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## UNIT 3 SARVODAYA

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### 3.0 OBJECTIVES

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Gandhian socio-political philosophy is impregnate with rich insights and novel ideas. The study is undertaken to have an in-depth analysis in the field of *Sarvodaya* movement. This unit would enable the students to understand the richness of Gandhian political thought, *Sarvodaya* or the welfare of all. It will enable one to have a wider vision on one's own role in the society and how one can contribute his or her share to the good of humanity. This study will also lead one to evaluate and compare the *Sarvodaya* ideals with other political ideals such as socialism and communism.

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### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

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The concept of *Sarvodaya* is a significant contribution of Mahatma Gandhi to the socio-political philosophy. His vision of *Sarvodaya* is not independent from the religions he came across, the persons with whom he came into contact, and the movements he has acquainted with. Though it is not easy to define properly Gandhi's vision of *Sarvodaya* it is an all-comprehensive vision assuring the total good of every individual: religious, moral, social, political, and economic. He used the word *Sarvodaya* to describe the principles that he felt should guide us in our efforts to build ourselves, our families, our communities and nations. He had arrived at these principles of a *Sarvodaya* society on the basis of his studies, his observations and his experiments with truth and non-violence. In the world threatened by poverty, unemployment, racial discrimination, exploitation, ecological destruction, war, and dehumanization, it was Gandhi's ardent desire to establish a new just society free from all social evils and which would ensure the good of all. He proposes *Sarvodaya* to achieve the integral development of every individual. It is an ideal to be translated into action in order to build up a new world society.

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## 3.2 THE MEANING OF SARVODAYA

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*Sarvodaya* is a Sanskrit word derived from two words, namely, *sarva* and *udaya*. *Sarva* means ‘all’ which includes every kind of living beings. *Udaya* means ‘rise,’ ‘uplift,’ ‘prosperity,’ ‘affluence,’ etc. So *Sarvodaya* literally means ‘the welfare of all’ or ‘the upliftment of all.’ The ultimate objective of *Sarvodaya* is the total well-being of all or the greatest good of all. By ‘welfare of all’ Gandhi means the sum total of conditions – religious, moral, political, social and economic – for the all round growth of the total individual and of every individual in the context of the overall development of society. By the concept *Sarvodaya* Gandhi really means universal uplift or the welfare of all men and women and not just the welfare, or greatest happiness, of the greatest number. *Sarvodaya* is the name Gandhi gives to the new society embracing the betterment of the entire humankind and the world at large. It is a society directed towards the integral welfare of all living beings based on age and on the old spiritual and moral values of Indian and those found elsewhere.

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## 3.3 THE PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF SARVODAYA

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The socio-political philosophy of Gandhi may be termed *Sarvodaya*. It may, however, be noted that Gandhi was not the author of the idea of *Sarvodaya*. He borrowed the idea as well as the term from Ruskin. Ruskin himself had borrowed it from the *Bible*. Gandhi first used the word *Sarvodaya* in a booklet which he published in his native Gujarati after he read John Ruskin. The essay, *Unto This Last*, was based on a parable from the Gospel according to Matthew 20:1-16 concerning the owner of a plantation and his hiring of labourers to work in his vineyard. In his parable Jesus made the master of the vineyard declare: “I will give unto this last even as I give unto thee.” The emphasis of Ruskin’s essay, as interpreted by Gandhi, is certainly that ideal society is none in which there is concern for the welfare of all. This is the foundation for his *Sarvodaya* movement. Along with *Unto This Last* Tolstoy’s *Bread Labour* also influenced Gandhi. However, the credit of Gandhi lies in the fact that he devoted his entire life to the creation of a new society, a society based on the principles of *Sarvodaya*.

Gandhi summed up the teachings of Ruskin’s *Unto This Last*, which he called *Sarvodaya*, in the following three fundamental principles:

- a) That the good of the individual is contained in the good of all.
- b) That a lawyer’s work has the same value as the barber’s inasmuch as all have the same right of earning their livelihood from their work.
- c) That a life of labour, i.e., the life of the tiller of the soil and the craftsman is life worth living.

