

The Gospel of Trusteeship*

Levelling Up, Down

M.K. Gandhi*

ECONOMIC EQUALITY is the master key to non-violent independence. Working for economic equality means abolishing the eternal conflict between capital and labour. It means the leveling down of the few rich in whose hands is concentrated the bulk of the nation's wealth on the one hand, and the leveling up of the semi-starved naked millions on the other.

A non-violent system of government is clearly an impossibility, so long as the wide gulf between the rich and the hungry millions persists. The contrast between the palaces of New Delhi and the miserable hovels of the poor, laboring class nearby cannot last one day in a free India in which the poor will enjoy the same power as the richest in the land.

A violent and bloody revolution is a certainty one day unless there is a voluntary abdication of riches and the power that riches give and sharing them for the common good.

I adhere to my doctrine of trusteeship in spite of the ridicule that has been poured upon it. It is true that it is difficult to reach. So is non-violence. But we made up our minds in 1920 to negotiate that steep ascent. We have found it worth the effort.

Non-violent Way

By the non-violent method, we seek not to destroy the capitalist, we seek to destroy

capitalism. We invite the capitalist to regard himself as a trustee for those on whom he depends for the making, the retention and the increase of his capital. Nor need the workers wait for his conversion. If capital is power, so is work. Either power can be used destructively or creatively. Either is dependent on the other. Immediately the worker realize his strength, he is in a position to become a co-sharer with the capitalist instead of remaining his slave.

Community Welfare

I am inviting those people who consider themselves as owners today to act as trustees, i.e, owners, not in their own right, but owners in the right of those whom they have exploited.

It has become the fashion these days to say that society cannot be organized or run on non-violent lines. I join issue on that point. In a family, when the father slaps his delinquent child, the latter does not think of retaliating. He obeys his father not because of the deterrent effect of the slap but because of the offended love which he senses behind it. That, in my opinion, is an epitome of the way in which society is or should be governed. What is true of the family must be true of society which is but a larger family.

Supposing I have come by a fair amount of wealth either by way of legacy, or by means of

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trade and industry – I must know that all that wealth does not belong to me; what belongs to me is the right to an honourable livelihood, no better than that enjoyed by millions of others. The rest of my wealth belongs to the community and must be used for the welfare of the community.

In Practice

The question how many can be real trustees according to this definition is beside the point. If the theory is true, man lives up to it. The question is of conviction. If you accept the principle of ahimsa, you have to strive to live up to it, no matter whether you succeed or fail. There is nothing in this theory which can be said to be beyond the grasp of intellect, though you may say it is difficult of practice.

I am not ashamed to own that many capitalists are friendly towards me and do not fear me. They know that I desire to end capitalism, almost, if not quite, as much as the most advanced Socialist or even Communist. But our methods differ, our languages differ.

No Make-shift

My theory of ‘trusteeship’ is no make-shift, certainly no camouflage. I am confident that it will survive all other theories. It has the sanction of philosophy and religion behind it. That possessors of wealth have not acted up to the theory does not prove its falsity; it proves the weakness of the wealthy. No other theory is compatible with non-violence. In the non-violent method the wrong-doer compasses his own end, if he does not undo the wrongs. For, either through non-violent non-co-operation he is made to see the error, or he finds himself completely isolated.

Acquisition of Wealth

Those who own money now, are asked to behave like trustees holding their riches on

behalf of the poor. You may say that trusteeship is a legal fiction. But if people meditate over it constantly and try to act up to it, then life on earth would be governed far more by love than it is at present. Absolute trusteeship is an abstraction like Euclid’s definition of a point, and is equally unattainable. But if we strive for it, we shall be able to go further in realizing state of equality on earth than by any other method.

It is my conviction that it is possible to acquire riches without consciously doing wrong. For example I may light on a gold mine in my one acre of land. But I accept the proposition that it is better not to desire wealth than to acquire it, and become its trustee. I gave up my own long ago, which should be proof enough of what I would like others to do. But what am I to advise those who are already wealthy or who would not shed the desire for wealth? I can only say to them that they should use their wealth for service.

It is true that generally the rich spends more in themselves than they need. But this can be avoided. Jamnalsji spent far less on himself than men of his own economic status and even than many middle-class men. I have come across innumerable rich persons who are stingy on themselves. For some it is a part of their nature to spend next to nothing on themselves, and they do not think that they acquire merit in so doing.

The same applies to the sons of the wealthy. Personally, I do not believe in inherited riches. The well-to-do should educate and bring up their children so that they may learn how to be independent. The tragedy is that they do not do so. Their children do get some education, they even recite verses in praise of poverty, but they have no compunction about helping themselves to

parental wealth. That being so, I exercise my common sense and advise what is practicable.

