
GANDHI VIEWS ON RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Dr. Ananda Rao Nuthakki

Department of Economics, Acharya Nagarjuna University, Nagarjunanagar, AP
Email: anandaraonutakki@yahoo.co.in

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Abstract: This paper reveals about Gandhian views on Rural development. Gandhi took the view of the maximization of social welfare and for this he gives first importance to the welfare of the individuals by reducing inequalities in income and wealth. According to Gandhi every person should be provided with minimum necessities that is food, cloth and shelter in rural areas. Gandhi concentration of wealth to a few groups of people certainly will shelter the dream of a society, which will be communists in Nature. Gandhi is in favour of the self-sufficient village economy where the villages will be the independent economic units. He wanted diversified economic activities in the village and they stood for all round development of rural India. In this context, Gandhi's sublime vision gives us a rare insight into the future of mankind! Gandhi belongs to advance India and not past India. Gandhi is not dead his views are eternal.

Keywords: Rural Development, Inequalities, Social Welfare, Development of Rural India.

Introduction: India is the land of villages, even today India has seven lakh villages, where 72% of her population lives in Rural India. Rural sector plans a significant role in Indian economy. Though the share of agriculture to GDP has reduced from 51% in 1950-51 to 26% in 2003, it is still the backbone of the Indian economy. More than 56 per cent of population directly or indirectly depends on agriculture. It has also contributed by supplying food for the survival of the entire population of India.

The production of food grain from a mere 54 million tonnes in 1950-51 has reached to 212 million tonnes 2003-04. But the starvation deaths of farmers, unorganized labour often repeats itself. The magnitude of poverty, illiteracy, ill health, unemployment is of higher order in the rural areas when compared to the urban areas.

Rural population is composed of agricultural producers. Marginal farmers. landless labourers, tenant cultivators and village artisans labour. Majority of these rural folk are not able to meet their day-to-day requirements from their own sources of income, not to speak of investing in other productive enterprises for improving their economic conditions.

Importance of Rural Development: The importance of rural development in a country like India, which is predominately rural, need not be over emphasized, as per the 2001 census. 72 per cent of people in India live in rural areas. Besides, the sharp incidence of poverty in the countryside rather than in urban areas emphasis the supreme need for an accelerated, rural development. According to the economic changes 27.09 per cent of rural population is estimated to live below the poverty line as against 23.62 per cent in urban areas.

The Rural people of India, more particularly the Indian farmer is born in debt, lives in debt, and dies in debt. In 1950-51 about 20.9 million hectares of land was irrigated, which accounted to only 18 per cent of the total cropped area but in 1999-2000 about 94.7 million hectares are irrigated which was nearly 54% of the gross cropped area in the country. This brings out the fact that 50 years of planning has contributed to only 54% of irrigation of gross cropped area and still it may take another 50 years for another 48% of lands to bought under cultivation.

Gandhi who realized the importance of villages and said that India lies in her villages. For Gandhi, the spirit and the soul of India rested in the village communities. "The true India is to be found not in its few

cities, but in its seven hundred thousand villages. If the villages perish, India will perish too." Swadeshi is a programme for long-term survival.

Since majority of the people in our country live in villages, the unit of development in Gandhian technique was the village itself. "Identifying himself with India's poor, he turned the thoughts of the nation to the needs for rural millions for whom "life was an eternal compulsory fast", who "live because they can not die at will". Hence he visualized that, 'the development of the country lies in the development of the rural masses and rural areas". This is because, they are the backbone of the country".¹

Gandhian strategy for rural development includes the development of the village and small scale industries, village handicrafts, development of agriculture, improvement of rural health, education and sanitation, betterment of the backward communities, specially harijans democratic decentralization of rural development, even distribution of income, wealth and co-operation at all levels accordingly.

A self-contained village according to Gandhi had immense possibilities for growth, but difficulty arises in defining a unit which could be considered self-contained. Gandhi thought that an area covered by a radius of eight kilometers could be considered the basic unit, of which the centre was not fixed. Each individual of the family could also in a way be considered the centre of such units. Each basic unit would have a natural consumption pattern depending upon its geology, physiological and temperamental conditions of the people, their customs and traditions, occupational pattern and economic undertaking, and educational and cultural attainments. These factors determine the mode of living of the community and therefore its consumption requirements and pattern of consumption. In self-contained basic units the well integrated production plans would necessarily be linked with natural consumption requirements of the region, and production would essentially be restricted and guided by the resources locally available. The schedule of production possibilities of an area would be drawn on the basis of the available.

