making power in the hands of the rulers, thousands of miles far away, resulting in the violations of the political, economic and socio-cultural rights of the Indians. The Indian society remained divided in the name of class, caste, creed, sect and the majority suffered silently under the domination of the native higher castes and elites on the one hand and the alien colonisers on the other. The caste system had reduced and relegated a majority of the Hindu society as untouchables, ignorant, hapless and helpless. The lower castes and the womenfolk lived a life of misery. At the advent of the Europeans, India was in higher status economically and it remained a manufacturing country, enjoying markets and commercial contacts far and wide including Africa, South East Asia and Far East and also the European markets.

The British imposed heavy taxes upon the Indian products so that they could not compete with the British manufactured goods. Not only did the Indian producers lose their home market but also every sector of production suffered. As Tilak wrote in *Kesari* on January 28, 1896: "Surely India is treated as a vast pasture reserved solely for the Europeans to feed upon." The British reversed the fortunes of India by systematically draining its wealth to Britain. The Indian agriculture, handicrafts and cottage industries were suppressed and the farmers were required to grow cash crops like cotton and indigo, which were in demand for the English industries as raw materials. This has seriously affected the native food production and resulted in periodical occurrence of famines and food shortages that ravaged the country during the second half of the 19th century. Nearly 29 million people died during famines from 1854 to 1901, while bubonic plague took a heavy toll of life in 1896. The famine in 1899 left people with poverty, starvation, disease and death.

The leaders of the freedom movement had to face the challenges of overcoming massive poverty and inequality perpetuated by the oppressive colonial politico-economic system and the reactionary social system simultaneously. The Gandhian answer to this challenge was Sarvodaya, which aimed at the establishment of an ideal politico-social and economic structure that would strive to achieve the welfare of all.

Aims and Objectives

After studying the unit, you will be able to understand :

- The philosophy of sarvodaya and its political and socio-economic dimensions.
- Sarvodaya as an attempt to achieve a silent, non-violent revolution
- The Gandhian idea of Sarvodaya and communitarian ownership and welfare.
- The Environmental dimension of Sarvodaya.

12.2 CONCEPT OF SARVODAYA

The ideal and objective of Sarvodaya is implied in the word itself- *sarva* (all) and *udaya* (uplift) - uplift/wellbeing of all- universal welfare. This ideal is to be achieved by unceasing service to humanity. Sarvodaya as the welfare of all represents the ideal social order

based on all-embracing love. No individual or group is to be suppressed, exploited and hounded. All are to be equal members of this social order, all sharing in the produce of their labour, the strong protecting the weak and functioning as their trustees and protectors, each promoting the welfare of all, according to their abilities and through all the means at their disposal. Sarvodaya is the peaceful and non-violent way of achieving social justice.

Sarvodaya is founded on the assurance of meeting basic essential needs and freedoms, physical and moral, of the humblest Antyodaya (individual last in the line). It was pervasive, though often enough implicit, strategy for realising fundamental changes to the socio-economic and political status. This is a strategy of appealing to a reasonable and realistic vision of an alternative and humanly superior pattern of life: a pattern in which sarvodaya (uplift/welfare of all, especially of the poorest) would be the guiding principle.

The word sarvodaya epitomises Gandhi's whole social philosophy, which is aimed at the attainment of mental prosperity (*Abhyudaya*) and spiritual realisation (*Nishreyasa*). Sarvodaya, for Gandhi, was an altruistic ethic of self-realisation. *Satya* (truth) and *swaraj* (freedom) as the ultimate aim of one's self-realisation can only grow in an atmosphere of *ahimsa* (non-violence). Such an atmosphere will prevail only in a society where equal share is given "even unto this last".

Gandhi felt very strongly that the best foundation on which societies should be built were the qualities of Truth, Love and Compassion in both our personal and public lives. 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 behaviour; and above all, securing the welfare of all without any distinction of race, religion, sex, political affiliation. These may be said to be the hallmark of the Sarvodaya society envisioned by the Mahatma.

The most predominant characteristics of the sarvodaya ideal are human values, individual development that is always consistent with 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.

Sarvodaya, therefore, is inclusive, experimental, holistic, ever-evolving and based on fundamental Gandhian premises of Truth and Non-violence. It is suffused with the spirit of optimism, participation and creativity. Under the label of sarvodaya, Gandhi presented flexible heuristic principles for designing a good place for humans to live: a simpler, more egalitarian life where the welfare of all would have priority and would be taken care of.

