

CHAPTER 2

DEFINITION AND INTERPRETATION OF GANDHI'S SOCIAL IDEAS

2.0 Mahatma Gandhi's Background

In as so far as humans are not formed from nothing, we are either consciously or unconsciously affected by the environment we lived and the people we come contact with. It is also true that we shaped ourselves through experiences and decisions we made and lived through. This was also true to Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi from his transformation from a nonentity to the image of a Mahatma to somewhat less saintly and tarnished man in present time. Regardless of how the world perceived Gandhi, we cannot deny an understanding of his background is necessary to better understand his social ideas in context.

Mohandas was the son of Karamchand Gandhi and Putlibai Gandhi, the fourth wife of his father. In his autobiography, it was clear that Gandhi admired both his grandfather and father for their steadfast principles in the face of overwhelming authority and worshiped his mother as a saint.³⁸ He was born in Porbandar, on the 2nd October 1869.³⁹

Gandhi did not seem to excel in school claiming that his memories of his school days as mediocre.⁴⁰ Gandhi appeared not to show any signs of ability

³⁸ Mohandas Kamarchand Gandhi, *Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, (New York: Dover Publications, 1983), 1-2.

³⁹ Louis Fisher, *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi*, (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 1997), 24. The similar date is found in Gandhi's *Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth*.

⁴⁰ Gandhi, *Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, 4.

at the very beginning of his life nor did he show any ambition or drive to make something out of himself.⁴¹ He was as mediocre as probably millions of Indian boys those days. During his school days, the only clear picture we have was that he held his moral character very dearly, refusing even to lie at the expense of his authority in life, namely his teacher in the face of upholding his principles.⁴² In defending these principles, Gandhi might have been influenced by his grandfather and father whom he held as role models on the purity of a moral character.

During school days, he befriended Sheikh Mekhtab who seemed to have led him astray a while from the strict asceticism practised in his house with vegetarianism, non-drinking of alcohol, etc.⁴³ Practising dietary discipline was not as foreign to him as to the rest of us. He probably had a good grounding and foundation from his family on strict dietary habits. This paved the way for him to put himself through dietary experiments that would last for the rest of his life. Although he was led astray for a while by eating meat and stealing, it did him no overdue harm once he was able to confess the truth to his father. With that, he seemed to have felt cleansed and convinced that the telling of truth cleansed a person.⁴⁴

The next important phase of his life would probably be his education overseas in England as a lawyer in 1888. For two years and eight months in

⁴¹ Judith Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), 7.

⁴² Fisher, *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi*, 27. Refer to Gandhi, 12. "But I very jealously guarded my character. The least little blemish drew tears from my eyes."

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹² Gandhi, *Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, 23.

England, he struggled to fulfill the three vows he gave his mother.⁴⁵ This had probably helped him to build up much self-discipline in mastering desires. With this mastery, it strengthened his personal character and the decisions he chose to make. By no means here that he had looked upon all his desires as superfluous, he still aimed to live a good life as an educated man.⁴⁶

After graduation, Gandhi returned to India, eager and apprehensive to regain the position of prime ministers held by his grandfather and his father. However, fate was not meant to be. He was not only not offered position he almost saw as birthright, he was also treated to much indignities that cankered at his soul and finding he had no abilities for manipulations and sucking up to authorities, he decided to find other alternatives.⁴⁷

Unable to tolerate India, he took a position as an attorney to the Porbandar Muslim traders in South Africa. South Africa was Gandhi's training ground from 1893 to 1914 and moulded much of his ideas.⁴⁸ This was the place where he was confronted with much of the prejudice and injustice of the British Empire that he did not find in England.

⁴⁵ Fischer, *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi*, 33.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁴⁷ Gandhi, *Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, 85-87.

⁴⁸ Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope*, 30.

First, he had to deal with the color prejudice with the two unfortunate incidents where he was mistreated and turned out of the train and carriage with some of the people also helping him.⁴⁹

He then proceeded to Pretoria where he called his fellow Indians to a meeting to improve their conditions with four things: to tell the truth even in business, be more hygienic in their lifestyle, discard the prejudice of the caste system and learn English to better themselves.⁵⁰ Much of all that was ignored by his fellow Indians except for a few who wanted to learn English to get more business.

It was then the Natal government stated that indentured serfs after their five years of service, they either had to stay back and continued as a serf and went back to India. If they wished to stay as free men, they were obliged to pay an exorbitant fee designed to discourage them to stay on and the next injustice the South Africans were obliged to suffer was the deprivation of the Indian's rights to vote for any members of the legislature.⁵¹ This was dangerous because it enabled the government to come up with any discriminatory laws in which the Indians had no say of their inception.

Gandhi was already well known to the community there as a leader and was asked to stay and helped to fight these injustice. He planned to stay only a

⁴⁹ Fischer. *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi*. 59-60.

⁵⁰ Ibid. 61.

⁵¹ Ibid.. 65.

month and found himself staying for twelve years and won the Indian rights.⁵²

However, these were only the first few injustices perpetrated by color prejudice legally by the South African government. Other injustices would be the proposed ordinance that required all Indians men, women and children over eight to carry a registered pass at all times or risked being deported back deprived of their South African citizenship.⁵³ This was followed by an Act in 1913, that only Christian marriages were recognized and all others were not.⁵⁴

It was here Gandhi hammered out most of his contributions that would eventually help him in India. It was here he coined the phrase *satyagraha* for his movement using the truth-force. *Satyagraha* meaning truth force requires its practitioners to develop self-discipline to suffer for truth and principle in order to see justice done. It is a non-violent act whereby opponents are slowly shamed into seeing the errors of their ways and to ignite the better side of the human spirit. It was here he demonstrated the uses of this practical side of this concept to fight against injustice.⁵⁵

⁵² Ibid., 63 .

