



Gandhian Approach to Rural Development

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Abstract: Rural development implies both the economic betterment of people as well as greater social transformation. Increased participation of people in the rural development process, decentralization of planning, better enforcement of land reforms and greater access to credit and inputs go a long way in providing the rural people with better prospects for economic development. Improvements in health, education, drinking water, energy supply, sanitation and housing coupled with attitudinal changes also facilitate their social development. Gandhian strategy of rural reconstruction was based on Gram swaraj and swadeshi movement. In this paper the author emphasized the Gandhiji's holistic ideas such as Trusteeship, Swadeshi, Self-sufficiency, Bread Labour, and Gram Swaraj are briefly discussed and enlighten the reconstruction activities in Sevagram to implement the idea of Constructive programme.

Key words: trusteeship, swadeshi, full employment

Introduction: Rural development implies both the economic betterment of people as well as greater social transformation. Increased participation of people in the rural development process, decentralization of planning, better enforcement of land reforms and greater access to credit and inputs go a long way in providing the rural people with better prospects for economic development. Improvements in health, education, drinking water, energy supply, sanitation and housing coupled with attitudinal changes also facilitate their social development (Government of India, 1992:). Gandhian strategy of rural reconstruction was based on Gram swaraj and swadeshi movement. The basic principle of Gram swaraj as outlined by Gandhiji are trusteeship, swadeshi, full employment, bread labour, self-sufficiency, decentralization, 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.

Gandhi gave emphasis on truth and non-violence in every aspect of human life and said "the swaraj of my opinion will come only when all us are firmly persuaded that our swaraj has got to be won, worked and maintained through truth and ahimsa alone". Gandhian holistic ideas such as Trusteeship, Swadeshi, Self-sufficiency, Bread Labour, and Gram Swaraj are briefly described as follows:

Trusteeship: According to Gandhiji, trusteeship is a way of life rather than just a method to achieve a particular end. According to his holistic approach, "everything on this earth belongs to God and is from God. Therefore, it was for this people as a whole not for a particular individual. Everybody on this earth has a natural right to at least the basic necessities of life, just like the birds and the beasts have. If somehow, an individual had more than his



proportionate share, he was a trustee of that portion for God's people"(S.H.Patil:1983)

As land belongs to God and thus belongs to the community and therefore should be used for the welfare of the community. By peaceful non-violent persuasion, the hearts of land owners should be changed to accept the trusteeship idea. If this is not accepted by them, the poor should organize non-violent non co-operation and civil disobedience struggle against them. He believed that the rich cannot accumulate wealth without the co-operation of the poor.

Swadeshi:

Swadeshi is the moral principle underlying a decentralized self-sufficient economic structure. According to Gandhiji, "Swadeshi is that spirit in us which restrict us to the use and service of our immediate surroundings to the exclusion of the more remote"(Shashi Prabha Sharma:1992)

In economic terms, a strict adherence to Swadeshi doctrine paves the way to decentralized self-sufficient economy. The buyers and sellers having a concern for each other, jointly work for the development of their local areas using local resources. Gandhiji emphasized, "every village of India will almost be a self supporting and self-contained unit exchanging only such necessary commodities to other villages where they are not locally producible"(Shashi Prabha Sharma: 1992). The spirit of Swadeshi guiding man's economic behaviour leads to natural love and preference for local products and an attitude of service to the immediate neighbours. The consumers, for their requirements must buy from the local producers and thus support the local

farmers, artisans such as weavers, carpenters, cobblers, potters etc. Adherence to the principle of Swadeshi leads to a natural economic order and harmony.

The decentralized economic units would thus facilitate the best possible use of local raw materials, talents and manpower; promote occupational equilibrium, ecological balance and co-operative living. The village would be able to produce whatever is required, with the help of local resources and would be intended with whatever has been produced in closer surroundings.

Self-sufficiency:

Gandhiji insisted on the self-sufficiency of Indian villages. Self-sufficiency was advocated by him as a basic principle of life because dependence brings in exploitation which is the essence of violence. The poor is exploited by the rich, the village by the city and the undeveloped country by the developed ones due to lack of self-sufficiency.

Gandhiji's self-sufficient and non-violent village society could only be built on the basis of co-operation and not on conflict. According to him as far as possible, every activity in the village will be conducted on co-operative basis. Even in the field of agriculture, Gandhiji recommended co-operative farming which would save labour, capital, tools and provide employment to all adult Villagers and increase production also. He said, "we must attempt to prevent further fragmentation of land and encourage people to take to co-operative farming". He noted that when dependence becomes necessary in order to help society to maintain good order it is no longer dependence but it becomes cooperation.