Sarvodaya- the rising of all- welfare of each and every human being implies liberation from all that make one not fully human. Sarvodaya is both an ideal-vision and a praxis-action programme for the welfare of all. These two functions of sarvodaya are complementary – as an ideal it sets sublime goals and inspires people to engage in an action programme to achieve the goals. Sarvodaya cannot be seen in isolation from other views of Gandhi; rather its significance becomes all the more clear when it is viewed in the whole spectrum of Gandhi's vision, his world-view. Sarvodaya occupies the central place in Gandhi's worldview or philosophy of life.

The way of life that Gandhi practised in the ashrams he had founded in South Africa and later in India was known as 'Sarvodaya' - the well being of all. The aim of these

Ashrams was plain living and high thinking, where the well-being of all men could be secured. Through this ideal, Gandhi envisioned the rise of whole of India, which in turn, can become a light to the other nations of the world. The Gandhian social ideal encompassed the dignity of labour, an equitable distribution of wealth, communal self-sufficiency and individual freedom.

12.3 SOURCES OF THE IDEA OF SARVODAYA

Gandhi coined the term sarvodaya in order to articulate his vision of Indian society and the way he wanted to transform and totally reconstruct it in accordance with his vision, imagination and prescription. Gandhi used the word Sarvodaya to describe the principles that he felt should guide us in our efforts to build ourselves, our families, our communities and nations. He had arrived at these principles of a Sarvodaya society on the basis of his studies, his observations and his 'Experiments with Truth and Nonviolence'.

Sarvodaya was a concrete manifestation of spiritual ideas found in many religious traditions. It seems that Gandhi borrowed the concept of sarvodaya from a Jain scripture authored by Acharya Samantabhadra, where the expression sarvodayam is used to mean the well-being of all. Regarding the conceptualisation of Sarvodaya, Gandhi admits his indebtedness to certain other sources:

- a) Tenets of major religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Islam, and Christianity.
- b) Religious and philosophical texts such as Bhagavad Gita and the Gospels.
- c) Writings of Tolstoy and Thoreau
- d) John Ruskin's 'Unto This Last'.

Ruskin's work impressed and influenced Gandhi in a very big way. As Gandhi construed it, Ruskin's outlook on political-economic life extended from three central tenets:

- That the good of the individual is contained in the good of all.
- That a lawyer's work has the same value as the barber's in as much as all have the same right of earning their livelihood from their work.
- That a life of labour, i.e., the life of the tiller of the soil and the handicraftsman is the life worth living.

Gandhi mentions in his Autobiography: "The first of these I knew. The second, I had dimly realized. The third had never occurred to me. Unto This Last made it clear as daylight for me that the second and third were contained in the first. I arose with the dawn, ready to reduce these principles to practice".

In 1908, Gandhi rendered a paraphrased translation of Ruskin's book into Gujarati. He entitled the book Sarvodaya - "the uplift of all", "the welfare of all". Most appropriate rendering of 'Unto This Last' would be antyodaya (uplift of the last and the least) rather than sarvodaya (uplift of all). However, Gandhi has used sarvodaya, since it implies antyodaya as well and is more comprehensive. Again, sarvodaya would very much begin with antyodaya, the lowest of the low and the poorest of the poor. It is rightly averred that antyodaya is the very soul of sarvodaya since it gives priority of service to the most deprived in the society.

The emphasis of Ruskin's essay, as interpreted by Gandhi, is certainly that the ideal society is one in which there is concern for the welfare of all: 'unto this last', that is the neediest or the poorest of the poor. Like Ruskin, Gandhi too believed sincerely that the socio-economic organisation that ensures the well-being of all is the only one worth striving for. As such, for Gandhi, Ruskin's *Unto This Last* was the main source of inspiration for the formulation of sarvodaya. Ruskin's book crystallized his amorphous conceptions of the economic and ethical foundations of sarvodaya social order (K.M. Prasad, *Sarvodaya of Gandhi*, New Delhi, Raj Hans Publications, 1971, p. 3).

12.4 BASIC COMPONENTS OF GANDHIAN SARVODAYA

Gandhi formulated his economic ideas and principles in the context of his ideal socio-economic order: a non-violent, non-exploitative, humanistic and egalitarian society- a sarvodaya socio-economic order. The basic components of Gandhian sarvodaya include swadeshi, bread-labour, aparigraha or non-possession, trusteeship, non-exploitation and samabhava (sense of equality).