⁵³ Ibid., 99.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 141.

⁵⁵ Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope*, 62.

He gave approval to set up the *Indian Opinion*, an important part to disseminate his ideas throughout the people. It started in 1904 and he was held responsible for its opinions whether or not he was not the editor.⁵⁶

He also started two *ashrams*, a community of its own practising their own brand of livelihood based on Gandhi's understanding of life's philosophy, the Phoenix Farm and the Tolstoy Farm.⁵⁷ Eventually, these injustices were overcome when the South African government passed the Indian Relief Act.⁵⁸

When Gandhi returned to India early in 1915, he saw himself as a social worker working to better the lives of the Indians at home and not as a politician. He also promised Gokhale that he would not speak on public matters for one year and would travel around India to acquaint himself with the lives of the Indian people.⁵⁹ In the beginning, Gandhi thought of joining Servants of Indian Society founded by Gokhale but eventually abstained because of the differences of thought between them.⁶⁰

He was then embroiled with a few problems that eventually led him to use *satyagraha* and propelled him to the limelight of the Indian politics. The problems were the Champaran Indigo issue, Gujarat's land revenue demand

⁵⁶ Gandhi, *Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, 252.

⁵⁷ Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope*, 79 & 91.

⁵⁸ Fischer, *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi*, 150.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 158.

⁶⁰ Gandhi, *Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, 335.

and most importantly the Ahmedabad issue between the wages of the mill workers and millowners.⁶¹

When the Rowlatt Act was implemented, he inaugurated all-India *satyagraha* movement, a countrywide *hartal* (a strike where all work ceased) to protest against this law.⁶² Unfortunately, violence broke out and he had to cancel this with an apology that he had made a miscalculation of Himalayan proportions. This was his first step to get the British out of India.⁶³

He then pursued a co-operation with the Muslim community in their *Khilafa* movement whereby he supported their act against the British government who attempted to deprive the Sultan of Turkey (the Muslim *Khalifah*) of his suzerainty over the Holy Places of Islam.⁶⁴ This he saw as an important part of the Indian Hindu-Muslim co-operation towards independence.

Gandhi, already a part of the Indian National Congress, started the *swaraj* using all legitimate and peaceful means to independence in December 1920. *Swaraj* was Gandhi's term coined for fight for independence. This *swaraj* included the boycott of all foreign manufactured goods by the Indians.⁶⁵ He was arrested many times by the British government and saw them as periods of rest for him from his hectic schedule.

⁶¹ Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope*, 109, 115 & 118.

⁶² Fischer, *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi*, 225.

⁶³ Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope*, 132.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 140.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 163.

During his period of fighting the British for independence, he had also addressed issues dear to his heart like the uplift of the untouchables, the sanitation and health system in India and an Indian system of education rather than the Western.⁶⁶

Although Gandhi succeeded in getting independence from British, he was saddened by the partition of Indian and Pakistan of which he saw as the partition of the Indian Hindus and Muslims. His attempts to mend the breach was stopped violently when he was gunned down in January 1948 by a Hindu fanatic.⁶⁷

2.1 Influences in Gandhi's life

Mahatma Gandhi does not just appeared out of thin air. It is a product of slow progressive understanding of the truth and gradual control over selfish desires all too prevalent in us. With this gradual control and slow progressive understanding or flashes of truth as Gandhi puts it, he was able to implement ideas as of and when needed.

In trying to understand Gandhi's ideas, we must see the type of people who shape his thoughts as he grew, the books he read and integrated and the events that foreshadowed the making of this man.

⁶⁶ Fischer, *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi*, 176, 406.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 12.

2.1.1 Major Events

We must not forget that Gandhi changed at different times in his life. Sometimes major events influenced him, sometimes people influenced him and above all he himself changed himself. These influences need to be studied to determine exactly how Mahatma Gandhi formulated his thoughts and ideas for a better society and world.

The first major event in his life was probably his confession to his father of the immoral activities he had been doing behind his back.⁶⁸ This helped him to realize the importance of not concealing of anything from anyone, namely truth. Without concealing from anyone, he was able to cultivate of all things, fearlessness. With this principle learnt, he cultivated boundless courage that enabled him to practise *satyagraha*. From *satyagraha*, he proceeded to formulate other ideas.

Furthermore, his self-discipline and self-denial were put into tests during his sojourn in England where he took an oath for his mother.⁶⁹ This helped to firm the foundation that Gandhi needed before he was able to propose and implement his unique brand of social ideas.

One cannot deny that it was in South Africa, Gandhi the man and politician as we knew from history was born and created. The was the first time Mahatma Gandhi set his belief in non-violence that soon characterized all of

⁶⁸ Gandhi, *Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, 23.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 43.

his movements whether of political, social or economical.⁷⁰ It was here he began using non-violence against established institution of power and winning a modicum of authority.

