
UNIT 1 AHIMSA AND SATYAGRAHA

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this unit is to introduce the students to socio-political significance of Gandhian concept of *ahimsa* and *satyagraha*. It would also enable one to know how to apply these principles in one's social and political interventions. Along with these, it is intended to evaluate and compare adequately the present day political system with Gandhian vision.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Ahimsa and *satyagraha* imply great significance in the life and philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi. They were two socio-political weapons he used in achieving his various goals. *Ahimsa* and *satyagraha* were not new ideals but they are the eternal principles of life preached for thousands of years. However, these ideals lacked universality and fullness of meaning. They were regarded as cloistered virtues. It was the great adventure of Gandhi that he reinterpreted and restated these fundamental principles of human behaviour in new ways and showed their universality. He made several experiments with them and with great zeal applied them in an original way practically in every aspect of human life especially in the social and political fields. In Gandhian philosophy all his main concepts like truth, *ahimsa*, *satyagraha*, *sarvodaya*, etc., are not individual and independent concepts but they are interrelated. *Satyagraha* is nothing but the implementation of

truth and *ahimsa* in the different walks of life. *Satyagraha* is a logical development of the doctrine of *ahimsa*. The history of Indian culture is the history of the evolution of the concept of *ahimsa*, and *satyagraha* is a practical application of *ahimsa* to politics. *Ahimsa* is the foundation of *satyagraha*, the “irreducible minimum” to which *satyagraha* adheres to. The idea and practice of *satyagraha* constitute the heart and soul of Gandhi’s belief in non-violence.

1.2 THE MEANING OF AHIMSA AND SATYAGRAHA

The literal meaning of the Sanskrit word *Ahimsa* is non-injury’ or ‘non-killing’. But Gandhi adopted the word ‘non-violence’ which means refraining from the use of physical force capable of causing injury or death to the opponent. Even though Gandhi admits that he could not succeed in defining *ahimsa* fully the meaning of this word developed further in the hands of Gandhi. *Ahimsa* means and includes non-violence in thoughts, words and deeds towards all sentient beings. It has been used interchangeably with simple inaction and with direct action. The idea of *satyagraha* was not originally conceived by Gandhi. The idea was found in religious anthologies like the Upanishads, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the Gita, the Quran and many others. It was also practiced by eminent personalities like Socrates, Plato, Jesus, Ashoka and others.

The term *satyagraha* is derived from a compound word in Sanskrit, *satya* and *agraha*. *Satya* itself is derived from *sat*, which means being, that which exists. *Satya* means that which is in accordance with *sat* or being, that is, truth. *Agraha* means holding fast, adherence or insistence. Thus the compound word *satyagraha* means clinging to truth, holding fast to truth, insistence on truth or firm adherence to truth. In the socio-political field *satyagraha* was a kind of resistant movement against the unjust laws. Gandhi started this movement in South Africa in 1906 with the Indians who were suffering from the unjust laws. In the early stages Gandhi himself called this movement ‘Passive Resistance,’ but later he felt ashamed of using an English word which could not be easily understood and used by the Indians. Thus, he adopted the term *satyagraha* which would give almost the same meaning of ‘Passive Resistance.’

1.3 THE DYNAMIC MEANING OF AHIMSA AND SATYAGRAHA

Even though the word *ahimsa* is equated with the English word ‘non-violence’ it connotes a negative meaning, almost a passive condition. However, the term *ahimsa* suggests a dynamic state of mind in which power is released. *Ahimsa* is negative in its meaning but positive in its approach to life i.e. doing good to others. According to Gandhi, strength does not come from physical capacity but it comes from an indomitable will. So *Ahimsa* is not just non-violence but strength of will. Violence checks this energy within, and is ultimately disruptive in its consequences, *ahimsa*, properly understood is invincible.

Ahimsa is not mere pacifism. It is dynamic positive force. It is active condemnation of untruth, without violence, anger or malice – an attitude both towards the human and the sub-human creation. *Ahimsa* is the principle of the sacredness of life and not merely a negative virtue; it involves the positive doing of good quite as much as the negative refusal to do harm. The idea of *ahimsa* is purity and truth rather than mere compassion or pity. It does not mean helping the evil-

doer to continue their wrong or tolerating it by passive acquiescence. On the contrary, love requires resisting the wrong-doer by dissociating oneself from him even though it may offend him or injure him physically.

Truth and Love is central to the whole concept of *ahimsa*. Gandhi often stressed that a seeker after truth must imbibe the faith of *ahimsa*. Gandhi stressed that the kingdom of God could be achieved by resorting to the twin principles of *ahimsa* and truth. In the ordinary sense, love means loving an object which is good but to Gandhi, love is absolute where the person, out of love, imposes suffering on himself, irrespective of whether the object on the other party is good or bad. Non-violence implies love of other human beings and love is directly related to God and truth.

As the Gandhian *ahimsa* is much more profound than the ordinary understanding of *ahimsa*, his notion of *satyagraha* also is more comprehensive than the ordinary meaning. The meaning of *satyagraha* is beyond the meaning of 'Passive Resistance.' Passive resistance, as commonly understood in the West in its historical setting, is a weapon of the weak, of the unarmed and helpless. It does not eschew violence as a matter of principle but only because of lack of the means of violence, or out of sheer expedience. It would use arms if and when they are available. Love has no place in it. There is no place for service of the people or constructive activity in it. In contra-distinction to passive resistance, *satyagraha* is the law of love or the way of love for all. It eschews violence absolutely as a matter of principle, at all stages and in all forms. It can never go hand in hand with any kind of violent activity involving injury to person or property. The idea behind it is not to destroy or harass the opponent, but to convert or win him over any sympathy, patience and self-suffering.

In ordinary *satyagraha*, we try to get the truth by hook or by crook. Either we will keep on fasting, or we will go on strike, and in that way we try to get things done. But true *satyagraha*, from the spiritual point of view, is not so. There we want to see the truth through surrender to the Will of God. The seeker wants to pursue the truth, but while pursuing the truth he feels the necessity of surrendering to the Will of God. So in the spiritual life, *satyagraha* means total devoted surrender to the Will of Truth, and this Truth is God.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) Give an explanation on the etymology of the term *satyagraha*.

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2) How is *ahimsa* different from pacifism?

3) “The real meaning of *satyagraha* is more profound than the meaning of Passive Resistance.” Illustrate the notion.

1.4 THE GOAL OF AHIMSA AND SATYAGRAHA

For Gandhi *ahimsa* and *satyagraha* were tools to social change. A *satyagrahi* has immense faith in the inherent goodness of human nature and he believes that it responds to love, to service, to suffering and to sacrifice. *Satyagraha* is never launched for personal gain but is always used for the good of others. A *satyagrahi* who is actively non-violent refuses to obey repugnant laws and cheerfully suffers the consequences. If there is a government that does not concede the reasonable and just demands of people, a *satyagrahi* would say that they would no longer be their petitioners, or be governed by them, or have any dealing with them. They would suffer the brutal might of the tyrant cheerfully but unbendingly.

The goal of *satyagraha* includes the solution of human problems. *Satyagraha* aims at moralization of politics, fighting injustice and tyranny, settling social, political and economical disputes, establishing effective democracy, laying foundations of a new social order based on justice and equality and paying the way for world peace. The *satyagrahi* peruses his path with the single-mindedness. When he encounters evil he resists it with all his might. The word ‘defeat’ does not find a place in his vocabulary. While fighting obstinately for his cause, he is ever willing to compromise with his opponents, provided that it does not involve humiliation and surrender of essentials.

Gandhi used *satyagraha* as a process of conversion. He, throughout his life, worked for the conversion or the correction of the evil-doers. He believed that suffering was a more potent and effective method of conversion than reasoning and discussion. Voluntary suffering will dominate the animal aspect of the opponent and will arouse the good aspect of his nature and will help him to become a better human being. As a moral weapon, *satyagraha* is a peaceful protest against the laws, customs and practices which one finds contrary to the dictates of one’s conscience. It aims

at cleansing of the whole atmosphere and voluntary change of the heart and mind of all parties to a conflict.

The goal of individual and group *satyagraha* is not to crush, defeat or punish the tyrant. It is not even to harm or embarrass him, though the resistance and suffering may, as a matter of fact, cause the wrong-doer embarrassment. Positively a *satyagrahi* will always try to overcome evil by good, anger by love, untruth by truth and *himsa* by *ahimsa*. The way to treat the opponent as a member of the family is to give him the same credit for honesty of purpose which the *satyagrahi* claims for himself.

1.5 THE SOCIO-POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF AHIMSA AND SATYAGRAHA

Even though *ahimsa* and *stayagaraha* were not new doctrines of Gandhian philosophy, never before it was used for political purposes. They enter into the very fibre of one's being and revolutionize all sides of one's life such as individual, domestic, social, political and economic. Non-violence resulted in good will for the British and transformed their hearts. *Ahimsa* in the hands of Gandhi became an efficacious social and political technique of action. According to Gandhi in violence there is nothing invisible, but non-violence on the other hand is three-fourths invisible, and hence the effect is in the inverse ratio to its invisibility.

Gandhi himself admits that *ahimsa* is a creed, the breath of his life, but he has never placed it before the country or the Congress as a creed, but as a political method for the solution of political problems. Gandhi was of the view that the social order should be established on truth and non-violence. Gandhi's non-violent society would be a perfect democracy where each unit of a village even was to be self-sufficient, independent and free. If there is a necessity of the state at all, it should be non-violent in its nature. Initially in his non-violent society there would be no necessity of military or police. Great emphasis in this society was laid on rural life and decentralization. The non-violent strategy demands a more rigorous training than the violent one. Conflict is inherent in social, economic or political situations. The non-violent technique claims creative and constructive results, after creating a 'crisis-packed' situation. Negotiation became imperative. The forces of understanding and cordiality are released.

Satyagraha is employed not only to solve the national problems but also to solve the international problems. In South Africa, this weapon was employed against the cruel and unjust policy of the government. Indians in South Africa were harassed, humiliated and debarred from all rights and privileges. According to Gandhi war is a product of envy, ill-will and misunderstanding between nations. The factors that lead the nations to war are the same as those that lead individuals to moral and spiritual degradation. Gandhi holds that war can be abolished forever and peace and harmony can be established between nations by an extension of the principle of truth and non-violence.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) The goal of *satyagraha* includes the solution of human problems. Explain.

