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**Gandhi's Doctrine of Trusteeship:
Spiritualizing Interpersonal Relationship**

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Abstract

Trusteeship is Gandhi's unique conceptualization of a bridge between labour and capital despite being contradictory to each other. Seeking to understand them as being complementary to each for meaningful socio-economic development and political understanding, the Mahatma evolved his own model of a relationship which is based on trust by the workers for the indigenous industrialists. This has also wider implications for the nationalist movement because it was also an endeavour by the Mahatma to bring people with 'wealth' to the nationalist movement. A brilliant strategy, the trusteeship model succeeded in temporarily defusing the stress that the nationalist campaign suffered in the wake of continuous working class agitation, spearheaded by the forces championing the workers' cause at the cost of the overarching nationalist movement. Drawn on John D Ruskin, among others, Gandhi persuasively theorized the model which gradually became one of the powerful conceptual inputs in meaningfully comprehending the labour-capital interface in transitional societies. Despite not being exactly the same, there are elements of what is being conceptualized in contemporary parlance as corporate social responsibility in the Gandhian notion of trusteeship. It is therefore a powerful conceptual tool to grasp the capital-labour dynamics in a theoretical fashion which is not stereotypical but intellectually challenging and also innovative.

Key words: Corporate Social Responsibility, Interpersonal Relationship, Mahatma Gandhi, Trusteeship

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1. Introducing the Idea

The idea of trusteeship seemed to have emerged out of Gandhi's concern for economic equality. He felt rather strongly that political freedom to be meaningful needed to be complemented by economic equality. It was easier said than done because 'working for economic equality means abolishing the eternal conflict between capital and labour [which] means the leveling down of the few rich in whose hands is concentrated the bulk of the nation's wealth on the one hand, and the leveling up of the semi-starved naked millions on the other'.¹ He was aware that the task was difficult though he had doubt that without removing this gulf between the rich and the poor, the non-violent system of government would remain a distant goal. He also expressed concern because unless the socio-economic differences between the wealthy and poor were meaningfully addressed it was likely to create a revolutionary situation. In his words, 'a violent and bloody revolution is a certainty one day unless there is a voluntary abdication of riches and the power that riches give and share them for the common good'.²

Gandhi's notion of trusteeship seems to be theological. According to him, God is the owner and also the master of the whole material universe. Humans are merely 'trustees'. They may earn by their labour what 'they need for their sustenance [which means] that they enjoy [the fruit of labour] not as proprietors but as trustees'.³ In pursuing this argument, Gandhi came closer to St. Thomas Aquinas of the Western tradition who also felt that

'God alone had absolute dominion over material nature. Humans had only relative dominion, and that too limited to the use of material things. No one was entitled to manage the world's resources merely for himself; he must do so in the interest of all, so that he is ready to share them with others in case of necessity'.⁴

Gandhi might have had access to the ideas of Aquinas, but it was John Ruskin who remained critical in his conceptualization of an equitable society. Although Gandhi was mesmerized by the Ruskin's *Unto this Last*, a relatively unknown essay by him, *A Joy for Ever*, left an indelible imprint in the Mahatma. Like Ruskin, Gandhi also believed that 'political economy consists simply in the production, preservation and distribution, at fittest time and place, of useful and pleasurable things. According to him, a person, if he/she is allowed to do whatever he/she enjoys doing is likely to contribute to the well-being of the nation to which he or she belongs. Integral to his political economy is

'the farmer who cuts his hay at the right time; the builder who lays good bricks in well-tempered mortar; the house-wife who takes care of her furniture in the parlour and guards against all waste in her kitchen are all political economists in the true and final sense, adding continually to the riches and well-being of the nation to which they belong'.⁵

¹ MK Gandhi, 'Constructive Programme :its meaning and place in *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. IV, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1968, p. 358.

² MK Gandhi, 'Constructive Programme :its meaning and place in *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. IV, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1968, p. 359.

³ Anthony J Parel, *Gandhi's Philosophy and the Quest for Harmony*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2006, p. 70.

⁴ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 2a, 2ae, Question 66, Article 1, 2 – quoted in Anthony J Parel, *Gandhi's Philosophy and the Quest for Harmony*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2006, p. 71.

⁵ MK Gandhi, 'the veins of wealth' in *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. IV, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1968, p. 57.

The Gandhian political economy thus consists in the careful possession and just division of human possession. While defending his stance he forcefully critiqued the prevalent notion of assessing the worth of human beings merely in terms of ‘the quantity of cash’; contrarily he argued that ‘in estimating the possessions of the wealthy, they rather calculate the value of their horses and fields by the number of guineas they could get for them, than the value of their guineas by the number of horses and fields they could buy with them’.⁶ In Gandhi’s perception which is akin to that of Ruskin, human beings and other objects – like cattle and also land – constitute the wealth and not ‘gold and silver’. In his words,

‘we must search for wealth not in the bowels of earth, but in the heart of men ... [because] the true law of economics [was] that men should be maintained in the best possible health, both of body and mind, and in the highest honour [and] that people alone will be happy which learns how to do justice and be righteous under all conditions of life’.⁷

Hence, he was opposed to competition which, in the long run led the nation to ruin because ‘competition only enables the purchaser to obtain his labour unjustly cheap, with the result that the rich grow richer and the poor poorer’.⁸ Since true economics was ‘economics of justice’, there was no room for competition. To teach the people ‘to get rich by hook and crook is [therefore] to do them an immense disservice’.⁹ Critiquing competition, Gandhi thus argued that true economics which was the economics of justice ‘empowered the last and the least of society, and helped create and develop in them the necessary capacity and moral dispositions’.¹⁰ In completely discarding competition in favour of cooperation, Gandhi evidently ‘rejects the fundamental engine of capitalist society’.¹¹ This was an idea that ran through his 1909 *Hind Swaraj* in which he developed an alternative model by rejecting the market principle which drew on the critical importance of market in deciding the value and prices of products and services. Trusteeship was Gandhi’s critique of western model of unbridled capitalism that always privileged competition against cooperation more or less in the line of thinking that Ruskin pursued. Hence Gandhi’s dialogue with Ruskin seems to be most critical in conceptualizing the notion of trusteeship and its roots. Like Ruskin, Gandhi also argued that human beings were not mere body or a money-making machine and bodily comfort did not necessarily provide comfort to soul. So, for Gandhi, human beings representing ‘soul-body composites’ are revelations of two important values of ‘self-interests’ and social affections’. While the former is critical for one’s existence, the latter works as a filter to human activity drawing on ‘the concern for others’. A creative combination lays and also consolidates, as the Mahatma argues, the foundation of an economy ensuring human ‘capabilities’ and ‘freedom’.¹² Trusteeship is thus an articulation of Gandhi’s undiluted faith in human righteousness. In view of human greed, trusteeship might have

⁶ MK Gandhi, ‘the veins of wealth’ in *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. IV, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1968, p. 58.

