



GANDHIAN TRUSTEESHIP IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

From Ameoba to Nuclear Age the Science & Technology has developed tremendously but the development of human beings is not adequate enough to be in step with it. One of the aims of Crest Associates is to publish literature of lasting value reflecting the creative zeal of Various Individuals & Institutes.

In view of the above, Crest Associates is reprinting the book-let entitled "Gandhian Trusteeship in Theory and Practice" originally published by Institute of World Culture with a sense of gratitude. I am sure this book-let will be helpful in realising the total integrated development of its readers.

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Suresh Parikh



GANDHIAN TRUSTEESHIP IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

The act of renunciation of everything is not a mere physical renunciation, but represents a second or new birth. It is a deliberate act, not done in ignorance. It is, therefore, a regeneration.

MAHATMA GANDHI.*

For India, the most critical issue involves the current rethinking of Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy. Gandhi said that soon after his death India would bypass and betray his ideas, but that thirty years later India would be compelled to restore them. Events have begun to validate his prophecy, and the trend will accelerate.... When India fully accepts that it cannot conceivably emulate Japan without harnessing its own indigenous values and providing new motivations, and when out of necessity its leadership recognizes that it can no longer inflate the token symbols of Gandhi or the facile slogans of socialism, she will be forced to ask more fundamental questions. Only then can the real social revolution emerge, which could have a strong radical base and also borrow from ancient traditions as well as modern movements. While it would be difficult to predict the changes themselves, they will require serious reassessment of Gandhi's questions relating to the quantum of goods needed for a meaningful and fulfilling way of life.

Parapolitics — Towar the City of Man§

* M.K. Gandhi, "The Golden Key", in *Socialism of My Conception*, ed. Anand T. Hingorani, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan (Bombay, 1966), p.260.

§ Raghavan Iyer, *Parapolitics — Toward the City of Man*, Chapter 13, Oxford University Press (New York, 1979), Second edition : Concord Grove Press (Santa Barbara, 1985), pp.250-1.



Mahatma Gandhi held that all human beings are implicitly responsible to God, the Family of Man and to themselves for their use and treatment of all goods, gifts and talents that fall within their domain. This is so because Nature and Man are alike upheld, suffused and regenerated by the Divine. There is a luminous spark of divine intelligence in the motion of the atom and in the eyes of every man and woman on earth. We incarnate our divinity when we deliberately and joyously nurture our abilities and assets for the sake of the larger good. In this sense, the finest exemplars of trusteeship are those who treat all possessions as though they were sacred or deeply precious beyond any worldly scale of valuation. Thus, it is only through daily moral choice and the meritorious use of resources that we sustain our inherited or acquired entitlements. For this reason, the very idea of ownership is misleading and, at root, a form of violence. It implies rights and privileges over Man and Nature that go beyond the bounds of human need — although not necessarily beyond the limits of human law and social custom. It obscures the generous bounty of Nature, which provides enough for all if each holds in trust only what he needs, without excess or exploitation.

Gandhi sensed that all our resources and possessions, at any level are not merely fragments of the Divine but are also inherently mortal and mutable. The Divine in its active aspect is ceaselessly creative and ever fluid in form. By analogy, human needs and material circumstances alter even while cultural patterns and social customs purport to maintain temporal continuity through established traditions. Ownership, from this standpoint, is truly a costly and illusory attempt to ensure permanency and succession. It gives birth to unwarranted attachments and insupportable expectations. 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. This appalling moral



malaise leads to inordinate self-assertion and self-projection which can only yield distrust, sorrow and “loss of all”. But when we attain the sacred mental posture of the trustee who regards all possessions as held in trust for the good of all, we can progressively approach the high spiritual state of mental renunciation. We can, in the Upanishadic phrase, “renounce and enjoy”. It is only when we voluntarily relinquish our unnatural claims and consecrate ourselves to a higher purpose that we can freely enjoy what we have. Thus, self-satisfaction is a natural outcome of a generous perspective and a greater purity of heart. It is truly a function of the harmonious cultivation of our spiritual, mental and material resources. In Gandhian terms, guilt-free enjoyment is inseparable from ethical probity. The real issue, then, is not how much or how little we possess in the way of property or talent, but the reasons and motives behind their allocations and uses.

Gandhi approached the concept of trusteeship at four different levels. First of all, trusteeship, as the sole universalizable means of continuously redistributing wealth, could be seen as a corollary of the principle of non-violence and simultaneously assure the generation and intelligent use of wealth.

