



THE ISSUE OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN GANDHIAN ECONOMICS

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Mahatma Gandhi remains the most celebrated national leader, who is admired and adored by Indians. He was not only a great freedom fighter but had such enormous charisma that his "thought process" has influenced and will continue to influence globally as well as the Indian political, social, economical and philosophical ideas for generations to come. Undoubtedly, Gandhian economic thought presents a counter theory to the modern Economics of the Western World, which aims at developing an underdeveloped economy into a full-fledged developed and established economic system.

Gandhiji's economic ideas were based on four cardinal principles: Truth, Non-Violence, dignity of labour and simplicity. His novel concept of "Trusteeship" is seen by many scholars as an alternative to Capitalism and Socialism. It has been claimed by eminent scholars that all the economic ideas of Gandhiji evolved in three distinct phases— The First Phase (up to 1919), whereby he developed altogether an anti-materialistic approach to different problems which is evident from his book "Hind Swaraj"(1909). The Second Phase (1919 to 1934), saw evolution of his economic ideas based on the "Swadeshi Movement"- i.e. the development of a positive counter theory to Western Civilization. The Third Phase (1934 to 1948) was a practical one in which he evolved the idea of "Sarvodaya" and prepared a concrete programme for the regeneration of village economy, revitalization of village industries and decentralization of productive organization.

Now, let us see what Gandhiji viewed for rural development and what were his ideas for regeneration of villages. Our beloved Bapu, knew well that villages were self-sufficient and economically self-dependent in ancient India. He knew that real India was to be found in villages and if India has to develop, its villages - agro economic centers - needs to be developed at first. Mahatma Gandhi in his essays and writings had described at length about the exploitation of villagers, lack of supplementary occupations, inadequacy of medical attention, insanitary conditions, extreme poverty in rural areas etc. He wanted every village to develop into a 'little republic' — independent village units so far as their vital wants are concerned — i.e. "Village Swaraj". Thus, Gandhiji evolved the idea of village swaraj in which he enlisted the following conditions for an ideal village:

- Every village should have a dharmshala, small dispensary and have fruit trees.
- Every village should be self-sufficient at least in requirements of food and clothing.



- The temple/mosque and roads of the villages should be kept clear and lanes of villages should have gutters for drainage.
- Every village should maintain a public hall, a school, a theater hall and there should be orderliness in the structure of the village.
- Every village should be capable of defending itself from robbers and wild animals. The services of village guards should be compulsory, on a rotational basis for villagers.
- It should have water supply facilities and recreation facilities — a playground, a reserve for the cattle etc.
- Caste system should be abolished and education up to basic level be made compulsory.
- All activities of the village should be conducted on a co-operative basis.
- Villages should have some space for growing cash crops except tobacco, opium etc.
- The villages should be governed by 'Panchyat' of 5 persons duly elected every year by adult villagers and Panchayats would enjoy judicial, legislative and executive powers.

Gandhiji was confident that India would be free from most of her worries if all villages of the country could come up to the ideal condition, conceived by him. However, he knew that villages cannot be regenerated simply by evolving an ideal condition. They can be regenerated only when their problems of poverty, healthcare, inadequate diet (malnutrition), education and cattle farming etc. are solved.

In order to solve the problem of rural poverty Gandhiji laid emphasis on the revival of village industries — khadi, hand pounding, hand grinding, soap making, paper making, match making, tanning, oil processing etc. Mahatma Gandhi, thus, stressed the need for the development of the khadi industry. Khadi to him, was "the symbol of unity of Indian humanity, of its economic freedom and equality". Gandhiji firmly believed that the khadi industry would save millions of people from starvation and would supplement the meager earnings of agriculturists. He wrote in 'Young India' dated July 21, 1920 under the title "The music of the spinning wheel" — "I feel convinced that the revival of hand-spinning and hand weaving will make the largest contribution to the economic and moral regeneration of India."

If we make a critical estimate of Gandhian Economics and his ideas of village regeneration and rural development, some critics have contended that Gandhiji never studied Economics; therefore, his economic ideas do not have theoretical backing and in comparison, to modern economic thought and theories are impractical to some extent. A considerable amount of incoherence and contradiction exists in his writings. He criticized private property, which has created social injustice but never pleaded for its abolition. He wanted it should be held in 'Trusteeship' so that it could increase welfare of workers. Gandhiji was also criticized by some critics for his ideas against heavy industrialization and mechanization. No doubt, his 'Charkha' supplements the meager



earnings of a large number of people but it cannot solve all economic problems. India can never become self-sufficient if it always depends upon agriculture and village industries.

Gandhiji, the greatest revolutionary, world has ever seen, gave to the modern world new tools of non-violence and non-cooperation to fight against mighty rulers. In the context of the present era of globalization and liberalization, it is impractical to think of life without large scale industries and their products. India, the land of Bapu, went ahead with the process of large-scale industrialization (against the views of Gandhiji) under the different five-year plan periods and is at present among the top ten industrialized nations in the world. Even our self-sufficiency in agro-products could not have been attained without 'green revolution' which depended heavily on mechanization and use of modern technology, HYV seeds and chemical fertilizers. The much talked about need for a second round of green revolution to be brought about by the "farmer - industrialist amalgamation" - will also heavily depend upon modern technology, heavy mechanization of agriculture and heavy capital investments.

However, we all know how deeply Bapu was concerned for the welfare of our country. Undoubtedly, modern India remains indebted to its father of nation- Mahatma Gandhi. India in its march of economic progress has tried to incorporate many noble ideals and ideas of Gandhiji. His views shaped and influenced our national social, economic, political, foreign and other policies. Many social reforms like abolition of untouchability, efforts for gender equality and the recent 'Swachh Bharat Mission' in India (launched by Modi government in 2014) have all been adopted from ideas of Mahatma Gandhi. I would therefore like to safely conclude that Gandhiji can rightly be credited to many new and novel concepts, which would keep on rejuvenating, catalyzing and revitalizing the thought process of scholars, planners, bureaucrats and governments for generations to come.

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