"Mahatma Gandhi in the Context of Enhancement of Rural Development in India"

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Abstract

Gandhi firmly believed that the essence of swadeshi consisted in producing enough cloth to wrap each Indian, which would be possible through spinning and weaving by the masses. The people needed to pledge themselves to the use of swadeshi cloth only. He added that the use of Khadi cloth for covering the body has greater implications. In his own words, "Khadi must be taken with all its implications. It means a wholesale Swadeshi mentality, a determination to find all the necessaries of life in India and that too through the labour and intellect of the villagers.

That means a reversal of the existing process. That is to say that, instead of half a dozen cities of India and Great Britain living on the exploitation and the ruin of the 7,00,000 villages of India, the latter will be largely self-contained, and will voluntarily serve the cities of India and even the outside world in so far as it benefits both the parties".

The potential to produce khadi lying at the fingertips of an individual makes him/ her empowered and proud of the identity. For Gandhi, khadi was a means of uniting the Indians, of acquiring economic freedom and equality. More importantly, khadi marked the decentralisation of production and distribution of the "necessaries of life". "If we feel for the starving masses of India, we must introduce the spinning wheel into their homes.We must, therefore, become experts and in order to make them realise the necessity of it, we must spin daily as a sacrament. If you have understood the secret of the spinning wheel, if you realise that it is a symbol of love of mankind, you will engage in no other outward activity. If many people do not follow you, you have more leisure for spinning, carding or weaving".

Keywords: decentralization, khadi, Swadeshi, Cottage industry, Inclusive Economics, Village Sarvodaya, Non-Violent Economy, Food Problem

Introduction

According to Gandhi, economic laws which aim at material progress as well as social harmony and moral advancement, should be formulated according to the laws of nature. There is no conflict between the laws of nature and laws of economics. The laws of nature are universal. The laws of economics, which deal with practical problems, are not universal. The economic laws of a country are determined by the climatic, geological and temperamental conditions of that country. Hence they vary with the conditions of the nations.

Gandhi advocated non-violence and hence his economics may be called economics of non-violence. The principle of non-violence is the principle of Gandhian philosophy. As there was no industry and no activity without certain violence, he wanted to minimize it. He believed that violence in any form breeds greater violence. He defined a non-violent occupation as one "which is fundamentally free from violence and which involves no exploitation or envy of others". The solution to Indian basic problems lies in the practice of non-violence. Gandhiji opposed capitalism as it resulted in exploitation of human labour. He believed that nature produced enough for the satisfaction of the people's wants and there would be no pauperism and starvation if everybody took only that much that was sufficient to him.

Gandhiji described machinery as 'great sin'. He believed that the modern technology was responsible for human frustration, violence and war. It was also responsible for the multiplication of material wants. The use of machines created a class of wealthy people and led to unequal distribution of wealth. Gandhiji was not against machinery.He says "the spinning wheel itself is a machine; a little toothpick is a machine, what I object to is the craze for labour saving machinery. Men go on saving labour, till thousands are without work and thrown on the open streets to die of starvation". But he was against all destructive machinery. He welcomed such instruments and machinery that saved individual labour and lightened the burden of millions of cottage workers.

Objective

The present paper aims to study the relevance of Gandhian vison of cottage industry as

a. A viable alternative of presenet day mindless industrailiation
b. A solution to employ and feed large rural population of India

Gandhiji's emphasis on cottage industry

Gandhiji emphasised that he was against large scale production only of those things which villages can produce without difficulty. He believed that machinery was harmful when the same thing could be done easily by millions of hands. He wrote "mechanisation is good when the hands are too few for the work intended to be accomplished. It is an evil when there are more hands than required for the work, as is the case in India".

In 1938 in 'Harijan' he wrote, "If I could produce all my country's wants by means of 30,000 people instead of 30 million, I should not mind it, provided that the 30 million are not rendered idle and unemployed." In short, Gandhi was aware of the menace of technological unemployment. He emphasised the need for labour-intensive methods of production in a country with surplus labour. Gandhiji's ideas on machinery are still relevant. In spite of more than six decades of planned, machine using and power driven economic development unemployment is still there and is still growing.

