Chapter - IV

GANDHI'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS SOCIALISM AND COMMUNISM

Before 1934, Gandhi did not approve of the word 'socialism'. He was very much against it. When he entered the Indian political scene, his views were very much clear about socialism. As in 1916 he had declared, "I am no socialist and I do not want to dispossess those who have got possession; but I do say that, personally those of us who want to see light out of darkness have to follow this rule. I do not want to dispossess anybody." I should then be departing from the rule of Ahimsa. But a change is evident from this earlier stand in 1924 when he admitted the necessity of nationalization or state control over certain key industries which was deemed as having guarded approval of socialism. Again in the 'Harijan' of September, 1946 he clearly expressed his views towards the socialism as follows: "I believe that some key industries are necessary. I do not believe in arm-chair socialism. I believe in action according to my belief, without waiting for wholesale conversion. Hence, without having to innumerate key industries, I would have state ownership, where a large number of people have to work together.

Gandhi had a passion for social justice and from the beginning of his public life in South Africa, he had been

2. Young India; November 13, 1924, p. 378.
incessantly working for the cause of the poor. The cause of poor as an ideal of socialism appealed to him but he declined to accept all its doctrines meticulously. And it was perhaps for this reason that Gandhi did not hesitate to declare himself "better socialist than those who have labelled themselves as socialists". This shows that he disliked the ideological and state socialism of 20th century. He wrote in the Harijan in 1940, "I have claimed that I was a socialist long before those I know in India had avowed their creed". Not only this, he claimed himself to be a "foremost Communist".

It is true that there are certain common points in Communism and Gandhism. As Gandhi has often claimed in course of his discussion with socialist and communist friends that their goal is identical. Perhaps that is why it is often said that Gandhism is Communism minus violence. Because it is maintained that in ultimate analysis both Gandhi and Marx stood for stateless and classless society. Another common point between them was their extreme concern for the suppressed and the oppressed, the resourceless and the ignorant, the dumb and the starving sections of the society. The glaring economic inequalities of the society leading to the concentration of capital in the hands of the few evoked condemnation of both Gandhi and Marx.

5. Ibid.; April 20, 1940, p. 97.
6. Ibid.; March 31, 1946, p. 64.
Despite these similarities there were fundamental differences between the two ideologies. Commenting on the differences between Gandhi and Marx, K.G. Mashruwala wrote:

"The fundamental difference between Gandhiji and Marx lies in their different approaches towards life and universe. All other differences are either secondary or resultant of the main difference".\(^8\) \(^9\) Marxian principles of socialism could not influence Gandhi as a philosophy of life and a principle of social organisation. He had certain fundamental beliefs and ideas out of which were fashioned his technique of non-violence and his social and political philosophy. When it is said that Gandhism is communism minus violence, the impression created is that the 'minus violence' factor in communism is some small impurity the removal of which will make it same as Gandhism. In the words of K.G. Mashruwala, "As a matter of fact, even if it were possible to so equate Gandhism in terms of Communism, the minus violence factor is a major factor of considerable value. The implications of minus violence are so great as to make the equation as illusory as to say that red is green minus yellow and blue, or a worm is a snake minus poison".\(^9\)

Next the place of religion to Gandhi is of vital importance in all human dealings. This ultimate significance of religion lies in the fact that he considers 'the task of religion is to guide man in his spiritual and moral development'. For, he was

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concerned with overall development of man. Although Gandhi considers himself to be a Sanatan Hindu. He does not mean conventional or usual religions termed in highly transcendental or mystified terms. Being a practical idealist, he believed in that religion which is at the root of all religions and this religion harmonizes the historical religions and makes them valid. 10 Thus, his concept of religion is very broad. "Here religion does not mean sectarianism. It means a belief in ordered moral government of the universe. This religion transcends Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, etc. It does not supersede them. It harmonises them and gives them reality". 11 He regards morality to be very important factor to reach the truth. In his own words, "For me morals, ethics, and religion are convertible terms. A moral life without reference to religion is like a house built upon sand. And religion divested from morality is like "sounding brass good only for making a noise and breaking heads". Not considering the religion in isolation as an independent branch but to synthesize it, to avoid all kinds of duplicity in human mind and action, he introduced religion into politics. Or in other words, through religious inhaler he wanted to spiritualize politics. Summarizing his view of life and significance of religion in politics Gandhi wrote, "To see the universal and all pervading spirit of Truth face to face one must be able to love the meanest of creation as oneself. And a man who aspires after that cannot afford to keep out of any field

of life. That is why my devotion to truth has drawn me into the field of politics; and I can say without the slightest hesitation and yet in all humility, that those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means. 12