12.4.1 Swadeshi

Swadeshi literally means "belonging to one's own country". It also means reliance on our own strength. Swadeshi is that spirit in us which restricts us to the use and service of our immediate surroundings to the exclusion of the more remote. For Gandhi swadeshi is not a narrow concept of using indigenous goods and despising foreign materials, but is a way to display genuine love and devotion for the nation and its culture and is a constant struggle to promote the economic interests of the fellow countrymen, especially when it is threatened by alien competition. Swadeshi is the basis of the "moral economics" advocated by Gandhi for India. The promotion of Ayurveda system and nature cure were also part of swadeshi, as practised by Gandhi. Swadeshi is intended to bring about a revolutionary change in the Indian outlook, perception, and socio-economic structure.

12.4.2 Bread labour/Living wage

Labour denotes both mental and physical labour and Gandhi had no preference for the former at the cost of the bread labour- the physical labour. He believed that obedience to law of Bread Labour will bring about a silent revolution in the structure of society. An individual is entitled only to a 'living wage' that is enough for a decent living against the service that he/she renders to the society and nothing more.

12.4.3 Aparigraha or non-possession

For Gandhi, the doctrine of *aparigraha* or non-possession means that everyone has to limit one's own possession to what is needed by one and spend the rest for the welfare of others. He considered this as a desirable, nonviolent method of reducing inequality of income distribution and maldistribution of wealth and in that sense, non-possession in practice means "possession by all". Non-possession is another form of non-violence, since possession involves and leads to violence for the sake of protection and promotion of one's own possession.

12.4.4 Trusteeship

Trusteeship is the theory closely linked to the concept of Sarvodaya, with its fundamental objective to establish non-violent and non-exploitative property relationships. Possession and private property are sources of violence, and in contradiction with the Divine reality

that all wealth belongs to all people. Gandhi recognised that the concept of ownership would not wither away easily, nor would the wealthy be easily persuaded to share their wealth. Therefore a compromise was to encourage the wealthy to hold their wealth in trust, to use for themselves only what was necessary and to allow the remainder to be utilised for the benefit of the whole society. The concept of trusteeship is based on the principle of non-possession of means of production and economic equality. Trusteeship is its natural corollary and is “sarvodaya extended to the firm”. The concept of trusteeship is born out of Gandhi’s profound belief in the goodness of human beings. Its appeal was to the higher/better sense of the landlords and the industrialists. Trusteeship is based on the noble idea that “what belongs to me is the right to an honourable livelihood, no better than enjoyed by millions of others. The rest of my wealth belongs to the community and must be used for the welfare of the community”.

12.4.5 Non-exploitation

Exploitation lies at the root of all socio-economic problems and as such, the removal of exploitation is a basic requisite for sarvodaya. There can be no living harmony between nations, races, communities, classes and castes unless the main cause- exploitation of the weak by the strong - is removed. Only a non-exploitative society can be ‘sarvodaya’ society.

12.4.6 Samabhava (sense of equality)

In Gandhi’s grand vision of sarvodaya society, socio-economic equality occupies a central place and it is both “an essential principle and indispensable condition”. He advocated equality not between the equals, but equality between the prince and peasant, wealthy and poor, strong and weak, landlord and landless and literate and illiterate. It is not equality in physical sense, which is unnatural and difficult to achieve, but in a moral sense. For Gandhi, the equality means providing equal preference and opportunity. When there is redistribution of land, we shall have full employment and an equitable redistribution of national dividend and thus we shall attain *Arthik Samata* (Economic Equality), which in turn will gradually lead to samabhava.

12.5 SARVODAYA: POLITICO-SOCIAL FRAMEWORK

12.5.1 Swaraj-Sarvodaya Democracy

For Gandhi swaraj means freedom for the meanest of our countrymen. They should be freed not only from the English colonial yoke but from every other yoke whatsoever. He opined that mere form of political self-government cannot satisfy the essentially democratic concept of swaraj. By swaraj he meant the government by the consent of the people and by the acquisition of the capacity by all to resist authority when it is abused. The swaraj as envisioned by Gandhi does not recognise race or religious distinctions or to be the monopoly of the few, but to be for all including “the maimed, the blind, the starving toiling millions”. Again, for Gandhi, swaraj was quite a comprehensive vision. His goal was to empower the people- not an abstract concept but the toiling people in the fields and factories, the suffering humanity, the dumb millions – to secure their political and socio-economic rights. In that sense, swaraj is sarvodaya democracy –of the masses and for the masses. Sarvodaya democracy of Gandhi had to be worked out dedicatedly from bottom up by the people of every village rather than imposed by few people from top down.