⁷ MK Gandhi, ‘even-handed justice’ in *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. IV, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1968, p. 73.

⁸ MK Gandhi, ‘even-handed justice’ in *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. IV, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1968, p. 72.

⁹ MK Gandhi, ‘even-handed justice’, in *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. IV, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1968, p. 73.

¹⁰ Anthony J Parel, *Gandhi’s Philosophy and the Quest for Harmony*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2006, p. 75.

¹¹ Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, *Talking Back: the idea of civilization in the Indian nationalist discourse*, Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 54.

¹² Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999.

lost its credibility as an inspiring human ideal. Hence in a society that encouraged selfish human desires, the goal appears to be distant.

The concept of trusteeship, as Gandhi defined, is a testimony of corporate social responsibility which meant an engagement of business in development. Trusteeship which Gandhi described as ‘India’s gift to the world’¹³ is revolutionary because it drew on the complete negation of values integral to capitalism, namely, private property and competition. While articulating his view of Trusteeship, Gandhi thus argued,

‘If I take anything that I do not need for own immediate use, keep it, I thieve it from somebody else. I venture to suggest that it is the fundamental law of Nature, without exception, that Nature produces enough for our wants from day-to-day, and if only everybody took enough for himself and nothing more, there would be no pauperism in this world, there would no man dying of starvation in this world. But so long as we have got this inequality so long we are thieving. I am no Socialist and I do not want to dispossess those who have got possessions; but I do say that, personally, those of us who want to see light out of darkness have to follow this rule. I do not want to dispossess anybody. I should then be departing from the rule of Ahimsa. If somebody else possesses more than I do, let him. But so far as my own life has to be regulated, I do say that I dare not possess anything which I do not want’.¹⁴

Trusteeship is drawn on a foundational principle of the Indian religious text, *Bhagvad Gita* which suggests that ‘enjoy thy wealth by renouncing it’. Gandhi elaborated this by saying that ‘take what you require for your legitimate needs and use the remainder for society [and] it the moneyed classes do not even act on [this principle] in these times of stress’, Gandhi further stressed, ‘they will remain slaves of their riches and passions and consequently of those who overpower them’.¹⁵

Gandhi’s primary aim was to achieve economic equality, which, according to him, was ‘the master key to nonviolent independence’ and Trusteeship was articulated accordingly. He was also aware that ‘working for economic equality means abolishing the eternal conflict between capital and labour [which meant] leveling down of the few rich in whose hands is concentrated the bulk of the nation’s wealth, on the one hand, and the leveling up of the semi-naked millions, on the other’.¹⁶ Opposed to the socialist method of forcible dispossession, Gandhi endorsed the idea that the rich could keep their wealth provided they acted as trustees for the underprivileged, as Gandhi mentioned, ‘I must know that all wealth does not belong to me; what belongs to me is the right to an honourable livelihood, no better than that enjoyed by millions of others. The rest of my wealth belongs to the community and must be used for the welfare of the community’.¹⁷ According to Gandhi, ‘at the root of this doctrine ... must lie that of the trusteeship of the wealthy for the superfluous wealth possessed by them [and the rich men] may possess nothing beyond what is required for personal needs’.¹⁸ He further elaborated this by saying ‘who ever appropriates more than the minimum that is really not necessary for him is guilty of theft [since] God never creates more than what is strictly needed at the moment’.¹⁹ Trusteeship thus means ‘the leveling down of the few rich in whose hands in concentrated the bulk of nation’s wealth on the one hand and the leveling up of the semi-

¹³ *Harijan*, 23 February, 1947, *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (CWMG hereafter), Vol. 94, p. 26

¹⁴ MK Gandhi, *Trusteeship*, Navajivan Trust, Ahmedabad, 1960, p. 3.

¹⁵ MK Gandhi, *Trusteeship*, Navajivan Trust, Ahmedabad, 1960, p. 4.

¹⁶ MK Gandhi, *Constructive Programme*, Navajivan Trust, Ahmedabad, 1960, pp. 20-1.

¹⁷ MK Gandhi, ‘theory of trusteeship’, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1960, p. 5.

¹⁸ MK Gandhi, *Trusteeship*, Navajivan Trust, Ahmedabad, 1960, p. 19.

¹⁹ MK Gandhi, ‘theory of trusteeship’, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1960, p. 5.

naked millions on the other'.²⁰ A non-violent system of government remained, Gandhi further argued, a distant goal so long as 'the gulf between the rich and the hungry millions persists'. He knew that violent methods of 'dispossession' were likely to alienate the rich. Hence he was careful in his response to Nehru who did not seem to appreciate Trusteeship as an economic design by saying that 'we do not seek to coerce any; we seek to convert them. This method may appear to be long, perhaps too long, but I am convinced that it is the shortest'.²¹ This notion was, as Gunnar Myrdal argues, 'a practical compromise motivated by his rejection of violence and his realization that the rich would not willingly give up their possessions'.²² Nonetheless, Gandhi was persuaded to believe that 'a society or a nation constructed non-violently' would inculcate values conducive for Trusteeship. Accordingly, '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 will act as a trustee for the remainder to be used for society'.²³ What is therefore most critical is 'individual honesty'²⁴; otherwise, Trusteeship was bound to collapse. Gandhi was aware that his doctrine of Trusteeship was 'ridiculed' by his colleagues since it derived its sustenance from high moral values which were hardly realizable in reality. As a pragmatic thinker, the Mahatma exhorted his Congress colleagues who were rich to set an example to fulfill his ideological dream by saying that

'the moneyed Congressmen ... have to lead the way. This fight provides an opportunity for the closest heart-searching on the part of the every individual Congressman. If ever we are to achieve equality, the foundation has to be laid now. Those who think that reforms will come after the advent of Swaraj are deceiving themselves as to the elementary working of non-violent Swaraj. It will not drop from heaven all of a sudden one fine morning. But it has to be built up brick by brick by corporate self-effort. We have traveled a fair way in that direction. But a much longer and weary distance has to be covered before we can behold Swaraj in its glorious majesty. Every Congressman has to ask himself what he has done towards the attainment of economic equality'.²⁵

As evident, Trusteeship is not merely a mental construct, but possibly an arrangement that fits into the class-compromise formula that Gandhi sincerely pursued to achieve political freedom. He was aware that it was a difficult to persuade his wealthy nationalist colleagues to his argument. Nonetheless, by defending Trusteeship as integral to economic equality, the Mahatma put forward a meaningful alternative that gained salience during the course of the freedom struggle. And Gandhi attained two significant goals: while, on the other hand, his exhortation that the rich would abdicate their wealth voluntarily to become trustees drew the underprivileged to his non-violent struggle the rich, on the other hand, never felt threatened because of Gandhi's commitment not to dispossess them of their wealth forcibly.

