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## The Gandhian approach of economic concepts related to rural development

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### Abstract

As a visionary Mahatma of India, Mahatma Gandhi had a very clear idea about the village of his country. Gandhi believed that India lives in his 7:30 lakh villages. He further believed that India would have to live in villages, not in towns, not in huts, not in palaces. Mahatma Gandhi firmly believed that if villages perished, India would also perish. Mahatma Gandhi played a very leading role in achieving India's political independence from the British Raj by organizing and mobilizing the Indian public in all walks of life in a non-violent and peaceful manner. That is why Mahatma Gandhi was given the title of Father of the Nation. Mahatma Gandhi's approach to the rural development of India was holistic and people-centred. It was rooted in his firm belief in the principles of truth, nonviolence and the wellbeing of human beings. Influenced by the teachings of Tolstoy Ruskin and the Bhagavad Gita, Mahatma Gandhi laid more emphasis on moral and spiritual values than the economic objective as a means of holistic development. He found that most of the progress of India lies in the development of its villages, rural economy, rural industry and rural skill development.

India has achieved a remarkable sustained socioeconomic development since independence. Unfortunately, this development is not shared equally by all. Some sections of society have been left out and development in some areas, like rural tribal and remote areas, has not been able to keep pace with the urban areas. Which is not conducive to the sustainable development of a country like India. Gandhi as a growing actor had emerged in Wardha very early in vision and action. Gandhi, being a national political leader, basically depended on the mobilization of the masses and their economic upliftment through the development of cottage and small scale industries. The ancient republican village served as a model unit without any form of exploitation in the Gandhian plan of rural reconstruction. Mahatma Gandhi aimed at the attainment of Gram Swaraj and said in 1942 that my view "My idea of Village Swaraj is that it is a complete republic, independent of its neighbours for its own vital wants and being inter-dependent on many others on which dependence is a necessity. Gandhiji fully understood the consequences of the western type of industrialization in India. Although Mahatma Gandhi was not a development economist, his theory was very important for rural development. The Gandhian theory of rural development is based on Mahatma Gandhi's ideas of development and Gandhi's ideas are embedded in his philosophy of life. This paper attempts to articulate Mahatma Gandhi's vision of achieving Gram Swaraj through rural development as well as throws light on the Gandhian philosophy of economic concepts that pertain to rural development. It attempts to trace the Gandhian model of rural development and its relevance in the new economic order.

**Keywords:** Mahatma Gandhi, sustainable development, gram swaraj, rural, development, sevagram, cottage industries, trusteeship

### Introduction

Rural development for Gandhi is a self-sufficient village economy and a self-sufficient village community. He emphasized the utilization of local resources for development. Gandhi realized that India lives in her villages and villages constitute the heart of India. Creating a better life for all and raising the standard of living is the means of development. In the current context of extreme economic inequality in the world, a better life for most people essentially means meeting basic needs, having enough food to maintain good health, a safe and healthy place to live, affordable services for all, and treatment with respect. In the context of India, rural development can be referred to as the maximum output in agriculture and allied activities in rural areas. In which emphasis is laid on rural and cottage industries with the development of rural industries, it gives importance to the creation of maximum employment opportunities in rural areas, especially for the weaker sections of the community, so that their standard of living can be raised.

Development is a variable and dynamic concept which takes different shapes and dimensions and follows it with the change of time. Various scholars have defined development with their own concepts, logic and time period justification, because development is a complex phenomenon in which many dimensions are involved in social, cultural, economic, political, administrative etc.

The Gandhian approach to rural development in India can be called idealistic. It gives more importance to moral values and gives primacy to moral values over material conditions. The concept of Ram Rajya is the basis of Gandhi's idea of an ideal social order. Gandhians believe that the source of moral values in general lies in religion and the Upanishads and Gita, which are important Hindu scriptures. The Gandhian model assumes the idea of decentralization, which ensures people's participation. The Gandhian decentralized approach strengthens a feedback system which ensures self-improvement and self-direction. There is more emphasis on village swaraj and human values, it highlights production by the people rather than mass production. The Gandhian theory of development emphasizes the use of labor intensive technology, small scale rural and cottage industries, handicrafts, spinning wheels and renewable energy and ecological balance. According to Gandhian thought, rural development is not a specific program, it is a process that can be triggered by external agencies and authorities. Gandhi wanted to make the affairs of rural development the work of the rural people themselves. Their participation is highly relevant to the effective implementation of programmes and schemes having direct, immediate bearing on their socio-economic life. He wanted to reverse this trend and bring about a rural reconstruction based on sound scientific and spiritual values. He said,

