



Research Paper

Reading Charles Dickens' a Christmas Carol Through Gandhian Doctrine of Trusteeship

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ABSTRACT: Gandhi's economic idea of Trusteeship is one of the fundamental contributions in solving the social and economical inequalities of private ownership. Trusteeship, rooted in aparigraha (non-possession) and samabhava (equability), put forward a new approach to meet the challenges faced by the forces of capitalism. According to Gandhi, it is not a theory that one must understand and apply when needed, but it is a way of life through one can uplift him spiritually and protect the rights of his fellow human beings – which are central to Gandhi's economic idea. Gandhian economic thought aims at resolving economic issues from a new perspective. Deeply influenced by Gita, almost all his actions were led by ethics and moral values. Trusteeship too is formed on the grounds of respect for social values. It is a time-tested philosophy where the wealthy people realize their duty in the welfare of society and would become the trustees rather than authorities to look after the interests of the people in general. What he meant to accomplish with this term was to describe that everything belongs to God and one may use only according to his needs, and remaining for the service of God's creation. Gandhian social-economic doctrine is not restricted to a particular domain, subject or country. His ideas are universal and can be modelled to see the effects. This paper attempts to read and interpret the story of Charles Dickens' classic character Ebenezer Scrooge from selfish and "tight-fisted hand" to a man "as good a man, as the good old city knew..."

KEYWORDS: Gandhian Socio-Economic Thought, Gandhian Trusteeship A Christmas Carol, Charles Dickens.

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Ebenezer Scrooge is portrayed as "A tight-fisted hand at the grindstone... a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous, old sinner! ... The cold within him froze his old features... No warmth could warm, no wintry weather chill him" [1]. He is repeatedly compared with the cold, as the one who only cares about capital and exploits his employee Bob Cratchit. Dickens resentment for the British social approach towards poverty, especially child-poverty, class-division, and how labours or employees are seen as disposable resources than humans. Bob Cratchit in *A Christmas Carol* works in horrible conditions.

"Scrooge had a very small fire, but the clerk's fire was so very much smaller that it looked like one coal... and [He] tried to warm himself at the candle; in which effort, not being a man of a strong imagination, he failed" [1]. He does not complaint to his employer and even too afraid about asking to go home early for Christmas Eve.

Gandhi had great respect for both physical labour and mental labour. For him, any kind of labour is unique in its way. He emphasized that the rich cannot accumulate wealth without labours working for them. The work ethic between Scrooge and his employee, Cratchit, does not improve until the three ghosts of Christmas make him realize how wrong he dealt with people all these years. The enlightenment which stimulated him from within changed him and made him become a "second father" to Tiny Tim, younger son of Cratchit, crippled from birth.

The philosophy of Trusteeship is based on a sense of compassion and morality – of living life through the perspective of non-possession. Gandhi was not against the capitalist mode of the economy; rather he states how capital and labour can support each other. Through a loving approach, the rich can be made to realise the merits of trusteeship and help them change for the wellbeing of society in general.

After the narration of Scrooge's workplace, appears his jovial nephew, Fred. Fred is quite contrary to his uncle, who, unlike Scrooge, loves spending his time with other people. He is excited about Christmas and exclaimed "Merry Christmas!" His greetings are turned down: "Bah! Humbug!" remarks ill-tempered Scrooge. Scrooge then adds, "What's Christmas time to you but a time for paying bills without money; a time for finding

yourself a year older, but not an hour richer..." [1]. Scrooge is presented as greedy, unkind and all that which make him stand against human dignity. Cratchit is one of many people who suffers under rich people like Scrooge. The counter-argument is presented by Dickens through his nephew Fred who says, "Christmas time... the only time I know of, in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of people below them as if they really were fellow-passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys. And therefore, uncle, though it has never put a scrap of gold or silver in my pocket, I believe that it has done me good, and will do me good; and I say, God bless it." [1].

Gandhian trusteeship is backed by the idea of detachment and service. Though these two values may or may not directly attract the riches of the world, everything that is done in service of God eventually makes the man rich from the heart and help him live a life for a greater cause. Gandhi clarifies it: "This does not mean that, if one has wealth, it should be thrown away and his wife and children should be turned out of doors. It simply means that one must give up attachment to these things and dedicate one's all to God and make use of His gifts to serve Him only. [2]

In *A Christmas Carol*, Dickens has represented the religious values of austerity and asceticism. The narrator does not propagate the idea of money as evil or the root of all problems in society. Nor he talks about spending extravagantly in throwing parties; rather he offers the belief of universal brotherhood and goodwill towards all.

When the Ghost of Christmas Past arrives at Scrooge in his bed-chamber, he is taken back to his childhood memories where the younger Scrooge is more patient, caring and enjoys the company of fellow human beings. As the memory proceeds further, he sees himself growing grumpy and cold. His greed holds back his love for Belle and ultimately, Belle leaves him to marry someone else.

"Belle," said the husband, turning to his wife with a smile, "I saw an old friend of yours this afternoon."
"Who was it?" "Guess!" "How can I? Tut, don't I know?" she added in the same breath, laughing as he laughed. "Mr. Scrooge."
"Mr. Scrooge it was. I passed his office window; and as it was not shut up, and he had a candle inside, I could scarcely help seeing him. His partner lies upon the point of death, I hear; and there he sat alone. Quite alone in the world, I do believe."
"Spirit!" said Scrooge in a broken voice, "remove me from this place." [1]

The older Scrooge, despaired and unable to bear the pain, pleads the Ghost of Christmas past to take him back home.

