

Gandhism: A Philosophy of Inclusion

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Exclusion/Inclusion Perspective is not a new view rather it is a new way of looking at social and political questions. Inclusivist view and way of life is holistic and wholesome whereas exclusivist view and way of life is parochial and harmful. All culture is born of inclusivist view of life. The very concept of culture defined as Universalism divided by Individualism (Universalism÷ Individualism) emphasizes inclusiveness. The Vedic precepts of Vasudhaiva kutumbakam¹ and Anobhadrahkratvo Yantu Vishwatah² (let noble thoughts come to us from all sides) impress upon us inclusivist view. Crusades and Jihads of 12th and 13th centuries were exclusivist by their nature whereas Hindu Sanatan Dharma is inclusivist by nature. Secularism when defined as Sarva Dharma Samabhava emphasized inclusivist attitude towards different faiths, whereas communalism is exclusivist by its very nature. Our Upanishads are the best repository of the philosophy of inclusion and at the same time they contain injunctions against exclusion, e.g. the following verse from Ishopanishad contains one of the finest expositions of inclusivist philosophy:

Yastusarvanibhootaniaatmanievaanupashyati

Sarva bhooteshuchatmanam, tatona vijugupsate³

That is, one who sees all the beings (animate and inanimate, mobile or immobile) within himself and himself within all beings bears no hatred for them.

Philosophically, 'inclusivism' or 'inclusiveness' is just a way of life. When we say inclusion, it is not something that we have made up, rather this is the way existence actually is. It is only in inclusiveness that existence is functioning. "if you are so exclusive why are you inhaling what I exhale? If we try to breathe separately we will be dead. It is only in inclusiveness that life is happening."⁴ When a common man tries to become 'extra-ordinary' from ordinary, in fact, he wants to become 'special'. Here he is being exclusivist or he is adopting the way of exclusion. As against this, when an evolved human being or a saint tries to become 'extra-ordinary' from ordinary in fact, he wants to become more ordinary than others-Extra-ordinary. Here, he is being inclusivist or he is adopting the way of inclusion or an inclusivist way of life. All inclusiveness is extraordinary. When philosophers talk about inclusiveness, they are not teaching people a new philosophy, rather, they are talking about leading life the way life is, just ordinary, as it is. Thus, inclusion is truth and exclusion is untruth.

In the west, this truth of inclusiveness was very well expressed by Charles Darwin and in his typical way, in his book *On the Origin of Species*. Darwin takes it for granted that we are part of the animal kingdom and he takes that understanding further: we are kin to all organic life forms, extant and extinct. In the *Origin of Species* Darwin also expanded the idea of family, away from the human only, away from what he called the exclusiveness of "pedigrees and arboreal bearings", to embrace all "the past and present inhabitants of the world." Instead of being "special creations", all organic beings are, as an outcome of his theory, "lineal descendants of those which lived long before the "Silurian epoch". We are all "the offspring of common parents", and for Darwin this inclusiveness is the "grand fact" he has uncovered.⁵

In the conclusion to the *Origin* Darwin seeks to hearten and reassure the reader. "When I view all beings not as special creations, but as the lineal descendants of some few beings which lived long before the first bed of Silurian system was deposited, they seem to me to become ennobled."⁶ We are part of the grandest of all families, he suggests, because we are part of the oldest family (that criterion by which grandeur of aristocratic families is judged): this theory challenges apartheid in all its forms, including that between the living and dead. In other words, Darwin's theory very forcefully discredits and rejects exclusiveness in all its forms.

When viewed from exclusion/inclusion perspective, the eco-philosophers or ecologists like Aldo Leopold (1887-1948), Garret Hardin (1915-2003) and Arne Naess (1912-) are great inclusivist. Leopold's *Land Ethic*⁷ that insists on extending the Human morality to land community, Garret Hardin's advocacy of being 'system sensitive' in order to avoid Tragedy of Commons⁸ and Arne Naess' Deep Ecology which describes the individuals as 'knots in the biospherical net'⁹ are all based on inclusivist view of ecology or nature. As against this the environmentalists or practitioners of green politics and environmental diplomacy are exclusivist as their views are anthropocentric and their concern for environment is based primarily on concern about the consequences of environmental degradation on human beings only.

