



# Right-Based Approach To Alleviate Global Poverty: Engaging Gandhi With Western Institutional Cosmopolitans

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## Abstract

This article explores a morally urgent question—“*is there any human right not to suffer from severe poverty, and if yes, then does it entail any corresponding duties, either positive or negative to minimise the suffering of global poor?*” It does not deny the contributions of Western moral cosmopolitans’ right-based approach in addressing global poverty rather it humbly attempts to highlights some of its moral insufficiencies in addressing acute global poverty, especially in the Global South. It explores why right-based approach is a “noble lie or hollow promise” to the global poor in the absence of any plausible framework of duty. In the ‘institutional approach’, my primary focus will be on Thomas Pogge for the reason that he is the leading global justice theorist of our time and have done significant work in this area Having discussed problems and limitations of Thomas Pogge’s institutional cosmopolitan right-based approach in addressing global poverty, I will be exploring Indian conception of human rights and how Gandhi’s understanding of the relationships between rights and duties helps us in addressing global poverty in a better way.

Keywords: Human Rights, Duty, Gandhi, Pogge, Global Poverty, Institution, Cosmopolitanism, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Moral Obligation, Sustainable Development Goals

## Global Institutions, Global Poverty and Human Rights

Various institutional efforts, in the forms of resolutions/declarations/Goals, in the past, have been made to mitigate severe poverty and hunger across the globe and they have understood and defined poverty as the violation of basic human rights and against the dignity of individuals. The General Conference of the International Labour Organization, in its Twenty-sixth Session in Philadelphia, on 10<sup>th</sup> May 1944, hereby adopts, “*poverty anywhere constitutes a danger to prosperity everywhere.*”<sup>1</sup>

The United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (1948), in its Article 25, and 28 clearly mentions the provisions to alleviate poverty and ensuring a minimum decent and dignified life to global poor. Article 25: “*Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.*” And Article 28: “*Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized.*”<sup>2</sup> UNGA 2030 agenda for sustainable development, Goal 1 aims to “*End poverty in all its forms everywhere*”. The first target under Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 1 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development reads: “*By 2030, eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere, currently measured as people living on less than \$1.25 a day.*”<sup>3</sup> The UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Goal 1 aims to “*eradicate extreme poverty and hunger.*”<sup>4</sup> Almost all institutional efforts, since 1944, understand and address global poverty as violation of human rights and against the dignity of individuals.

The observance of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty can be traced back to 17 October 1987. On that day, over a hundred thousand people gathered at the Trocadéro in Paris, where the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was signed in 1948, to honour the victims of extreme poverty, violence and hunger. They proclaimed that poverty is a violation of human rights and affirmed the need to come together to ensure that these rights are respected.<sup>5</sup>

According to Thomas Pogge, around 2.800 million or 46 percent of humankind live below the World Bank's \$2/day poverty line - precisely: in households whose income per person per day has less purchasing power than \$2.15 had in the US in 1993. On average, the people living below this line fall 44.4 percent below it. Over 1.200 million of them live on less than half below the World Bank's better-known \$1/day poverty line.<sup>6</sup> People so incredibly poor are extremely vulnerable to even minor changes in natural and

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ilo.org/legacy/english/inwork/cb-policy-guide/declarationofPhiladelphia1944.pdf> accessed on 22 May 2020

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/> accessed on 22 May 2020

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Sustainable%20Development/ISSUE%20BRIEF%20-UNDP%20and%20the%20concept%20and%20measurement%20of%20poverty%20pc%20V2.pdf> accessed on 22 May 2020

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.mdgmonitor.org/mdg-1-eradicate-poverty-hunger/> accessed on 22 May 2020

<sup>5</sup> <https://en.unesco.org/commemorations/povertyeradicationday> accessed on June 10 2020

<sup>6</sup> Pogge, Thomas (2002), “*World Poverty and Human Rights: Cosmopolitan Responsibilities and Reform*”, Polity Press, Cambridge (UK), p.2

social conditions and to many form of exploitation and abuse. Each year some 18 million die prematurely from poverty related causes. This is one-third of all human deaths – 50,000 every day including 34,000 children under age five." In addition, 18 million people die annually from poverty related causes, of which more than half are children under the age of five. In the past 20 years, 360 million people have died of hunger and remediable diseases in peacetime, which is more than the people that have died from, "wars, civil wars and government repression over the entire 20th century." Furthermore 1,020 million human beings are chronically undernourished, 884 million lack access to safe water, and 2,500 million lack access to basic sanitation; 2,000 million lack access to essential drugs; 6,924 million lack adequate shelters and 1,600 million lacks electricity; 774 million adults are illiterate; and 218 million children are child laborers.<sup>7</sup>