The concept of the ‘welfare of all’ has been the fundamental fact in the Indian religious consciousness from time immemorial and he only embodied it more fully and more clearly than before in the light of his life experience in the West. Thousands of years ago the *rishis* in India preached the welfare of all beings as god, human beings and nature constitute one organic whole. Hindu *dharma* or

morality teaches that the individual has certain social and moral duties towards the other members of the community depending on his or her caste and the stage of life. *Sarvodaya* traces its theoretical roots in the Vedic and Vedantic teaching that from a higher standpoint all living beings are participants in a super-material reality. Ahimsa is exhorted by the Upanishads as an important spiritual and moral value for breaking the law of karma and thus bringing about the final liberation. The spirit of *ahimsa*, i.e., to love all animate and inanimate beings and to work for the well-being of every being is found in Bhagavad Gita's teaching on *lokasamgraha* (well-being of the world) and *sarva bhutahite ratah* (those who delight in well-being of all beings).

### Check Your Progress I

**Note:** Use the space provided for your answers.

- 1) Write a brief note on the etymological origin of *Sarvodaya*.

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- 2) What are the three fundamental principles of *Sarvodaya*?

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## 3.4 THE GOALS OF SARVODAYA

The fundamental goal of *Sarvodaya* is the greatest good of all living beings. Gandhi aims at the transformation of society in which everybody contributes his or her own maximum share for the peace and harmony of the world. As a consequence the integral growth which includes spiritual, moral, political, social and economic welfare of every individual and the welfare of all is visualized. It also aims at the all-round development of all, without distinction of caste, creed, sex or religion. Gandhi wanted to establish a welfare state in India, which he called *Ram Rajya*. When each individual including the sick and the invalid fulfills his or her duties according to his or her capacity, there will be a healthy community assuring the integral welfare of all beings. By providing sufficient opportunities to every individual for their personal initiatives and capacities *Sarvodaya* aims at the total and integral development of every individual in human society.

Gandhi was not the supporter of utilitarianism which aims at the greatest happiness to the greatest number. *Sarvodaya* aims at the integral liberation of every individual. It also stands for the well-being of the whole individual, body and soul. The goal of *Sarvodaya* is not the suppression or liquidation of an individual

or a group but the triumph of truth which means the victory of the oppressor and the oppressed, the exploiter and the exploited. It is not the victory of an individual over another individual or even a group over other. The main principle behind it is that the good of the individual is contained in the good of all. Gandhi's liberated society defends and stands for the rights and the dignity of every human person. While rejecting the principle of the greatest good of the greatest number, it upholds the maximum welfare of every individual on the basis of sharing goods and services regardless of one's own contribution. The resources and the progress of the village should be accessible to every individual. No individual or a group will be left out or suppressed in the *Sarvodaya* society.

The philosophy of *Sarvodaya*, based on the insights and experiences of Gandhi, is a reassertion of his commitment to the problems of mankind in the direction of establishing a new social, political, economic and moral order. Vinoba Bhave, an ardent disciple of Gandhi, rightly says, "*Sarvodaya* stands for not only making all happy by eliminating suffering from all but also for bringing a world state based on equality" For Gandhi, *Sarvodaya* as a broader concept stands for the merger of one in all with self-sacrifice and a selfless service. His *Sarvodaya* ideal, apart from standing for the meaning of the welfare of all, implies the meaning of the universal welfare and integrated development of all. The greatest contribution of *Sarvodaya* in this century lies in the reassertion of the Gandhian moral approach to the problems of humanity.

Through *Sarvodaya*, Gandhi strives for the establishment of a new, moral, just, non-violent, non-exploitative, non-materialist, non-imperialist, non-racist, non-consumerist, egalitarian, liberated, humane and de-centralised socio-politico-economic order which aims at the integrate welfare of the whole person everywhere. To achieve the welfare of all, the benefits of the nations' progress and prosperity must reach down unto the least and the lowest of the society. The natural and available resources of the world are to be for the total well-being of all human beings for their proper fulfilment as human persons. *Sarvodaya* aims at the realisation of global welfare and, consequently, a universal brotherhood and friendship in the place of a corrupt and unjust world where only a few enjoy the fruits of the world.