In political philosophy the exclusion/inclusion perspective is narrower than in pure philosophy and it is so because all the political philosophy is anthropocentric. But exclusion/inclusion has always been a central problem of political theory and political practice. When sophist Protagoras said, "Man is the measure of all things. Man is the real study of mankind. Study thyself virtuous", he was propounding anthropocentric inclusiveness. Aristotle's concept of 'koinonia', a community or society based on sharing and caring is inclusivist in nature. When Aristotle said in oligarchies revolutions occurred because of the concentration of ruling power in a few hands and other aspiring oligarchs were deliberately kept out of the power positions, he was actually talking of 'exclusion' as a cause of revolutions in oligarchies. Individualism, classical liberalism and its contemporary version, libertarianism which treats man as maker of his destiny are exclusivist in nature and all of them promoted capitalism. This laissez faire individualism and rampant capitalism gave rise to socialism, socialist movements and Marxism. Revolutionary Marxism capitalizes on exclusion of workers from economic and political power. At the same time, Marxism emphasises inclusion when it stresses that the workers 'know no nation'. In contrast to the 'atomistic' view of individual forwarded by libertarianism, communitarianism advances the concept of 'situated self and hence is an inclusivist perspective on political theory.

Most of the contemporary ideologies or the so called new social movements namely, Multiculturalism, Feminism and Ecologism are inclusivist in nature and they challenge exclusivist perspective. Firstly, they are inclusivist because they challenge the distinction between national and international politics. Multiculturalists argue that cultures do not equate to the nations. Similarly, an important feature of feminism is linking together women's experiences across the world.¹⁰ Also the feminism is a movement against the historical exclusion of women from authority and decision-making process and at the same time, it is a movement for the inclusion of women in authority and decision-making - are inclusivist as process. Ecologists too- as distinct from environmentalists they see 'nature' as an interconnected whole, protection of which requires both small-scale organization and global action. Global agreements are necessary to tackle environmental problems that by their nature do not respect state boundaries.

If judged against the above conceptual framework, Gandhian perspective is out and out inclusivist. Gandhi's doctrine of Non-Violence or Ahimsa, which is the governing principle as well as foundation of all his social, political and economic philosophy and strategy, is identical with the philosophy of inclusion. In other words, all the Gandhian philosophy and strategy is based on the exclusion of violence or Himsa from human behaviour in all its forms and manifestations. This represents only the negative side of non-violence. On the positive side, it implies love of all or all-inclusive love encompassing in its fold even flora and fauna. In fact, Gandhian principle of non-violence exhorts us not only to live peaceably with other human beings but also with the nature, which is consistent with the inclusivist position of eco-philosophers. In a way, "Gandhiji was a precursor of ecological activism. He was a passionate critic of industrialism (which is exclusivist in nature), an uncritical and exaggerated belief in the need for virtues of industrial organization. Industrialism is violence - not only of man on man but of man on other species."¹¹ Also, non-violence towards the nature is consistent with the Gandhian principle of minimization of our physical wants. When we abstain from damaging nature, this will enable the nature to satisfy minimum needs of larger human population of present and future generations and thereby strengthen the spirit of coexistence and sustainable development.

Gandhian concept of coexistence being an offshoot of his principle of non-violence is again an inclusivist idea which denotes an attitude of tolerance towards each other. It does not mean absence of differences of opinion, but being ready to live peacefully in spite of our differences. To give respect to others' faiths is never a disrespect to one's own faith. Considering oneself as sole expositor of truth is being conceited and conceit is parent of violence. Some Urdu poet has rightly said: "Hai gumrahjiskedil me Khudibaakihai". If 'self' or 'khudi' is too much with a person then he is exclusivist and misguided. Gandhian injunction of "Hate the sin and not the sinner" is again an appeal for the practice of inclusion. Hereby Gandhiji impresses upon us the basic goodness of the individual soul. (Ishwar AnshJeev Avinashi : Tulsii), or of AhamBrahmasmi Tat Tvamasi. What is hateful is the dirty deed perpetrated by the individual not the individual himself, who is just a noble soul. 'Hate the sin' is another version of his fundamental principle of Ahimsa, which positively means universal love or all-inclusive love including even flora and fauna. Once a sinner is reclaimed, he is as lovable and pure as any other good individual, hence only sins are hateworthy not the sinner.