Regarding measuring the global poverty, Pogge says that there is no consensus among the global institutions. For example, the World Bank measures global poverty rates by taking a simple headcount of people on, below, or above the International Poverty Line (IPL). The IPL is calculated by picking a base year and basing poverty reduction on Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) from that year.<sup>8</sup> The World Bank does not provide any justification for its choice of a base year. But it is clearly in their interest to downwardly adjust the IPL since the reduction of global poverty is an important part of their mandate.<sup>9</sup>

For Pogge, not considering global poverty as a moral problem is really bad and thinking that there is nothing seriously wrong with our conduct, policies, and global economic order is unacceptable.<sup>10</sup> He further says that the global institutional order harm global poor in two main ways. Firstly, sometimes global institutions and their norms help legitimizing despotic and corrupt rulers in developing countries and these despotic rulers loot the natural resources and ordinary citizens are left with very few means to resist their oppression and secondly, some rules of the WTO may directly affect the poor people like 'protectionism'-reduces the export opportunities from poor countries by constraining their export into the affluent countries. And another example of direct impact of the global institution is the globalization of Intellectual Property Rights through the TRIPS component of the *WTO treaty*. For example due to the TRIPS, various generic medicines are patented and poor people from across cannot afford and excluded from the benefits of cheap generic versions of advanced medicines.<sup>11</sup>

### **Pogge and Western Institutional Cosmopolitans' Right-based Approach to Alleviate Global Poverty**

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<sup>7</sup> Pogge, Thomas (2010), "*Politics as Usual: What Lies Behind the Pro-Poor Rhetoric*", Polity Press, Cambridge (UK), p. 11

<sup>8</sup> For instance, \$1.25 PPP 2005 means that all those whose average daily consumption costs less than what \$1.25 could buy in 2005 (in the United States) are poor, and those who consume more than this amount are 'not poor.'

<sup>9</sup> Taking baseline year for calculation of poverty is highly political and sometimes global institutions like World bank, under the pressure of powerful nations, take those baseline which shown lower poverty percentage in those countries. For example, using 1993 as baseline raises China by 31% but taking it 1985 lowers it by 31%.

<sup>10</sup> Pogge, Thomas (2002), "*World Poverty and Human Rights: Cosmopolitan Responsibilities and Reform*", Polity Press, Cambridge (UK), p.4

<sup>11</sup> Pogge, Thomas (2010), "*Politics as Usual: What Lies Behind the Pro-Poor Rhetoric*", Polity Press, Cambridge (UK), pp. 20-21

Various cosmopolitan proposals has been offered by the Western liberals to address and alleviate global poverty like Thomas Pogge initially offered a proposal of Global Resource Dividend (GRD) and then moved on to talk about negative duty to help global poor, Paula Casal offeres a proposal of resource taxation to support resource deficient nations, Simon Caney argues for positive duty to help poor people providing them a minimum decent life but most of them agree that a reform is needed in the existing global institutional order.

Thomas Pogge is the leading global justice theorist of our time who proposes an institutional cosmopolitan approach to address global poverty. He argues that getting out of the poverty is a matter of human rights for the poor people across the globe. For Pogge, human rights are primarily “claims on coercive social institutions and secondarily as claims against those who uphold such institutions”. For him, “A human right is a moral claim *on* any coercive social institutions imposed upon oneself and therefore a moral claim *against* anyone involved in their imposition”.<sup>12</sup> His moral institutional cosmopolitanism is built upon human right which is further based on idea of negative duty of justice-not to harm or refuse to participate in those unjust global institutional orders which violate the basic human rights of the global poor. In this passage, Pogge tries to explain how well-off of the affluent nations are violating their negative duties towards the global poor:

I must not help uphold and impose upon them coercive social institutions under which they do not have secure access to the objects of their human rights. I would be violating this duty if, through my participation. I helped sustain a social order in which such access is not secure, in which blacks are enslaved, women disenfranchised, or servants mistreated, for example. Even if I owned no slaves or employed no servants myself, I would still share responsibility: by contributing my labor to the society's economy, my taxes to its governments, and so forth. I might honor my negative duty, perhaps, through becoming a hermit or an emigrant, but I could honor it more plausibly by working with others toward shielding the victims of injustice from the harms I help produce or, if this is possible, toward establishing secure access through institutional reform.<sup>13</sup> This passage invites criticisms and I will be discussing them in the critique part.