The problem of unemployment, specially the disguised one, works a serious problem in rural areas in Indian and it is the basic cause for rural poverty. We require dynamic plan to use the vendable dynamo of human energy which can become a moving devil. Vast masses of men cannot remain without work. Gandhiji said, "Swaraj has no meaning for the million if they do not know how to employ their enforced idleness. To a people famishing and idle, the only acceptable form in which God can dare appear is work and promise of food as wages. God created man to work for his food, and said that those who are without work were thieves. Eighty per cent of Indians are compulsorily thieves half the year". He continued, "I have found it impossible to soothe suffering patients with a song from Kabir. The hungry millions ask for one poem-invigorating food. They cannot be given it. They must earn it. And they can earn only by the sweat of their brow".²

Gandhiji explained this problem vividly in the following words, "Imagine therefore what a calamity it must be to have 300 million unemployed several millions becoming degraded every day for want of employment devoid of self respect, devoid of faith in God, I dare not take them the message of God. I can take before them a message of God only by taking the message of sacred work before them. It is good enough to talk of God whilst we are sitting here after a nice breakfast after that".³ Under these circumstances, people and sometimes nations come to lose their confidence in peaceful change through democratic and non-violent means and so become desperate and opt to resort to force.

The development of village industries would not only solve the problem of rural unemployment but also enable us to balance our occupational pattern. Revitalization of our rural areas in every way is the only answer to change favourably our occupations structure. We have to provide not only primary amenities such as good water, clean roads, electricity education and health centres but also fuller gainful employment to the working population in the diversified rural economy, besides agriculture. Against the backdrop of this reality the development of village industries, therefore, assumes significance. The aim of the Government policy, should, therefore be as Gandhiji observed nearly half a century ago to

“return to the villages the industries that have been cruelly and thoughtlessly snatched away from them by the city dwellers”.⁴

Gandhi believed that India’s socio-economic construction toward swaraj, i.e. political independence or self-government, depended on freeing itself from modern civilization. “If British rule were replaced tomorrow by Indian rule based on modern methods. India would be no better, except that she would be able to retain some of the money that is drained away to England; but then India would only become a second or fifth nation of Europe or America”, Gandhi’s socio-economic construction was, needless to say, Swadeshi, or self-reliance, of which village manufacturing industries like charkha and khadi have their major places.

Gandhi advocated that, to reconstruct the internal economy as the “strongest bulwark”, against economic drain by Britain, India should first cease to be dependent upon foreign cloth. “India cannot be free so long as India voluntarily encourages or tolerates the economic drain which has been going on for the past century and a half. Boycott of foreign goods means no more and no less than boycott of foreign cloth. Foreign cloth constitutes the largest drain voluntarily permitted by us”. The boycott of foreign cloth was, indeed, resolved at a convention of Indian National Congress, even before Gandhi came back home from South Africa to take the leadership of independent movement in India in 1915. The Calcutta session in 1906 produced resolutions: 1) swaraj, 2) boycott of British products, 3) Swadeshi (or use of Indian products) and 4) national education,

In the first non-violent resistance movement led by Gandhi, on the other hand, revival and promotion of charkha and khadi were thought to be the most important. They were about to be almost driven away by the “machinery of Manchester,” disappearing in the midst of modern civilization. Gandhi wrote in his autobiography, “I am, therefore, concentrating my attention on the production of Khadi. I swear by this form of Swadeshi, because through it I can provide work to the semi-starved, semi-employed women of India My idea is to get these women to spin yarn and to clothe the people of India with Khadi woven out of it”.⁵

Village Industries and Village Service: In 1934, Gandhi resigned from the Indian National Congress over his differences with other leaders on the purity of ends and means. He established the “All India Village Industries Association” at Wardha and devoted most of his time towards reorganization of Indian villages. Gandhiji started experiments in rural lifestyle such as revival of village crafts and agro processing industries, village cleanliness, diet reforms, etc., so that villages could be developed as ideal surroundings to live in. He concentrated on the removal of untouchability also and to give the equal respect of people and distributed the work.

Village Development & Economy of Country:

The Present State in India: Little do town-dwellers know how the semi-starved masses of India are slowly sinking to lifelessness. Little do they know that their miserable comfort represents the brokerage, they get for the work they do for the foreign exploiter, that the profits and the brokerage are sucked from the masses. Little do they realize that the Government established by law in British India is carried on for this exploitation of the masses. No sophistry, on jugglery in figures can explain away the evidence that the skeletons in many villages present to the naked eye. I have no doubt whatsoever that both England and the town-dwellers of India will have to answer, if there is a God above, for this crime against humanity which is perhaps unequalled in history.

The Root Cause: The present distress is undoubtedly insufferable. Pauperism must go, but industrialism is no remedy. The evil does not lie in the use of bullock-carts. It lies in our selfishness and want of consideration for our neighbours. If we have no love for our neighbours, no change, however revolutionary, can do us any good. These agencies necessarily advance our moral growth or are indispensable for our material progress.