²⁰ MK Gandhi, 'economic equality', *Constructive Programme: its meaning and place*, Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1941, p. 20.

²¹ Letter to Jawaharlal Nehru, 28 July, 1933, CWMG, Vol. 61, , p. 395.

²² Gunnar Myrdal, *Asian Drama: an inquiry into the poverty of nations*, Vol. II, Pantheon, New York, 1968, p. 755.

²³ *Harijan*, 25 August, 1940, CWMG, Vol. 79, p. 260.

²⁴ MK Gandhi, *Trusteeship*, Navjivan Trust, Ahmedabad, 1960, p. 19.

²⁵ MK Gandhi, 'economic equality', *Constructive Programme: its meaning and place*, Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1941, p. 20-21.

Drawn on high moral values, Trusteeship is a three-dimensional concept: *first*, Trusteeship is a moral attack on those with disproportionate wealth which is possible only when one ‘thieves it from somebody else’; *secondly*, Gandhi held the view that with equal distribution of what Nature produces, there would be ‘no pauperism’ in this world; and *thirdly*, notwithstanding his strong views against those possessing more than what they required, Gandhi was opposed to ‘dispossess’ them since it would be a departure from the creed of non-violence. The fundamental point that Gandhi made in regard to Trusteeship corresponds with his political strategy. While pursuing the nationalist goal, the Mahatma sought to bring, as far as possible, the contradictory classes under his leadership by glossing over, as far as possible, the obvious tension among them which was perhaps the best course of action during the freedom struggle. By articulating Trusteeship in such a fashion as not to create ‘discord’ among the participants in the nationalist movement for freedom, Gandhi provided a mechanism to draw both ‘dispossessed poor’ and those with disproportionate wealth. This is the kernel of Gandhian Trusteeship that cemented and also consolidated, at least during India’s freedom struggle, a solid bond between the nationalist businessmen and the Congress.

Trusteeship is thus an ethical principle seeking to redefine the relationship between the wealthy and poor. Gandhi had no doubt that Trusteeship provided a meaningful device to bring about economic equality in society. In his perception, economic equality never meant that ‘everyone would literally have the same amount; it simply meant that everybody should have enough for his or her needs. For instance, [he further argued] the elephant needs a thousand times more food than the ant, but that is not an indication of inequality. So the real meaning of economic equality is to each according to his needs [which means that] if a single man demanded as much as a man with wife and four children that would be a violation of economic principle’.²⁶ Gandhi appears to have been persuaded by Marx’s notion of economic equality that entails that everyone is entitled to have as much as he or she requires for ‘a quality survival’. The similarity ends here because whereas Marx recommended violent class struggle to get rid of economic inequality, the Mahatma sought to accomplish his task ‘through non-violence, by converting people to [his] point of view by harnessing the forces of love as against hatred’. He further suggested that it would be a mockery to talk about economic equality unless one was dispossessed of one’s wealth to ‘reduce oneself to the level of the poorest of the poor’.²⁷ As he argued, ‘I cannot hope to bring about economic equality of my conception, if I am the owner of fifty motor cars or even of ten *bighas* of land’.²⁸ What is most critical in Gandhi’s approach to economic equality is the idea of ‘entitlement’. One is entitled to keep as much wealth as one requires to satisfy one’s needs. The other equally significant point that separates Gandhi from Marx was his emphatic opposition to class war as device to bring about economic equality. True to its commitment to non-violence, Gandhi hardly wavered even when it was pointed that the Mahatma was always ‘soft’ to the wealthy because he depended on their financial support. Gandhi however retorted by saying, ‘although I make use of cars and other facilities offered to me by the rich, ... [t]hey have no hold on me and I can shed them at a moment’s notice, if the interests of the masses demand it’.²⁹ Given the arguments that Gandhi offered to defend his stance, one is inclined to believe that the Mahatma, a true apostle of non-violence, put in place an alternative theoretical discourse by drawing on non-violence which was probably the most appropriate political means to sustain the multi-class anti-

²⁶ MK Gandhi, *Trusteeship*, Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1960, p.17.

²⁷ MK Gandhi, *Trusteeship*, Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1960, p.16.

²⁸ MK Gandhi, *Trusteeship*, Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1960, p.16.

²⁹ *Harijan*, 31 march, 1946, *CWMG*, Vol. 90, p. 128

British political platform. In other words, Trusteeship that sought to bring about economic equality regardless of class, caste and creed was certainly complementary to Gandhi's political strategy bringing people together notwithstanding their contradictory socio-economic locations.

2. Sources of Trusteeship

There are four different sources from which Gandhi seemed to have derived his concept of trusteeship. *First*, there is no doubt that trusteeship was rooted in the strong religio-social tradition of India.³⁰ He based his doctrine on the first verse (*sloka*) of *Isopanishad* which insists that one should dedicate everything to God and then use it only what is required for one's survival. One therefore does not have right to anything beyond what is necessary for one's existence. What is most critical to this doctrine is the spirit of detachment and service. Unless these two virtues are inculcated, trusteeship loses its significance. Gandhi drew on indigenous sources while formulating his notion of trusteeship. Two fundamental concepts of Indian scripture, *Bhagvad Gita*, namely *aparigraha* (non-possession) and *samabhavana* (equality or oneness with all) remained critical in his formulation. Gandhi translated these two major values of *Bhagvad Gita* in trusteeship. In his views, trusteeship is an also exact articulation of 'the English rule of equity' that was deliberately distorted by the ruler in India to justify colonialism. He was not 'a renouncer' at all. As he stated, 'I am entitled to wealth which gives me an honourable livelihood – the rest belongs to the community and must be used by the community'. Being critical of 'individual property', the Mahatma firmly believed that trusteeship by contributing to 'corporate property' was the answer to capitalism which, by injecting fierce competition, allowed 'violence' to strike roots in human society. Gandhi did not elaborate precisely what he meant by corporate property. Nonetheless, corporate property is critical to Gandhi's conceptualization of trusteeship which primarily drew on 'voluntary' surrender of a significant portion of private wealth to meaningfully establish trust between the rich and the poor.