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2) How does *satyagraha* function as a means of conversion?

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3) How did Gandhi give a new socio-political outlook to *ahimsa* and *satyagraha*?

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1.6 THE PRINCIPLES OF SATYAGRAHA TECHNIQUE

The basic assumption of *satyagraha* is the essential goodness of human nature. It holds that temporary aberrations of brother-humans would pass away if the right attitude, namely, of love and self-suffering, is adopted. The origin of this relationship based on love is to be sought in the intuitive and mystic realization of the oneness of all life. The *satyagrahi* does not feel that his blood-relations alone are his family. It is no rhetoric when Gandhi said that the whole world was his family. Thus, *satyagrahi* looks upon no one as his enemy. Everyone is a friend, a fellow being and a brother or sister for him.

The *satyagrahi*, instead of physically resisting wrong, suffers it bravely and cheerfully as something done by his or her own brother or sister and thus attempts to reach the heart of the wrong-doer. He separates the evil from the evil-doer and while trying to eradicate evil, tries to save the evil-doer by making him or her cognizant of the evil. The *satyagrahi* makes the opponent feel that he or she is loved and respected and that he or she must divest himself or herself of the evil that harbours or clings to. By suffering himself or herself and by assuring his or her opponent of his or her physical safety, he or she sets him or her thinking about the wrong he or she has committed. According to Gandhi one must non-co-operate with his actions and at the same time one must show loving tendency towards him or her as a fellow being.

Whenever there is a conflict or grievance or a wrong which can be redressed by the application of mass or group *satyagraha*, a *sayagrahi* must first convince himself or herself of the truthfulness of the cause. If after a full, careful and disinterested investigation he finds that grievance is real the next thing he or she has to see is whether those who are suffering from it are keenly feeling the necessity to get rid of it. As soon as a *satyagrahi* realizes the enormity of the grievance, he or she should bring it to the notice of the perpetrators of the wrong in the gentlest language possible and try to convince them of their responsibility for it. Then he or she should give due and truthful publicity to the facts of the situation without any exaggeration. In the meanwhile, the *satyagrahi* must make himself or herself sure whether he or she is ready to suffer and follow the path of *satyagraha*. If a substantial majority of the people agree to offer *satyagraha* they should be strengthened in their resolve. If a majority is not willing, it is no bar to launch individual *satyagraha* to rouse the consciousness of the sufferers and set an example.

The people concerned must, first of all, take a pledge and begin with a programme of self-purification. The solemnity of the pledge and the arduous task ahead need not in any way frighten the people. They should rather stiffen them in their resolve. It should be emphasized that the weapon they are using is morally superior to the struggle unflinchingly. It is necessary that *satyagraha* campaigns should not be dependent for finance upon outsiders as far as possible. Whatever finance is required should be locally raised and very economically spent. Correct account must be kept of every pie collected and spent. If there are arrests, the people should willingly submit and while in prison obey the jail rules not repugnant to their religion or self-respect. One should conform to the jail regulations unless one launches a campaign for prison reform there should be no heart-burning over the arrest of people. In disobeying any order or law that prohibits a certain person from carrying on his or her legitimate duty, one need not have knowledge of the finer points of *satyagraha* technique. He is to declare his or her intention to disobey the order, and invite the penalty cheerfully. But it is absolutely essential that he or she should be civil throughout.

1.7 THE APPLICATION OF SATYAGRAHA TECHNIQUE

Gandhi took recourse to the various methods of *satyagraha* during his life-time for the success of *satyagraha* movement. These techniques were employed and experimented by Gandhi and his co-workers for the correction of social, political, economic and religious wrongs and for the conversion of wrong doers. Among the many techniques let us see some important techniques.

Fasting

Fasting is the most potent and effective method of conversion and correction. Gandhi described it to be the last resort to be used when all other techniques fail. Fasts were undertaken to check the act of violence, to remove the bitterness or even to purify socio-political atmosphere. Fasting as a technique of *satyagraha*, was first employed by him in South Africa for the purpose of self-purification, then in India for various social and political causes. Self-purification though a goal of fasting is also in some sense, a condition for fasting. Without self-purification on the part of a *satyagrahi*, a fast cannot be successful. Fasting according to him is a spiritual weapon addressed to God. A *satyagrahi* who undertakes fast must be free from anger and malice and should obey

the call one's conscience. Gandhi undertook fasting seventeen times during his lifetime for a total period of one hundred and thirty eight days. He undertook fast unto death for various genuine grievances. According to him, fasting unto death is an integral part of *satyagraha* programme.

Non-Cooperation

Non-cooperation, as a technique of settling domestic and social disputes and correcting the unjust and immoral government, was existent even before Gandhi. However, he approved this as a method of *satyagraha* in September, 1920 in the special session of the Indian National Congress at Calcutta to secure redress of Punjab and Khilafat wrongs. Non-cooperation should be employed mainly in four stages, viz, giving up of titles and resignation of honorary posts, calling off of government servants, the withdrawal of the police, and the military and the suspension of taxes. Non-cooperation should not be along with violent lines, but along with non-violent lines. Non-cooperation was meant to resist all domestic, social and political injustices. Non-cooperation, according to him, is not only a domestic weapon, but also a political weapon. In political sphere, he employed this method not only against the unjust and improper governmental order, but also against all unjust and unfair authorities and institutions.

Civil Disobedience

In the view of Gandhi, civil disobedience should be undertaken as a last resort when all methods of *satyagraha* are employed and they fail. Civil disobedience is the inherent birthright of the citizens. It is to resist the unjust and immoral laws of the state by disobeying them. It becomes a sacred duty of the citizens when the state becomes lawless or corrupt. It can be offered by those who are not attracted by criminal disobedience or violence. Criminal disobedience leads to social and political disintegration. Disobedience combined with civility is strictly nonviolent. For Gandhi, in order that disobedience may be civil, it must be sincere, respectful, restrained, and never defiant; it must be based upon some well understood principle, must not be capricious and above all, must have no ill-will or hatred behind it. In India, he and his followers employed this method while distilling salt from seawater and violating unjust orders of the government.

Peaceful Picketing

The aim of peaceful picketing was to put social, economic and political pressure on the government and to create political consciousness and Swadeshi spirit amongst the masses. This technique was employed by Gandhi for the first time in 1907 during his South African *satyagraha* struggle. According to Gandhi, picketing is different from *dharna*. *Dharna* is a form of passive resistance. Picketing is non-violent in spirit, whereas *dharna* is violent in spirit. By *dharna*, he meant, sitting down or lying flat at the oppressors' door to block the way and inviting them to go for their work by treading on the bodies of those sitting or lying.

Constructive Programme

Gandhi's aim of *satyagraha* was not only to replace the existing socio-political order, but also to construct a new one in its place. The positive side of Gandhi's *satyagraha* programme is called 'constructive programme,' which he presented to India, through the Congress, in 1920; but it got a definite shape in 1941. He always attached more importance to constructive works than to civil disobedience due to three main reasons. They are;

1. Civil disobedience without constructive works becomes criminal and ineffective. Performance of constructive activity supplies civility to disobedience.
2. The greater the cultivation of the habit of performing constructive works, the less the need of offering civil disobedience.
3. Gandhi believed that every reform comes from within, not from without. Constructive programme offers an opportunity of building oneself from within.

Other than these, the *satyagraha* techniques include persuasion and propaganda, self-suffering and moral force, strikes, *hartal*, books, weeklies and pamphlets, imprisonment, boycott, no-tax campaign, etc.

1.8 CRITICISM ON GANDHIAN CONCEPT OF AHIMSA AND SATYAGRAHA

Even though Gandhian *ahimsa* and *satyagraha* were rich in its content and application, there are a few who make criticism on them. Let us see some of them in brief.

1. Gandhian thought has many inconsistencies and ambiguities. Sometimes he stood for absolute and sometimes for relative non-violence. At times he permitted violence. All life is accompanied by some violence and it is an inherent necessity of life in the body. Strictly speaking, no activity and no industry is possible without a certain amount of violence.
2. Gandhi's views on war and defence are ambiguous and seriously conflicting. As an apostle of non-violence, he condemned war, and yet he gave moral support to three imperial wars. In the Boer War and the First World War he extended active co-operation to the British. In Second World War, Gandhi was of the opinion that the allies could keep their armed forces in India and make it the base of operations against the potential Japanese attack.
3. Like militaries who usually overestimate their strength, Gandhi, generally over-rated the strength of his weapon of non-violence and was disillusioned towards the close of his life.
4. *Satyagraha* is a non-violent weapon, but it may lead to violence if it is introduced prematurely. *Satyagraha* can be considered as a useless weapon by those who expect too much from it. He was considered an extremist in pressing his views. He was a saintly figure and he ignored the frailties of human nature.

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) How did Gandhi use civil disobedience as a means of *satyagraha*?

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2) Why did Gandhi give more importance to constructive programmes than to civil disobedience?

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3) Write a criticism on Gandhi's notion of *ahimsa*?

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1.9 LET US SUM UP

Gandhi extended the practice of *ahimsa* and *satyagraha* in all fields related to the day-to-day life of the individual men and women. In the active use both *ahimsa* and *satyagraha* stand as social and political weapons in fighting against evil and injustice; in inspiring masses with self-confidence in the matter of fighting with their own strength against all tyranny; and in proving many successful experiments to show that *satyagraha* is a workable method and can be a substitute for violence and even violent war. Gandhi wielded the moral weapons of *ahimsa* and *satyagraha* to end domestic, social, political, economical, religious and cultural problems and conflicts. Removal of untouchability, communal harmony, solution of unemployment and illiteracy, non-possession, India's independence, economic and religious equality were the social, economic and political targets to be achieved through this great weapon. Even though we feel that nothing new or unique is there in Gandhian *ahimsa* and *satyagraha*, on a deeper analysis we find that there is much newness and meaning in them. His philosophy of *ahimsa* and *satyagraha* transcends all regional, religious and cultural barriers. It is global and it comprehends not only humanity but the whole living world.

1.10 KEY WORDS

Ahimsa - The literal meaning of the Sanskrit word *ahimsa* is non-injury' or 'non-killing'. In a wider perspective it means non-violence in thought, word and deed towards all sentient beings.

Satyagraha – The literal meaning of the word *satyagraha* is clinging to truth, holding fast to truth, insistence on truth or firm adherence to truth. In the socio-political field *satyagraha* was a kind of resistant movement against the unjust laws.