Though fulfilling human rights is the primary responsibility of domestic social institutions but today globalization has made our different social institutions so interdependent that it is implausible to limit the responsibility of realizing human rights to any domestic social institution. In other words, in today's globalized world realizing human rights has been a collective responsibility for all of us. As we know that global institutions affect people's lives everywhere so the moral obligation for the fulfilment of human rights should rest in these global social structures and those persons who have a strong influence in deciding the policies and designing of such structures. Pogge argues that global poverty is primarily caused

<sup>12</sup> Pogge, Thomas (2002), “*World Poverty and Human Rights: Cosmopolitan Responsibilities and Reform*”, Polity Press, Cambridge (UK), p. 44-46

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 66

by unjust global order and so there is a need to reform those structures in such a way that the global poor are not deprived of their basic necessities. He says that severe global poverty in the world is avoidable an alternative institutional design where the global poor are not unduly harmed. So what Pogge proposes is to redesigning of the global order where human rights are respected and realized

### **Critical Analysis of Pogge's Moral Institutional Cosmopolitan Approach to Human Rights and global poverty**

1. Pogge shifts the blame of human rights violation of the global poor entirely on coercive social institution and does not see any causal connection between the luxurious life of the well-off of the affluent West and global poverty.
2. Pogge's institutional conception of human rights emphasises too much on "official disrespect" and how does it violate human rights by not ensuring secured access to certain right necessary for the minimum decent living. And for this reason, to me, this understanding attracts serious critique from the global south perspective, like in various countries India and Latin American countries people are poor not only because of failures of coercive social institutions or official disrespect of human rights but problems like Caste system, ethnic/racial violence, various threats and other forms of violence have made them poor. And for pogge other forms of threats and occasional violations of human rights does not count as official disrespect. Like a person may have access to certain rights but at the same time he/she may be subject to certain type of torture like in India low Caste people are tortured by the people, not always official, but they have access to certain rights. Therefore, I find this understanding of human rights violations too narrow to apply for understanding the experiences of the global south.
3. To me, Pogge has failed in establishing how the well-off citizens are individually or collectively responsible for the life-threatening inequalities in the global south. And further he does not clearly explain how affluent citizens participate or collaborates in the economic and political processes and policy designing of the global institutions.
4. Pogge needs to be very careful in establishing the causal connections between the human rights violations and coercive institutional order. Let's try to understand his idea of institutional harm through making distinction between two propositions/claims: (A) we need to reform the global institutional order so that we can protect the human rights in better way (B) Our participation in the existing global institutional order is considered to be 'unjust' if it fails to protect the basic human rights of the global poor. To me, participation in the existing global order does not obstruct the process of designing a better institutional order so it cannot be argued that participation leads to the violation of negative duties. For reference, if the British government refuses to vote in the United Nations against Indian atrocities then according to Pogge every Britisher should be held responsible to violate his/her negative duty, which seems, to me, it is quite objectionable.

To me, Pogge is committing a methodological problem-he is trying to deduce/derive individual responsibility from collective responsibility. He writes: “I must not help uphold and impose upon [others] coercive social institutions under which they do not have secure access to the objects of their human rights. I would be violating this duty if, through my participation, I helped sustain a social order in which such access is not secure, in which blacks are enslaved, women disenfranchised, or servants mistreated, for example. Even if I owned no slave or employed no servants myself, I would still share responsibility: by contributing my labour to the society’s economy, my taxes to its governments, and so forth. I might honour my negative duty, perhaps, through becoming a hermit or an emigrant, but I could honour it more plausibly by working with others toward shielding the victims of injustice from the harms I help produce or, if this is possible, toward establishing secure access through institutional reform.”<sup>14</sup>

If this is a kind of solution that Pogge is looking forward to then it is problematic- I (being a citizen of the affluent West) do not understand how my simple economic contributions to a society can held me responsible for supporting/sharing a coercive social order. And how am I harming the global poor and it is a violation of my negative duties. I do not think the above mentioned argument is sufficient enough to held me individually responsible for violating my negative duties. Contrary to this, suppose the well-off citizens of that state react to unjust policies of such a state by refusing to pay taxes then that state might react by cutting developmental aid to the global institutions causing even more harm to the poor across the globe.

5. However, Pogge does not deny the roles and relevance of domestic factors in poverty alleviation but he treats them as distinct from global causes. He thinks that local/domestic causes are conditioned by global causes but the experiences of the global south tells a different story. In various parts of the global south I has been seen that the success of global institutional policies depends on various local factors like bad governance (the corrupt government or despotic rule), political dynamics, civil or ethnic conflicts etc.
6. Pogge’s idea of global poverty as violation of human rights is inextricably linked with his idea of moral cosmopolitanism and he poses two questions before the enlightened affluent West:
  - a. “How can the severe poverty for half of humanity continue despite enormous economic and technological progress and despite the enlightened norms and values of our heavily dominated Western civilization”?
  - b. “Why do we the citizens of the affluent Western states not find it morally troubling, at least, that a world heavily dominated by us burdens so many people with such deficient and inferior starting positions.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Pogge, Thomas (2002), “*World Poverty and Human Rights: Cosmopolitan Responsibilities and Reform*”, Polity Press, Cambridge (UK), p.