Today, globalization brings different cultures together. This raises the question of how we should deal with cultural differences. Some see them as challenges or threats, and turn inward. Others embrace them with abundant enthusiasm as if cultures were consumer goods. Gandhiji's response was more measured and mature. Every civilization, culture or religion is unique, and represents distinctive and partial vision of human possibilities. Cultures therefore benefit from a dialogue with each other. They borrow what is valuable and digestible in others and grow in process. Others are not 'others' but conversational partners. Differences not only add variety to life but are the very condition of our intellectual and moral growth. An intercultural dialogue tells us not only what is unique to us, but also heightens our awareness of our limitations and gives us the

opportunity to borrow from others. "This is what Gandhiji himself did without the slightest inhibition. He freely borrowed from Christianity, and both Christianised Hinduism and Hinduised Christianity. He also borrowed from Buddhism and Jainism and to a lesser extent from Islam. His thought is unique and creative blend of these influences, and does not belong to a single tradition. In this respect he was the patron saint of multiculturalism, and shows us how to respond to both the multicultural society and the multicultural world."¹²

Like Tagore, Gandhiji was deeply troubled by the European ideas of nationalism and patriotism, which were exclusivistic in essence. Instead, Gandhiji provided an alternative way of thinking about one's community. Nationalism glorifies an abstract entity called India or Britain. It values territory more than people, thinks little of sacrificing millions to defend a piece of land even when it is uninhabitable. It values the glory and power of the nation more than the well-being of his people. Patriotism is better but not much. It centres on the state rather than its people, is militaristic and exclusive. In fact, "Gandhiji placed people at the centre of politics. Rather than talk about nationalism and patriotism, he talked about prajaprem, love of one's people. This is very similar to Tagore's idea of 'swadeshchinta' an anxious and loving concern for the well-being of one's community. A country is nothing more than its people. And its people are made up of concrete living individuals. These individuals should be at the centre of one's concern. Gandhiji never lost sight of this."¹³ It is striking that when he was invited to unfurl the flag of the independent India, he declined that honour and preferred instead to spend his time injecting a measure of sanity in violence affected areas. True 'patriotism' lay in healing wounds, in wiping away every tear from every eye, not in flag waving, military parades and war-mongering, which all are symbols or expressions of exclusiveness or exclusion. Gandhian principles of tolerance and coexistence which follow from his basic principle of Ahimsa are based on Rigvedic percept of "ekam sat viprabahudhavadanti", and his basic principle of Ahimsa is his own version of the 'advaita' philosophy contained in earlier quoted verse of Ishopanishad. This 'advaita' darshan is source of the philosophy of inclusion. In fact, violence is begotten of fear and hatred and nobody fears or hates himself or herself. Hence, when we overcome the feeling of otherness and see others in self and self in others our behaviour is transformed to become nonviolent in thought, speech and action. In other words, we become inclusivist in our behaviour. To put it differently, all violence is begotten of 'exclusion' and when our mind is in vise- like grip of exclusivist view our behaviour is violent in one way or the other. Like Gandhiji's fundamental philosophy of 'Ahimsa' (non-violence), his chief strategy of 'Satyagraha', for fighting all sort of injustices, too was inclusivist in essence, as the basic idea lying at the heart of Satyagraha is to fight injustices in such a way as not to create further injustices in the process. For Gandhiji, perpetrators of injustices and domination are opponents to be fought, not enemies to be killed or humiliated.

