

SEMESTER-IV

PAPER-EC 1 : RURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL JOURNALISM

UNIT-V

LESSON DEVELOPER : SOURABH KUMAR

MOB- 8797408738

[Email-sourabh.iimc@gmail.com](mailto:sourabh.iimc@gmail.com)

DEPARTMENT : Journalism and Mass Communication

Hindi Department, Darbhanga House,

Patna University, Patna-800005

Table of Contents

LESSON –3 : Gandhi’s view of Social change

3.1 : Concept

3.2 : Gandhi’s view

3.3: Notion of ideal state

Concept :

Social change in India constituted his immediate goal and priority. In the pursuit of this objective, he fashioned a programme of social reconstruction that evolved from his experiences and experiments in various areas of social life in a kind of trial and error process. He was deeply conscious of the inertial drag of tradition as well as the natural propensities of man to pursue narrow and immediate interests and dominate his fellow beings.

The central feature of Gandhi's thought is that it is man centred, not system centred. Its premise is the moral autonomy of man and the possibility of his lasting liberation from his own lower self and the impersonal and compelling dictates of the structure of society. The ideal social order is that which gives man the opportunity to realize his moral autonomy and encourages him always to exercise this autonomy in an enlightened manner that is conducive to individual and collective well-being.

The movement from the existing imperfect state of man and society towards perfection requires the inculcation of certain fundamental values by man along with the establishment of social instrumentalities, which will promote and ensure the perennial primacy of these values.

However, Gandhi postulates the inseparability of 'ends' (values) and 'means' (instrumentalities) that is the dialectical unity of cause and effect. Therefore, a logical discrimination between values and instrumentalities is not possible – nor even desirable – in his thought.

It is in this context that the basic issues of social change in his writings have to be identified. In other words, these issues cannot be classified into neat categories labelled 'values' and 'instrumentalities'. Rather, they form a configuration that can only be analysed in terms of certain objectives, which need to be woven into the social fabric.

From this point of view, we may identify the basic issues of social change prescribed by Gandhi as the institution of human dignity and equality; the elevation of labour to a high dignity; the quest for self-reliance; the propagation of the principle of trusteeship; the pursuit of truth and ahimsa; the establishment of a socially purposive system of education;

the recognition of tolerance as a primary value; the realization of the inseparability of ends and means; and the urge towards a rational and scientific view of life.

Before proceeding to a brief elucidation of these issues, it is necessary to point out that, in contrast to other modern thinkers, Gandhi distilled most of his ideas from a-secular premises. This is clearly seen, for instance, in his justification of equality and his prognosis for sustaining the egalitarian imperative.

Modern egalitarianism has been derived from a positivist theory of natural rights, or from the logic that it is not possible to determine relative primacy between the infinite hierarchies of classification, or from the irrationality of discrimination between incomparable individualities. Gandhi, on the other hand, eschews such abstract considerations and bases his concept of equality on the monistic premise of advaita philosophy that all sentient beings possess divinity as ultimately inalienable parts of the Supreme Being.

His belief in the Supreme Being, who manifested himself *inter alia* in an immanent moral law of the universe and was the ultimate reality, identical with the absolute truth, was the core of his thought. But his theism was rationally constructed and argued and it was devoid of mystical elements. Indeed, his calculus of good and evil was based upon secular and rational criteria and it is possible to argue that his references to the Supreme Being had a metaphorical quality inasmuch as they sought to enjoin socially constructive conduct. To him, religions were valuable not because they were built on the idea of communion with God, but because they gave strength to ethical principles and conduct. In other words, despite the a-secular foundations of some of them, his social ideas were rationalistic in their content and orientation.

To return to the issues of social change identifiable in Gandhi's vision, the institution of human dignity and equality as the guiding principles and objectives for social reconstruction derived from his belief that every human being, by virtue of the element of divinity in him, must be recognized as having intrinsic worth and as deserving of the highest respect, and he should feel and be free to achieve his full potential.

Denial of dignity or equality to an individual was thus unacceptable, not so much for being offensive to formal human rights, as for its effect of crushing his spirit and denying the Supreme Being itself. The dismantling of the artificial barriers that categorized human beings according to descending scales of dignity and equality was a *sine qua non* for the ideal society and necessitated a conscious realization of the moral indefensibility of these

categories on the part of those who were responsible for their sustenance and benefited from them. But it also required the assertion of the right to dignity and equality by the victims of their denial.

Gandhi extended the application of these concepts beyond individuals to group identities, such as religious communities, cultural and linguistic entities, regions, and other distinctive social collectives. His view that the oppressed and the underprivileged must struggle for their own liberation is evident in his social crusades against untouchability and for gender equality, for all through, he insisted that it was as much a duty for the untouchables and women to strive for their emancipation from social degradation and inequality as it was for the rest of society.

Although he was categorical in upholding the principle of merit, he did not reject the principle of positive discrimination outright and, in fact, recognized the urgent need for providing the conditions and wherewithal for the backward and the underprivileged to bring them on par with the privileged sections of society.

He also maintained that if an equitable social order reflecting the ideal of respect for human dignity and equality was founded on the inner realization that this ideal was an inalienable element of the moral law of the universe, instead of on formal laws and social sanctions, it would not have the tendency to regress towards older or new patterns of indignity and inequality.

However, Gandhi's conception of equality went beyond the right to equal dignity and opportunity, for it envisioned the right to equitable sustenance by society for individuals contributing to the social process to the best of their ability and potential. This was imperative to preclude the persistence and steady enlargement of inequality on account of the differing capacities and needs of individuals and the cooperative nature of social life.

