# UNIT 6: GANDHI'S CONCEPT OF TRUSTEESHIP

## UNIT STRUCTURE


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## 6.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- explain Gandhi's idea about the economic basis of society
- explain the concept of trusteeship
- define what is trustee
- explain the origin of trusteeship
- explain the basic features of trusteeship
- discuss the relevance of the concept of trusteeship

## 6.2 INTRODUCTION

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, the greatest Indian of all time, is also known as the apostle of peace and non-violence. He was not only famous for his political or social works but also known for his unique but practical economic thought. The background of gndhian economy is very strong. Gandhi was influenced by the writings of Karl Marx, Adam smith, tolostoy, Ruskin bond, R.C. Dutta and many others and he examined

their writings in the context of india and started to think about various economic problem and adopted various action plan for solving those problem.

Gandhi was fighting against the extreme poverty, backwardness and socio –economic challenges as a part of his independence movement, of that time. Gandhi thought that economic self-sufficiency is very much essential for an individual and nation. He thought that the important economic wealth of the nation is human being so throughout his life he was working for the overall development of the individual and also for the economic equality. Working for economic equality means abolishing the conflict between capital and labour section of our society. To build the economic foundation of the nation and individual strong and make the country economically self sufficient he used many non violent means. swadeshi, swaraj, sarvodaya, trusteeship are some of them.

Swadeshi literally means "belonging to one's own country". Gandhi applied this notion almost in every spare of life - social, political and economic. Swadeshi doctrine is a doctrine employed for the protection of home industry. By protecting the home industry Gandhi tried to make the individual and the nation economically self sufficient.

Swaraj means self rule or own government. Gandhi realised that to attain ideal state political freedom is essential i.e swaraj is essential. Gandhi also explained swaraj from the economical point of view. Economically swaraj means full economic freedom for all the people of the country. Gandhi says"the swaraj of my dream is the poor man's swaraj. The necessities of life should be enjoyed by you in common with those enjoyed by priences and monied man"

Sarvodaya is a movement which is literally means betterment of all. The main aim of this movement is rural reconstruction and upliftment of all.

To abolish the distinction between poor and rich and to establish permanent peace in society he introduced the concept of trusteeship. It is a concept where one voluntarily gives up one's right on wealth earned by him and dedicates it to the welfare of the weaker section of the

society. The idea of trusteeship is based on the notion that nobody can be the permanent owner of property. Everything belongs to god. We can only hold the thing or property as a benevolent custodian. In this chapter we are going to discuss about trusteeship elaborately.

## 6.3 THE ECONOMIC BASIS OF SOCIETY

According to Mahatma Gandhi the economic basis of a society should not be separated from morality and spirituality. Gandhi believed that to establish peace and harmony in society the economic basis of society should based on love and trust. He never separated his economics from ethics. He said that economics that hurt the moral well-being of an individual or a nation are immoral and sinful. Gandhi was always working for establishing economic equality in society. But to establish equality he never used external force but use only soul force. He believed that if people develop the quality of sympathy, kindness, benevolence and the feeling of oneness then voluntarily they will think about the weaker section of the society. Gandhi said a good individual would love to share his things with other because for such people life is not meant for enjoyment only but it is meant to help other.

## 6.4 TRUSTEESHIP: WHAT IT IS

Trusteeship is a Socio-economic Philosophy which was developed by Mahatma Gandhi as a part of his non-violent revolution. It is a concept where one voluntarily gives up or relinquishes one's right on wealth earned by him and dedicates it to the welfare of the poorer section of the society. Gandhi had a firm believe that every capitalist being a human have in them the element of goodness which every individual necessarily possess. So, if they realize that without the labour of the poor it would not possible for those to acquire wealth, then the capitalist would function only as trustee for the poor. They would then keep all the surplus money or wealth in trust for the welfare of the poor which would establish economic equality in society. Gandhi described trusteeship very simply

by the following words" Supposing I have come by a fair amount of wealth either by way of legacy or by means of trade and industry. I must know that all that wealth does not belong to me. What of others. The rest of my wealth belongs to the community and must be used for the welfare of the community".

Mahatma Gandhi used it as a powerful tool for removing economic and social disparity and ultimately establishing peace in the society. Gandhi had no doubt about its abiding value. He said, "My theory of Trusteeship is no makeshift, certainly no Camouflage. I am confident that it will survive all other theories. It has the sanction of Philosophy and religion behind it..... No other theory is compatible with non-violence." He used trusteeship as an instrument for establishing economic and social equality. In fact Gandhi said that his trusteeship is a gift from india to the world. Mahatma Gandhi himself was an example of this idea as his worldly possessions were just a pair of cloths, watch, stick and few utensils. Gandhi was not an arm- chair philosopher. He never believed in theory only. He believed in experimenting his own theory and he made a first test on him.