Those of us, however, who consider it a duty to adopt poverty and believe in and desire economic equality may not be jealous of the rich, but should exhibit real happiness in our poverty which others may emulate. The sad fact is that those who are thus happy are few and far between.

A trustee has no heir but the public. In a State built on the basis of non-violence, the commission of trustees will be regulate. Princes and zamindars will be on a par with the other men of wealth.

The Choice

As for the present owners of wealth, they will have to make their choice between class war and voluntarily converting themselves into trustees of their wealth. They will be allowed to retain the stewardship of their possessions and to use their talent, to increase the wealth, not for their own sakes, but for the sake of the nation and, therefore, without exploitation.

The State will regulate the rate of commission which they will get commensurate with the service rendered and its value to society. Their children will inherit the stewardship only if they prove their fitness for it.

Supposing India becomes a free country tomorrow, all the capitalists will have an opportunity of becoming statutory trustees. But such a statue will not be imposed from above. It will have to come from below.

When the people understand the implications of trusteeship and the atmosphere is ripe for it, the people themselves, beginning with gram panchayats, will begin to introduce

such statutes. Such a thing coming from below is easy to swallow. Coming from above it is liable to prove a dead weight.

Zamindars, Kisans

I am quite prepared to say for the sake of argument that the zamindars are guilty of many crimes and of omissions and commissions. But that is no reason for the peasant and the labourer who are the salt of the earth, to copy crime. If salt loses its savour, wherewith can it be salted?...

To the landlords I say that, if what is said against you is true, I will warn you that your days are numbered. You can no longer continue as lords and masters. You have a bright future if you become trustees of the poor kisans. I have in mind not trustees in name but in reality. Such trustees will take nothing for themselves that their labour and care do not entitle them to. They then will find that no law will be able to reach them. The kisans will be their friends.

If the zamindars really become the trustees of their zamindari for the sake of the ryots, there never could be an unholy league (between the two). There is the difficult zamindari question awaiting solution... What one would love to see is proper, impartial and satisfactory understanding between the zamindars, big and small, the ryots and the Governments, so that when the law is passed, it may not be a dead letter nor need force be used against the zamindars or the ryots. Would that all changes, some of which must be radical, take place throughout India without bloodshed and without force!

Practical Trusteeship Formula*

1. Trusteeship provides a means of transforming the present capitalist order of society into an egalitarian one. It gives no

- quarter to capitalism, but gives the present owning class a chance of reforming itself. It is based on the faith that human nature is never beyond redemption.
2. It does not recognize any right of private ownership of property except so far as it may be permitted by society for its own welfare.
 3. It does not exclude legislative regulation of the ownership and use of wealth.
 4. Thus under State-regulated trusteeship, an individual will not be free to hold or use his wealth for selfish satisfaction or in disregard of the interests of society.
 5. Just as it is proposed to fix a decent minimum living wage, even so a limit should be fixed for the maximum income that would be allowed to any person in society. The difference between such minimum and maximum incomes should be reasonable and equitable and variable from time to time so much so that the tendency would be towards obliteration of the difference.
 6. Under the Gandhian economic order the character of production will be determined by social necessity and not by personal whim or greed.

*This "simple, practical trusteeship formula" was drawn up by Kishorlal Mashruwala and Narahari Parikh and approved, with a few changes, by Gandhiji

WHERE WAS GANDHIJI ON INDEPENDENCE DAY?

Many people thought he was in Noakhali. But he was actually in Calcutta. He meant to go back to Noakhali. But Muslims from Calcutta requested him to bring peace to Calcutta which was burning with communal violence.

Gandhiji stayed in a Muslim home in Beliaghata, a filthy locality full of hooligans, which was one of the most disturbed areas of the city. On August 13th Hindu youths surrounded Gandhiji's house and shouted slogans against Suhrawardy and Gandhi. Gandhiji pacified the crowds.

On August 14th there was no ugly incident in Calcutta. Calm prevailed around the Gandhi residence. In the evening he addressed a prayer meeting in Beliaghata, attended by over ten thousand people. Gandhiji appealed for peace and asked people to observe the Independence Day with fasting and prayer.

So while the rest of India celebrated the birth of Independence, Gandhiji fasted, prayed and was spinning. His residence became a place of pilgrimage for the people of Calcutta. His presence brought peace to the city.

Said Rajaji, "Gandhiji has achieved many things, but there has been nothing not even independence, which is so truly wonderful as his victory over evil in Calcutta."

Lord Mountbatten wrote to Gandhi, "In the Punjab (Punjab) we have 55,000 soldiers and large scale rioting on our hands. In Bengal our forces consist of one man and there is no rioting. As a serving officer, as well as an administrator, may I be allowed to pay my tribute to the one-man boundary force!"

Gandhiji left for Delhi after spending thirty days in Calcutta – 24 days in Beliaghata. When approached for message he wrote down in Bengali, "My life is my message".