
UNIT 10 M.K. GANDHI

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10.1 INTRODUCTION

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948), herein after Gandhiji, was undoubtedly the most authentic and celebrated representative of the wisdom and culture of India in our times. His countrymen address him, with respect, as the Mahatma. For Many, **among** the greatest, Gandhiji was the great. He was a social reformer, an economist, a political philosopher and a seeker of truth. We **consider** him as a 'yugapurusha', one who inaugurated a new era.

The contribution of Mohandas **Karamchand** Gandhi to the Indian national movement was **unparalleled**. He made the Indian National Congress a **peoples'** Congress and the national movement a **mass** movement. He made people fearless and bold and taught them the **non-violent** methods for fighting against injustice. He had a passion for individual liberty which was closely bound with his understanding of truth and self-realisation. His search for truth

led him to make deep forays within his own inner self as it led him to probe into the natural and social world around him, particularly the tradition which he considered his own.

Gandhiji's philosophy was a profound engagement with modernity and its pitfalls. Against the evils of wanton industrialisation, materialism and selfish pursuits, Gandhiji suggested, in turn, swadeshi, primacy of the self and trusteeship; against the institution of state, as the force personified, and the prevalent notion of democracy where only heads are counted, he favoured a swaraj type of democracy where everything springs from the free individual and where decisions are made bottom-up with the locus of power below. He proposed a minimal slate, vested only with coordinative powers, that supports decentralisation with the autonomous individual as its base of support.

A spiritual perspective infuses Gandhiji's whole approach to life. His political understanding and practices, suggestions on the economy, social mobilisation and practical life have their basis in morality and ethics. Pursuit of Truth is his mantra and non-violence was integral to it.

Among Gandhiji's notable writings, mention may be made of *An Autobiography: The Story of my Experiments with Truth*; *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*; *Panchayat Raj*; *Satyagraha in South Africa*; *Sarvodaya* and *Hind Swaraj*. He edited *Young India* which he later renamed as *Harijan* which remained his mouthpiece.

As is true about anyone else, Gandhiji was also influenced by many: Tolstoy (*Gospels in Brief, What to Do, The Kingdom of God is Within You*), Ruskin (*Unto This Last*), Thoreau (*Essay on Civil Disobedience*), Swami Vivekananda, Gokhale and Tilak, just to mention a few. There is the strong stamp of his family and the Indian national movement with its cross-currents on him. He was familiar with the teachings of the major religions of the world. He was exceptionally well-read and even translated such works as *Plato's Republic* into Gujarati. He maintained extensive correspondence with some of the most outstanding figures of his time. He maintained a whipping schedule travelling to different parts of the vast Indian subcontinent sometimes traversing long distances on foot. Many associated themselves personally close to him and he left his imprint on many who came into contact with him. He learnt from everyone he came across and no significant event of his times escaped his attention. His assassination brought to a close a life of undaunted courage resting on the call of conscience, committed to the service of his country, common welfare and universal love.

10.2 PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF GANDHI'S POLITICAL PERSPECTIVE

Gandhiji was a deeply religious man. This perspective shaped his politics, his economic ideas and his view of society. However, the religious approach that he imbibed was markedly different from other religious men. He wrote to Mr. Polak, "Most religious men I have met are politicians in disguise; I, however, who wear the guise of a politician, am at heart, a religious man. My bent is not political but religious."

He accepts the inner oneness of all existence in the cosmic spirit, and saw all living beings as representatives of the eternal divine reality. Divine presence envelops the whole world and it makes its reflective presence felt in men and women. Gandhiji believed that man's ultimate goal in life was self-realisation. Self-realisation, according to him, meant seeing God face to face, i.e., realising the absolute Truth or, what one may say, knowing oneself. He believed that it could not be achieved unless man identified himself with the whole of mankind. This necessarily involved participation in politics. Politics is the means, par excellence, to engage with the world. Such an engagement is expressed in service. Gandhiji was clear in his mind that Truth could not be attained by merely retiring to the Himalayas or being bogged down with rituals but in actively engaging with the world, keeping oneself open to the voice of God and critically reflecting upon oneself and letting others to reflect on you.

"Man's ultimate aim is the realisation of God, and all his activities, social, political, religious, have to be guided by the ultimate aim of the vision of God. The immediate service of all human beings becomes a necessary part of the endeavour, simply because the only way to find God is to see Him in His Creation and be one with it. This can only be done by service of all. I am a part and parcel of the whole, and I cannot find Him apart from the rest of humanity. My countrymen are my nearest neighbours. They have become so helpless, so resourceless, and so inert that I must concentrate myself on serving them. If I could persuade myself that I should find Him in a Himalayan cave I would proceed there immediately. But I know that I cannot find Him apart from humanity."