## 6.5 DEFINITION OF TRUSTEE

A Trustee is one who holds property in trust for the benefit of others. A trustee is legally and morally bound to manage the trust properly in responsible and productive manners for the benefit of the trust's beneficiaries. A trustee may have a share of the benefit of the trust like the other beneficiaries. A trustee cannot leave his property to his children as a heir except the public. Gandhi thought that the very idea of ownership is at root a form of violence. So if the capitalist or the rich people realize that their surplus property is actually not their property and if they willingly keep their surplus money in trust then it will definitely guarantee social and economic equality. Gandhi desired the capitalist to become trustees of the nation by running their business with integrity for the welfare of the people.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q.1**. what is trusteeship?

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**Q.2.** What is trustee?

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Q.3. Define sarvodaya

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## 6.6 ORIGIN OF TRUSTEESHIP

The concept of trusteeship comes from the ideas of Ahimsa and Aparigraha. For Gandhi, Ahimsa is the greatest virtue. Ahimsa generally means non-killing. Gandhi gave a new dimension to the highest human value in theory and practice. The usual meaning of Ahimsa is not merely refraining from causing injuries to creature, it stands for certain positive attitudes towards other living beings that one must cultivate. In fact in its positive aspect Ahimsa is nothing but love. This positive attitude inspired Gandhi to think about the concept of trusteeship.

It is true that one cannot acquire excess wealth without exploiting the labours of others. Exploitation is one kind of violence. A true believer of non-violence can never exploit the labour of others for having excess wealth. A votary of non-violence then can hold anything in excess of what he needs only as a trustee for others. Gandhi believed that at its very root the concept of ownership or capitalism involves the form of violence. Centralization of power creates social and economic inequalities in society. But Gandhi did not believe that the evil could be removed from the society by transferring the concencetrated ownership from the individual to the state. So he offered trusteeship as an alternative. Trusteeship which is based on non-violence is nothing but only the qualitative transformation of the attributes and meaning of ownership.

Aparigraha is the ethical ideas of non-possession of the renunciation of ownership. It also means non-attachment of worldly objects and things. It simply means honest living and avoidance of avarice. Gandhi was very deeply influenced by this ethical idea and so he developed the concept of trusteeship. Gandhi thought that absolute non-possession is impossible since one possesses the body. But one should distinguish between needs and wants, reduce one's wants to the barest minimum. Gandhi believed that God never creates more than what is strictly needed for the moment. So acquire things more that what we need is against the fundamental law of nature.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q.4**. Write the positive meaning of Ahimsa.

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**Q.5.**"Ahimsa is the greatest virtue" who said this?

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## 6.7 SALIENT FEATURES OF TRUSTEESHIP

The following are the salient features of trusteeship:

1. Trusteeship is a socio-economic philosophy, which provides a means by which the wealthy people would be the trustee of trust that looked after the welfare of the people in general. Trusteeship provides a means of transforming the present capitalist order of society into an equalitarian one.

2. Gandhi used trusteeship as a powerful tool to establish permanent peace in society by removing economic and social inequalities. Gandhi did not believe in capture of power, but accumulation of power to the many. He believed that the very concept of ownership or capitalism involves at its root the form of violence. He believed in the

equal distribution of wealth. So, he used trusteeship as an instrument to remove social and economic disparities from society.

3. Trusteeship tries to reduce the gap between rich and the poor. Economic eqauality is the master key to non violent movement. so Gandhi want to abolish capitalism not capitalist. He invites capitalist to become a trustee.

4. It tries to change the attitude of the capitalist. Because without the labour and the co-operation of the poorer section of the society it would not possible for the capitalist to accumulate wealth. So, they should voluntarily surrender their excess wealth and keep that in trust for the welfare of the working and the poorer section.

5. Gandhi's trusteeship covered not merely material source of wealth and power but also non-material possessions such as special talents that some individual have possessed. Gandhi believed that every individual has got some talents or ability. But we exploit that talent or ability for personal gain in the beliefs that we own the talent. But Gandhi said that we do not own the talent but we are appointed as trustee by God and so we should use the talent to help others who are less fortunate or talented.

6. The idea of trusteeship is inherent in the idea of non-violence. Gandhi believed that the economic basis of society must be based on love and trust. A non-violent society is always non-exploitative society. One who believes in non-violence cannot therefore believe in inevitability of class war. Trusteeship then has to be understood as a part of the scenario of a non-violent revolution, as an instrument in the Satyagrahi's struggle for economic equality. Gandhi was also highly influenced by the moral concept "Aparigraha" of Bhagabhat Gita, the Hindu scripture. Aparigraha means non-attachment for worldly object or non-possession. Gandhi felt that the tendency to possess things is at once the cause of all evils. Therefore one must cultivate the discipline of living with that amount of minimum wealth with which one can live a happy and comfortable life.

7. Gandhi's trusteeship is not Philanthropy. Gandhi himself said, "if trusteeship idea catches, philanthropy, as we know it will disappear". Distribution of wealth is not about charity but about ensuring basic human dignity. Gandhi believed that giving charity to healthy person is shameful acts. The core of trusteeship is the protection of human dignity not mere materialistic prosperity.