It was also here he established a reputation as a person who worked for society at the expense of his own. It was also here he became aware that to serve humanity and civilisation, one's needs and desires must be given the last place.⁷¹ When he was aware of that, his diet and his self-discipline practised for so long come forth to help him build a strong character that he was able to use to the betterment of society. In 1901, Gandhi decided to return to India and he was given numerous gold and silver objects and diamond ornaments. He did not like this as he saw the danger in wealth and property and gave them back. The gifts of 1896 and 1901 would be surrendered to trustees who would use it as a fund.⁷²

It was here too, Gandhi made the changeover from a private family man to a public man. He decided that selfless service meant that he could no longer see his family as his responsibility but all society as part of his family.

To attain that end, Gandhi restrained from sexual intercourse with his wife and remained celibate from 1906 until his death in 1948.⁷³ He took a vow to become a *Bramacharya*, where he redirected his sexual energy into his passion for the common good.

⁷⁰ Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope*, 55.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁷² Gandhi, *Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, 194.

⁷³ Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope*, 41.

It was also here that Gandhi first applied his ideas of sanitation and health on the Indian community and started off his own concept of education in the Phoenix and Tolstoy Farms.⁷⁴ His sons were his experiments in this case. He also reached an understanding about 'untouchability' when he was faced with discrimination in South Africa.

Unable to accept that he was fighting discrimination in one hand with the South African government and condoning the discrimination against the 'untouchables' Indians, he decided that this was an abomination that should be eradicated from the Hindu religion.⁷⁵

After his baptism of fire in South Africa, he was able to move back to India. In India, he was called by Gokhale to come back to help India based on his successes in South Africa. India, however, is a different piece of cake. Mahatma Gandhi was not poised to become a well-known and influential person as he had few contacts and his ideas were not part of the mainstream Indian influential politicians and statesmen at that time.⁷⁶

It was only when Gandhi was needed in India to play a part in solving problems at a grassroot level in Champaran incident and the Ahmedabad incident, he became somewhat involved in politics. He took a radically different way of tackling social, political and economical problems in India.

The issue was tackled from grassroots level namely from the people and not

⁷⁴ Ibid., 91-92.

⁷⁵ Fischer, *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi*, 185.

⁷⁶ Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope*, 105.

from the government. Subsequently, Gandhi's social ideas have their basis in believing the strength of the human spirit especially of the masses. This became his trademark throughout his campaign in India.⁷⁷

Looking at all these major events, one is fascinated by the fact that he was never showed much promise as a youth can become such a strong character and personality albeit someone that many do not understand until today.

2.1.2 People

Putlibai – his mother

His mother probably inculcated within Gandhi a sense of piety and steadfastness in carrying the religious duties. Her ability to withstand suffering imposed by religion probably made a great impression on him and enabled him to carry out self-discipline later on in his life.⁷⁸ Witness how steadfastly he held to his three vows in England of not drinking, eating meat and dallying with women. These must show how strong he respected and loved his mother. Even the beads his mother tied for him, he cherished the blessing that was given.⁷⁹

Karamchand Gandhi – his father

Gandhi seemed to worship his father, looking up at him as the Father, whereby he seemed to be relieved after his father forgave for his lies and

⁷⁷ Ibid., 107.

⁷⁸ Gandhi, *Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, 2.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 107.

theft.⁸⁰ This indicated that Gandhi might have put his father on the pedestal as God, to cleanse him of his sins.

His father and his grandfather probably incalculated in the primary importance of duty before desires. Their ability to hold fast to their principles and their readiness to sacrifice for these principles probably made a very deep impression on him and convinced him of the rightness of his holding true to his principles.⁸¹

Kasturbai – his wife

His wife was a great influence to Gandhi in that in her service to him, he was able to concentrate fully on his job at hand. His attachment to her in the beginning was more of sexual possessiveness and gradually grew into respecting her as another person with her own needs.

One of the greatest praise Gandhi ever given to his wife was that she had never tried to stop him from his journey and exploration with truth and gave him instead much support as he needed.⁸² His wife's uncomplaining service to him was probably the foundation on which he can build his strength and principles to serve his people. The solidarity he found from his family can only help him to move with whatever principles he believed.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 23.

⁸¹ Ibid., 1.

⁸² Ibid., 245.

A man who cannot find peace with his wife and family cannot find peace with himself and eventually find peace with the world. He would not be able to find energy to dedicate himself to the world outside if he is constantly quarrelling with his wife. Witness the unhappy life of Leo Tolstoy, pursued even unto his grave by his wife. He may be able to live his life as he chose but without the support of his wife, he could not vigorously took part in enacting a social revolution practically.⁸³

2.1.3 Gandhi's Favorite Books

First, Gandhi started to read *Bhagavad Gita* in Sir Edwin Arnold's translation when he was a second year law student in London.⁸⁴ Through this, he came to know of the Hindu's religious richness. The *Gita* soon became his points of reference whenever he is in doubt of anything. Anything great decision he intended to make, he will consult the *Gita* first for any saying that may strengthen his resolve.⁸⁵

Bhagavad Gita is not an easy book to understand. Different people with different levels of understanding can read different meanings from the same hymns. Gandhi read his understanding of the *Gita* with his own spiritual understanding.⁸⁶ One cannot deny that Gandhi was a person of a good character, strongly believing in God.

⁸³ Martin Green, *Tolstoy and Gandhi, Men of Peace*, (New Delhi: HarperCollins Publishers, 1983), 108-109.

⁸⁴ Gandhi, *Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, 59.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 233.

⁸⁶ Fischer, *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi*, 48.