This, in turn, required the removal of artificial distinctions between different kinds of labour, and particularly between intellectual and manual labour, through the universal acceptance of bread labour and the pursuit of self-reliance by individuals as well as different levels of collective life from the family to the nation, which was represented by such ideals as the self-sufficiency of villages with respect to their essential needs and use of swadeshi.

A significant component of this approach was the minimization of wants and the related idea of non-retention of what was surplus to the satisfaction of natural needs. In order to ensure

against the resultant accumulation of unproductive wealth, Gandhi postulated the principle of trusteeship whereby the rich were to act as trustees for their superfluous wealth, which was to be used for society.

It is true that dignifying of labour, self-reliance and trusteeship are generally associated with the economic realm of Gandhi's thought. Yet, they are of central relevance to the process of social change for several reasons.

Gandhi's views :

Firstly, Gandhi himself insisted on the comprehensive and integral nature of his ideas and their categorization is, therefore, anathema to his scheme for social transformation.

Secondly, these ideas, despite their apparent economic orientation, are basically concerned with and provide important instrumentalities for social change through the metamorphosis of man into a social being in the true sense.

Thirdly, their operation represents and reinforces the innate higher traits of social commitment and sympathy in human nature. In the ultimate analysis, the elevation of labour to a high dignity, the quest for self-reliance and the propagation of the principle of trusteeship are important basic issues of social change because they have a direct bearing on extant social structures and human tendencies that militate against progress towards the ideal society.

Truth and ahimsa were regarded by Gandhi as forming an inseparable complex, logically distinguishable only in that the former is the end and the latter, the means. Although he defined truth variously in different contexts, there is no inconsistency in his formulations. To him, truth (the absolute truth) is identical with the ultimate reality which pervades the universe (the eternal principle or God).

However, man cannot realize this absolutely and is prone to regarding a particular facet of it, relative in time, place or substance, as the end itself. This may generate conflict between specific relative truths.

However, in the contest between different relative truths, there can be no place for asserting the superiority of one over another and, therefore, for the imposition of one's own perception over an opponent. This necessitates the adoption of ahimsa as an operative creed, indeed as a supreme duty, not merely in the negative sense of not inflicting physical or emotional injury on any living being, but also – and more importantly – in the positive sense of active empathy with and love for the opponent, even to the extent of inviting and experiencing self-suffering.

The struggle for social change, therefore, requires the inculcation of persistent concern for the disclosure of the absolute truth. This implies that each individual must recognize the relative character of his own variant of the truth and commit himself to non-violence. In other words, social change has to be predicated on a conscious and continuing pursuit of truth and ahimsa, the mode of its articulation being satyagraha.

To Gandhi, education could sub serve social change only if it gave primacy to character building over the acquisition of knowledge and occupational skills, and was moreover related to the individual's environment and oriented towards its betterment. The character building aim of education ought, he felt, to be directed.

Notion of ideal state

Ideal state: Notion of ideal state or society explained by Gandhiji was a non-violent and stateless society. He disclaimed state on ethical, historical and economic grounds. A man is moral when he acts freely and voluntarily. According to Gandhi, the state characterises violence in a concentrated and organized form. The individual has a soul but as the state is a soulless machine; it can never be dissuaded from violence to which it owes its very existence. Although he considered the state as imbedded in violence, he differed from anarchists. Unlike anarchists, Gandhi gave more emphasis on moral force and on the realisation of one's own self and his method of establishing a stateless society free from violence. Therefore, in political ideology of Gandhi, there was no place for violence in ideal society. Further, Gandhi also did not want to eliminate the state completely as did the anarchists.

Stateless democracy: Gandhi's model is a stateless democracy, in which there is a federation of satyagrahi village communities, functioning on the basis of voluntary cooperation and dignified and peaceful co-existence. Non-existence of state as appreciated by Mahatma Gandhi is impossible instantly or in near future. Even then, it is obligatory on the people,

who are living in state organizations, to develop non-violence that is permanently present in their nature and to enhance it progressively up to satisfactory level. Along with that, democratic system should work in direction of development of non-violence at individual, community, social and national levels. The atmosphere of fear, the decrease of values in life and the problems having harvested intensely cannot be eliminated without developing it.

He acknowledged that his ideal state or society would have representative institutions and government. His ideal society would be a stateless society comprising of self-sufficing, self-regulating and self-governing village communities joined together in a voluntary federation, the maintenance of federation involved the necessity of government. Thus his ideal state is principally a non-violent state, and not a non-violent and stateless society as it is generally thought. He was only opposed to the oppressive authority and to the theory of absolute sovereignty of the state, but not to the ideal state itself. Gandhian idea of ideal state was a non-violent democratic state where social life would remain self-regulated. In a democratic state everyone is his own ruler. In the opinion of Gandhiji, democracy lies not in the number of persons who vote, but in the sense to what extent masses imbibe the spirit of non-violence, and society service.

In an ideal democratic state, the powers are to be decentralised and equality is to succeed in every sphere of life. Every individual is to be given complete freedom to devote himself to social service according to his capacity. The structure of the state that is to arise as a result of non-violent revolution is to be a compromise between the ideal non-violent society and the facts of human nature. He believed that democratic government was a distant dream so long as non-violence was not recognised as a living force, an unbreakable dogma, not a mere policy. According to Gandhi, State is necessary due to the anti-social propensities of certain individuals and groups. But the functions of the state are to be reduced to the minimum. Similar to Bertrand Russell, G.K. Chesterton, G.D.H. Cole and other guild socialists, Gandhiji acknowledged that most of the functions of the state were to be transferred to the voluntary associations in order to have a real self-government in the country. There are certain things which cannot be done without political power, but there are also numerous other things which do not at all depend upon political power, and hence they should be left to the voluntary associations. When people come into ownership of political and economic power, the interference with the freedom of the people is reduced to a minimum.