

“Gandhi’s Vision Of A Utopian State: Understanding Practical Application Of Ethics And Their Modern Relevance”

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Abstract

Mahatma Gandhi’s concept of a utopian state represents an ideal society characterized by harmony, equality, and perfection in governance, economics, and social structures. Ethical principles of Truth and Non-violence are the basis of this ideal or utopian state which is composed of righteous individuals. Gandhi promoted a decentralized, stateless society governed by moral self-regulation as opposed to outside government, rejecting the hierarchical and coercive structures present in modern state systems. In his ideal society, everyone exemplifies moral qualities, promoting peace and cooperation at all phases of society. Giving priority to community-centric governance, Gandhi’s utopian state tries to abolish the exploitation of the central authority over individuals. This way of thinking challenges materialism and industrial exploitation by promoting ecological sustainability, economic self-sufficiency, and simplicity. Being a radical critique of industrialization and materialism, the goal of his philosophy is to the upliftment of the self-rule government, where local decision-making ensures equal distribution and enhances the life of the labour. Gandhi’s utopian state becomes the hope for every individual who desires to live his life with full dignity and liberty.

Key Words: Utopian State, Truth, Non-violence, Self-Rule, Peace, Cooperation, Decentralized stateless society, Economic Self-sufficiency.

Introduction:

Mahatma Gandhi envisioned a utopian state grounded in the ethical principles of truth, non-violence, and self-sufficiency. He believed that when people honored these principles in their both personal and professional lives could a genuinely peaceful and successful society arise. For him, non-violence is an active force of love and compassion, an instrument for change that requires great courage and resilience, rather than just the absence of physical force. Violent approaches only serve to nourish repetitions of hatred and retaliation, and thus could never lead to true peace. A society established on non-violence, on the other hand, would encourage respect, forgiveness, and reconciliation among its people. Gandhi urged individuals to live honestly and openly, stressing the need of truth in alongside non-violence. He believed that adherence to truth would prevent corruption and injustice. It ensures that society’s structures are built on integrity and trustworthiness. Gandhi’s

utopian vision, often referred to as *Ram Rajya*, would be a decentralized society with small, self-sufficient communities. Here individuals governed themselves based on moral laws rather than coercive power. This ideal society would embody respect for all living beings, egalitarianism, and economic self-reliance, with each person contributing to the community’s well-being without harming others. In this utopian state or the rule of divine justice, there would be no need for a centralized authority, as each individual would be guided by an inner sense of duty toward non-violence and truth, ensuring harmony and justice in the social fabric.

Objective of the paper:

To analyze Gandhi’s vision of a utopian state or the ideal state, concentrating on its foundational ethical principles of nonviolence, truth, and self-reliance.

To evaluate how Gandhi’s ideal of self-rule or Swaraj, specially the village self-governance would operate within a larger framework of decentralized

governance and its implications for social and economic equality.

To examine the relevance of Gandhi's utopian state model in contemporary society, particularly concerning social equity, justice, and environmental sustainability.

Methodology:

This research paper's methodology usually entails an analytical approach to the selection, analysis, and synthesis of appropriate data. Information related to this paper is collected from both primary and secondary sources like books, journals, and credible online sources. The chosen texts are closely studied and critically evaluated with an emphasis on literary devices, contextual analysis, and subject components. To find changes, important works are contrasted and compared.

Discussion:

Gandhi's vision of an ideal society or utopian society is based on his belief in the ethical principles of truth and non-violence. The vision of a perfect society is to create a moral and sympathetic community where people co-exist peacefully with nature and one another, rather than focusing on material wealth or technological growth. It begins with ethical principles, whose implementation immediately creates a perfect state of existence where the primary goal is to the enhancement of the lives of all creatures. He maintained that moral goals must be attained by non-violent means and that everyone's humanity and dignity must be respected in the search for the truth. That is, we can understand that, by exploring ethical principles and their real-life application, Gandhi wished to create his ideal state. When the votary of the principles understands their efficacy and then applies them to his everyday life, the notions of truth and non-violence will prove effective. The application has the power to transform each individual, which subsequently serves as the foundation for the creation of an ideal or utopian state. Gandhi asserts that in order to transform the entire world, it must first begin at the individual level and then progress to the universal level. Truth, non-violence, and self-control are not only ideals; they are the cornerstones of a society that upholds equality, rejects exploitation, and respects human dignity. Considering the methods used to accomplish social and political goals would represent the society's core beliefs, he thought that a

state founded on moral behaviour would be naturally peaceful and just. He therefore proposed that everyone should pursue the truth in any area of life, and that a society that is honest and trustworthy will inevitably result from this dedication.¹ Gandhi's ideal state focuses a strong emphasis on ethical coherence, where the strategies employed to create society are in line with the desired results, in contrast to many contemporary political systems. Gandhi's applied ethics for a utopian society, provides an objective to strive for and useful advice for bringing about a world that respects both ecological balance and human dignity. He gave the following explanation of how Truth and non-violence function as a means of creating an ideal state:

Gandhi was talking about a Truth that is more than a personal virtue or theological Truth. People can eradicate violent behaviour from their surroundings by deeply adopting this universal principle. By using it as the method, humans can create voluntary cooperation among all, since it is the moral law or the God who rules the entire universe. The establishment of voluntary cooperation is facilitated by the truth. The Quotation of Gandhi proves it more clearly that, "Truth is the moral law. Truth is the first thing to be sought for, and that which you cannot understand by the help of Truth, you will never understand."² Since it is the Moral Law, one might express gratitude for it by engaging in the actions that the Law prescribes. In other words, Gandhi believed that the first step in changing society is to engage in activities. True pleasure, which is independent of material and economic achievement, is the happiness that comes from fulfilling one's responsibilities to others.³ Gandhi has already stated that the ultimate reality is Truth, and that our actions yield positive outcomes when they are founded on this truth. Thus, fulfilling one's own duties with sincerity signifies adherence to the Law of Truth, while disobeying this Truth signifies a detachment from the principles or rules in life.⁴ Gandhi says that, "Truth is the right designation of God. Hence there is nothing wrong in every man following Truth according to his lights. Indeed it is his duty to do so. Then if there is a mistake on the part of any one so following Truth, it will be automatically set right."⁵ In light of the Varna Dharma, Gandhi now asserted that fully submitting to one's Varna does not entail taking advantage of others or exploiting others. The

¹ Gandhi, M.K. (1927). *An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, (pp. 150). Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad.

² Gandhi, M.K., (1929). *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. 40, (pp. 486). The Publication Division, Government of India, New Delhi

³ Gandhi, M.K. (1954). *Sarvodaya*, (pp. 7). Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad.

⁴ Gandhi, M.K. (1954). *Sarvodaya*, (pp. 8). Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 8.

law of varna actually teaches us how to limit our material cravings and enjoy the best possible lives by acting in accordance with our varna. One gets closer to the Truth or God through participating in activities that are consistent with the Varna.⁶ Every aspect of life will be impacted by the implementation of these clear and universal rules. It is the cornerstone of preserving positive relationships among various cultures, classes, faiths, etc. Gandhi explains how fulfilling responsibilities can promote positive relationships in society by stating that when two religions coexist, the primary goal of both should be to practice their respective works honestly. This will benefit not only that person who practices but also other religious followers. In other words, a Hindu should establish pleasant contact with other religious people and engage in activities that inevitably benefit those of other faiths. He receives the same respect and assistance in his time of need as a result of his good deeds toward other religious people. Therefore, fulfilling obligations inevitably results in the privilege that one ought to have.⁷

The performance of one's own duty according to the order of life leads to the concept of bread labour. That is, according to Gandhi, involving the self in the action of producing own bread is the perfect application of non-violence and Truth. Gandhi believed that non-violence is a path of bravery and selflessness that necessitated actively working to advance justice and serve others. It is the greatest and most selfless thing that one can do for other people.⁸ Its implementation is exemplified by the idea of "bread labour," which states that no one is discovered to be idle. According to Gandhi, true social service is the outcome of intelligent bread labour. It suggests that in order to earn their daily bread, each person demands to perform some kind of manual labour. Gandhi thought that, this practice encouraged respect for physical labour, equality, and independence. The entire society will automatically revolve if everyone serves in accordance with the law that God has ordained. This true service demonstrates selfless commitment and adherence to the law.⁹ True service is possible when it contains, love or ahimsa, the tendency to do bread labour or