Poorna (complete) swaraj precludes all possibility of the swaraj being more for some one

than for the other, being partial to some or prejudicial to others. Swaraj is not poorna until all the ordinary/basic amenities of life are guaranteed to all. On the other hand, poorna swaraj also meant freedom from political, social and economic bondages/restraints imposed by the then existing political and economic order.

Gandhi also, like Thoreau, held the view that democracy can be realised only in a stateless society and that government is best which governs the least. Gandhi preferred society of “enlightened anarchy” to a coercive state and he was for the evolution of an ideal non-violent State which will be an ordered anarchy. For him, the ideal democracy is sarvodaya democracy in which every individual enjoyed control over himself and over his destiny.

12.5.2 Sarvodaya and Ramarajya

Swaraj is a step to Ramarajya – a reign of righteousness and justice on earth, a true democracy in which the meanest citizen could be sure of swift justice without an elaborate (so causing inordinate delay) and costly (so not reachable to all) procedure. A gradual growth in the understanding of Ramarajya can be observed in Gandhi’s writings. In 1937 he described it as sovereignty of the people based on pure moral authority. In 1946 he wrote that Ramarajya is independence – political, economic and moral – and by next year he emphasised: “... there can be no Ramarajya in the present state of iniquitous inequalities in which a few roll in riches and the masses do not get even enough to eat”. Ramarajya, for Gandhi, is a dreamland, in which “inequalities based on possession and non-possession, colour, race or creed or sex vanish. In it, land and state belong to the people and justice is prompt, perfect and cheap. Such a state must be based on Truth and Non-violence, and must consist of prosperous, happy and self-contained villages and village communities.”

Ultimately, the goal of sarvodaya became Ramarajya (Kingdom of God) and this kingdom was to be attained on earth and had to be created and nurtured with sarvodaya beliefs and practices. Ramarajya was to be Gandhi’s favourite name for his vision of a new social order where every individual becomes “a full-blooded, fully-developed member of society”. In a nutshell, Ramarajya is the ideal polity as envisioned by Gandhi for India and for the world.

12.5.3 Sarvodaya Samaj (Society)

Gandhi’s Sarvodaya is based on a total - social, economic, political, moral, religious and spiritual - view of life of human society comprising individual as well as groups, the culmination of which is a liberated society, a sarvodaya samaj. Since sarvodaya stood for the welfare of all, commitment to all kinds of sacrifices, including one’s own life, for the welfare of all others was at the core of sarvodaya. For Gandhi, Sarvodaya represented an Ideal Social Order, ideal for human social order in which the individual was supreme but as a unit of the society. Sarvodaya envisages a non-violent, egalitarian, decentralised, people-oriented, sustainable and a flourishing social order.

Gandhi argued that if the Indian society is reformed, colonial rule would automatically cease to exist. On one hand, Gandhi tried to resist oppressions of all kinds and from all sources, both domestic as well as external, and on the other, tried to reconstruct Indian society on the basis of his vision. For him, the end result would be good and would happen automatically if correct and effective means were employed as per his vision/plan. This would be a sure, forward step in human civilisation, what Gandhi called the ‘swaraj’ society, to be attained in the future.

12.5.4 Sarvodaya and Communism

Gandhian philosophy, particularly in the Sarvodaya ideal, does contain many socialist sentiments. The difference between Communism and Gandhian Sarvodaya is not in the ends but in the means. Gandhi himself more than once declared that he was a Communist *minus* the violence that a Communist is ready for. Again, he claimed that he did not propagate Samyawad (the theory or ideology of Communism) but Samyadharma (the practice or duty of equality). Gandhian sarvodaya tried to achieve through non-violent methods the changes in the social and economic order which the Communists wanted to effect through violence. What Gandhi tried to achieve through transforming human heart, the Communists attempted to accomplish by rolling their head. Communists generally believed that the evils of the capitalist system could not be banished by wishing a change of hearts and minds of the owners of property. On the other hand, Gandhian sarvodaya believed not in the programme of 'seizure of land' but in transformation of relationships ending in the 'peaceful transfer of land'.

