Gandhi: The Non-Violent Socialist is Trusteeship the Only Viable Sustainable Economic Model?

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ABSTRACT

Fighting against inequality and discrimination, Gandhi developed his famous non-violent resistance, first in South Africa, and then later on in India, in the fight for independence. However, non-violence was not only his “experienced truth”, but also an essential requirement in the socio-economic arena. According to Gandhi, economic equality was not to be achieved through violence or revolution, as communists suggested. Rather, a peaceful shift in people’s self-transformation, and the construction of Swaraj and Swadeshi were desirable in order to make a true socialist India in a Gandhian sense. On the other hand, Gandhi’s theory of trusteeship has made a comeback in the 21st century along with a continuous discussion on sustainable development.

This paper critically reviews and discusses Gandhi’s conception of Trusteeship and its worth as a sustainable and equitable mode of production. How does Gandhi’s trusteeship model put emphasis on the decentralization of power and sustainability? How is it still relevant in the late modern world? What kind of impact can this model of trusteeship have on the current problems of climate change and sustainability? Does corporate social responsibility partially realize this Gandhian model of economic production? Observing corporate social responsibility in the light of Tata Group and its obligations and accountability for effects on society, a new framework is formed supporting Gandhi’s model of trusteeship, which, as observed nowadays, is starting to have a global appeal.

Keywords: Capital, Decentralization, Equality, Gandhian philosophy, Non-violence, Trusteeship, Satyagrah, Socialism.

I. INTRODUCTION

To understand how Gandhi developed his life philosophy, it is important to look at some of the most important of his life’s struggles that were to be turning points in the development of concepts such as Satyagraha, Ahimsa, Constructive Program, Swaraj and Swadeshi. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born into a fairly religious environment that included his closeness to Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam (Parekh, 2001). Such environments made him find profound respect for all religions, as well as integrate different religious philosophies into his idea of “relational truths”. As an Indian, he faced discrimination in South Africa and decided to stay to fight for the rights of Blacks and Indians. One of the turning points was in 1907, when the Transvaal passed a law that required fingerprint registration of all Indians. That was the moment when Gandhi first used his now well-known method of Satyagraha, which, in the end, resulted in the Indian Relief Act in 1914 (Parekh, 2001). Additionally, he wrote a comprehensive syllabus of national regeneration, called the Constructive Program, where he included proposals for India’s political and socio-economic transformation, among which included: religious unity, removal of untouchability, a ban on alcohol, use of khadi, development of village industries and craft-based vocational education, equality of women, health education, and other socio-economic issues (Parekh, 2001).

Gandhi defines several concepts that explain how one should perform their duties in life, and in that sense, the personal and political are inseparable. He elucidates this point with personal examples from his own life, such as how he would turn to his moral and spiritual side whenever he found himself in a political struggle (Parekh, 2001). Modern scholars, especially Max Weber, believe that politics is completely devoid of ethics, morality, and values (Gerth & Mills, 1946). Gandhi, therefore, suggested that India needs to rest on the foundation of revitalized village panchayats. This means that it was not the state that organized these panchayats, but vice versa. Hence, economic decentralization of industry would lead to political devolution of power, which is not concentrated in the hands of one man or a party. Thus, democracy would be effective only in small units with constant dialogue and no feat of power concentration (Kripalani, 1970).
Truth and the cosmic spirit, or Satya (in sanskrit), were what held the universe together, what could be equated to God and the ultimate unchangeable of a person from within (Parekh, 2001). Such soul-force or truth-force was the method of seeking justice through benevolence, as human nature is to be rational and self-reflective, which again, is based on Gandhi’s presupposition that the political is based on ethics and morality, as well as that morality, spirituality, and religion are inseparable from one another (Parekh 2001). Following that, Gandhi’s idea of justice based on forgiveness1 is fairly different from the western conception, where the wrongdoer is punished. Moreover, in western “rational” thinking, the concept of justice requires, at least in theory, that there is no difference in treatment between people, although this position of disinterest is never realized. Accordingly, western jurisprudence and systems of politics are predominantly based on win-or-lose playgrounds, which consequently allow hostility and division2 (Marcin, 2004). On the other hand, Gandhi’s perception of justice is purely ontological. He emphasized that the wrongdoer and the one in a subjugated position are one, in a sense that one accepts wrongdoings and it could somehow bring the wrongdoer to the same realization, that later on brought Gandhi to his understanding of non-violence, or ahimsa (Marcin, 2004). This comes from the underlying connectedness of all human beings through the cosmic spirit and the inherent goodness of the cosmic spirit itself. One, therefore, does not stop at passive resistance only, but rather appraises the wrongdoer of his or her humanity, and that “an action could only be just if it does not harm either party”, unlike in western jurisprudence systems (Marcin 2004, 26).

