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A Comparative Study of M. K. Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* and John Ruskin's *Unto This Last*

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Abstract:

The present paper proposes to investigate the different aspects of Mahatma Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* and John Ruskin's *Unto This Last*. *Hind Swaraj* and *Unto This Last* deal with common socio-economic aspects, other problems related to modern civilisation, dehumanisation, the true nature of wealth, etc. Both texts share the same arena of socio-economic factors and evaluation of machinery and its impacts on human civilisation. The purpose of Ruskin and Gandhi's writing is to establish a Utopian society but their views roar upon the hostility of machinery, and capitalism. Regarding their views, Gandhi and Ruskin followed the same path when discussing the political economy. However, Ruskin's and Gandhi's views share common aspects but the dissimilarity between the two was that Ruskin was more willing about the working class and labourer by providing them equal wages and the same way of living as the rich. But Gandhi's view of Sarvodaya acts as an umbrella that covers the poor as well as the rich, Brahmans as well as Dalits, and women as well as men. So, adopting 'Sarvodaya' the utopian dream will not remain a dream for any society; it is the most beautiful aspect of Sarvodaya.

Keywords: Sarvodaya, dehumanization, industrialization, modern civilization, decentralization.

Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* was published in 1909 and John Ruskin's *Unto This Last* was published in 1860. Ruskin's *Unto This Last* has given insight into labour wages, capitalism, production and supply. It would not be wrong to say that *Unto This Last* is his greatest work on socio-economics. In *Unto This Last*, time and again he has criticized the political economy. In his opinion, industrialization made men handicapped and he is unable to see the beauty of

nature. M.K. Gandhi was deeply influenced by John Ruskin's *Unto This Last*. He has drawn the insights of 'Sarvodaya' from *Unto This Last* by Ruskin and coined the term in 1908. The very basic meaning of Sarvodaya is the 'upliftment' or 'progress of all'.

Gandhi's view in the *Hind Swaraj* is beyond the time limit, the thought of Sarvodaya, the exaltation of all or the welfare of all, guides the human civilization from being dehumanized. Gandhi saw Sarvodaya as an exercise for economic upliftment which saved the Indian culture from dehumanization. Gandhian view of the socioeconomic gap between the rich and the poor is not much different than that of Ruskin's. As Ruskin too was very supportive of the upliftment of the poor by giving them economic rights. They both were the critique of 'modern civilization' which posed a threat to the human system.

The title *Unto This Last* had been adopted by the *Parables of the Workers in the Vineyard* in which labourers were paid in the last hour as they worked for the entire day. Both texts, *Hind Swaraj* and *Unto This Last* deal with the relevance and existence of life, morality and ethical education and pave the way for the establishment of an 'egalitarian society' which is not only concerned with the economic upliftment of the poor but one can also choose the path of ethical development.

John Ruskin was born in London on 8th February. As his mother was a religious-minded lady she always asked her son to read the Bible daily with her and to learn whole portions by heart. This reading of the Bible influenced John Ruskin, deeply.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born on 2nd October, 1869, Porbandar, Kathiawar Agency, British Raj. Gandhi in his childhood was an average and not a meritorious student. But Gandhi was deeply committed to moral values. Tulsidas' Ramayana is, in his opinion, the greatest work of all devotional literature. Gandhi regarded the Gita as his mother.

Spiritualism and morality hit the minds of Ruskin and Gandhi in their childhood, both were religious and truthful men, and Gandhi was highly influenced by the character of 'Harish Chandra'. "I do not remember", writes Gandhi in *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, "having ever told a lie during a short period either to my teachers or schoolmates" (25).

This intense honesty of John Ruskin and M.K. Gandhi led them towards the path of social reformation. They greatly emphasized correctness and truthfulness. Gandhi devoted his whole life to social work because he was a keen believer in giving service to the needy and the poor, Ruskin also wanted the welfare of society. He wanted labourers should be paid well so that the economy would gain pace.

The essay *Unto This Last* was first published in 1860 in Cornhill Magazine. However, it sparked controversy when released as a series of articles. As a result, the editor, Thackeray, stopped the publication of Ruskin's paper. This essay was later published in Fraser's Magazine, which Froude edited.

John Ruskin's *Unto This Last* had a great impact on Gandhi which motivated him to 'good of Individuals lies in the good of all'. *Unto This, Last* helped him to emerge his Sarvodaya theory and its principles that is progress for all. Therefore, it would be true to say that *Unto This Last* meant to Gandhi as Antyodaya that is only upliftment of the last. Kept into the serial Gandhi had published the nine-part paraphrase of John Ruskin's book into Gujarati in *Indian Opinion* which was later published under the title of *Sarvodaya* as a pamphlet. And in 1951 it was again translated into English.