Sarvodaya stands for non-violent socialism and all members of society are equal – none low, none high – and all are on the same level. A non-violent society of Gandhi's vision is non-exploitative and egalitarian, not only equal in rights and opportunities but also in the sense that there is no exploiter and exploited. He believed that such a horizontal structure is a necessary condition for self-realisation in liberating both exploiter and exploited from the shackles of an exploitative structure.

12.6 SARVODAYA IN PRACTICE

Sarvodaya ideal, based on the swadeshi strategy, is closely linked to the economic reconstruction strategy aimed at village-oriented, people-oriented economy. Consequently village regeneration became a major aspect of Gandhi's vision of India. Gandhi tried to achieve it through constructive programme targeting every sphere of human activity at the village setting.

12.6.1 Constructive Programme

The sarvodaya ideal of Gandhi acquired a coherence of thought and action in 1920, when he introduced a fourfold constructive programme in his ashram environment. To decentralise the constructive programme, several ashrams were established in different parts of India predominantly in rural areas. Gandhi initiated several activities under the umbrella of constructive programme. From the 1920s, he shifted the emphasis of his work from Satyagraha (nonviolent resistance) to constructive schemes- an embodiment of sarvodaya - for the welfare of all. The Constructive Programme is "a positive aspect of Satyagraha in action, and is the concomitant of resistance action". This programme of sharing resources, education, rural industry, in particular weaving, and improvement of the position of the untouchables stems from his philosophy of Sarvodaya.

Initially in 1941, Gandhi listed some fourteen items and later in 1945, he devised eighteen fold constructive programme and set up a number of organisations to work it out. He intended to knit together a fellowship of millions and inculcate the pattern of non-violent conduct into their thought and action through the following steps: communal unity, removal of untouchability, prohibition of alcohol, promotion of khadi and other rural industries, village sanitation, *nai talim* (basic education), adult education, uplift of women, education in health and hygiene, propagation of *rashtra bhasha* (national language), *swabhasha-prem* (love of one's language), uplift of labour, uplift of students, service of backward

tribes, and treatment of lepers. They are merely illustrative, not exhaustive and as such can be changed according to the varying needs, contexts, traditions and the socio-economic and political requirements of the people concerned. The constructive programme of Gandhi was basically “village-oriented” and aimed at village uplift. Gandhi sincerely believed that if carried out in the right direction and with earnestness, the constructive programme would result in the ideal sarvodaya samaj, devoid of any discrimination based on sex, wealth, education and so on. It would provide a common experience and would result in a democratic common endeavour, thereby bridging the gap between the classes and the masses.

12.6.2 Application of Sarvodaya to People-Oriented Economics

Gandhi’s economy is village-oriented and his constructive programme is geared towards village reconstruction and he considered khadi as the lead industry. In khadi Gandhi saw “the revival of the entire economic, social and cultural life of the villages which constitute our country”. Through khadi and village industries, Gandhi expected to lay the foundations of a non-violent economic and social order which would bring peace and happiness to all, leading to the uplifting of the rural masses. Khadi and village industries are not an end in itself but a means for the all-round socio-economic development of rural India. Gandhi intended to link agriculture and industry by making village industries agro-based as an effective way for meaningful development of agrarian societies. He believed that unless industries in rural areas are linked with the primary occupation of the vast mass of the people— agriculture, they would make little impact on the lives of the people.

Gandhi believed that industrialisation has been planned to destroy the villages and village crafts; instead it should sub-serve the village and their crafts. Gandhian solution to industrialisation and its evil effects is the reconstruction of rural economy with an emphasis on the primacy of agriculture and the supplementary and complementary importance of cottage industries. By the revival and rejuvenation of the village economy, Gandhi wanted to rejuvenate and restore the simplicity of village life and to establish decentralised, self-sufficient, self-reliant and autonomous communities. He advocated “production by the masses” instead of “mass production”. Such Gandhian alternative may be qualified as “appropriate technology”, “intermediate technology” or “holistic technology”, which could be adopted by the village homes. Gandhi advocated “the technology of production by the masses”, which was named by Schumacher as “intermediate technology”, which make use of the best of modern knowledge and experience, is conducive to decentralisation, compatible with the laws of ecology, calculative in its use of scarce resources, and designed to serve the people instead of making them the servants of machines.

