



Mahatma Gandhi Vs. Karl Marx on Socialism

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Abstract: *This paper examines some of the fundamentals of Gandhian and Marxian philosophies with reference to the meaning and instruments of socialism. It has been claimed in the conclusion that while the Gandhians can claim its contemporary superior relevance, it has not been fully adopted in our country and that most of us just pay lip service to it. Often attempts are made to compare Gandhi and Marx; the two messiahs of the downtrodden and their views on socialism. Although some people describe Gandhi as the mascot of the bourgeoisie, one finds, again and again, oneself confused and the explanations remain inconclusive. Here the effort has been made to examine the widening gap and narrowing escape between them and the explanations offered. Its therapeutic implications with the help of two examples (brief case studies).*

Key Words: paper examines, fundamentals, Marxian philosophies, instruments, socialism, claimed.

Economic historians more or less agree that there has always been a historical process of change from 'primitive production relations' to 'feudalism' and thereafter the advent of 'capitalism' and 'socialism' associated with primitive, simple, advanced, and sophisticated technology. This is the course of the development of the economic system running through the pages of history. And it is said that just as Darwin discovered the law of evolution of organic nature, so Marx discovered the law of historical materialism. But it does not mean that it should follow the same path everywhere.

It "requires only that there should be a succession of modes of production, though not necessarily any particular mode of production and perhaps not in any particular predetermined order." And, as such, one is tempted to agree with Maurice Dobb who said: "Economic analysis makes sense and can only bear fruit if it is joined to a study of historical development." Under socialism, means of production are owned by the society and there is a socialisation of means of production, distribution and also of accumulation.

There are no antagonistic classes between rich and poor. All distinctions between physical work and mental work and town and village life are wiped out. Class conflict is absent.

There is no exploitation of one class by another. This is scientific socialism.

On the other hand, for Gandhi "socialism is

a beautiful word" as he himself said, "and so far, as I am aware in socialism all the members of the society are equal - none low, none high. In the individual's body the head is not high because it is (at) the top . . . nor are the soles of the feet low because they touch the earth. Even as members of the individual's body are equal so are the members of the society. . . The prince and the peasant will not be equalled by cutting off the prince's head nor can the process of cutting off equalize the employer and the employed." And "even a king can be socialist by becoming a servant of the people." According to him, socialism is a mode of personal conduct and form of social service in which there is room for both the rich and the poor. He believed in simple life and the limitation of wants. He was to establish a village-based industry where the people would rule themselves in autonomous villages. He emphasised physical or manual labour. His aim of socialism is to break the aristocracy of the brain as also the aristocracy of wealth. Socialism, for Gandhi, was love for and the identification with the poor, and socialistic endeavour consisted of service for the poor. Thus, his view was humanitarian socialism.

Capitalism and Industrialisation-

According to Marx, there is industrialisation and large-scale production in capitalism. Individual ownership of means of production, appropriation of surplus value, and wide use of machines dictate the system. The development of science and technology



multiplies and goes on improving for further economic development.

On the other hand, Gandhi was firmly convinced that modern technology was responsible for the multiplication of material wants. Comparing the machinery with a snake hole, he enumerated the evils of its growing use. He called the modern civilization (which aims at destroying time and space) Satanic. He believed that the indiscriminate use of machinery on a large scale was a great sin. To him, the craze for machinery created a class of wealthy men and caused an uneven distribution of wealth which strengthens imperialism. "Industrialization is, I am afraid", said Gandhi, "going to be a curse" for mankind. Industrialisation depends entirely on your capacity to exploit, on foreign markets being open to you. ..." Marx also believed that these evils are inherent in the very system of capitalism associated with large-scale production, industrialization, and the use of machinery. Marx saw the removal of these evils in socialism on the grave of capitalism. According to him, socialism is the advanced stage of capitalism. Only the private ownership of means of production and appropriation of surplus value is replaced by social ownership and social appropriation. But Gandhi wanted not to destroy the capitalists, but only capitalism. In July 1940 Gandhi wrote in Harijan: "Exploitation of the poor can be extinguished not by effecting the destruction of a few millionaires but by removing the ignorance of the poor and teaching them to non-cooperate with their exploiters. This will convert the exploiters also." His aim was not to establish a socialised state which would ensure work, wages, and equality to all, but to establish "a village-based society where the people would rule themselves in autonomous villages."

