Gandhian Sarvodaya

Prabodh Kumar Rath

M. K. Gandhi was by common consent one of the greatest leaders. Asia has produced in an era of colonial nationalisms and decolonization, who in his own life time was called a saint and a Machiavellian politician and who has become in independent India both a national myth and an embarrassment.¹

The political philosophy of M.K. Gandhi had been analysed thoroughly in the country and abroad. He had been a successful man of action in pre-independent India. He had struggled hard to win the freedom by non-violent means. He had aimed to end exploitation and set up a new social order on principles of truth and non-violence. He was a great social scientist often experiencing certain principles.

He located the truth of Indian ideas through study of Tolstoy and Ruskin. He can be acclaimed as a politician, prophet, a humanist, a social scientist, a democrat and above all an economist.

He viewed the function of the existing state as evil which hardly would permit a new social order of his dream. He opined for a co-operative federation of village republics. He pointed the role of majority rule in western democracy and precarious position of minorities. These are not conducive for promotion of welfare of one and all.

He coined the term Sarvodaya to mean “good of all” for the title version of Ruskin ‘not’ the greatest good of the greatest number, Gandhi viewed his classless society with welfare of all sections of people the poor, the down trodden, the exploited and the least. He had the ideal of Sarvodaya of social upliftment, economic emancipation and moral resurrection of all. Gandhiji considered this ideal as the only real dignified human doctrine is the greatest good of all, he cherished this welfare of the rich and the poor, the prince and the dullard, the dumb, deaf and mute. He had envisioned development with moral, ethical and spiritual values than the western economic parameter alone. Gandhiji cherished to establish a democratic state and a new social order on principles of truth and non-violence with Sarvodaya.

Sarvodaya as an ideal, a vision and a movement in Gandhian philosophy in its origin, dynamic in outlook, it is solidly based on a philosophy of praxis that demands the commitment of its follower to the care and the uplift of humanity, especially of the last and the least in any society. Gandhi’s dream of Sarvodaya society is an ideal towards which he worked and for which he expected a continuity of commitment till it is realized. The dynamics of Sarvodaya are deeply rooted in the world view of Gandhi, within which he thought and acted and from the
perspective of which he viewed other realities and which gave him the inner direction for his search for and experiments with truth.

The dynamics of Sarvodaya assumes a process that begins with the last and the least in the society and moves on toward the dawn of a Moksha on earth or Ram Rajya (Kingdom of God). This kingdom was to be attained on earth and had to be created and nurtured with Sarvodaya beliefs and practices. Through Sarvodaya Gandhi attempted to recapture the spiritual heritage of India, which had thrived in the villages and used it to build the nation. He criticized western civilization not because it was totally corrupt, but because it was contrary to the needs of India. In western values he saw a craze for comfort, multiplication of wants and self indulgence, which could lead to greed, conflict suppression of the weak by the strong and social disparity. Gandhi was convinced that decentralization of power is the key to just and equitable society. On economic level decentralization of power meant discovering big industries and encouraging village cottage industry. “Small is beautiful” thus would become the economic slogan. In a social level, the Harijans, Tribals and members the lower castes would be given all the rights of equality.

Sarvodaya owes its origin to Gandhi. The concept Sarvodaya was first used by Gandhi to express an idea which he found. Very captivating in Ruskins un to this last. In order to understand the full meaning and implications of Sarvodaya, one has to situate it in the broader perspective of Gandhi’s thinking. Gandhi never attempted to build a systematic thought pattern or sat down to write a whole book containing a systematic exposition of his ideas. Instead, he wrote in bits and pieces, usually for journals put out by his organizations. He never hesitated to admit inconsistencies in his thinking and writings. For Gandhi Sarvodaya was a concrete manifestation of many spiritual ideas found in many religious traditions. Like many other great concepts, the evolving and expanding concept of Sarvodaya had a small and humble beginning. Gandhi seems to have borrowed the concept Sarvoday from a Jain scripture written by Acharya Samaanta Bhadra who lived about 2000 years’ ago. No doubt for Gandhi Ruskin’s book “un to the last” was one of the main sources of inspiration for the formation of Sarvodaya. But Gandhi admits his debt to certain other sources like the “Gospels” by Tolstoy and Thoreau. Gandhi obviously drew a lot of inspiration from Jainism, besides Jainsim Gandhi’s thought owes much to the scriptures of Hinduism, Islam, Christianity and Buddhism.

The ideal of Sarvodaya is implied in the word itself; Sarva and Udaya. Sarva means “all” and the key to this and Udaya means “uplift”. The culmination of Sarvodaya vision, which was the life mission of Gandhi, is nothing but a liberated society, a Sarvodaya Samaj. He devoted his entire life for the achievement of this goal. Since Sarvodaya stood for the welfare of all, commitment to all kinds of sacrifices, even unto death, for the welfare of others was at the core of Sarvodaya.

