



Gandhian Approach to Rural Development – An Alternative Paradigm

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Abstract: *At the time of independence, India was an economy with a low level of social, economic, and technological development, low per capita income, slow pace of development of economic institutions and obsolete techniques of production in all the sectors of economy, and most of the symptoms are still persist in the economy. Villages in our country are still suffering from various maladies and lack of basic necessities. To solve rural poverty, he emphasized not only on agriculture but also cottage and small scale industries. Even though the government has been implementing a number of schemes and programs for providing employment opportunities to the rural poor over the years, due to poor implementation of the programs and the absence of proper monitoring almost all the schemes have not shown expected results. Thus the Gandhian Model of development needs to be followed effectively in our villages for self-sufficiency and self-reliance. India needs a new matrix of economic development, in which progress is measured in terms of development of human capability, dignified employment for everyone, equitable distribution of income and wealth, ecological sustainability and social well-being of the community. He stressed the need for cottage industries in place of gigantic industries and advocated for a decentralized economy instead of a centralized one. Apart from creating a new socio-economic order, it endeavour's to transform man; otherwise the changes in the socio-economic order will be short-lived. Therefore, Gandhiji's ideas are more relevant today than ever before, specially his philosophy of self-reliance and decentralization for rural development. In this context this article is an attempt to characterize the rural development approach evolved in Gandhian Philosophy and explained its significance in this globalised era.*

Key-Words: *Rural Reconstruction, Village Transformation, Truth, Non-Violence, Freedom, Equality, Gram Swaraj, Swadeshi, Khadi, Alternative Model, Decentralization.*

Introduction:

During the freedom struggle, Mahatma Gandhi said that freedom for the sake of the dumb millions can never mean a form of political freedom, it must include economic freedom which alone enables the people to enjoy the fruits of political freedom. One of the important factors that shaped Gandhiji's economic ideas was the principle of Gram Swaraj.

According to Gandhiji, Swaraj meant self-rule based upon self-reliance. Therefore, Gandhiji stressed on economic self-sufficiency in the matter of vital fundamental needs which alone could give the people and the villages the strength to stand up against whole world, when need arises.¹

Mahatma Gandhi as a visionary of India had a very clear perception of its



villages and made an emphatic assertion that "India lives in her seven and half lakhs of villages². He found that the progress of the country lies in the development of majority of its rural villages, develop rural economy, industry and rural skills. Gandhiji found the only way of bringing hope of good living to the rural people is by making the village the central place in the economic programme. Rural development as outlined by Mahatma Gandhiji 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. Through his 18-point Constructive Programme, Gandhiji successfully implemented his rural reconstruction activities in Sevagram Centre near Wardha in 1935.

Concept of Rural Development:

Gandhi's idea to develop the Indian society was based on his understanding of the society and hence based on the village system. Talking about the importance of village, he wrote in 1936, "I would say if the village perishes, India will perish too. It will be no more India. His one mission in the world will get lost."³

Mahatma Gandhi, was probably the first among our leaders to promote rural development in India. On March 30, 1946 at the Prayer meeting at Urulikanchan before leaving for Delhi for final negotiation with the British, Gandhiji reiterated that we cannot retain power in Delhi without developing rural India. His concept of rural development meant self reliance with least dependence on outsiders. The Swadeshi Movement was launched through spinning and

weaving to promote Khadi. This also provided livelihood to the rural people.

In the Indian context rural development may be defined as maximizing production in agriculture and allied activities in the rural areas including development of rural industries with emphasis on village and cottage industries. It attaches importance to the generation of maximum possible employment opportunities in rural areas, especially for the weaker sections of the community so as to enable them to improve their standard of living.

Provision of certain basic amenities like drinking water, electricity, especially for the productive purpose, link roads connecting villages to market centres and facilities for health and education etc., figure prominently in the scheme of rural development. Theoretically, Gandhian approach to rural development may be labeled as 'idealist'. It attaches supreme importance to moral values and gives primacy to moral values over material conditions.⁴ The Gandhians believe that the source of moral values in general lies in religion and Hindu scriptures like the Upanishads and the Gita, in particular.