Following this, Gandhi made a strong critique of modernity, which he saw as exploitative, brutal, and aggressive, and which “neglected the soul and privileged the body” (Parekh, 2001). Hence, Gandhi accentuated the importance of non-violent society, Swaraj, or self-rule, where individuals and their own inner moral guidance, without external pressure, is a compass toward regulated social and political relations. Moreover, capitalism and communism, in their extremes, being morally problematic, have no part in such a non-violent society. Capitalism as deepening greed and aggressive materialistic competition and its exploitative nature, and communism as imposing force and uniformity, and disregarding individualism through violent revolution, had no place in Gandhi’s alternative or trusteeship, which explains cooperation, sharing, human dignity, and self-respect, and which would further “socialize property without completely nationalizing it” (Parekh, 2001).

Nowadays, the trusteeship model could be considered as a treasure to be returned to, emphasizing the necessity for transformation and improvement of society and eradicating poverty. Corporate social responsibility, a concept closely related to Gandhi’s notion of trusteeship, explains the obligation of companies to be accountable for any effect or externality caused to society, consequently, giving back to society and the environment while at the same time preserving sustainability. Therefore, this paper aims to explain Gandhi’s philosophical principles, with a main focus on the economic model of trusteeship, in the light of today’s heightened necessity for sustainability and corporate social responsibility, while at the same time preserving the principles of Gandhi’s economic thought led by non-violence, self-sufficiency, bread-labour, and limitation of wants.

II. GANDHI’S ECONOMIC THOUGHT

Gandhi’s economic thought is neither completely the same nor completely different from Marx’s economic theory and communism in general. Although Gandhi was fairly influenced by Marx’s economic thinking, he distinguished himself from him in various areas, such as the meaning of socialism, the ideal structure of the economy, and the concept of labour and industrial relations (Koshal, 1973). Gandhi’s “India of my dreams” had an economic structure that had equitable distribution and consumption of wealth and resources, where there were no rich and poor, and which was a self-sufficient economy without exploitation and violence (Koshal, 1973). Hence, for him, that was the meaning of Swaraj; self-rule and self-restraint at the same time, true independence from foreign control, which is mirrored in both political and economic independence (political self-government and economic self-sufficiency). This finds its meaning in his definition of socialism, which it represents complete political and economic independence and where all members of society are respected equally. However, unlike other socialists, Gandhi did not believe that private property should be eliminated at all costs (which he explains through trusteeship), furthermore, unlike socialists who believed that equality in socio-economic terms should be established through violence, Gandhi, as we can see from his life moral standing, was strongly against any violent recapturing of control and power (Koshal, 1973). What really set him apart were not the goals, which were similar to those of socialists, but the means towards achieving them, which were non-violent. At the same time, he concentrates on people and the revolution in people’s lives and their community, at the same time

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1 He develops these ideas of forgiveness by combining the catholic principle of absolutions through confessional and on the Indian principles of forgiveness (prayashchit) mentioned in the ancient texts especially the Ramayana.
2 Leading to a cycle of violence.

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establishing equality for individual freedom and the extinction of all classes, while socialists, in general, set classes against each other (Koschal, 1973), where one (bourgeoisie in this case) is always a “loser”.

As spirituality plays a more significant role than materialism in Gandhi’s socio-economic philosophy, he differentiates between economic progress, which represents material advancement, and real progress, which mirrors itself moral and spiritual progress. Hence, he criticizes modern civilization for the use of machinery as a product of industrialism, which deepens the exploitation of the majority by world imperialism, whether it is colonialism or modern-day capitalism (Ishii 2001). Industrialization and the use of modern machinery for mass production resulted in unrealistic consumption demands. Materialistic consumerism was a direct consequence of this phoney demand created by capital, and Gandhi criticized it by pointing out that mother earth could satisfy everyone’s needs but not everyone’s desires. For Gandhi, modern civilization was fundamentally flawed and he thought of it as aggressive, violent, exploitative, imperialist, and brutal. It not only ignored the soul, but it also favored the body and self-interest, satisfying materialistic desires (Parekh, 2001). Since mechanization highlighted the need to fulfill individuals’ self-interest, Gandhi emphasized that it was immoral and led only to “hatred, ill-will, perversity at pleasure at another’s misfortunes, and sordid thoughts and fantasies, reflecting ill-developed and coarse soul” (Parekh, 2001). Modernity brings with it materialism which, according to Gandhi, undervalues spirituality. Not only did capitalism introduce money, luxuries, and material advancement without limit, but it also undervalued “real progress” or moral progress (Ishii, 2001). Instead of industrialism, he attaches significance to hand-spinning and bread labour, which is the point at which he disagrees with Marxist socialism and communism. Gandhi based his critique of communism and socialism on the fact that they did not encourage the “moral energies” of the people and were imposed by force. Furthermore, its characteristics, such as a lack of sharing and cooperation in a state with absolute power, both political and economic, posed a threat to human dignity and self-respect (Parekh, 2001).