<sup>15</sup> Pogge, Thomas (2002), “*World Poverty and Human Rights: Cosmopolitan Responsibilities and Reform*”, Polity Press, Cambridge (UK), p. 3

7. Pogge's account of the global institutional network does not make any distinction between the harms caused by the global institutions and the ones caused by the domestic policies of the states. In a society corrupted to the core, with irresponsible leaders and local institutions at an advanced state of degeneration and distortion, there is little hope of a successful implementation of Pogge's global institutional reform agenda.
8. Pogge's understanding of "harm" is very narrow and limited, for him, harm is not only done by the violation of negative duty however it could also be done by harming someone physically or mentally or forcing someone to have poor access to the resources.

And despite these morally troubling questions, well-off of the affluent west do not find eradication of global poverty morally compelling and this is primarily for the reason that they do not find the causes of acute global poverty in rising global inequalities<sup>16</sup>. And many of the well-off of the developed nations know only the bare outline of the issues. To me, Pogge has failed in teaching moral cosmopolitanism to the well-off of the enlightened affluent west. Considering poverty as such a serious moral problem originating out of multiple reasons like global, local, individual or structural, I admit that identifying a duty-bearer would not be an easy task but real challenge before us is---*who has what obligation towards global poor and how to enforce it?* There are some morally urgent questions, and if these are not addressed both in theory and practice, the notion of protection of basic human rights of poor people (not to suffer from poverty) would not be more than a noble lie or hollow promise. The right-based approach still confronts the same problem of identifying duty-bearer whether individual, collective or institutions.

### **Indian Conception of Human right and Gandhi's Understanding of the Relationship between Rights and Duties to Address Global Poverty.**

Panikkar in his article, "*Is the Notion of Human rights A Western Concept*"<sup>17</sup> develops an Indian vision of human rights. Following organic conception of human rights, Panikkar argues that "human rights are not individual human rights rather it belongs to all, it's an organic concept. Because essential idea of human is not incarnated in the individual only rather it resides in all, organically. Individual is simply an abstraction of the Real/Whole/Ulimate and abstraction can never be the ultimate subject of rights." Thus, for Panikkar, human rights are an organic concept, not an individualist one. And what rights an individual might possess depends on his/her position in the Organic. He puts forward a very *organic* understanding of human relationship where individuality is not a substantial category but a functional one. He admits that the

<sup>16</sup> The UNDP Human Development Report as reported by Crossette (1998): "Americans spend \$8 billion a year on cosmetics-\$2 billion more than the estimated annual total needed to provide basic education for everyone in the world. Europeans spend \$11 billion a year on ice cream-\$2 billion more than the estimated annual total needed to provide clean water and safe sewers for the world's populations. Americans and Europeans spend \$17 billion a year on pet food- \$4 billion more than the estimated annual additional total needed to provide basic health and nutrition for everyone in the world. It is estimated that the additional cost of achieving and maintaining universal access to basic education for all, reproductive health care for all women, adequate food for all and clean water and safe sewers for all is roughly \$40 billion a year- or less than 4 percent of the combined wealth of 225richest people in the world.

<sup>17</sup> This paper is an expanded and revised version of the presentation at the "Entretiens de Dakar," Senegal, to the annual session of the Institut International de Philosophie on *Philosophical Foundations of Human Rights*, first published in 1982

structure of the universe is hierarchical but, for him, it does not mean that those who are up in the hierarchy can crush the rights of the lower ones, whatever situation might be.<sup>18</sup>

Panikkar argues that human rights are not the rights only. In fact, humanity survives if we all perform our duties to maintain the world order. And we all participate and perform our duties to maintain the metabolic function of the universe.<sup>19</sup> He further argues that if we are seriously concerned about the protection of human rights then we should have a Declaration of Universal Rights and Duties which will encompass the whole of Reality. But it won't be an easy task because framing of this kind of declaration requires a different and holistic understanding of the Universe in terms of anthropology, cosmology and theology.<sup>20</sup>

Since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 by the United Nations, the discussion of the human rights has become very important, both morally and politically, for global political community. Among the Thirty articles, Article 25 is important for the discussion of this chapter; "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control."<sup>21</sup>

In 1947, an invitation was sent by by Dr. Julian Huxley, Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization to 60 leading personalities throughout the world including Gandhi asking them to define their thought on what would form the basis of a "World Charter of Human Rights" and Gandhi in his letter to Dr. Huxley replied back<sup>22</sup>;

"I learnt from my illiterate but wise mother that all rights to be deserved and preserved came from duty well done. Thus the very right to live accrues to us only when we do the duty of citizenship of the world. From this one fundamental statement perhaps it is easy enough to define the duties of man and woman and correlate every right to some corresponding duty to be first performed. Every other right can be shown to be usurpation hardly worth fighting for."<sup>23</sup>

Being cosmopolitan, Gandhi reflects on his understanding of human rights and its corresponding duties. For Gandhi, human rights are protected when we, as a duty-bearer, fulfil our duties, considering ourselves as the citizen of the world. By saying this, Gandhi wants to transcend boundaries of local/national allegiance, in terms of fulfilling our duties and he is very much of the views that this is the only way through which rights are protected. However, Gandhi would not be absolutely in opposition to the rights-based approach but he would not appreciate the way Western moral cosmopolitans have dealt with the issues of human rights and the duties to protect them separately. While replying to Dr. Huxley, Gandhi was