Many of the decisions Gandhi had made seemed irrational to his followers and Congress. It is said that to the wise men, we are like children, unknowingly playing with fire. Just as we know what is right and wrong but a child does not, which is why we educate the child on the right and wrong actions.

Gandhi was also deeply influenced by Tolstoy's book, *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*.⁸⁷ He found a deep sense of brotherhood with Tolstoy in that they both shared the belief that one cannot be a religious person without upholding the religious principles in all parts of life.⁸⁸

The influence of this book helps to set Gandhi on the path to search for Truth. It set him on the path of *satyagrahi*, of truly putting theory into practice just like Leo Tolstoy. He was able to start by striking off the chains as advised by Tolstoy in making oneself free by freeing himself from his desires for worldly goods and relationships.⁸⁹ This can be seen from Gandhi's strict diet and his vow as a *bramacharya* in order to prepare himself to serve the public.

2.2 Mahatma Gandhi's Social ideas

When one wants to write about Gandhi's social ideas, one must be prepared to take note that Gandhi was interested in people and their lives due to his

⁸⁷ Green, Tolstoy and Gandhi, Men of Peace, 61.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 86 & 88.

⁸⁹ Fischer, *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi*, 126.

religious and ethical beliefs.⁹⁰ Because of this interest, Gandhi was prepared to go into politics, social institutions, economics, etc. Anything that improves the lives of people and society, these will constitute his social ideas. Hence, Gandhi's social ideas will endeavour to change all spheres such as politics, economics, social institutions.

Gandhi's social ideas are all aimed into making social changes in society. This chapter identifies four ideas they believe help to change society, i) *satyagraha*, ii) *sarvodaya*, iii) decentralisation and iv) trusteeship.

According to Vago, there are many levels of change such as changes one can make individually, through groups, organisations and society.⁹¹ Thus we need to go through Gandhi's social ideas, taking note of which level it attempts to change society.

2.3 Gandhi's interpretation

2.3.1 *Satyagraha*

Satyagraha is actually a concept that one can make changes through making changes with oneself. This concept is most often associated with Gandhi's political weapon in order to get the British empire out of India. However, *satyagraha* is a force that can be used in any context to make changes.

⁹⁰ Mohandas Kamarchand Gandhi, *All Men are Brothers: Life & Thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi as told in his own words*, ed.. UNESCO, (Calcutta:Orient Longmans Private Ltd, 1959), 4.

⁹¹ Steven Vago. *Social Change*. 2nd ed. (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1989), 9.

According to Gandhi, the meaning of *satyagraha* is holding to the truth at all costs and the force one derives from such insistence on truth. This truth-force, he said, is the essence of *satyagraha* which helps to give the person the strength he or she needs in order to address any social injustice he or she perceives.⁹²

Gandhi stated that *satyagraha* is important because it is the trunk whereby other virtues can sprang from as it is the combination of truth and *ahimsa*. Truth and *ahimsa* being Gandhi's foundation as a person and he saw them as the foundation of a harmonious and peaceful society.⁹³

According to Gandhi, *satyagraha* works through action of truth and *ahimsa* as its basic foundation. Through these two principles, this technique of *satyagraha* is born.⁹⁴ *Satyagraha* has been referred as the weapon of the strong and not the weak because it requires enormous moral strength from the individual's inner character that training to be *satyagraha* was outlined carefully by Gandhi to reach the goal.⁹⁵

For Gandhi, *satyagraha* requires direct action in comparison with passive resistance which resist passively.⁹⁶ This is also the reason Gandhi coined another term for his technique. Gandhi said that the active component of

⁹² Gandhi, *The Essential Writings of Gandhi*, 319.

⁹³ Gandhi, *Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, 453-454.

⁹⁴ Glyn Richards, *The Philosophy of Gandhi: A Study of His Basic Ideas*, (London: Curzon Press, 1991), 48.

⁹⁵ Richards, *The Philosophy of Gandhi: A Study of His Basic Ideas*, 50.

⁹⁶ Bandyopadhyaya, *Social and Political Thought of Gandhi*, 220.

satyagraha is clear from four characteristics, namely: i) *ahimsa*, ii) impersonal motivation, iii) fearlessness and iv) creative power.⁹⁷

As a instrument of social control, *satyagraha* needs to be endlessly creative through *ahimsa* and moral persuasion.⁹⁸ According to Gandhi, *satyagraha* helps to improve society in two ways; first, by their own individual moral development and slowly spreading in society and second by transformation of relationship and elimination of injustice.⁹⁹ With *satyagraha*, when an individual changes, he or she also changes the people they come into contact with. This is like a stone thrown into a lake, spreading a small ripple. If there are enough small ripples, the whole lake may be changed.

2.3.2 *Sarvodaya*

This concept is another level of change that can be made through the co-operation of a group of people who strongly believe in common goals. This concept implies the ability of the men and women to see their roles in life not in terms of their self-interest but to put themselves into a position whereby they can be of assistance to society at all costs.¹⁰⁰

This nobility of purpose, according to Gandhi, is *sarvodaya* and helps to bring one closer to divinity, which is the actual purpose in life that we are striving after. With *sarvodaya*, one can see oneself as only the conduit to the

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 224

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Gandhi, *The Essential Writings of Gandhi*, 1.

well-being of the world and whatever possessions and talents that one possesses, it was to be used for the benefits of all.¹⁰¹

This in turn helps to form a mindset that would be conducive to trusteeship, the seeing of oneself as a trustee, not daring to take more than needed and if there is more, a trustee gives as needed for society. This is in line with Gandhi's belief that social change should happen in an evolutionary way and not revolutionary.