In fact, Gandhiji excluded all that from his value system which did not conform to his philosophy of non-violence. It was for this reason that he excluded state from his scheme of things because state functioned through coercion and it was inclined to impose its will on individuals with the help of elaborate machinery of police force, prisons, law courts and military power and like instruments of violence. He said, "I look upon an increase of the power of the state with the greatest fear because although while apparently doing good by minimizing exploitation, it does the greatest harm to mankind by destroying individuality, which lies at the root of all progress."¹⁴ Gandhian scheme of things excluded state authority but included 'power to the people'. This Gandhian view of power has been described as constructive view of power¹⁵ and has inclusivist flavour. This view of power is well expressed in the following excerpt of Young India (1925): "Real Sawraj will come not by the acquisition of authority by few but by acquisition of the capacity by all to resist authority when it is abused. In other words, Sawraj is to be obtained by educating masses to a sense of their capacity to regulate and control authority."¹⁶

Mahatma Gandhi's adherence to Ahimsa was his way of adhering to truth and God. In fact, Gandhiji was not a follower or adherent of any particular scripture, teacher or preacher, rather he was a staunch adherent of Truth (Satyanisth). At the same time, he did not believe in God is True, because it is communal view which is the path of exclusion. As against this, Gandhi believed in Truth is God (Satyameva Ishwarah), which is an altruistic view or ParmarthDristhi and path of inclusion. Adherence to such a view of truth and God dissolves all differences between different faiths and sects. This Gandhian view of Truth and God is inclusivist and echoes again the philosophy of Ishopanishad contained in its opening verse which says: "IshavasyamIdam Sarvam."¹⁷

As the political philosophy and strategy of Gandhi is largely inclusivist so is his economic strategy of Trusteeship which aims at protection and preservation of both parts of the Marxian divide - Capitalist and Proletariat or haves and have-nots. This Gandhian economic strategy of trusteeship is based on the 'change of heart' of the capitalist and not on the elimination of capitalist class as suggested and sought by Marx. Doctrine of Trusteeship is inclusivist in character as it is based on the belief of mutual complementarity and interdependence of capitalist and worker. Neither the capitalist can play worker nor the worker can play capitalist, rather each can play only one's individual role properly. Capitalist is best in producing capital and worker is best in producing goods and providing services using physical labour. Hence both are necessary for the welfare of the society. The

problem of exploitation and deprivation of workers can be eliminated by bringing about the change of heart in capitalists and by converting them from owners of their property to being Trustee of their wealth.

Similarly Gandhian model of development is inclusive in approach as it insists that not a few but individuals all and sundry should do physical labour equal to that needed for the production of goods for their own consumption. In other words, Gandhian perspective on development emphasised 'bread labour'. Gandhi argued that in a country like India where a huge work-force was available for employment, priority should be given to 'production by the masses' over 'mass production' by machines. But Gandhi did not disparage the machinery either, he only wanted that "dead machinery must not be pitted against the millions of living machines represented by the villagers scattered in villages of India."¹⁸

Lastly, the best example of Gandhian philosophy of inclusion is his social philosophy of Sarvodaya which aims at good of one and all, of the high and low, of the strong and the weak, of brilliant as well as the dull. Sarvodaya means 'uplift of all', 'rise of all' or 'awakening of all'. It also connotes the versatile development of one and all. It is the best expression of Gandhian inclusivism and is Gandhian version of the old Indian ideals of 'SarvBhuto Hite Ratah' and 'SarveBhavantuSukhinah'. Gandhiji's Sarvodaya Darshan is philosophy of inclusion as its ideal is 'Sarv Jan HitaySarv Jan Sukhay' and not 'bahujanhitay, bahujansukhay' or the utilitarian principle of 'greatest happiness of the greatest number', which are exclusivist precepts.

Hence, if viewed from exclusion/inclusion perspective, Gandhian philosophy and strategies are largely inclusivist because inclusion is the right and true way of life and Gandhism in essence is devotion to truth. Truly, Gandhi is patron saint of inclusion.

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