Gandhi's idea of trusteeship seems to have been rooted in the law of non-possession or *aparigraha* because he firmly believed that 'the selfish grasping for possessions of any kind not only violates the deeper purposes of our human odyssey but eventually breeds possessiveness and greed, exploitation and revenge'.³¹ It was founded on 'his religious faith that everything belonged to God and was from God'.³² There was nothing which exclusively belonged to an individual since 'the bounties of the world were for His people'. When an individual had more than his respective share, he became, as the argument goes, a trustee of that portion for God's creation. Based on his absorption of the spirit of *Isopanishad*, Gandhi's trusteeship was a well-meaning effort to resolve all social and economic conflicts which grew out of inequalities and privileges of the prevalent social order because. The idea was 'to delegitimize the gross accumulation of wealth [because] trusteeship is a principle of economic conscience'.³³

Secondly, in formulating his idea of trusteeship, Gandhi was heavily influenced by John Ruskin's *Unto this last and other essays*. The book seemed to have cast 'a magic spell'

³⁰ For a detailed analysis of indigenous roots of trusteeship, see Phyllis J Rolnick, 'charity, trusteeship and social change in India: a study of a political ideology', *World Politics*, Vol. 14 (3), April, 1962, pp. 439-460.

³¹ Raghavan Iyer, 'Gandhian trusteeship in theory and practice' in JD Sethi (ed.), *Trusteeship: the Gandhian alternative*, Gandhi Peace Foundation, New Delhi, 1986, p. 9.

³² Y Kesuvulu, 'Gandhan trusteeship as an instrument of human dignity', *Gandhi Marg*, Vol. 25 (4), January- March, 2004.

³³ Thomas Weber, 'Gandhi's moral economics: the sins of wealth without work and commerce without morality' in Judith Brown and Anthony Parel (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Gandhi*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2011, p. 143.

on Gandhi who ‘determined to change his life in accordance with the ideas’ of Ruskin. The book was remarkable, as Gandhi felt, because it highlighted those ‘moral’ principles which lost salience in the phase of industrialism. Gandhi summarized the teachings of the book in following terms:

‘that the good of the individual is contained in the good of all; that a lawyer’s work has the same value as the barber’s, in as much as all have the same right of earning their livelihood from their work; that a life of labour, that is, the life of the tiller of the soil and the handicraftsman, is the life worth living’.³⁴

What impressed the Mahatma was Ruskin’s philosophical underpinning for ‘an enlarged entitlement’ for labour on the one hand and ‘limited entitlement’ for business, on the other. *Unto this Last* was an eye-opener for Gandhi and he believed that he ‘discovered some of [his] deepest convictions reflected in this great book of Ruskin [that] transformed [his] life’.³⁵ He thus metaphorically stated that after he completed the book he ‘arose with dawn [and was] ready to reduce these principles to practice’.³⁶ Gandhi’s fascination for Ruskin’s ideas was evident by the fact that he immediately translated *Unto This Last and Other Essays* into Gujarati with the title *Sarvadaya*. According to Gandhi, Ruskin laid the foundation for trusteeship by enumerating the following conditions which ‘a merchant’ should take as his duties:

1. Ruskin saw self-interest-based economies as bringing ‘schism into the Policy of Angles and ruin into the Economy of Heaven’.
2. ‘For as consumption is the end and aim of production, so life is the end and aim of consumption.
3. An enlarged entitlement for labour on the one hand, with more limited entitlement for business.
4. What was morally legitimate for business to claim, according to Ruskin, hovered precariously on survival entitlements only?
5. A merchant should, in his call to duty, use his utmost energies not just to produce at the cheapest cost but to distribute at the cheapest price where the merchandise is most needed. In the course of doing this he should be prepared to meet ‘fearlessly any form of distress, poverty, or labour which may, through the maintenance of these points come upon him’.³⁷

By insisting on a specific code of conduct for ‘the merchants’, Ruskin sought to articulate an undiluted liberal approach to business at the dawn of industrial revolution in the west. His ‘Economy of Heaven’ was nothing but a powerful metaphor to draw-out an ideal economy for the humanity where the marginalized could both participate and share the benefits of the burgeoning economy out of industrial revolution. In this sense, Ruskin was ‘a conscience keeper’ of a still growing human civilization which confronted new issues of entitlement and property in a completely different socio-economic and political milieu. Gandhi had applied Ruskin’s theory in two complementary ways: he, on the one hand, found in Ruskin powerful arguments to combat the form of industrialism

³⁴ Gandhi quoted in DG Tendulkar, *Mahatma: life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi*, Vol. 1 (1869-1920); Gandhi National Memorial Fund, New Delhi, 1953, p. 79.

³⁵ MK Gandhi, *Autobiography or the story of my experiments with truth*, Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1995 (reprint), p. 250.

³⁶ MK Gandhi, *Autobiography or the story of my experiments with truth*, Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1995 (reprint), p. 250.

³⁷ Drawn on Gandhi’s introduction to the Gujarati version of John Ruskin’s *Unto This Last and Other Essays* – quoted in MeeraMitra, *It’s only business: India’s corporate social responsiveness in a globalized world*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2007, p. 22.

that the colonial power had introduced in India disregarding entirely its obligations to the colonized; given the well-argued defence for humanity as a whole by Ruskin, Gandhi was, on the other hand, also inspired to set-out specific code of conduct for Indian merchants who became close partners in his fight against colonialism. So, in view of strong resonance of Ruskin's views in trusteeship, one can safely conclude that Gandhi conceptualized trusteeship by absorbing a persuasive liberal critique of industrial civilization (by Ruskin, among others) that raised its ugly face particularly in the wake of its expansion in various parts of the world for markets.

Thirdly, Gandhi may have been influenced by Andrew Carnegie's *The Gospel of Wealth*³⁸ which was regularly serialized in different publications in England, including, *Fortnightly Review*, *Nineteenth Century*, *Saturday Review* and *Pall Mall Gazette* during the 1888-91 period when Gandhi was there pursuing his training as a lawyer. Seeking to offer an alternative to socialism within capitalism, Carnegie devised a scheme by urging the wealthy to adopt the principle of 'trusteeship' which 'is held to be the duty of the man of wealth'. He further insisted that

'to set an example of modest, unostentatious living, shunning display of extravagance; to provide moderately for the legitimate wants of those dependent upon him; and, after doing so, to consider all surplus revenues which come to him simply as trust funds, which he is called upon to administer ... the man of wealth thus becoming the mere trustee and agent for his poorer brethren, bringing to their service his superior wisdom, experience, and ability to administer, doing for them better than what they would or could do for themselves'.³⁹

In order to serve the poor, Carnegie recommended that the surplus wealth should be spent on worthy causes, like building educational institutions, hospitals and churches, among other things. Supporting 'unbridled capitalism', Carnegie believed that one should grow one's capital to meaningfully combat poverty. According to him, capital is 'the tool with which he (sic) works wonders; nor can he restrict his operation, for the cessation of growth and improvement in any industrial undertaking marks the beginning of decay'.⁴⁰

Trusteeship is Gandhi's effort at 'spiritualizing economics' which is based on 'trust'. For an inclusive society, the common man should trust his trustee and the latter plays the role of a custodian. The rich man should 'outgrow his greed and sense of possession ... and to come down to the level of those who earn their bread by labour'. Trusteeship thus means that 'the rich man will be left in possession of his wealth which he will use what he reasonably requires for his personal needs and will act as a trustee for the remainder to be used for society'.⁴¹ On another occasion, he elaborated this concern by stating that

'supposing I have come by a fair amount of wealth – either by way of legacy, or by means of trade and industry – I must know that all that wealth does not belong to me; what belongs to me is the right to an honourable livelihood, no better than enjoyed by millions of others. The rest of my

³⁸ Andrew Carnegie, *The gospel of wealth* (1989) in M. Kammen (ed.), *Contested Values*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1995, p. 45-50.