Passive Resistance – ‘Passive Resistance’ is almost a subsequent English word for *satyagraha*. This term was used at the early phase of Gandhi’s *satyagraha* movement.

Civil Disobedience - The Civil Disobedience Movement led by M K Gandhi, in the year 1930 was an important milestone in the history of Indian Nationalism. The essence of The Civil Disobedience Movement was defying of the British laws.

Peaceful Picketing – Picketing or protesting is a way to express the dissatisfaction publicly and forcefully, attempting to influence the public opinion or government policy. Peaceful protest is defined as a way to demonstrate without any loss of life, negative effect to public and country, and positively, non-violent.

1.11 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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UNIT 2 SWARAJ AND SWADESHI

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2.0 OBJECTIVES

- To inspire the students with Gandhian vision of *Swaraj* and *Swadeshi*.
- To find the historical significance of these terms.
- To figure out the contemporary relevance of these two terms.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This unit tries to understand the historical context and significance of two key concepts of Gandhi: *Swaraj* and *Swadeshi*.

2.2 BASIC NOTIONS

While the freedom struggle was in progress, Gandhi was working on ideas for a new social order for post-colonial India. He believed that there would be no point in getting rid of the British without getting rid of the centralised, exploitative and violent system of governance and the economics of greed that they pursued. Gandhi designed a new trinity to achieve his vision of a new non-violent social order. He called it *Sarvodaya*, *Swaraj* and *Swadeshi*. The first of the trinity was *Sarvodaya*, the 'upliftment of all'. "All rise" - not a few, as in capitalism, not even the greatest good of the greatest number as in socialism, but each and every one should be taken care of. That is *Sarvodaya*. This includes the care of the Earth - of animals, forests, rivers and land. Gandhi's vision is better encapsulated in the concept of biocracy (where the interest of all living

beings, including nonhuman species, local and global ecosystems, and future generations are taken into account, because their interest is our interest) rather than democracy (SSS).

In such a situation we need an economic development as consensus and profitable for all. Not "the rising tide lifts all boats" but "everybody in the water gets to ride in a boat" and even more, the trees have standing. The second aspect of the Gandhian trinity is *Swaraj*, 'self-government'. *Swaraj* works to bring about a social transformation through small-scale, decentralised, self-organised and self-directed participatory structures of governance. It also implies self-transformation, self-discipline and self-restraint. Thus *Swaraj* is a moral, ethical, ecological and spiritual concept and therefore a *sattvic* method of governance. The third part of the trinity is *Swadeshi*, 'local economy'. Gandhi opposed mass production, favouring production by the masses. Work for him was as much a spiritual necessity as an economic one. So he insisted on the principle that every member of society should be engaged in manual work. Manufacturing in small workshops and adherence to arts and crafts feeds the body as well as the soul, he said. He believed that long-distance transportation of goods, competitive trading and relentless economic growth are *rajasic*, verging towards *tamasic*, because they destroy the fabric of human communities. Within the context of *Sarvodaya*, *Swaraj* and *Swadeshi*, taking care of each other and caring for the Earth, constantly and regularly, development emerges through *seva* and is *sattvic* development (SSS).

The English translation of *seva* as service does not convey the depth of its meaning. For example, one can be paid for a service but *seva* is offered as a gift. *Seva* implies devotion and a long-term commitment. It is good in itself, irrespective of results, outcomes and achievements. The person performing *seva* does not try to change the world but to serve the world. When one wishes to change others, there is a certain amount of *rajasic* hubris involved. When we want to change the world, we know what is good for the world and we want to shape it to our image and to our ends. The person engaged in serving the world accepts his or her limitations and offers himself or herself for the wellbeing of the other, believing that the other is none other than I, and I am none other than the other. There is no duality, nor separation between the one serving and the one served. Both exist in a web of relationships and both are seeking spiritual fulfilment as well as material and physical wellbeing. It was this spirit which inspired many thousands of Gandhian workers to commit themselves to *sattvic* development through service (SSS).

2.3 HIND SWARAJ

Hind Swaraj, the title of the first definitive writing of Mahatma Gandhi, and which continues to evoke critical interest the world over even now, literally means 'self-rule in India'. This small book of about 30,000 words was written in Gujarat in November 1909 on board the ship during Gandhi's return trip from England to South Africa after an abortive mission, within 10 days, 40 of the 275 pages being written with left hand. As stated by Gandhiji himself: "I wrote the entire *Hind Swaraj* for my dear friend Dr. Pranjivan Mehta. All the argument in the book is reproduced almost as it took place with him." [CWMG 71: 238] It was published in the Indian Opinion in Natal and was soon banned by Government in India because it contained 'matter declared to be

sedition'. On that, Gandhi published the English translation from Natal to show the innocuous nature of its contents. The ban was finally lifted on 21 December 1938.

A number of editions have been published thereafter, the most common being that published by Navjivan press in India in 1938 with the title '*Hind Swaraj: the Indian Home Rule*'. *Swaraj* lays stress on governance not by a hierarchical government, but self governance through individuals and community building. The focus is on political decentralization. Since this is against the political and social systems followed by Britain, Gandhi's concept of *Swaraj* laid stress on India discarding British political, economic, bureaucratic, legal, military, and educational institutions. The book has 20 chapters and 2 appendices. Some useful quotes from this book are given below:

Concept of Swadeshi

"God set a limit to man's locomotive ambition in the construction of his body. Man immediately proceeded to discover means of overriding the limit. God gifted man with intellect that he might know his Maker. Man abused it so that he might forget his maker. I am so constructed that I can only serve my immediate neighbors, but in my conceit I pretend to have discovered that I must with my body serve every individual in the Universe." [M. K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, Chap. X]

Why was India Lost?

"The English have not taken India; we have given it to them. They are not in India because of their strength, but because we keep them. When our Princes fought among themselves, they sought the assistance of Company Bahadur. That co-operation was versed alike in commerce and war. It was unhampered by questions of morality. Its object was to increase its commerce and to take money. The Hindus and the Mohammedans were at daggers drawn. This, too, gave the Company its opportunity and thus we created the circumstances that gave the Company its control over India. They wish to convert the whole world into a vast market for their goods. They will leave no stone unturned to reach the goal. It is my deliberate opinion that India is being ground down, not under the English heel, but under that of modern civilization. We are turning away from God." [M. K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, Chap. VII & VIII]

Indian Civilization

"Civilization 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. The Gujarati equivalent for civilization means 'good conduct.' [M. K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, Chap. XIII] "The more we indulge our passions, the more unbridled they become. Our ancestors, therefore, set a limit to our indulgences. They saw that happiness was largely a mental condition." [M. K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, Chap. XIII] "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 fibre. They, therefore, after due deliberation decided that we should only do what we could with our hands and feet." [M. K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, Chap.

XIII] “They further reasoned that large cities were a snare and a encumbrance and that people would not be happy in them, that there would be gangs of thieves and robbers, prostitution and vice flourishing in them and that poor men would be robbed by rich men. They were, therefore, satisfied with small villages.” [M. K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, Chap. XIII] “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.” [M. K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, Chap. XVI] “Justice was tolerably fair. The ordinary rule was to avoid courts. There were no touts to lure people into them. This evil, too, was noticeable only in and around capitals.” [M. K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, Chap. XIII] ”The tendency of Indian civilization is to elevate the moral being, that of the Western civilization is to propagate immorality.” [M. K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, Chap. XIII]

***Swaraj* Is Self-Rule**

“It is *Swaraj* when we learn to rule ourselves. It is, therefore, in the palm of our hands. But such *Swaraj* has to be experienced, by each one for himself. One drowning man will never save another.” [M. K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, Chap. XIV] ”I believe that you want the millions of India to be happy, not that you want the reins of government in your hands. If that be so, we have to consider only one thing: how can the millions obtain self-rule?” [M. K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, Chap. XV]

Freedom from England

“If the English become Indianized, we can accommodate them. If they wish to remain, in India along with their civilization, there is no room for them.” [M. K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, Chap. XIV]

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) Briefly mention the new trinity Gandhi designed to achieve his vision of a new non-violent social order..

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2) What is *Hind Swaraj*?

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2.4 SWARAJ AND SWADESHI: VILLAGE AS A REPUBLIC

What Gandhi was looking for was what he called *Swaraj* and *Swadeshi*. These two terms taken together represent the type of society that Gandhi was looking for. *Swaraj*, very badly translates as independence/autonomy/home rule/self-rule. *Swadeshi* can be translated as self-sufficiency or self-reliance (Burke 2000). *Swaraj* for Gandhi was not simply a question of ousting the British from India and declaring independence. What it implied was a wholly different type of society. He did not want the British to be replaced by Indians doing exactly the same. If that was all they achieved, they would not have achieved true freedom but merely the same type of government run by a different set of men. He wanted the value system and life style of the British Raj to be done away with and totally replaced by a simpler, more spiritual, communal life. This new type of society, reflecting the old values of pre-colonial days, was to be based on the village. He stated that: “[I]ndependence must begin at the bottom. Thus every village will be a republic ... having full powers. It follows, therefore, that every village has to be self-sustained and capable of managing its affairs. Thus, ultimately, it is the individual who is the unit. This does not exclude dependence on and willing help from neighbours or from the world... In this structure composed of innumerable villages, there will be ever-widening, never-ascending circles. Life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom.”

Therefore, Gandhi's vision for a new India entailed that 'every religion has its full and equal place'. (That is why Gandhi was totally opposed to the partition of India). Equally, 'there would be no room for machines that would displace human labour and that would concentrate power in a few hands'. In his *Collected Works* there is a passage, written in 1942, that amplifies his ideas on the role of the village. He states that 'my idea of village *Swaraj* is that it is a complete republic, independent of its neighbours for its own vital wants, and yet interdependent for many others in which dependence is a necessity' (Burke 2000). He continues: “Thus every villages first concern will be to grow its own food crops and cotton for its cloth. It should have a reserve for its cattle, recreation and playground for adults and children. Then, if there is more land available, it will grow useful money crops, thus excluding *ganja*, tobacco, opium and the like. The village will maintain a village theatre, school and public hail. It will have its own waterworks, ensuring clean water supply. This can be done through controlled wells or tanks. Education will be compulsory up to the final basic course. As far as possible every activity will be conducted on the co-operative basis. There will be no castes such as we have today with their graded untouchability. Non-violence with its technique of... non-cooperation will be the sanction of the village community. There will be a compulsory service of village guards who will be selected by rotation from the register maintained by the village. The government of the village will be conducted by a [council] of five persons annually elected by the adult villagers, male and female, possessing minimum prescribed qualifications. These will have all the authority and jurisdiction required. Since there will be no system of punishments in the accepted sense, this [council] will be the legislature, judiciary and executive combined to operate for its year of office.”