The basis of village sarvodaya is the principle of sharing of the natural resources and means of production among all the members of the community towards the welfare of all. Gandhi worked towards the resuscitation of the village through the revival of its handicrafts and industries utilising the resources available locally to satisfy the basic needs of the rural masses.

12.7 POST-GANDHIAN PHASE

From March 11 to 14, 1948, a month and a half after Gandhi’s assassination, his followers gathered in Sevagram in order to continue his work in the spirit of his philosophy of Sarvodaya. It was decided to form a rather loosely structured fellowship of *lok sevaks* (servants of people) known as the *Sarvodaya Samaj* (Sarvodaya Society),

that was further strengthened by the founding of the *Akhil Bharat Sarva Seva Sangh* (All India Association for the Service of All). In December 1949, two hundred constructive workers met in Wardha and endorsed the programme which was published on January 30, 1950 as the Sarvodaya Plan. It was a concrete programme of basic social revolution and the first attempt to picture concretely a new social order.

Considering India's overwhelming poverty and dire economic conditions, the sarvodaya leaders too felt strongly about the plight of the landless people exploited by their landlords and chalked out a plan which would prove mutually beneficial acceptable to the land owners and beneficial to the landless masses.

Bhoodan Movement

In this context, Vinoba Bhave (1895-1982), a close associate and faithful follower of Gandhi, organised the Bhoodan movement ("gift of land"). Sarvodaya workers associated with Vinoba, J. P. Narayan, Dada Dharmadhikari, Dharendra Mazumdar, Shankarrao Deo and K. G. Mashruwala who undertook various projects aimed at encouraging popular activities during the 1950s and 1960s, including Bhoodan and Gramdan movements. Vinoba traveled 25,000 miles on foot, persuading 700,000 landowners to give up 8 million hectares. Bhoodan movement is a bloodless revolution unprecedented in the annals of world history, not a mere movement for equitable distribution of land but a further step towards establishing a sarvodaya society. Gramdan, along the lines of Bhoodan, and more radical in its tone and tenor, proved harder to promote than Bhoodan. However, by 1964, some 6,807 of India's 550,000 villages had accepted this concept and by 1971, more than 168,000 or roughly 30 per cent of the Indian villages had been pledged to Gramdan. For Vinoba, these epitomised gramswarajya, a new polity, economy and society, that would bring about a rural communitarian society characterised by harmonious relations between the individual and the group and participatory democracy.

Sampoorna Kranti

Jayaprakash Narayan (JP) was another notable sarvodaya leader who initiated Total Revolution. JP maintained on one occasion: "There is hardly any difference between sarvodaya and Total Revolution. If there is any, then sarvodaya is the goal and Total Revolution the means. Total Revolution is basic change in all aspects of life. There cannot be sarvodaya without this." To be precise, Total Revolution is a further extension of Gandhi's thought on socio-economic problems and technique of change in the context of the modern social reality. Rampant corruption in the Indian polity and economic life goaded JP to call for a mass movement. He appealed to the youth to revolt against the existing system and to be the harbingers of change. In spite of being termed as a failure, the mass movement he generated brought about a massive positive change in the systemic structure.

12.8 ENVIRONMENTAL DIMENSION OF SARVODAYA

Sarvodaya implies an all-round material as well as spiritual development of each and every individual and is concerned with a continued healthy environment to ensure the holistic development of man. Since the human is organically linked with the whole ecosystem and its healthy functioning, there is a need to extend the concept of Sarvodaya to the whole of sentient and non-sentient being in the universe. Again, Gandhi's sarvodaya-utopian mode of holistic discourse has an innate ecological dimension. Perhaps, for the present day ecologically-disturbed world, Gandhian Sarvodaya ideal might be the panacea.

The concepts of environmental conservation, sustainability and survival are inherent in the Gandhian ideology. His emphasis on small-scale industry, which promotes “production by the masses in stead of mass production” was in tune with man-nature co-relationship as it is less energy-intensive and consequently less-polluting. He advocated sustainable development and appropriate technology to achieve rural development. The simple life style that Gandhi preached and practised had a great bearing on nature and its preservation. His insights into eco-spirituality and eco-villages contribute immensely to living in harmony with nature.

