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# GANDHI'S VISION OF SARVODAYA AND POLITICAL THEORY OF UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME

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## ABSTRACT

The urgency of the current pandemic has strengthened some of Gandhi's core ideas about the concept of universal basic income (UBI) and social justice. Gandhi's vision of Sarvodaya is strongly tied to the concept of universal basic income and social justice. Upliftment of all through all and the idea of "wiping out the tears from the eyes of the poorest of the poorer" is very much inherent in the Gandhian concept of Sarvodaya and the theory of UBI. The notion of the Universal Basic Income (UBI), a modern political initiative, is to provide every member of a political community with a lump sum payment of money each month, without any conditions attached, regardless of their social standing. This will allow them to live decent, dignified, and secure lives. Once a utopian proposal, the policy is now widely discussed and piloted throughout the world including in India. Gandhi would have been conflicted by the idea of UBI but, on balance, might have endorsed it. However, if Gandhi were alive today, he might be in favour of it if private players and large corporations shared the load with the aid of high taxes and reduced welfare programmes. Gandhi's theory of trusteeship where he concedes that surplus wealth created and earned by industrialists and big business houses would be used for the welfare of the community. The concept once developed can foster the idea of UBI. The UBI debates of today aim to redefine justice in a normative sense and represent a severe challenge to the notion of perfect justice as it is currently understood. Universal Basic Income's assumption raises the possibility of a conflict with the idea of justice. Gandhi's ideal of Sarvodaya, social justice and a just society may be significantly advanced if UBI is implemented appropriately and broadly. This piece of writing is an attempt to understand Gandhi's vision of Sarvodaya and a Just Society within the theoretical framework of UBI.

**Keywords:** Sarvodaya, UBI, AI, Trusteeship, Social Justice, Just Society

## INTRODUCTION

In today's academic world, there is intense debate over the concept of Universal Basic Income, or UBI. In India, the discussion surrounding universal basic income (UBI) has sparked a reconsideration of social protection, the fight against poverty, and the role of the government in development. It differs slightly from the idea of universal basic income as advocated by its proponents. UBI, according to modern philosophers, is for everyone, regardless of social or economic standing. These are not your average economic problems. A variety of perspectives, frequently controversial, have been expressed by sociologists, political scientists, and philosophers regarding the place of universal basic income (UBI) in the social contracts that govern our societies ( Gentilini et al.:2020). The present pressing situation of the global pandemic reinforces some of the core ideas of Gandhi around the notion of Universal Basic Income (UBI) and social justice. Gandhi's vision of Sarvodaya strongly connects with the notion of universal basic income and the idea of social justice.' Upliftment of all through all and the idea of "wiping out the tears from the eyes of the poorest of the poorer " is very much inherent in the Gandhian concept of Sarvodaya and corresponds to the idea of UBI. The concept of Universal Basic Income (UBI) is hotly debated, although economist Pranab Bardhan was among the first to advocate for India to transition to a UBI architecture. Sikkim, a state in northeastern India, maybe the first to introduce a Universal Basic Income (UBI) programme for all of its citizens. Arvind Subramanian, the former chief economic adviser, did, however, make the official proposal for a UBI plan in the Economic Survey of 2016–17. He brought up the concept of universal basic income (UBI) and voiced strong support for Indian UBI in the form of QUBI (a quasi-universal basic income) in chapter 9 of the survey "Universal Basic Income: A Conversation With and Within the Mahatma". He acknowledged that the concept of a Universal Basic Income (UBI) is a radical and persuasive paradigm shift in how we think about social justice and a productive economy, and he claimed that it has become a popular idea in both advanced economies and India (Economic Survey 2016–17). The survey's publication gave UBI's adoption as a policy option more traction in India.

### Idea of UBI

According to Karl Widerquist, A universal, unconditional cash grant is provided to all citizens in the true UBI model, regardless of their income, whether or not they work, whether they intend to work, whether or not they are disabled, and so providing that floor. Everyone receives a cheque if they do have personal income from investments they made at work or from other sources. That is how universal basic income is proposed (Widerquist: 2021). The radical policy proposal known as universal basic income (UBI) calls for a monthly cash grant to be given to every member of a community, regardless of their financial situation, without any conditions attached. ( Bidadanure:2019: p.481). Philippe Van Parijs is a strong supporter of UBI and his writings ("Why Surfers Should Be Fed: The Liberal Case for an Unconditional Basic Income" of 1991 and his book Real Freedom for All of 1995) advanced a new contemporary normative debate on UBI, centred on the ideals of justice, freedom and equality. He argues that a cash grant at the highest

sustainable level to everyone, without conditions and questions asked, is bound to advance the ideal idea. Or, if it doesn't, the challengers bear the entire weight of the argument. (Van Parijs: 2000 cited in Bidadanure:2019: p.487). If UBI is given to all regardless of their social status they would feel independent and confident. A cash grant to all increase people's purchasing capacity and will raise demands in the market economy. Many researches show that the purchasing power and savings of the young population in developed countries are decreasing which is not good for the overall development of the world economy. The Gandhian idea of Trusteeship and Sarvodaya cannot be realized in minus(-) growth of the economy. Therefore UBI that guarantees the positive movement of the world economy can be the only way out. Once we talk about the work to be done by all, UBI is attached to the modern mode of production through Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools. Once AI tools substitute manual work for human beings their energy can be used in some more constructive which all help in getting more creative work than before. This will lead to more discoveries which will further help in the positive development of society.

