

# Critical Evaluation Of Gandhi's Concept Of Trusteeship

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**ABSTRACT:** Trusteeship is a socio-economic philosophy that was propounded by Mahatma Gandhi.<sup>[1]</sup> It provides a means by which the wealthy people would be the trustees of trusts that looked after the welfare of the people in general. This concept was condemned by socialists as being in favor of the landlords, feudal princes and the capitalists, opposed to socialist theories.<sup>[2]</sup> Gandhi believed that the wealthy people could be persuaded to part with their wealth to help the poor. Putting it in Gandhiji's words "Supposing I have come by a fair amount of wealth – either by way of legacy, or by means of 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 by millions of others. The rest of my wealth belongs to the community and must be used for the welfare of the community."<sup>[1]</sup> Gandhi along with his followers, after their release from prison formulated a "simple" and a "practical" formula where Trusteeship was explained. A draft practical trusteeship formula was prepared by Gandhi's co-workers, Narhari Parikh and Kishorelal Mashruwala and it was fine-tuned by M.L. Dantwala.

**KEYWORDS:** trusteeship, capitalists, trade and industry, honourable, community, welfare, fine-tuned, formula

## I.INTRODUCTION

Gandhi's economic ideas were part of his general crusade against poverty, exploitation against socio-economic injustice, and deteriorating moral standards. Gandhi was an economist of the masses. His approach was rooted in human dignity. His economic philosophy is a result of innumerable experiments which he conducted in the course of his life. His pragmatic approach gave a new direction to the existing socio-economic problems in the process of protecting human dignity.

The fluid international conditions fraught with ideological tensions in the economic domain demanded a fresh approach to economic philosophy, with emphasis on the ideals of human rights like democracy, economic freedom, and social justice. Gandhism as a socioeconomic philosophy suits not only to accomplish the higher ideals of democratic freedom and socialism but it was also thoroughly developed to meet the challenge of national and international forces of communism and capitalism.

The core of Gandhian economic thought is the protection of the dignity of human person and not mere material prosperity. He aimed at the development, upliftment, and enrichment of human life rather than a higher standard of living with scant respect for human and social values. Fundamental ethical values dominated his economic ideas. He wanted to liberate the modern economic philosophy from the quagmire of materialism and bring it to a higher spiritual plane. Human actions were motivated by social objectives of the protection of human rights. Gandhi's efforts towards "spiritualizing economics" are truly reflected in his concept of trusteeship. He based his doctrine of trusteeship on the first sloka of Isopanisad, according to which one is asked to dedicate everything to God and then use it only to the required extent. The principal condition laid down in it is that one must not covet what belongs to others. In other words, in the first instance, everything must be surrendered to God and then out of it one may use only that which is necessary for the service of God's creation, according to one's strict needs. This makes it clear beyond doubt that it is not in industrial and business sectors only that the doctrine of trusteeship is to be made applicable. The spirit of this doctrine is detachment and service. Unless these two virtues are inculcated, it is impossible to obey the command "covet not anybody's riches." Therefore Gandhi's idea of trusteeship arose from his faith in the law of non-possession. It was founded on his religious belief that everything belonged to God and was from God. Therefore the bounties of the world were for His people, as a whole, not for any particular individual. When an individual had more than his respective portion, he became a trustee of that portion for God's people. God who is all-powerful has no need to store.

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He creates things afresh everyday. Therefore man should also live his life from day to day without trying to store things for the future. If this principle was imbibed by people in general, it would have become legalised and trusteeship would have become a legalised institution. Gandhi wished it became a gift from India to the world (Harijan, 23 February 1947).

Basically Gandhi suggested this doctrine as an answer to the economic inequalities of ownership and income - a kind of nonviolent way of resolving all social and economic conflicts which grew out of inequalities and privileges of the present social order. Gandhi never ceased to believe in trusteeship in theory from the beginning or, at any rate, towards the later part of life, though the method was proving ineffective. He believed in the indispensability of nonviolence, nonco-operation and Satyagraha in converting the privileged classes into trustees. He even advocated violence as a last resort to dispossess property-owners of their wealth. Therefore man's dignity, and not his material prosperity, is the centre of Gandhian economics. Gandhian economics aims at a distribution of material prosperity keeping only human dignity in view. Thus it is dominated more by moral values than by economic ideas. According to Gandhi, trusteeship is the only ground on which he can work out an ideal combination of economics and morals. In concrete form, the trusteeship formula reads as follows: (i) 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 to reform itself. It is based on the faith that human nature is never beyond redemption.

(ii) It does not recognise any right of private ownership of property except so far as it may be permitted by society for its own welfare.

(iii) It does not exclude legislation of the ownership and use of wealth.

(iv) Thus under state regulated trusteeship, an individual will not be free to hold or use his wealth for selfish satisfaction in disregard to the interests of society.

(v) Just as it is proposed to give a decent minimum living wage, 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 tenancy would be towards the obliteration of the difference.

(vi) Under the Gandhian economic order, the character of production will be determined by social necessity and not by personal greed.

The theory of trusteeship applies equally to both tangible and intangible property, "such as the muscular energy of the labourers and the talents of a Helen Keller" (K. G. Mashurwala, Gandhi and Marx, Navajivan Trust, Ahmedabad, 1951, p. 79). According to Gandhi, all property belongs to God and in his concept of trusteeship the trustees have no right to destroy that property deliberately and wantonly. Besides, trusteeship aims at the rising of the morale of the people by giving them a sense of security in the hands of the trustees. The trustees, in their turn, are beholden to creating an urge among the masses for a higher standard of life. As man advances from a narrow sphere of personal satisfaction to the nobler concept of the welfare of all, he marches closer towards self-realization. The whole idea of possessing wealth only to guard it from being misused and to distribute it equitably aims at protecting human dignity. If it is possessed for any other objective, it is objectionable on moral grounds. Gandhi enjoins this moral obligation on the part of the trustees as he is fully aware of the ills of capitalism which widen the gap between the rich and the poor.