³⁹ Andrew Carnegie, *The gospel of wealth* (1989) in M. Kammen (ed.), *Contested Values*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1995, p. 46.

⁴⁰ Andrew Carnegie, *The gospel of wealth* (1989) in M. Kammen (ed.), *Contested Values*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1995, p. 48.

⁴¹ Quoted in BR Nanda, PC Joshi and Raj Krishna, *Gandhi and Nehru*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1979, p. 55.

wealth belongs to the community and must be used by the welfare of the community’.

Here Gandhi was not different from Carnegie who also defended the role of the trustee as custodian of wealth for ‘the impoverished’. While Carnegie seemed to have appreciated the role of capital, Gandhi was ambiguous presumably because of the role of colonial capital in a colony which he himself witnessed both in South Africa and later in India. He was critical of the British colonial rule primarily because ‘the British failed ‘to be trustee’ and failed ‘to live in perfect peace with the whole of the inhabitants of India’.⁴² His basic concern was to reinforce ‘the Economy of Heaven, as Ruskin suggested. He thus argued,

‘I offer the economics of God as opposed to the economics of Devil which is gaining ground in the world today. The latter aims at or results in concentrating a million rupees in one man’s hands, whereas the former in distributing them among a million or thousands; and in placing the economics of spinning wheel before you, I am really trying to establish the economics of God (which) the industrialism of today is fast destroying’.⁴³

Fourthly, Gandhi seemed to have derived his passion for Trusteeship from his study of English law which recognized the importance of ‘tutelage’ in treating the colonial subjects. Edmund Burke was perhaps the first the British ideologue who clearly formulated the idea of Trusteeship until the latter half of the eighteenth century in the context of the famous trial of Warren Hastings when he mentioned that ‘all political power which is set over men ... ought to be some way or other exercised ultimately for their benefit’.⁴⁴ This was based on the assumption that ‘the presumed superiority of European virtue, and the superior practice and achievement [did not] ... countenance the exploitation of the disadvantaged [but] ... the excellence of European civilization imposed a heavy burden on the strong to act on behalf of the weak’.⁴⁵ There is an implicit paternalistic assumption here: the colonized were incapable of governing themselves and their European masters were this left with the task of determining what was best for the governed. Only then would these self-designed guardians approximate to the values which Edmund Burke sought to inculcate while defending colonial rule in India. In other words, Trusteeship was a moral design that consisted in promoting ‘the welfare of people who were incapable in choosing for themselves the ends for which they should strive’.⁴⁶ Even before India was brought under the control of the Crown, ‘India was understood legally to be held in trust by the East India Company as an agent of the Crown’.⁴⁷ Notwithstanding its clear paternalistic bias, Trusteeship thus sought to fulfill the so-called benevolent ends of colonial rule by insisting on its moral commitment to the colonized. So the relationship between the ruler and the rules was not exploitative, but one that accrued benefits to both.

Three points emerge out the preceding discussion: (a) Gandhi’s trusteeship was based on a perfect marriage between ideas of *Isopanishad* with that of Ruskin and Carnegie; (b) it was also an outcome of his understanding of the British legal discourse which put in place the moral obligations of the privileged over the socio-economically peripheral

⁴² Gandhi, *Young India*, 14 October, 1908, Vol. 9, Sept-Nov, 1908, p. 481.

⁴³ *Young India*, 15 September, 1927.

⁴⁴ Edmund Burke, ‘the speech on Mr. Fox’s East India Bill, 1 December, 1799’ – quoted in William Bain, ‘the idea of trusteeship in international society’, *The Round Table*, vol. 368, 2003, p. 68.

⁴⁵ William Bain, ‘the idea of trusteeship in international society’, *The Round Table*, Vol. 368, 2003, p. 70.

⁴⁶ William Bain, ‘the idea of trusteeship in international society’, *The Round Table*, Vol. 368, 2003, p. 72.

⁴⁷ FW Maitland, *State, Trust and Corporation*, edited by David Runciman and Magnus Ryan, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003, p. 127 – quoted Ritu Birla, *Stages of Capital: law, culture and market governance in late colonial India*, Orient Blackswan, New Delhi, 2011, p. 104.

sections (c) by defending trusteeship as morally apt, the Mahatma was also pursuing a clear political agenda in conformity with his multi-class campaign against the British and trusteeship was also therefore a model cementing a bond among the contradictory class forces. Besides his theoretical justification for trusteeship, Gandhi listed 'responsibilities' for the mill-owners for the workers which are as follows:

1. The hours of labour must leave the workmen some hours of leisure.
2. The workmen must get facilities for their own education
3. Provision should be made for an adequate supply of milk, clothing and necessary education for their children.
4. There should be sanitary dwelling for the workmen.
5. They should be in a position to save enough to sustain themselves during the old age.⁴⁸

3. Principles of Trusteeship

Although trusteeship was a creative articulation of a relationship between the wealthy and poor, Gandhi hardly put his views in a precise manner. He articulated his thought on the subject while responding to queries. On one occasion, he elaborated the theory of Trusteeship by stating that

I enunciated this theory when the socialist theory was place before the country in respect the possessions held by the Zamindars and ruling chiefs. They would do away with these privileged classes. I want them to outgrow their greed and sense of possession, and to come down in spite of their wealth to the level of those who earn their bread by labour. The labourer has to realize that the wealthy man is less owner of his wealth than the labourer is owner of own, viz., the power to work'.⁴⁹

On the basis of these and other inputs, his colleagues prepared six-point guidelines which Gandhi himself approved.⁵⁰ Besides, drawing on what Gandhi had suggested, these guidelines sought to create a new social order by redefining the relationship between the haves and have-nots.