Therefore, Gandhi introduces an alternative, in the form of trusteeship, which is not exploitative like capital, nor is it based on the state-ownership and forced uniformity of Communism. Bread-labour, meaning earning with your own hands, fairly explains Gandhi’s opposition to mass production, which was violent and exclusionary. Bread-labour, on the other hand, is non-violent and natural act. Although Gandhi does not exclude intellectual labour, it cannot, however, be superior or a substitute for bodily labour, which should be considered a true appreciation of the equality of every man (Gandhi, 1962).

Gandhi further introduces Swaraj, boycott of British products, Swadeshi, and national education as a resolution and leap toward India’s economic independence (Ishii, 2001). Swadeshi, or self-reliance, is emphasized through a self-supporting system where the promotion of khadi plays an important role. His theory of trusteeship is defined as the idea that wealthy people should not give up their property (as socialism suggests), but rather consider themselves trustees of that property, given to them to manage it for the benefit of the whole society. This contradicts the socialist model, which suggests that such a position legitimizes the hegemony of capitalists and landlords in society (Ishii 2001).

For Gandhi, socialism could not be established by the submission of the upper class because it would be immoral. Rather, it needs to be directed as voluntary practice or self-transformation (limitation of wants) which nurses socio-political transformation of society. Since socialism for Gandhi represented purity, it was needed to have pure means to achieve it. In this sense, violent overthrow or replacement of the capitalist class would represent impure means towards socialism, and its base would not only be grounded on impure grounds but at the same time, would lead to a cycle of violence. Non-violence not only represents a strategy for acquiring that, but also is an inalienable part of the moral being, where Satyagraha is an example of how one does not use “physical force” or violence, but “truth force” or “soul force” and non-violence to resist. Where one does not do it to the detriment of another but involves self-sacrifice (Chakrabarti & Dhar, 2019). Self-transformation, according to Gandhi, is a voluntary practice, one that is guided by the principle of satyagraha, and an act that finally leads toward political and social transformation (Chakrabarti & Dhar, 2019).

Gandhi’s conception of society itself is based on Sarvodaya (uplifting everyone), where sovereignty is given to the people and is entrusted to them. Everyone is his/her own ruler, based on a new cooperative village culture and its regeneration, which would, moreover, be new federal units of social order and where the possibility of abusing power would be significantly reduced (Vettickal, 1998). Autonomous and self-ruled village republics, described as “concentric circles” (from villages to larger units of government), would primarily be concerned with fulfilling the needs of the local community. They would focus on education, health, and agriculture, and settle disputes amicably through conciliation. Such freedom within the villages and also increased cooperation, decentralized government, self-reliance, and being politically and economically independent would be the main factors to stabilize the new social system of the village community that would decrease the concentration of power in the centre of the state apparatus and its abuse of power (Vettickal, 1998). This is included in his Constructive Program, where he highlights village republics and decentralization of power as revolutionary changes that would establish a new social structure based on self-sufficiency and swadeshi (Vettickal, 1998). Hence, panchayats would represent self-
governing organizations, where villages are fundamental units that would lead toward political independence (Ishii, 2001). Because the law, society, politics, economy, religion, ethics, and morality were all intertwined for him, his economics cannot be understood without understanding the interconnected principles of nonviolence and truth; additionally, his understanding of the economy is non-exploitative, egalitarian, and humanistic (Sarvodaya society) (Vettickal, 1998).