The Gandhian theory of trusteeship departs significantly from Marxian economic philosophy too. If Marxism is the child of the Industrial Revolution, Gandhian theory can be understood only in the context of certain basic spiritual values of the Indian tradition. Marxian socialism aims at the destruction of the class called capitalists, whereas the Gandhian approach is not to destroy the institution, but to reform it. Gandhian socialism, being ethical, is different from Marxian socialism. Man, to him, is an ethical being first and a social being later.

The most significant difference between Marxian socialism and Gandhian socialism lies in the method they recommend to achieve it. Whereas Marxian socialism harps on violence, Gandhian socialism aims at a change of heart on the part of the rich. There is no place for violence, but only trust. The common man trusts his trustee and the latter plays the role of a custodian. Thus Gandhian socialism radically departs from both capitalism and socialism; it is trusteeship socialism. Though this kind of socialism is difficult to achieve, Gandhi advocated it as he believed in the basic strength

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of the goodness of man and the value of morals. All other "isms" address the problem superficially, whereas trusteeship strikes it at the root.

Gandhi wanted Zamindars to act as trustees of their lands and allow them to be used by tenants. This idea was based mainly upon the fact that India is an agricultural country where more than 80 percent of the population lives in villages. By providing them trust land, Gandhi was solving one of the major economic problems of an independent India to be. In the socialist collective agricultural system, we find the same idea implemented. The success of this system in certain countries shows that the concept is not impracticable at all. The failure of this system is often attributed to the will of the people. But a more sound reason seems to be the force that was being applied while putting this system into practice.

At the centre of this concept is the urge to protect human dignity. They are, broadly speaking, the demands or desires of the modern man. The revolutions that are raised from time to time in different countries are motivated by the same objectives of human dignity, justice, and equity. It is very clear that the idea is relevant today as it aims at the social, economic, and political changes in the world. One of the first steps to achieve this human dignity, justice, and equity is to eliminate the ever-present troublesome element of class struggle in the society. Though the Gandhian concept of trusteeship does not seek to destroy any particular class, it provides us with an idea of how to narrow the class gap. The practice of all the democratic nations has been to reduce the gap between the rich and the poor to a minimum. In India we find this motive behind our cooperative policies, the community development projects, and the taxation policy that heavily taxes the upper class and gives some relief to the lower strata of society. We find the manifestations of the Gandhian concept of trusteeship in these policies.

## II. DISCUSSION

Gandhi's theory of trusteeship stipulates that the rich should consider their property as what God trusted them to manage for the benefit of the poor. This theory legitimated the positions of the former, as long as they behaved as "trustees". Therefore, Marxists severely condemned it as conservative, while some scholars re-evaluated it as consonant with capitalist or mixed economies during the post-Cold War period. However, the theory is observed to have some aspects concessive to socialists, or aspects not really observed in the past evaluations. Here I would trace in what way Gandhi presented this theory from the 1920s to the 1940s, in order to evaluate it as a form of "non-violent" social reform, which was far different from any of existing theories based on capitalism or socialism. Mohandas K. Gandhi's theory of trusteeship is an idea that wealthy people should consider their property as what God trusted them to manage as "trustees" for the benefit of the poor. This theory legitimated the positions of capitalists and landlords in society, as long as they behaved as "trustees". Therefore, socialists and communists severely condemned it as supportive for the existing regime, while some scholars re-evaluated it as consonant with capitalist or mixed economies during the post-Cold War period. However, the theory is observed to have some aspects concessive to socialists, or aspects not really observed in such condemnation or re-evaluation. Here I would first introduce evaluations, both positive and negative, of this theory in the past. I would then trace in what way Gandhi presented the theory in various occasions from the 1920s to the 1940s. Lastly, I would like to indicate the possibility of evaluating the theory as a form of "non-violent" social reform, which was far different from any of existing theories based on capitalism or socialism.

### 1. Past Evaluations of the Theory

Let us first consider how the theory of trusteeship has been evaluated in general, before investigating how it was displayed in reality. Marxists asserted that the theory aimed to support the existing regime, in consonance with Gandhi's attitude to suddenly stop mass movements based on the spirit of "non-violence", or that the theory at least had an effect of supporting the regime.

First, Jawaharlal Nehru doubted the practicability of this theory, assuming that human nature was fundamentally evil: "Is it reasonable to believe in the theory of trusteeship — to give unchecked power and wealth to an individual and to expect him to use it entirely for the public good?"<sup>2</sup> To his eyes, Gandhi looked to advocate this theory in order to support large land ownership, feudalism and capitalism. Nehru deplored that Gandhi "blesses all the relics of the old order which stand as obstacles in the way of advance - the feudal States, the big zamindaris and taluqadaris, the present capitalist system"<sup>3</sup>. Nehru could not accept such an attitude as Gandhi's, when he said:

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...why with all his love and solicitude for the underdog he yet supports a system which inevitably produces it and crushes it; why with all his passion for non-violence he is in favour of a political and social structure which is wholly based on violence and coercion?<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand, E. M. S. Namboodiripad wrote Mahatma and the Ism in order to prove that “Gandhi was, above all, the astute political leader of a class — the bourgeoisie, in whose class interests he always acted”.<sup>5</sup> To him, Gandhi's trusteeship theory and other tactics “proved in actual practice to be of enormous help to the bourgeoisie in (a) rousing the masses in action against imperialism and in (b) preventing them from resorting to revolutionary mass action”<sup>6</sup>.