It is only through the means of self-purification that self-realisation can be attained. The fasts, prayers and works of service that he undertook were all directed towards such an end. In his Autobiography, Gandhiji says that self-realisation required self-purification as its ethical foundation. Man's moral life flows from such a search inward into his own self and expresses itself in outward activity of fellowship and concern to others. Gopinath Dhawan writes in this connection: "This ethical outlook is the backbone of Gandhiji's political philosophy even as his ethics has for its foundation in his metaphysical principles. To him the moral discipline of the individuals is the most important means of social reconstruction." Gandhiji invoked the five-fold moral principles: truth, non-violence, non-stealing, non-possession and celibacy. The observance of these moral principles would purify man and enable him to strive after self-realisation.

10.3 VIEWS ON HUMAN NATURE

Gandhiji's views on man, human nature and society are in consonance with his philosophical outlook and reflect his convictions regarding morality and ethical pursuit of life. At the same time he was deeply aware of the imperfections of human beings. What is important, however, is the disposition: "There is no one without faults', not even men of God. They are men of God not because they are faultless but because they know their own faults and are ever ready to correct themselves." Conscious as Gandhiji was about man's weaknesses as an individual or a member of a group, he still did not think of man merely or only as a brute. Man, he was convinced, was after all a soul as well. Even the most brutal of men, he felt, cannot disown the spiritual element in them, i.e., their potentiality for goodness. While regarding the individual as imperfect, he had great faith in human nature. "I refuse", he says, "to suspect human nature. Its will is bound to respond to any noble and

friendly action". At another place, he says, "... There are chords in every human heart. If we only know how to strike the right chord, we bring out the music." What distinguishes man from the brute is the self-conscious impulse to realise the divinity inherent in him. He writes: "We were born with brute strength but we were born in order to realise God who dwells in us. That indeed is the privilege of man and it distinguishes him from the brute creation." He argued that every man and woman has capacity in them to change their life and transform themselves truly into the self they are. "Man as animal," he says, "is violent, but as spirit (he) is non-violent. The moment he awakens to the spirit within he cannot remain violent."

Man is inherently predisposed towards his self-realisation. In him, moral qualities and social virtues such as love, cooperation, and tolerance preponderate over violence, selfishness and brutality, and man keeps working for higher life. He writes: "I believe that the sum total of the energy of mankind is not to bring us down but to lift us up and that is the result of the definite, if unconscious, working of the law of nature".

Gandhiji believed that human nature is, in its essence, one and that everyman has the capacity for the highest possible development: "The soul is one in all; its possibility is, therefore, the same for everyone. It is this undoubted universal possibility that distinguishes the human from the rest of God's creation."

10.4 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RELIGION AND POLITICS

The modern world attempted to mark off religion from the political domain and made religion a purely personal affair. Religious beliefs and commitments by themselves are not supposed to shape the political realm. Against such a position Gandhiji called for the reinsertion of religion in shaping public life and saw an intimate relationship between the health of a polity and religious pursuits.

10.4.1 Concept of Religion

What does religion stand for? How does one make sense of diversity of religions? Gandhiji's answer was, "I believe in the fundamental truth of all great religions of the world... they were at the bottom all one and were all helpful to one another." There were, according to him, as many religions as there were minds. Each mind, he would say, had a different conception of God from that of the other. All the same they pursue the same God. He insisted that religion be differentiated from ethics. Fundamental ethical precepts are common across religions although religions may differ from each other with respect to their beliefs and practices. "I believe that fundamental ethics is common to all religions. ... By religion I have not in mind fundamental ethics but what goes by the name of denominationalism".

Religion enables us to pursue truth and righteousness. Sometimes he distinguished religion in general and religion in a specific sense. One belongs to a specific religion with its beliefs and practices. As one proceeds through the path suggested by it one also outgrows its limitations and comes to appreciate the common thread that binds all religions and pursuers of truth. Gandhiji once said: "Let me explain what I mean by religion. It is not the Hindu religion which I certainly prize above all other religions, but the *religion* which transcends

Hinduism, which changes one's very nature, which binds one indissolubly to the truth within and whichever purifies. It is the permanent element in human nature which counts no cost too great in order to find full expression and which leaves the soul utterly restless until it has found itself knows its maker and appreciates the true correspondence between the Maker and itself'. Any kind of sectarian foreclosure, he felt, was a violation of human nature and its authentic striving. He said, "Religion does not mean sectarianism. It means a belief in ordered moral government of the universe. It is not less real because it is unseen. This religion transcends Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, etc. It does not supersede them. It harmonises them and gives them reality". Talking about specific religions, he says, "Religions are different roads converging to the same point. What does it matter that we take different roads, so long as we reach the same goal? In reality, there are as many religions as there are individuals". While diversity of religions is admissible, he did not think that any religion can claim itself as superior over others. In fact, when a religion claims itself superior to others its credentials are suspect and it becomes a hurdle in the path of our self-realisation: "So long as there are different religions, every one of them may need some distinctive symbol. But when the symbol is made into a fetish and an instrument of proving the superiority of one's religion over others, it is fit only to be discarded'.