Socialism for Gandhi was “as pure as crystal”, and thus, required pure means for achieving equality, meaning that cutting off the bourgeoisie to acquire equality, would require impurity of deeds and therefore could not attain a “blessed state”. Humans are not born equals; we have different physical and intellectual capacities. However, equal respect for everyone is the basis of the Gandhian conception of equality. It is quite different from the modern definition of equality, and rather than being based on external traits, Gandhi’s equality is rooted in the intrinsic goodness and ethical values that flow through the entire living world in the form of the cosmic spirit. Therefore, people should always use their physical and intellectual capacities as trustees for the good of the state and society (Gandhi, 1962). As he insisted on a deep relationship between economics and ethics, Gandhi explains the importance of the concept of bread-labour, which asserts the moral imperative that one must earn his/her “bread”. Everyone needs to do physical work as a duty that is imposed by nature. In this way, individual productivity would also increase (Dasgupta, 1996).

III. SAME ENDS DIFFERENT MEANS

Gandhi suggests that his version of socialism would not mean that every single man would have the same amount; rather, economic equality would mean that everyone would have enough according to their needs and capacity. Thus, the co-existence of capitalists and workers would be attainable through the system of trusteeships that ensures voluntary cooperation and the responsibility of trustees to provide. On the other hand, Marxist ideology does not accept any co-existence between these two and implies a class struggle that ends violently in victory for the proletariat, further emphasizing equality in a sense different from Gandhi’s, where everyone gets the same amount (emphasizing true communism) (Chakrabarti & Dhar, 2019). Although both Marx and Gandhi stand on the side of exploited masses, their writings take different turns in the approach to how to gain that equality that socialism presupposes. Turning to history, Marx asserts that exploited classes would revolt against the ruling class, resulting in the emergence of a socialist society in which the proletariat would gain new power and control over the society’s economic means of production. This concept of revolution is the point where Marx and Gandhi separate. Gandhi suggests, as mentioned earlier, that true transformation can happen only through voluntary cooperation and trusteeships and neither through violent revolution nor historical class conflict, as emphasized by Marx. In sum, although both were against exploitation, Gandhi accepts the private property and implies trusteeships as a solution, while Marx denies the existence of private property (Ghosh, 2011).

As Gandhi was more interested in the purification of the means of social transformation, he further emphasized individual self-reform and human unity (Rothermund, 1969). Moreover, as Gandhi believed in inner purification and self-control, it implies that the development and emancipation of the whole society are only possible from the improvement of one individual at a time. Hence, Gandhi’s thought is a “dual process” where society responds to its individual members, while Marx, on the other hand, highlights one’s spiritual development through the development of society itself (Rothermund, 1969). We can conclude from this that there are two approaches to social and economic transformation: Gandhi’s bottom-up approach and the Marxist top-down approach.

Communism does not accept revolution without violence. According to Marx, Gandhism is not compatible with communism, because non-violence, as such, is connected to an irrational belief in religion which is representative of capitalist hegemonic orders. Moreover, Marxist ideas take revolution as the only sanction of the capitalist government (Mashrufala & Pezzoni, 1951). In a broader sense, as Varma (1954) states, Gandhi could be seen as metaphysical idealist, who acknowledges omnipresent spiritual reality or Truth, and Marx could be seen as a dialectical materialist, and rationalist, where mysticism and faith have no place. Whilst Gandhi believed in Sarvodaya and its good for all, Marx believed in absolute rationalism where there are no eternal moral principles, but rather a revolution which is the only rational outcome of a class conflict. Since Gandhi highlights the importance of truth and non-violence, he further explains the importance of religion, while Marx states that religion is an ideology that was fitted into the capitalist hegemonic system from a historical perspective (for example, the orthodox Russian church supported Czar, Islam gives two options – conversion or sword).

For Gandhi the main evils were imperialism, communalism, and untouchability. Throughout his life, he fought social injustices and economic and political exploitation of India. For Marx such evil was a mainly western industrial world and capitalism. Even though seemingly, Marx and Gandhi concentrate on different threats, both considered capitalism as deeply flawed, exploitative in nature, imperialist, and rooted in
inequality. However, for Gandhi the key was in the individual journey of Satyagraha, self-sacrifice, love of the perpetrator, and success though pure means, while Marx mainly stressed the goal of impure replacement by force, taking lightly the cycle of violence capitalism-socialism were creating. To a certain degree, both Gandhi and Marx were anarchists, and considered states as a violent force, the only difference is the replacement which for Gandhi it would mean an ideal state under the moral authority of people, where violence would be extinct, and for Marx it would mean replacement of capitalist states with proletarian dictatorship and communism.