No other theory is compatible with non-violence. In the non-violent method the wrongdoer compasses his own end, if he does not undo the wrong. For, either through Non-violent Non-co-operation he is made to see his error, or he finds himself completely isolated.¹

Even if wealth could be coercively redistributed, the resulting greed and inexperience on the part of many and the resentment on the part of the dispossessed would lead to economic instability and rapid decline. More likely than not, it would lead to class war, anomic violence and widespread self-alienation. Trusteeship, however, encourages owners to see themselves as



vigilant trustees of their accumulated wealth for the larger community without threatening them.

Secondly, Gandhi's practical psychological intuition allowed him to see that fear would prevent other means of economic distribution from succeeding in the long run. A fundamental change in the concepts of activity and courage is needed to overcome passivity and cowardice. Courage must be detached from violence, and creativity must be dislodged from the self-protective formulations of entrenched elites. This involves rooting new notions of noetic activity which are creative, playful and tolerant, and new notions of moral courage which are heroic, magnanimous and civil, in a search for universal self-transcendence. An individual must feel, both abstractly and concretely, a secure sense of joyous eros in fellowship, and a positive sense of solidarity with hapless human beings everywhere. He must feel at one with the victims of incomplete revolutions, with the understandably impatient and occasionally mistaken pioneers of great revolutions, and even more with those willing to defy every presumptuous criterion and form of authority which trespasses upon individuality.

The fearful man tyrannizes others: forced redistribution would bring fearful responses from owners, who would see their lives and futures threatened, and fearful masses would deal with excess wealth incompetently. For Gandhi, the ever-present possibility of social change must be approached from a position of truth and encourage, whereas fear is weakness which leads to violence. Strength should not be mistaken for the modalities of violence, which are instruments of fear and always lead to varying degrees of self-destruction. Since strength rests on human dignity and respect, workers must approach exploitative capitalists from a position of self-respect based on the capital of labour, for "labour is as much capital as metal". To abolish fear and even failure itself requires a



fundamental change in the social structure. The feasibility of this social transformation does not lie in denying the judgements of others, but rather in regarding them as partially relevant though in no sense compelling. Individuals can commit themselves to increasing their own capacity for self-transcendence of external criteria of differentiation, and thereby attain liberation from the self-perpetuating inequities and horrors of the System.

Therefore, workers, instead of regarding themselves as enemies of the rich, or regarding the rich as their natural enemies, should hold their labour in trust for those who are in need of it. This they can do only when instead of feeling so utterly helpless as they do, they realize their importance in human economy and shed their fear or distrust of the rich. Fear and distrust are twin sisters born of weakness. When labour realizes its strength it won't need to use any force against moneyed people. It will simply command their attention and respect.²

Gandhi discerned the critical role acceptability plays in legitimating a social order, and distinguished between a people's tacit acceptance and active dislike of an economic regime. So long as any society finds its socio-economic system acceptable, that system will stand even if a militant minority detests it. But should a significant number of individuals find it unacceptable, it is shaken to its foundations, regardless of the complacency of privileged elites.

Thirdly, Gandhi contended that the idea of trusteeship could be put into practice non-violently, because it could be instituted by degrees. When asked if such 'trustees' — individuals who possessed wealth and yet saw themselves as stewards for society — could be found in India in his day, he rejected the question as strictly irrelevant to the theory, which can only be evaluated by extensive testing over time.



At this point I may be asked as to how many trustees of this type one can really find. As a matter of fact, such a question should not arise at all. It is not directly related to our theory. There may be just one such trustee or there may be none at all. Why should we worry about it? We should have faith that we can without violence or with so little violence that it can hardly be called violence, create such a feeling among rich. We should act in that faith. That is sufficient for us. We should demonstrate through our endeavour that we can end economic disparity with the help of non-violence. Only those who have no faith in non-violence can ask how many trustees of this kind can be found.

Gandhi knew that he sought the widespread realization of a forgotten ideal, but he repudiated the conventional notion that an experiment is unworthy to be tried simply because it stems from an exacting ideal. Even if one argued that trusteeship was doomed to failure, it ran no greater risk than the conventional social proposals of the day. Committed to principles but flexible in policies, Gandhi saw no reason to neglect ideals and to institute social reforms from a defeatist standpoint. Such an approach only guaranteed that structural faults would be built into the new social order. Rather, he emphasized, it is better to move towards the ideal and make appropriate adjustments necessitated by the specific failures encountered in attempting to reach it. In doing so, principles would remain uncompromised and the possibility of improvement would always remain, whereas in a system which assumes cupidity and corruption in human nature, nothing encourages their eradication.