Marxists thus considered that this theory would sustain the existing class relations and represent the class interests of the bourgeoisie. Such a view of Gandhism as supporting the existing system was widely shared in the former Soviet Union and Japan.

According to Marietta T. Stepaniants, A. M. D'iakov, a Russian authoritative Indologist, at one time considered that “Gandhian ideology, which has emerged on the outdated basis, prevents the development of the productive forces. It defends the interests of reactionary classes which have no interest in the progress of but, on the contrary, wish to preserve the old social relations”<sup>7</sup>. Tokumatsu Sakamoto also quoted D'iakov as saying, “Gandhism is the most powerful weapon in the hands of the bourgeoisie and landlords, who are the leaders of the National Congress, by means of which they could subordinate the masses and utilize their movement for the benefit of their own interests”<sup>8</sup>. D'iakov was further quoted:

Gandhi took advantage of a religious prejudice of the farming masses, utilized their ignorance, retardation and blind obedience to the Congress and its leaders, in particular Gandhi himself, who was looked up to as a saint-hero, thus suppressed their activeness, corrupted them, and made them into the victims of being betrayed by the bourgeoisie and landlords<sup>9</sup>.

Sakamoto resented such condemnation on Gandhi as D'iakov's in 1957: “Could there be any insult as cruel as this against the leader of nationalism and people in India?”<sup>10</sup> However, Sakamoto himself could not avoid incorporating such a Marxist view into his own Ganji (Gandhi) in 1969, when he said:

Gandhi as the leader of Indian nationalism did not represent any class position of farmers or labourers. This is clear in the fact that Gandhi always took a position to suppress people's movements, whenever they roused their movement to the extent that they were about to explode into revolutionary violence<sup>11</sup>.

Here comes Sakamoto's thesis, “Gandhi was sound for the matter of nation, but unsound for that of class”<sup>12</sup>.

Yoshiro Royama also stated in his Mahatma Ganji (Mahatma Gandhi) in 1950 that “Gandhi preached his doctrine of non-violence as the representative of Indian national capitalists, whose power strongly backed him”<sup>13</sup>. Masao Naito highly valued this view, in conjunction with Royama's assertion that Gandhi contributed to “the growth and development of Indian national capitalists”<sup>14</sup>.

Referring to the class conflicts in India doomed to become more violent after the death of Gandhi, Royama also explained that “Gandhi's great fame over the Indian masses veiled class struggle that was making progress underneath of it”<sup>15</sup>. Naito noticed in Royama's argument the “cool eyes of science”<sup>16</sup>, based on his own image of Gandhi as conservative regarding any system transformation.

In his book, Gandhi wo meguru Seinen Gunzo (Youths around Gandhi), Naito cautioned us not to consider that “Gandhi and his thought reflected capitalists' interests”, but to consider that “the capitalists' interests needed concepts of Gandhian philosophy, since they were attracted by it”<sup>17</sup>. However, according to Naito, “the fact that Gandhi abnormally evaded or turned against class struggle left a huge problem”<sup>18</sup>, and Gandhi's

peculiar “theory of trusteeship” stipulated it as a duty for them [landlords and capitalists] to distribute their own wealth, or the trust from God, to peasants and labourers, acknowledging the positions of landlords and capitalists in Indian society as what they were. Therefore, it embodies a typical theory of class reconciliation at best. Gandhi was eager to confront peasant and labour movements led by leftists in the 1920s and 1930s by means of this thought as his weapon<sup>19</sup>.

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The conservative image of Gandhi mainly formed by Marxists was thus widely accepted. Nevertheless, such image was to be largely modified after the Cold War was over.

I would like to introduce several positive evaluations of the trusteeship theory formed during the post-Cold War period. First, Surineni Indira refuted in 1991 Nehru's skepticism about the theory as follows: "Despite its unattainability, when at least if some people earnestly practice, we may eradicate much of exploitation, violence, inequality, unfreedom in the world"<sup>20</sup>. She regarded trusteeship as "a lofty ideal worth striving for", although she knew Gandhi's idea that "Absolute trusteeship is an abstraction like Euclid's definition of a point and is equally unattainable". Indira thus asserted that both capitalism and communism could not solve such problems as hatred, violence, exploitation, class conflict and alienation, and that it would be only way out for an individual and society to practice trusteeship in a more effective way"<sup>21</sup>.

Second, Ajit K. Dasgupta also positively evaluated the trusteeship theory as an alternative to communism. To him this theory prevented radical land reform in the landlord-tenant relations, but increased productivity in the capital-labour relations as a result of their cooperation:

Historical experience suggests that as a means of bringing about an end to landlordism this [trusteeship] is unrealistic. For the management of industrial enterprise, trusteeship offers greater scope, and some elements of it are included in the so-called 'Japanese' style of management, with its tradition of life-long employment and emphasis on cooperation, rather than conflict, between labour and capital.<sup>22</sup>

Third, Madhuri Wadhwa placed Gandhi in the camp of liberalism as she thought his fear of state ownership, which had a tendency for "destroying the individuality", would synchronize with those of "modern libertarians, like Frederick [sic] Hayek and Milton Friedman". She also related the trusteeship theory to mixed economies, and argued that economic equality suggested by Gandhi would be possible "through modern welfare states, such as Scandinavia"<sup>23</sup>.

In these circumstances Indira considered the trusteeship theory as the third path to overcome the harms of capitalism and communism. Dasgupta understood it as a way of capitalism based on the labour-capital cooperation. Wadhwa seemed to be wavering between libertarianism and the Scandinavian type of welfare statism. They all evaluated the theory positively, unlike Marxists who viewed it as an attempt to support the existing regime.