<sup>18</sup> Panikkar, R. (1982), "Is the Notion of Human rights A Western Concept", *Diogenes*, Vol.30, pp.97-98

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p.99

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p.99

<sup>21</sup> Lichtenberg, Judith (2014), "*Distant Strangers: Ethics, Psychology and Global Poverty*", Cambridge University Press, United Kingdom, p. 60

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.mkgandhi.org/thiswasbapu/134rightsandduties.htm> accessed on May 14, 2022

<sup>23</sup> Gandhi, *The Hindustan Times*, 19 October 1947, CWMG (electronic book), New Delhi, Publication Division Government of India, Vol. 97, p. 99

of the view that people of the West have right-centric approach to the life without any will to bear their duties. For Gandhi, rights and duties are very much interrelated to each other. His cosmopolitan understanding of rights and duties widens the moral circle of interdependence and connects every individual of the world. He declares himself as a citizen of the world and also wants every individual to behave like this. And he is of the views that then only rights of everyone will be protected.

Gandhi throws light on the rights and its corresponding duties in his cable to late Mr. H. G. Wells, He writes;

“Received your cable. Have carefully read your five articles. You will permit me to say that you are on the wrong track. I feel sure that I can draw up a better charter of rights than you have drawn up. But what good will it be? Who will become its guardian? If you mean propaganda or popular education, you have begun at the wrong end. I suggest the right way. Begin with a charter of the Duties of Man, and I promise the rights will follow as spring follows winter. I write from experience. As a young man I began life by seeking to assert my rights, and I soon discovered I had none -not even over my wife. So I began by discovering and performing my duty by my wife, my children, friends, companions and society, and I find today that I have greater rights, perhaps, than any living man I knew. If this is too tall a claim, then I say I do not know anyone who possesses greater rights than I.”<sup>24</sup>

In his reply to Wells or Huxley, Gandhi is not denying the significance of the human rights, either in general or specific. He believed that certain rights belong to the human being by virtue of their being human. And this notion brings in equality among all human beings irrespective of their position and privileges. In the above reply to late Mr H. G. Wells, Gandhi widens the domain of the idea of duties from family to the society and argues that by fulfilling my duties this way only we can enjoy our rights. And if everyone is doing the same then possession of their rights could be maximized. Thus, it can be argued that Gandhi has a canonical understanding of the rights and its corresponding duties. Gandhi writes that:

“The true source of rights is duty. I have therefore spoken only about the duties of Princes as well as the peoples. If we all discharge our duties, rights will not be far to seek. If, leaving duties unperformed we run after rights, they will escape us like a will-o'-the-wisp. The more we pursue them the farther will they fly.”<sup>25</sup>

Gandhi grounds the rights in the duty itself and talks about the duties of both the prince and common people. For him, if we fulfil our duties then rights would not be too far to realize. During Ahmedabad Mill Strike, Gandhi says that: “Rights and duties were reciprocal in their nature, the former accrued only from a

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<sup>24</sup> *Harijan*, 13 October 1940, CWMG (electronic book), New Delhi, Publication Division Government of India, Vol. 79, p. 293

<sup>25</sup> Gandhi, *Young India*, 8 January 1925, CWMG (electronic book), New Delhi, Publication Division Government of India, Vol. 30, p. 68

due performance of the latter.”<sup>26</sup> It is safe to argue that Gandhi’s understanding on rights primarily centred on the idea that rights and duties are correlated, and it is the duties that have priority and various rights are derived from them only. And Gandhi has maintained these views throughout his writings. In 1925, in an article he writes, “The true source of rights is duty.....if we all discharge our duties rights will not be far to seek.” In 1939, he writes very categorically:

“Rights accrue automatically to him who duly performs his duties. In fact the right to perform one’s duties is the only right that is worth living for and dying for. It covers all legitimate rights. All the rest is garb under one guise or another and contains in it seeds of himsa.”<sup>27</sup>

Gandhi further argues that:

“Every man has an equal right to the necessaries of life even as birds and beasts have. And since every right carries with it a corresponding duty and the corresponding remedy for resisting any attack upon it, it is merely a matter of finding out the corresponding duties and remedies to vindicate the elementary fundamental equality. The Corresponding duty is to labour with my limbs and the corresponding remedy is to non-co-operate with him who deprives me of the fruit of my labour. And if I would recognize the fundamental equality, as I must, of the capitalist and the labourer, I must not aim at his destruction. I must strive for his conversion. My non-co-operation with him will open his eyes to the wrong he may be doing.”<sup>28</sup>

It is really interesting to see how Gandhi talks about the content of rights in this passage. He is not emphasizing on the quality of earning or opportunity rather he wants to achieve an equality of minimum subsistence. For him, every individual is a duty-holder on the part of some other individuals or institutions. And it is so because rights and duties are correlated. Like many other western moral cosmopolitans argue for the equal access to the global natural resources, Gandhi too argues that we all have equal rights to the necessities of life. To promote fundamental equality among people, Gandhi argues that every right has its own corresponding duty.

