

Gandhian Economics – Trusteeship

By Jayant Pandya

"Believing as he did in non-violence, Gandhi was against the physical liquidation of the capitalists and landlords. Yet their exploitation had to end. This he believed could be done if the landlords and the capitalists acted as trustees of the poor. His doctrine of Trusteeship is designed to work in all spheres of life. Like parents acting as trustees for their children, the government should act as trustees of those who have chosen them to be their representatives in the legislative assemblies. The trustee, by its implications, meant that he is not the owner. The owner is one whose interest he is called upon to protect."

The philosophy of Trusteeship believes in the inherent goodness of human beings. It involves the capitalists and landlords in the service of society without any element of coercion. It doesn't want the destruction of capitalists. Gandhi himself believed that their destruction would result in the end of the workers.

Gandhian economics is essentially the collection of Gandhi's thoughts on various economic systems. Gandhi was not an economist and he didn't propound any new economic theory. In his time any discussion on economics was centered around two accepted economic systems – Capitalism and Socialism. Both were rigid in their own terms and even today there is no universally accepted economic system that can be uniformly applied over space and time. Every region can have its characteristic economic system which varies with time. One has to take in to account the prevalent conditions; Socio-political, economic and educational status of the people; comparative advantages and disadvantages of the regional economy etc.

Gandhi's thoughts on economic systems evolved over time and they incorporated the good of both Capitalism and Socialism. A conservative may identify his views when he reads that Gandhi was against the confiscation of private property. Similarly a liberal socialist identifies his views when he reads about non-recognition of private property, social responsibility of those possessing property etc. Every thought of Gandhi may not be relevant today but Gandhian economics is very comprehensive in dealing with many present day issues. One such issue is "Corporate Social Responsibility," which can be traced to Gandhi's concept of "Trusteeship."

Corporate Social Responsibility links the Corporate Sector to the Social Sector. It is becoming more relevant in our society plagued by increasing inequalities between the haves and have-nots. Corporate Social Responsibility means that the corporate sector, which earns profit through the sale of its goods and services in the society, also has some responsibility towards it. This is essential to promote growth with equity and to achieve an inclusive society. An increasing number of industrial houses are taking an active interest in the welfare of their employees, their families and society at large. Starting from the provision of basic necessities like drinking water, primary education, and health facilities to the development of environmentally friendly technologies on regional, national and even international scales, they are working in various spheres. In taking up few initiatives, some of them also have enlightened self-interest in mind. They are not only able to advertise their products but are also selling them to the beneficiaries of their activities. Some of them are involved in charity work like the provision of midday meals to school children. Many of them have their own NGOs operating at ground level, and in other cases they are involving civil society in their activities.