Gandhi was not in favour of large scale industrialisation, as it was responsible for many socio-economic evils. He believed that large scale use of machinery led to drudgery and monotony. He was in favour of decentralised economy.In such an economy, exploitation of labour would be nil. His belief was strong in the context of the Indian economy. India has plenty of human resources but capital supply was poor, therefore labour intensive technology should be followed. Gandhiji advocated a decentralised economy.

Production should be organised in a large number of places on a small scale. As Gandhiji was for the development of cottage and rural industries, he suggested delocalization of industries. Gandhiji believed that decentralisation was essential for the survival of democracy and for the establishment of a non-violent state.Gandhi preferred the decentralisation of small units of production to the concentration of large scale units in few places. He wanted to carry the production units to the homes of the masses, particularly in villages. Cottage and village industries help increasing employment. Commodities can be produced cheaply as there is no need for a separate establishment; very few tools are needed. There is no problem of storage. Transport cost is negligible.

There is no overproduction and wastes of competition. All these factors make the production by the small units economical and thus, provide logic to the Gandhian scheme of decentralisation of village and cottage industries, Integration of cottage industries with agriculture provides work to the farmer in their spare time and thus harnesses "all the energies that at present run to waste".

In fact, these industries are best suited to the rhythm of rural life. These industries increase the income of the villages and satisfy their basic requirements. They not only remove poverty and unemployment from the villages but also make them self-sufficient economic units.

Khadi Industry

Every Indian needed at least 13 yards of cloth per year. Gandhiji believed that multiplication of mills could not solve the problem of cloth supply; therefore he stressed the development of Khadi industry. For Gandhiji, khadi was the "symbol of unity of Indian humanity of its economic freedom and equality". Khadi means the decentralisation of production and distribution of the necessaries of human life. Khadi movement began only after Gandhiji's return from South Africa.

He believed that Khadi industry would save millions of people from starvation and would supplement the earnings of poor people. To him, the music of the spinning wheel was sweeter and more profitable than harmonium. Gandhiji advocated the use of charkha due to its advantages. Charkha requires a small amount of capital; it is simple in operation. It is a source of steady income; it does not depend upon monsoon; it helps in solving the problem of unemployment. Charkha was considered to be the symbol of non-violence. His slogan was "swaraj through spinning".His khadi scheme included the following:

1. Compulsory spinning in all primary and secondary schools.

2. Cultivation of cotton in areas where it was not grown.

3. Organisation of weaving by the multipurpose co-operative societies.

4. All employees in the department of education, co-operation, municipalities, district boards and panchayats should be required to pass a test in spinning, otherwise they may be disqualified.

5. Control of prices of handloom cloth woven of mill yarn.

6. Imposition of a ban on the use of mill cloth in areas where the hand woven cloth was in abundance.

7. Use of hand-spun cloth in all Government and textile and weaving departments.

8. The old cloth mills should not be allowed to expand and new ones should not be opened.

9. Import of foreign yarn or cloth should be banned.

However Gandhiji's belief in charkha as a means to solve the problem of poverty was criticised as stupid, and childish. Some people criticised Khadi as a non-economic proposition because its roughness caused it to soil more quickly than the mill made cloth.

It required more frequent washing and its thickness used up more soap and therefore khadi wear was not economic but expensive. Further the wages paid to spinners were low. Khadi arrested the forward march of prosperity.

Gandhiji's views on modern industry and it's implications

Gandhiji remarked that the capitalist who had amassed a large sum of money was a thief. If a person had inherited a big fortune or had collected a large amount of money by way of trade and industry, the entire amount did not belong to him. It belonged to the entire society and must be spent on the welfare of all. He wanted to avoid a violent and bloody revolution by gearing a permanent stability of economic equality. He wanted the capitalists to be trustees and he enunciated the doctrine of **trusteeship**.

All social property is meant for all people—rich or poor. Capitalists being trustees would take care of not only themselves but also of others. The workers would treat the capitalists as their benefactors and would keep faith in them. In this way there would be mutual trust and confidence with the help of which the remarkable ideal of economic equality could be achieved.

His entire ideology is summed up as follows:

(i) "Trusteeship provides a means of transforming the present capitalist order of society into an egalitarian one. It gives no quarter to capitalism, but gives the present owning class the chance of reforming itself. It is based on the faith that human nature is never beyond redemption.

(ii) "It does not recognise any right of private ownership of property except in as much as it may be permitted by society for its welfare.