Gandhi was quite certain that any village could become such a republic straight away without much interference even from the colonial government because he believed that their sole effective connection with the villages was the collection of village taxes. All that was needed was the will to do it. He referred to his ideal state as one of 'enlightened anarchy in which each person will become his own ruler'. It is interesting to see that throughout his writings on the autonomous self-sufficient village communities we see echoes of the anarchist lifestyles proposed by such writers as Tolstoy or Thoreau in the nineteenth century (Burke 2000).

2.5 SWARAJ AND SWADESHI: HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

The first nationalistic sentiment among the members of the Indian National Congress was to representation in the government bodies. Dadabhai Naoroji successfully contested in an election and become the first Indian member in the British House of Commons (Friends of India 2007). Aware of the economic devastation that British rule had brought on the country, India's broad masses were responding eagerly to the nationalist message. But the nationalist movement was also becoming exceedingly divided between two poles representing radically different currents and tendencies. Whereas one side attempted to restrict the national movement to a struggle for political reforms, the other side sees the aspirations of the general public and called for the complete liberation from colonial rule. Bal Gangadhar Tilak eloquently and succinctly summarized the sentiments of the new and increasingly militant national movement. He spoke of British rule as having ruined trade, caused the collapse of industry, and destroyed the people's courage and abilities. Under the colonial regimen, Tilak asserted that the country was offered neither education, nor rights, nor respect for public opinion. Without prosperity and contentment, the Indian people suffered constantly from poverty, famine and drain. He believed that without political power Indian industry could not develop, the nation's youth could not be educated, and the country could win neither social reforms nor material welfare for its people (Friends of India 2007). *Swaraj* can mean generally self-governance but the word usually refers to Gandhi's concept for Indian independence from foreign domination. *Swaraj* lays stress on governance not by a hierarchical government, but self-governance through individuals and community building (Friends of India 2007).

Tilak was the first Indian nationalist to embrace *Swaraj* as the destiny of the nation. Tilak deeply opposed the British education system that ignored and defamed India's culture, history and values. He resented the denial of freedom of expression for nationalists, and the lack of any voice or role for ordinary Indians in the affairs of their nation. So he considered *Swaraj* as the natural and only solution. His popular slogan "*Swaraj* is my birthright, and I shall have it" became the source of inspiration for Indians. For Tilak the idea of *Swaraj* is not only an end to foreign rule but also an end to exploitative social traditions indigenous to the country. He knew that it is possible only by drawing our people belonging to all sections of society in to the national movement. His vision and his desire to achieve *Swaraj* through the mobilization of common people constituted a turning point in the independence movement. The Home Rule Movement that he started with other prominent members forced the British to concede that introduction of responsible Government was their final objective. His activism and his passionate advocacy, especially through the media, inspired an entire generation. Tilak wrote in the journal *Kesari*:

“When Hindus and Muslims jointly ask for *Swarajya* from a common platform, the British bureaucracy has to realize that its days are numbered.” (Friends of India 2007).

Gandhi had a more philosophical view of *Swaraj*. According to him, adopting *Swaraj* means implementing a system whereby state machinery is virtually nil, and the real power directly resides in the hands of people. Gandhi wrote "Independence begins at the bottom... A society must be built in which every village has to be self sustained and capable of managing its own affairs... It will be trained and prepared to perish in the attempt to defend itself against any onslaught from without... This does not exclude dependence on and willing help from neighbors or from the world. It will be a free and voluntary play of mutual forces... In this structure composed of innumerable villages, there will ever widening, never ascending circles. Life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. But it will be an oceanic circle whose center will be the individual. Therefore the outermost circumference will not wield power to crush the inner circle but will give strength to all within and derive its own strength from it."

The *Swadeshi* movement was a successful economic strategy to remove the British Empire from power and improve economic conditions in India through following principles of *Swadeshi* (self-sufficiency). Strategies of the *Swadeshi* movement involved boycotting British products and the revival of domestic-made products and production techniques. *Swadeshi*, as a strategy, was a key focus of Gandhi who described it as the soul of *Swaraj* (Wikipedia 2011). Gandhi described *Swadeshi* as "a call to the consumer to be aware of the violence he is causing by supporting those industries that result in poverty, harm to workers and to humans and other creatures." Gandhi recognized that alienation and exploitation often occur when production and consumption are divorced from their social and cultural context, and that local enterprise is a way to avoid these problems. "*Swadeshi* is that spirit in us which requires us to serve our immediate neighbors before others, and to use things produced in our neighborhood in preference to those more remote. So doing, we serve humanity to the best of our capacity. We cannot serve humanity by neglecting our neighbors".

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) Give the meaning and significance of *Swadeshi*.

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2) What does Bal Gangadhar Tilak speak about British rule?.

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2.6 EDUCATION AND UPLIFTMENT OF ALL

Why Gandhi proposed the introduction of productive handicrafts into the school system was not really as outrageous as may appear. What he really wanted was for the schools to be self-supporting, as far as possible. There were two reasons for this. Firstly, a poor society such as India simply could not afford to provide education for all children unless the schools could generate resources from within. Secondly, the more financially independent the schools were, the more politically independent they could be. What Gandhi wanted to avoid was dependence on the state which he felt would mean interference from the centre. Above all else, Gandhi valued self-sufficiency and autonomy. These were vital for his vision of an independent India made up of autonomous village communities to survive. It was the combination of *Swaraj* and *Swadeshi* related to the education system. A state system of education within an independent India would have been a complete contradiction as far as Gandhi was concerned (Burke 2000).

He was also of the opinion that manual work should not be seen as something inferior to mental work. He felt that the work of the craftsman or labourer should be the ideal model for the 'good life'. Schools which were based around productive work where that work was for the benefit of all were, therefore, carrying out education of the whole person - mind, body and spirit. The right to autonomy that Gandhi's educational plan assigns to the teacher in the context of the school's daily curriculum is consistent with the libertarian principles that he shared with Tolstoy. Gandhi wanted to free the Indian teacher from interference from outside, particularly government or state bureaucracy. Under colonial rule, the teacher had a prescribed job to do that was based on what the authorities wanted the children to learn. Textbooks were mandatory so that Gandhi found that 'the living word of the teacher has very little value. A teacher who teaches from textbooks does not impart originality to his pupils. On the other hand, Gandhi's vision implied the end of the teacher's subservience to the prescribed textbook and the curriculum. It presented a concept of learning that simply could not be fully implemented with the help of textbooks. Of equal, if not more importance, was the freedom it gave the teacher in matters of curriculum. It denied the state the power to decide what teachers taught and what they did in the classroom. It gave autonomy to the teacher but it was, above all, a libertarian approach to schooling that transferred power from the state to the village (Burke 2000).

Gandhi's basic education was, therefore, an embodiment of his perception of an ideal society consisting of small, self-reliant communities with his ideal citizen being an industrious, self-respecting and generous individual living in a small cooperative community. For informal educators, we can draw out a number of useful pointers. First, Gandhi's insistence on autonomy and self-regulation is reflected in the ethos of informal education. Gandhi's conception of basic education was concerned with learning that was generated within everyday life which is the basis on which informal educators work. It was also an education focused on the individual but reliant

on co-operation between individuals. There is also a familiar picture of the relationships between educators and students/learners: “A teacher who establishes rapport with the taught, becomes one with them, learns more from them than he teaches them. He who learns nothing from his disciples is, in my opinion, worthless. Whenever I talk with someone I learn from him. I take from him more than I give him. In this way, a true teacher regards himself as a student of his students. If you will teach your pupils with this attitude, you will benefit much from them.” (Talk to Khadi Vidyalaya Students, Sevagram, Sevak, 15 February 1942 CW 75, p. 269 quoted in Burke 2000) Lastly, it was an education that aimed at educating the whole person, rather than concentrating on one aspect. It was a highly moral activity and a spiritual endeavour leading to full *Swaraj* and *Swadeshi*.

2.7 **SWARAJ IN SWADESHI: IN GANDHI'S OWN WORDS**

The following is taken from *Young India*, 10-12-1919 and is written by Gandhi himself. Though some of the historical events have become outdated, Gandhi's eagerness for *Swaraj* and *Swadeshi* and his reasons are clearly evident in the passage given below. “The much-talked-of Reforms Bill will become the law of the land within a few days and in due course the new legislatures will take the place of the old. The Viceroy has announced that he is going loyally to abide by the new scheme and that he will try to make it a success. I have refrained from expressing an opinion on the report of the Joint Committee for I do not feel sufficiently interested in it. It is not possible to be enthused over a thing which when analysed means little for the people. So far, therefore, as the Reform Scheme is concerned, I would simply urge that we should take the fullest advantage of it and, like the Viceroy, loyally work to make it a success. That it is an improvement upon the original measure is admitted by all.”

“But the real reform that India needs is *Swadeshi* in its true sense. The immediate problem before us is not how to run the government of the country, but how to feed and clothe ourselves. In 1918 we sent sixty crores of rupees out of India for buying cloth. If we continue to purchase foreign cloth at that rate, we deprive the Indian weaver and spinner of that amount from year to year without practically giving him or her any other work in exchange. No wonder a tenth at least of the population is cruelly half-starved and the majority of the rest underfed. He who has eyes may see for himself that the middle-class people are already being underfed and our babies are not getting enough milk for themselves. The Reform Scheme, no matter how liberal it is, will not help to solve the problem in the immediate future. But *Swadeshi-Gan* solve it now.”

“The Punjab has made the solution still clearer to me. God be thanked that the beautiful women of the Punjab have not yet lost the cunning of their fingers. High or low, they still know the art of spinning. They have not yet burnt their spinning-wheels as many Gujarati women have done. It is to me a perfect delight to find them throwing balls of yarn into my lap. They admit they have time at their disposal for spinning. They admit that the khaddar woven from their hand-spun yarn is superior to the machine-spun yarn. Our forefathers were well able to clothe themselves with little effort and with perfect comfort without having to buy from the foreign markets.”

