

# THE PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF SARVODAYA

The socio-political philosophy of Gandhi may be termed Sarvodaya. It may, however, be noted that Gandhi was not the author of the idea of Sarvodaya. He borrowed the idea as well as the term from Ruskin. Ruskin himself had borrowed it from the Bible. Gandhi first used the word Sarvodaya in a booklet which he published in his native Gujarati after he read John Ruskin. The essay, *Unto This Last*, was based on a parable from the Gospel according to Matthew 20:1-16 concerning the owner of a plantation and his hiring of labourers to work in his vineyard. In his parable Jesus made the master of the vineyard declare: "I will give unto this last even as I give unto thee." The emphasis of Ruskin's essay, as interpreted by Gandhi, is certainly that ideal society is none in which there is concern for the welfare of all. This is the foundation for his Sarvodaya movement. Along with *Unto This Last* Tolstoy's *Bread Labour* also influenced Gandhi. However, the credit of Gandhi lies in the fact that he devoted his entire life to the creation of a new society, a society based on the principles of Sarvodaya. Gandhi summed up the teachings of Ruskin's *Unto This Last*, which he called Sarvodaya, in the following three fundamental principles: (a) That the good of the individual is contained in the good of all. (b) That a lawyer's work has the same value as the barber's inasmuch as all have the same right of earning their livelihood from their work. (c) That a life of labour, i.e., the life of the tiller of the soil and the handicraftsman is life worth living. The concept of the 'welfare of all' has been the fundamental fact in the Indian religious consciousness from time immemorial and he only embodied it more fully and more clearly than before in the light of his life experience in the West. Thousands of years ago the rishis in India preached the welfare of all beings as god, human beings and nature constitute one organic whole. Hindu dharma or morality teaches that the individual has certain social and moral duties towards the other members of the community depending on his or her caste and the stage of life. Sarvodaya traces its theoretical roots in the Vedic and Vedantic teaching that from a higher standpoint all living beings are participants in a super-material reality. Ahimsa is exhorted by the Upanishads as an important spiritual and moral value for breaking the law of karma and thus bringing about the final liberation. The spirit of ahimsa, i.e., to love all animate and inanimate beings and to work for the well-being of every being is found in Bhagavad Gita's teaching on lokasamgraha (well-being of the world) and *sarva bhutahite ratah* (those who delight in wellbeing of all beings).