The goal of *Sarvodaya* includes ultimately the self-realization of every individual. Total self-realization, according to Gandhi, is the god-realization. It is to be achieved through the inner conversion of the individual and a life based on the twin principles of truth and non-violence, within the family, the village, the province, the nation and the world as a whole. It embraces all humanity and all spheres of life. The liberation of one and all, including even the animal and plant life, is aimed at. The entire world is seen as an organism.

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### **3.5 THE MAIN FEATURES OF SARVODAYA**

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The main features of *Sarvodaya* are trusteeship, economic equality and networking.

#### **Trusteeship**

The theory of trusteeship, elimination of exploitation in every shape or form; a classless society which offers no privileges by the birth or wealth or talent; mutual cooperation being the driving force of motivation and behaviour; and above all,

securing the welfare of all without any distinction of race, religion, sex, political affiliation: these may be said to be the highlights of the *Sarvodaya* society envisioned by the Mahatma. *Sarvodaya* is the application of the principle of non-violence in the transformation of societies: from their present forms which are mostly exploitative of and unfavourable to the disadvantaged, toward more balanced, inclusive and egalitarian forms in which can be enshrined the principle of social justice for all.

### **Economic Equality**

According to Gandhi economic equality is the master key to non-violent transformationary independence. Working for economic equality means abolishing the eternal conflict between capital and labour. A non-violent system of government is clearly and impossibly so long as the wide gulf between the rich and the hungry millions persists. The most disadvantaged sections of the community being the economically, the physically and the mentally poor, it is obvious that no egalitarian society could evolve without the poor taking part in the evolutionary process. And for this sector to take part, focus must be put on raising their status to an acceptably decent level. However, as it should be for all the other sectors of society, if an acceptable level of existence is to be reached and maintained for the disadvantaged sector, it is imperative that it should be self-sustainable through their participation in their own management.

### ***Sarvodaya* Network**

During his lifetime, Gandhi never allowed *Sarvodaya* organisations to be formally instituted. His thinking was that once you served people, as ‘*sevakas*,’ within the *Sarvodaya* philosophy there was no need for institutionalization. But since his demise *Sarvodaya* organisations have been established world-wide genuinely helping people towards building new societies from the ‘grass-roots’ up. At the operational field level, the most successful *Sarvodaya* programmes have most often been those which, apart from being self-created and self-managed, have employed practical hands-on-learning-by-doing methods, including a lot of income generation, skills training and conscientisation; rather than the theoretical ‘talk-shop’ or workshop approach.

#### **Check Your Progress II**

**Note:** Use the space provided for your answers.

- 1) How is *Sarvodaya* different from utilitarianism?

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- 2) The goal of *Sarvodaya* includes self-realization. Explain.

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3) *Sarvodaya* network is an important feature of Sarvodaya movement.  
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### 3.6 SOCIO-POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY OF *SARVODAYA*

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Gandhian concept of *Sarvodaya* is both social and political in nature. It is not easy to distinguish both. For Gandhi politics was a means to social change and social transformation. Therefore, all his political agendas, principles and movements were social in nature. The main pillars of Gandhian political philosophy are philosophical anarchism, partyless democracy and decentralization. Let us see them in detail.

**Philosophical Anarchism**

In political struggles we find the causal role of ruthless competition for power and dominance. In such dangerous games of politics we can discover at the action of the fundamental urge for domination over others and the working of an elementary rule that if one person renounces the attempt for obtaining power, others will begin to dominate over him. *Sarvodaya* accepts the sacrosanct character of the human spirit. Hence, it is emphatic on the inculcation of the values of freedom, equality, justice and fraternity. Thus, it is opposed to the state machine. In most cases the state operates by methods of intimidation, coercion, persecution and organized violence. Gandhi wanted that *swarjaya* should be based on the moral sovereignty of the people.