The six-principle-based guidelines are as follows:

1. Trusteeship provides a means of transforming the present capitalist order of society into an egalitarian one. It gives no quarter to capitalism but gives the present owning class for reforming itself. It is based on the faith that human nature is never beyond redemption.
2. It does not recognize any right of private ownership of property except in so far as it may be permitted by society for its own welfare.
3. It does not exclude legislative regulation of ownership and use of wealth.
4. Thus under the state-regulated trusteeship, an individual will not be free to hold or use his wealth for selfish satisfaction or in disregard of the interests of society.
5. Just as it is proposed to fix a decent minimum living wage, so a limit should be fixed for the maximum income that would be allowed to any person in society. The difference between such minimum and maximum incomes should be

⁴⁸Gandhi's speech at the Textile Labour Union, Bangalore, 28 February, 1927, *CWMG*, Vol. 38, pp. 412-3.

⁴⁹MK Gandhi, *Trusteeship*, Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1960, p. 5.

⁵⁰*Harijan*, 25 October, 1952. This draft which was prepared by Professor Dantwala after discussion with KishorilalMashuruwala, Narhari Parikh and Pyare Lal was placed before Gandhi who then approved the guidelines. JD Sethi, *Gandhi Today*, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1958, 153-54.

reasonable and equitable and variable from time to time, so much so that the tendency would be towards obliteration of the difference.

6. Under the Gandhian economic order the charter of production will be determined by social necessity and not by personal whim or greed.

On the basis of this six-point agenda, one can safely pursue the argument that philosophically, trusteeship is 'an economic conscience by which an individual when engaged in economic activity takes into account not only his own interests but also the interests of others'.⁵¹ Thus trusteeship is 'a theory of need-based production, equitable distribution and social justice'.⁵² A trustee is thus one 'who self-consciously assumes responsibility for upholding, protecting and putting to good use whatever he possesses, acquires or earns [and] he has no heir, but the public'.⁵³ Primarily a theoretical construct, based on high moral values, trusteeship is an effort at redefining capitalism as a system of production within 'the limits imposed upon its use for sustaining minimum living standards, the constraints it imposes by prohibiting its use for selfish satisfaction or in disregard of the social interests and the inclusion of legislative regulation for determining its ownership and us in the desired direction for non-exploitative purposes'.⁵⁴

As evident, the key to Gandhian model is cooperation between the factory owners and the workers. While the owners have a right to profit the workers will have to work for them for their survival. So the relationship is mutually-benefitting. Nonetheless, Gandhi minced no words to establish 'the intellectual superiority' of the capitalists over the workers. As he argued,

'when labour comes fully to realize its strength, I know it can become more tyrannical than capital. The mill-owners will have to work, dictated by labour if the latter could command the intelligence of the former. It is clear however that labour will never attain to than intelligence. If it does, labour will cease to be labour and become itself the master. The capitalists do not fight in the strength of money alone. They do possess intelligence and tact'.⁵⁵

He was not in favour of increasing the wage of the factory workers beyond what is absolutely necessary for their daily existence. Accusing workers of squandering money as a matter of habit, the Mahatma insisted that instead of giving 'extra money' which the worker had earned because of increase in wages, the mill-owner should retain that amount for education and other welfare measures for the workers and their children. Giving extra money to the workers meant, Gandhi felt, 'going into the frying pan out of the fire (because the workers) would use the increase in wages in the grog-shop or in gambling dens'.⁵⁶ Here Gandhi's ideas resonate with those of Aristotle who defended masters' hegemony over slaves in the Greek city state on the basis of a criterion of 'intelligence' which the latter miserably lacked. Although it was possible for Aristotle's slaves to become master if they had acquired the level of intelligence of the masters, Gandhi remained ambiguous whether the workers could be owners, except suggesting

⁵¹ JD Sethi, 'trusteeship and the crisis in economic theory' in JD Sethi (ed.), *Trusteeship: the Gandhian alternative*, Gandhi Peace Foundation, New Delhi, 1986, p. 93.

⁵² BP Mathur, 'Gandhian alternative to economic development : relevant for India today', *Mainstream*, 1 October, 2011, p. 8.

⁵³ RaghavanIyer, 'Gandhian trusteeship in theory and practice' in JD Sethi (ed.), *Trusteeship: the Gandhian alternative*, Gandhi Peace Foundation, New Delhi, 1986, p. 8.

⁵⁴ VKRV Rao, 'trusteeship as Gandhian instrument for socialist change' in JD Sethi (ed.), *Trusteeship: the Gandhian alternative*, Gandhi Peace Foundation, New Delhi, 1986, pp. 27-8.

⁵⁵ MK Gandhi, 'On labour', *The Hindu*, 17 September, 1921, CWMG, vol. 18, pp. 133-4.

⁵⁶ *Young India*, 6 October, 1921.

that 'the capitalists are morally bound to' protect the workers in the interest of sustained production.

4. Trusteeship: a utopia (?)

In the light of growing importance of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), trusteeship does not, at all, appear to be a utopia at all. However in the context of colonialism, the idea which was based on 'change of heart' was ridiculed as 'impractical'. Even Gandhi was aware that for many 'trusteeship is a legal fiction'. He was however confident of its success for two reasons because (a) 'it has the sanction of philosophy and religion behind it [and] that the possessors of wealth have not acted up to the theory does not prove its falsity, it proves the weakness of the wealthy' and (b) absolute trusteeship is an abstraction like Euclid's definition of a point and is equally attainable. But if we strive for it, we shall be able to go further in realizing state of equality on earth than by any other method'. Hence he further argued,

'the question how many can be real trustees according to the definition is beside the point. If the theory is true, it is immaterial whether many live up to it or only one man lives up to it. The question is of conviction. If you accept the principle of ahimsa, you have to strive to live up to it, no matter whether you succeed or fail. There is nothing in this theory which can be said to be beyond the grasp of intellect, though you say (that) it is difficult of practice'.⁵⁷

Trusteeship is basically a mental construct, drawn on strong moral values. What Gandhi sought to establish was 'economic equality' which was the master key to non-violent independence. Economic equality meant, as he defined, did not mean that everyone would literally have the same amount. It simply meant that everybody should have enough for his/her needs.⁵⁸ So, Gandhi's notion of economic equality approximates to the Marxist formulation of 'to each according to his needs'. How to accomplish such a goal? Gandhi was opposed to 'forcible snatching of property' from the wealthy as he argued,

'[w]ealthy people should act as trustee of their wealth. But if they are robbed of their wealth through violent means, it would not be in the interest of the country. This is known as communism. Moreover by adopting violent means we would be depriving society of the services of capable individuals'.⁵⁹

As evident, he was not persuaded by the communist way of bringing economic equality because it challenged the very foundation of *ahimsa*. In no way, a better society would emerge by the use of violent means. He was also convinced that wealthy people had a role of play in social well-being and if they were forcibly deprived of their wealth, they would obviously abdicate their responsibility. Hence the best option was to resort to non-violence that, drawn on the force of love, remained, undoubtedly, an effective mechanism provided the wealthy abdicated their wealth voluntarily keeping in mind their social role for the poor. If the situation was otherwise, 'a violent and bloody revolution is a certainty'.⁶⁰ So what did Gandhi prescribe for reconciling conflicting class interests between the rich and the poor? For the Mahatma, the choice was very unambiguous: according to him, 'the present owners of wealth ... will have to make a choice between class war and voluntarily converting themselves into trustees of wealth

⁵⁷ *Hairjan*, 3 June, 1939, *CWMG*, Vol. 76, p. 312.