“This beautiful art and yet so simple is in danger of being lost if we do not wake up betimes. The Punjab gives proof of its possibilities. But the Punjab too is fast losing her hold of it. Every year witnesses a decrease in the output of hand-spun yarn. It means greater poverty in our homes and greater idleness. The women who have ceased to spin are not utilizing their time in any other or better manner than gossiping.” “But one thing is needful to undo the mischief. If every educated Indian will realize his clear primary duty, he will straightway present the women of his household with a spinning-wheel and provide the facilities for learning the art of spinning. Millions of yards of yarn can be produced from day to day. And if every educated Indian will condescend to wear the cloth produced from such yarn, he will support and assist in rebuilding the only possible cottage industry of India.” “Without a cottage industry the Indian doomed. He cannot maintain himself from the land. He needs a supplementary industry. Spinning is the easiest, the cheapest and the best.”

“I know this means a revolution in a mental outlook. And it is because it is a revolution that I can aim that the way to *Swaraj* lies through *Swadeshi*. A nation that can save sixty crores of rupees per year and distribute that large sum amongst its spinners and weavers in their own homes will have acquired powers of organization and industry that must enable it to do everything else necessary for its organic growth.” “The dreamy reformer whispers, “Wait till I get responsible government and I will protect India’s industry, without our women having to spin and our weaver having to weave.” This has been actually said by thinking men. I venture to suggest that there is a double fallacy underlying the proposition. India cannot wait for a protective tariff and protection will not reduce the cost of clothing. Secondly, mere protection will not benefit the starving millions. They can only be helped by being enabled to supplement their earnings by having a spinning industry restored to them. So whether we have a protective tariff or not, we shall still have to revive the hand-spinning industry and stimulate hand-weaving.”

“When the war was raging, all available hands in America and England were utilized in the naval yards for building ships and they- built them, too, at an amazing pace. If I would have my way, I would make every available Indian learn spinning or weaving and make him or her do that work for a certain fixed portion of every day. I would start with schools and colleges presenting as they do ready-made organized units.” “Multiplication of mills cannot solve the problem. They will take too long to overtake the drain and they cannot distribute the sixty crores in our homes. They can only cause concentration of money and labour and thus make confusion worse confounded.”

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) How is *Swaraj* and *Swadeshi* related to the education system.

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2) “Gandhi’s basic education was, therefore, an embodiment of his perception of an ideal society” Comment..

2.8 LET’S SUM UP

In this unit we saw the basic notions leading to *Swaraj* and *Swadeshi*. From a historical perspective, we have been able to see Gandhi’s ideal vision as the upliftment of all, including the villagers. Making the proud and giving them the dignity that is due is the basic principle of self-rule. Gandhi’s self-rule is the key to understanding India’s unique identity and destiny. It may be mentioned that though the cultural and economic situation in India today is very different, the basic insights of Gandhi is still valid. Unless we are proud of our own dignity and unless we have the right to determine our own destiny, we cease to be a nation.

2.9 KEYWORDS

Biocracy: Our current ideal of democracy, which is a form of tyranny of one generation of humans, has been a phase of our cultural evolution, and one that is now outdated, according to some thinkers. We need to move from a democracy to a biocracy. A process of decision making where the interest of nonhuman species, local and global ecosystems, and future generations are taken into account, because their interest is our interest.

Swaraj: self-government; independence

Swadeshi: A movement, part of the Indian independence movement, was a successful economic strategy to remove the British Empire from power and improve economic conditions in India through following principles of *Swadeshi* (self-sufficiency)

2.10 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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UNIT 3 SARVODAYA

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- 3.2 The meaning of *Sarvodaya*
- 3.3 The Philosophical Foundations of *Sarvodaya*
- 3.4 The Goals of *Sarvodaya*
- 3.5 The Main Features of *Sarvodaya*
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- 3.9 Drawbacks of Gandhian *Sarvodaya*
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- 3.11 Key Words
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3.0 OBJECTIVES

Gandhian socio-political philosophy is impregnate with rich insights and novel ideas. The study is undertaken to have an in-depth analysis in the field of *Sarvodaya* movement. This unit would enable the students to understand the richness of Gandhian political thought, *Sarvodaya* or the welfare of all. It will enable one to have a wider vision on one's own role in the society and how one can contribute his or her share to the good of humanity. This study will also lead one to evaluate and compare the *Sarvodaya* ideals with other political ideals such as socialism and communism.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The concept of *Sarvodaya* is a significant contribution of Mahatma Gandhi to the socio-political philosophy. His vision of *Sarvodaya* is not independent from the religions he came across, the persons with whom he came into contact, and the movements he has acquainted with. Though it is not easy to define properly Gandhi's vision of *Sarvodaya* it is an all-comprehensive vision assuring the total good of every individual: religious, moral, social, political, and economic. He 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 non-violence. In the world threatened by poverty, unemployment, racial discrimination, exploitation, ecological destruction, war, and dehumanization, it was Gandhi's ardent desire to establish a new just society free from all social evils and which would ensure the good of all. He

proposes *Sarvodaya* to achieve the integral development of every individual. It is an ideal to be translated into action in order to build up a new world society.

3.2 THE MEANING OF SARVODAYA

Sarvodaya is a Sanskrit word derived from two words, namely, *sarva* and *udaya*. *Sarva* means 'all' which includes every kind of living beings. *Udaya* means 'rise,' 'uplift,' 'prosperity,' 'affluence,' etc. So *Sarvodaya* literally means 'the welfare of all' or 'the upliftment of all.' The ultimate objective of *Sarvodaya* is the total well-being of all or the greatest good of all. By 'welfare of all' Gandhi means the sum total of conditions – religious, moral, political, social and economic – for the all round growth of the total individual and of every individual in the context of the overall development of society. By the concept *Sarvodaya* Gandhi really means universal uplift or the welfare of all men and women and not just the welfare, or greatest happiness, of the greatest number. *Sarvodaya* is the name Gandhi gives to the new society embracing the betterment of the entire humankind and the world at large. It is a society directed towards the integral welfare of all living beings based on age and on the old spiritual and moral values of Indian and those found elsewhere.

3.3 THE PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF SARVODAYA

The socio-political philosophy of Gandhi may be termed *Sarvodaya*. It may, however, be noted that Gandhi was not the author of the idea of *Sarvodaya*. He borrowed the idea as well as the term from Ruskin. Ruskin himself had borrowed it from the *Bible*. Gandhi first used the word *Sarvodaya* in a booklet which he published in his native Gujarati after he read John Ruskin. The essay, *Unto This Last*, was based on a parable from the Gospel according to Matthew 20:1-16 concerning the owner of a plantation and his hiring of labourers to work in his vineyard. In his parable Jesus made the master of the vineyard declare: "I will give unto this last even as I give unto thee." The emphasis of Ruskin's essay, as interpreted by Gandhi, is certainly that ideal society is none in which there is concern for the welfare of all. This is the foundation for his *Sarvodaya* movement. Along with *Unto This Last* Tolstoy's *Bread Labour* also influenced Gandhi. However, the credit of Gandhi lies in the fact that he devoted his entire life to the creation of a new society, a society based on the principles of *Sarvodaya*.

Gandhi summed up the teachings of Ruskin's *Unto This Last*, which he called *Sarvodaya*, in the following three fundamental principles:

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

The concept of the 'welfare of all' has been the fundamental fact in the Indian religious consciousness from time immemorial and he only embodied it more fully and more clearly than before in the light of his life experience in the West. Thousands of years ago the *rishis* in India preached the welfare of all beings as god, human beings and nature constitute one organic whole. Hindu *dharma* or morality teaches that the individual has certain social and moral duties towards the other members of the community depending on his or her caste and the stage of life. *Sarvodaya* traces its theoretical roots in the Vedic and Vedantic teaching that from a higher

standpoint all living beings are participants in a super-material reality. Ahimsa is exhorted by the Upanishads as an important spiritual and moral value for breaking the law of karma and thus bringing about the final liberation. The spirit of *ahimsa*, i.e., to love all animate and inanimate beings and to work for the well-being of every being is found in Bhagavad Gita's teaching on *lokasamgraha* (well-being of the world) and *sarva bhutahite ratah* (those who delight in well-being of all beings).

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) Write a brief note on the etymological origin of *Sarvodaya*.

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2) What are the three fundamental principles of *Sarvodaya*?

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3.4 THE GOALS OF SARVODAYA

The fundamental goal of *Sarvodaya* is the greatest good of all living beings. Gandhi aims at the transformation of society in which everybody contributes his or her own maximum share for the peace and harmony of the world. As a consequence the integral growth which includes spiritual, moral, political, social and economic welfare of every individual and the welfare of all is visualized. It also aims at the all-round development of all, without distinction of caste, creed, sex or religion. Gandhi wanted to establish a welfare state in India, which he called *Ram Rajya*. When each individual including the sick and the invalid fulfills his or her duties according to his or her capacity, there will be a healthy community assuring the integral welfare of all beings. By providing sufficient opportunities to every individual for their personal initiatives and capacities *Sarvodaya* aims at the total and integral development of every individual in human society.

Gandhi was not the supporter of utilitarianism which aims at the greatest happiness to the greatest number. *Sarvodaya* aims at the integral liberation of every individual. It also stands for the well-being of the whole individual, body and soul. The goal of *Sarvodaya* is not the suppression or liquidation of an individual or a group but the triumph of truth which means the victory of the oppressor and the oppressed, the exploiter and the exploited. It is not the victory of an individual over another individual or even a group over other. The main principle behind it is that the good of the individual is contained in the good of all. Gandhi's liberated society defends and stands for the rights and the dignity of every human person. While rejecting the principle of

the greatest good of the greatest number, it upholds the maximum welfare of every individual on the basis of sharing goods and services regardless of one's own contribution. The resources and the progress of the village should be accessible to every individual. No individual or a group will be left out or suppressed in the *Sarvodaya* society.

The philosophy of *Sarvodaya*, based on the insights and experiences of Gandhi, is a reassertion of his commitment to the problems of mankind in the direction of establishing a new social, political, economic and moral order. Vinoba Bhave, an ardent disciple of Gandhi, rightly says, "*Sarvodaya* stands for not only making all happy by eliminating suffering from all but also for bringing a world state based on equality" For Gandhi, *Sarvodaya* as a broader concept stands for the merger of one in all with self-sacrifice and a selfless service. His *Sarvodaya* ideal, apart from standing for the meaning of the welfare of all, implies the meaning of the universal welfare and integrated development of all. The greatest contribution of *Sarvodaya* in this century lies in the reassertion of the Gandhian moral approach to the problems of humanity.