But Marx gave no sympathetic treatment to the religion which was to Gandhi, 'the way of life'—'daily, practice of truth and non-violence' and 'service of God' by introducing it in the political field. Marx never appreciated the participation of religion in politics as relevant. He wanted to keep politics free from any religious or spiritual dogma. Because, in his view, the ruling bourgeois class use the religion in their class interest to exploit the poor and oppressed people. So, he considered religion as the gigantic deception and big hurdle in the way of socialist revolution. Religion to Marx was "the sob of the oppressed creature", "the heart of heartless world" and "the opium of the poor". Perhaps there is hardly another school of thought which denounced religion in the strongest term as the Marxists have done. As Lenin wrote; "Our programme rests in its entirety on a scientific philosophy and notably on a materialistic philosophy ... Our propaganda therefore necessarily embraces atheism".

Further, in Gandhian philosophy, supremacy of spirit over matter has been considered the fundamental principle of life.

While on the other hand, Marx considered matter to be the ultimate reality and spirit only a reflex of matter. Rejection of God, religion and spiritual evolution in man in the Marxian philosophy made Gandhi to oppose it vehemently. In December 1924, he wrote in Young India:

"I am yet ignorant of what exactly Bolshevism is. I have not been able to study it. I do not know of it is for the good of Russia in the long run. But I do know that in so far as it is based on violence and denial of God, it repels me."

Hence Gandhi's opposition to Bolshevism was not less than the capitalism. To him both were 'materialistic cultures'. He feared from this materialistic race of modernity and this made him react when he sharply assails Saklatwalla:

"Comrade Saklatwalla, I wholeheartedly detest this mad desire to destroy distance and time, to increase animal appetites and go to the ends of the earth for their satisfaction". He further said,

"Self-indulgence is the Bolshevik creed, self-restraint the satyagraha creed. If I can but induce the nation to accept satyagraha if only as a predominant factor in life, we need have no fear of Bolshevik propaganda."

Further, he observed that so-called Communism or scientific socialism was one-sided as it was taking into consideration only the material aspect. The Marxian study of society and state he argued, purely treats man as a material body neglecting spiritual and ethical values. This was against Gandhi's view of ultimate reality. For, he starts with the premise of all pervading and omnipotent spiritual power which may be called Brahman or God or Truth. According to him man can have a revelation of the spiritual power intimately by a process of ethical discipline and purification of heart through a life of truth and non-violence. Religion is the anchor sheet of Gandhian philosophy. Man's spiritual and moral progress stems from religion. It leads Gandhi to believe in the power of the spirit of man to shape the environment with his spiritual consciousness. Hence, he believed, "If one man gains spiritually the whole world gains, if he falls the whole world falls to that extent".

Naturally for him, dealing of man with man is judged with spiritual considerations. "To me God is truth and love, God is ethics and morality; God is fearlessness. God is the source of light and life and yet he is above and beyond all these. God is conscience. He is even the atheism of the atheist. For in His boundless love God permits the atheist to live. He is the searcher of hearts better than we do ourselves. He does not take us at our word, for He knows that we often do not mean it, some knowingly and other unknowingly".  

15. Young India; March 5, 1925, p. 81.
Gandhi, the theist and prophet of non-violence, did not believe in communism for its excessive materialistic vision. Reacting on Marxism, Gandhi put forward an approach which considered "Man not only a material being, he is not simply a material body, neither is he simply a creature of feeling. All three must be blended in order to make the whole man". 16

While on the other hand, viewed from the Marxian angle, Gandhi seemed to be over-confident about the presence of God and spirit in man and thus Gandhi's conception of spirit cannot be appreciated at all which is nothing but imagination of spirit.