Gandhi not only had faith that it was possible for human beings to become trustees of their resources for the sake of all, but also that many in fact were already and had always been trustees. They are the preservers of culture and



tradition, who show their ethical stance through countless daily acts of graciousness and concern for others. To treat man as man requires not so much the acceptance of the equal potentialities of all men, let alone the infinite potentialities of all men, but rather the acceptance of the unknown potentialities of all human beings. Given scarce resources and the limits of productivity and of taxable income, there are definitely limits to what the State can do, but is there any reason why voluntary associations should not be entrusted with the task of extending the avenues of opportunity available to the disinherited? The socialist could argue that by an indefinite extension of opportunities (not always requiring State action) and by changing not only the structure but the entire ethos and moral tone of society, new social values could slowly emerge and usher in an era in which men show mutual respect which is not based on skills and promotions, rank and status.

The minimal goal of basic economic equity is easily stated, yet it is the fundamental first stage for the uplift of the whole.

Everybody should be able to get sufficient work to make the two ends meet. And, this ideal can be universally realized only if the means of production of elementary necessities of life remain under the control of the masses. These should be freely available to all as God's air and water are, or ought to be; they should not be made a vehicle of traffic for the exploitation of others. Their monopolization by any country, nation or groups of persons would be unjust. The neglect of this simple principle is the cause of the destitution that we witness to-day, not only in this unhappy land, but other parts of the world, too.⁴

The principle of trusteeship in its application to the equitable distribution of wealth, as well as to the non-violent socialist reformation it underpins, is



practicable because it does not require everyone to undertake it all at once. Unlike most socialists who reason that they must seize the power of the State before instituting effective reforms, Gandhi held that enlightened individuals could initiate the process of divesting themselves of what is unnecessary, while becoming true trustees of their own possessions.

It is perfectly possible for an individual to adopt this way of life without having to wait for others to do so. And if an individual can observe a certain rule of conduct, it follows that a group of individuals can do likewise. It is necessary for me to emphasize the fact that no one need wait for anyone else in order to adopt a right course. Men generally hesitate to make a beginning, if they feel that the objective cannot be had in its entirety. Such an attitude of mind is in reality a bar to progress.⁵

Once the barrier in consciousness is broken, the principle of trusteeship can be made to work by letting go of the demand for a mechanically equal distribution, something Gandhi doubted could ever be realized. Instead, he held to the revolutionary ideal of *equitable* distribution, which would not only be possible but necessary in the non-violent socialist State.

Should attempts to encourage the abandonment of exploitation through misappropriation of the means of production fail, trusteeship could be made to work through non-violent non-cooperation, wherein workers realize the capital worth and collective strength of their labour. Should it succeed, ideas which arise out of narrow acquisitive thinking would vanish because they were rooted in unacceptable and illusory assumptions.

If the trusteeship idea catches, philanthropy, as we know it, will disappear..... A trustee has no heir but the public.⁶



Gradually, statutory trusteeship could be introduced in which the duties of the trustee and the public could be formalized. The trustee may serve so long as the people find his services beneficial. He may even designate his successor, but the people must confirm it. Should the State become involved, the trustee's power of appointment and the State's power of review will strike a balance in which the welfare of the people will be safeguarded.

Fourthly and finally, Gandhi believed that social conditions were ripe for imaginative applications of the principle of trusteeship. The collapse of Western imperialism, the spiritual and social poverty of fascism and totalitarianism, the psychological failure of capitalism, the moral bankruptcy of state socialism and the ideological inflexibility of communism all indicate an ineluctable if gradual movement towards a reconstitution of the social order which will compel some form of redistribution.

The limits to growth make themselves felt through the undermining of social virtues like trust and truthfulness, restraint and mutual acceptance, as well as a sense of fraternal obligation, all of which are essential to individual initiative in a contractual economic system. If such virtues are treated as public goods necessary to universal welfare, then unrestricted individualism faces noticeable limits, lest the social justification and viability of the whole system be destroyed. C.B. MacPherson went so far as to predict that the time will come when it will no longer be feasible to put acquisition ahead of spiritual values, and that national power will become a function not of market power but of moral stature. Although we have to confront scarcity, the emphasis on Hobbesian self-preservation alone is inadequate.