Failure to address human nature, which is not constant, hence does not fit into a mould of sameness proposed by socialism, replacement of people’s will with the state’s central authority and its gap between theoretically explained utopia of equality and dictatorship like reality led to the success of Capital and failure of Communism. Realization that technological development enhances and increases capital acquisition could be a possible reason why many socialist states failed to stick to the same system, although having great pressure from the governments. From the very beginning of human history, man has always strived for technological development, whether it concerned hand-made “tools” dating thousands of years ago, or modern age machines or data-base systems. However, such development has led to a gap of a certain degree between those who had and those who did not have access to such technology applied in their everyday life, and this may be one of the reasons for the existence of differentiation in human societies. Although the idea posed by Marx and his idea of equality was fairly ground holding if we exclude the fact that Marx supported violent conflict and overthrow and replacement of capitalist owners by violent means, such a way would be more suitable for Gandhi’s voluntary socialism. Moreover, in the long run, it could be argued that capitalism does not bring development, at least not to society as a whole. However, Marx could be correct in pointing out that capitalism will bring itself to its own death very soon (Freeman, 2010).

A valid argument can be made to this effect by connecting it to Gandhian economic thought concerning industrial and technological development. Nowadays, artificial intelligence and everyday technology bring us a completely new way of life. Robotization leads to a huge job loss, and it is fairly estimated that around 10-20 million jobs will be lost due to the replacement of human capital with technological capital in the period from 2020 to 2030 (Oxford Economics, 2019). This leads to the very core of Gandhi’s criticism of “machinery”. We need to ask ourselves whether we develop new technology because we really need it or whether we just do it because we want to show man’s superiority and power over nature. Furthermore, what are the impacts of the ecological disasters we are facing today? Are we thinking about sustainable development at all?

If we look at Gandhi’s idea of the Constructive Program and its impact on India now and in the past, we could conclude that it was well-adapted to the Indian society. Most of the people lived in the villages, thus, it seems reasonable that villages formed the core of participative democracy and people directly had the power to decide about political and economic issues. Most of the society was rural and was based on agriculture; hence, improving the economy through trusteeships which would, as opposed to Marx, would include both capitalist owners and workers, in theory, works well. Looking back at both it can be said that neither of them predicted the sudden boom of technology or its impact on ecology and sustainability. Marx would have not imagined how capitalism exploited nature and people through technological advancements, although he was for the development of industry and technology, and Gandhi may have predicted that mass production and consumerism will create problems of sustainability but he could not have imagined how capitalist hegemony would spread across the globe through economic globalization, where it is impossible not to follow the steps of the first world unless one decides to be an outcast and cut off from the rest of the world economy (Krishan & Rathee, 2012).

Does Marxism go too far when it comes to state power and nationalizing property? And can that lead to the exploitation of power in the hands of a few? At the same time, unlike Gandhi, it would not be prudent to put too much hope in human beings’ good nature. Gandhi’s economic model could work to the point where we come across an individual who, as a trustee, is unethical and immoral.

IV. TRUSTEESHIP AND SUSTAINABILITY

Since the beginning of the industrial revolution and technological advancements, there has been a new wave of materialistic, modern, and western points of view, which did not turn out to be sustainable for the future generations, precisely because of its exploitative nature led to degradation of the environment. The concept of sustainable development circles around the importance of survival and not leaving worse off conditions for the future generations, which might suffer from our own development (Sahu 2009). Global warming and climate change disasters in the 21st century could be considered adverse consequences of the industrial revolution which additionally put pressure on the world’s natural resources. For such reasons, sustainability tries to establish harmonious relationship between humans and nature, that should be based on coexistence and justice (Sahu 2009). Since excessive use of our natural resources could lead to the
environmental disaster that increases materialistic consumption and subsequently leads to climate change, global warming, and extinction of different species, we are gradually shifting towards the concept of sustainable development taking into consideration the environment’s capacity, moral, social and spiritual values (Gupta 2015). Perhaps, one of the striking calls for the necessary change was Rio Summit in 1992, and the guiding principles of the conference implies sustainability and development, and peace: “Principle 5: All states and all people shall cooperate in the essential task eradicating poverty as an indispensable for sustainable development, in order to decrease the disparities in standards of living and better meet the needs of the majority of the people of the world”; “Principle 25: Peace, development and environmental protection are interdependent and indivisible” (UN, 1999).