Bread Labour:

Gandhiji developed his idea of Bread Labour. According to him each man must do physical labour to earn his bread. He called this as Bread Labour and said, "God has given everyone the capacity to work and earn more than his daily bread and whatsoever is ready to use that capacity is sure to find work"

The needs of the body should be supplied by the work of the body. He said, "one who does not work will not have the right to his bread. Even Lawyers, Engineers, Scientists, Professors, Poets will have to perform physical labour apart from their intellectual labour to earn their upkeep, they will not demand any payment or compensation for their intellectual labour (B.P.Pandey).

Grama Swaraj:

Gandhiji used the term 'Swaraj' with a definite meaning and significance i.e. self rule and self restraint. 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 clothing. Every member of the family will play the charka and spin yarn. 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.

The Ramraj of Gandhiji's dream was to be realised in three stages. In the initial stage, the goal was Swaraj i.e. to achieve independence for India. In the second stage, the objective was to bring about a predominantly non-violent state

through the evolution of Village Republics, i.e., Grama Swaraj. In the final stage the purpose was to achieve Ramraj, i.e., the Kingdom of God on this earth which would be the totally non-violent and purely democratic stateless society. Swaraj, Grama Swaraj and Ramraj are thus the three significant milestones in the process of achievement of the ideal social order of Gandhiji's vision.

Constructive Programme:

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, Village Sanitation, Removal of untouchability, the Role of Women, Education in Health and Hygiene, Prohibition and propagation of the Mother tongue.(Sriram Maheswari 1995)

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. The Constructive Programme may be called as construction of Poorna Swaraj or complete independence by truthful and non-violent means(M.K.Gandhi,1941).

The Constructive Programmes are briefly discussed as following.

1. *Khadi*
2. *Promotion of Village industries*
3. *Basic Adult education.*
4. *Village sanitation*
5. *Removal of untouchability*
6. *Role of Women*



7. *Education in health and hygiene*
8. *Prohibition*
9. *Propagation of Mother tongue*

1. Khadi:

Khadi mentality means decentralization of production and distribution of the necessities of life. Khadi has to play an important role in the village economy of India. It can give the poor at least three things: cloth, work and self-confidence to articulate themselves.

Gandhiji considered Khadi as an inevitable means for the all-round development of the Nation. He said in 1921, "Just as we cannot live without breathing and without eating, so it is impossible for us to attain economic independence and banish pauperism from this ancient land without reviving home-spinning. I hold the spinning wheel to be as much as a necessity in every household as the hearth. No other scheme that can be devised will ever solve the problem of the deepening poverty of the people.

In 1934 Gandhiji wrote in Harijan, "Khadi is the sun of the village solar system. The planets are the various industries which can support Khadi in return for the heat and substance they derive from it. Without it, the other industries cannot grow . . . and also without the revival of the other industries, khadi could not make further progress. For, villagers to be able to occupy their spare time profitably, the village life must be touched at all points.

2. Promotion of Village Industries:

According to Gandhiji village economy cannot be completed without the essential village industries such as hand-grinding, hand pounding, soap-

making, paper-making, match-making, tanning, oil-pressing etc. The village industries give employment to millions of people and provide an outlet for the creative skill and resourcefulness of the people.

Large scale industries will eliminate the spinning wheel and the handloom, and through the large-scale industries, the wealth will be concentrated in the hands of a few. On the contrary, the village industries will lead to distribution of national income among the millions of people in thousands of villages.

Under Village Industries Scheme, the individuals are to engage themselves in home industries in their homes and cottages. While the production is to be carried out on individually, the sharing of raw materials and marketing of finished goods are to be carried out collectively on a corporate basis. The All India village industries Association can guide such co-operative societies which are to be affiliated to or recognized by it. It should encourage and expand the existing village industries and revive certain dying or dead Village industries wherever it is possible and desirable. It should prescribe the minimum living wages for the workers engaged in the village industries.

3. Basic Adult Education:

According to Gandhiji, adult education should not end with bare acquaintance with the alphabet. The literary education of illiterate adults should go hand in hand with the spread of the knowledge which is useful to the villagers in their daily life. During the transitory stage towards complete literacy; the social workers shall engage themselves in adult education of the



illiterate people. This will lead to the eradication of illiteracy from the country.

Arithmetic, Geography, History and other subjects should be taught with a special reference to the village life and the village needs. If the adult education were to be village need-based education, the villagers would definitely take interest in it and would certainly view it as a useful treasure and pass it on to the others.

4. Village Sanitation:

The ideal village envisaged by Gandhiji could be constructed on the basis of the principles of public hygiene and sanitation. The houses which are to be built with locally available material will have sufficient light and ventilation. Each house or a cottage shall have a courtyard to grow vegetables for domestic consumption and to house cattle. The village streets will be kept clean. Each village shall have its own waterworks to ensure clean water supply.

The constructive workers shall make the villages models of cleanliness by teaching the villagers to maintain cleanliness in and around the village, including public wells, tanks and rivers.