The rich should ponder well as to what is their duty today. They who employ mercenaries to guard their wealth may find those very guardians



turning on them. The moneyed classes have got to learn how to fight either with arms or with the weapons of non-violence.... I see coming the day of the rule of the poor, whether that rule be through force of arms or of non-violence.⁷

Even though the war against poverty will take a long time to win, it is necessary for the State to adopt various measures to reduce the sharp economic inequalities that undermine the working of mass democracy, and to strengthen the organizing power of peasants, artisans, and industrial and clerical workers. In addition to fiscal and monetary measures to reduce income ceilings, it would be desirable to assist wealthy landlords and industrialists in parting with portions of their wealth, property and earnings as public contributions towards specific local schemes and plans. The more the redistributive process can be extended beyond legal compulsion and political action, the more democracy is strengthened at the social level. The more the State can bring together representatives of richer and poorer groups, stronger and weaker sections of society, in planning local programs, the better it will be for all.

At this point the socialist's faith as well as his integrity are tested, and so are his ultimate premises. Does he believe in perfectibility or in original sin? If, like Condorcet, he believes that the historical process and the progress of humanity involve an increasing equality among nations, equality within nations and the perfectibility of man, how much emphasis does it put on human growth and perfectibility rather than on inherent flaws and weaknesses? If committed socialists are not imbued with atavistic or original sin, if they hold to a truly open view of human nature, then they could adopt a different parapolitical standpoint.⁷ They could say that it is because they believe in the unknown



possibilities of every human being that they are concerned to extend the idea of human excellence to a point where external social distinctions do not matter, but where trusteeship is honoured wherever it is witnessed in human beings.

Owing to his unshakeable conviction that violence can never produce permanent results, only Gandhi's modesty prevented him from asserting that his ethical solution would come to be seen as the only feasible alternative to wholesale misery and destruction, if not now, then in the foreseeable future. He deliberately avoided elaborating a complete system of statutory or voluntary trusteeship out of the conviction that structural and organizational details necessarily varied with the social and political context and with the personnel, whilst the essential core of the ideal was universally applicable. Thus he could gain a serious hearing from those who would be most affected by the implementation of his proposals without threatening them.

I am not ashamed to own that many capitalists are friendly towards me and do not fear me. They know that I desire to end capitalism almost, if not quite, as much as the most advanced Socialist or even Communist. But our methods differ, our languages differ. My theory of 'trusteeship' is no make-shift, certainly no camouflage. I am confident that it will survive all theories.⁸

Looking at Gandhian trusteeship more closely, we might ask what it actually means to be a trustee. *A trustee is one who self-consciously assumes responsibility for upholding, protecting and putting to good use whatever he possesses, acquires or earns.* For an individual to be a trustee in any meaningful sense implies that he is self-governing and morally sensitive. He is acutely aware of the unmet needs of others and, simultaneously, is capable of controlling and transmuting his own appropriating tendencies. He is deeply committed to



cultivating his most generous feeling and altruistic hopes for others while consciously and patiently freeing himself from all recognized exploitative attitudes and relationships. He strives to become self-regulating, reliable and sacrificial. But he must become so in a courageous and intelligent way. He must learn to think and feel altruistically. He must learn by degrees the heart's etiquette — to speak, touch and act with the utmost purity and solicitousness. He must become, by virtue of self-training, very attentive to every resource at his disposal — both inner and outer. It is precisely because he sees his abilities and possessions as belonging to God, mankind or to future generations that he is eager to use them to the maximum. His posture towards his overall resources is therefore not one of a lazy or selfish indifference. He is not concerned with hoarding nor is he fearful of multiplying his guts, talents and possessions. Like the good servant in the New Testament, he wishes to increase his meagre “talents”, but not for his own sake, nor merely for his own family.

The best trustee is indeed someone who has attained an inward moral balance. He is serenely detached, magnanimous and imaginative. But his detachment is never cold or narrow. It is an expression of his unshakeable confidence in the ontological plenty of Nature and the inexhaustible resourcefulness of Man. His steadfastness and trustworthiness are principally due to this broader focus of concentration. Likewise, his motive is benevolent and self-sustaining because it is not mixed with the turgid waters of personal aggrandizement. Instead, he expresses a quality of love and appreciation for what he has that enhances its moral and practical value for others. He might even possess little, but his sense of when, where and how to use what he has increase its potential good a hundredfold.



