Gandhi

Socialist Activist who Fought for Indian Independence and Pacifism

(1869 - 1948)

Description: A complex man with a controversial legacy, Mohandas Gandhi remains one of the pioneers of civil disobedience as a political weapon and a giant in 20th century anti-colonialism. (From: Center for a Stateless Society)

Tags: pacifist, anti-colonialist, socialist, indian, swaraj, nationalist, activist, vegetarian, indian independence.

Quotes:

"The ideally nonviolent state will be an ordered anarchy. That State is the best governed which is governed the least." (From: Gandhi's Wisdom Box (1942), edited by Dewan Ram Parkash, p. 67.)

"...the shape of reproduction on that sacred soil of gun factories and the hateful industrialism which has reduced the people of Europe to a state of slavery, and all but stifled among them the best instincts which are the heritage of the human family." (From: "A Letter to a Hindu: The Subjection of India- Its Cause and Cure," by Leo Tolstoy, With an Introduction by M. K. Gandhi, December 14th, 1908.)
"Tolstoy's life has been devoted to replacing the method of violence for removing tyranny or securing reform by the method of nonresistance to evil. He would meet hatred expressed in violence by love expressed in self-suffering. He admits of no exception to whittle down this great and divine law of love. He applies it to all the problems that trouble mankind." (From: "A Letter to a Hindu: The Subjection of India - Its Cause and Cure," by Leo Tolstoy, With an Introduction by M. K. Gandhi, December 14th, 1908.)

**Biography:**

Even though Mahatma Gandhi was pragmatic in many ways his concept of ideal State exhibited anarchist outlook. In his words: "The State represents violence in a concentrated and organized form. 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."

**Enlightened anarchy:**

Gandhi's ideal State was a nonviolent state of enlightened anarchy where social life would remain self-regulated. In that State there is no ruler, no subject, no government or no governed. It is a perfect State consisting of enlightened persons, self-regulated and self-controlled following the principles of nonviolence.

**Role of manual work:**

The ideal State of Gandhi was to be governed, by the principle of manual work. Every individual should take up manual work for rendering his/her service to the State and wellbeing of his fellow individuals inside the State. This will promote his service in the direction of welfare of the State.
Village as the unit of State:

The ideal State of Gandhi should consist of villages which are from units. Each village, a component part of the State, should be a village consisting of nonviolent Satyagrahis. They would form the life-breath of an ideal State and preserve and protect nonviolence and truth in their entirety throughout the State.

Decentralization of authority:

In an ideal State, authority should be decentralized. Gandhi was against centralization for it leads to absolutism. In decentralizing the authority, Gandhi gave scope to individual liberty. The State should guide the individuals by appealing to their morality. If State resorts to violence, it will damage the enthusiasm, initiative, courage, creativeness and nonviolent mind of individuals and as such, the State cannot prosper.

Selflessness and Swadeshi:

An individual in Gandhian ideal State should be selfless. He should not accumulate wealth. Accumulation of bread and controlling labor will bring poverty to the State. Thus, in the villages, means of production should be commonly won. This should generate love among the people of the locality binding them in the common tie of love. Swadeshi should be promoted because that is the characteristic feature of Gandhian ideal State.

Spiritualized democracy:

Gandhi envisaged that the principle of nonviolence should be the basis of State. Naturally, a democracy that will emerge out of it, will give vent to the majority of opinion. Here, neither property nor status or position but manual work should be the qualification of village republic. It will be a State devoid of corruption and hypocrisy. In a simple statement, democracy will be spiritualized.

State and people - means and ends relationship:
To Gandhiji, State is not an end itself; it is rather a means to the end. It is meant to do greatest good of greatest number of the people. Neither force nor absolute sovereignty is the basis of State. Gandhi's ideal of a welfare State is always ready to promote the condition of its subjects.

Critic of western democracy:

Gandhiji vehemently opposed the parliamentary democracy of western type. He criticized the universal suffrage system of the election held in western countries. The Parliament is not stable to the change of ministry from time to time. Further, the Prime Minister is always concerned about his own interest and the interest of his party members for retaining his power. So, Gandhi criticized it and as such, western democracy has no place in Gandhi's welfare State.

Verna system:

Following the doctrine of Gita, Mahatma Gandhi told that the Varna system should form the basis of the ideal State. As Varna is related to birth, every Varna should render its labor to the betterment of the State. That will result in non-possession and economic equality. This will bring complete social and economic equality.

Importance of dharma:

Dharma is a novel aspect of Gandhi's ideal state. It is not a religion of a particular sector creed; rather it is moral and ethical code of conduct which preserves the culture of the nation. Further, it holds together the social order and brings harmony among the people uplifting their potentialities.

Role of police:

Gandhiji prescribed for a minimum intervention of police force in the activities of the State. To him, crime is a disease and it must be cured. Accordingly, appeal to the conscience of the criminals will change their mind but not the police atrocity. Out and out, the State should be governed by the principle of Ahimsa where virtually, there is no place of coherence.
Emphasis on duty and resorting to natural means:

Gandhi put emphasis on duty rather than rights. If one becomes cautious for his duties, then rights will automatically be taken due care by the State. Rights are nothing but opportunities for self-realization. It is the link of one's spiritual unity with others by serving them. The role of doctors and machines was to be ignored and traditional method it to be adopted for curing the diseases.

Basic education:

Gandhi laid emphasis on basic education. By that he wanted to spread vocational education in the nook and corner of the country. Gandhi had realized that this will improve small-scale industry, which in turn, will bring a self-sufficient economy for every country.

Thus, Gandhi's concept of ideal State was based on nonviolence and truth. Spiritualized democracy, emphasis on duties, considering State as a means to an end etc. were some of the factors which made Gandhi's ideal State distinct.


Works:

Author of Letter to a Hindu (December 14, 1908)Author of Gandhi Letters (November 30, 1909)Chronology:

October 02, 1869: Gandhi's Birth Day.


Links:

• Anarchy Archives: Gandhi Archive
http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/Anarchist_Archives/bright/gandhi/Gandhi.html

• Wikipedia: Mohandas K. Gandhi
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gandhi

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