“My deal village will contain intelligent human beings. They will not live in dirt and darkness as animals. Men and women will be free and able to hold their own against anyone in the world. There will be neither plague nor cholera nor small pox, none will be idle, and no one will wallow in luxury. Everyone will have to contribute his quota of manual labour... . . . It is possible to envisage railways, post and telegraphs and the like”

### Objectives

1. Analysing Mahatma Gandhi's vision of rural development in India.
2. To analyse the fundamentals of the Gandhian model of rural reconstruction for an economic model of rural development.

### The Gandhian approach to rural development

The Gandhian approach to rural development consist of—

#### A. Economic Concepts Related to Development

Globalization has failed to address the problems of many important socioeconomic sectors. Apart from these failures, there are other possible negative effects of globalization such as loss of economic independence of India, destruction of domestic industries, dumping and monopoly power. The important question at present is how the drawbacks and harmful effects of globalization can be met through the application of Gandhian economic principles, which is as follows.

**Labour:** Exploitation of labour is an evil of the capitalist economic system, it creates a rebellion in their minds against the system by creating peace. According to Gandhi, whenever a worker is paid work at his basic wage rate or minimum living wage rate, it is called exploitation. Exploitation of labour is a common feature in the capitalist system, which is used by the capitalists to increase their profits. The ultimate solution lies in bridging the gap between the capitalists and the workers. His view was that people should not lose their independence, identity, and thus, their creativity.

**Employment:** Full employment of human resources is the primary requirement of any economic system. Gandhi emphasized employment of labour. By full employment, Gandhi meant employment for every person. According to him, full employment cannot be achieved by the development of large-scale industries. Such industries generally use capital-intensive and labour-saving techniques and do not provide adequate employment opportunities. The majority of the population of India resides in rural areas. Due to the seasonal nature of agriculture, rural underemployment exists in India. Rural agricultural labourers work in agriculture for 6 months while remaining idle for 6 months. Small and semi-rural unemployed people do not get employment promotion even in urban industries because of their religious, cultural and social affiliations with rural life. Thus, mechanization and mass production does not create any solution to the problem of unemployment in an agrarian economy. As Gandhi pointed out, "Mechanization 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." According to Mahatma Gandhi, the solution to the problem of rural unemployment can be possible only by developing rural small and cottage industries.

**Poverty and Inequality:** Mahatma Gandhi was not an economist. Gandhi was clear of the specific issues of poverty and income inequalities. Poverty is not created by the poor man himself. According to him, poverty and inequality are very well connected. Man's greed has resulted in poverty, and it is the cause of the persistence of poverty in the economy. Economics that disregards moral values is false, according to Gandhi. He introduced moral values as a factor to regulate all economic transactions and international commerce. Gandhiji himself did not advocate socialism but humanist values.

**Production:** The logic behind the Gandhian plan of decentralization of rural and cottage industries is that all these activities make production economical for small units. Mahatma Gandhi advocated production by the people. He wanted to take the production units to the homes of the people, especially in rural areas. A special advantage of village and cottage industries is that they increase employment. There are many reasons to believe that it is relatively cheap to produce any item in small and cottage industries. A-No separate installation fee is required, B Requires very little equipment C-Storage problems do not arise D-Integration of rural and cottage industries with agriculture is possible, E-No waste duplication due to lack of competition F-The cost of transporting goods to

consumers is negligible. G-There is no problem of overproduction, whatever is produced, the demand for all remains.

**Technology:** According to Gandhi, there is enough to satisfy the needs of every person on earth but not to satisfy anyone's greed. It is wrong to believe that Gandhiji was against technology. The essence of science is to acquire knowledge through experimentation. Mahatma Gandhi did not object to the use of machinery to increase production and improve the condition of workers, but did not approve of machinery which, in his view, produces goods along with starvation. Gandhi said, "What I object to is the craze for machinery, not machinery as such. The craze is for what they call labour-saving machinery. Men go on 'saving labour' till thousands are without work, and thrown on the open streets to die of starvation." Gandhiji always gave top priority to human beings over science and technology.