Among these positive views of the trusteeship theory, Indira's is closest to mine. However, there is still room for us to trace in what way Gandhi displayed this theory in various political circumstances. By doing so, we will see that he endeavoured to prevent class struggle but redress unequal economic distribution among the classes, by means of incorporating some socialist elements into his own theory. It will then become clear that any view of Gandhism as backing the existing structure or consonant with capitalism is not comprehensive enough to understand this theory.

## 2. Trusteeship and Big Capitalists

Gandhi clearly acquired the knowledge of "trust" when he studied at Inner Temple in Great Britain from 1888 to 1891. According to his Autobiography, Snell's Equity gave him a big, clue to shape his concept of "trust"<sup>24</sup>. In the book Snell defined a "trustee" as "a person capable of taking and of holding the legal estate and possessed of natural capacity and legal ability to execute the trust, and should (for reasons of convenience) be domiciled within the jurisdiction of the English courts of equity"<sup>25</sup>. In that case, "cestui que trust" is "not one person having limited beneficial interest in the trust fund, ... but the aggregate body of persons (born and unborn) that make up the entirety of the persons entitled, or who may be or become entitled, to any beneficial interest in the trust property"<sup>26</sup>.

Gandhi's legal understanding of "trust" later assisted him to study it from religious viewpoints as well during his stay in South Africa. "My study of English law came to my help. I understood more clearly in the light of Gita teaching the implication of the word 'trustee'<sup>27</sup>. In fact he learned "aparigraha" (non-possession), "samabhava" (equability), "anasakti" (selfless action), and so on from the Bhagavad Gita. Incorporating these religious concepts, his idea of "trust" seems to have changed into a form of belief beyond a simple legal concept.

Another clue which helped Gandhi to deepen his insight into "trust" was John Ruskin's economic thought, which he also encountered in South Africa. Gandhi read Ruskin's *Unto this Last*, and noticed the possibility that the master would be "dealing with such subordinate as he would with his own son"<sup>28</sup>. Ruskin's idea of "social affection" of this



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type seems to underpin Gandhi's trusteeship theory that enjoins the rich to manage their property for the benefit of the poor.

In the Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, the word "trustee" indeed first appears in Gandhi's writings in 1908, when he led the Satyagraha Movement in South Africa. Yet, Gandhi then used the word to mean "British" or the "British Government", in contrast to "British Indian" as a "ward", not to mean a "capitalist" or a "landlord" in the conventional usage found in his writings later:

What is the duty of a trustee, if not to make his ward fit for everything that the trustee has been doing for the ward? Are the Government fitting us, their wards, for full citizenship?<sup>29</sup>

At that time Gandhi was solely tackling the deprivation of civil rights of Indian people in South Africa. It was after he was back to India in 1915 that he earnestly narrated the theory of trusteeship in a commonly known way.

Since Gandhi was back home, he had met a series of entrepreneurs through a series of events including ashram establishments and labour disputes. These entrepreneurs became the prototypes of "trustees" as capitalists. Here, I would like to refer to Ambalal Sarabhai, Ghanshyam Das Birla and Jamnalal Bajaj in order to analyze their relations with Gandhi.

First, Ambalal Sarabhai was a mill owner in Ahmedabad. According to Gandhi's Autobiography, when his ashram fell into financial difficulties, "a Sheth" placed in his hands currency notes to the value of Rs 13,000 and drove away<sup>3</sup>. It is well known that this "Sheth" was Ambalal at the age of twenty-five, that their relationship then started<sup>31</sup>.

In a labour dispute in 1918 over the amount of salary increase as compensation for the bonus cut, Ambalal confronted his sister Anasuya Sarabhai, who stood on the side of labourers. Gandhi then suggested that the labourers follow these conditions of a successful strike:

1. Never to resort to violence,
2. Never to molest blacklegs,
3. Never to depend on arms, and
4. To remain firm, no matter how long the strike continued, and to earn bread, during the strike, by any other honest labour<sup>32</sup>.

After two weeks, however, some of the labourers resumed their work at the mills, and others started feeling unhappy about that. Having seen their motivations lowered, Gandhi started fasting. This fast "was undertaken not on account of lapse of the mill-owners", but it moved not only the labourers' hearts but also the mill-owners<sup>33</sup>. When the dispute ended on the twenty-first day, Gandhi referred to Ambalal as follows:

The mill-owners were represented by Mr. Ambalal Sarabhai who is a gentlemen[sic] in every sense of the term. He is a man of culture and equally great abilities. He adds to these qualities a resolute will<sup>34</sup>.

According to Chamanlal Revri, the Ahmedabad Textile Labour Association (ATLA) was a labour union that functioned as an arbitration machinery to solve conflicts between the labourers and capitalists<sup>35</sup>. As M. V. Kamath and V. B. Kher explain, it was Ambalal who suggested that this ATLA be established<sup>36</sup>. The mission of this association was thus exactly to have the trusteeship theory function in reality.

On the other hand, Ghanshyam Das Birla provided the greatest financial support for Gandhi's political, social and economic activities. According to Madan Mohan Juneja, Birla met Gandhi in 1915, and started having a deeper association with him around 1924<sup>37</sup>. Birla's *In the Shadow of the Mahatma: A Personal Memoir* indicates that he made donations to Gandhi, more than ten times, to the amount of more than Rs 400,000. The amount was meant to support Gandhi's journals such as *Young India* and *Navajivan*, Aligarh Muslim University, Deshbandhu Memorial Fund and his khadi works<sup>38</sup>.