The contribution of Karl Marx to the socialist-thinking is based on his attitude towards development of capitalism and its impending crisis. He lived in a period when rapid development of capitalism in European and North American countries took place. Marx tried to generalise his empirical knowledge about the working of capitalism in England. In his outlook he brought into light the contradiction of capitalist development between the production process and private capitalistic methods of appropriation. To emancipate the proletariat from the clutches of Capitalists, Marx saw the class war as an historical necessity. His was the endeavour ending exploitation of man by man by the extermination of the capitalist system through the capture of the machinery of the state whether by violent or democratic method. In the proletariat state no form of private property exists which ends exploitation of any form. Such a state has no

coercive function to perform but for the establishment of classless and stateless society in the world order, dictatorship of proletariat become inevitable to fight against the other bourgeoisie states. This keeps up the communists to prepare for continuous struggle for the establishment of classless, stateless social existence till state withers away.

Certainly, Marx is a philosopher of matter. But his concept of matter is not static. It is moving phenomenon embracing all, hence dynamic and all objective reality. It is for this reason that he considers life, consciousness and even social life a "higher form of motion of matter". In this way the concept of matter and motion are interconnected and inseparable based on the material unity of the world. Marx, with the help of the concept of matter, thus explains the all activities in the field of politics, economics and social life.

On the concept of human nature, both Gandhi and Marx take opposite sides. It is because of their different attitudes of looking at things. Gandhi, guided by his spiritual and moral view of life considers the human nature as basically good. Being a part of divinity, man is incessantly striving for the achievement of inner goodness. Such a man, according to Gandhi, is the ideal man who is full of qualities of truth and non-violence. This was his unique approach of life envisaging towards the goal of classless and stateless society. Marx does not believe in the presupposition that human nature is basically good.
Rather he believed that human nature is a social construct and the man is a product of his social environment. His ideas and activities are based on this law. Any change in human nature can be possible only through a corresponding change in man's environment.

According to Marxist theory of state, the whole universe and all the things in the history are related with economic process determined purely in materialistic terms. In his own words, "all human history is based on 'economic determinism' and the 'mode of production' in every society. The history of hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle. There have emerged three types of classes in history, viz., slave, feudal and capitalist. In all these three stages of economic development of human history, the state has been the apparatus of class-coercion, and class dictatorship of the economically dominant class. The state of exploiting classes assumed different forms in different phases of human history but the specific nature of the owning class i.e., exploitation of non-owning, value producing toiling classes of society remains as usual on the basis of their property rights. In the words of Marx, "Social relations are closely bound with productive forces. In acquiring new productive forces, men change their mode of production, they change all their social relations. The hand mill given you society with a feudal lord, the steam mill society with the industrial Capitalist". 17 In the contemporary capitalist

society, the capitalists constitute the economically dominant class in the state machinery over all non-capitalistic sections of society. The capitalists own modern means of production and exploit the proletariat engaged in their factories, mills etc. Explaining inherent contradictions of capitalism Marx advocated the establishment of proletarian state which ends exploitation of man by man.

But Gandhi did not agree with Marx's economic interpretation of history and did not think in terms of a single factor (economic) as determining the social process. Gandhi's interpretation of history is the extension of his metaphysical concepts of truth and non-violence and his living faith in God. He believes firmly in dynamic forces of the spirit or God acting behind all social and historical movements. 'Not a leaf stirs without His order'. The spirit is moving with a purpose of progressive realization of truth and perfection at all levels both in individual as well as in society.

Among most of the political and social thinkers, Gandhi seems to have his own stand regarding the means-ends controversy. Led by his metaphysical belief inspired by the law of Action (Karma), he found close relationship between 'means-ends' the same as 'we reap exactly what we sow'. Thus, he always pleaded for the purity of means.

To Marx, the problem of means and ends was not as serious as it was to Gandhi. The ethics of communism are the natural sequence of its materialistic belief. Lenin said, "We deny all
morality taken from super-human or non-class conceptions. We say that this is a deception, a swindle, a befogging of the minds of the workers and peasants in the interests of the landlords and the capitalists. Violence has moral and social justification in Marxian view as he regarded the history of human society based on class-struggle. Throughout the history, the working class people have been brutally exploited by the dominating classes through the apparatus of state machinery. He thinks there is nothing immoral if for happy and free life violent means are adopted for the establishment of socialist society. Communism denies an independent existence to ethics and morality.

But to Gandhi, purity of means in all human dealings is of vital significance as he firmly believed that progress towards goal would be exactly proportional to the purity of means. So he said, violent means will give violent Swaraj. In another statement he said, "For me it is enough to know the means. Means and ends are convertible terms in my philosophy of life. We have always control over the means but not over the ends". So he advocated the dictum that "means justified the end".