10.4.2 Concept of Politics

Politics, for Gandhiji, was but a part of man's life. Though he thought that an increase in the power of the state did the greatest harm to mankind by destroying individuality which lay at the root of all progress, yet he viewed political power as a means that enabled people to better their conditions in every department of life. Politics therefore is an enabling activity. He wrote, "my work of social reform was in no way less subordinate to political work. The fact is that when I saw that to a certain extent my social work would be impossible without the help of political work, I took to the latter and only to the extent that it helped the former".

Political activity of man is closely associated with other activities of man and all these activities, according to Gandhiji, influence each other. "Life is one indivisible whole, and all my activities run into one another". Therefore political activity is intimately related to other walks of life and pursuits. What he hated in politics was the concentration of power and the use of violence associated with political power.

10.4.3 Relationship between Religion and Politics

He formulated the relationship between politics and religion as an intimate one. Religion cannot be divorced from politics. Given the fundamental objective of life as self-realisation, if politics does not enable religious pursuits it is not worthwhile at all. He stated categorically, "For me, politics bereft of religion is absolute dirt, ever to be shunned". He further thought that political activity that divorces itself from the quest of self-realisation is not worth the salt. Politics creates the conditions for pursuits which members of a polity feel are basic to the making of their selves. What could be more basic than pursuit of one's own self? He felt, "For me there is no politics without religion – not the religion of the superstitious and the blind, religion that hates and fights, but the universal religion of toleration."

Politics is intimately related to the entire activities of human life. This is particularly true in

modern times. He wrote, "The whole gamut of man's activities today constitutes an indivisible whole. You cannot divide social, economic, political and purely religious work into watertight compartments."

While regarding politics as the method through which men can rule themselves without violence and religion as the embodiment of ethical and moral rules, Gandhiji argued that their close relationship has to be recognised. So much importance did he attach to politics that he insisted on taking part in politics as if it is something religious in nature.

As evident, Gandhiji looked at politics with a view to reform it. He firmly believed that he could lead a truly religious life only when he took part in politics. But the motivation that imbues one in participation in public life is important.

The Gandhian view of politics was a politics where people participated in public affairs for purposes of serving others. Hence, for him, all political activities concerned themselves with the welfare of everyone. As political activity is closely related to the cause of the people it is essential that such activity be permeated by religion or at least should be the concern of the people who are religiously motivated. Politics permeated by religion, according to him, means politics dedicated to serve the cause of humanity which eventually leads to a better understanding of truth. For him, the kingdom of God lies here in this world, in the men here, and within men, those whose political activity is directed towards the service of humanity. To quote him, "I could not be leading a religious life, unless I identified myself with the whole of mankind, and I could not do so unless I took part in politics".

For Gandhiji, politics, is one method of seeking a part of the whole truth. Political activity helps man to achieve the capacity to rule himself, a capacity wherein he obeys rules of the society without any external force or external imposition. Religion and politics, so understood, make, a good case for swaraj. He regards concentration of power as detrimental to the individual freedom and initiative

Gandhiji never considered political power as an end; it was a means to enable people to better their condition in every walk of life. For him political power was a means to regulate public life at various levels in tune with the principles stated above. If the life of a polity becomes self-regulated, there was no need to have representative government. It will then be an enlightened anarchy. In such a state everyone will be his own ruler respecting the self-rule of others over themselves. It would then be a completely non-violent society and state. He however felt that no society can ever become completely non-violent but if it does 'it would be the purest anarchy'. The latter is the ideal to strive for. In the ideal state, therefore, there is no political power because there is no state.

10.5 UNITY OF ENDS AND MEANS

That the ends and means are related to each other is one of the basic tenets of Gandhian philosophy. Gandhiji drew no distinction between the means and the ends implying thereby that one leads to the other and that the latter is the effect of the former, Such an assertion, for him, approximates the scientific principle of the relationship between cause and effect. Gandhiji would not like to attain the noblest end if that was to be achieved through impure means.

10.5.1 Relationship between Means and Ends

He felt that the relationship between means and ends are integral and constitutive. "Means and ends are convertible terms in my philosophy of life". Refuting those who opined that 'means are after all means', he said, "means are after all everything". As the means so the end. There is no wall of separation between means and ends. While good ends have to be cherished they are not in our control. But means are in our control. "Indeed the Creator has given us control (and that too very limited) over means, none over the end. Realisation of the goal is in exact proportion to that of the means. This is a proposition that admits of no exception." Therefore, "If one takes care of the means, the end will take care of itself."