Rural Reconstruction & Ideal Village :

His 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 Gandhiji outlined the objectives of rural reconstruction: - he said,

“My idea of an ideal village is that of complete republic independence of its neighbor for its own vital wants, and yet dependent for many others in which dependence is necessity. Such village will contain intelligent people. First concern of the village should be to grow its own food. Then only all communities will live together in harmony.”⁵

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.⁶ 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”.

Affluence of people was, not in Gandhi’s mind. He believed that there was sufficient to meet the needs of all people, but not their greed. He considered, that the type of development, Europe had achieved was the result of a systematic colonization and exploitation of both people and nature. In addition, it had contributed to imbalance in the levels of development of different areas,

monopolization of benefits by a few families, and an increase of poverty and violence. He, therefore rejected not only supportive mechanism of development seen as bureaucracy, technology, elitist education, but also the whole idea of development as conceived by the builders of the western industrial society.

According to Gandhi every person should be provided with bare minimum necessities i.e. food, shelter, and clothing. An increase in personal income is an indication of the growth of national income. But the opposite may not be true i.e. the growth of national income may not always benefit every man in society. Agricultural sector alone cannot solve the problem of rural poverty and unemployment. That’s why Gandhi gives stress on the growth of the rural industries like khadi, handlooms, sericulture and handicrafts. He opines that large-scale industries make people lazy and help concentration of wealth in the hands of few. On the contrary, rural industries are based on family labour and required less amount of capital. Raw materials are also collected from local markets and the goods thus produced are sold in the local markets. Therefore there is no problem of production and market. Large scale production creates conflicts between labour and capital. Such conflicts may not occur in the case of rural industries. Gandhiji wanted diversified economic activities in the villages and thus stood for all round development of rural India.⁷

Truth, non-violence, freedom, equality, full employment, bread labour, trusteeship, decentralization, swadesh and cooperation were perceived as cardinal principles for rural reconstruction.



VALUES : 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. A brief elaboration of some of these principles like truth, no-violence, freedom and equality will be useful to understand them and their importance in the context of initiating action for rural reconstruction.⁸

Truth : He regarded truth as the source of Dharma. Hence there should be truth in thought, speech and action. The man who has realized truth completely has nothing else to know, because all knowledge is necessarily included in it. And that is why truth is perhaps the most important name of God. In fact it is better to say that truth is God, than to say God is truth. His concept of truth involves complete tolerance to those who differ. According to him the aim of human life is to attain truth and non-violence. Truth is of two types, Ultimate and Relative. It is comparatively easy to achieve relative truth. However the endeavor should be to know the ultimate truth, because this results in realization of God.

Non-violence : Gandhi considered non-violence, besides truth synonymous with God. He believed that non-violence has its own relevance in resolving conflict and is also related to reconstruction of society. Non-violent resolution of conflict is in accordance with the dignity of man's spirit. He can save his spirit by observing

non-violence, which is in tune with his spirituality. Another aspect of non-violence is progress. It binds people together, promoting cooperation, harmony and unity and preventing destruction, contributes to development. Practice of absolute non-violence is not possible so long one exists physically. It is not the same as non-killing, nor it is non-resistance borne out of cowardice. It implies absence of hatred or ill will, love for wrong doer, courage in the face of violence, bread labour, truthfulness and freedom from possession.

Freedom : Closely linked with truth and non-violence is freedom; without the freedom of body, mind and soul, the individual cannot attain perfection. It is used to indicate freedom to make a choice and to take a decision without which development of individual is not possible. This perfection can be achieved by acquisition of the capacity by all to resist authority, when it is misused. It makes people tolerant to other ideas.

Equality : It flows logically from the concept of non-violence, since non-violence and non-exploitation is impossible without equality.