Within the *sarvodaya* social order, the society is to be nonviolent, based on love and human values, a decentralized self-governing, non-exploitative, and cooperative society.¹⁰² For Gandhi, *sarvodaya* should uplift all of humanity and not just the majority.¹⁰³

There are three basic principles in *sarvodaya*, that is i) the good of an individual is contained in the good of the society, ii) the job of the lowliest sweeper is as good as a doctor and iii) the life of a farmer and craftsmen is a good life.¹⁰⁴

Gandhi wanted *sarvodaya* socialism to synthesize the spiritual and cultural heritage of all India's human values and achievements.¹⁰⁵ The real implication of this *sarvodaya* socialism is to ensure equal distribution for

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 2.

¹⁰² Clymes Augustine & A.K.Sharma. "Gandhi and the Contemporary Challenges: The Emergence of New Social Movements." *Gandhi Magazine* 16, no.4 (1995): 447.

¹⁰³ Richards, *The Philosophy of Gandhi: A Study of His Basic Ideas*, 72.

¹⁰⁴ Midatala Rani, "Sarvodaya as Development Strategy." *Gandhi Magazine* 20, no.2 (1998): 214.

¹⁰⁵ Kunal Roy Chowdhuri. "Gandhi's Theory of Sarvodaya Socialism.", 64.

each man to satisfy his basic wants and for this the whole society needs to be reconstructed.¹⁰⁶

2.3.3 Trusteeship

After the level of change initiated by a dedicated group, namely a group of *satyagrahis* who got together to form *sarvodaya*, it is time for social change to move to a larger area which is the social institution.

Social institution here refers to family system, class system, any system that was taken for granted in a society.¹⁰⁷ This social institution can only be changed by those involved. This is where Gandhi conceived of trusteeship whereby he hoped to erase the class of *zamindars* and farmers by appealing to their moral conscience.

Gandhi said, “The finest exemplars of global trusteeship are, therefore, those who treat all possessions as though they were sacred or priceless, beyond any pecuniary or earthly scale of valuation.”¹⁰⁸

This automatically invokes the principle that mankind’s best interests would be the best interest of the society. The conflicts of trusteeship is the ability one must have in trusting the trustee to do what is right. To gain this kind of trust entails great sacrifice that these trustees must not be seen as benefiting in any sort of way from the products they hold in trust.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 70.

¹⁰⁷ Vago, *Social Change*, 5.

¹⁰⁸ Gandhi, *The Essential Writings of Gandhi*, 2.

Trusteeship sees that property belongs to everyone and its proprietor only manages and takes care of it for the benefit of the society.¹⁰⁹ When the trustees are unable to act as one, society itself will divest them of these possession through *satyagraha* as it presupposes that the rich cannot grow rich without the help of others in society.¹¹⁰

2.3.4 Decentralisation

In decentralisation, Gandhi may have to contend with the authorities in power for its application. He basically wanted to do away with the state itself. In this, he was a socialist anarchist. Gandhi himself stated "Independence must begin at the bottom. Thus, every village will be a republic or *panchayat* having full powers. It follows, therefore, that every village has to be self-sustained and capable of managing its affairs even to the extent of defending itself against the whole world."¹¹¹

He believed that the authority of the government actually comes from the willingness of the people below to be governed by them. If there is any injustice, then the people have every right to rebel and put a government they find more applicable.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Midatara Rani, "Sarvodaya as Development Strategy.", 215.

¹¹⁰ Kunal Roy Chowdhuri, "Gandhi's Theory of Sarvodaya Socialism.", 69.

¹¹¹ Gandhi, *The Essential Writings of Gandhi*, 359.

¹¹² Ibid., 11.

Gandhi had wanted a society without the constraints of a state whereby people within society would perform their duties spontaneously without the need for authority to enforce it on them.¹¹³

Gandhi had a vision that with decentralisation, everyone in society will be provided for and although not everyone can be equal in wealth, they had all their basic needs.

He envisioned the village as the small center that can operate independently with all the roles of the government shrunk in dimension such as the social system, the defence system, the education system and much more.¹¹⁴ With that, he believed the centralised government could no longer hold these people in bondage to do its will as they are self-sufficient enough not to need to heed the central government.

All these showed an idealism of where the people will rule from the bottom and that the people who ruled will look at their rule as if they are the servants.

In practise however, looking at the weaker character of people of lesser discipline than the *Mahatma*, one can only say that they will then seized power. "Power corrupts" is a phrase that one must never forget. A man who feels he is in a position of advantage over his fellow people will do anything within his ability and device to keep that advantage. Decentralisation hinges

¹¹³ K.J. Mahale. *Society & State*. ed. S.C. Biswas. (Simla: Indian Institute of Advance Study, 1969), 313.

¹¹⁴ Gandhi, *The Essential Writings of Gandhi*, 359.

too much on our human's ability to control our selfish desires that unless we became much better people, it is quite impossible to see how it can work.

A lot of liberal socialists and modern pluralists are now emphasizing on decentralisation of political and economic powers of the state. Gandhi's concept of the state needs to fulfill two criteria, namely: i) it should be done through non-violence and ii) it should be done within a non-industrial society with self-sufficient villages as the main unit of the social organization.¹¹⁵

2.4 Reasons and discussions for choice

2.4.1 *Satyagraha*

Satyagraha appears to be one level one can make changes to society that is through an individual level. Many great persons make changes to the world through their own unique contribution. For example, the invention of electricity by Thomas Edison changes the way we work, the works of Lord Buddha and Jesus Christ change the way society perceives their roles. Thus, it is true individual level of change can change society, civilisation and eventually the world.