He rebuked those who think that if one seeks good ends the morality of means can be left to themselves. For him, "Impure means result in impure end... One cannot reach truth by untruthfulness. Truthful conduct alone can reach Truth".

He argued that means and ends are enmeshed into each other. "Are not Non-violence and Truth twins?" He replies, "The answer is an emphatic 'No'. Non-violence is embedded in Truth and *vice-versa*. Hence has it been said that they are faces of the same coin. Either is inseparable from the other."

Inspired by the *Gita*, the ethical principle that he upheld was *atmasakti*. One does not perform his duty expecting the fruit of his action and does it for the sake of duty. It sought detachment from the fruits of action. "By detachment I mean that you must not worry whether the desired result follows from your action or not, so long as your motive is pure, your means is correct. Really it means that things will come right in the end if you take care for the means and leave the rest to Him."

His approach to action was to be stated by him in categorical terms "I have... concerned myself principally with the conservation of the means and their progressive use. I know if we can take care of them, attainment of the goal is assured. I feel too that our progress towards the goal will be in exact proportion to the purity of our means.

This method may appear to be long, perhaps too long, but I am convinced that it is the shortest."

10.6 SATYA, SATYAGRAHA AND AHIMSA

Truth or Satya, for Gandhiji, is God himself. He therefore changed the statement, "God is Truth", later in his life into, "Truth is God" and suggested that it was one of the fundamental discoveries of his life's experiments. It is Truth, he says, that exists; what does not exist is untruth. The life of man, for Gandhiji, is a march of his pursuit in search of Truth or God.

According to Gandhiji, truth is what the inner self experiences at any point of time; it is an answer to one's conscience; it is what responds to one's moral self. He was convinced that knowledge alone leads a person to the truth while ignorance takes one away from the truth.

Satyagraha means urge for Satya, or truth. Satyagraha is not merely the insistence on truth;

it is, in fact, holding on to truth through ways which are moral and non-violent; it is not the imposition of one's will over others, but it is appealing to the reasoning of the opponent; it is not coercion but is persuasion.

Gandhiji highlights several attributes of satyagraha. It is a moral weapon and does not entertain ill-feeling towards the adversary; it is a non-violent device and calls upon its user to love his enemy; it does not weaken the opponent but strengthens him morally; it is a weapon of the brave and is constructive in its approach. For Gandhiji, a Satyagrahi is always truthful, morally imbued, non-violent and a person without any malice; he is one who is devoted to the service of all.

Truth, he firmly believed, can be attained only through non-violence which was not negative, meaning absence of violence, but was positively defined by him as love. Resort to non-violence is recourse to love. In its positive sense, non-violence means love for others; in its negative sense, it seeks no injury to others, both in words as well as deeds. Gandhiji talked of non-violence of different people. There is the non-violence of the brave: one has the force but he does not use it as a principle; there is the non-violence of the weak: one does not have faith in non-violence, but he uses it for attaining his objectives; there is the non-violence of the coward: it is not non-violence, but impotency, more harmful than violence. For Gandhiji, violence was a better option than cowardice.

Through non-violence one appeals to the truth that nestles in people and makes the latter realise it in themselves, come around, and join hands in the common march to truth along with those whom they earlier considered as their adversaries. Given the enmeshing of means and ends, Gandhiji, often saw Love, Truth, God and Non-violence as interchangeable terms. Truth or God or Self-realisation being man's ultimate goal in life, this goal can be attained only through non-violence or ahimsa.

10.7 CONCEPT OF SWARAJ

Gandhiji's concept of Swaraj was not merely confined to freeing India from the British yoke. Such freedom he desired but he said that he did not want to exchange 'king log for king stork'. Swaraj is not transfer of political power to the Indians. Nor does it mean, as he emphasised, mere political self-determination. For him, there was no Swaraj in Europe; for him the movement of Swaraj involved primarily the process of releasing oneself from all the bondages one is prey to both internal and external. It involves a movement of self-purification too. It is not the replacement of one type of authority by another. He felt, "the real Swaraj will come not by the acquisition of authority by a few but by the acquisition of the capacity by all to resist authority when abused". Swaraj, he used to say, is power of the people to determine their lot by their own efforts and shape their destiny the way they like. In other words, "Swaraj is to be attained by educating the masses to a sense of their capacity to regulate and control authority".

Swaraj is usually translated in English as 'Independence'. Gandhiji, however, gave this term a much deeper meaning. "The word Swaraj is a sacred word, a Vedic word, meaning self-rule and self-restraint and not freedom from all restraint which 'independence' often means". He saw swaraj as freedom for all plus self-control by all. It is related to the inner strength

and capacity of a people which enable them to understand and control their social world: "The outward freedom that we shall attain will only be in exact proportion to the inward freedom to which we may have grown at a given moment. And if this is the correct view of freedom, our chief energy must be concentrated upon achieving reform from within".