Also to attain socialism Gandhi stressed on the purity of means. In his view, "Socialism is as pure as crystal. It therefore requires crystal-like means to achieve it. Impure means result in an impure end. Hence, the prince and the peasant will

18. Lenin, V.I.; Religion, p. 47.
19. Young India; December, 1924, p. 3.
not be equalled by cutting off the prince's head nor can the process of cutting off equalize the employer and the employed. One can not reach truth by untruthfulness. Truthful conduct alone can reach truth... Harbor impurity of mind or body and you have untruth and violence in you.²⁰

Perhaps nowhere is the difference between Gandhi and Marx so fundamental as in their views about capital versus labour. Marx does not believe that the capitalist will act as a trustee of the poor. He, on the other hand, has given a complete different picture of the hard materialism purported to be scientific which finds manifestation in his concept of surplus value. This surplus is pocketed by the capitalist which makes him more and more exploiter till at certain stage, the only thing is that the labourer has to 'lose his chains' and this is when a violent revolution takes place.

Gandhi, the lover of humanity and liberty, found that Russian experiment of Bolshevism could scarcely prepare the necessary atmosphere for the fuller development of human personality. He was sure that under non-violence it was possible to preserve the freedom and democracy. Through violence only a dictatorship could be established. He denounced the communistic idea of violence for the establishment of new world order which is free from exploitation. Suppression and degradation under dictatorship (though it is of proletariat) was a matter of grave

concern for Gandhi. Excessive centralization of power or dictatorship according to Gandhi, could never blossom into democracy.

Being humanitarian, any kind of violence or any system that kills man, preaches violence ethical against human life, is immoral and can never be approved of by Gandhi. In his own words "a state bureaucracy taking over from the capitalist class was no real solution to the problem of ending economic exploitation by violence. If the state suppressed capitalism by violence, it will be caught in the coils of violence itself. The state represents violence in a concentrated and organised form. The individual has a soul, but as the state is a soulless machine, it can never be weaned from violence to which owes its very existence". This was Gandhi's rejection of both capitalism and statism because he found in both the systems a high degree of violence and exploitation.

Obviously, the philosophies of Marx and Gandhi are poles apart. These have differences of fundamental nature which cannot simply be equated by saying as 'Gandhism is Communism minus violence' or 'Gandhism is Communism plus God'. The difference between them is intense and deeper and cannot be explained by a simple equation with plus and minus signs.

Whenever Gandhi got an opportunity he did not hesitate to comment against Communism or Socialism. In his reply to a

question he expressed, "Socialism and Communism of the West are based on certain conceptions which are fundamentally different from ours. Once such conception is their belief in the essential selfishness of human nature. I do not subscribe to it, for, I know that the essential differences between man and the brute is that the former can respond to the call of the spirit in him, can rise superior to the passions that he owns in common with the brute and, therefore, superior to selfishness and violence which belong to the brute nature and not to the immoral spirit of man. That is the fundamental conception of Hinduism, which has years of penance and austerity at the back of the discovery of this truth. That is why, whilst we have saints who have worn out their bodies and laid down their lives in order to explore the secrets of the soul we have had none, as in the West, who laid down their lives in exploring the remotest or the highest regions of the earth. Our socialism or communism should, therefore, be based on non-violence and on harmonious co-operation of labour and capital, landlord and tenant".  

Now it is clear that Gandhi rejected both, the Western Socialism and Communism. But his opposition to Western Socialism is not as strong as against Communism. He had his own conceptions of socialism, a distinct of its kind, borrowed not from outside but Indian in essence.

The 'socialism' that Gandhi envisages has to be brought about by peaceful persuasion and a radical transformation of the character of individual. "Private property need not be abolished in this type of socialism. Gandhi was fond of quoting the opening verse of the Isopanished which prohibits coveting anybody's riches. This implies the recognition of private possession of wealth".23