When a person manages to keep control of his evil desires and takes care of himself, it goes without saying that society has one less burden to bear with even if he cannot help others.¹¹⁶ By helping himself, he helps to lessen the social ills in society. For instance, if a man is to stop drinking, he would not

¹¹⁵ Bandyopadhyaya, *Social and Political Thought of Gandhi*, 116.

¹¹⁶ K. Sri Dhammananda, *What Buddhists Believe*. 3rd ed. (Kuala Lumpur: Buddhist Missionary Society, 1982), 189.

only be able to work more permanently, he would be able to take care of his family.

Gandhi was very serious in the remaking of human before the remaking of society. He believed society could be changed from one person who can stick to moral principles.¹¹⁷ When a person changes, he may influence another to change and another and starts a chain reaction that may help his immediate circle and subsequently society.

Even if he is not able to influence people, his ability to stick to his principles will keep him from harming himself and others. As society is made up of individuals, each individual can make a difference to society.

2.4.2 *Sarvodaya*

When there are enough individuals that believe in the promotion of the benefits to society, we have a group who is dedicated to *sarvodaya*.

If we look carefully in the past history, we would be struck by the awareness that human beings have always live in society regardless of where they live. Ibnu Khaldun said that a human being is shaped in such a way that he must live with other human beings in order to survive. He is not capable of fulfilling all his needs by staying alone.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ Mahadeva Prasad, *Social Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi*, 22.

¹¹⁸ Ibnu Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah : An Introduction to History*, 89.

Aristotle had also commented human beings seem to be social animals whereby they not only get their physical needs fulfilled within groups but also emotional and social needs.¹¹⁹ John Rawls had said that when humans came together to form a society, they have come to an agreement, which is implicit understanding that there are certain rules in society one must follow.¹²⁰

This goes to show *sarvodaya* is not a foreign concept to them except perhaps in the expression of a word. After all, the whole of the society is more important than the self-interests of individuals. Is this not the whole of the expression of *sarvodaya*? Thus, *sarvodaya* is best served when the human beings understand that it is in their best interests to serve their society.

Naturally, we must remind ourselves the purpose of our society. Society is meant to help all its members to improve themselves in all aspects. This basically means everyone in society has a responsibility towards society in making it work.

If there is any social discrimination in society, it is detrimental to society itself although it may not be clear to the individuals concerned. For example, if the lower class in society is deprived of their basic need for work, they would be idle. Idle people tend to be violent as they feel helpless

¹¹⁹ Donelson R. Forsyth, "Why so social an animal," *Virginia Commonwealth University*, April 22, 2003, <http://www.has.vcu.edu/psy/faculty/fors/function.html#aristotle>.

¹²⁰ John Rawls, "A Theory of Justice," *Homepage on Academic Dialogue on Applied Ethics*, 1971, April 22, 2003, <http://caae.phil.cmu.edu/Cavalier/Forum/meta/background/Rawls.html>.

in the face of authority to fulfill even their most basic needs. When they are violent, everyone suffers including themselves.¹²¹

Thus, it is very obvious *sarvodaya* exists to a certain extent in society, without which the society would have been destroyed long ago.

2.4.3 Trusteeship

Trusteeship is actually an idea Gandhi proposed in order to facilitate the slow change of the benefits of economy in the hands of a few people to the benefits of the economy in the hands of the people themselves.¹²²

This change he hoped will minimize the disruption to the system of *zamindar*-farmer through an evolutionary change of their hearts and beliefs rather than a revolutionary one as proposed by Marx.¹²³

This social idea is necessary so that the oppressed class does not feel cornered and explode in a violent manner. In that, Gandhi hoped that the privileged would be aware as a part of society, they have the responsibility and duty to look after the poor and underprivileged.¹²⁴

In trusteeship itself, Gandhi talked of things belonging to everyone as only God can create and man made things from his creations. Thus, everyone has

¹²¹ Gandhi, *All Men are Brothers*, 95.

¹²² Gandhi, *The Essential Writings of Gandhi*, 396.

¹²³ James R. Ozinga *Communism: The Story of the Idea & Its Implementation*. 2nd ed., (New Jersey: Prentice Hall Inc, 1991), 59.

¹²⁴ Gandhi, *All Men are Brother*, 131.

a right to this creation and it does not belong a privileged few only. Gandhi felt that in trusteeship, an ethical economics can be carried out. If it can be carried, it would reduce economic problems especially poverty and helps to promote the good of all including the weakest.¹²⁵

. 2.4.4 Decentralisation

Decentralisation is a necessary part of social change because people who are controlled by a centralised power tend to lose themselves in a centralised bureaucracy.

When one is lost in a centralised bureaucracy, one is not immediately exposed to the social problem at hand.¹²⁶ Instead, you can actually look at things in a distance without understanding the pain and suffering that it may bring.

This leads to a loss of humanity because one does not have to identify with a human being anymore. One basically does something because the machine of the bureaucracy requires you to do so.