Need for alternative model for rural development:

Many thinkers doubt the economic ideology of Gandhi, since they believe that it is not a suitable method either as a policy or as an approach. But gradually this way of thinking has been changing across the world. Some argue that Gandhian economics is quite appropriate for the present day crisis in rural development in India. While India started formulating planning strategies in 1951-52 there was intense debate on India's development policy, strategies and issues because economic development of a



country depends on the proper utilization of natural and human resources. At the time of independence, India was an economy with a low level of social, economic, and technological development, low per capita income, slow pace of development of economic institutions and obsolete techniques of production in all the sectors of economy, and most of the symptoms are still persist in the economy.

This is the right time to take the message and practice of Gandhian thought both in our policies and implementation to bring a real change in village life. We have to think that when the old policies have failed to guarantee welfare to all, an alternative policy must be devised. Since the gloomy situation, as discussed above, stand in the way of ensuring peaceful and harmonious life for vast segments of Indian people, it is necessary on the part of policy makers to reconsider the Gandhian ideology of village transformation, and helps to ameliorate the prevailing conditions.⁹

The economic models of India are hardly successful to remove the maladies on the rural front; rather these have paved the way for transfer of resources from rural to urban in the form of humans and raw material. It is high time to formulate a new model, which is based on the Gandhian ideology.¹⁰

The Gandhian model would be much reliable to reduce the gap between the haves and have-nots, instead of replicating the Western models of economic development, which lead to drastic inequalities and too much capital concentration in a few hands.¹¹ There are certain objections to the adoptability of Gandhian rural reconstruction, since certain academic and political groups

express the view that rural social stratification and social hierarchy may become obstacles for the development of the underprivileged and backward sections in society. But at same time, they argue strongly for a new approach for the welfare of the huge masses of rural India.¹² Though there are doubts over the working of the Gandhian economic ideology, we should be ready to accept the ground realities of the present scenario of economic failure in ensuring well-being for a large chunk of our fellow men. Therefore, Mathur B.P. (2011) clearly articulated: "It is time we abandon a model whose foundations rest on materialism, consumption and greed."¹³ Notwithstanding the controversial aspects of the Gandhian model, one can hardly deny its relevance in the current turbulent and violent-prone societies. It is the right time to adopt the Gandhian model in the interest of 90 crores of the rural population. Hence, our rural development policies are to be given shape through the prism of Gandhian rural reconstruction. What we need today is to devise a new model of economic development based on the Gandhian ideology.

Conclusion:

Gandhiji's concept of development is oriented to the uplift of the common man. Gandhiji was very keen to bring about maximum regional self-sufficiency in regard to food, clothing and shelter in rural areas. He focused his attention on non-agricultural aspect of the rural economy also. He wanted diversified economic activities in the villages and thus stood for all round development of rural India. In this context, we can remember what Shriman Narayan emphasized: "Gandhiji's sublime vision gives us a rare insight into the



future of mankind. Gandhiji belongs to the future and not the past. He is not dead; his message is eternal and shall live as long as sun shines in the vast open skies". Villages in our country are still suffering from various maladies and lack of basic necessities. The major problem poverty is one which resulted in suicides of a large number of farmers. To solve rural poverty, he emphasized not only on agriculture but also cottage and small scale industries. Even though the government has been implementing a number of schemes and programs for providing employment opportunities to the rural poor over the years, due to poor implementation of the programs and the absence of proper monitoring almost all the schemes have not shown expected results. Thus the Gandhian Model of social progress needs to be followed effectively in our villages for self-sufficiency and self-reliance. India needs a new matrix of economic development, in which progress is measured in terms of development of human capability, dignified employment for everyone, equitable distribution of income and wealth, ecological sustainability and social well-being of the community. He stressed the need for cottage industries in place of gigantic industries and advocated for a decentralized economy instead of a centralized one. He preferred village habitats to megalopolises and Swadeshi craft to imported technology for the economic well being of the common man. In fine, Gandhian approach to rural development strives to reconstruct village republics which would be non-violent, self-governed and self-sufficient so far as the basic necessities of ruralites are concerned. Apart from creating a new socio-economic order, it endeavours to transform man; otherwise the changes in the socio-economic order will be short-

lived. Therefore, Gandhiji's ideas are more relevant today than ever before, specially his philosophy of self-reliance and decentralization for rural development.

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