**Capital:** According to Mahatma Gandhi, capital is the source of all wealth, it is necessary to pay for the means of production and production of goods. We can divide capital into two types; money capital and labor capital. The art skill of a worker is his capital. Both labour capital and money capital are necessary for production. If the extent of concentration of capital in the hands of an entrepreneur is exceeded, then exploitation of labor begins. Gandhiji gave two methods to eliminate the ill-effects of concentration of capital. First, the ownership of capital should be decentralized. Even if concentration of capital is necessary, the government should have complete control over the use of capital, and "Capital should be the labourer's servant not its master".

**Profits:** In the Gandhian approach, with mechanization, the profit of the entrepreneur increases while the workers face unemployment and decrease in the required wages. Gandhiji did not consider profit as necessary for the survival of a firm.

### B. Self-Sufficient Village Economy

The main goal of Gandhian development is to build a self-reliant society. Every society must be self-reliant. Mahatma Gandhi sought to develop ways to fight India's extreme poverty, backwardness and socioeconomic challenges as a large part of his wider participation in the Indian independence movement. Gandhi's advocacy of non-cooperation and Swadeshi cantered on the principles of economic self-reliance. European industrial goods left millions of workers, craftsmen and women in India without a means of livelihood. Gandhi sought to engage peaceful civil resistance as a means of promoting national self-reliance, by endorsing Indian Khadi clothing and manufactured goods. Gandhi led the farmers of Champaran and Kheda to conduct Satyagraha against the mill owners and landlords who had the full support of the British Government.

Gandhiji used to mean decentralized politics with a decentralized economy. This can be achieved only through self-reliance at the village level. In this regard, Gandhiji said that the village has to import some such things which it cannot produce in the village. That is, we have to produce more than what we can produce so that in return we can get

what we are unable to produce. The village economy should be planned with a view to providing full employment. Every person in the village should be guaranteed employment so that he can meet the basic needs in his village and is forced to migrate to the cities. Full employment is linked to equality in final analysis. The production, consumption and distribution of village industries are confined within them. In the case of cottage industries, the articles may be produced for the entire country and sometimes for foreign countries. According to Gandhi, every person should do physical labor to earn his bread. Physical labor is very necessary for the development of moral discipline and the health of the mind. Gandhi said, "If all laboured for their bread, then there would be enough food and enough leisure for all." Shriman Narayan rightly observes, "Gandhiji recognised toil to be not a curse but the joyful business of life as it has the power to make man healthier, merrier, fitter and kindlier".

### C. The Gandhian Doctrine of Trusteeship

Gandhi was not against the institution of private property but wanted to limit the right to private property to the extent necessary for a dignified livelihood. Mahatma Gandhi's idea of trusteeship was an innovative way of reconciling the psychological need for rewards for entrepreneurship and skill on the one hand and the social need to care for the underprivileged on the other. The principle of trusteeship is based on the idea that everything is from God, and belongs to God. Thus, it is for the people of God as a whole and not for any individual. If a person has more than his proportionate share, then he becomes trustee of that extra amount to the people of God. Mahatma Gandhi emphasized the principle of trusteeship in social and economic matters. He firmly believed that all social wealth should be kept in trust. Capitalists will take care of not only themselves but also others. Some of their surplus wealth will be used for the benefit of society. Trusteeship will go a long way in realizing the condition of equality on earth. Gandhiji firmly believed that land should not be owned by any person. All land belongs to God, so personal ownership of land should be abandoned. The landlord must be persuaded to be the trustee of his land. He must be convinced that the land he owns is not his. The land belongs to the community and should be used for the welfare of the community. Under the trusteeship, the poor workers and labourers considered the landlords and capitalists as their benefactors. Mahatma Gandhi believed that if such a trusteeship was established, the welfare of workers would increase and conflicts between workers and employers would be avoided. Gandhiji rightly held the view that "no person can amass wealth without the cooperation, willpower or force, of the people concerned". Victims should also not resort to violent methods to deal with it. The principle of love, cooperation and service is most important in the Gandhian plan and violence has no place in it. Violence is against moral values and in the absence of moral values, a civilized society cannot be imagined. Gandhi's concept of development is oriented towards the uplift of the common man. He preferred village habitats to megalopolises and Swadeshi craft to imported technology for the economic wellbeing of the common man. The Gandhian approach to rural development in India seeks to rebuild village republics that would be non-violent, self-governing and self-reliant.