**Partyless Democracy**

The activities and operations of the political parties in modern states become mainly oriented to the ruthless pursuit of power. Even in democracies, in spite of the theoretical adherence to the principles of the basis of government, in actual practice, there is the domination of the all-powerful parties. Consequently, there are no occasions for the continuous dynamic political initiative of the masses and for the sovereign exercise of that general will of the community conceived. *Sarvodaya* is definitely hostile to the mechanism of representative democracy which amounts in actual practice to the dictatorship of the cabinet and the party oligarchy. Hence *Sarvodaya* advocates partyless democracy.

**Decentralization (*Ramarajaya*)**

In place of the ever-growing centralization of power *Sarvodaya* pleads for decentralization. Gandhi was hostile to all types of concentration of power and he pleaded for decentralization at the economic and political levels. What is essential is that the people should be trained and disciplined into the management and control of their own affairs. These workers should behave as the brethren of the people and not their rulers and educate the people through tier co-operative

solicitude. The advocates of *Sarvodaya* are quite correct in holding that if genuine self-government or real democracy is practised at the village level, then that would be the greatest bulwark against any totalitarian encroachment. *Sarvodaya* accepts the universalization of self-government. This means the activation of the people for vigilant and active participation in co-operative action. If the officials at the top are liable to perversity and corruption, it is equally essential to guard effectively against the corruption of the workers and petty officials at the level of the villages. *Sarvodaya* wants to elevate the people. Hence the people and not the central parliament of cabinet have to become the focus of political attention.

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### **3.7 POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF SARVODAYA**

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The fundamental theme of *Sarvodaya* is the realization of the happiness and elevation of all. At the political level it has two implications: the repudiation of the theory of class struggle and the safeguarding of the interests and rights of the minority.

#### **The Repudiation of the Theory of Class Struggle**

*Sarvodaya* attacks the repugnant and perverse consequences of egoism and the lust for power and wealth. Hence, it stresses the necessity of the disinterested service. Service, dedication and the realization of common good are its techniques and formulas and it is opposed to the Marxist theory of class struggle, which favours utilization of violence. *Sarvodaya* pleads for the replacement of the concept of class struggle by the more rational and organic theory of social good and harmony. The aim is not the forcible expropriation of the wealth of the rich but the conscious and spontaneous practice of 'sharing' the goods one has ready at hand. In this way there can be an overpowering accentuation of the ideal of sharing and almost a mass moral revolution oriented to the effectuation of a peaceful social reconstruction can be brought about. *Sarvodaya* contemplates not the retention of the system of exploitation and coercion but it wants to bring about a regime of absolute social equality and the maximum of economic equality too. *Sarvodaya* contemplates a regime of liberty, equality and justice to be brought about by the dynamic transforming power of love and non-violence.

#### **The Repudiation of the Concept of Majoritarianism**

The second implication from the *sarvodayist* conception of the organic reality of the community is the repudiation of the element of superior virtue supposed to be contained in the judgement of a majority of heads. If the community is an organic structure and if all the individual members of it are bearers of moral and cultural values then there is no place for jeopardizing the lives and interests of even the lowest and humblest. But if truth is the supreme canon and if the opinion, wish and aspiration of every member is precious, then in that case one has to work by consensus and not by majority. Hence, according to *Sarvodaya* the concept of majoritarianism has to be replaced by the concept of consensus. *Sarvodaya* is not satisfied with the various safeguards of proportional representation that have been devised to protect the interests of the minority. It adheres, rather, to the Gandhian concept that the superficial numerical criteria of many and few have to be replaced by a fundamental adherence to the good of the community. Thus, *Sarvodaya* aims to replace the concept of majoritarianism by the concept of fundamental consensus.