Gandhi’s original use of the term Sarvodaya dates back to the year 1904. In translating into Gujarati, Ruskin’s unto this last the book that he acknowledge as exerting the most radical and revolutionary influence on his life and philosophy he first used the term Sarvodaya. The title of the book when translated in to Gujarati was Sarvodaya or “the
welfare of all” but the idea of “welfare of all” formed a part of his mental make up even before he read this book. Ruskin’s book according to Gandhi had three lessons for him.

1. That the good of the individual is contained in the good for all.

2. That a lawyer’s work has the same value as the barber’s in as much as all have the same right of earning their livelihood from their work.

3. That a life labourer of the that is the life of the tiller of the soil and the handicraftsman is the life worth living.”

But to Gandhi our of the three lessons the first one is most significant. But Gandhi had deep in his heart the cherished objective of welfare of all or Sarvodaya even before he read Ruskin’s “unto this last.”

Gandhi had deep down in his heart the desire to see the welfare of all. unto his last, he stimulated this desire and instilled in him a sense of determination and dedication to work for it, to give his life for it. Sarvodaya or welfare of all became hence forward his polestar. Unto this last literally translated lays emphasis on the last, the oppressed and the

down trodden rather. Than all.

As Vinoba Bhave has observed “The proper rendering of unto this last would be Antyodaya “uplift of lost”, rather than Sarvodaya.” But Gandhi intentionally used the word Sarvodaya or welfare of all instead of Antyodaya.

The Gandhian concept of Sarvodaya also inherited from the cultural heritage of India-Indian culture since the early days of recorded history clearly conceives of the welfare of all. Even Kautilya’s Arthasastra, a masterpiece of ancient Hindu treatise on diplomacy and state craft prescribes that the ruler must be just and righteous, his supreme consideration being the welfare of the people.

“In the happiness of the subjects lies his happiness, in their welfare his welfare. Whatever pleases himself he shall not consider as good, but whatever pleases his subjects he shall consider as good”.

Indians conceived of universal love and universal service in terms of “VASUDHAIVA KUTUMBKAM and SVADESA BHUBANA TRAYAM”. The concept of universal brotherhood, universal love and service to the entire creation is contained in the following ideology of Hindu saints and seers. The Bhagavad Gita is also replete with references to the concept of universal welfare or the welfare of all. Apart from Hindu Scriptures, Buddhism and Jainism served as adjuncts to Hinduism also lay equal emphasis on the welfare of all. The universal love and universal welfare form the corner-stones of the Buddhist philosophy. The Jainas equally accept as their ideal the welfare of all. Even before the Christian Era the term Sarvodaya was used by one Jaina teacher Samantabhadra. Islam not only conceives of Allah or God as Omniscient-Omnipresent having no beginning and no end. It also concedes that all is from God. The message of God and the kingdom of God advocated by him comprehend universal good or the welfare of all. Thus the Gandhian concept of Sarvodaya or the uplift or welfare of all was stimulated by the combined effect of “Common humanity” as preached by all religions.

The philosophy of Sarvodaya makes the attempt of reorienting human mind, of reconstructing human society. Sarvodaya means welfare and prosperity of all. All most progress together without
collision of interest. Prosperity is not attained in vacuum. It needs money after all but what type of money? Money earned without moral and spiritual consideration leads to animality. When becomes possession-oriented he does not care for anything good or bad. This leads to social imbalance. Sarvodaya is a philosophy which provides checks against these imperfections of human mind and soul. It endeavours to put man on the tract which may lead him to real social happiness. Sarvodaya ideals have been there since the Vedic times.

For building a Sarvodaya society in India, Gandhiji gave 18-fold programme. They are:

- Communal unity,
- Removal of untouchability,
- Prohibition, Khadi, Other rural industries, Village sanitation, Nai Talim, Adult Education,
- Uplift of women, Education in health and hygiene, Provincial language, National language, Economic equality, Uplift of Kisans, Uplift of Labour, Uplift of Lopers, Uplift of Adivasis, Uplift of Students.

Sarvodaya pleads for the replacement of the concept of class struggle by the more rational theory of social goods and harmony. This social harmony is to be realised not by mere verbal profession. It is to be experienced in daily conduct.

Gandhi’s ideals have often left little mark on Indian society and politics and where they have been influential they have often been distorted in practice by social conditions. What left by the Mahatma in modern India is not a social and political reformation, but merely a tiny group of devoted Gandhis. Some, under the leadership of Jaya Prakash Narayan, preach the doctrines of Sarvodaya, the welfare of all.

References:

3. Archana Sinha, the school philosophy of Sarvodaya (Patna, Janki, Prakasan) 1978
4. T.S. Deva Das, Sarvodaya and the problem of Political Sovereignty, Madras, 1974
7. Ibid, P -224
9. Kautilya, Arthasastra, Book-I, Chapter–VII.
10. Al Quoran, Chap-iv, quoted in Islam by Annie Besant P-22