He also emphasised the importance of physical or manual labour. Gandhi imbibed from Ruskin the idea that a lawyer's work had the same value as a barber's. An egalitarian society would be truly established only when all distinctions between man and man would disappear. This will happen only when all men do physical labour. According to him, the aim of socialism is to break down the aristocracy of the brain as also the aristocracy of

wealth. Brain workers would not be able to appreciate a lot of manual workers unless physical labour was made the supreme source of wealth. Gandhi said: "In my system, it is labour which is a current coin, not metal. Any person who uses his labour has that coin, his wealth." Thus, like Gandhi, Marx also believed in the equality of mental and physical labour. Marx and Gandhi seem to be on the same plane. The aim is the same. Both aim at removing the disparity between mental and physical labour. But the approaches are different. Gandhi wanted to put the physical labour on the highest scale as the source of wealth and made it compulsory for all, while in Marxian socialism the advancement of all wipes out the distinction between the two.

The exploitation of Workers- In the Marxian analysis of capitalism, workers are paid lower wages than what they produce. Surplus value is created which is appropriated by capitalists. Thus, there is a capitalist surplus. With the improvement of the proportion of constant capital and variable capital, and the development of capitalism this surplus-value rises. The development of capitalism is associated with imperialism. And at last, this surplus becomes so huge that capitalism is faced with a crisis for a lack of demand. Class conflict becomes acute. Socialism replaces capitalism. Thus, it is the exploitation of workers which brings socialism to the grave of capitalism.

On the other hand, Gandhi was also well versed in the evils of the modern industrial system in which workers are exploited. As such, he saw its removal in nationalised and state-owned factories and in the institution of trusteeship. Capitalists, the owner of factories, pay low wages and amass wealth for further amassing. While talking to Horace Alexander, Gandhi once remarked that a capitalist who has amassed a large sum is a thief." He was also apprehensive of the evils of imperialism. Industrialisation and mechanisation are also meant to exploit other countries. Thus, he disfavoured the replacement of hand labour by power-driven machines and welcomed simple tools and implements which helped workers and lightened the burden of the millions of cottages and small-scale workers. The



machine was bad which ceased to help the individual worker and encroached upon his individuality.

While giving an interview with an associate of his, Gandhi reiterated his view and said "but I am socialist enough to say that such factories should be nationalised or state-controlled." He believed that if a person had collected a large amount of money by way of exploitation of workers, the amount rest of his honourable living belongs to the community as a whole. He predicted class conflict and a violent and bloody revolution if they did not surrender their riches to the institution of trusteeship based on the faith that human nature is not beyond redemption. He disfavoured expropriation by the use of force. He said: "Society will be poorer for it will lose the fights of a man who knows how to accumulate wealth". He favoured non-economic methods like love and reason so as to make them realise the evils and dangers of accumulation and feel that it is in their interests if they used their capital for the people rather than for their personal comforts. Capitalists are only the trustees of their wealth. In his final formula of trusteeship, he also hinted at non-recognition of any right of private ownership of property except inasmuch as it may be permitted by society for its own welfare.

Trusteeship- Gandhi advocated the institution of trusteeship to make society free from the ravages of capitalist exploitation. The theory of trusteeship stipulates that a rich person is to be left in possession of things subject to the strict condition that he will use only that part of it which he "reasonably requires for his personal needs and will act as a trustee for the remainder to be used for the society," if the rich persons failed to function as a trustee and spend the bulk of his earnings for the good of the society, he should be deprived of his wealth through the state but with the minimum exercise of violence. The implications of trusteeship as approved by Gandhi in 1944 may be enumerated as follows:

1. It transforms the present capitalist order of society into an egalitarian one giving the present owning class a chance of reforming itself.
2. It recognises the right of private ownership of the

property to the extent permitted by society for its own welfare.

3. If the situation demands, ownership and use of wealth may be regulated by law.
4. Even under capitalism the character of production will be determined by social necessity and not by personal whim or greed. But it did not give control of the state because Gandhi was always maintained that the state should only "carry out the will of the people, not to dictate them or force them to do its will."