#### **D. Sustainable Development**

Gandhi has strongly recommended the eco-friendly cultivation and production method. "Gandhi believed that economic productivity, environmental protection, maintenance of resources and social justice should go together with growth". Our view of the earth is faulty and so dangerous that we own it and can take advantage of it. Mahatma Gandhi's ideas are very relevant to protecting the environment and maintaining the potential of the earth. Gandhi lays special emphasis on three aspects: the economy, society and the environment. He says that the present materialistic lifestyle has to be changed for sustainable development. Gandhi was against the policy of over exploitation of natural resources in order to get rapid economic growth by blindly following the western method of development. The Gandhian model of rural development highlights the following points to achieve a sustainable lifestyle (a) Khadi and village industries are environmentally friendly. They generate more employment and remove poverty, so we must promote products of khadi and village industries. (b) We should adopt technology which is simple and which our villagers themselves can understand and operate. (c) For sustainable agricultural development, we should use organic fertilizers and bio-pesticides except chemical fertilizers and pesticides. (d) We have to adopt solar energy for our energy requirement. Solar energy is limitless and inexhaustible. We have to ensure the use of solar energy for heating and lighting and the generation of electricity will also be made possible by hydro and wind energy.

#### **E. Decentralisation**

Mahatma Gandhi firmly believed that decentralization of social and political power was necessary for the formation of village republics. In such a system, all decision-making power would be vested in the Gram Panchayat instead of the State and National Capital. The representatives of this would be elected by all adults for a fixed term of 5 years. The elected representatives would constitute a council called the Panchayat. Panchayat exercises judicial, executive and legislative functions. The elected Panchayat will have all the responsibility for the protection and development of the untouchables and other poor people. Gandhiji believed that the resources related to the village would be managed from within the village. All disputes would be resolved within the village and, as far as possible, not a single case should be referred to the courts outside the village. Panchayat will play its role in propagating the importance of spiritual and moral values among the rural people for the reconstruction of villages. Apart from managing all its own affairs, the village will be fully capable of defending itself against any invasion. A non-violent peace brigade of volunteers will be set up who will be responsible for protecting the village. These volunteers will have full faith in God and non-violence and this corps will be in addition to the general organization.

#### **F. Sarvodaya in The Rural Sector**

Mahatma Gandhi firmly believed that the development of the Indian economy depended on rural development. Rural development depends on agricultural development, which is the integration of both agricultural and non-agricultural activities into the rural economy. Gandhi never accepted that any contradiction lies between economic development

and human development. Therefore, he emphasized establishing harmony between the two through Sarvodaya. Gandhiji emphasized pre-determining the goals and making plans to achieve them. Mahatma Gandhi tried to achieve the goal of non-violent socialism through Sarvodaya Yojana. Sarvodaya means all-round welfare of all and the purpose of Sarvodaya Yojana is to establish the Sarvodaya social system on the principles of non-violence, truth, love and cooperation. The following are the main points of Sarvodaya Yojana propounded by Gandhiji. (a) Basic and technical education for all. (b) Full attention to rural labourers and farmers (c) economic equality and communal harmony (d) All rural farmers should organize their own committees (e) Spinning the spinning wheel by every rural household. (f) All workers forming their own union. Gandhi's Sarvodaya Yojana is essentially a specific program for the upliftment of the Indian village. In the revival of rural India, special measures have included development of rural and cottage industries, improvement in village sanitation, protection from robbers and wild animals, development of agriculture, conducting activities on a cooperative basis, etc. Gandhiji developed plans for the revival of the rural economy. His struggle against poverty and unemployment and the cause of national reconstruction begins in the village itself. The Sarvodaya movement tried to promote self-reliance among the rural population of India by encouraging land redistribution, socio-economic reforms and promoting cottage industries. The ultimate aim of the Sarvodaya movement is to uplift the downtrodden and to make a silent revolution in society through the change of people's attitudes as well as appropriate development strategy concerned to the rural people.

#### **G. Industrialization**

Mahatma Gandhi believed that industrialization leads to passive or active exploitation of villages. Industrialization will help only a few and will lead to the concentration of economic power. Large scale production requires marketing. Marketing means seeking profit through an exploitative mechanism. Industrialization uses capital intensive techniques which replace manpower and hence increase unemployment. In countries like India, where lakhs of labourers get work in villages for only 6 months a year, industrialization will not only increase unemployment but will also force labourers to migrate to cities. To avoid this, Gandhiji was of the opinion that rural and cottage industries should be revived. This provides employment to meet the needs of the villagers and facilitates self-reliance on the village. Mahatma Gandhi was not against machines which serve the objectives of self-reliance and full employment in rural areas. Machines should not be used to make rural people unemployed and as a means of their exploitation.