Now I want to go back to Western moral cosmopolitans’ discussion that raises the problem of the relationship between the rights and its corresponding duties. Let me put the basic question this way—can we have rights without any corresponding duties? If you ask any decent person they will agree that acute poverty is really bad because it deprives many people of their basic necessities of life necessary for the minimum decent survival. But the moment we agree on this, here comes a corresponding duty to ensure those basic necessities. Duties without rights are possible, but rights without duties are not possible. The primary problem, for Western moral cosmopolitans, is the problem of demandingness. For them, these

<sup>26</sup> Gandhi, *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 25 December 1945, CWMG (electronic book), New Delhi, Publication Division Government of India, Vol. 89, p. 91

<sup>27</sup> Gandhi, *Harijan*, 20 May 1939, CWMG, (electronic book), New Delhi, Publication Division Government of India, Vol. 75, p. 176

<sup>28</sup> *Young India*, 26 March 1931, CWMG (electronic book), New Delhi, Publication Division Government of India, Vol. 51, p. 296

duties demand too much from an individual, and sometimes much over and above the call of a duty. And secondly, they are not very clear how to identify a duty-bearer.<sup>29</sup> I will be answering this question in the next chapter.

Gandhi was least concerned with the various possible interpretations of the relationships between the rights and correlative duties and he was not interested in the definitional aspects of the rights and corresponding duties. While replying to both Julian Huxley and H. G. wells, Gandhi was worried about the safeguard of the rights declared in the Universal Declaration of Human rights. He argued that, in order to realize those rights, unless we take the responsibilities to be 'guardian' of the rights declared, rights has no meaning in itself. Gandhi does not simply says that rights and duties are correlated rather for him rights are derived from the duties and therefore it is a more important concept. And he prioritises duties over the rights. He argues that each individual of the society is assigned a task to perform according to his position in the society. And rights are contingent upon the fulfilment of the duties assigned to the individuals.<sup>30</sup> Gandhi was an ardent supporter of positive rights like the right to minimum level of nutrition, shelter, education, health care (taken together could be called as 'decent minimum level' of material welfare). He does not see rights so much as a moral claim by the right-holder but rather as opportunities open to individuals for self-realisation. In his views, rights do not become effective until we have both the appropriate assertion of the rights and willing performance of the corresponding duties by the individuals in the society.<sup>31</sup> Commenting on the programme of rights drafted by M. R. Masani, Gandhi asked: 'Does "the right of the child to care and maintenance by the State" absolve the parent from the duty of caring for the maintenance of his children?' Gandhi's understanding of correlative duties is not institutional rather he favours individual obligations. He argues some specific rights which are claimed against the state but it does not limits individual responsibilities. He does not look at the state for the solution of every problem of the society. Unlike many other Western statist cosmopolitans he strongly favours individual obligation.<sup>32</sup> In his views, to solve various problems confronted by the humanity, we must look beyond the state.

Following Gandhi's understanding of rights and its corresponding duties, I want to place few questions for the discussion for the Western moral cosmopolitans to rethink their position to eradicate global poverty and protect the basic human rights of the global poor. Firstly, I want to start with—many argue that basic needs of the global poor must be protected for their minimum decent survival. Western moral cosmopolitans do not answer it clearly whether--right to live a minimum decent life is a moral right; secondly, they do not answer whether well-off of the affluent nations (those who live above the standard of minimum decent level), do share any duties/obligations to raise the standard of living of the global poor; thirdly, they are not very clear how the between the rights and its corresponding duties ought to be characterized. Gandhi's understanding of right does not fit easily into contemporary political theory of rights because it has

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<sup>29</sup> Lichtenberg, Judith (2014), "*Distant Strangers: Ethics, Psychology and Global Poverty*", Cambridge University Press, United Kingdom, p. 75

<sup>30</sup> Dasgupta, Ajit K. (1996), "*Gandhi's Economic Thought*", Routledge, London and New York, pp. 54-55

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, pp. 59-60

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p. 60

theoretical structure of its own. He draws his understanding of rights from various distinct traditions of philosophy and it requires a very broad perspective to understand it.

Gandhi says that Western right discourse is primarily based on the principles of violence and it has been observed that they have used brute force to realise their duty. In the Western society, everyone is insisting on his rights, nobody is thinking about his or her duties. In his view, western idea of securing rights is fundamentally dependent on the use of force. Gandhi uses the example of the Reform Act of 1833 and argues that violence was used to extend the voting rights. For him, 'real rights' comes out of the result of performance of duty. Gandhi argues that modern western philosophy of rights does not begin with the idea of duty. And he emphasises that rights secured through the use of brute force remains like a burden on the society and individuals.