⁵⁸ *Harijan*, 31 March, 1946, *CWMG*, Vol. 90, p. 112.

⁵⁹ Talk with Manu Gandhi, 15 April, 1947, *CWMG*, Vol. 87, p. 284.

⁶⁰ MK Gandhi, *Constructive Programme*, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1960, p. 21.

[and] ... they will be allowed to retain the stewardship of their possessions and to use their talent, to increase the wealth, not for their own sakes, but for the sake of the nation and, therefore, without exploitation'.⁶¹ In case the rich did not behave as 'trustee', Gandhi justified the application of violence to dispossess them of their property. He referred to two agencies which were capable of translating his trusteeship idea into reality: *first*, the state by legal means was by far the most effective instrument to implement the pro-people welfare schemes by snatching the wealth of what they amassed as 'disproportionate wealth'⁶²; *secondly*, the role of public opinion was considered to be another powerful device to articulate trusteeship in its true sense 'if the owning classes do not accept trusteeship voluntarily'.⁶³ Although he was persuaded to accept the role of state in articulating 'trusteeship' in such a situation, Gandhi never ever appreciated state ownership as an economic model for mass well-being. He was in favour private property and private ownership because state, to him, represented violence 'in a concentrated and organized form'. Trusteeship can be translated in its true form so long as wealth belongs to the individual who can easily be persuaded because 'the individual has a soul, but as the State is a soulless machine, it can never be weaned from violence to which it owes its very existence'.⁶⁴

There is no doubt that in Gandhi's world-view, non-violence remained the critical denominator for judging one's action. For transforming the prevalent social system based on class conflict and exploitation of the poor by the rich, he preferred non-violent means and cooperation. There was no need for a violent revolution because it could be started gradually, as he believed, by good-hearted individuals. In case, those with wealth declined to follow the principles of Trusteeship, what Gandhi would recommend. He himself posed the question by saying, 'if, however, in spite of the utmost effort, the rich do not become guardians of the poor in the true sense of the term and latter are more and more crushed and die of hunger, what is to be done?'.⁶⁵ The Mahatma recommended 'non-violent non-cooperation. When his attention was drawn to the fact that despite being 'trustees', the mill-owners continued to act as 'exploiters' of the labourers suggesting that 'the assumption of honesty that [his] theory of trusteeship finds it necessary to make, might not apply in practice'.⁶⁶ The idea will remain 'unrealized' presumably because of a well-entrenched mind-set that seems to have governed the wealthy. The wealthy might insist that they should become 'trustees', but the fact that they chose to remain 'owners' suggests a clear continuity of their role as exploiters. Once Gandhi's attention was drawn to this possibility, he reacted instantly by categorically suggesting that 'we shall then have to oppose and fight them'.⁶⁷ For Gandhi, Trusteeship was not a utopia, but a realizable goal, based on compassion and care for the poor which should come naturally because capitalists flourished not by dint of their hard work, but by the contribution of the toiling workers. Hence they should regard themselves as trustees for those 'on whom [they] depend for the making, the retention of, and increase of [their] capital'.⁶⁸ To translate Trusteeship into reality, the Mahatma was not hesitant to deviate from his well-avowed path of non-violence though he was favourably disposed towards 'non-violent non-cooperation with the property

⁶¹ *Harijan*, 31 March, 1946, Vol. 90, p. 113.

⁶² MK Gandhi, *Trusteeship*, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1960. p. 23.

⁶³ MK Gandhi, *Trusteeship*, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1960. p. 35.

⁶⁴ MK Gandhi, *Trusteeship*, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1960, p. 22.

⁶⁵ *Harijan*, 25 August, 1940, *CWMG*, vol. 81, p. 401.

⁶⁶ Ajit K Dasgupta, *Gandhi's Economic Thought*, Routledge, London, 1996, p. 122.

⁶⁷ Gandhi's statement – quoted in *The Hindu*, 7 September, 1945, *CWMG*, Vol. 81, p. 210 – drawn from Ajit K Dasgupta, *Gandhi's Economic Thought*, Routledge, London, 1996, p. 122.

⁶⁸ MK Gandhi, 'can you avoid class war?', *Young India*, 26 March, 1931.

owners by the masses of people' given his uncritical faith in *ahimsa*. In circumstances when the rich declined to voluntarily give-up their possession, Gandhi approved the application of violence. 'I would be very happy indeed', argued Gandhi, 'if the people concerned behaved as trustees; but if they fail, I believe we shall have to deprive them of their possessions through the State with the minimum exercise of violence'.⁶⁹ In other words, he was persuaded to accept that he would condone direct dispossession of property by the state for the purpose of placing it under the control of a trustee if other means had failed.⁷⁰ Reiterating that the application of force is justified, Gandhi, on another occasion, argued that 'if the owning class does not accept trusteeship basis voluntarily, its conversion must come under the pressure of public opinion'.⁷¹ As the discussion demonstrates, Trusteeship, as Gandhi conceptualized, is two-dimensional: on the one hand, it was 'a moral responsibility' of those with wealth to take care of the underprivileged; it was also a moral responsibility on the part of the masses, on the other hand, to 'dispossess' the wealthy of their wealth by force if persuasion did not work. As a true believer in praxis, not only did the Mahatma articulate the idea of Trusteeship, he also elaborated the mechanism, as shown above, of putting the idea into practice.

Trusteeship cannot be understood merely with reference to its ethical roots which traditional scholarship on Gandhi tends to highlight by underplaying the influence of the contexts; it has to be located in the overall structure of Gandhian politics that had its root in the contemporary socio-economic and political milieu. In this sense, Trusteeship also confirms how realistic Gandhi was in creating a political platform in which people with contradictory socio-economic interests coalesced under his stewardship. In fact, the entire philosophy of non-violence, though drawn on morality and ethics, was also based on a clear (and realistic too) reading of colonial circumstances which made non-violence far more effective than any other competing ideologies.⁷² Reflective of Gandhi's realism, Trusteeship fulfilled a grand design of class-reconciliation which just fit-in with the aim of the nationalist movement that the Mahatma guided till political freedom was attained.