the services for food, the feeling of selflessness etc. Life flourishes when one fulfills their own duties with sincerity and selflessness. Everyone will have adequate food and if they work for their own bread, then it guarantees a fruitful result in the future. This can only be obtained by carrying out their assigned tasks. A balanced society free from sickness, overpopulation, and other ills is established as a consequence of the performance of this task of bread labour. This is the highest form of sacrifice. Gandhi therefore counseled everyone that in order to earn their daily bread, each person should perform some kind of manual labour. He believed that this practice promoted equality, self-reliance, and respect for physical work. Gandhi's quotation proves the importance of bread labour is that, "The idea is that every healthy individual should labour with his body for bread, which is indispensable for sustaining life."¹⁰ According to Gandhi, the motivation behind bread labor is to eliminate social injustices. The conflict between the rich and the poor will be eliminated automatically if all the varnas participate in the activity and create their own bread. Rich people would portray themselves as trustees of their property, ensuring that they are utilized solely for the benefit of their fellow citizens.¹¹ According to Gandhi, though it seems to be difficult to achieve, still daily performing physical labour for daily bread becomes the means that leads to the ideal of Truth. The law of bread labour will bring about a revolution in society because it prioritizes the welfare of everyone over individual interests. When one does their task with sincerity, its results will be reflected in the universal welfare. In that situation, the earnest bread worker can win people's esteem voluntarily and without coercion.¹² Therefore, Mahatma Gandhi saw "bread labour" as a powerful means to promote social equality, as it required everyone to contribute to their own sustenance. In Harijan, it is mentioned by Gandhi that, "If all laboured for their bread, distinction of rank would be obliterated. The rich would still be there, but they would deem themselves only trustees of their wealth."¹³

As the practice of bread labour becomes the cause of maintaining a good relationship between the poor and the rich classes thus, it is the basis of the application of the sense of Trusteeship. A

⁶ Ibid., pp. 53.

⁷ Ibid., pp. 7.

⁸ Gandhi, M.K. (1927). *An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, (pp. 236). Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad.

⁹ Gandhi, M.K. *Harijan*, 2-3-1947, <https://www.gandhiheritageportal.org>, pp. 47.

¹⁰ Gandhi, M.K., (1921-1922). *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. 22, (pp. 81). The Publication Division, Government of India, New Delhi

¹¹ Gandhi, M.K. (1954). *Sarvodaya*, (pp. 19). Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad.

¹² Gandhi, M.K. (1954). *Sarvodaya*, (pp. 20). Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad.

¹³ Gandhi, M.K. *Harijan*, 24-3-1946, <https://www.gandhiheritageportal.org>, pp. 63.

fundamental tenet of Mahatma Gandhi's economic and social theory is the idea of trusteeship. According to him, money should be held in trust for the good of society rather than being seized by individuals. Trusteeship is rooted in the idea that wealthy persons have a moral obligation to use them for the benefit of others. Gandhi says that, "The economic structure that I have contemplated will be one that will not include the element of exploitation of others. It will be a form of trusteeship that will be more socialistic and not in the least capitalistic."¹⁴ By explaining the procedure of the trusteeship, Gandhi asserts that, as it is related to the rich people so when the rich class produces more money through their capacity, it should be the duty to utilize the excess money to the poor class for their upliftment.¹⁵ Gandhi's words of explanation are that, "The rich man will be left in possession of his wealth, of which he will use what he reasonably requires for his personal needs and act as a trustee for the remainder to be used for society."¹⁶ Since trusteeship is the ethical way that the underprivileged improve their life, it further contributes to the development of positive relationships between these two groups of people, regardless of their disparities. Each section of mankind exhibits a cooperative effort that creates a link through love. Nobody takes advantage of others, they are not envious of one another, and they do not act aggressively against one another. All that is composed of love, mutual respect, and a helpful attitude. Gandhi's trusteeship aimed to bridge the gap between socialism and capitalism, encouraging the wealthy to see themselves as custodians of their assets for the common good. It reflects his vision of a non-violent, equitable society where economic resources are distributed fairly.¹⁷ Therefore, considering trusteeship as the perfect example of the application of Non-violent principles, he shares his feelings that, "I suggest that we are all trustees, and we should act as such. Then there would be no private property except for what is needed for personal well-being."¹⁸ The inequality among men would therefore be eliminated by engaging in selfless actions, preserving mutual cooperation among all in all areas of life, practicing trusteeship, etc. The absence of inequality results in a peaceful society where people coexist without causing harm to one another. Gandhi