Machinery in the Ideal Condition: “Ideally would you not me out all machinery?” Ideally, however, I would rule out all machinery, even as I would reject this very body, which is not helpful to salvation, and seek tile absolute liberation of the soul. From that point of view, I would reject all machinery, but machines will remain, because like the body, they are inevitable. The body itself, itself, as I told you is the purest piece of mechanism; but if it is a hindrance to the highest flights of the soul, it has to be rejected.

Machinery, The Practical Side: Machinery has its place; it has come to stay. But it must not be allowed to displace necessary human labour. An improved plough is a good thing. But if by some chances, one man could plough up by some mechanical invention of his the whole of the land of India, and control all the agricultural produce and if the millions had no other occupation, they would starve, and being idle, they would become dunces, as many have already becomes. There is hourly danger of many more being reduced to that unenvisable state.

Large-scale Production and our Economic Problem: Our mill cannot today spin enough for our wants, and if they did, they will not keep down prices unless they were compelled. They are frankly money-makers and will not therefore regulate prices according to the needs of the nation. Hand-spinning is therefore designed to the put millions of rupees in the hands of poor villagers. Every agricultural country requires a supplementary industry to enable the peasants to utilize the spare hours. Such industry for India has always been spinning. Is it such a visionary ideal - an attempt to revive an ancient occupation whose destruction has brought on slavery, pauperism and disappearance of the inimitable artistic talents which was once all expressed in the wonderful fabric of India and which was the envy of the world?

The Economics of Khadi: The science of Khadi requires decentralisation of production and consumption. Consumption should take place as nearly as possible where Khadi is produced. The central fact of Khaddar is to make every village self-supporting for its food and clothing. Self-sufficient khadi will never succeed without cotton being grown by spinners themselves or practically in every village. It means decentralization of cotton cultivation so far at least as self-sufficient Khadi is concerned.

Khaddar does not seek to destroy all machinery but it dies regulate its use and check its weedy growth. It uses machinery for the service of the poorest in their own cottages. The wheel is itself an requisite piece of machinery.

The Principle of Planning for India: The Government has been introducing schemes of industrializing the country for the maximum utilization of her raw materials, not of her abundant and unused manpower which is left to (take care of itself as best as it can). Can such schemes be considered Swadeshi?

Gandhiji remarked that the question had been well put. He did not exactly know what the Government plan was. But he heartily endorsed toe proposition that any plan which exploited the raw materials of a country and neglected the potentially more powerful manpower was lopsided and could never lend to establish human equality.

Decentralization and Non-violence: I suggest that, if India is to evolve along nonviolent lines, it will have to decentralize many things. Centralization cannot be sustained and defended without adequate force. Simple homes from which there is nothing to take away require no policing; the palaces of the rich must have strong guards to protect them against dacoity, So must huge factories. Rurally organized India will run less risk of foreign invasion than urbanized India, will equipped with military, naval and air forces.

Remember also that your nonviolence cannot operate effectively unless you have faith in the spinning wheel. I would ask you to read Hind Swaraj with my eyes and see therein the chapter on how to make

India nonviolent. You cannot build non-violence on a factory civilization, but it can be built on self-contained villages. Even if Hitler was so minded, he could not devastate even hundred thousand nonviolent villages. He would himself become nonviolent in the process. Rural economy as I have conceived it, eschews exploitation altogether, and exploitation is the essence of violence. You have, therefore, to be rural-minded before you can be nonviolent, and to be rural-minded you have to have faith in the spinning wheel. The end to be sought is human happiness combined with full mental and moral growth. I use the adjective moral as synonymous with spiritual. This end can be achieved under decentralization. Centralization as a system is inconsistent with nonviolent structure of society.

Co-operative Effort: Some women workers who earn part of their living by weaving mats were advised by you the other day to work on cooperative principles. Bengal's agriculture has been reduced to an uneconomic proposition through extreme fragmentation of holdings. Would you advise farmers also to adopt cooperative methods?