An excellent example of bureaucracy is what happens in the recent invasion of Iraq by the United States Government. It was quite evident that some of the people of United States were not happy with their government's decision

¹²⁵ Sulak Sivaraksa. "Applying Gandhi for Alternative to Consumerism." *Gandhi Magazine* 19, no. 4 (1998): 392.

¹²⁶ Coser, "Max Weber: Bureaucracy", *Dead Sociologists' Society*, 1977, April 22, 2003, <http://www2.pfeiffer.edu/~lridener/DSS/Weber/WEBERW8.HTML>

to wage a war in Iraq.¹²⁷ Unfortunately they were not able to stop it because the power of the military is centralised on a few persons and it is not the power of the people that rule but the power of a few politicians that made the decisions.

• Meanwhile, when one has a centralised authority, one does not have to think and feel so badly when one acts in a certain way. This is because the authority legitimise the suffering you are inflicting on others.¹²⁸ For instance, the caste system in India is being legitimised by its religion, Hinduism. This central religious authority relieved the Indian people from any way thinking of how their discrimination is harming others especially the untouchables or *dalits*.

With decentralisation, the people get back their own autonomy and lose their cushion of self-complacency and need to see the social ills that they too have a hand in.

The establishment of *Panchayati Raj* (self-sufficient village) is based on the principle of decentralisation whereby power and income are distributed more evenly through the nation.¹²⁹ The decentralisation means the people have a

¹²⁷ "Iraq Pledge of Resistance," *Achives*, 2003, April 22, 2003, <http://www.peacepledge.org/resist/release-archives.shtm>. This website managed to get more than 80,000 people signing against the U.S.-led war against Iraq.

¹²⁸ Stanley Milgram, "The Perils of Obedience," *Harper's Magazine*. 1974, April 22, 2003, <http://home.swbell.net/revscat/perilsOfObedience.htm>. 2003)

¹²⁹ S. Selvam. "Caste, Empowerment, and Panchayati Raj." *Gandhi Magazine* 17, no.3 (1995): 311.

more direct say in their lives instead of helpless pawns in the centralized government.

2.5 Comparison with other major social ideas

Our society and civilisation are currently caught up with these two major social ideas that focus on economic and material development as the yardstick to measure the progress of our society and civilisation. Gandhi offered us another alternative whereby the progress of a society and civilisation is measured by the moral development of its people through his ideas to change society, country and world.

There are basically a few social ideologies that have influenced the world. Even Gandhi's social ideas are seen to fall into the category of socialism and he himself unabashedly agreed to it.¹³⁰ We will only discuss three ideologies, namely capitalism, socialism and communism.

Naturally, capitalism, socialism and communism do not exist in a static form, nor do they stick the absoluteness of their tenets. That is not possible. Still there are certain common characteristics. We will compare in terms of ownership, economy, the state's role and the method of application.

2.5.1 Capitalism

In capitalism, it is quite clear that ownership of the means of production (land, factories, machinery, natural resources) is held by most part

¹³⁰ Gandhi, *All Men are Brother*, 82.

individuals or corporations and not by the state.¹³¹ This means the owners would hold certain power over people who are dependent on them.

This is something Gandhi disagreed on. When he proposed trusteeship, he was aware that in India, private ownerships are everywhere and this entraps people who are dependents on these ownerships. By using trusteeship, he hoped to convince the owners that somehow their property is a common property entrusted by a higher power for them to do something for society rather than solely in their self-interest.

However, Gandhi did not go as far as to get the owners gave up their ownership rights as was advocated by the revolutionary methods of Marx and Engel. Instead, he merely wanted them to look at themselves as trustees of the property and would help the other people accordingly.

In capitalism, it strongly advocates a free market system whereby means of production is in the hands of the private entrepreneurs.¹³² This naturally gives people room to achieve their success based on their ability and work. Progress can truly be achieved as people are more interested in achieving their goals.

In comparison with this, Gandhi himself had advocated against the free market system because he believed that it created unhealthy competition

¹³¹ Alan O. Ebenstein, William Ebenstein & Edwin Fogel man. *Today's Isms: Socialism, Capitalism, Fascism and Communism*. 10th ed. (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1993), 40.

¹³² Alan O. Ebenstein, William Ebenstein & Edwin Fogel man. *Today's Isms: Socialism, Capitalism, Fascism and Communism*, 41.

whereby greed is nurtured and progress is measured by material acquisition.¹³³ This, he believed, sidelined the disadvantaged people who are unable to compete in a free market environment.

He strongly believed that capitalism advocates and encourages greed in a person to accumulate as much as he can. This accumulation would naturally mean that the other person would be deprived since our resources are naturally limited.¹³⁴

This unabashed greed and competition is not only not conducive to the society following this doctrine because it deprives other societies not as capable in competition and ability of their basic needs, it also creates in the other society the false sense of abundance based on the deprivation of others.

Although the democratic government is a characteristic of the capitalism system and it is claimed that the system itself talks about by the people, for the people and with the people. Unfortunately, Schumpeter refuted that by saying that the system itself is a lie whereby the politician chosen would naturally want the position through his own greed for power and position.¹³⁵

This seriously hampers the government's ability to address necessary but unpopular social issue.

¹³³ Gandhi, *The Essential Writings of Gandhi*, 97.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 383.

¹³⁵ Richard D.Coe & Charles K.Wilber. *Capitalism & Democracy: Schumpeter Revisited*. ed. Richard D.Coe and Charles K. Wilber (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press. 1985), 13.