Through *Sarvodaya*, Gandhi strives for the establishment of a new, moral, just, non-violent, non-exploitative, non-materialist, non-imperialist, non-racist, non-consumerist, egalitarian, liberated, humane and de-centralised socio-politico-economic order which aims at the integrate welfare of the whole person everywhere. To achieve the welfare of all, the benefits of the nations' progress and prosperity must reach down unto the least and the lowest of the society. The natural and available resources of the world are to be for the total well-being of all human beings for their proper fulfilment as human persons. *Sarvodaya* aims at the realisation of global welfare and, consequently, a universal brotherhood and friendship in the place of a corrupt and unjust world where only a few enjoy the fruits of the world.

The goal of *Sarvodaya* includes ultimately the self-realization of every individual. Total self-realization, according to Gandhi, is the god-realization. It is to be achieved through the inner conversion of the individual and a life based on the twin principles of truth and non-violence, within the family, the village, the province, the nation and the world as a whole. It embraces all humanity and all spheres of life. The liberation of one and all, including even the animal and plant life, is aimed at. The entire world is seen as an organism.

3.5 THE MAIN FEATURES OF SARVODAYA

The main features of *Sarvodaya* are trusteeship, economic equality and networking.

Trusteeship

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 highlights of the *Sarvodaya* society envisioned by the Mahatma. *Sarvodaya* is the application of the principle of non-violence in the transformation of societies: from their present forms which are mostly exploitative of and unfavourable to the disadvantaged, toward more balanced, inclusive and egalitarian forms in which can be enshrined the principle of social justice for all.

Economic equality

According to Gandhi economic equality is the master key to non-violent transformationary independence. Working for economic equality means abolishing the eternal conflict between capital and labour. A non-violent system of government is clearly and impossibly so long as the wide gulf between the rich and the hungry millions persists. The most disadvantaged sections of the community being the economically, the physically and the mentally poor, it is obvious that no egalitarian society could evolve without the poor taking part in the evolutionary process. And for this sector to take part, focus must be put on raising their status to an acceptably decent level. However, as it should be for all the other sectors of society, if an acceptable level of existence is to be reached and maintained for the disadvantaged sector, it is imperative that it should be self-sustainable through their participation in their own management.

Sarvodaya Network

During his lifetime, Gandhi never allowed *Sarvodaya* organisations to be formally instituted. His thinking was that once you served people, as ‘*sevakas*,’ within the *Sarvodaya* philosophy there was no need for institutionalization. But since his demise *Sarvodaya* organisations have been established world-wide genuinely helping people towards building new societies from the ‘grass-roots’ up. At the operational field level, the most successful *Sarvodaya* programmes have most often been those which, apart from being self-created and self-managed, have employed practical hands-on-learning-by-doing methods, including a lot of income generation, skills training and conscientisation; rather than the theoretical ‘talk-shop’ or workshop approach.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) How is *Sarvodaya* different from utilitarianism?

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2) The goal of *Sarvodaya* includes self-realization. Explain.

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3) *Sarvodaya* network is an important feature of *Sarvodaya* movement. How?

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3.6 SOCIO-POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY OF SARVODAYA

Gandhian concept of *Sarvodaya* is both social and political in nature. It is not easy to distinguish both. For Gandhi politics was a means to social change and social transformation. Therefore, all his political agendas, principles and movements were social in nature. The main pillars of Gandhian political philosophy are philosophical anarchism, partyless democracy and decentralization. Let us see them in detail.

Philosophical Anarchism

In political struggles we find the causal role of ruthless competition for power and dominance. In such dangerous games of politics we can discover at the action of the fundamental urge for domination over others and the working of an elementary rule that if one person renounces the attempt for obtaining power, others will begin to dominate over him. *Sarvodaya* accepts the sacrosanct character of the human spirit. Hence, it is emphatic on the inculcation of the values of freedom, equality, justice and fraternity. Thus, it is opposed to the state machine. In most cases the state operates by methods of intimidation, coercion, persecution and organized violence. Gandhi wanted that *swarajya* should be based on the moral sovereignty of the people.

Partyless Democracy

The activities and operations of the political parties in modern states become mainly oriented to the ruthless pursuit of power. Even in democracies, in spite of the theoretical adherence to the principles of the basis of government, in actual practice, there is the domination of the all-powerful parties. Consequently, there are no occasions for the continuous dynamic political initiative of the masses and for the sovereign exercise of that general will of the community conceived. *Sarvodaya* is definitely hostile to the mechanism of representative democracy which amounts in actual practice to the dictatorship of the cabinet and the party oligarchy. Hence *Sarvodaya* advocates partyless democracy.

Decentralization (Ramarajaya)

In place of the ever-growing centralization of power *Sarvodaya* pleads for decentralization. Gandhi was hostile to all types of concentration of power and he pleaded for decentralization at the economic and political levels. What is essential is that the people should be trained and disciplined into the management and control of their own affairs. These workers should behave as the brethren of the people and not their rulers and educate the people through tier co-operative solicitude. The advocates of *Sarvodaya* are quite correct in holding that if genuine self-government or real democracy is practised at the village level, then that would be the greatest bulwark against any totalitarian encroachment. *Sarvodaya* accepts the universalization of self-government. This means the activation of the people for vigilant and active participation in co-operative action. If the officials at the top are liable to perversity and corruption, it is equally essential to guard effectively against the corruption of the workers and petty officials at the level of the villages. *Sarvodaya* wants to elevate the people. Hence the people and not the central parliament of cabinet have to become the focus of political attention.

3.7 POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF SARVODAYA

The fundamental theme of *Sarvodaya* is the realization of the happiness and elevation of all. At the political level it has two implications: the repudiation of the theory of class struggle and the safeguarding of the interests and rights of the minority.

The repudiation of the theory of class struggle

Sarvodaya attacks the repugnant and perverse consequences of egoism and the lust for power and wealth. Hence, it stresses the necessity of the disinterested service. Service, dedication and the realization of common good are its techniques and formulas and it is opposed to the Marxist theory of class struggle, which favours utilization of violence. *Sarvodaya* pleads for the replacement of the concept of class struggle by the more rational and organic theory of social good and harmony. The aim is not the forcible expropriation of the wealth of the rich but the conscious and spontaneous practice of 'sharing' the goods one has ready at hand. In this way there can be an overpowering accentuation of the ideal of sharing and almost a mass moral revolution oriented to the effectuation of a peaceful social reconstruction can be brought about. *Sarvodaya* contemplates not the retention of the system of exploitation and coercion but it wants to bring about a regime of absolute social equality and the maximum of economic equality too. *Sarvodaya* contemplates a regime of liberty, equality and justice to be brought about by the dynamic transforming power of love and non-violence.

The Repudiation of the Concept of Majoritarianism

The second implication from the *sarvodayist* conception of the organic reality of the community is the repudiation of the element of superior virtue supposed to be contained in the judgement of a majority of heads. If the community is an organic structure and if all the individual members of it are bearers of moral and cultural values then there is no place for jeopardizing the lives and interests of even the lowest and humblest. But if truth is the supreme canon and if the opinion, wish and aspiration of every member is precious, then in that case one has to work by consensus and not by majority. Hence, according to *Sarvodaya* the concept of majoritarianism has to be replaced by the concept of consensus. *Sarvodaya* is not satisfied with the various safeguards of proportional representation that have been devised to protect the interests of the minority. It adheres, rather, to the Gandhian concept that the superficial numerical criteria of many and few have to be replaced by a fundamental adherence to the good of the community. Thus, *Sarvodaya* aims to replace the concept of majoritarianism by the concept of fundamental consensus.

3.8 SOCIALISM, COMMUNISM AND SARVODAYA

***Sarvodaya* and socialism**

Sarvodaya is closely related to socialism in some respect. First of all, both derived their profound moral appeal from their rootedness in the fundamental belief in the good of the whole community in place of the narrow pursuit of the interests of the oligarchical minority of plutocrats. Secondly, both stress that there should be a social appropriation and equitable distribution of the goods of society. But in spite of the some fundamental similarities between socialism and *Sarvodaya*, there is great difference between them on the question of means and methods. The *Sarvodaya* concept has also specified that for achieving good ends we should adopt only good means. The good means here represent the path of love, truth and non-violence. The *Sarvodaya* workers and all those who have faith in the concept of *Sarvodaya*, should have clarity about their goal and should ensure the purity of means. One has to be vigilant about the ends and means. From the standpoint of *Sarvodaya* there are two shortcomings in the socialist philosophy. First, the basic technic for effectuating socialism is supposed to be nationalization whereas *Sarvodaya* holds villagism. Secondly, socialism adheres, at least in some cases, to the concept of violent revolution.

Communism and *Sarvodaya*

Sarvodaya is more or less different from communism in its approach and methods. The difference between *Sarvodaya* and communism is far more basic and fundamental. Communism in Russia is a totalitarian system wedded to the cult of regimentation, violence and party dictatorship. Its all-pervasive aim has been the transformation of a backward feudal agrarian economy into a modern industrial-collectivist economy and this immense transformation has been sought to be achieved by the revival, in more intensified forms. *Sarvodaya*, on the contrary, believes in persuasion and change of heart. Gandhi has taught the ethics of self-suffering to convert the opponent because violence can never be the foundation of a just and equal society. A society of liberty and equality cannot be built by the capture of state power by a monolithic totalitarian party. *Sarvodaya*, hence, is intensely and trenchantly critical of the methods and techinics of Russian communism.

3.9 DRAWBACKS OF GANDHIAN SARVODAYA

Sarvodaya is a concept which is rich in insight and ideology. However, many consider it as utopian as many of the things are not very easy to put into practice. *Sarvodaya* emphatically pleads for small communities. But it has some practical difficulties in the modern civilization. For instance, if we want the country to be strong and able to protest itself against the deprivation of the neighbours, we have to industrialize. The pace of industrialization will be determined by the competitive march of other powers in the race of industrial and military supremacy. Also it is true that the growth of factionalism and partisanship is one of the greatest evils of democracy. But it does not seem possible to abolish parties. It is good to abolish partisanship and not parties.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) How does decentralization replaces the totalitarianism?

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2) Why do we say that *Sarvodaya* ideals are more profound than socialist ideals?