Louis Fischer once asked Gandhi, "What proportion of the Congress budget ... is covered by rich Indians?", he answered, "Practically all of it"<sup>39</sup>. Fischer furthermore explains that "Most of the money for the maintenance of

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Gandhi's ashram and of Gandhi's organizations for Harijan and peasant uplift and the teaching of a national language came from G. D. Birla, the millionaire textile manufacturer at whose house in New Delhi the Mahatma sometimes lived<sup>40</sup>.

One of the reasons why Birla never ceased supporting Gandhi's works is that he was attracted by Gandhi's personal qualities. Juneja explains that Birla was deeply influenced by Gandhi's tendencies to always listen to his inner-voice, to admit his own mistakes and overlook the mistakes of others, and to maintain the accounts properly and spend the public money economically<sup>41</sup>.

However, Birla did not have any sympathy with Gandhi's economic thought. He wrote in the introduction of *In the Shadow of the Mahatma*:

His outlook on economics, however, was different. He believed in small-scale industries — Charkha, Ghani<sup>42</sup> and all that. I, on the other hand, led a fairly comfortable life and believed in the industrialization of the country through large-scale industries<sup>43</sup>.

In fact Birla wrote to Gandhi in October 1927, "I wear khadi just for your satisfaction", which indicated his deep skepticism of Gandhi's economic policies<sup>44</sup>.

Nevertheless, Birla supported Gandhi's works, because he was not only charmed by his personality, but deeply motivated by his own economic interests as a business person. First, as Juneja explains, Birla counted much on the Indian National Congress to pressure the British government, which was eager to materialize economic interests of its own country. Second, he wanted to strengthen Gandhism as a preventive measure against communism, which had already gained the growing popularity in India<sup>45</sup>. Naturally, Birla could not keep following Gandhi's teachings of khadi, charkha, cottage industries and trusteeship forever. Soon after Gandhi died, he considered most of these teachings outdated, and started advising his friends to adapt their mode of living according to the changed circumstances. For example, he wrote to C. Rajagopalachari on April 16, 1948, emphasizing:

Some of these associates of Bapu have lived a life which in the absence of Bapu will be a burden on them. I have, therefore, advised Miraben, Sushila and Pyarelal — all to have a change in the fresh atmosphere<sup>46</sup>.

This attitude change of Birla's was perhaps well anticipated by Gandhi before he died. Asked who was the closest to the ideal image of "trustee" among "the first Parsi Baronet, the Tatas, the Wadias, the Birlas, Shri Bajaj and the like", Gandhi mentioned the name not of Birla, but of Bajaj<sup>47</sup>.

Jamnalal Bajaj influenced Gandhi to form his ideal image of an entrepreneur so decisively that he became to be called a "Gandhian capitalist". According to Bal Ram Nanda, Bajaj contributed Rs 31,000 for construction of the Sabarmati Ashram, and arranged for a car for Gandhi's use at the Bombay Congress session in 1915<sup>48</sup>. In 1921 he donated Rs 100,000 for the support of needy lawyers who had given up their practice to join the non-cooperation movement<sup>49</sup>. He accepted the chairmanship of the Reception Committee for the Nagpur Congress session in 1920, and acted as the treasurer of the Congress and also of the All India Spinners' Association (AISA) for years<sup>50</sup>.

Bajaj was eager to tackle social issues such as child marriage, inter-caste marriage and untouchability, in order to fulfill the "social responsibility of businessmen"<sup>51</sup>. To tackle untouchability in particular, he was involved in the establishment of Harijan Sevak Sangh in 1933<sup>52</sup>. As Gandhi suggested him to deal with the issue of cow protection in 1940, he also started managing Go Seva Sangh in the following year<sup>53</sup>.

In 1934 Bajaj thought of buying a cloth mill but gave up the idea when he received the following letter from Gandhi:

Vallabhbhai tells me that you are thinking of buying a cloth mill. ... I was certainly shocked to hear this. I felt that it was wrong for a person like you, who had taken so much interest in khadi, to own a cotton mill; but I could not decide whether I should write to you. Meanwhile, Janakimaiya came here yesterday. ... She has been upset since she heard this story... 'And the servants say that since you will now have a mill of your own, you will not ask them to wear khadi. Nobody likes your decision. ... If you wish to earn more money so that you may spend it for public good, we shall do without such contribution. ... If you can, send a wire giving the happy news that you have abandoned the plan<sup>54</sup>.

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Bajaj in fact was wavering between private business and public service, and struggling to make both compatible with each other. Such conflict inside him was reflected in Gandhi's letter to Bajaj in December 1938:

You should overcome excessive greed. You should give up private business even if it is intended to help you in public service. If you cannot do that, you must lay down strict limits. You should try to retire from politics. ... But your real field is altruistic business. Hence you should again use all your ability for the Charkha Sangh. That activity can make full use of your intellect, your moral qualities and your business acumen<sup>55</sup>.

As Juneja explains, this attitude of Gandhi's towards Bajaj was clearly different from that towards Birla: That is, Gandhi forbade Birla from taking part in the Independence Movement urging: "The country needs money. Earn it and send it for the national good"<sup>56</sup>. Under Gandhi's strong guidance, Bajaj had never stopped walking "in Gandhi's footsteps" for the rest of his life. He had remained the most important capitalist who supported Gandhi until he died in 1942. Gandhi then delivered a eulogy as follows:

In Seth Jammalal Bajaj, death has taken a mighty man. Whenever I wrote of wealthy men becoming trustees of their wealth for the common good I always had this merchant prince principally in mind. ... His contribution as a satyagrahi was of the highest order. ... He wanted to take up a constructive activity to which he could devote the rest of his life and in which he could use all his abilities. ... He threw himself into the work with a single-mindedness and zeal I had never seen surpassed. His generosity knew no distinction of race, creed or colour. ... The country has lost one of the bravest of its servants<sup>57</sup>.