UBI as a policy choice has intellectual detractors as well. Karl argues that Universal benefits tend to be better than anything else for the least advantaged, which is why UBI is the model used today. Giving this money to Elon Musk and Bill Gates benefits you, the extremely disadvantaged person, more. It benefits you more to give him the same amount. Taxes can always be increased by them. Their taxes will therefore increase more than their monthly checks, meaning they will not directly benefit from the UBI. However, you benefit from it since you don't have to demonstrate that you're not a billionaire. Sarath Davala, the vice-chairman of BIEN, talks about how the success of UBI is shaped by six key elements: universal, unconditional, individual, monthly, monetary, and lifetime rights. Although many families can obtain grains from their village, they still require money for other needs. It ought to be evident that the government must reorganise its finances and eliminate any unwelcome programmes. Families with a steady income feel more confident and can make plans based on their needs. Davala does not buy the argument that free cash makes one lazy, he argues The upper and middle classes ought to have collapsed if wealth caused people to become lazy. The idea that having money makes people lazy is merely a product of working-class prejudice. There is enough data to conclude that the money provided by the Universal Basic Income (UBI) aids individuals in making wise life plans. (Davala:2020). Louise Haagh (2019), one of the world's leading experts on basic income, argues that the 21st century's advancement of freedom and democracy depends on the UBI. Once considered an idealistic idea, the policy is currently being piloted and discussed globally, including in India.

### **Gandhi's Vision of Sarvodaya**

Sarvodaya is a term that signifies "Progress of All" or "Universal Uplift." Gandhi originally used the phrase as the heading of his 1908 translation of "Unto This Last," a political economy tract by John Ruskin. Gandhi later used the phrase to refer to the central idea of his political philosophy. Gandhi refers to the welfare of all men and women when he uses the term "Sarvodaya," not just the welfare or greatest happiness of the greatest number, as Bentham claims. Gandhi dubbed this new society, Sarvodaya, which aimed to improve both the world and all of

humankind. It also suggests that Lokniti will take precedence over Rajniti and that politics will no longer be a tool of power but rather an agency of service. (www.mkgandhi.org). Thus, the 'development of all through all in every walk of life' is the core concern of the Sarvodaya and the spirit of social justice which is all about addressing all types of inequalities existing in society. This very idea has strong connections with the core concerns of UBI i.e. safe, secure and dignified life of the individual. It also corresponds to the 'happiness theory' of Aristotle. In addition to success, human life is about love, contentment, and respect for one's body, mind, and spirit as well as kind relationships and faith. It is Aristotle who declares that "the state exists for the sake of a good life, having begun with the necessities of existence. Not only that 'caring for populations' as Guy Standing asserted (cited in Davala:2020) is very much inherent in the concept of UBI and Sarvodaya because both the concepts eulogize happiness theory and talk about decent, dignified and secure life for individuals. The ultimate goal of Gandhi's notion of state is Sarvodaya. It is a blend of Bentham's majoritarianism and Raskin's minoritarianism. Almost all theories of justice, from Thomas Paine to John Rawls and Amartya Sen, have maintained that a society cannot be considered just if it does not provide a sufficient minimum income for all of its members. Gandhi's vision of Antodaya or Sarvodaya and the concept of UBI both try to redefine the idea of justice in a normative manner and offer a serious critique of the existing notion of perfect justice.

Not only that thinkers give the responsibility of implementation of UBI to the Government but if we look into the theory of trusteeship of Gandhi where he speaks to the industrialists, big businessmen and the rich class that the money you have accumulated is for the welfare of the entire society and you are just the trustee of that wealth. While exploring Gandhi's Trusteeship theory, surplus wealth is for the welfare of the entire human community, not the accumulator. In this way, Gandhi succeeded in bridging the gap between socialists and capitalists by introducing the theory of Trusteeship whereby capitalists do not exploit the workers to gain profits. The argument Gandhi gives is that the capitalists owe society a debt as in the accumulation of their wealth the society helped them. Thus, rich businessmen can contribute to the implementation part of the UBI. Hence, this should not be the sole responsibility of the government of a nation to execute it. In this direction, multinational corporations and big business houses that have operations worldwide can come forward to share the responsibility of granting UBI. Here it is noteworthy that the idea of "wiping out the tears from the eyes of the poorest of the poor of the land" explicitly lies in the Gandhian system of thought. As Gandhi wrote in Amrit Bazar Patrika (1934)- What is needed is not the extinction of landlords and capitalists, but a transformation of the existing relationship between them and masses into something healthier and purer," Gandhi wrote in Amrit Bazar Patrika (1934). Gandhi saw that moral decay was the reason the current system had become oppressive. Instead of the current animosity, the organisers of industry and agriculture would gain widespread public respect if they could be convinced to serve as public servants. The spirit of class cooperation would take the place of the tendency towards class conflict. Gandhi believed that the wealthy and cunning members of society could be persuaded to "change their hearts" by the power of truth and nonviolence (Gauga: 2014: p.78).<sup>10</sup>