Freedom from within means control over oneself, which, in turn, means a life based on understanding one's own self. Gandhi perceived non-violence as the key to attain such freedom and self-control. Non-violence needs to be imbued in our thought, words and deeds. Once non-violence as love takes possession of these dimensions of the person then a sense of duty prevails over those of rights. We tend to do things for others without expecting returns thereon. "In Swaraj based on Ahimsa, people need not know their rights, but it is necessary for them to know their duties. There is no duty that does not create corresponding rights and those rights alone are genuine rights, which flow from the performance of duty.

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Swaraj is thus a basic need of all. It recognises no race, religion, or community. "Nor is it the monopoly of the lettered persons..... Swaraj is to be for all, including the former but emphatically including the maimed, the blind, the starving, toiling millions. A stout hearted, honest, sane, literate man may well be the first servant of the nation." Swaraj will necessarily be inclusive of the poor and the toiling masses. Therefore, he adds, "Let there be no mistake as what Purna Swaraj means. It is full economic freedom for the toiling millions. It is no unholy alliance with any interest for their exploitation. Any alliance must mean their deliverance." (Young *India*, 16.4.1931, p.77). In the same vein, Gandhiji made it very clear that India's Swaraj did not mean the rule of majority community i.e. Hindus. 'Every community would be at par with every other under the Swaraj constitution.'

Swaraj, implying government based on the consent of the people is not a gift which comes from above, but it is something that comes from within. Democracy, therefore, is not the exercise of the voting power, holding public office, criticising government; nor does it mean equality, liberty or security, though important as they all are in a democratic polity. It is when the people are able to develop their inner freedom which is people's capacity to regulate and control their desires/impulses in the light of reason that freedom rises from the individual and strengthens him.

His Swaraj had economic, social, political and international connotations. Economic Swaraj, as he says himself, "stands for social justice, it promotes the good of all equally including the weakest, and is indispensable for decent life." Social Swaraj centres on "an equalisation of status." Political Swaraj aims at "enabling people to better their condition in every department of life." In the international field, swaraj emphasised on interdependence. "There is", he says, "No limit to extending our services to our neighbours across state-made frontiers. God never made those frontiers."

10.8 ON PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY

Gandhiji did not subscribe to the view that democracy meant the rule of the majority. He gave several definitions of democracy on several occasions. When we put them together, Gandhiji may say, "Democracy must in essence... mean the art and science of mobilising the

entire physical, economic and spiritual resources of all the various sections of the people in service of the common good of all." He further said, "true democracy or the **Swaraj** of the masses can never come through untruthful and violent means, for the simple reason that the natural corollary to their use would be to remove all opposition through the suppression or extermination of the antagonists. That does not make the individual freedom. **Individual** freedom can have the fullest play only under a regime of unadulterated **Ahimsa**."

Democracy is a reflective and deliberative activity marking the presence of **everyone**. "In true democracy every man and woman is taught to think for himself or herself. **How** this real revolution can be brought about I do not know except that every reform, like charity must begin at home." Democracy extends consideration to the viewpoints of others as it expects consideration to one's own viewpoint. "The golden rule of conduct (in a democracy), he said, "is mutual toleration, seeing that we will never all **think** alike and that **we** shall always see Truth in fragments and from different angles of vision. Conscience is not the same thing for all. Whilst, therefore, it is a good guide for individual conduct, imposition of that conduct upon all will be an insufferable interference with everybody—else's **freedom** of conscience."

Gandhiji was wedded to adult suffrage. He felt that it is the only way to safeguard the interests of all: the minorities, the poor, the dalits, the peasants and women. He **hoped** that the voters give weight to the qualifications of the candidates, not their caste, community, or party affiliation. He wanted men of character to **enter** legislatures for even if they commit mistakes they would never do anything against the interests of the voters. Men and women without character elected by the people would destroy the democratic system.

Referring to parliamentary democracy in 1931, Gandhi envisaged a constitution of **independent** India "which will release India from all thralldom and patronage, and give her, if need be, the right to **sin**". He laid down his vision of an independent India as follows: "I shall work for an India in which the poorest shall feel that it is their country in whose **making** they have an effective voice; an India in which there shall be no high class and low class of people; an India in which all communities shall live in perfect harmony. **There** can be no room in such an India for the curse of untouchability, or the curse of intoxicating drinks and drugs. Women will enjoy **same** rights as men. Since we shall be at peace **with** all the rest of the world, neither exploiting nor being exploited. We shall have the smallest army imaginable, All interests not in conflict with the interests of the dumb millions will be scrupulously respected whether foreign or indigenous. Personally, I hate distinction between foreign and indigenous. This is the India of my dreams. ... I shall be satisfied with nothing less."