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### 3.8 SOCIALISM, COMMUNISM AND SARVODAYA

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#### *Sarvodaya* and Socialism

*Sarvodaya* is closely related to socialism in some respect. First of all, both derived their profound moral appeal from their rootedness in the fundamental belief in the good of the whole community in place of the narrow pursuit of the interests of the oligarchical minority of plutocrats. Secondly, both stress that there should be a social appropriation and equitable distribution of the goods of society. But in spite of the some fundamental similarities between socialism and *Sarvodaya*, there is great difference between them on the question of means and methods. The *Sarvodaya* concept has also specified that for achieving good ends we should adopt only good means. The good means here represent the path of love, truth and non-violence. The *Sarvodaya* workers and all those who have faith in the concept of *Sarvodaya*, should have clarity about their goal and should ensure the purity of means. One has to be vigilant about the ends and means. From the standpoint of *Sarvodaya* there are two shortcomings in the socialist philosophy. First, the basic technic for effectuating socialism is supposed to be nationalization whereas *Sarvodaya* holds villagism. Secondly, socialism adheres, at least in some cases, to the concept of violent revolution.

#### Communism and *Sarvodaya*

*Sarvodaya* is more or less different from communism in its approach and methods. The difference between *Sarvodaya* and communism is far more basic and fundamental. Communism in Russia is a totalitarian system wedded to the cult of regimentation, violence and party dictatorship. Its all-pervasive aim has been the transformation of a backward feudal agrarian economy into a modern industrial-collectivist economy and this immense transformation has been sought to be achieved by the revival, in more intensified forms. *Sarvodaya*, on the contrary, believes in persuasion and change of heart. Gandhi has taught the ethics of self-suffering to convert the opponent because violence can never be the foundation of a just and equal society. A society of liberty and equality cannot be built by the capture of state power by a monolithic totalitarian party. *Sarvodaya*, hence, is intensely and trenchantly critical of the methods and techinics of Russian communism.

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### 3.9 DRAWBACKS OF GANDHIAN SARVODAYA

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*Sarvodaya* is a concept which is rich in insight and ideology. However, many consider it as utopian as many of the things are not very easy to put into practice. *Sarvodaya* emphatically pleads for small communities. But it has some practical difficulties in the modern civilization. For instance, if we want the country to be strong and able to protest itself against the deprivation of the neighbours, we have to industrialize. The pace of industrialization will be determined by the competitive march of other powers in the race of industrial and military supremacy. Also it is true that the growth of factionalism and partisanship is one of the greatest evils of democracy. But it does not seem possible to abolish parties. It is good to abolish partisanship and not parties.



**Check Your Progress II**

**Note:** Use the space provided for your answers.

1) How does decentralization replace totalitarianism?

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2) Why do we say that *Sarvodaya* ideals are more profound than socialist ideals?

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**3.10 LET US SUM UP**

The philosophy of *Sarvodaya* is integral and synthetic in character. The synthetic approach is of great merit in political philosophy. For instance, Plato built his philosophy by the synthesis of the ideas of Parmenides, Socrates and Pythagoras. The philosophy of *Sarvodaya* is based on the mystical intuitions and socio-political experiences of Gandhi. He attempted the synthesis of the ideas of Vedanta, Buddhism, Tulsidas, Christianity, Ruskin, Tolstoy, Thoreau, etc. He tried to incorporate some ideas from the Western philosophy as well. The political philosophy of *Sarvodaya* is an intellectual attempt to build a plan of political and social construction on the basis of metaphysical idealism. It is based on the insights of Gandhi in the framework of independent India. The synthesis of partyless democracy and village self-government is a notable contribution from the standpoint of Indian political thought and practice. The villagism of *Sarvodaya* may appear as a reaction against the modern industrial trends of civilization, but it has added the new radical gospels of the ownership of all land of the village by the village community itself and the formation of a decentralized village commonwealth.

**3.11 KEY WORDS**

- Sarvodaya*** : Universal uplift, welfare of all or progress of all.
- Swarajya*** : It generally means self-governance or self-rule. The word usually refers to Gandhi's concept for Indian independence from foreign domination.
- Institutionalization** : Making something to become part of an organized system, society or culture, so that it is considered normal.

- Decentralization** : Giving some of the power of a central government, organization, etc. to smaller parts or organizations around the country.
- Universalization** : Making something universal in use or distribution, often within a particular field.
- Majoritarianism** : It is a traditional political philosophy or agenda which asserts that a majority of the population is entitled to a certain degree of primacy in society, and has the right to make decisions that affect the society.

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### 3.12 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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