The English in 1833 obtained greater voting power by violence. Did they by using brute force better appreciate their duty? They wanted the right of voting, which they obtained by using physical force. But real rights are a result of performance of duty: these rights they have not obtained. We therefore, have before us in England the force of everybody wanting and insisting on his rights, nobody thinking of his duty. And, where everybody wants rights, who shall give them to whom? I do not wish to imply that they do no duties. They don't perform the duties corresponding to those rights; and as they do not perform that particular duty.<sup>33</sup>

Denying the use of brute force to achieve anything, Gandhi writes:

Brute-force is not natural to Indian soil. You will have, therefore, to rely wholly on soul-force. You must not consider that violence is necessary at any stage for reaching our goal.<sup>34</sup>

The western idea of rights which is fundamentally premised upon the use of brute force does not recognise performance of duty as essential part of realising the rights. They hardly accept that every right has corresponding duties or they consider it over-demanding. In his book *Hind Swaraj* Gandhi writes:

Civilization is that mode of conduct which points out to man the path of duty. Performance of duty and observance of morality are convertible terms. To observe morality is to attain mastery over our mind and our passions. So doing, we know ourselves.<sup>35</sup>

For Gandhi, fulfilling the duty is equal to the observance of morality. And it is absolutely based on the practice of *Ahimsa* (non-violence) in realising the rights and fulfilling the duties. I argue that Gandhi's certainly has much to say about this moral dilemma where the Western cosmopolitans have confused the humanity and proposed a cosmopolitan solution to the global poverty primarily based on the right-based understanding of the problem. As Parekh writes:

<sup>33</sup> Gandhi, M. K. (1910), "*Hind Swaraj*" (electronic book), Indian Opinion, p. 45

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p. 64

<sup>35</sup> Gandhi, M. K. (1910), "*Hind Swaraj*" (electronic book), Indian Opinion, p. 37

In Gandhi's view, right and duty were inseparable not only in the usual sense that one person's rights created corresponding duties for others, but in the deeper sense that they were two different ways of looking at the same thing. One had a duty to exercise one's rights and a right to discharge one's duties.<sup>36</sup>

For Gandhi, idea of obligation comes prior to the rights and rights are always subordinated and relative to obligations. Rights are ineffective if they are not related to the corresponding obligation. Rights do not have any independent existence and they exist only relative to the obligations. Gandhi argues that rights do not spring from the individual who possess it but from those who consider themselves as a duty-bearer and discharge their obligations towards him. Thus recognition of an obligations corresponding to certain rights are very much necessary otherwise rights do not have any worth. Having agreed to Gandhi on the priority of rights and duty debate, a French philosopher, Simone Weil writes:

It makes nonsense to say that men have, on the one hand rights, and on the other hand, obligations. Such words only express differences in point of view. The actual relationship between the two is as between the object and subject. A man, considered in isolation, only has duties, amongst which are certain duties towards himself. Other men, seen from his point of view, only have rights. He, in his turn, has rights, when seen from the point of view of other men, who recognise they have obligations towards him. A man left alone in the universe would have no rights whatever, but he would have obligations.<sup>37</sup>

Gandhi does not use Hobbesian theory of human nature to justify the existence of Individuals' right. The modern theory of rights traces the origin of rights in Hobbes which does not speak of any duty at all while Gandhi's own understanding of rights necessarily connects itself to the duties. It is associated with universal dharma. He argues that human society evolved with idea of duties and rights were added later to protect those humans who could not act according to dharma. He also adds that Western manner of securing and protecting rights is ultimately based on the use of violence.<sup>38</sup> As Parel writes:

Mazzini, one of Gandhi's sources on rights, is one of them. According to him, knowledge of rights was not enough to enable human beings to affect any appreciable or lasting improvement in human affairs. In order to achieve that goal they had to look upon rights "as a consequence of duties fulfilled, and one must begin with the latter in order to arrive at the former. Similarly, you cannot your rights except by obeying the command of duties."<sup>39</sup>

And this is the primary reason Gandhi believes in the essential interdependence of mankind. Having believed in the cosmo-centric view of human nature, he argues that we exist only in relation to each other and in isolation we do not have our worth. He says that existence of rights is contingent upon recognition of certain corresponding obligations towards it. It is really important to think that if Gandhi, while replying

<sup>36</sup> Parekh, Bhikhu (1997), "*Gandhi: A Very Short Introduction*", Oxford university Press, New York, p. 52

<sup>37</sup> Weil, Simone (1997), "*The need for Roots: Prelude to a Declaration of Duties Towards Mankind*", Routledge, London, P. 3