If this conveys the invisible grandeur of the Gandhian trustee, then what steps can we take to become more like such sage-like trustees and less like small-minded appropriators? Gandhi might well suggest that our first steps should be the fruit of honest self-examination. Grandiose gestures about giving up external possessions and impulsive statements about our good intentions have little practical impact on our character. The initial step should be at the level of thought. We should think clearly and deeply about the principles of trust and trusteeship. What does trusteeship mean as an idea and as an ideal? What are its practical implications? And what would we have to give up for it to become a potent *mantram* in our lives? This form of reflection and self-questioning initiates a period of “mental gestation”. It allows us to strengthen our understanding, dispel illusions and light the subtle fire of altruism.

Once we have grasped the principle of trusteeship at a rudimentary level — and recognized its radical implications for our personal lives and impersonal relationships — then we could commit ourselves wholeheartedly to the moral heroism of non-possession. Thus moral commitment would be fused with clarity of thought and psychological honesty. Clarity in relation to the ideal of non-possession is vital, as is firmness of resolve. Mentally, we must see where we are going — even though it be only the next step — and we must be unconditional if we hope to approximate the end in view. Otherwise, we will neither overcome nor transform the possessive attitudes that self-examination reveals. This is a fundamental theme in Gandhian thought. We must be courageous and unflinching in our efforts to fulfil our self-adopted vows. Only an unqualified resolve can generate the curve of growth necessary to negate and transcend our appropriating tendencies.



If wholeheartedness or total renunciation is the ideal, we might ask ourselves, do little renunciations count? Yes, so long as they are unconditional. If, for example, I promise myself to return all that I borrow, then this promise is binding in relation to my children, to people I like, to people I dislike and to those who rarely return what I lend them. This illustrates the principle that non-possession (*aparigraha*) pre-supposes a change of heart, not merely a change of intellectual viewpoint. To be genuine, the change of heart must come about non-violently through the *tapas* of a self-imposed discipline. This is why Gandhi encourages us to integrate unconditional commitment with both philosophical thought and mature self-honesty.

A second step towards instilling the spirit of trusteeship is taken when we simplify our wants. This is a pivotal point in Gandhi's concept of non-possession. If we want to make the most deliberate and compassionate use of our individual talents, gifts, faculties and skills, then we need to simplify our desires and wants. Gandhi insisted upon this minimal moral asceticism for the trustee because he saw that unrestrained wants waste our internal capital and channel our resources into selfish uses. Inordinate wants obscure perceptions both of basic needs and deeper human aspirations. They diminish our sense of dignity as self-governing agents and corrode our credibility with others. Furthermore, when the multiplication of possessive desires proceeds far enough, it leads to self-destruction. This is compellingly depicted in Tolstoy's short story "How Much Land Does a Man Need?" in which a petty landowner is undone by his unchecked desire for land and wealth. He is initially simple and good, but his wish to improve his lot in life is progressively corrupted by a swelling ambition to own and possess



more. In the end, Tolstoy answers the question raised in the story's title by wryly stating that the only land we truly need is a grave six feet long by three feet wide.

We might ask ourselves what it means to simplify our wants or needs in a Gandhian manner. It would seem that we can simplify our lives in at least two primary senses. First of all, we can make a concerted effort to reduce the sheer number of encrusted desires and habit-patterns that vitiate our altruistic impulses and fond dreams for others. We self-consciously check the tendency of the aggressive and expansive self to acquire more at the expense of others. But secondly, we take care to this discriminatingly. We must, like the smelter and the goldsmith, extract and refine the pure metal from the crude ore. We want not just less possessive desires but more benevolent ones. Furthermore, as we cleanse the energy of desire, we purify our imagination. When we gain control over imagination, we establish mind control and render ourselves capable of using all personal, financial and other resources skilfully. We are more earthed, so to speak. With minds unclouded by vain imaginings, we feel more in charge of ourselves and are more responsive to the needs of fellow human beings. Our feeling for what others may attain is gradually enriched, whilst our fantasies about what we hope to acquire wane. We eventually insert our resources into the expanding circle of human interdependence.

