



Gandhian Strategy for Rural Reconstruction: Some Perspectives for Modern Management Students

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Abstract : *The development approach as outlined by Gandhi contained self-sufficiency, inter-dependence for other wants and development of Village Industries. He wanted to bring about rural reconstruction with sound scientific and spiritual values. Since all service ranks the same and carries equal wages, hereditary skills are conserved and developed from generation to generation. The principle of community service replaces unrestricted, soulless competition. Everybody is a toiler with ample leisure, opportunity, and facilities for education and culture. It is a fascinating world of cottage crafts and intensive, small-scale farming co-operatives. There will be neither paupers nor beggars, neither millionaire employers nor half-starve employees. Mahatma Gandhi's concept of rural reconstruction is a comprehensive one, emphasizing on the economic, political, social, educational, ecological and spiritual dimensions. He ceaselessly insisted on a pattern of village life, which will be man-centered and non-exploiting. The decentralized village economy should provide full employment to all on the basis of voluntary cooperation and work for achieving self-sufficiency in its basic requirement of food, clothing and shelter.*

Keywords: Arogya, rural reconstruction, Rural skills

Introduction

Mahatma Gandhi is a multi-dimensional visionary of India. He is relevant today. The modern management students need to know and get benefit from Gandhian wisdom. Gandhi touched all aspects of managing Indian way of living for the masses. He laid down a clear strategy for rural reconstruction, which is pragmatic even in the context of globalisation. He found that the progress of the country lies in the economic reconstruction of its villages. It meant promotion of rural economy, rural industry and rural skills. Gandhi assigned to village the central place in development. Thus, Mahatma Gandhi was probably the first among our leaders to theorise on economic development based

on village economy in India. His concept of economic development meant self reliance with least dependence on outsiders.

Gandhian model of economic development

The Gandhian model of economic development can provide solutions to rural management based on the basic needs of the people, such as 'Anna' (livelihood), 'Akshar' (literacy), 'Arogya' (health) and 'Acharan' (moral values). While the development programmes should aim at meeting these needs, it is essential to blend these activities with 'Dharam' - not any particular religion but the essence of all religions along with a focus on moral values - 'Acharan'. In the absence of moral values, particularly



non-violence, non-addiction to gambling, drugs and alcohol and marital discord, the development may shape our future generations as demons, instead of citizens of a civilised society. If one can insist on adopting moral values, it will be easy to curb one's greed and with sincere efforts, there will be no difficulty in meeting one's needs".

The basic theme of Gandhiji's economic theory was village self-sufficiency or Gram Swaraj. It meant that every village should be self-sufficient in two basic requirements - food and

¹ The development approach as outlined by Gandhi contained self-sufficiency, inter-dependence for other wants and development of Village Industries. He wanted to bring about rural reconstruction with sound scientific and spiritual values. Since all service ranks the same and carries equal wages, hereditary skills are conserved and developed from generation to generation. The principle of community service replaces unrestricted, soulless competition. Everybody is a toiler with ample leisure, opportunity, and facilities for education and culture. It is a fascinating world of cottage crafts and intensive, small-scale farming co-operatives. There will be neither paupers nor beggars, neither millionaire employers nor half-starved employees.. There will be the same respect for women where every woman except one's wife, will be treated by men of all religions, as mother, sister or daughter according to her age. Mahatma Gandhi's concept of rural reconstruction is a comprehensive one, emphasizing on the economic, political, social, educational, ecological and spiritual dimensions. He ceaselessly insisted on a pattern of village life, which will be man-centered and non-exploiting.

clothing. Every member of the family will play the charka and spin yam. The village weaver will play the loom and produce the cloth necessary for the village. Similarly, the village should produce its own rice, vegetables etc. Food and clothing will not have to be imported into the village from outside. Necessarily, it meant a particular lifestyle -the lifestyle of plain living and high thinking". Gandhiji said the only realisable and immediate ideal was that of Grama Swaraj.

The decentralized village economy should provide full employment to all on the basis of voluntary cooperation and work for achieving self-sufficiency in its basic requirement of food, clothing and shelter.

Constructive work:

Mahatma Gandhi considered constructive work as important. In 1935, Gandhiji started his rural reconstruction activities in Sevagram to implement his idea of Constructive Programme which included items such as the use of Khadi, promotion of Village industries, Basic and Adult Education, Rural Sanitation, upliftment of the Backward Classes, the welfare of Women, Education in Health and Hygiene, Prohibition and propagation of the Mother Tongue². He incorporated all these activities under his 18-point Constructive Programme. Constructive Programme is not a fragmented approach. It is an attempt to develop society at the grassroots level with the resources that are available locally.