10.9 GRAM SWARAJ OR DEVELOPMENT FROM BELOW

According to the Gandhian thinking, democracy can function smoothly and according to the concept of **swaraj** only if it is decentralised. "Centralisation as a system is inconsistent with non-violent structure of society". He wanted the centre of power to **move** from cities to villages.

While **conceptualising** the decentralised system of rule, Gandhi advanced his theory of Oceanic Circle, which he explained in the following words:

"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. But it will be an oceanic circle whose **centre** will be the individual always ready to perish for the village, the latter ready to perish for the circle of villages, till at last the whole becomes a life **composed** of individuals, never aggressive in their arrogance but ever humble, sharing the majesty of the oceanic circle of which they are integral units.

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. Gandhi defended such a position even at the cost of being called a utopian. "I may be taunted with the retort that this is all Utopian and, therefore, not worth a single thought. If Euclid's point, though incapable of being drawn by human agency, has **an-imperishable** value, my picture has **its** own for mankind to live. Let India live for this true picture, though never realisable in its completeness".

The building blocks of democracy have to be villages. **Gandhiji** wanted each village to have an annually elected Panchayat to manage the affairs of the village. Each village following the oceanic circle theory would be autonomous yet interdependent. As Gandhiji argued, "My idea of village **swaraj** is that it is a complete republic, independent of its neighbours for its own vital wants, and yet inter-dependent for many others in which dependence is a necessity".

10.10 IDEAS ON THE ECONOMY

Gandhiji's political philosophical ideas came to shape his ideas on the economy centrally. His economic thought revolves around the following normative ideas: (i) Economic process must work towards equality and non-exploitation (ii) it must be consistent with full employment (iii) it must provide **low** priced consumer goods which satisfy the needs of the people (iv) all those industries with sophisticated technology must be in the public sector (v) no mass production without equal distribution.

For Gandhiji, the two cardinal principles in his economic thought are the promotion of equality together with social justice. For the purpose the three principles which he prescribed are: (a) of non-possession **i.e.** economic policies to be pursued on need-base and not on the **want-**base (b) inequality arises with irrational desires to have more than what one wants (c) in technologically advanced countries, people do not consume goods in the same proportion they produce; labour-intense technologies are to be preferred to the capital-intensive ones.

Gandhiji's economics stressed on equality, social justice, full employment and harmonious labour-capital relations. The last two centuries produced a good number of social thinkers and scientists. **Mam** offered an alternative to the capitalistic system articulated by Adam Smith. He called it communism. In between capitalism and communism stood socialism. Capitalism gave rise to colonialism and exploitation of the poor against which Gandhi fought all through his **life**. But he opposed capitalism as much as communism. For him the individual, his freedom, dignity and satisfying life were more important than mere economic progress, which both capitalism and communism promised to deliver, Anything that did not liberate the man was unacceptable to Gandhi.

Morality and ethics occupy a central place in Gandhian concept of economics. "True economics never mitigates against the highest ethical standard, just as all true ethics to be worth its name must. An economics that inculcates Mammon worship and enables the strong to amass wealth at the expense of the weak is a false and dismal science. It spells death. True economics, on the other hand, stands for social justice; it promotes the good of all, equally including the weakest, and is indispensable for decent life."

In Gandhian economics, the supreme consideration is the human being. Every man has the right to live and, therefore, to find work to meet his basic needs of food, clothing, shelter, education, health and self-esteem. He felt, 'these should be freely available to all as God's air and water are ought to be. They should not be made a vehicle of traffic for exploitation of others. Their monopolisation by any country, nation or group of persons would be unjust'.

He argued that we must utilise all human labour before we entertain the idea of employing mechanical power. "Real planning", according to Gandhi, "consists in the best utilisation of the whole man-power of India and the distribution of the raw products of India in her numerous villages instead of sending them outside and re-buying finished articles at fabulous prices."

10.11 SARVODAYA: THE RISE OF ALL

Gandhiji was critical of the path both capitalist and socialist economies had taken, America harbours massive poverty amidst abundant wealth. "America is the most industrialised country in the world, and yet it has not banished poverty and degradation. That is because it neglects the universal manpower and concentrates power in the hands of the few who amass fortunes at the expense of the many." Socialist economies, he felt, put the cart before the horse: "As I look at Russia where the apotheosis of industrialisation has been reached, the life there does not appeal to me. To use the language of the Bible, 'what shall it avail a man if he gain the whole world and lose his soul? In modern terms, it is beneath human dignity to lose one's individuality and become a mere cog in the machine. I want every individual to become a full blooded, fully developed member of the society."