Gandhi thus maintained good relations with different types of capitalists such as Sarabhai, Birla and Bajaj. Whenever Gandhi noticed the shrewdness of capitalists, he also shrewdly extracted financial support from them. That money was largely used to implement the Constructive Programme, which consists of communal harmony, abolishment of untouchability, khadi and others. The Programme was, according to its pamphlet in 1945, "designed to build up the nation from the very bottom upward"<sup>58</sup>, and implemented widely for the purpose of enhancing employment opportunities and living standard of the poor. Gandhi's friendship with the rich provided Marxists with grounds to regard him as supporting the existing regime. While he permitted capitalists to accumulate wealth, it has certainly to be questioned whether this attitude of his was consistent with his other, that the minority exploited the masses through machinery with the motive force of the former being greed and avarice<sup>59</sup>. Yet we also have to take into account that the rich class had to take on a huge burden to support his Constructive Programme. Here, one can clearly observe that one of the important characteristics of Gandhism appeared in its attempt to reallocate resources of the rich to the poor peacefully to make the latter self-reliant.

In any case, big capitalists who supported Gandhi played decisive roles in the formation of the trusteeship theory in the late 1920s. Indeed, the word "trustee" first appeared in his writings in 1927 to signify someone committed to the welfare of the masses, and that was all after Gandhi had met a series of important capitalists. In that year Gandhi requested donations for the khadi movement and appealed to the people:

We, I who make these collections, traders who trade in khadi, organizers who go out to the villages, all of us have to consider ourselves to be the trustees for the welfare of the spinners for whom and whom alone we exist<sup>60</sup>.

At the opening ceremony of a crèche in Ahmedabad in 1928, Gandhi expressed his dissatisfaction concerning the insufficient amelioration for the condition of the labouring class. There he requested mill owners to "hold all your riches as a trust to be used solely in the interests of those who sweat for you"<sup>61</sup>. In 1931 he appealed to the zamindars in the United Provinces to "take a lively interest in their [tenants'] welfare, provide well-managed schools for their children, night schools for adults, hospitals and dispensaries for the sick, look after sanitation of villages"<sup>62</sup>.

Here the basic framework of the trusteeship theory was shaped to stipulate that the rich manage their God-entrusted wealth for the welfare of the poor and accept only a commission for that management. The legal and religious understandings of "trust" that Gandhi acquired in South Africa then came to accompany some economic implications as well. The theory would be more enthusiastically advocated from then on as the means to eradicate "that unbridgeable gulf that today exists between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots'"<sup>63</sup>, or to bring about "equal distribution"<sup>64</sup> among people.

### 3. Penetration of Marxism into India



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It was during the 1920s and 1930s that Marxism spread widely in India. Manabendra Nath Roy and others established the Communist Party of India in Tashkent, the former Soviet Union in October 1920<sup>65</sup>. The Kanpur Conspiracy Case in 1924<sup>66</sup> and the Meerut Conspiracy Case in 1929<sup>67</sup> symbolized the deep penetration of communism into India. Across the world liberal societies suffered the Great Depression between 1929 and 1933, while the former Soviet Union successfully implemented its First Five-Year Plan. That world situation might have encouraged many young radical Indians to listen to the voice of Marxism as well.

In such a historical context, Gandhi counter-posed his theory of trusteeship against the Marxist theory of class struggle. Let us here look at some debates that Gandhi held with people influenced by Marxism, in conjunction with socialists' reactions to Gandhi who stopped the Civil Disobedience Campaign in 1934.

Gandhi suddenly stopped the Civil Disobedience Campaign in April 1934, on the ground that there was an ashram inmate reluctant to go to jail and preferring his private studies. Gandhi's press statement reads:

This statement owes its inspiration to a personal chat with the inmates and associates of the Satyagraha Ashram who had just come out of prison and whom at Rajendrababu's instance I had sent to Bihar. More especially it is due to a revealing information I got in the course of conversation about a valued companion of long standing who was found reluctant to perform the full prison task and preferring his studies to the allotted task. This was undoubtedly contrary to the rules of satyagraha. More than the imperfection of the friend, whom I love more than ever, it brought home to me my own imperfection. ... I was blind. Blindness in a leader is unpardonable. I saw at once that I must for the time being remain the sole representative of civil resistance in action<sup>68</sup>.

Having heard about the cessation of Civil Disobedience in jail, Nehru felt that "A vast distance seemed to separate him from me. With a stab of pain I felt that the chords of allegiance that had bound me to him for many years had snapped"<sup>69</sup>. According to D. G. Tendulkar, "This was the reaction of many Congressmen"<sup>70</sup>. They established the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) in Patna on May 27<sup>71</sup>.

Two days before, Gandhi had an acute debate with two socialists, M. R. Masani and N. R. Malkani, over "coercion" of socialism or state-ownership of industries along the socialist lines: "Your socialistic system is based on coercion"; "Violence is impatience and non-violence is patience"<sup>72</sup>. While Masani and Malkani asserted state-ownership of industries, Gandhi was eager to secure room for entrepreneurs' business based on the trusteeship theory:

Industries like transport, insurance, exchange must be State-owned. But I would not insist that all large industries should be taken over by the State. Suppose there is an intelligent and expert individual who volunteers to run and direct an industry, without much remuneration and only for the good of society, I would keep the system elastic enough to allow such an individual to organize that industry<sup>73</sup>.