Economic Equality

Economic equality means that everyone shall have sufficient and nutritious food to eat, proper shelter to



live in, adequate Khadi to wear, timely medical relief and necessary facilities for education. It also implies abolition of the eternal conflict between the capital and the labour by the levelling down of the rich in whom bulk of the Nation's wealth is concentrated and the levelling up of the poor. For this, the constructive workers shall strive to level down the few rich and level up the semi -starved millions through trusteeship system. It does not mean that everyone would literally have the same amount but it means that everyone should have enough for one's needs.³

The ultimate aim of Gandhian concept of economic equality is equal pay for all. The doctor, the lawyer, the teachers etc. would get the same wages for an honest day's work. To bring about the economic equality in the society, Gandhi suggested the following measures:

- i. There are only two alternatives to bring about the desired economic equality- violent means and non-violent means. The economic equality realized through violent means will have to be sustained by further violence. But when it is brought about through non-violent means, it can be preserved by non-violent means which visualizes the plan of trusteeship.
- ii. The trusteeship which brings about economic equality has to be popularized. There should be sustained non-violent education of the people towards its realization . When there is change in the outlook of the people towards the progressive common sharing of the wealth of

the society, the economic equality is guaranteed.

- iii. If the rich do not heed to the appeal of the people for establishing trusteeship, the people can resort to peaceful satyagraha of noncooperation and civil disobedience.⁴

Rural economy:

Agriculture is the backbone of rural economy. *Kisans* form the bulk of India's population and are the backbone of this rural country. Majority of the India's population depend on agriculture and associated occupations such as cattle farming, dairying, poultry, piggery etc. Hence Gandhi insisted on the social workers to render effective service in the socio-economic transformation of a village. In order to do this, they must acquire sufficient theoretical as well as practical knowledge about agriculture. According to him, the agriculture of a village should be planned in such a manner that each village shall be self-sufficient in its food requirements. If geographical conditions permit, the farmers should cultivate cotton required for the village.

Land owners and Labour:

Land owners and labourers play a vital role in economic transformation.

According to Gandhi, he who tills the land should own the land. The land owners should not think that the possession of land gives them any superiority over the tenants and the landless labourers. They should recognize that the tenants and the landless labourers possess the same soul which they possess. The land owners whose agricultural income is surplus should act as trustees for the benefit of the



agricultural labourers and others.⁵ The land owners should not take more than their needs and should lead a simple life. They should engage themselves in the upliftment of the poorer sections of the village and should become partners in the peaceful evolution of socio-economic change. The landless should not use violent methods to dispossess the lands of landlords while the landlords should not exploit the landless. There should be a Village Committee to look into grievances of the tenants and the landlords in each village. The landless labourers should get sufficient wages to provide their primary requirements such as food, clothing and shelter. To them, their labour is the capital. This capital should be given due recognition in the society. When the importance is given to the living capital, the working conditions, hours of leisure and standard of living are automatically taken care of.

The Gandhian strategy of rural reconstruction was based on village Swaraj and Swadeshi movement. The basic principles of village Swaraj as outlined by Gandhiji are trusteeship, Swadeshi, full employment, bread labour, self sufficiency, decentralisation, equality, Nai Talim etc. Thus the idea of ideal village of Gandhian dream was a comprehensive one, encompassing the economic, social, political and educational dimensions.

Village Industries and Swadeshi

Gandhi provided the main constituents of his strategy of India's rural reconstruction in his *Hind Swaraj*. He made it clear that modern civilization', nourished by British rule was the real cause of economic distress. Therefore, Gandhi envisaged that the salvation of India was in the revival of its

ancient civilization. Under the shadow of ancient civilization, Gandhi wanted to develop a New Social Order which was based on the foundation of non-violence and truth, where economic progress and moral progress go together and the focus is on the development of individual. Life and human relations in society, village and nation in the new social order were envisaged not like pyramids with an apex sustained at the bottom but, as an oceanic circle. To achieve this New Social Order Gandhi's development model evolved around village development or rural development. Gandhi's emphasis on rural development is viewed as an attempt to establish a non-violent social order from which exploitation is completely done away with. Two basic components of Gandhian development, self-sufficient villages and decentralization of economic and political powers, gave a very important place to development of Khadi and Village Industries.

Gandhi believed that Khadi and Village Industries are the alternative to provide work to all people in villages. This is evident from his statement of challenge to rulers to whom he stated that, "If the government could provide full employment to all without the help of Khadi and Village Industries, I shall be prepared to wind-up my constructive programme in this sphere". He said, Production of Khadi includes cotton growing, picking, ginning, cleaning, carding, slivering, spinning, sizing, dyeing, preparing the warp and woof, weaving and winding. These, with the exception of dyeing, are essential processes every one of which can be effectively handled in the villages]]. Gandhi insisted on primitive methods of production in the village industry. Village



economy cannot be complete without the essential village industries such as hand-grinding, hand-pounding, soap-making, paper-making, match-making, tanning, oil-pressing etc.