(iii) "It does not exclude legislative regulation of the ownership and the use of wealth.

(iv) "Thus, under state-regulated trusteeship, an individual will not be free to hold or use his wealth for selfish satisfaction or in disregard of the interest of society.

(v) "Just as it is proposed to fix a decent minimum living wage, even so, a limit should be fixed for the maximum income that could be allowed to any person in society. The difference between such minimum and maximum incomes should be reasonable and equitable and variable from time to time so much so that the tendency would be towards obliteration of the difference.

(vi) "Under the Gandhian economic order the character of production will be determined by social necessity and not by personal whim or greed".

Gandhian idea on exchange economy is based on the swadeshi spirit. Every Indian village should be a self-supporting and self-contained unit exchanging only necessary commodities with other villages where they are not locally producible.The person who has accepted the discipline of swadeshi would not mind physical discomfort or inconvenience caused by the non-availability of certain things which he has been using. He would gradually learn to do without those things which up to this time he has been regarding as necessary for his life.

Mahatma Gandhi asked people not to worry about the non-availability of such things as pin and needle, because these were not manufactured in India. He was prepared to buy from other countries those commodities (like watches from Switzerland, surgical instruments from England, etc.) which were needed for his growth; but he was not prepared to buy an inch of cotton of the finest variety from England or Japan or any other country of the world because the importation of cloth had caused the ruin of the home industry – it had harmed the interests of the millions of inhabitants of this country.The guiding

principle that he laid down in respect of all foreign goods was that those things should not be imported which were likely to prove harmful to the interests of the indigenous industry.

Mahatma Gandhi was against the multiplication of human wants. In order to lead a simple life — a life untouched by immorality, untruth and political gain, he did not want many things. He eventually succeeded in complete renunciation. He firmly believed that Western materialism and industrialisation had increased human wants. He always pleaded for a simple life, life of plain living and high thinking, so that the requirements of such a life could be satisfied easily.To Mahatma Gandhi, happiness lay in the curtailment of wants, and not in their multiplication. As he observed — "The less you possess, the less you want, the better you are, better not for the enjoyment of this life but for the enjoyment of personal service to one's fellow beings, service to which you dedicate yourself, body, soul and mind".

One of the important fields where Mahatma Gandhi extended his right for economic equality was the factory. He saw that workers were subjected to gross injustice and the treatment meted out to them was below dignity. To him, the employment of children was a national degradation. He always pleaded for shorter hours of work and more leisure so that workers might not be reduced to the condition of beasts. He also demanded safety measures inside factories.

Mahatma Gandhi laid emphasis on the welfare of the worker, his dignity and proper wages. In the Harijan dated June 9,1946 he wrote that all useful work should bring to the worker the same and equal wages. Until then, he should be paid at least that much which could feed and clothe himself and his family.In order to improve the condition of the worker, first of all he laid claims on a minimum living wage so that a family of 4 to 6 members might live a human life. He wrote as far back as 1920 that the worker should get more wages, and should be given less work to do so that the following four things might be guaranteed to him — clean house, clean body, clean mind and a clean soul.In so far as the relation between labour and capital is concerned, Mahatma Gandhi always suggested harmony between them. He argued that if the distinction of high and low disappeared, it would have a healthy reaction on all aspects of life. Consequently, the struggle between labour and capital would come to an end; and would give place to co-operation between them.

According to him, "capital should be labour's servant, not its master". Moreover, he believed in the formation of labour unions. If the rights of workers were not conceded, they could go on a strike which should be based on non-violence and truth.

Conclusion

Small cottage industries promoted by today's economists were envisaged decades ago by Mahatma Gandhi, said speakers at a discussion yesterday.Gandhi believed that economic emancipation can be achieved through small and medium enterprises and rural village based economic activities.

Like most of Gandhi's philosophies, his thoughts on economy have transcended the barriers of time.Mahatma Gandhi recognised money as a token of exchange only. In the economy envisaged by him, commodities were to be exchanged with commodities. The part played by money was insignificant. It became instrumental in the exploitation of the weak by the strong. To him, money was as useful as labour. He suggested that in order to make khadi universal, it should be made available in exchange for yarn, i.e., yarn-currency. Through this paper author exhorts that Gandhiji's model of village industry needs to be explored in today's day and age.

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