Many times it happens that in want of more and more, we lose the ability to understand the importance of people that matters most in life. Greed, egotism and selfishness blindfold human beings to look beyond the materialistic life. According to Gandhi, there are subtle chords in the human heart that can play the music of bliss and pleasure. As he says, "There are chords in every human heart. If we only know how to strike the right chord we bring out the music." [Harijan, 27-5-1939] At the beginning of the story, we see Fred, Scrooge's nephew, tries to strike the chord through an intellectual dialogue on the significance of Christmas day. Unfortunately, Scrooge is unmoved.

The second attempt by the Ghost of Christmas Past is quite successful to shake the spirit of Scrooge. Though for a reader this awakening through the Ghost of Christmas Past may seem a violent process, as Scrooge is forced to see what he least desired, Gandhian trusteeship is a non-violent process. However, we cannot forget that yet Trusteeship is a non-violent process and if the privileged sections of the society, fail to live up to the notion of Trusteeship, an approach of mental coercion or we can say a dose of warning can be employed against the rich. In *A Christmas Carol*, Fred fails to move Scrooge, the Ghost of Christmas Past works as a substitution and warning to awake the conscience of Scrooge through the memories of the past.

The same warning we see towards the end of the novella when the Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come where the Spirit takes Scrooge to future events. The Spirit is silent, unknown and mysterious which makes the Spirit the most frightening of all the three. The mental coercion the Spirit builds upon Scrooge is a warning that if he fails to change for better the fate is already decided. This dream is marked by the death of Scrooge in future. As he looks at his corpse, he listens to the talk of people around him:

"When did he die?" inquired another.
"Last night, I believe." "Why, what was the matter with him?" asked a third, taking a vast quantity of snuff out of a very large snuff-box. "I thought he'd never die."
"What has he done with his money?" asked a red-faced gentleman with a pendulous excrescence on the end of his nose, that shook like the gills of a turkey-cock.
"I haven't heard," said the man with the large chin, yawning again. "Left it to his company, perhaps. He hasn't left it to me. That's all I know."
This pleasantry was received with a general laugh.
"It's likely to be a very cheap funeral," said the same speaker; "for upon my life I don't know of anybody to go to it. Suppose we make up a party and volunteer?"
"I don't mind going if a lunch is provided," observed the gentleman with the excrescence on his nose. "But I must be fed, if I make one."

Another laugh. "Well, I am the most disinterested among you, after all," said the first speaker, "for I never wear black gloves, and I never eat lunch. But I'll offer to go, if anybody else will. When I come to think of it, I'm not at all sure that I wasn't his most particular friend; for we used to stop and speak whenever we met. Bye, bye!"
Speakers and listeners strolled away, and mixed with other groups...."

The last move played by the narrator changes Scrooge forever. This mental coercion is first applied before a loving and kind approach of the second Spirit, Ghost of Christmas Present who is kind and clear in his demeanour.

"In easy state upon this couch, there sat a jolly Giant, glorious to see; who bore a glowing torch, in shape not unlike Plenty's horn, and held it up, high up, to shed its light on Scrooge, as he came peeping round the door. "Come in!" exclaimed the Ghost. "Come in! and know me better, man!"

Scrooge entered timidly and hung his head before this Spirit. He was not the dogged Scrooge he had been; and though the Spirit's eyes were clear and kind, he did not like to meet them."

Then the Spirit takes Scrooge to the house of Bob Cratchit where the family is preparing for Christmas. Though the feast is not a big one, the family is "happy, grateful, pleased with one another, and contended with the time" [1]. On looking at Tiny Tim, Scrooge asks if he will survive. The Spirit shows him an empty chair at next year's Christmas chair. Scrooge's overcome with grief hears his own words quoted by the Spirit:

"if man you be in heart, not adamant, forbear that wicked cant until you have discovered What the surplus is, and Where it is. Will you decide what men shall live, what men shall die? It may be, that in the sight of Heaven, you are more worthless and less fit to live than millions like this poor man's child..."

Such visions and reminisces of Scrooge's speech takes him one step closer to self-realization and prepares him to move from materialism to egalitarianism. He is reborn again and grateful for a second chance of his life. He offers a boy a large sum of money to buy Christmas turkey as big as him for Bob Cratchit. He meets the old gentleman who was rebuked for asking for donations at the beginning of the novella, promises him to donate huge for the poor and thanks him for contributing to a great cause. He visits the church, walks about the streets and get himself involved in the very essence of life. "He had never dreamed that any walk—that anything—could give him so much happiness." This change of Scrooge's character makes us revisit the Gandhian doctrine of trusteeship where he gives the best and most effective mantra: "Enjoy thy wealth by renouncing it." [4]

More than a philosopher or thinker, Gandhi was a reformer and practised what he preached. Unlike Karl Marx or Adam Smith, he did not formulate any principles. "Marxian socialism aims at the destruction of the class called capitalists, whereas the Gandhian approach is not to destroy the institution, but to reform it [3]". He was more of a practitioner than a theorist. He also mentions that he formed his philosophies by reading several books and he laid no claim to originality. However, he also claimed that his views are his own as he practised them throughout his life and brought a change in the world around him. Trusteeship is one such practice he developed during his encounters with real-life challenges and finding a way to solve them through religious values.

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