Gandhiji said that true Swadeshi consists in encouraging and reviving Village industries as these would add to national wealth. The village industries help millions of people by providing an outlet for the creative faculties and resourcefulness of the people. They also usefully employ hundreds of youths in the country who are in need of employment. It may harness all the energy that at present runs to waste. "I do not want anyone of those who are engaged in more remunerative occupations to leave them and take to the minor industries. Just as I did with regard to the spinning wheel, I would ask only those who suffer from unemployment and penury to take to some of these industries and add a little to their slender resources". The idea behind the village industries scheme is that we should look to the villages for the supply of our daily needs and that, when we find that some needs are not so supplied, we should see whether with a little trouble and organization, they cannot be profitably supplied by the villagers. In estimating the profit, we should think of the villager, not of ourselves. It may be that, in the initial stages, we might have to pay a little more than the ordinary price and get an inferior article in the bargain. Things will improve, if we will interest ourselves in the supplier of our needs and insist on his doing better and take the trouble of helping to do better.⁶

Swadeshism is not a cult of hatred. It is a doctrine of selfless service that has its roots in the purest *ahimsa*,

i.e., love. According to Gandhiji, to reject foreign manufactures, merely because they are foreign and to go on wasting national time and money in the promotion in one's country of manufactures for which it is not suited would be criminal folly and a negation of the Swadeshi spirit. A true votary of Swadeshi will never harbour ill-will towards the foreigner; he will not be actuated by antagonism towards anybody on earth. However, revival of the cottage industry will remove the growing poverty. Encouraging village industries and Swadeshi is a constructive, not a destructive, programme. This leads to rural development. Gandhiji believed -- The big industries can never, they don't hope to, overtake the unemployed millions. Their aim is primarily to make money for the few owners, never the direct one of finding Village Industries employment for the unemployed millions. The present use of machinery tends more and more to concentrate wealth in the hands of a few in total disregard of millions of men and women whose bread is snatched by it out of their mouths.⁷ Gandhiji firmly said: "I would say that if the village perishes, India will perish too. It will be no more India. Her own mission in the world will get lost. The revival of the village is possible only when it is no more exploited. Industrialization on a mass scale will necessarily lead to passive or active exploitation of the villagers as the problems of competition and marketing come in. Therefore, we have to concentrate on the village being self-contained, manufacturing mainly for use. Provided this character of the village industry is maintained, there would be no objection to villagers using even the modern machines and tools that they can make and can afford to use. Only they



should not be used as a means of exploitation of others".⁸

Comprehensive thought:

Mahatma Gandhi's concept of rural reconstruction is a comprehensive one, emphasizing on the economic, political, social, educational, ecological and spiritual dimensions. He ceaselessly insisted on a pattern of village life, which will be man-centered and non-exploiting. The decentralized village economy should provide full employment to all on the basis of voluntary cooperation and work for achieving self-sufficiency in its basic requirement of food, clothing and shelter. In short, it can be said that rural reconstruction, according to Gandhi should not be merely concerned with raising the standard of living of village folk, though that was important. Talking specifically about an ideal village, where in he outlined the objectives of rural reconstruction. He said that his idea of an ideal village is that of complete republic independence of its neighbour for its own vital wants, and yet dependent for many others in which dependence is a necessity. Such village will contain intelligent people. The first concern of the village should be to grow its own food. Then only all communities will live together in harmony. The curse of untouchability, intoxicating drinks and drugs will not exist. Women will enjoy the same right as the men. People in villages will not live in dirt and darkness as animal. No one will wallow in luxury. The village community should take up the responsibility for providing work to all able bodied people and every one will have to contribute his quota of manual labour. Non-violence with its techniques of Satyagraha and non-cooperation will have the sanction of village community. The government of the village will be

conducted by the panchayat of five persons annually elected by the villagers. Such an ideal society, he stated is necessarily highly cultured because every man and women in that society knows what he or she wants and also no one should want anything that others could not have. Such a society will be an "Oceanic Circle" where the centre will be the individual who will always be ready to perish for the village, later ready to perish for the circle of villagers, till at last the whole becomes a life comprised of individuals". Truth, non-violence, freedom, equality, full employment, bread labour, trusteeship, decentralization, Swadeshi and cooperation were perceived as cardinal principles for rural reconstruction. The first four principles are the universal or core values, i.e. Truth, Non-violence, Freedom, Equality; the remaining, flowing mostly from them and are linked with his economic ideas. They were formulated by Gandhi to regulate initially the conducts of inmates of Satyagraha Ashram in 1930 and latter extended to the work for rural reconstruction. These were not intended to be mechanical formulae, but as practical aids to moral and spiritual growth.

Conclusion:

According to Gandhi, real democracy should have meaning not for a few but for all including the poorest and even for the maimed, the blind and the deaf. He did not believe in mere lip sympathy for the ideal which comes so easily. The entire social order should be such that this ideal should be achieved in practice. A genuine democracy calls for a higher degree of seriousness of purpose and a sense of urgency. Gandhi realized that once people are awakened, they would become a revolutionary force.



Their minimum expectations would have to be satisfied otherwise they would explode. This explosion could take many unpleasant and ugly forms.

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⁴ M.K. Gandhi, *Towards Nonviolent Socialization*, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad 1951, p.24

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⁶ Harijan, 23-11-1934, p. 324

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⁸ Harijan, 29-8-1936, p. 226

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