While he looked at socialism positively, he felt that it was deeply enmeshed in violence "Socialism was not born with the discovery of the misuse of capital by capitalists. As I have contended, socialism, even communism is explicit in the first verse of *Ishopanishad*. What is true is that when some reformers lost faith in the method of conversion, the technique of what is known as scientific socialism was born. ... I accepted the theory of socialism even while I was in South Africa. My opposition to socialists and others consists in attacking violence as a means of affecting any lasting reform." Further, socialism has only one aim that is material progress. "I want freedom for full expression of my personality. ... Under the other socialism, there is no individual freedom. You own nothing, not even your body." (*Harijan*, 4.8.1946)

Against capitalism and socialism, Gandhi proposed the concept of Sarvodaya, which was based on three basic principles:

1. that the good of the individual is contained in the good of all;

2. that the 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 of labour, i.e., the life of the tiller of the soil and the handicraftsman is the life worth living.

10.12 THEORY OF TRUSTEESHIP

One of the most original contributions of Gandhiji in the area of economics is the concept of trusteeship. Gandhiji wanted complete equality in so far as the basic needs of the people were concerned. In fact he wanted the basic needs of all including animals to be met satisfactorily. But at the same time, he wanted people to have incentives to remain economically **active** and produce more. This naturally would lead to some people having more than what they need. They would be rich but there would be no poor because the basic needs of all would be satisfied.

To ensure that those who were rich did not use their property for selfish purposes or to control others, he derived the term "Trusteeship". Explaining the meaning underlying this term he said, 'Everything belonged to God and was from God. Therefore, it was meant for His people as a whole, not for particular individuals. When an individual had more than his proportionate portion he became trustee of that portion for God's people'.

He wished that the idea of trusteeship becomes a gift from India to the world. Then there would be no exploitation and no reserve. In these distinctions he found the seeds of war and conflict.

He elaborated on his idea of trusteeship extensively. He suggested "as to the successor, the trustee in office would have the right to nominate his successor subject to the legal sanction."

The idea underlying the concept of trusteeship was twofold:

1. All humans are born equal and hence have a right to equal opportunity. This means that all must have their basic needs fully satisfied.
2. All humans, however, are not endowed with equal intellectual and physical capacity. Some would have greater capacity to produce than others. Such persons must treat themselves as trustees of the produce beyond their basic needs.
3. Violence and force as modes of distribution of produce have to be rejected,

10.13 EVILS OF INDUSTRIALISM

Gandhiji was against industrialisation on a mass scale because it leads to many insoluble problems such as the exploitation of the villagers, urbanisation, environmental pollution etc. He wanted manufacturing to be done in villages and by the villages. This would keep the majority of the people of India fully employed; they would be able to meet their basic needs and would remain self-reliant. Even modern machines could be used provided they did not lead to unemployment and become the means of exploitation.

Gandhiji considered the prevailing industrialisation as a disease. 'Let us not be deceived by catchwords and phrases', he admonished. Modern machines 'are in no way indispensable for the permanent welfare of the human race.' He was not against machinery as such; he was against industrialism, i.e. industrial and mechanical mentality. "Industrialisation is, I am afraid, going to be a curse for mankind. Exploitation of one nation by another cannot go on for all time. Industrialism depends entirely on your capacity to exploit ... India, when it begins to exploit other nations - as it must if it becomes industrialised - will be a curse for other nations, a menace for the world".

It is because of this perspective that Gandhi suggested the boycott of mill made cloth and manufacture of handmade cloth in each and every household particularly in the rural areas. The efforts he made to promote Khadi were just a beginning of the movement he wanted to launch to promote village industries in general. One must see Gandhiji's concept of basic education (nai taleem) in relation to his movement for village industries.

10.14 CONCEPT OF SWADESHI

Swaraj as we would see later does not mean just political freedom. Gandhi ascribed a far deeper meaning to this term. It means self-control to begin with. Swaraj and Swadeshi go together. Swadeshi is 'that spirit in us which restricts us to use the services of our immediate surroundings to the exclusion of the more remote'.. "Much of the deep poverty of the masses", he felt, "is due to the ruinous departure from swadeshi in the economic and industrial life." Swadeshi will not merely reinforce autonomous local units but also build cooperative relations with others with whom they need to associate. 'If we follow the swadeshi doctrine, it would be your duty and mine to find our neighbours who can supply our wants and to teach them to supply them..... Then every village of India will almost be self-supporting and self-contained unit exchanging only such necessary commodities with other villages as are not locally producible".