Hind Swaraj was written in Gujarati between November 13-22 in 1909 on board the Kildonan Castle, on Gandhi's return trip from England to South Africa. It was published in two instalments in the Gujarati section of *Indian Opinion* (December 11 and 19). It was later released as a book in January 1910. The English translation by Gandhi, under the title *Indian Home Rule*, with Preface and Forward was published on March 20, 1910. *Hind Swaraj* is presented in the literary genre of dialogue between a reader and an editor. Gandhi says "I wrote the entire *Hind Swaraj* for my dear friend Dr. Pranjivan Mehta. All the argument in the book is mimeograph almost as it took place with him." *Hind Swaraj* has been published in several editions. In 1938 it was published by Navjivan Press in India. Thereafter in an American edition, in 1924 published in Chicago under the name *Sermon on the Sea*.

In 1910, this text was banned by the British government, with the claim that it was agitating. However, the British were considered hypocritical for only banning the Gujarati version and not the English one. This was because at the time, few people knew how to read English and those who did were under British control. Therefore, there would be no effect of the English version on *Hind Swaraj* on English English-speaking population. Gandhi defended himself by stating that he had translated *Unto This Last* into Gujarati as *Sarvodaya*.

For Gandhi, the true meaning of *Swaraj* lies in promoting the Indian government and Indian economy wholly according to the Indian ways. If we will be able to do so, then, we shall attain Home Rule. In other words, Home Rule is nothing but 'Poorna Swadeshi'. Gandhi in *Hind Swaraj*, "You want tiger's nature, but not the tiger; that is to say, you would make India English. And when it becomes English, it will be called not Hindustan but

Englistan. This is not the *Swaraj* I want" (24). Gandhi was a critique of modern civilization and according to him for the people of modern culture material pursuits were the 'emblem of civilization'. The more the lives of people are materialized, the more they are known to be civilized. But Gandhi emphasized that it is the moral character of a person that makes him civilized not his pursuits. And one could connect such an idea to true Indian ideology. In Indian ideology, the total emphasis is on moral character and behavioural code which is opposite to that of Western civilization.

Similar was the way of thinking of John Ruskin who accentuated that wealth and material pursuits which cannot be equated with natural surroundings and without nature wealth is worthless. Nature is a binding force for human beings to connect with their surroundings. "There Is No Wealth But Life", writes John Ruskin in *Unto This Last* "including all its powers of love, of joy, and admiration" (125). The happiness, nature and joys of life hold much more value than the monetary wealth. The power of nature is unseen yet it is more impactful on human minds.

Ruskin considered that the poor also share a major portion of the society. If the bourgeoisie is important for the economy of the nation; the proletariat has its relevance. The exploitation and insufficient wages of the proletariat will make them against the bourgeois which creates a gap between the two and this circumstance is not ethically good for the society. That is why Ruskin fights for equal rights for the working class. Gandhi also considered capitalism as the main reason for inequality in society but his idea of 'upliftment for all' is slightly different from that of Ruskin's idea and is not restricted to a particular class, creed, gender and race. Sarvodaya gives benefit to both, its doer as well as who is being uplifted by the doer. For him, upliftment means upliftment by all 'just means'. Genuinely, upliftment is possible for both the rich and poor. The rich can gain upliftment by acting as a trust and this action will help both the rich and the poor for their upliftment. His ideal of Sarvodaya is not only limited to the economics of the poor but also by practising it the rich can develop himself ethically. According to Gandhi, if anyone has surplus assets, he should treat himself as a trustee towards the weak and the poor. The concept of Sarvodaya goes beyond times and it is as new as it was at that time when the term was coined. By the word trusteeship he does not mean to say that everyone should have equal wealth but the real meaning of trusteeship is that everyone should have wealth but according to his or her needs. Because man's greed has no limitation and wealth is limited this craving for comfort gives rise to the accumulation of materialistic wealth and the use of monetary wealth more than their needs. Capitalism is the root cause of

this wide gap between the haves and the have-nots. According to Gandhi, it is all due to the mechanical era which is responsible for the capitalistic system. The main ambition of trusteeship was to demolish the capitalistic system.

The concept of Ruskin of ill-gotten wealth in his essay “Qui Judicatis Terram” is very similar to Gandhi’s concept of trusteeship in his *Hind Swaraj*. Ruskin took the example of a Jewish merchant in his essay who was famous because of his wisdom and who had accumulated money but kept in his mind the distinction between ill-gotten and well-gotten wealth. For him, justice was the way to get rich; he was an ideal to all merchants of the contemporary era. The Jewish merchant was successful only because of his honesty and truthfulness. In his essay “Qui Judicatis Terram” included in *Unto This Last*, John Ruskin writes, “The rich and the poor have met. God is their maker/ The rich and the poor have met. God is their light.” (65). Ruskin puts up a question on the meeting of the rich and the poor. He finds that the rich cannot do anything good for the welfare of the poor instead they oppress and exploit them.