In the early 20th century, long before the Rio Summit, Gandhi recognized modern civilization’s limitless desires which threatened humanity with their multiplication of wants with no morality, which went fairly beyond people’s actual needs. Hence, Gandhi’s “Hind Swaraj” became “manifesto of sustainable development”, where Gandhi critically observed evils of the modern civilization and industrialization as a “self-destructive process” (Sahu, 2009). According to Gandhi, imperial rule is based on exploitation and injustice and, thus, leads to unsustainable development. Furthermore, environmental ethics are an integral part of Gandhian philosophy and have importance in highlighting the ethical relationship between humans and the natural environment. From the ethical perspective, there are two general categories that are concerned with ecologically sustainable development: anthropocentrism which emphasizes human interests and well-being, and non-anthropocentrism which, on the other hand, focuses on human impact on the environment, and questions moral responsibility towards each other and environment (Shearman, 1990). Because nowadays we witness growing economies that are exploiting natural resources, forming, sort of, hierarchy in relation to worse-off countries whose income depends on the foreign financial inflow, Gandhi emphasized inseparability between economics and ethics. He encourages economics of sympathy, kindness and affection, economics based on truth and non-violence. Gandhi also believed that “while economic concepts stem from ethical implications, ethics too must come from good economies” (Dasgupta, 1996).

Minimum consumption or limitation of wants was introduced by Gandhi because multiplying wants can lead a person to become dependent on one’s desires which, consequently, could not lead to sustainable life. On the opposite, by limiting one’s wants, people become prone to self-respect, autonomy, and peace of mind (Dasgupta, 1996). Because limitless use of natural resources leads to environmental degradation, limitless wants impact drastically the nature by additionally putting a burden on it and increasing their own dependence on increased needs. Limitation of wants, in that sense, is not only considered as purification of oneself but also is considered to decrease adverse material progress and avoid externalities people make towards nature (Dasgupta, 1996). Gandhi used the concept of Swadeshi to bring together Indian people, focusing on reliance on their own strength. It was one of the most important movements considering India’s independence. Khadi became the symbol of nationalism, signifying a boycott of foreign products, bringing out self-sufficiency and support of local products (Dasgupta, 1996). If we reflect on it from today’s perspective, in the era of globalization, we could conclude that the global economy is not only indicating low self-sufficiency but also widens the gap between rich and poor, simply leaving developing countries unstable and with growing poverty. Moreover, the concept of bread labour signifies earning for oneself with your own hands. It encourages physical labour, instead of its replacement with machines, thus helping people understand the connection with nature (Dasgupta, 1996).

The concept of trusteeship could be seen as an encompassing term that is nowadays commonly connected to sustainable development and environmental ethics. Trusteeship is a concept that explains the moral obligation of the trustees to reduce conflict and build cooperation for the well-being of the community. Such mutual understanding would increase productivity, while at the same time bringing out ethical and economic worth. Gandhi’s theory of trusteeship can be considered an alternative to both capitalism and communism. The idea itself is non-violent and dispossessing the means of production from the wealthy is not acceptable, as communism would suggest, on the other hand, the rich are expected to hold their wealth solely for the interest of the whole society and its well-being (Dasgupta, 1996). Trusteeship tries to resolve the conflict between capital and labour, promotes bread labour, and tries to establish a workable solution for sustainable development in the long run while closing the gap between rich and poor, thus focusing on economic equality. Gandhi, unlike Marx, believes that not all people are equal in their abilities, further explaining that everyone has different skills and highlighting that for such reasons one should be a trustee for the public good if one has the ability to do so. This sort of transforms the society into an egalitarian one, where individual’s needs are accomplished, only taking into consideration the limitation of wants (Joseph & Reddy, 2021).

The foundation of moral economy is a trusteeship, which is based on the voluntary abdication of wealth for the general well-being of society. Privileged are morally responsible for the community, and as such, competition is replaced with cooperation. The core reasons why Gandhi’s concepts are revisited nowadays are indeed his high moral values of equal distribution of what nature produces. He opposes dispossessing and violence and establishes an ethical principle of economic equality and economic conscience towards
the environment by limiting one’s own desires (Chakrabarty, 2015). Thus, the importance of Gandhi’s moral values and ethical stances regarding economic theory is now integrated into developing a good strategy for sustainable development.