Gandhi preferred people-centred, need-based economy to machine-centred, greed-fulfilling economy. Gandhi’s sarvodaya vision has deep environmental implications. He reiterated the eternal bond of mankind co-existing with nature and advocated that people should not use more than their share of the resources and the consumption should be based on need satisfaction rather than greed promotion. In a world of vanishing environmental ethics, there is a strong and urgent need for evolving ‘eco-centric’ ethic and consciousness and thus, Gandhian ideals may come in handy in this regard. His exemplary way of life in his ashrams consist of “voluntary simplicity” or “ecological living” that serve as a source of insight and inspiration.

12.9 SARVODAYA AS A REALISTIC UTOPIAN IDEAL

Gandhian Sarvodaya is not a mechanistic or deterministic manual but an ideal for humankind, for individual and social relationships and for human-ecological relationships in varied and changing circumstances. It enunciates principles and sets the direction, approaches and guidelines. It encourages us to be ever hopeful for building up a better human being, a better society and a better world. Sarvodaya or universal welfare was the logical corollary of Gandhi’s fundamental premises about human perfectibility and the mature fruit of his repeated experiments with political action and social reforms. Gandhian concept of ahimsa (non-violence), with satya (truth) as the common goal, enabled him to develop the doctrine of sarvodaya or non-violent socialism.

Thomas Vettickal maintains that Gandhian sarvodaya has the potential to be a utopian ideal and the factor that makes it a realistic utopia is the presence of provisionality, open-endedness, untiring hope in the future, and creativity. In Gandhi’s sarvodaya there is “creative expectation”, a “hope which sets about criticizing and transforming the present because it opens towards the universal future of the kingdom (of God)”. The Sarvodaya ideal of Gandhi stems from an undying hope in the better future of India: utopian economy that is people-oriented and which promotes appropriate technology; social and communal life that is village-based, theology and spirituality that is indigenous and a sustainable eco-system that is in harmony with nature. Gandhi initiated a process that can be realized and is open to immense possibilities (*Ibid.*, p.76).

Sarvodaya society is liberated from both external and internal oppressors and suppressors in society. Gandhi’s sarvodaya economics is more of an action programme than abstract theory and principle, aimed at offering an alternative to the existing condition towards achieving a better future. It is a constant ideal towards which we are directed with the hope of attaining the cherished goal. Sarvodaya is a significant and revolutionary contribution of Gandhi and his worthy disciples to contemporary political thought. Sarvodaya ideal keeps its appeal to many as it can be easily realised and its openness to future possibilities.

12.10 SARVODAYA NETWORK

During his lifetime, Gandhi never allowed sarvodaya organisations to be formally instituted. His thinking was that once you served people, as 'sevaks', within the Sarvodaya philosophy there was no need to institutionalise. But since his demise, Vinoba gave sarvodaya an organisational structure, divided into national, state and local levels. Many groups, descended from these networks, continue to function locally in India today. At present, Sarvodaya organisations have been established (some 40 of them) world-wide genuinely helping people towards building new societies from the 'grass-roots' up. These are now being connected into a Sarvodaya network with headquarters in Bangalore, India.

12.11 SUMMARY

Sarvodaya 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 in which could be enshrined the principle of Social Justice for All. Gandhi's vision embraced a holistic approach to life. Gandhian Sarvodaya remains his major and distinctive contribution to India, a vision that looks forward to the creation of an ideal society, a sarvodaya society that is nonviolent and peaceful, non-exploitative and equalitarian in nature as well as structure. Gandhian Sarvodaya vision as well as action has high contemporary relevance. The neo-liberal market forces in the present day globalised world are exploiting the poor and marginalised; thousands of farmers committing suicide in different parts of India; and Special Economic Zones are being created and fertile lands being taken away from the hands of the poor peasant community and handed over to corporate houses in the name of industrialisation and economic growth. Depleting natural resources like water, which remained communitarian so far, are being allowed to be commercialised. The gap between the rich and poor within the country and rich and poor countries are getting widened day by day. The ideal of the sarvodaya- non-exploitation and equality – needs to be taken as a guiding spirit to do away with this disparity, which may eventually lead to crises and calamity. As such, the sarvodaya ideal is more relevant today than ever before.

12.12 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Describe the concept of 'sarvodaya' and bring out its political, socio-economic and spiritual dimensions.
2. Analyse the contemporary relevance of Sarvodaya. Is it a realistic utopia?
3. Write short notes on the following:
 - a) Sarvodaya samaj
 - b) Ruskin's Unto This Last
 - c) Ramarajya
 - d) Ecological dimension of Sarvodaya

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