Two other factors contribute crucially to our becoming authentic trustees — *the art of silence and the ability to put trust in others*. Silence or “speech control” is a precondition for all moral and intellectual growth. A trustee must guard his speech if he is to uphold and extend the good. This is not secretiveness but healthy common sense. A trustee's intentions should be as pellucid as crystal and visible to all. But wisdom is needed in all relationships. Hence, a trustee gradually learns not to speak prematurely or out of turn. He fosters a refreshing



candour and reserve in speech which enables him to initiate constructive activity in season. He views wise silence and worthy expression as golden keys to maximizing the appropriate use of resources. No one would entrust us with anything precious or worthwhile if we were known to be garrulous, profligate, promiscuous or indiscreet. Nor could we be credible to ourselves and others if our speech is compulsive.

If the ears are the gates of learning and the eyes the windows of the soul, the tongue is the key to the alchemical transmutation of resources and the freemasonry of benevolence. Thus, a benign and intelligent silence is the precursor of effective, beneficial action. It aids mind control and augments true wealth. For example, parents often discern certain admirable qualities in their own children and those of others. These qualities are frequently at a germinal stage. We notice them intuitively but only partially observe them at an empirical level. By a sage-like silence we can help these virtuous traits to grow and luxuriate, thus becoming serene and sacred trustees of the good. Without drawing premature attention to what we perceive, we are ready to acknowledge or welcome the child's unfolding abilities when it seems helpful or important to do so. This makes every man and woman a custodian of the good in others. This is a high responsibility assumable by the poorest and most destitute as well as by the wealthy. Whenever any one of us treasures the finest qualities and exemplary contributions of another, we add to the store of human good. This commonwealth grows unseen but yields great benefits to all. Its value is especially apparent when we help someone going through difficult times. To remind someone gently of the best in himself is to remind him of what is most salutary and what is relevant to the moment of death.



Finally, we strengthen our desire to act as trustees for the good when we imaginatively extend our trust and the sacred responsibility for our riches in relation to others. This is integral to Mahatma Gandhi's idea of trusteeship. But what is the obstacle? According to him, the root of the problem lies in a fearful refusal to relinquish attachments. We often fail to confer equal trust on others or fail to share responsibilities with others because we will not distance ourselves from our suspicions and mental images of them. This is noticeably true with respect to parents faced with granting their own and other children a wider circumference of choice. It seems that a detached love is the only cure because there is no growth unless we expand the circle of opportunity continually and appropriately. This is not always easy, and good results are certainly not automatic. To confer upon the untried or inexperienced that which we have so judiciously cultivated is no simple task. To retire, like the court musicians of Akbar, from the limelight at the right time is a sign of self-mastery, while avoiding the sorry humiliation of hanging on to offices and honours. Such renunciation calls for a great deal of thought and a definite degree of risk-taking, but at least the risks are on the side of the potential good in others.

If every man or woman has some innate recognition of the true and the good, enriched by active participation in a theatre of political interaction, then a collectivity of citizens is a mature moral community. It necessarily rests upon and reinforces social sympathy born of self-awareness and a shared consciousness of "the species nature", the common humanity and essential similarity, of individuals in diverse roles, situations and circumstances. With this wider perspective, it is possible to derive a viable conception of the common good or public welfare from the individual's pursuit of the good in the privileged company of other men and women. This humane pursuit requires a reasoned reflection



upon oneself in relation to others and an imaginative empathy with an expanding circle of human fellowship. The germs of noetic change — hidden within the depths of human beings — can become the basis of communities, communes, conceptions of community, at several levels and in concentric circles, in a novel and more intentional sense than any known in recorded history. They serve as the seeds of a rich variety of modes of participation in the politics of perfectibility. An ideal community is as utopian as the ideal man or the ideal relationship. But every human being is constantly involved in some kind of correction from his external environment, so that he engages in criticism of others (often his own way of criticizing and defining himself). Everyone can see through formal laws and coercive sanctions and recognize constructive alternatives among true friendships for an easier, more natural, trustful context in which one can free oneself and grow.

If this is what is involved in becoming better and abler trustees, then what concrete implications could trusteeship have in relation to day-to-day matters? In other words, if we wish to embody the quintessential principle of trusteeship more fully, how might it affect our attitude and response towards (i) property, (ii) money, (iii) time and (iv) skills?