According to Gandhi, sustainable development can be achieved if an individual voluntarily limits his/her own desires, which consequently leads to greater self-sufficiency and less use of resources, hence sustainable development for future generations (Bansal & Srivastava, 2008). The Gandhian model of community development majorly pays attention to the preservation of the planet’s integrity, balanced use of natural resources, and concerns about exploitation. Although the concept of sustainable development is multi-dimensional, it is certainly based on local requirements, which play a major role in Gandhi’s economic thought (Badal, 2020). Gandhian idea of trusteeship is based on the ethical and moral stance of self-sufficiency, autonomy, simple lifestyle, truth, non-violence, environmental protection, decreased use of machinery, sensitivity to environmental sustainability, rejection of modernization, consumerism, and mass production, all currently form the core of the discourse on sustainability and sustainable development.

V. TRUSTEESHIP AND CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Corporate social responsibility is an important feature of the capitalist system where corporations try to fill the gap between people’s expectations and their corporation’s regulations (Balakrishnan et al., 2017). Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) covers a wide range of issues such as employee relations, human rights, corporate ethics, community relation, and the environment. Within the literature of CSR, there is a growing emphasis on corporations’ obligations to improve life quality, both in the workplace and in the local community and widely at the level of society as well (Moir, 2001). CSR has a commitment to better the lives and well-being of people and to behave ethically while contributing to economic development.

Although there are various theories that explain corporate social responsibility in depth from various aspects and perspectives, they all have the general well-being of the people in common. Stakeholder theory analyses those groups towards whom the firm should be responsible, but any individual who could be affected by the acts of the firm is in focus. On the other hand, social contracts theory describes society as a series of contracts, and thus, a firm needs to act in a responsible manner since its business depends on commercial interests. Finally, legitimacy theory accepts that a firm’s actions are legitimate if they are constructed in a certain system of norms, values, and beliefs that are defined in a given society (Moir, 2001). Subsequently, CSR involves principles of treating employees fairly and equitably, operating ethically and with integrity, respecting human rights, sustaining the environment for future generations, and caring for the community (Moir, 2001).

Business organizations are increasingly considered to be playing a dominant role in society, not only because of their influence but also due to their growing area of responsibility. Because there is no sole profit maximization and economic prosperity, corporate social responsibility pays major attention to social progress, as well. Since the individual is the basis of society, CSR has to start with the individual as well. In this sense, what is of great importance in creating a sense of responsibility among individuals. Self-management could be understood as the “optimum utilization of one’s energy and talent, without causing stress on the individual and resulting in greater harmony between the individual and his environment and the people around him” (Bansal & Srivastava, 2008). Since the businesses and large corporations operate by “draining” resources, whether they are from society or from nature, they need to be socially responsible.

Emphasis should not only be on the corporations’ side of view; as Gandhi explains, Swadeshi is the basis of a good economy. He wanted people to use products from the local community, from one’s own neighbourhood, rather than those made outside. Such an idea could not be comprehended in a globalized economic area, but Swadeshi would ensure the development of the local economies, moreover, helping those who are “worse-off” on the capitalist hierarchy, closing the gap between rich and poor. Gandhian model of trusteeship nowadays is starting to have a global appeal. It is recognized as having the potential of transforming society and eradicating poverty. Following the path of sustainability and corporate social responsibility, Gandhi’s concept of trusteeship emphasized ethical, economic, and moral aspects, ensuring sustainable, self-sufficient livelihoods for all. Nowadays, we are faced with environmental, ethical and social challenges which are frequently connected back to the theory of trusteeships whose principles are workable for solving these problems.