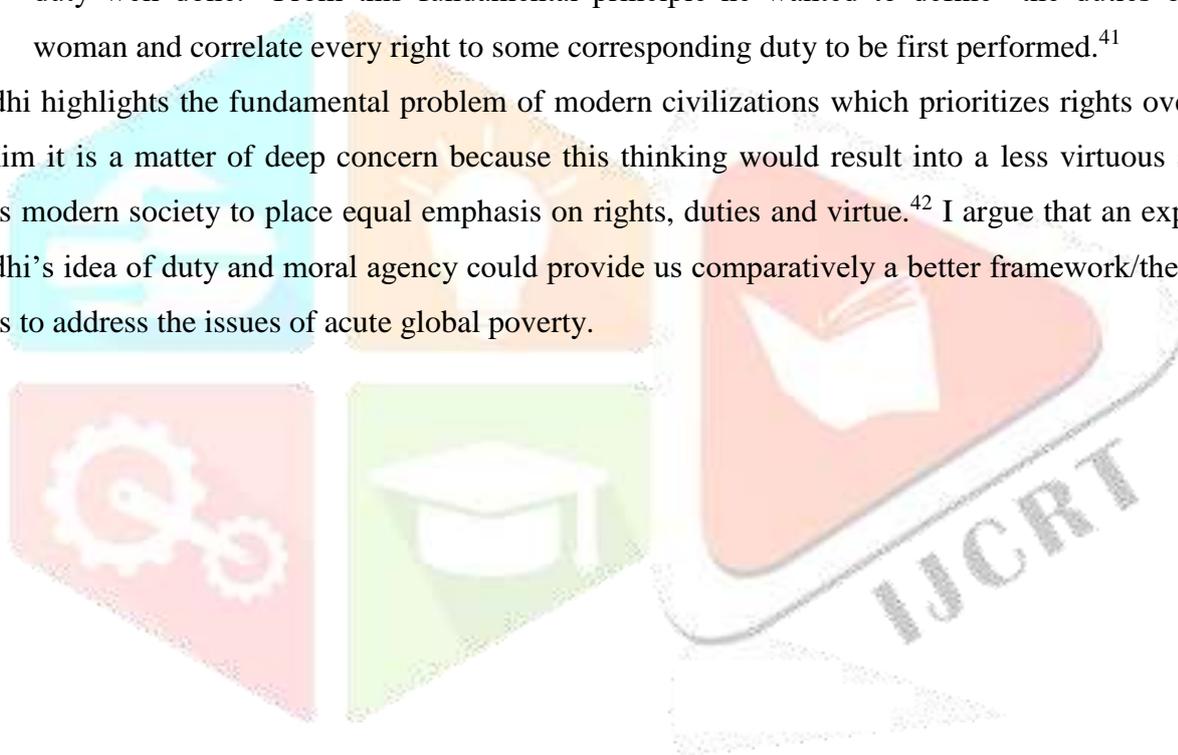
<sup>38</sup> Parel, Anthony J. (2006), "*Gandhi's Philosophy and the Quest for Harmony*", Cambridge University Press, India, p. 95

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p. 96

to H. G. Wells, would have drawn up the *Charter of the Duties of Man* then he would have had to specify universal duties that applied equally to everyone. Both stoics and Gandhi believed in determining individuals' duty but they both had doubt about the rules of conduct that could be applied universally to everyone. But one thing was common in both that they both believed in the universal moral law.<sup>40</sup> As Parel writes:

Gandhi never wavered in his conviction that Dharma and rights had to work in tandem. The emphasis in modern culture was to over-emphasize the role of rights and to undermine or even ignore that of duty. This explains why he refused to a "Charter of Rights" that H. G. Wells, the British writer, was sponsoring. Begin with a "Charter of Duties of Man", Gandhi wrote back, and I promise right will follow as spring follows winter. His response to the United Nations Human Rights Commission, charged with the responsibility of drafting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), expressed a similar sentiment: "all rights to be deserved and preserved came from a duty well done." From this fundamental principle he wanted to define "the duties of man and woman and correlate every right to some corresponding duty to be first performed."<sup>41</sup>

Gandhi highlights the fundamental problem of modern civilizations which prioritizes rights over duty and for him it is a matter of deep concern because this thinking would result into a less virtuous society. He wants modern society to place equal emphasis on rights, duties and virtue.<sup>42</sup> I argue that an exploration of Gandhi's idea of duty and moral agency could provide us comparatively a better framework/theory of duty ethics to address the issues of acute global poverty.



<sup>40</sup> Sorabji, Richard (2012), "*Gandhi and the Stoics: Modern Experiments on Ancient Values*", Oxford University Press, United Kingdom, p. 108-109

<sup>41</sup> Parel, Anthony J. (2006), "*Gandhi's Philosophy and the Quest for Harmony*", Cambridge University Press, India, p. 96

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, p. 98