Gandhi disliked the state because he feels the state is basically controlled only by a selected few and the people at the grassroot level cannot make decisions that will basically changed their lives. Hence he advocated decentralisation of power where he wanted power to be concentrated in a village like sphere (the *panchayat raj*).¹³⁶

This, he believes is more useful as any changes made can be specific to the organisation itself. It is not that Gandhi disagreed with the function of the democracy acting for the benefit of the people. It is just that he doubted the top officials of a centralised state could truly carry out the wishes of the people.¹³⁷

We fast forward to the world today, nowhere in this world nowadays can we find a country who can proudly said that they are 100% capitalist. Even in a nation like United States who proudly proclaims its adherence to capitalism, we still see that there is a need for socialism to foster for example unemployment benefits, etc. All these should only take place in a socialist country can be seen here. Gandhi's idea of a village *swaraj* is as stated below:

“ My idea of village *Swaraj* is that it is a complete republic, independent of its neighbours for its vital wants and yet interdependent for many others in which dependence is a necessity. Thus every village's first concern will have to grow its own food crops and cotton for its cloth. It should have a reserve for its cattle, recreation and playground for adults and children.

¹³⁶ S. Selvam. “Caste, Empowerment, and Panchayati Raj.”, 310.

¹³⁷ Richards, *The Philosophy of Gandhi: A Study of His Basic Ideas*, 149.

Then if there is more land available, it will grow useful money crops, thus excluding ganja, tobacco, opium and the like. The village will maintain a village theatre, school and public hall. It will have its own waterworks ensuring clean supply. This can be done through controlled wells and tanks. Education will be compulsory up to the final basic course. As far as possible every activity will be conducted on the cooperative basis. There will be no castes such as we have today with their graded untouchability. Non-violence with its technique of *satyagraha* and non-cooperation will be the sanction of the village community. There will be a compulsory service of village guards who will be selected by rotation from the register maintained by the village. The government of the village will be conducted by *Panchayat* of five persons annually elected by the adult villagers, male and female, possessing minimum prescribed qualifications. These will all have the authority and jurisdiction required. Since there will be no system of punishments in the accepted sense, this *Panchayat* will be the legislature, judiciary and executive combine to operate for its year of office.¹³⁸

2.5.2 Socialism and Communism

Socialism and communism are put together because some of the ideas propagated by socialism are also found in communism. The major difference between socialism and communism is in its belief of the state's role and their method of ensuring that these ideologies are implemented.

In socialism and communism, there is no private ownership. Essentially, ownership is public and held by everyone in society. Everyone gets equal share within society whatever hard work they do or whatever position they

¹³⁸ Mohandas Kamarchand Gandhi, "Village Swaraj," *Harijan*, July 26, 1942.

held. This helps to fulfill the basic needs of everyone in society. Gandhi supported this idea very much, so much so that he praised socialism as a “beautiful word”.¹³⁹

The only dissent that Gandhi would have is that in communism, all these supposedly public properties are being held by the state.¹⁴⁰ This naturally means those in the power and authority of the state have even more control over society than in the capitalist society since they are the only ones holding this power.

One major point they managed to overlook in communism is that the state does not represent the people. Perhaps in the beginning the state acts in the interests of the people but as time passes, it corrupts the person holding the power and position.

For Marx and Engel, the state is something of a necessary evil for them to ensure the means of production and the social institutions are put into the hands of the people.¹⁴¹ However, they did not outline clearly how the state is to be put away after the people have achieved their goals in getting their own empowerment.

¹³⁹ Gandhi, *All Men are Brother*, 82.

¹⁴⁰ James R. Ozinga, *Communism: The Story of the Idea & Its Implementation*. 2nd ed. (New Jersey: Prentice Hall Inc, 1991), 60.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 60.

However, economy in a socialist and communist state would be less efficient as people are no longer propelled by their need to better themselves.¹⁴² Regardless of what they do, their basic needs would be fulfilled. Whatever extra effort they put in work is not going to benefit them in particular. Sluggishness will then prevail. Of course, it is not true that some people will not work hard for non-monetary rewards but much more people would do for that. Gandhi underestimates the need of people to get prestige and power from the economy will help improve it.

Communism makes use of revolutionary methods to achieve its goal.¹⁴³ Namely, the end justifies the means. Gandhi would have strongly disagreed with that. He felt that the right means is more important than anything in changing a society.¹⁴⁴ This is quite similar with socialism.

He wanted people to change, but starting first from *satyagraha*. From there, he envisioned the upper and middle-class being melted by the social ills of society surrounding them and tried to change it by looking at themselves as trustees of the society instead of the owners of a piece of the market. This naturally points out his ideas of trusteeship.

Whereas the revolution that creates socialism has crumbled in the form of East Germany in 1989 and Russia in 1991. Only Cuba is still sticking to

¹⁴² Alan O. Ebenstein, William Ebenstein & Edwin Fogel man. *Today's Isms: Socialism, Capitalism, Fascism and Communism*, 131.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 116.

¹⁴⁴ Gandhi, *All Men are Brothers*, 81.

communism whereas China has changed its communism system so much it resembles a juxtaposition of capitalism, socialism and communism.

Overall, when one looks at Gandhi's social ideas, one is overwhelmed by the high expectations set by these ideas. It may be true that human beings are motivated more than by their own selfish gains but the ability to achieve the standards set by Gandhi is well-nigh impossible unless one has already set one's mind to become a saint which can only appeal to a few of us in the billions of population in the world.