Several points should be kept in mind when considering trusteeship and property. In the first place, most of us do not own property, but we all occupy, use and share it. As trustees we should make every effort to look upon all private and communal property with gratitude. We should be grateful for what we have and treat it with respect — whether it be our bodies, our books or the flowers in public parks and private gardens. This mental posture helps us to divest ourselves of the false modern expectation that there is always more, that everything is replaceable, and that there is always someone else available to tend, fix or clean



our material possessions — whether a gardener or a doctor. When we treat all matter with respect, we develop an immense appreciation for those who willingly help in the physical upkeep of our homes and grounds. Those who perform this specialized familial and communal service are thereby less likely to fall prey to an often unarticulated resentment when they see our authentic gratitude and the meticulous care we take with all our possessions and resources.

What could it mean for us to be scrupulous trustees of our money? What attitude and conduct are compatible with the living ideal of trusteeship? Money is a means of meeting certain basic needs, and not an end in itself. It must be handled with the same degree of care that we exercise in relation to electricity. We should plan for its proper use so that it fits into the overall purpose and rhythm of our individual and collective lives. It works best when it is in its proper place, and it can be put to noble, mundane and ignoble uses. Balance is required and so are balance sheets. If we specify suitable uses for our funds — from donations to necessities — they can aid private and collective endeavours. Often our bad habits make it seem as though we lack money, and we seek to earn or grab more. This merely creates an unnatural strain. If, however, we study our spending patterns, tracing them back to their roots, we will frequently find the existence of an unacknowledged trait or hidden desire that needs to be transmuted. As we simplify our wants, establish good patterns and set clear priorities, we generate opportunities to build capital for a higher use. Wealth is not itself the source of vice. Its moral meaning depends entirely upon why we seek it, how we acquire it and how we use or pollute it.

Custodianship of time can confront needlessly possessive and demanding attitudes in relation to time. This appears to be especially true in relation to ‘open time’ or non-compulsory time. It is undoubtedly true of obligatory time as well.



When we are at work or performing necessary responsibilities at home, how conscientiously do we use our time? Is it well thought out? Is it properly coordinated? Are we cheerfully open to unexpected needs? Do we somehow manage to dissipate time through several 'chat sessions' a day? More significantly, how high is our precise level of constant attentiveness? How often does someone have to repeat the same points to us? Time is, to some degree, a function of conscious attention to duty. The more attentive we are, the more we learn and the more helpful we are to others with our time. This is because, paradoxically, the more concerned we are to do our best with and for others, the more we forget ourselves. Our troubles and trials are largely forgotten when we shift our focus of awareness to a higher and more considerate level of human involvement.

How possessive are we about our leisure — limited though it may be? Do we insist that this 'free' time is 'my' time because well earned? We may be quite entitled to what we term our 'private time'. Private time is an elementary human need (although not to the *yogin*, for whom time is a continuous inward state called 'living in the eternal'). But, whilst we are entitled to leisure time, we must, as ethical trustees, be willing to utilize it well. Furthermore, our chaste or corrupt visualization and use of free time often tells us something about the colour and direction of our spiritual will. If, for example, we use our leisure time constructively, then, in fact, time is a friend and not an enemy — either to us or to others. We work with the critical points within time — called cyclic recurrences — to regenerate ourselves within the spacious transcendental realm of the timeless. If we are wholly unable to use voluntary time well, then we sadly diminish ourselves and rapidly subtract from our opportunities to add to the sum



of good. *Adharma* inevitably invites destructive *Karma*, “for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap”.

When we turn to individual skills, we can appreciate the full significance of trusteeship — its subtle power of reconciliation and its ineffable moral beauty. In what sense, we might ask, are our individual skills to be held in sacred trust for others? In what sense can we badly abuse our skills and even use them to exploit others? *The litmus test as to whether or not we are true trustees of our skills lies in our expectations of return for using them.* Our motivation and our expectations are generally interwoven. In the modern West, and increasingly in the modernizing East, skills and specialized knowledge are felt to be convertible into personal success and personal status. We might suppose that we are too mature to fall for the ‘lure of filthy lucre’, the cancer of greed, the canker of soulless competition. However, we are often all too susceptible to self-deception in this regard. We are subject to the satanic temptation that our hard-earned skills should purchase some intangible reward — from spiritual salvation to public praise. If we receive no external acknowledgements, then we are almost certain to be insidiously tempted to retreat into the tortured world of self-pity and self-approbation. This is because the tenuous exercise of borrowed knowledge and routinized skills is inescapably bound up with a fragile and fugitive self-image. Our frail sense of self-regard is disastrously opposed to the Aquarian spirit of effortless renunciation and intelligent sacrifice.