Moreover, Gandhi and Ruskin both stood in support of workers. According to Ruskin, it is necessary to have fixed wages for the workers to secure the job of the working class whereas Gandhi suggests giving up the use of machine-made products to secure the jobs to the craftsmen and to support the use of handicrafts in India. Their willingness was to promote the working class which shows that they were subconsciously sensitive towards the proletariat and carried a feeling of pity for workers.

Gandhi very intellectually concludes that the machinery slowly with time sucks the real skills of labourers without letting them know that their natural skills are devastated with time. The hatred towards political economy can be justified by the views of Gandhi writes of machinery in *Hind Swaraj*, “Machinery is the chief symbol of modern civilization it represents a great sin” (76).

The mechanical era, according to John Ruskin, reduced the social affection in human beings and made them covetous of self-interest. Ruskin was against the subjugation of the working class because it would lead towards an economically and morally imbalanced society. He obstructs the capitalistic theory of using the labour force as if they are machines themselves.

Gandhi and Ruskin were not emotional boors but their logical thinking and the irregularity in economic flow due to capitalism made them stand against the tremendous industrialization. Even in *Hind Swaraj* Gandhi appealed not to go for machine-made products because at that time the readymade products were imported from the European Nations which weakened India economically. But in the case of John Ruskin, he was more worried about master and worker relationship. Ruskin sees the political economy not only from the perspective of merchants but also from the workers' and says that workers should not demand high pay when their master is not in the condition to pay high wages. Socio-political theory for Ruskin is something in which the role of labour and worker go hand in hand. Without the cooperation of both the employer and the employee, the entire socio-political structure would not function properly.

According to Gandhi, the centralization of power is the major shortcoming of any society in both the social and economic domains. If all individuals become self-sufficient then there will be no need for a central authority or power. Hence decentralization is a must for the establishment of a society that is free from the evils of class inequality. Centralization of authority leads to the suppression of the voices of those who are economically and socially backward. Therefore, it leads to the condition of subalternity. The even distribution of power opens the doors to equality among the society and people can live more dignified lives. The decentralization of the economy enables individuals to experience economic freedom. If individuals are not economically free then it would lead to illiteracy, class disparity and poverty. The economic condition of the whole nation depends on its citizens irrespective of their class and social strata. However, such an ideal society can only be established by non-violence which is more inclined towards performing duties rather than emphasis on rights. Gandhi wanted to decentralize India's economy so that poverty would not increase there. However, his concept of establishing an ideal state will remain ambiguous. He thought that self-rule would be sufficient for ruling over the nation because a sort of centralized power is recommended for socio-political command of the society.

Similar were the views of Ruskin on monetary centralization. To become rich, according to Ruskin, is to accumulate more and more wealth, which signifies the power of the individual to accumulate money not only to get rich it means that a person obtains power over others to exert authority over them. If the circulation and accumulation of money are not in a just way, the nation will have to suffer tyranny.

As Gandhi was against capitalism and mechanical civilization, he attacked social disparity. He also criticized colonialism in his *Hind Swaraj*. He thought that the root cause of colonialism is capitalism which makes a group of individuals so much stronger that they could be able to subjugate other individuals. Not only had it created social disparity but also economic disparity and a sense of alienation. He wanted to prohibit colonialism because it promoted violence along with the exploitation of the poor. Gandhi strictly condemned industrialization and analysed its effects in his *Hind Swaraj* and considered industrialization as a hindrance rather than a progression. He always targeted the Western culture, especially in the fields of education and industrialization and warned his countrymen that if they copied them there would be nothing than mere anarchy. The empowerment of our nation will only be possible if we can establish our state with our own rules.

Both Gandhi and Ruskin criticized modern technology and mechanical civilization because it creates ecological imbalance, pollution and unemployment. Gandhian model of 'welfare of all' proved a social rejuvenation that played a great role in the establishment of a society that is morally strong where neither violence has its place nor corruption exists.

Even Gandhi's socio-political views are slightly different from that of Ruskin because Ruskin suggested the way of equal distribution of wealth through the socio-political methods but Gandhi's methodology was different as he suggested the more ideal way of the upliftment of the society through Sarvodaya although it sounds entirely utopian and Gandhi himself was aware of the problems in its implementation. Gandhi's method of social equality was based on non-violence self-suffering and self-reliance. The real wealth for Ruskin and Gandhi was human life itself. The wealth of any country is due to the happy citizens but if the citizens of the nation are not in a joyous condition, then it cannot be counted as a progressive nation. Their prime object was to determine the meaning of real happiness and the satisfaction of life.

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