Nehru, still in jail, in June started writing his Autobiography, in which he severely criticized Gandhi's ideas including the theory of trusteeship. The Autobiography was completed by February 1935, and it is not clear exactly when he gave the following account. However, the account is clear enough to express his deep distrust of Gandhi during these months:

Imperfection or fault, if such it was, of the 'friend' was a very trivial affair. ... But even if it was a serious matter, was a vast national movement involving scores of thousands directly and millions indirectly to be thrown out of gear because an individual had erred? This seemed to me a monstrous proposition and an immoral one. ... But the reason he had given seemed to me an insult to intelligence and an amazing performance for a leader of a national movement<sup>74</sup>.

Gandhi would never know about the manuscript of this Autobiography that Nehru was preparing in jail. Probably without being aware of Nehru's sentiment, he confronted socialist students in July. While they insisted that class struggle would be inevitable, Gandhi endeavoured to persuade them of the possible harmony between the capitalists and the masses, which would be brought about by the theory of trusteeship:

'We must trust them [the capitalists] to the measure of their ability to surrender their gains for the service of the masses. ... In India class war is not only not inevitable but it is avoidable if we have understood the message of non-violence. Those who talk about class war as being inevitable have not understood the implications of non-violence or have understood them only skin-deep<sup>75</sup>.

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Indeed, Gandhi was eager to avoid class conflicts by means of allotting tasks of trustees to landlords and capitalists. Having sympathy with the notion of “equality” that socialists pursued, he wanted to trust and rely upon the goodness of the rich in finding the means to bring about that “equality”. At this point he drew a clear line between himself and socialists, who thought class struggle as inevitable: “It is surely wrong to presume that Western socialism or communism is the last word on the question of mass poverty”<sup>76</sup>.

Four days later Gandhi thus requested zamindars to behave as “trustees”, and promised to protect them decisively from the peril of class struggle: “You may be sure that I shall throw the whole weight of my influence in preventing class war. ... But supposing that there is an attempt unjustly to deprive you of your property, you will find me fighting on your side”<sup>77</sup>.

As mentioned above, Gandhi's theory of trusteeship functioned to defend the rich class from the threat of revolutionary thought and class struggle on the rise at that time. Such a function of the theory, accompanied by Gandhi's fraternity with the rich, clearly induced one to view him as conservative and supporting the existing regime of Indian society.

#### 4. The Influence of Socialism

However, Gandhi could not totally avoid being influenced by socialism and communism. Nehru expressed the great shock he felt upon hearing the news of the campaign's suspension in his letter to Gandhi of August 13. On the contrary, it seems that this letter shocked Gandhi as well:

When I heard that you had called off the C. D. movement I felt unhappy. ... Much later I read your statement and this gave me one of the biggest shocks I have ever had. ... But the reasons you gave for doing so and the suggestions you made for future work astounded me. I had a sudden and intense feeling, that something broke inside me, a bond that I had valued very greatly had snapped<sup>78</sup>.

This letter must have been a turning point in Gandhi's attitudes towards socialists. In his reply of August 17 to Nehru, one can read his ardent hope that he would never like to part with Nehru in their movements for independence and social reform:

Your passionate and touching letter deserves a much longer reply than my strength will permit. ... But I am quite sure that from our common standpoint a closer study of the written word will show you that there is not enough reason for all the grief and disappointment you have felt. Let me assure you that you have not lost a comrade in me. ... I have the same passion that you knew me to possess for the common goal. ... But I have found them [socialists] as a body to be in hurry. Why should they not be? Only if I cannot march quite as quick, I must ask them to halt and take me along with them<sup>79</sup>.

Gandhi could never ignore Nehru's leadership as a socialist as well as the power of socialism in India. Gandhi commented on this as follows in his letter to Sardar Patel in September: “Then there is the growing group of socialists. Jawaharlal is their undisputed leader... That group is bound to grow in influence and importance”<sup>80</sup>. In fact, Gandhi is observed to have conceded to socialists to a certain extent in his statement regarding the theory of trusteeship from then on.

In October 1934, Gandhi preferred trusteeship to state-ownership, but admitted that, if the former was impossible, it would be unavoidable for the state to confiscate individual properties along the socialist lines:

I would be very happy indeed if the people concerned behaved as trustees; but if they fail, I believe we shall have to deprive them of their possessions through the State with the minimum exercise of violence. ... What I would personally prefer would be not a centralization of power in the hands of the State, but an extension of the sense of trusteeship; as in my opinion the violence of private ownership is less injurious than the violence of the State. However, if it is unavoidable, I would support a minimum of State-ownership<sup>81</sup>.

Gandhi's attitudes also changed after 1934 over the amount of “commission” that a trustee would receive, or the amount of wealth that the trustee would hand over to society. For example, in his interview with Charles Petrasch and others in 1931, he said, “I do not fix a figure for this ‘commission’, but I ask them [owners of wealth] only to demand what they consider they are entitled to”<sup>82</sup>. On the other hand, in his letter to Premabhen Kantak in 1935, Gandhi

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indicated a far bolder demand from trustees: “The owner becoming trustees means their handing over to the poor, that is, to the State or any other public welfare institution, all income in excess of a certain percentage”<sup>83</sup>. Moreover, in 1939 Gandhi insisted that the Princes, millionaires and zamindars should receive the same amount of wages as everyone else, that is, “eight annas a day” and “use the rest of his wealth for the welfare of society”<sup>84</sup>. In 1942 he stated that “In a State built on the basis of non-violence, the commission of trustees will be regulated”<sup>85</sup>.

Gandhi's concession for socialists is also found in his speech in 1947: “God who was all-powerful had no need to store. ... Hence men also should in theory live from day to day and not stock things. If this was imbibed by the people generally, it would become legalized and trusteeship would become a legalized institution”<sup>86</sup>. Here seems to be assumed a certain form of “coercion” by the state in turning trusteeship into “a legalized institution”.