The meaning and interpretation of socialism, according to Gandhi, is based upon his metaphysical view of life. To that view perfect unity in the plurality or diversity is the ultimate goal. The difference of social status of the prince and the peasant, the wealthy and the poor, the employer and the employee have no place in his conception of socialism.24 In terms of religion there is no duality in socialism. Though Gandhian socialism derived its views from common religio-philosophic and religious traditions of the past but he differed altogether with sectarian theories. To Gandhi, socialism begins with the first convert rather than waiting for others' conversion. Referring to this he said; "It is perfectly possible for individual to adopt this way of life without having to wait for others to do so..." 25 Keeping in view the methods and ideals of socialists Gandhi said; "I will not preach the same socialism as most socialists do." 26 Replying to a group of fifteen socialist students

23. Young India; 23.11.1924.
25. Gandhi, M.K.; My Socialism, p. 27.
Gandhi told them that they called themselves socialists while they made others slave for them. (Since they each had a servant at home). Furthering his views on socialism, Gandhi said that the practice of socialism is to learn to use your hands and feet for the eradication of violence and exploitation from the society.27 In his own words "Socialism is a beautiful word and so far as I am aware in socialism all the members of society are equal—none low, none high. In the individual's body the head is not high because it (at) the top of the body nor are the soles of the feet low because they touch the earth. Even as members of the individual body are equal so are the members of society".28 In replying to Louis, he emphasised the peculiarity of non-violent socialism: "My claim will live when their socialism is dead". Regarding individual's freedom in a socialism Gandhi replied, "I do not want to rise on the ashes of the blind the deaf and the dumb. In their socialism these will probably have no place... I want freedom for full expression of my personality. I must be free to build a staircase to Sirius, if I want to ... Under the other socialism there is no individual freedom. You own nothing, not even your body or individual will".29

The Western theories of Socialism and Marxism could not win over Gandhi, primarily, because of his belief that all institutions and social systems have dependence ultimately upon


29. Pyarelal; Towards New Horizons, op. cit.; p. 204.
the creativity of the individuals who are actively engaged in them. For, individuals have flexibility of conscience which institutions and systems lack completely. "As the individuals, so are the systems" was the belief of Gandhi. Systems can never be built in isolation. Hence, Gandhi's eagerness lies in curing the original ill i.e. reforming the individual rather than organisation or system. According to T.K.N. Unnithan, "The fundamental Gandhian means for bringing about social change rest on the reformation of the individual does not seem to be unsound and logically wrong, because if all the individuals undergo a transformation, "internally, morally and spiritually," the society, which is a function of the "complex web of interactions and inter-relationships" that exist between those very individuals, also, ipso facto, undergoes a transformation. But when it is projected into a practical "social perspective" it tends to become "situationally transcendent" or impractical. 30

Commenting on socialism Gandhi said, "Socialism was not born with the discovery of the misuse of capital by the capitalists. As I have contended, socialism, even communism, is explicit in the first verse of Ishopanishad. What is true is that some reformers lost faith in the method of conversion, the teachings of what is known as scientific socialism was born. I am engaged in solving the same problems that face scientific socialists. Trusteeship as I conceive it has yet to prove its worth. It is an attempt to secure best use of property for the

people by competent hands". For realising the ideal society he relied not in the increase of state power (as mostly socialists believe) but in the increase of goodness in individual human beings. In his scheme, "individual is the centre of authority and value. The state and governments derive their existence and power from individuals. Their object should, therefore, be to help the all-round evolution of the individual". Socialism of Gandhi, in this way is centred around individual's development preceding Marxist socialism of state. Gandhi's socialism is humanitarian and dynamic all along the line and concerned with individual reform more than propaganda of any kind, as he wrote:

"The socialists and communists say that they can do nothing to bring about economic equality today. They will just carry on the propaganda in its favour and to that end they believe in generating and accentuating hatred. They say, 'When they got control over the State they will enforce equality'. Under my plan the State will be there to carry out the will of the people, not to dictate to them or force them to do its will. I shall bring about economic equality through non-violence, by converting the people to my point of view by harnessing the forces of love as against hatred. I will not wait till I have converted the whole society to my view but will straightway make a beginning with myself".

33. Harijan; March 31, 1946, p. 64.
In this way, Gandhian socialism is a socialism from within, based on the idea of brotherhood, human service and dignity of labour. Socialism to Gandhi was a way of life, a way of society and civilization. He was engaged in the task to frame such social order which had its own foundations rooted in social and moral virtues and not to be preserved or protected through violence or dictatorship. By basing socialism on non-violence, he has made a definite advance over the traditional socialism. Gandhi has made a serious effort by balancing material and spiritual forces for the fuller development of man.