Gandhiji's idea was not confined only to the removal of garbage from the lanes and streets of the villages but also to put the same to the productive use. If the garbages are scientifically converted into manure, the villages can not only make use of productive manure to grow more food but also keep the villages clean from dust, dirt and bad smell.

5. Removal of Untouchability:

Untouchability is a social evil and should not be looked upon as a mere

political necessity. The socio-economic evils associated with this system must be abolished. According to Gandhiji, there should be perfect social equality among the people in the society. No social superiority should be entertained by any individual or by a section of the society on the ground of birth or knowledge or religion or any other consideration. Gandhiji fought against social superiority in any form and carried on his crusade against the doctrine of racial superiority in South Africa and evil practices of untouchability in India.

In 1932, Gandhiji introduced Harijan Sevak Sangh, a non-political association for their self-improvement. He suggested their economic self-reliance through the adoption of spinning and weaving. He advocated non-violent methods to be adopted by them for their self-employment and for proper realization of their rights.

6. Role of Women:

Gandhiji believed that the same soul resides in both man and woman and both of them have equal opportunities to develop their personality. They are inseparable pair; and one cannot live without the other. Though both man and woman possess equal mental abilities, they differ in certain respects. Woman possesses greater degree of non-violence than man. As a mother, she exhibits greater degree of suffering, sacrifice and love. She is the mistress of the house, keeper and distributor of the bread in the house and takes greater interest in the management of the house. After completing her house work, she can take up some constructive activities. Gandhiji appreciated the active role of women in the non-violent struggle for independence to India. They must also participate in all



the nation building activities. In a non-violent society, moral strength is more important than physical strength. The women reveal powers of endurance, sacrifice, love and non-violence in greater measure than men.

As the future of the country is to be shaped by her children, the women should teach her children simplicity, faithfulness, non-violence, truth, fearlessness, dignity of labour and self-reliance. Such children will shape the destiny of the country on sound moral lines.

7. Education in Health and Hygiene:

According to Gandhiji it is the duty of the social workers to explain the simple rules of health and hygiene to the villagers. The way of life of the social workers should be a living message to others in health and hygiene. They should maintain good health by following the rules of health and nature cure. They have to make attempts to get purified water for the villagers.

Gandhiji emphasized to maintain public sanitation and hygiene in the villages, the social workers should take up brooms, pick axes and baskets to clean the public places, including tanks and wells. If they take up these implements with the same pride and dignity as they do with the pens, the problem of finance would not arise in maintaining cleanliness and hygiene in the villages. If they engage themselves in public cleanliness as self-appointed sweepers, the villagers will voluntarily join the movement for cleanliness in their villages and will definitely learn the lessons in public hygiene.

8. Prohibition:

Gandhiji considered drinks, intoxicating drugs and gambling as the social evils which eat into the very vitals of the social system and its values. He suggested the various measures to be undertaken to implement prohibition by the Government, Social organizations and Social Workers.

He realized the fact that the drinks and drugs harden the heart of man and endanger it with cruelty and is the root cause of many social evils. The moral loss is greater than the financial loss; the physical disease may harm body but the drinks and drugs sap both the body and the soul.

According to Gandhiji, for eradicating the drink evil, the Government should adopt the following measures.

- It is the moral duty of the Government to introduce prohibition even if it comes to loss huge resources from the sale of liquor. People can save their money if prohibition is introduced and can use their savings for constructive and creative purposes.
- The factory owners should create humane conditions for the workers by opening refreshment and recreation rooms so that the workers can comfortably relax. Thus the factory owners have social responsibility towards their workers to prevent the latter from evil habits and to channelize their energies for constructive work.
- The social workers have a great role in fulfilling the idea of prohibition. Gandhiji suggested



the social workers to visit the homes of the addicts and dissuade them from drinking habit. The liquor shop owners should be requested to close down their business and to take up some other occupation. The social workers should carry on picketing before liquor shops to persuade the addicts and shop owners. Public opinion should be cultivated against liquor business and drinking habit.

Besides the Social Workers, Doctors, Women especially house wives and students should also have the responsibility to save the country from this evil effect.

9. Propagation of the Mother Tongue:

Gandhiji was in favour of regional languages as media of instruction at all stages of education. The social workers have to carry on the fight for establishing the supremacy of the regional languages at all levels of education and administration.

According to him, mother tongue is a natural means to develop the mind of the child. It is a mere superstition to believe that a particular language is incapable of expression of scientific ideas. He explained this point by giving the examples of Russia and Japan which have achieved all their scientific progress without English as their medium. Hence the Indian languages are to be properly developed and the useful English books should be translated into regional languages for the sake of majority of the Nation.

Conclusion:

In the present paper, Gandhiji was very keen to bring about maximum

regional self-sufficiency in regard to food, clothing and shelter in rural areas. To solve rural poverty, he emphasized not only agriculture but also cottage and small scale industries. 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.

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