The theory of trusteeship after 1934 thus assumed a kind of “coercion” with regard to trustees' property ownership and wages, as well as the institution itself. This is clearly a sign that Gandhi incorporated socialist elements into his own theory, as he deeply acknowledged the significance of Nehru and his socialist followers in India.

Now what is the meaning for Gandhi to assume “coercion” in his theory of trusteeship? Although it was not particularly clear in his statements before 1934, this theory had an intention, at least in principle, of redressing unfair economic distribution among people. After that year, Gandhi wanted to shorten the distance between himself and socialists by means of admitting “coercion” if it was inevitable, and hence to prove that the theory would actually have the same potential for social reform as theirs.

This point escaped the notice of Marxists, who criticized Gandhi as conservative regarding social transformation. It was also ignored by those who highly evaluated in the post-Cold War period the trusteeship theory as an alternative to communism or as an ethic supportive for capitalist or mixed economies.

Gandhi basically believed that India should not adopt the Russian-style of communism forced on people by means of “violence”. It was, therefore, a great deviation from the principle of “non-violence” that he assumed “coercion” in the theory of trusteeship. In that sense, Gandhi's concession to socialism was not small.

Despite such remarkable strides towards socialism, Gandhi did not intend to completely align his theory with those of socialists. The assumed “coercion” has not completely changed the nature of the trusteeship theory. That is, although he conceived of the possibility for the state to confiscate an individual's property by means of the least violence, to him this must be the last resort only when the theory proved unrealizable. While Gandhi stipulated the commissions for trustees, he wished that any forceful measure be avoided in line with the spirit of “non-violence”. Trusteeship as a “legalized institution” also seemed to be conceived as the extreme situation where it would be universally accepted among people.

Having received a critical impact from socialism, the theory of trusteeship maintained itself within its basic framework. While Gandhi wanted to maintain his friendship with wealthy people he considered good-willed, he thought of the abolition of capitalism by means of trusteeship in 1939:

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 communist. ... My theory of ‘trusteeship’ is no makeshift, certainly no camouflage. I am confident that it will survive all other theories<sup>87</sup>.

This statement proves that any understanding, either positive or negative, of this theory as supportive for capitalism is insufficient.

## III.RESULTS

Furthermore, Gandhi indicated his unique view of “socialism” towards the end of his life. At the Delhi Provincial Political Conference in July 1947, he stated:

It has become a fashion these days to call oneself a socialist. It is a mistaken notion that one can serve only if one carries a label of some ‘ism’. ... I have always considered myself a servant of the workers and peasants but I have never found it necessary to call myself a socialist. ... My socialism is of a different kind. ... If socialism means turning

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enemies into friends I should be considered a genuine socialist. ... I do not believe in the kind of socialism that the Socialist Party preaches. ... When I die you will all admit that Gandhi was a true socialist<sup>88</sup>.

As indicated above, Gandhi's theory of trusteeship certainly received critical impact from socialism after 1934, but kept a distance from it in essence until the end. Also drawing a line with thoughts supportive for capitalism in principle, it uniquely evolved within the basic framework shaped during the 1920s and 1930s.

Gandhi indeed preached the theory of trusteeship, in order to bring about class harmony and “equal distribution” among people. In 1944, considering the possible exploitation of peasants by landlords, he set forth that “Closest co-operation amongst the peasants is absolutely necessary. To this end, special organizing bodies or committees should be formed”<sup>89</sup>. The “organizing bodies or committees” here would mean panchayats. He conceived of solidarity among peasants and of strike in the form of “non-violent non-cooperation”, in order for trusteeship to function in reality<sup>90</sup>.

In April 1947, Gandhi persuaded peasant and labour leaders to cooperate “with zamindars not by harassing or killing them”<sup>91</sup>. He warned zamindars and capitalists as well: “Zamindars and capitalists will not be able to survive if they continue to suppress peasants and labourers”<sup>92</sup>.

Class conflict was one of the greatest issues in India during the last twenty years of Gandhi's life. He demanded that the ruling class behave as “trustees” to tackle this issue. After all, the theory of trusteeship was different from socialism, but not purposed to maintain the existing capitalist system, when it functioned as a means of social reform in Gandhi's unique way.

## IV.CONCLUSION

Now we cannot easily accept the Marxist notion that the theory of trusteeship aimed to maintain the existing capitalist regime. While the theory would legitimate the positions of capitalists and landlords as “trustees”, for that legitimacy, they had to take on a huge burden to financially assist Gandhi's works. He conceded to socialists in order to indicate that this theory also had the same vector of social reform as their theories did. This means that the positive understanding of Gandhism in conjunction with capitalism was also one-sided.

With capitalists and landlords on the one hand and socialists on the other, Gandhi did not take any side. Ultimately, the theory of trusteeship was an attempt to shorten its distance with socialism to avoid class struggle, and to reallocate the wealth of the rich to the poor non-violently. With this theory Gandhi dreamt of establishing - to borrow Ivan Illich's terminology - a “convivial”<sup>93</sup> society by means of mobilizing all the classes towards the construction of a politically and socio-economically new India.

Gandhi did not regard capitalists and landlords as his opponents when he advocated the theory of trusteeship. It may be questioned whether this theory was consistent with another position of his, in which he condemned their greed and avarice. Yet only by means of carrying such philosophical contradictions inside himself, could he tackle the contradictions that existed within Indian society itself.

The theory of trusteeship might have benefited capitalists and landlords as a result of its attempt to avoid class struggle. That is, though, an inevitable consequence due to the fact that Gandhi was not particular about his own principles, and that he remained within modernity in order to renovate it from the inside. By doing so, he endeavoured to redress, instead of veiling, the internal contradictions of Indian society in a peaceful manner, and this aspect of his work should be more highly valued.

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