Swadeshi and self-sufficiency go together. The former is possible only if the latter is accepted as a matter of principle. Each individual, each family, each village and each region would be economically self-reliant, "Self-sufficiency does not mean narrowness; to be self-sufficient is not to be altogether self-contained. In no circumstances would we be able to produce all the things we need. So though our aim is complete self-sufficiency, we shall have to get from outside the village what we cannot produce in the village; we shall have to produce more of what we can in order thereby to obtain in exchange what we are unable to produce".

There are two other concepts, which go together with Swadeshi: they are Decentralisation and Cooperation. "Interdependence is and ought to be as much the ideal of man as self-sufficiency. Man is a social being. Without inter-relation with society he cannot realise his oneness with the universe or suppress his egotism... If man were so placed or could so place himself as to be absolutely above all dependence on his fellow-beings, he would become so proud and arrogant, as to be veritable burden and nuisance to the world. Dependence on society teaches him the lesson to humility". He felt that the value of self-sufficiency central to swadeshi has its limits. 'Self Sufficiency too has a limit. Drops in separation could only fade away; drops in cooperation made the ocean which carried on its broad bosom greyhounds".

The concept of Swadeshi, for Gandhi, is encompassing. In religion, it means to be faithful to our ancestral religion; in politics, it means the use of indigenous institutions; in economics, it emphasised on the use of things produced in the immediate neighbourhood; one must prefer locally produced things even if they are of relatively inferior quality or costly. It does not mean that one should hate foreign-made products. Gandhiji had a place for foreign-made goods, especially medicines and life-saving drugs if they are not produced in the country.

10.15 SUMMARY

There is a remarkable consistency and continuity in the political ideas of Gandhiji and the uses he put them to. Gandhi considered man as embodying the spiritual principle in him which is divine. His self-realisation is the prime task of every man and woman. While man is not perfect and desires and mundane interests constantly pitch themselves as his prime wants, he has an innate disposition to seek his spiritual realisation. If the spiritual nature of man has to be privileged then man's priorities have been to be ordered accordingly. He therefore bitterly criticised modernity and its insinuations which confine man to this world and its allurements. He argued that the divine nature of man makes religion to engage itself positively with the world. He did not agree that religion should be separated from politics. He thought that politics offers great opportunities to serve others and such service is an essential attribute of religion. While Gandhi believed in his own religion and thought highly of it, he had equal respect for all other religions, considered all of them as true but not without shortcomings. He considered that ends and means are integral to each other. He did not subscribe to the idea that good ends justify appropriate means. He applied this principle to the pursuit of truth as well, which he considered as God himself. Truth as end and non-violence as means are inseparable.

While Gandhiji appreciated the need of power in the absence a fully self-regulated and self-directed order, which he called swaraj, he did not consider political power as an end; it was only a means to serve the people, especially the poor. Its primary purpose is to enable people to be themselves and to establish the conducive conditions for the purpose. He was the votary of swaraj which meant more than political freedom. Swaraj to him meant self-control. A person who can control his thoughts, words and actions is well-disposed to self-realisation. If all are imbued with swaraj individually and collectively, an ideal society would become a reality,

He saw democracy as an art and science of mobilising the entire physical, economic and spiritual resources of all the various sections of the people in service of the common good of all. It cannot come about by untruth and violence.

Gandhi considered capitalism, communism and socialism as socio-political systems that do not recognise adequately the freedom, equality and dignity of the individual. Their priorities remain lop-sided. He advocated the principle of sarvodaya – the rise of all – which ensures basic needs of all and extends equal consideration to all.

Gandhi rejected the concept of *Homo economicus* on which modern economics and civilisation is based. Gandhian economics focuses on meeting the basic needs of all through self-employment. This is possible only if the wants are minimised and they are placed in perspective

with the essential striving of man. Gandhi believed that trusteeship ensures creativity and initiative, ensures freedom while at the same time ensuring equal distribution of goods. Gandhi stood for village based decentralised system of governance. He wanted to see villages as self-governing republics with maximum autonomy but at the same time cooperating and interdependent upon one another. He defended swadeshi wherein all the basic needs of citizens can be met locally. Gandhiji not only encountered strong opposition to his ideas but also received support in ample measure. But these consequences did not deter him from holding fast to his ideas and formulate his practices accordingly.

10.16 EXERCISES

1. Explain briefly the philosophical foundations of Gandhiji's political philosophy.
2. List the special features of Gandhian economics.
3. Highlight the Gandhian concepts of economic equality and swadeshi.
4. Discuss Gandhiji's views on religion and its relationship with politics.
5. Comment on Gandhi's views on the End-Means unity.
6. Discuss Gandhiji's views on truth and non-violence.
7. Explain the uses of power according to Mahatma Gandhi.
8. Discuss Gandhiji's ideas of parliamentary democracy.
9. Do the present day village panchayats meet the requirements of Gram Swaraj?