8. Gandhi's concept of trusteeship gives more importance to socialism. But his socialism is something different from Karl Marx. In Gandhi's social order the individual will be at the centre and the state has to promote his welfare. But, under Marxism individual will be subordinate to the state. Again while Marx considered force and violence as inevitable in the birth of a new order, Gandhian Socialism is based on non-violence.

9. It does not recognize any right of private ownership of property except in as much as it may be permitted by society for its welfare.

10. Trusteeship should be regulated by Government. No individual should be allowed to use his wealth for his own interest.

## 6.8 TRUSTEESHIP AND MODERN WORLD

Gandhi's concept of trusteeship has been criticised for some of its limitations. Some critics opine that it wants to destroy capitalism and support socialism. But now a days instead of socialism capitalism proving very successful all over the world.

Some wants to blame that it will take away the working spirit of the businessman which will slow down the economic development of a society.

Again in today's competitive world every businessman tries to accumulate more wealth. So such attitude never let them to accept easily the concept of trusteeship. But in spite of all these we cannot consider trusteeship as an impractical and imaginary theory of Gandhi. It is true that not all of Gandhi's theories are relevant in modern day context but some of them are relevant. Trusteeship is one of them. If we go deep in to the corporate world then we will come across the concept

of corporate social responsibility. The welfare activities undertaken by corporate world are known as corporate social responsibility (CSR). The root of corporate social responsibility lies in Gandhi's concept of trusteeship. This CSR connect corporate sector to social sector. Every company draws its resources from society so they must have some responsibilities towards society. It has seen that now a day every company expenses a huge amount in the name of social service. Many of them have their own NGOs, some company involve themselves in doing charity works etc. Ratan tata, the founder of TATA Group was highly influenced by trusteeship of Gandhi and he developed his life based on this idea. So if CSR activities are backed by Trusteeship they can bring real prosperity and permanent peace to our life.



## 6.9 LET US SUM UP

- Trusteeship is a unique concept advocated by Gandhi in order to establish social and economic inequality. It is a concept with its origin in spirituality wherein one voluntarily surrender one's excess wealth ,and keep that in trust for the welfare of the poorer section of society.
- A trustee is a person who holds property in trust for the welfare of its beneficiary. He must morally and legally bound to manage the trust.
- The concept of trusteeship flows from, the ideas of Ahimsa and Aparigraha . Positively Ahimsa stands for love and negatively it means non-killing. The very concept of trusteeship is inherent in the concept of Ahimsa. Because a true believer of non-violence can feel the actual meaning of trusteeship, a votary of non-violence cannot hunger for possessions.
- With the help of trusteeship Gandhi tried to establish permanent peace in society by removing economic and social disparity.

- Socialism of Gandhi is something different from the socialism of Marx. Gandhian Socialism was completely based on non-violence but Marx considered force and violence as inevitable in the birth of a new order.
- Protection of human dignity and enrichment of human life is the core of trusteeship.



## 6.10 FURTHER READING

1) Lal, Basanta Kumar. 1973. Contemporary Indian Philisophy, Motilal Banarasidas Publication, Delhi.
2) Kumar Ravindra, India and Mahatma Gandhi, Kaplaz Publication, New Delhi.
3) Dutta, Mishra Anil (edt). Gandhian approach to Contemporary Problems. Mittal Publication, New Delhi.
4) Lokonathat, V. A History of Economic thought, S. Chand and Company Ltd. New Delhi.



## 6.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Ans. to the Q. No.1**. Trusteeship is a Socio-economic Philosophy adopted by Gandhi with a view to establish a equalitarian society. It provides a means by which the wealthy people would be the trustee of trust that looked after the trust for the welfare of the poorer section of the society.

**Ans. to the Q.No.2**. A trustee is one who holds property in trust for the benefit of others.

**Ans to the Q.No. 3** sarvodaya is a comprehensive, economic, political and above all a spiritual movement which aims at betterment or upliftment of all.

**Ans. to the Q.No.4.** 'Love'.

**Ans. to the Q. No.5.** Mahatma Gandhi



## 6.12 MODEL QUESTIONS

**A. Very Short questions**

**Q.1.** Define Ahimsa.

**Q.2.** What is Aparigraha?

**Q.3.** Is absolute non- possession possible?

**Q..4.** Gandhi's Trusteeship is Philantrophy. Is it true?

**B. Short question. (Answer in about 100-150 words)**

**Q.1.** Explain Ahimsa both positively and negatively.

**Q.2.** Distinguish between socialism of Karl Marx and Gandhi.

**C. Long questions (Answer in about 300-350 words)**

**Q.7.** Explain Ahimsa and Aparigraha as origin of Trusteeship.

**Q.8.** What are the salient features of Trusteeship? Discuss.

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