Starting from 1990s, corporations were often being criticized for their antisocial practices, which led to the definition of corporate social responsibility to be integrated to take action in order to improve the welfare of the society in general, holding corporations accountable for their effects on the communities and their environment (Wulfson, 2001). Economic responsibilities are to increase the profit of the organization, legal responsibilities to frame codification of what is right and wrong and lastly, ethical responsibilities to indicate what is fair, just, and right. For this reason, between 1995 and 1998 Microsoft donated more than 103 million dollars in software, licenses, and grants to educational institutions (Wulfson, 2001).
Furthermore, Gates Foundation in 2005 made a 285 million dollars commitment to developing HIV vaccine. The foundation guarantees collaboration for AIDS Vaccine Discovery (Cohen, 2006). Likewise, the Tata Group is considered one of the leaders in corporate social responsibility. Founded in the late 19th century, the group established several industries of national importance, namely, steel, power, hospitality, and airlines. However, in 2012, the Tata Group incorporates overall seven sectors: information technology and communications, engineering, materials, service, energy, consumer products, and chemicals (Shah, 2014). Each of the Tata companies is working independently, and it is estimated that the group’s revenue comprises almost 3.2 percent of the nation’s GDP (2007-2008). The company has always tried to reinforce the return of its wealth to society, and two-thirds of the equity of the groups are held in philanthropic trusts that have created national institutions for science and technology, medical research, social studies, and the performing arts. They have also reinforced assistance to the NGOs in the areas of education and health care (Shah, 2014). Tata Group is said to have been driven by core values of integrity, understanding, excellence, unity, and responsibility (to be responsible to the countries, communities, and environments in which they operate, ensuring the welfare of the people). Thus, Tata’s Code of Conduct facilitates initiatives that are closely related to social development, environmental management, biodiversity restoration, and climate change (Shah, 2014). Consequently, Tata Group is one of the companies that functions through “social mission” by incorporating corporate social responsibility as one of its benchmarks. It provides insight into Gandhi’s trusteeship model and putting it into practice, since about 75 percent of Tata Group’s shares are held in trust, and between 8-14 percent of the Group’s annual profits are distributed to social causes through these charitable funds (Balakrishnan et al., 2017). As the trusts have been invested in scientific and technological education in India it helps social development, consistent with corporate social responsibility goals, as well as, with Gandhi’s trusteeship model, by leaving trusts held by the whole community to benefit from it.

VI. ARE WE REINVENTING THE WHEEL?

Social change and moving toward the road of ending the “evils of society” was one of the main ideas of Gandhi. By introducing the concept of trusteeship, he not only paved the way for the emergence of sustainable development; he also provided people with the opportunity to recognize their value in terms of ethical responsibility to one another. It would sound absurd for society to go back and interpret principles that were laid down in the early 20th century. However, we live in an era of great technological and industrial advancement and slowing down our pace is essential for future generations to come. Can we “go back” and essentially put a value on Gandhi’s moral and ethical principles that one should be guided by? How far has modern western civilization taken on a self-interest perspective when conducting business? How important is it to prioritize nonviolence, trusteeship, and swadeshi in order to achieve the SDGs? These and many more are the questions that need further examination. Gandhi preached cooperation between “exploiters” and “exploited”. It was an idea that was based on faith in humanity for the collective good. Trusteeship goes even further. It reconciles two opposing capitalist and communist sides, replaces competition with cooperation, and emphasizes mutual respect and peaceful, inclusive, sustainable development.

The fact that Gandhi was opposed to both capitalism and Marxist socialism only brings out the fact that his alternative concept of trusteeship was guided by moral and spiritual values, that involved both caring for the local communities and village panchayats and caring for nature and its sustainability. According to Gandhi, self-rule, but at the same time, self-control and one’s own limitation of wants are necessary to gain progress which will not be based on mere materialistic consumption and, therefore, degradation of the environment itself.

Modernity has led us to define progress in terms of capital, the economy, finances, technology, and science, instead of integrating it with moral progress. Hence, decreasing and limiting our own wants for the betterment of ourselves, purification, and the environment, suggests that it is necessary to revisit Gandhi’s economic thought and use it to merge with the current economic and social challenges we face in the 21st century, as we could notice through corporate social responsibility and the importance of giving reciprocally back to society and the environment, in order to leave the opportunity for future generations to follow the same steps.

As organizations are increasingly being held responsible for social issues, it has been debated to which degree they have the responsibility to provide back to society, either health care (as in the Gates Foundation), support education, culture, or promote economic redistribution. Hence, one of the central notions is the concept of trusteeship, which is concerned with the distribution of wealth and social welfare to improve society. As Gandhi advocated, companies should use wealth strictly to improve society while keeping a reasonable amount of profits to themselves. This connects to the aforementioned example of the Tata Group. As the group emphasized organizational, as well as individual ethical obligations, it correlates
with Gandhi’s ideas of economic self-reliance and Swaraj and the reciprocal obligations underscored in the trusteeship model (Balakrishnan et al., 2017).

In sum, Gandhi’s concept of trusteeship is not only changing the view of the ethical economic system but also comprises newly debated corporate social responsibility to diminish externalities posed to society by large companies. The trusteeship model, thus, offers an ethical solution to the eradication of poverty and overall social improvement in a more comprehensive way than communism or socialism. The unity of non-violence and sustainability, limitation of wants, self-reliance, and social justice in the trusteeship model provides the ability for national regeneration. Likewise, trusteeship practice ought to be incorporated in today’s capitalist environment to put obligations and duties on the ones that might have an adverse effect on society in the long term.

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