

Gandhian Economy in the Present Context

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Abstract

The concept of sustainable development was described by the 1987 Bruntland Commission Report as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (en.unesco.org). Although the concept has been popular since 1987, Mahatma Gandhi's views on economics were simple and straightforward and related with the theme of sustainable development. Gandhian ideology, on the economic issues, is based on three basic principles, viz., self-sufficiency, mass participation, and Indianisation (Swadeshi). Anyway, the present economy is influenced towards being a centralized, mechanized and globalised one. The objective of this paper is to analyze Gandhiji's economic thought keeping in mind the sustainable development present context.

Key words: Mahatma Gandhi, Economics/Economy, and Sustainable development.

Introduction

The concept of sustainable development was described by the 1987 Bruntland Commission Report as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (en.unesco.org). Although the concept has been

popular since 1987, Mahatma Gandhi's views on economics were simple and related to the present sustainable development.

Mahatma Gandhi was in favour of sustainable development in his time. According to Him (*Hindustan Standard, 6-12-1944*), industrialization and large-scale production refer only to comparatively recent growth but it would fail to develop the happiness of human beings. So he gave importance to village and cottage industries and the self-development of the villages which will sustain for long.

Objectives of the study & Methodology

There is no dearth of specific studies on Gandhiji and economic development, but the area of studies of reflection on variances between Gandhiji's thought of economic development and the present economic scenario has not yet been exhausted. Thus, the objectives of the research paper are:

- To understand the economic thought of Gandhi;
- To understand the variances between the Gandhiji's thought of economic development and the present economic scenario;

This research article is based on secondary sources such as books, journals, reports, etc.

Gandhiji's thoughts on economic development: Gandhi's views on economics were simple and straightforward which could make India economically self-sufficient. Gandhian economics is governed by two principles - (i) truth and (ii) non-violence. Mahatma Gandhi talked about true self-rule which was not merely political independence by Indians. Beyond that, it also meant a change in the economic pattern and political power through the moral revolution of the human beings upwards through society as a whole. It's not surprising that Gandhi talked about the highest ethical consciousness during that time. Ethical standards are not constant; rather vary from man to man. The different stages of ethical standards may be followed as the following:

Jungle raj → only for profit → profit in short term → profit in long term

Stakeholder concept

In the first stage, Jungle raj, the economic decision is driven by the philosophy of "might makes

right” where one treats another in an unkind and cruel way. Here one becomes violent to satisfy his/her own need.

In the second stage, only for profit, a person becomes ready to do anything to reach his economic goal until or unless he is interrupted by the law or by anything else.

In the third level of ethical standard, profit in the short term, people believe that “good business is good ethics”. In this stage also individual profit is given more priority than that ethics. But here a person tries to keep the balance between his rights with duties.

The fourth stage, profit in the long term, emphasizes that sound ethics is good business. Here an individual is concerned about the ethics to run the economic activities. An individual does not think for his own interest but for general interest. In this case, a sense of duty becomes more important than the feeling of right.

The stakeholder concept concentrates on profit to have a social as well as economic mission. This is the stage where an individual thinks about the associated stakeholders. The philosophy behind the concept is that if the environment is good then only it becomes possible to run the business activities successfully. Of course, Gandhi dreamed of an economy where all the participants would be highly conscious of their ethical duty at the highest level. His approach was ‘Participatory’, which means all should participate in the development process without damaging nature.

According to Gandhi (Hind Swaraj), instead of welcoming machinery as a boon, we should look upon it as evil. He added that it is not that we did not know how to invent machinery, but our forefathers rejected only to retain the ethical fibers instead of becoming slaves of some machines and equipment. Thus we should only do what we can with our hands and feet.

Mahatma Gandhi emphasized Labour intensive. According to Him “I am aiming, not at eradication of all machinery, but limitation.” He emphasized mass participation in the production process which would not only bring employability but also would give dignity to human beings. Gandhi also advised giving attention and effort to all the small-scale and unorganized industries so that economics should not be separated from the holy spirit of human beings. In his opinion, the violence of small enterprises is less injurious than the violence of the state. According to him, this can be best achieved when every individual feels an integral part of the community; when the production of goods is on a small scale and when the economy is local. But gradually these small-scale enterprises changed into big industries. Mahatma Gandhi’s concept of economic development was based on sustainability. According to him, "The world has enough for everyone's needs, but not everyone's greed.”

According to Gandhiji, true economics stands for social justice; it promotes the good of all equally including the weakest, and is indispensable for a decent life. To keep the equality he remarked (Young India, 26-3-1931), “the corresponding duty is to labor with my limbs and the corresponding remedy is to non-co-operate with him who deprives me of the fruit of my labour” (P-49). But income and wealth inequality have become the causes of concern for India even in other developing countries, where economic growth and income inequality go hand in hand in today’s economic atmosphere. Gandhiji deeply felt the lives of daily working poor people. He strongly believed that a man may become poor in terms of material goods and wealth only but not poor in spirit. Thus every person has a dignity of his own. To a certain extent, inequality of possessions was inevitable in society since all were not born with equal talents. Thus the poor man was not ashamed of his poverty for having lack of materials and everyone should accord dignity for his spirit.

Mahatma Gandhi said (Amrita Bazar Patrika, 2-8-1934) that “My objective is to reach your heart and convert you so that you may hold all your private property in trust for your tenants and use it primarily for their welfare.” The philosophy behind wealth distribution is nothing but the application of the concept of equality. He proposed trusteeship so that the desired equality may gradually be achieved non-violently. The need was put on a pedestal where no place was assigned to greed. Gandhiji's vision of the utopian world led him to raise this question “What would it profit a man if he gained the world but lost his soul into the bargain?”

Gandhiji wanted a revolutionary change in the education system. He emphasized on value based education for the upliftment of every individual. According to him, education should enhance a harmonious development of three H's—Head, Heart and Hand. He introduced *Nai Talim* that connects the basic education system with the ability to cope up with the changes around. *Nai Talim* was introduced to make all-round development of the body, mind and spirit of a child through handicraft works. Mahatma Gandhi always had a feeling for the poverty of Indian masses. In his autobiography, he clearly mentioned “The grinding poverty and starvation with which our country is afflicted is such that it drives more and more men every year into the ranks of the beggars whose desperate struggle for bread renders them insensible to all feelings of decency and self-respect. And our philanthropists, instead of providing work for them and insisting on their working for bread, give them alms”.

Conclusion:

His proposed economic principles still have potential to address a wide range of issues like poverty, marginalization, consumerism, profit maximization, environmental degradation; exploitation and even all the existing evils of the economic world can be addressed using his economic principles. In a country like India where crores of rural people are still in poverty, poverty alleviation programmes are having great relevance. With the eradication of poverty, “village *swaraj*” as viewed by Gandhiji may be achieved. Gandhiji’s idea of “village *swaraj* ” may be described as “my ideal of Village *Swaraj* is that it is a complete republic. Independent of its neighbours for its vital wants, and yet inter-dependent for many others in which dependence are necessary. Thus, the village's first concern will be to grow its own food crops and cotton for its cloth. It should have a reserve for its cattle, recreation and playground for adults and children”.

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