5. Concluding Observations

The Gandhian Trusteeship that translated the concern of business houses for society into a reality was a context-driven response. The concern logically flowed from Gandhi's commitment to protect the native industries. The workers' experiences however demonstrated that national industries operated no differently from non-Indian industries in dealing with workers' demands on in their attitude towards trade unions. Thus the workers, as Amrita Bazar Patrika commented, 'find nothing to discriminate between the Bombay mill owners who are Indians and the proprietors of Ludlow Jute Mill at Changail, for instance, who are foreign'.⁷³ In his determination to draw the Indian mill-

⁶⁹ MK Gandhi, *Trusteeship*, Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1960, p. 23.

⁷⁰ Ajit K Dasgupta pursues this argument at length in his *Gandhi's Economic Thought*, Routledge, London, 1996, p. 122.

⁷¹ MK Gandhi, *Trusteeship*, Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1960, p. 35.

⁷² Seeking to understand Gandhi in a new theoretical mould, a new breed of Gandhi scholars has shifted our attention away from moral and ethical consideration to the reality in which he perfected his technique of non-violence. Prominent among these authors are: Uday S Mehta, 'Gandhi on democracy, politics and ethics of everyday life', *Modern Intellectual History*, vol. 7 (2), 2010; Ajay Skaria, 'Gandhi's politics: liberalism and the question of Ashram', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, Vol. 101 (4), 2002; Akeel Bilgrami, 'Gandhi : the philosopher', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 38 (39), 2003; Faisal Devji, 'a practice of prejudice: Gandhi's politics of friendship' in ShailMayaram, MSS Pandian and Ajay Skaria (ed), *Muslims, Dalits and the Fabrications of History*, Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2005.

⁷³ West Bengal State Archives, Calcutta, *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, editorial, 3 May, 1928.

owners into the freedom struggle, Gandhi seemed to have eroded the possibility of a bond between the workers and the national movement. Since the nationalist movement was largely 'political' in character, the mill-owners did not generally feel threatened so long as Gandhian non-violence remained the leading ideology. That Gandhi had strongly felt that reconciliation of conflicting class interests was perhaps the most key to social equilibrium was also evident in the formation of *Majoor Mahajan Sangh* in 1920 which reflected Gandhi's concern for the striking textile workers in Ahmedabad. The strike was withdrawn out of an agreement between the workers and the management which was heavily tilted in favour of the owners. By preaching an ideology of class harmony instead of class conflict, Gandhi agreed to sacrifice the workers' genuine economic demands for the sake of protecting India's economic future in which the role of the Indian industrialists was most critical.⁷⁴ The purpose was to create circumstances for concerted action for the nationalist goal for political freedom which was likely to be weakened if parochial interests along lines of class, caste and religion were privileged. Although *Majoor Mahajan Sangh* never became workers' flag bearer presumably because of its clear bias for the industrialists, it nonetheless confirmed Gandhi's genuine faith in an ideology of class-reconciliation even at the cost of the workers. For Trusteeship to succeed, Gandhi insisted on 'a moral revolution' which meant 'a change of heart'. Critical of the 'wholly unnecessary pomp and extravagance of the moneyed class and the squalid surroundings and the grinding pauperism of the [millions] in whose midst the former are living', Gandhi thus argued that 'if only the capitalist class will read the signs of the times, revise their notions of God-given right to all they possess, in an incredibly short-space of time the seven hundred thousand dung-heaps which today pass muster a villages, can be turned into abodes of peace, health and comfort'.⁷⁵

Trusteeship is a provocative theoretical construct seeking to redefine the relationship between the indigenous business houses and the nationalist movement. That Gandhi succeeded in persuading the business men to participate in the freedom struggle despite adverse consequences suggests the extent to which Trusteeship was an effective mechanism in political mobilization. In two specific ways, Trusteeship served a useful purpose: while it made the relationship between Indian business houses relatively friction-free Trusteeship seemed to have strengthened the bond as well. By being no so critical of the indigenous business houses even when they undertook anti-labour policies, Gandhi's primary concern was not to protect the interests of a group of native capitalists but to ensure India's economic future. Hence he was reluctant to support the textile workers of Birla Mills when they sat on *dharna* for wage-rise because he felt that 'strike in the cotton and textile industries are highly prejudicial to the economic interests of India and indirectly help the foreign manufacturers in enabling them to replace the quantity which India could not manufacture in consequence of such strikes'.⁷⁶ Gandhi thus upheld 'the national democratic' argument in defending business interests at a particular juncture of India's political history that perhaps remained a significant influence in independent India. Although Jawaharlal Nehru preferred 'state-directed planned development' by agreeing not to disturb the indigenous business houses, he, at least in the initial years of his rule, appeared to have endorsed the spirit of Trusteeship. As regards national industries, the concerns of the Congress leaders, including Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhas Chandra Bose, among others, were not substantially different from that of Gandhi. By according priority to the struggle for Swaraj, Bose, like Nehru,

⁷⁴ Jan Breman, 'communal upheaval as the resurgence of social Darwinism' in Ravinder Kaur (ed), *Religion, Violence and Political Mobilization in South Asia*, Sage, New Delhi, 2005, pp. 69-78.

⁷⁵ MK Gandhi, *Trusteeship*, Navajivan Trust, Ahmedabad, 1960, p. 27.

⁷⁶ Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, PTP PT 42(2), GD Birla to PurushattamdasThakurdas, 16 July, 1929. In his letter to PurushattamdasThakurdas, GD Birla quoted this statement of Gandhi.

emphasized cooperation between labour and capital in the Indian-owned industries.⁷⁷ In a substantial way, national democracy and Trusteeship seem to have complemented each other: while the former had provided an solid defence to the radical Congressmen who thus did not find it ideologically incongruent to protect the socio-economic interests of the Indian business community despite being anti-labour, the latter gave the Gandhians an appropriate mechanism to solicit their support for the nationalist cause by being lenient even when they are not exactly pro-labour.⁷⁸ In this sense, Trusteeship set a powerful trend in India's development trajectory that was articulated differently in different phases of her history though, in conceptual terms, it has elements of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) because the principle that the wealthy has a social responsibility (whether institutionalized or not) remains as pivotal in CSR as it was true of Trusteeship.

⁷⁷ Subhas Chandra Bose, *Selected Speeches*, Ministry of Information, Government of India, 1973, p. 33.

⁷⁸ I have elaborated this argument in my 'Jawaharlal and planning, 1938-41: India at the crossroads', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 26 (2), May, 1992.