Gandhi's faith in the doctrine of trusteeship for an egalitarian society based on moral values and supported by philosophy and religion was so firm that he believed that if wealthy persons did not act up to this ideal, it did not mean that the doctrine was false. It rather showed the weakness of the wealthy people.

Thus, the objectives of Gandhi and Marx are the same, i.e., amelioration of the poor and the growth of the power of the people. "I see", said Gandhi, "the coming of the rule of the poor, whether that rule be through force of arms or of non-violence." In this way, Gandhi believed in the use of force only when the method of non-violence failed. But in Gandhi's Ram Rajya, the rights of princes and paupers are enshrined alike and protected but in Marxian socialism and communism, paupers and princes are absent in unequal status.

Both Gandhi and Marx also wanted a system in which there is no desire for accumulation. The socialism of Marx is a system in which there is no opportunity for private property and private accumulation of wealth. Gandhi preferred not to desire wealth but to have wealth and become the trustee of the same. In his own words: "It is better not to desire wealth than to acquire it and become a trustee, I gave up my own long ago which should be proof enough of what I would like others to do. But what am I to advise those who are already wealthy or who would not shed the desire for wealth? I can only say to them that they should use their wealth for service." Gandhi added: "Personally I do not believe in inherited riches."

Thus, his concept of an egalitarian society

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based on his institution of trusteeship of Gandhi is the product of his approach to life, while that of Marxian socialism is a stage in the historical evolution of mankind in which an egalitarian society is achieved.

Sarvodaya- The programme of Sarvodaya as enunciated by Gandhi is also said to be akin to socialism. Sarvodaya means the welfare of all. The life of labour was worth living, the good of the individual was contained in the good of all, and all people have the same right of earning their livelihood. He suggested the payment of just wages because if all were paid just wages, no one would be able to amass an unlimited fortune. Every individual has equal opportunities for the satisfaction of economic wants. But such a scheme of Sarvodaya cannot be realised by laying emphasis on 'industrialisation but on the development of village industries where production will be made only for use. "Industrialisation on a mass scale will necessarily lead to the passive or active exploitation of the villages as the problems of competition and marketing come in. Therefore, we have to concentrate on the village being self-contained, manufacturing mainly for use."In a self-sufficient village economy, every man and woman knows what he or she wants and, what is more, knows that no one should want anything that others cannot have with equal labour.

Thus, the programme of Sarvodaya leads us to nowhere but to a feudal system of the historical evolution of society in which production is for use and not for the market with the primitive technology as the village industries with simple technology have been emphasised as compared to modern large-scale industries with high technology of socialism of Marx.

Conclusion- Thus, on the basis of the above analysis, we come to the conclusion that the theory of Gandhian socialism, the concept of an egalitarian society, the doctrine of trusteeship and Sarvodaya, and the theory of exploitation have unfortunately not been systematically worked out. That is why Gandhi's programmes so far implemented are not succeeding. We are carrying them out only with sentiments and emotion. They have not yet been able to establish their firm roots in the present-day

situation. And, probably due to this, the Gandhian streak even among Indian intellectuals after independence has gradually shown a tendency to wane, although the Sarvodaya and Bhoodan movements purported to carry on his message to the people for some time.

However, it was most suited to the prevailing conditions of the national liberation movement. His code of personal conduct, service for the poor, renunciation of riches and an economic ideology based on ideas of non-possession, trusteeship, nonviolence and human equality had great appeal to the masses for the success of the independence movement.

On the other hand, Marxian socialism is a scientific concept in the historical evolution of human society. It has the treasure of the precedence, utility of the present, and guidelines for the future. It has an appeal, an impact on intellectuals and on the working classes. Its influences are spreading like anything. However, it might not succeed during the national liberation movement. But it has a future.

Thus, on the basis of the above analysis, we come to the conclusion that Gandhi and Marx are on different planes regarding the concept of socialism. Their concepts developed during different conditions. Marx developed his ideas in the analysis of the class conflict of capitalism, while Gandhi did so during the national liberation movement based on nonviolence. Hence, it would be in the fitness of things not to compare them on the same footing and treat them differently. However, both were for the amelioration of the poor and the removal of exploitation from society. They differ in their approaches, methods, and processes.

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