In practice, our daily approximation to distant ideals will depend upon the extent to which a substantial number of individuals balance their timid concern with individual claims to freedom against a calm willingness to consider the moral claims of the larger community of mankind. Can even the most ingenious organization of industry be dynamized by the innate desire to serve, not merely



the desire to be served, the readiness to hold in trust and not the urge to appropriate? Psychologically, the spontaneous commitment to serve a community selflessly may be a self-conscious development, but the primary impulse to serve others is as much rooted in the universal desire for self-expression as the familiar instinct of self-preservation. The noble impulse to serve others, first displayed in the family, could progressively develop into the Bodhisattvic vow to serve the community of souls. This rests upon the compelling assumption that as citizens mature into creative individuals, the very process of individuation requires the growing recognition of the just claims of other individuals and of concentric communities, as well as a deepening concern with self-transcendence and the pilgrimage of humanity.

There is indeed no external cure for egotism or pride in what we have accomplished — especially when we strive and hope to see that it has truly benefited others. It is only through pain and patience that we learn to enjoy giving freely without expectation. However, if we readily recognize that trusteeship is a form of sacrificial action (*yajna*) natural to man, then it can truly help us to release the exhilarating sense of soul-satisfaction and soul-emancipation taught by the *Ishopanishad* and exemplified by Mahatma Gandhi. Our daily sacrifices merge into the mighty stream of *Adhiyajna* or cosmic sacrifice. Such ungrudging contributions cannot be measured and meted out in the meagre coinage of thank yours and material rewards. Voluntary sacrifice (*tapas*) releases its own incomparable spiritual elixir. The sacramental yearning to use everything wisely for the greater welfare of our Teachers and for all Humanity could progressively dissolve the noxious sense of ‘mine’ and ‘thine’. The raging fires of rampant greed, insatiable craving and demonic possessiveness could gradually subside because there would be less and less fuel to sustain them. There would then



arise, Phoenix-like, the incandescent spirit of love and longing for *Lokasangraha*; universal welfare, the ceaseless celebration of excellence and promise. Meanwhile, courageous pioneers could light up all over the globe the sacred fires of creativity, altruism and universal fellowship in the common cause of *Lokasangraha*, human solidarity and welfare, enlightenment and emancipation.

1. M.K. Gandhi, "Theory of 'Trusteeship' ", *Harijan*, December 16, 1939.
2. M.K. Gandhi, "Letter to B. Srirangasayi", *The Hindu*, October 11, 1934.
3. M.K. Gandhi, "Answers to Questions at Gandhi Seva Sang Meeting. Brindaban — II", *Gandhi Seva Sanghke Panchama Varshik Adhiveshan (Brindaban, Bihar) ka Vivaran*, pp. 50-9. Cf. "Gandhi Seva Sangh — IV: More Communings", by M.D., *Harijan*, June 3, 1939.
4. M.K. Gandhi, "Economic Constitution of India", *Young India*, November 15, 1928.
5. M.K. Gandhi, "Equal Distribution", *Harijan*, August 25, 1940.
6. M.K. Gandhi, "A Question", *Harijan*, April 12, 1942.
7. M.K. Gandhi, "Advice to the Rich", *Harijan*, February 1, 1942.
8. M.K. Gandhi, "Theory of Trusteeship", *loc. cit.*



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Crest Associates is a friendly association of persons in the field of Science, Engineering, Technology & Humanities: (i.e. Philosophy, Sociology, Literature, Music etc.) who are feeling the need to come out of the narrow considerations of their own specialized fields and think in terms of an integrated approach. These persons will naturally be concerned with the quality of human life more than mere intellectual excellence in their own field. The aims of the organization are as follows:

- (1) To promote the continuous advancement and constant improvement of all the aspects of higher education with emphasis on effective utilization by the society aimed at improved quality of life.
- (2) To initiate closer co-ordination of educational institutes and professional organisations.
- (3) To enhance the ethics and standards among the professionals.
- (4) To consider the utilization of Engineering, Science and Technology for Rural Development.
- (5) To work for civilizing the resourcefulness of Engineering, Science & Technology.

In view of the above, the Organization may undertake various activities such as

- (a) to publish books, magazines etc.
- (b) to conduct group discussions, seminars, study circles, in educational institutes, industrial organizations, professional firms etc.
- (c) to undertake the establishment and/or development of any other activity to promote the aims of the CREST ASSOCIATES.



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To promote universal brotherhood and to foster human fellowship



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Raghavan Iyer

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