suggested using ahimsa, or non-violence, to create a peaceful society. He imagined a society in which respect and understanding, are used to settle conflicts.¹⁹ He believed that since people would naturally behave in ways that do not injure others, a fully non-violent society would not need the police or military. This non-violent approach also applies to governance, as leaders demonstrate humility and a dedication to the greater good by serving rather than ruling. Gandhi feels that when a state has both violent and non-violently minded inhabitants, in that case the necessity of central authority must be addressed. However, the country will be peaceful and happy if it is full of non-violent people who know how to treat the poor, how to deal with other people, how to be calm, upbeat, and kind in every situation, how to be moral and just with all the creatures in the area, etc. Pure people can be guided without the need for outside leadership. The peaceful members of the ideal society have happy lives by carrying out their assigned duties and responsibilities without any selfish intentions. In order to prevent hatred and jealousy, no one looks at other people's property. Everyone in that society lives in peace without the use of force. Therefore, the non-violent state gives rise to the establishment of decentralization. Their positive effect forces Gandhi to build a strong disagreement towards the centralized power of the State. Gandhi therefore favors decentralization. There is never a need for a centralization process while using non-violent principles. A self-contained village, society, or nation is the ideal setting for putting pure, non-violent principles into practice. Because non-violence encourages basic life, it makes it easier for villagers or those with a rural mindset to engage in the self-activity of the spinning wheel rather than the growth of any industry.²⁰ These programs, which included spinning cloth, promoting local industries, and eradicating social discrimination, are designed to encourage active participation in community development and to foster self-sufficiency. For Gandhi, these programs are essential for creating a peaceful society based on ethical interdependence. Therefore, the rural economy lacks exploitation- the

¹⁴ Gandhi, M.K., (1945). *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. 81, (pp. 196). The Publication Division, Government of India, New Delhi

¹⁵ Gandhi, M.K., (1937). *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. 65, (pp. 348). The Publication Division, Government of India, New Delhi

¹⁶ Gandhi, M.K. *Harijan*, 25-7-1936, <https://www.gandhiheritageportal.org>, pp. 180.

¹⁷ Gandhi, M.K. *Harijan*, 16-12-1939, <https://www.gandhiheritageportal.org>, pp. 376.

¹⁸ Gandhi, M.K. *Young India*, 3-12-1931, <https://www.gandhiheritageportal.org>, pp. 369.

¹⁹ Gandhi, M.K. (1909). *Hind Swaraj*, (pp. 63). Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad.

²⁰ Gandhi, M.K. (1954). *Sarvodaya*, (pp. 35). Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad.

essence of violence.²¹ In this regard, Gandhi says, "I suggest that, If India is to evolve along non-violent lines, it will have to decentralize many things. Centralization cannot be sustained and defended without adequate force. Simple homes from which there is nothing to take away require no policing; the palaces of the rich must have strong guards to protect them against dacoity. So must huge factories. Rurally organized India will run less risk of foreign invasion than urbanized India, well equipped with military, naval and air forces."²² As a result, the morality-following society is one where people live their lives using their hands and feet, everyone pursuing his own agricultural profession and receiving a fair income, and each finding delight in his own accomplishments. The members of that area learn to control their passions. Their non-violent use enables them to successfully manage their pleasures by controlling their thoughts, emotions, and desires in order to live a life of luxury. They take pleasure in having home rule.²³ This concept of home rule or *swaraj* proves Gandhi's vision of economic life that is grounded in simplicity and ecological responsibility. His disagreement with industrialization and materialism proves that a true utopian society would focus on fulfilling basic needs rather than accumulating wealth.²⁴ Therefore, Gandhi's utopian state is built on the principle of *swaraj*, or self-rule. Gandhi desired for small, self-reliant communities where individuals work collectively to meet their needs.²⁵ Another reason for his disagreement regarding the centralization of power is that, it is in the hands of the state. He says, "Centralization as a system is inconsistent with non-violent structure of society."²⁶ His hatred of the State's authority derives from the fact that it symbolizes violence in the exercise of power. Gandhi claims that the State (Authorities) uses violence to suppress the capitalists, even when the issue of economic equality comes up. Therefore, a government that governs the state through violent means is never trustworthy or honest. Gandhi consistently favors the idea of trusteeship over state ownership when it comes to allocating resources for the benefit of everyone. According to Gandhi, "What I would personally prefer would be not 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, it is unavoidable, I would support a minimum of State-ownership."²⁷ Once more, Gandhi believes that individuality is progressively diminished by state power. If everyone relies on the State, then the progress of the individual becomes reduced as everything is determined by the State. A trustee is a person who works to improve the lives of the underprivileged. However, the state's power reflects its opposite, raising questions about whether or not it benefits the poor. Gandhi says, "We know of so many cases where men have adopted trusteeship, but none where the State has really lived for the poor."²⁸ Therefore, Gandhi says that, this decentralized model reflects his belief that political and economic power concentrated in central authorities often leads to corruption and inequality. In Gandhi's view, a self-reliant state would enable people to govern themselves ethically, reducing dependence on large, impersonal institutions. Gandhi's idea of an ideal society that is based on independent, morally upright, and peaceful communities is still very relevant in today's world. His idea of *Swaraj*—self-rule—emphasized personal and collective liberty, where individuals control themselves in balance with the environment, promoting social justice and sustainability. As nations struggle with problems like economic injustice, environmental degradation, and the deterioration of civic ideals, this concept is still relevant today. Gandhi supported less reliance on centralized authority because he thought that when people and communities had the moral and financial ability to choose their own destiny, true freedom may be achieved. Gandhi's emphasis on nonviolence, ethical governance, and simplicity offers a motivating framework for social justice and sustainable development in an era of rapid globalization. It encourages societies to maintain a balance between human-centered values and economic and technological advancement. Gandhi's philosophy promotes a change from materialistic