#### **H. The Gandhian Principle of Grama Swaraj**

The word 'Gram Swaraj' means self-government and self-realization. In this ideal village, if people are doing any wrong thing or ill-legal activities, it means not being treated in a harsh way. Moreover, reformation of the mental attitude of the culprit is the panacea. With the concept of Gram Swaraj, Mahatma Gandhi intended to build such a non-exploitative, non-violent and non-competitive society in the near future. An article written by Mahatma Gandhi in Harijan in 1942 very clearly expressed that "my idea of village swaraj depends upon perfect democracy based on



individual freedom". Swadeshi, Trusteeship, Bread Labour, self-sufficiency, decentralization, co-operation and equality are the main elements included in the Gandhian concept of Gram Swaraj. Gandhi's intention in 'Gram Swaraj' was to completely free man from evil, bondage and low human dignity.

### I. Bread-Labour

Mahatma Gandhi developed this concept by reading the books of Tolstoy, Ruskin and the New Testament. According to Gandhi, one who eats without sacrifice eats food stolen. Sacrifice here means bread labour. The bread labour concept would give new vigour among the many unemployed people living in the rural areas of the country. People can get essential commodities like food, shelter and clothes by doing manual labour in faraway places in villages. No labour is much less for one who wants to earn honest money.

### J. Removal of Untouchability

Untouchability is a social evil and should not be seen as a mere political necessity. The socio-economic evils associated with this system should be abolished. According to Mahatma Gandhi, there should be complete social equality among the people of society. No social superiority should be entertained by any individual or by a section of society on the ground of birth or knowledge or religion or any other consideration. Mahatma Gandhi fought against all forms of social superiority and continued his religious war against the doctrine of racial superiority in South Africa and the practices of untouchability in India. He is of the opinion that no one is born untouchable and unequal. The practice of untouchability is a sin against God because Harijans and non-Harijans are children of the same God. He advocated non-violent methods to be adopted by them for their self-employment and for proper realisation of their rights. For this, cleanliness, good habits, frugality and moral courage have to be inculcated. He warned the Harijans that they should make serious efforts for self-improvement in all walks of life. In the Gandhian concept of swaraj, no one should be high or low but all should be equal citizens and this swaraj is free from any social exploitation and domination of society.

### K. Valuable Programme for Rural Development

Mahatma Gandhi prepared a creative program in which the following programs were included for the construction of villages-

- |                                    |                              |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Communal unity                  | 7- Removal of untouchability |
| 2. Khadi                           | 8- Other village industries  |
| 3. Basic education                 | 9- Adult education           |
| 4. Prohibition                     | 10- Village sanitation       |
| 5. Economic equality               | 11- farmers                  |
| 6. Education in health and hygiene | 12- Labour                   |

### Conclusion

Gandhi will continue to be credited for emphasizing the role of small scale industries and agriculture in the development of the Indian rural economy, despite the generally passive nature of the Gandhian philosophy. Even today, almost all economists recognize the importance of small-scale industries and the need for their decentralization in a highly populated and rural-based underdeveloped country. Mahatma Gandhi aptly defined it and realized that in such

an economy the reorganization and revival of agriculture is a necessary and pre-condition for economic development. Mahatma Gandhi envisioned a comprehensive approach to rural development and inspired people to develop a rural mind-set to make full use of local resources to become self-reliant and all this together formed the Swadeshi Movement. The Gandhian model of rural reconstruction, like any other development model, has both its supporters and opponents. Gandhian principles give us the confidence that a better world is possible. The argument that Gandhi's ideas and principles are outdated is not true. At the time of colonization, Mahatma Gandhi used his ideological weapons. The world has changed a lot since then. There have been new innovations and developments in all walks of life. So there is a need to redefine Gandhian development concepts and ideas, but it does not mean that those concepts and ideas are irrelevant in the present world. Gandhi was not a truly neo-classical economist. His economic ideas were pragmatic yet moral. In his words: 'true economics never militates against the highest ethical standards; just all true ethics to be worth its name must at the same time also be good economics'. The basis of all Gandhian thought is rural development or rural independence. The village is the foundation of any society and if it is not in better condition, then society cannot progress so quickly. It would be like building a skyscraper without a strong foundation and that's what India is doing now. For the Father of the Nation Mahatma Gandhi, the development of the village is not just an economic expansion, it is the creation of a non-violent social system where every villager is not made selfish but self-reliant.

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