Communal Unity: Everybody is agreed about the necessity of this unity. But everybody does not know that unity does not mean political unity which may be imposed. It means an unbreakable heart unity. The first thing essential for achieving such unity is for every Congressman, whatever his religion may be, to represent in his own person Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Zoroastrian, Jew, etc., shortly, every Hindu and non-Hindu. He has to feel his identity with every one of the millions of the inhabitants of Hindustan. In order to realize this, every Congressman will cultivate personal friendship with persons representing faiths other than his own. He should have the same regard for the other faiths as he has for his own. In such a happy state of things there would be no disgraceful cry at the stations such as "Hindu water" and "Muslim water" or "Hindu tea" and "Muslim tea". There would be no separate rooms or pots for Hindus and non-Hindus in schools and colleges, no communal schools, colleges and hospitals. The beginning of such a revolution has to be made by Congressmen without any political motive behind the correct conduct. Political unity will be its natural fruit.⁶

Removal of Untouchability: At this time of the day, it is unnecessary to dilate upon the necessity of the removal of this blot and curse upon Hinduism. Congressmen have certainly done much in this matter. But I am sorry to have to say that many Congressmen have looked upon this item as a mere political necessity and not something indispensable, so far as Hindus are concerned, for the very existence of Hinduism. If Hindu Congressmen take up the cause for its own sake, they will influence the so-called "Sanatanis" far more extensively than they have hitherto done. They should approach them not in a militant spirit but, as befits their non-violence, in a spirit of friendliness. And so far as the Harijans are concerned, every Hindu should make common cause with them and befriend them in their awful isolation-such isolation as perhaps the world has never seen in the monstrous immensity one witnesses in India. I know from experience how difficult the task is. But it is part of the task of building the edifice of Swaraj. And the road to Swaraj is steep and narrow. There are many slippery ascents and many deep chasms. They have all to be negotiated with unflinching step before we can reach the summit and breathe the fresh air of freedom.

Prohibition: Although like communal unity and removal of untouchability prohibition has been on the Congress programme since 1920, Congressmen have not taken the interest they might have taken in this very vital social and moral reform. If we are to reach our goal through nonviolent effort, we may not leave to the future government the fate of lakhs of men and women who are laboring under the curse of intoxicants and narcotics.

Medical men can make a most effective contribution towards the removal of this evil. They have to discover ways of weaning the drunkard and the opium-addict from the curse. Women and students have a special opportunity in advancing this reform. By many acts of loving service they can acquire on addicts a hold which will compel them to listen to the appeal to give up the evil habit.

Khadi: Khadi' is a controversial subject. Many people think that in advocating 'Khadi'. I am sailing against a headwind and am sure to sink the ship of Swaraj and that I am taking the country to the dark

ages. I do not propose to argue the case for 'Khadi' in this brier survey. I have argued it sufficiently elsewhere. Here I want to show what every Congressman, and for that matter every Indian, can do to advance the cause of 'Khadi'. It connotes the beginning of economic freedom and equality of all in the country. "The proof of the pudding is in the eating."

Relevance of M.K. Gandhi's Ideal of Self-sufficient Village Economy in the 21st Century: Economic Development of a country depends on the proper utilisation of resources (both human and non-human). India, at the time of her independence, had an economy with a low level of economic and technological development, low per capital income, slow pace of development of economic and social institutions and outdated methods of production techniques. Our objective then was to attain and accelerate the economic development of the country. At the time, while India started formulating planning strategies in 1951-52 there was debate on India's development problems. The debate centred around the Gandhian approach and the Nehruvian approach. Nehru adopted modernizing approach of the planning. i.e., socialist framework of economic policy. He also viewed planning as a way of avoiding the unnecessary rigorous industrial transition. He believed that this way would affect the people living in the rural areas. He also learned lesson from Gandhi and accordingly initiated policy which centred around the rural masses.

Gandhian view of Self-Sufficient Village Economy: Gandhi holds the view of the maximization of social welfare and for this he gives prime importance to the welfare of the individuals by reducing inequalities in income and wealth. According to Gandhi every person should be provided with bare minimum necessities i.e. food, shelter, and clothing. Concentration of wealth to a few groups of people certainly will shatter the dream of a society which will be socialist in nature. Gandhi is in favour of the self-sufficient village economy where the villages will be the independent economic units. In agriculture that techniques will be adopted, which will not deplete the soil and pollute the environment. For this farmers should use eco-friendly production technique by using lesser and lesser amount of fertilizers, insecticides and pesticides. He prefers well irrigation instead of large hydroelectric projects since this will read to exploitation. As regards the ownership of land holding, Gandhi is against the zamindari system and ownership of land should go to the actual tillers of the soil. He also viewed that there should be communal ownership of land for balanced cultivation and the surplus land, if any must be distributed to the rest of the village communities.

Conclusion: Gandhi was very keen to bring about maximization of social welfare, he gives pre-eminence to the welfare of Individuals by reducing inequalities in income and wealth. Gandhi says that very person should provided minimum necessities that is food, cloth and shelter in rural areas. To solve rural poverty and removal of untouchability. He emphasized not only agriculture but also cottage and small scale industries. He views on non-agricultural aspect of the rural economy also. He wanted diversified economic activities in the rural villages and so stood for all round development of rural India.

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