²¹ Gandhi, M.K. (1954). *Sarvodaya*, (pp. 35). Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad.

²² Ibid., pp. 35.

²³ Ibid., pp. 37.

²⁴ Gandhi, M.K., *Young India*, (pp. 209). Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad.

²⁵ Gandhi, M.K. (1941). *Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place*, (pp. 32). Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad.

²⁶ Gandhi, M.K. *Young India*, 18-1-1942, <https://www.gandhiheritageportal.org>, pp. 5.

²⁷ Gandhi, M.K. *Peace, Non-violence, and Conflict resolution- the non-violent state*. <https://www.mkgandhi.org>

²⁸ Gandhi, M.K. *Peace, Non-violence and Conflict resolution- the non-violent State*. <https://www.mkgandhi.org>

objectives to principles that uphold moral integrity and the welfare of the community.²⁹

Conclusion:

Concluding this, we can come to the point that, the core of Gandhi's philosophical and social vision is his idea of an ideal state or utopian state, that is based on truth and non-violence or ahimsa. His utopian state, centered on applied ethics, challenges conventional ideas about governance and social organization. Gandhi presents a vision of society that places a higher priority on environmental preservation and human dignity than on economic expansion and technical advancement by stressing truth, non-violence, and self-reliance. His approach offers a goal to aim for as well as practical measures that people and communities may take to make the world more sustainable and compassionate.³⁰ Considering the non-violent principles, Gandhi says, these principles are not abstract ideals but actionable, transformative forces. It can reshape society from its core. His vision is a community-led society, often described as *Ram Rajya*, where individuals govern themselves based on moral principles, duty and awareness, rather than force or coercive authority. As he explained in *Hind Swaraj* the cornerstone of this ideal society is the spiritual commitment of each individual to live in alignment with non-violence and truth, as these are "the law of our species as much as the law of life in general"³¹ In Gandhi's utopian state, violence and exploitation, would have no place, whether it belongs to economic, political, or social areas. Because, these negativities are relied in falsehood and selfishness, which Gandhi saw as the root causes of human suffering.³² According to him, upholding the truth would promote trust and honesty, and non-violence would increase empathy and compassion, resulting in peace between people and communities. Because it depends on individual accountability and respect for one another rather than institutional coercion or harsh actions, this decentralized form of government would be sustainable.³³ Gandhi's faith in humanity's ability to achieve this vision underscores his belief that the application of non-violence and truth is not merely an idealistic pursuit but a practical pathway to an equitable, and peaceful world. Consequently,

Gandhi's utopian state, through non-violence and truth, envisions not only the cessation of conflict but a transformation of society that based on ethical living and spiritual awakening.³⁴ This vision is still a powerful foundation for debates regarding justice, peace, and sustainable living today.

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³¹ Gandhi, M.K. (1909). *Hind Swaraj*, (pp. 62). Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad.

³² Gandhi, M.K. (1927). *An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, (pp. 355). Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad.

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