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3.10 LET US SUM UP

The philosophy of *Sarvodaya* is integral and synthetic in character. The synthetic approach is of great merit in political philosophy. For instance, Plato built his philosophy by the synthesis of the ideas of Parmenides, Socrates and Pythagoras. The philosophy of *Sarvodaya* is based on the mystical intuitions and socio-political experiences of Gandhi. He attempted the synthesis of the ideas of Vedanta, Buddhism, Tulsidas, Christianity, Ruskin, Tolstoy, Thoreau, etc. He tried to incorporate some ideas from the Western philosophy as well. The political philosophy of

Sarvodaya is an intellectual attempt to build a plan of political and social construction on the basis of metaphysical idealism. It is based on the insights of Gandhi in the framework of independent India. The synthesis of partyless democracy and village self-government is a notable contribution from the standpoint of Indian political thought and practice. The villagism of *Sarvodaya* may appear as a reaction against the modern industrial trends of civilization, but it has added the new radical gospels of the ownership of all land of the village by the village community itself and the formation of a decentralized village commonwealth.

3.11 KEY WORDS

Sarvodaya: Universal uplift, welfare of all or progress of all.

Swarajya: It generally means self-governance or self-rule. The word usually refers to Gandhi's concept for Indian independence from foreign domination.

Institutionalization: Making something to become part of an organized system, society or culture, so that it is considered normal.

Decentralization: Giving some of the power of a central government, organization, etc. to smaller parts or organizations around the country.

Universalization: Making something universal in use or distribution, often within a particular field.

Majoritarianism: It is a traditional political philosophy or agenda which asserts that a majority of the population is entitled to a certain degree of primacy in society, and has the right to make decisions that affect the society.

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UNIT 4 CASTE AND SOCIAL ORDER

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- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Caste System in India
- 4.3 *Varna* System
- 4.4 Gandhian Social Thought
- 4.5 Gandhi's Concept of *Varna* System
- 4.6 Gandhi's Views on Caste System and Untouchability
- 4.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.8 Key Words
- 4.9 Further Readings and References

4.0 OBJECTIVES

The main objective of the unit is to give a history of caste system. The history of caste system is dealt in brief and traced to the caste system in Indian society. The place of it in the social order of India is also given in this unit. Finally the views of Mahatma Gandhi on caste system and untouchability are paid due attention. Thus by the end to this unit you will able to have brief idea of the history of caste system; to know about its origins in the Indian history; to have a basic understanding about its role in Indian social order; and to understand about the views of Gandhiji on caste system and untouchability.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The word 'caste' is derived from the Portuguese and Spanish word '*casta*' meaning 'race', breed or lineage. According to the Britannica Encyclopedia, it means a group of people having a specific social rank, defined generally by descent, marriage and occupation. Each caste has its own customs that restrict the occupations and dietary habits of its members and their social contact with members of other castes. Anthropologists use the term more generally, to a social group that is endogamous and occupationally specialized. Caste systems are traditional hereditary systems of social stratification enforced by common practice and based on classification such as occupation, race, ethnicity etc. In its broadest sense, examples of caste based societies were found in Latin America under Spanish and Portuguese rule apart from India.

Systems similar to caste are said to exist in other parts of the world such as Japan, Indo-China, Indonesia and in countries situated to the north of India like Afghanistan and Baluchistan. They do not completely resemble caste but they have some resemblance of the caste system. A caste system is one whereby a society is divided into a number of self-contained and completely segregated units or castes, and the mutual relationship between them are determined ritually in a graded scale. The caste system in its most developed form is found in India. In this unit we are dealing mainly with the place of caste system in the social order of India and Gandhiji's views on it.

4.2 CASTE SYSTEM IN INDIA

Caste is a fundamental institution of Indian society. It pervades the entire gamut of Indian social organization and there is hardly any aspect of Indian society which is not influenced by caste. India has to contend with a vast array and variety of problems inherent in the social fabric. The caste system has had profound and far reaching effects on the very ethos, culture, and character of the society at large in the country. Caste, in one form or the other, in a rudimentary or highly developed form, has always been associated with Indian society. The relation between caste and Indian society has been so long and so intimate that many have viewed caste and Indian society as coeval. The features of caste prevailing through the past centuries may be described under nine heads: hierarchy, endogamy and hypergamy; occupational association; restriction on food; drink and smoking; distinction in custom, dress and speech; pollution; ritual and other privileges and disabilities; caste organization and caste mobility.

A number of theories about the origin of caste have been given by Indologists and other social scientists. But no one has so far succeeded in giving a satisfactory theory of the origin of caste. The very dynamic nature of caste seems to elude all efforts to theories or generalize about the system. Some researchers believe that the caste system began with the Indo-Aryan migration to India. However, the theory of Indo-Aryan migration itself is a highly disputed topic.

Although many Hindu scriptures contain passages that can be interpreted to sanction the caste system, they also contain indications that the caste system is not an essential part of Hindu religion. The Vedas place very little importance on the caste system. Later scriptures such as *Bhagavad Gita* and *Manu Smriti* state that the four *varnas* are created by God. The traditional theory believes that the caste system has been established by divine ordinance or at least with divine approval. This theory views caste system as a normal and natural system. On the other hand, the sociological theory regards caste system as a man-made or artificially created and an ascriptive system of stratification in which status and role are determined by birth.

The traditional view has two versions: Mythical and metaphysical. The metaphysical version explains the fixed function, hierarchy and other characteristics of caste. Each caste has a separate function and this function is determined by the nature and qualities of the caste members. The mythical version regards four castes have emerged from different parts of *Brahman's* body, *Brahma*, the lord of creation, created human beings from different limbs; the *Brahmanas* from

his mouth, and so they were to be the intellectuals. Hence they were assigned the highest position in society and their occupation was priesthood. The *Kshatriyas* sprung from the arm of *Brahma* and were given the second position in society, that of warriors signified by the use of arms. The *Vaishyas* were given the third position and they were believed to be created from the thigh of *Brahma*. They became traders by occupation. *Shudras* who sprung from *Brhama's* feet were manual workers and they occupied the fourth position in society.

4.3 VARNA SYSTEM

The Sanskrit term *varna* is derived from the root 'vri' which means choice or to choose. This is contrary to the assumption that 'varna' denotes color and hence signifies qualities of some one. In the context of social hierarchies, it means social arrangement. At later stages the word 'varna' came to be used for the four social classes i.e. *Brahmana* (scholarly community), *Kshatriya* (warriors or political community), *Vaishya* (mercantile community) and *Shudra* (service providing community). There was nothing like higher or lower *varna* in the Vedic period. The divisions of society into four varnas or four orders were based on the division of labour. *Brahman* acted as priest, *Kshatriyas* as rulers and fighters, *Vaishyas* as traders and *shudras* as service class. Each *varna* worshipped different deities and followed different rituals. This difference was because each group had to achieve different object according to its occupational role. Brahmins wanted maximum holy luster for which they worshipped *agni* (fire) and recited *gayatri* mantras. *Kshatriyas* wanted physical strength for which they worshipped *Indra* and recited *Trishubh* mantras. *Vaishyas* wanted cattle wealth for which they worshipped *Visvedevas* and recited *Jagati* mantras. But there were no restrictions on the matrimonial alliances or social relations or even on the change of membership from one *varna* to another.

The aim of the four fold *varna* system in India was division of labour. The theory of division of labour is one of the fundamental theories of social organization. It propounds that for an orderly progress of work in society, it is necessary that it be divided into classes according to natural tendencies. Thus the responsibility of *Brahmanas* was to see the proper execution of works like study of knowledge and teaching and other religious activities. The government, defense and direction of the state were left to the *Kshatriyas* while the *Vaishyas* carried on the agriculture, diary farming and business. The *Shudras* served the other three *varnas*.

The *varna* system is a developed social system. Social stratification is found in all societies but it is difficult to find one as systematic as the Indian *varna* system. The object of this system was to put the different powers of man to proper and productive uses in order to maintain the solid, organized and balanced state of society. Another major advantage of the *varna* system was the decentralization of power. Concentration of all power in the hands of one class may lead to exploitation and despotism. In the *varna* system, the power of knowledge, power of arms, power of wealth and power of labour were evenly distributed among the *Brahmanas*, the *Kshatriyas*, the *Vaishyas* and the *Shudras* respectively. By keeping respect, authority and wealth separate, the *varna* system saved the society from the defects of concentration or localization of power.

In this way the *varna* system shows a fine synthesis of the fundamentals of social organization, division of labour and decentralization. This convention was not severe and was based on inherent qualities and tendencies. Here we see the technical skill of the occupation was passed on hereditarily from generation to generation and because of practicing the same occupation over a long period of time 'occupational guilds' came into existence which later on came to be known as castes. But at a later stage, when it became the caste system we see a rigid form which lost all its good qualities. The caste system which is said to be originated from the *varna* system, is very different from it. It lost the advantages of the *varna* system and became detrimental to the society. Thus we see that though the caste system was originally evolved for the necessary classification of human duty in order to preserve the organic stability of society, its original meaning and intention were forgotten through the passage of time. It is necessary for every one to have consideration for the facts of world unity and goodwill. Humanity demands love for all, justice; fair treatment and help to the needy and this should form the basis of society. Here we see the relevance of Gandhian social thought which India needs today because he aimed not only the uplift of this or that particular class or caste but the welfare of all or *sarvodaya*, as he called it.

4.4 GANDHIAN SOCIAL THOUGHT

With the message of love, tolerance and service of mankind, Mahatma Gandhi successfully infused a new hope in man, both in India and abroad. As one of the builders of modern India, his contribution is second to none in the spiritual and political regeneration of India. His broad and humanistic outlook towards the problems of life will always remain an ideal to be followed not only by Indians, but humanity in general.

Before making an attempt to outline the social thought of Gandhi, we should bear in our mind that Gandhiji was a 'Practical Idealist'. He did not want to find out the basis of social organization or wanted to evolve a theory of state. Instead, he wanted to find out a way through which such a system of social organization could become a healthier system. According to him, the origin of society lies in man's realization that complete selfishness has no place in life. The formation of society was also to avoid violence. Thus Gandhiji was able to prove that the basis of society consists in Non-violence and Self-sacrifice. If the very origin of society lies in self-sacrifice, then there has to be a harmony between personal consideration and the good of the society. In the society he has to care for his food and shelter and for that he has to work in co-operation with others. This 'work' relates every man with every other man of society. Work thus becomes the basis of social organization.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your Answers.