According to Arvind Subramanian, there is currently a radical option that has gained traction in both Indian and global policy circles to accomplish Gandhi's objective: universal basic income. Although Gandhi may not have agreed with the idea in its entirety, he may have had mixed feelings about it. Being the epitome of the global moral conscience, he would have recognised that universal basic income could help bring about the changes he had spent his entire life fighting for. As a fiscal conservative, he would only support universal basic income (UBI) if he was certain that it wouldn't compromise macroeconomic stability. As a perceptive political observer, the Mahatma would have been concerned that UBI was just another tacked-on government programme, given how difficult it would be to withdraw. Overall he might have approved UBI. ( Union Budget:2017-18: Chapter-9).

### **Gandhi on Social Justice**

The idea of Gandhi's just society, in which everyone is given and treated equally, is another similar concern of UBI and Gandhism. Gandhi was a great individualist his whole ideas were based on individuals' spiritual, political and economic freedom. Gandhi's beliefs about social justice were derived from his experiences with both his own and other people's cultures and religions. Each one of them focuses on a spiritual revolution that must start with each person, without any regrets, even if they must fight alone. He developed his beliefs in the context of a country battling for political independence, and many of those ideals included references to a just society. According to Gandhi, political freedom would be meaningless without the social and economic liberation of the millions of oppressed people in Indian society (Palakkappillil: 2014).

Gandhi contends that social justice is a necessity for both individuals and society as a whole. Justice, in his opinion, is essentially the same as receiving a fair shake. Gandhi explains this in some of his writings. According to Gandhi, one can exercise certain unalienable rights, such as equality, liberty, and equal opportunity, by pursuing justice. According to Gandhi, justice is a set of inherent, natural, universal, and inalienable rights that are obtained via obligations. Natural universal justice is what justice is, and it is based on rights. He maintains that justice is unassailable and that everyone is entitled to the same natural rights, such as social status equality, equitable access to opportunities in the social and economic spheres, equal enjoyment of freedom, and other rights of a similar nature. In line with his fundamental non-violent tenets, Gandhi had a strong concern for social and economic fairness. Gandhi was a forerunner in the field of social justice because he advocated for the decentralization of authority and power, which is one of the safeguards for personal freedom. My ideal village swaraj, according to Gandhi, is a fully functional republic. Gandhi contends that the Panchayati Raj protects both the freedom of the individual and the freedom of the rural society as a whole for their complete moral growth. Human equality was a key theme for Gandhi. He understood that the purpose of political institutions is to further the economic security and social justice of the people. Gandhi once said, "In my view, economic equality simply means that everyone should have enough for their basic needs. It does not mean that everyone would have the same amount."(Haq: 2020).

### **Concluding Remarks**

By drawing the theme of Gandhi's vision of social justice or a just society it is clear enough that it is based on the idea of a safe, secure and good life for individuals. The assertion of Gandhism and the theory of UBI are very similar in a way that both give centrality to an individual's economic freedom and work in everyone's hands. It could be possible only when the individuals have resources. If UBI is given to all regardless of their social status they would feel independent and confident. A cash grant to all increase people's purchasing capacity and will raise demands in the market economy. It will accelerate demands and supply chains further and the production of goods and services will increase automatically. If it happens so, definitely economy will definitely grow. Not only that if it is implemented successfully, there will also be gains in housing, education, employment, stress management, and physical and mental health. Additionally, it will help halt widespread corruption and social aid programme leaks, about which Gandhi was also very much concerned. Arvind Subramaniam, the former chief economic advisor to the Indian government, is adamant that a universal basic income should take the place of welfare programmes. He felt that the people would benefit far more from universal basic income than from the 950 projects that the federal government and state governments put together. He has emphasized the proper implementation of the Jan Dhan Yojana, AADHAR, and mobile system for universal basic income to benefit the recipients and facilitate direct cash transfers (Lakhotia:2022).

Gandhi may have felt uneasy about the financial burden of the government because of persisting poverty in India. However, if Gandhi were alive today, he might be in favour of it if private players and large corporations shared the load with the aid of high taxes and reduced welfare programmes. Needless to say, the contemporary debate on UBI seeks to redefine justice in a normative sense, offering a serious critique of the idea of perfect justice that currently exists. UBI itself suggests a possible contradiction with the notion of justice. If UBI is properly and universally implemented, it can play a key role in realizing Gandhi's vision of Sarvodaya, social justice and a just society. In developed economies, UBI will enhance creativity and more innovations but in the developing society it will lead to poverty alleviation, decent life and pride to be born as a human being who is not forced to do indecent work and live less than a human.

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