1) What are the two versions of the traditional view of the origin of caste system in India?

2) How did Gandhiji defined *varna* system?

3) How is caste system different from *varna vyavastha* according to Gandhi?

4.5 GANDHI'S CONCEPT OF VARNA SYSTEM

Gandhi believed that there should be an inner arrangement in a society for enabling every member to do his share of work for the betterment of the society. He held that the ancient classification of Hindu society into four *varnas* has been made in that spirit. Thus Gandhian concept of the relation between the society and the individual is based upon the ancient Indian *varna* system. In the *varna* system different individuals were classified according to their innate tendencies and were given social roles corresponding to them. This according to Gandhi created conditions both for individual development and social system. He believed that every man was born with some definite limitations which he cannot overcome. The law of *varna* system according to Gandhi was deduced from a careful observation of these limitations. It established certain sphere of action for certain people with certain tendencies. This will help to avoid all unworthy and unnecessary competition. Gandhi finds this system to be advantageous in many ways. It is advantageous economically because it involves division of labour. It ensures hereditary skills. It has all advantages of trade unions and above all it reduces the possibility of individual poverty or pauperism to the minimum. Gandhiji's appreciation of *varna* system was based on his faith in *Bhagavad Gita* because Lord Krishna said in it that the 'four-fold system (*Chathurvarnya*) was created by me according to the division of qualities (*gunas*) and functions (*Karmas*). Here it is clear that *varna* does not mean that somebody is born high and some low, *varna* does not give superiority to any body simply by birth. The original *varna*-distinctions were

based not on the distinctions of high and low, but on the capacities, skill and power inherent in an individual, and also on the principle of 'division of work'.

In the opinion of Gandhi according to *varna* system, an individual was a *brahmin* not because he was born a *brahmin*, but because he was brought up in an atmosphere that enabled him to perform the duties of a *brahmin*. Similarly, *Kshatriyas* or *Vaisyas* or *Sudras* were known by their respective names on account of the specific duties that they used to prefer. It was quite possible for a *sudra* to change his *varna* by successfully performing the duties of a different *varna*. Moreover, only because one *varna* performs a kind of duty, which, from a superficial point of view, appears to be a better kind of duty than the duties of another *varna*, the former does not become superior to the latter. All kinds of work are important and equally essential for the society, and therefore, all kinds of work are equal.

According to Gandhi *varna* means pre-determination of the choice of man's profession. The law of *varna* is that a man shall follow the profession of his ancestors for earning his livelihood. Every child naturally chooses his father's profession. *Varna* therefore is in a way that law of heredity. It is not a human invention but an immutable law of nature - the statement of a tendency that is ever present and at work. Gandhi made it clear that *varna* prescribes duties and obligations only. The performance of hereditary functions merely means that the kind of duty that he has to perform in the society has already been settled. This factor of heredity avoids the possibility of rift and strife ensuing from making fresh distribution of work everyday. Here Gandhi was asserting that in order to become a Brahmin it is necessary for a person to reveal the attributes of *brahmin*. Otherwise he ceases to be so. Because of this, Gandhi always related the doctrine of *varna* to that of *ashrama dharma*. The four fold divisions of class are added to the four fold divisions of the life of an individual. The four *ashramas* are *Brahmacarya*, *Grhastha*, *Vanaprastha* and *Sanyasa*. The ashram system is a means of systematic development for the better life. Thus *ashrama dharma* was the basis of *vedic* social organization. The notion of *dharma* was emphasized very much. *Dharma* here stands for duties. According to Gandhi every *varna* had specific and definite duties or *dharma*s attached to it. He believed that if these divisions are understood properly and their implications are fully realized, then a strong and moral society can be built on their basis.

As the champion of *varnashramadharma* Gandhi fought against the arrogant assumption of superiority of one *varna* over another. The very question of superiority or inferiority demonstrates the weakness of human nature. *Varnashrama*, on the other hand, is based on the rocky foundation of the recognition of the essential identity and oneness of all that lives. It excludes the very idea of superiority and it stands for the ideal of service to all in the society. It is through service, according to Gandhi, persons occupy their positions in their respective *varnas*. To him, no *varna* stands for inequality. He views all *varnas* as equal because the community depends on all of them in one way or another.

4.6 GANDHI'S VIEWS ON CASTE SYSTEM AND UNTOUCHABILITY

Gandhi did not think that caste system is a necessary corollary of *varna* system. He believed that caste system has been a blot on Hinduism and it has robbed the Hindu religion of its vitality and brilliance. He held that caste system is a degraded form of the original *varna* system as it has distorted the very spirit of *varna*. He said “*varnas* and *ashramas* are institutions which have nothing to do with castes. The law of *varna* teaches us that each one of us have to earn our bread by following the ancestral calling. It defines not our rights but our duties”. Gandhi felt that the caste system with the existing innumerable divisions and with the artificial divisions imposed upon it is the very antithesis of *varnashrama*. Gandhi made a distinction between *varna* and caste. Caste is determined at birth whereas *varna* is acquired by a person according to his nature. Thus caste is based upon birth while *varna* is in action. The idea of *varna* mainly lays emphasis on the ethical and intellectual capabilities of man. In the caste system special importance is given to birth rights and respect enjoyed on this account. Again, whereas the *varna* system was flexible the caste system is a rigid one and while the number of *varnas* were only four, the number of castes are many. Caste is an excrescence upon *varna*. It is a weedy growth fit only to be weeded out. He held that there is nothing in common between caste and *varna*, because while *varna* gives life, caste kills it. He also added that caste is a man-made institution and it has to go. It has no religious basis also. He was of opinion that Hindu society was full of chaos and confusion because of the wrong interpretation of *varna*. The *varna* of today means the gradations of high and low and it is a hideous travesty of the original. *Varna* has nothing to do with caste. Caste is an excrescence, just like untouchability upon Hinduism. It is this travesty of *varna* that has degraded Hinduism and India. Our failure to follow the law of *varna* is largely responsible for both our economic and spiritual ruin. It is one cause of unemployment and it is responsible for untouchability and defection from our faith. While defending *varnashrama* as a rational scientific fact, Gandhi criticizes untouchability as an immitigable evil.

Varna, according to Gandhi, does not admit the superiority or the inferiority of any *varna* over any other. So Gandhi held that *varna* system was against untouchability. Equality demanded that we should not distinguish among human beings on the basis of social occupation. Therefore, Gandhi through out his life waged a war against the evil of untouchability. By attacking untouchability, he was attacking both untouchability and the caste system. This was Jawaharlal Nehru's understanding of Gandhi's strategy. Elimination of untouchability was an important aspect of his programme. As equality of all men was the fundamental principle of Gandhian thought, he considered it his duty to uplift the untouchables and eradicate untouchability from the society. According to him, treating some as untouchables or inferiors is nothing but the abuse of *varnashrama*, which never entertains the feeling of superiority or inferiority. Viewing one as high or low is the weakness of human nature, and it reveals a person's unmanly nature. *Varnashrama* compels everyone to bow down his head in all humility before knowledge, before purity, before every person where God is seen face to face. The difference between *varna* system and untouchability is not of degree, but of kind. The basis of Gandhiji's religion was love and truth and he wanted to create a social order free from class and caste distinction. He considered untouchability as a crime on the basis of these principles and so he wanted to eradicate it.

Mahatma Gandhi held that by enforcing laws, one cannot remove untouchability. This can be removed only through the purification of one's own heart. He wanted every individual to be inwardly transformed in order to bring about a true equality. Untouchability could be removed only if the people responsible for perpetrating it wanted to do away with it. Because Gandhi views that every fight against untouchability is a religious fight, it can be gradually removed when the majority of Hindus realize that it is a heinous crime against God and man. Inter dining or an inter-caste marriage does not help the removal of untouchability. That is why he appealed to the hearts of every social reformer to take bold steps to allow the untouchables to enter temples. Side by side, he induced government of the state to legalize temple entry. He even suggested to the highly placed Hindus to adopt children of the untouchables as their own.

In order to tackle the problem of untouchability properly, Gandhiji went to the root of it. The root lies in the holy books like the Vedas and the *shastras*. He could not rewrite them and not improve them. So he interpreted the holy books in his way and made it his life's mission for the upliftment of untouchables. The Gandhian approach to the problem was simple and optimistic. He wanted truthful and non-violent means to be followed in this case also as in the pursuit of other ends of life.

Again, no *swaraj* is possible without the removal of untouchability. True democracy lies in the revival of *svadharma*, which means fulfillment of the duties that naturally come one's way. The members of the *ashrama* carried out their various responsibilities from a sense of duty, regardless of their original caste backgrounds. We are all born to only fulfill that dharma. It brings material well being to society and spiritual freedom to individual. Thus fulfilling *svadharma* alone is conducive to bring *sarvodaya* or welfare of all.

Gandhi's concept of *Ramarajya* stands for an egalitarian and non-violent democratic social order wherein moral values pervade all spheres of human life. Politically, it is a form of stateless society. Socially, it is a form of classless society where all persons are equally treated irrespective of caste, color, religion, sex and so on. Economically, it is a form of socialist society in which inequalities based on possession and non-possession vanish because all wealth belongs to the society as a whole. Thus, Gandhi suggested a one caste society as the solution to the caste system. He held that civic nationalism should replace casteism.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your Answers.

1) What are the reasons that made Gandhiji to fight against untouchability?

2) Describe in detail the features of *varna ashrama dharma*.

4.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we are giving a brief idea of the caste system in India in the introduction. Caste system in India with emphasis on *varna* system is dealt in detail as it forms the origin of the system in Hindu society. This is followed by an analysis of Gandhian social thought and his views on *varna* system. We see that he defended *varna* system very much but was against the then existing caste system of India which is a perverted form of *varna* system. This also made him to fight against untouchability which was prevalent in Indian society during that time. It is concluded by giving a brief idea of Gandhi's idea of one caste society which he suggested as a solution to the evils of caste system and how he incorporated this idea in his concepts of *Ramarajya*, *Sarvodaya* etc.

4.8 KEY WORDS

Excrecence : an unnecessary or unattractive addition

Mythical : that which is legendary

Metaphysical : of or relating to metaphysics/supernatural

Anthropologist : a scientist who studies about the origin, and development-
Of human race

Ethnic : a group sharing a common origin, culture or language

Hierarchy : a system in which grades or classes of status or authority are
ranked one above the other.

4.9 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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