

The Features Of Mahatma Gandhi's Economic Thought And Its Relevance In Present Day Context In Indian Economy With Special Reference To Gram Swaraj

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Abstract

Although Mahatma Gandhi is primarily known as 'Father of our Nation' as well as the most prominent freedom fighter of Indian freedom struggle, But along with his political ideology his economic ideas basically emphasizing on self-reliance, self-dependency are very important even on present day context of economic and social developments. He had very definite ideas on the appropriate ways of his country's economic and social developments which anticipated major elements of the present developments strategies of India as well as a number of other developing countries. Among his various economic ideas one major concept 'Gram Swaraj' is very significant which Gandhi presented as the conception of his ideal of stateless democracy and a self-sufficient village economy. The present paper will focus on the prime features of Gandhian economic thoughts and its relevance in present day Indian economic context.

Key words- Gandhian economy, Gram Swaraj, Self-sufficient village economy, self-reliant

Introduction

“According to me, the economic Constitution of India and for the matter of the World should be such that no one under it should suffer from want of food and clothing.” - Mahatma Gandhi. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi popularly known as father of our nation and as 'bapu' among the masses of India was also a great philosopher who had played major role in the national movement that defeated the British colonialism in India. With his truth and non-violence approaches he engaged in non-cooperation, peaceful struggle against British rule. Although he was not economist but he has given economic vision which if implemented would relieved India from many socio-economic problems. With a political vision to independent India from British colonialism, throughout his life Gandhi sought to fight against Indian poverty, backwardness, and socio-economic challenges as a part of his wider involvement in the Indian independence movement. Gandhian economic ideas such as Gram

Swaraj which he presented as rural democracy, the principles of swadeshi, use of commodities which were produced within our own country etc. Thus, all of this Gandhian economic philosophy more relevant even in the present day context of Indian economy. Gandhi was primarily interested in India and its problems and was aware of the socio-economic consequences of the British rule. Moreover Gandhi preferred to bring economic changes in a truthful and non-violent manner as well as wanted to rebuild Indian economy on purely Indian pattern. So, here is an attempt to discuss about Gandhian economic philosophy as well its relevance in the present day context of Indian economy.

*"I would like to say to the diligent reader of my writings and to others who are interested in them that I am not at all concerned with appearing to be consistent. In my search after Truth I have discarded many ideas and learnt many new things. Old as I am in age, I have no feeling that I have ceased to grow inwardly or that my growth will stop at the dissolution of the flesh. What I am concerned with is my readiness to obey the call of Truth, my God, from moment to moment, and, therefore, when anybody finds any inconsistency between any two writings of mine, if he has still faith in my sanity, he would do well to choose the latter of the two on the same subject."*¹

2. Objectives Of The Study

- To gain familiarity with the economic thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi.
- To explain the key features of economic ideas of Mahatma Gandhi.
- To know about the relevance of Gandhi's economic thought in present day context of Indian economy.

3. Methodology And Sources

The sources of data are mainly secondary sources. The researchers depended mainly on articles, Published Books, journals, Magazines etc. Also the researchers followed both historical and analytical methodology to prepare this article.

4. Discussion

Gandhiji was not a scholar in the sense in which Karl Marx was. He did not try to present a pre-worked-out, complete and self-contained theory of his economic ideas. In that sense he was not the father of a 'systematic body of thought.' He himself did not very much like the term 'Gandhism.' He was seeking his own solutions to the concrete problems as he found them in the Indian situation,² and though many may not accept the solutions which he proposed, he must receive credit for being the first to identify some of the basic issues facing the Indian economy with its background of colonial exploitation, underdevelopment, large-scale unemployment and underemployment. He was not content with laying the burden of the blame at the door of the foreign rule. He was seeking to provide an alternative which would give the masses a chance to achieve a higher standard of living, consistent with the maintenance of individual freedom and human dignity.

¹ Harijan 20. 4. 1933-p. 2.

² Gandhiji admitted that he had not read books on economics by well-known authorities such as Mill, Marshall, Adam Smith and host of other authors (Tendulkar Vol. 1-p. 236). While interned during the second world war, he read the first volume of Capital and Works by Engels, Lenin, Stalin and Bernard Shaw (D. G. Tendulkar, Mahatma Vol. VI, 1953, p. 293).

Gandhiji's approach to most of the economic problems was essentially practical. Unfortunately, this is not commonly recognized. The limitations of his solutions were generally due to the limitations of the situation. The only important issue on which his approach was rather rigid and impracticable was in relation to the need for control of population. According to Gandhiji, if every man was prepared to work and if men did not hanker after a progressively increasing standard of living, the population problem need not be very acute. Further, even if there was need to control the population, this check should be exercised through moral restraint and not through the use of the means of birth control. It is a pity that Gandhiji should have developed this blind spot. The struggle for population control which India is waging and will have to wage seriously for decades to come would have been greatly helped if Gandhiji had given his moral support to the use of contraceptives. Unfortunately, this was not to be and ignorance and prejudice continue to be the stumbling block in the programme of family planning. In relation to all other problems Gandhiji's approach was very much practical.³

The term *Gandhian philosophy* was coined by *J.C Kumarappa* one among the prominent disciple of Gandhi. Before discuss about Gandhi as a economist we have to discuss about all his philosophy specially on economic perspectives. It is noteworthy that regarding his economic thought Gandhi was greatly influenced by two prominent personalities of his ideals- Ruskin and Tolstoy. Mahatma Gandhi derived the concept of egalitarianism, simplicity and asceticism from the philosophy of Tolstoy, which later on become the foundation of his economic ideas. And on the other hand, he developed a distaste progress from the philosophy of Ruskin. Simply, Gandhi's economic philosophy was a part of his life which reflected in his livelihood as well. The four major pillars on which his economic ideas are based on- Truth, Non-violence, Dignity of labor and simplicity. Thus, Gandhian economic philosophy occupied man and their thoughts as well as individual happiness a prominent position more than wealth. Here, we are going to discuss some of the notable economic ideas of Gandhi –

4.1 The key points of Gandhi's economic thought-

- **Practical application of the economic laws of a country:** According to Gandhi, the economic policies that adopted by a country should in favor of the nature. It's shouldn't harm the environment and its components. He suggested that economic laws should be formulated according to the laws of nature. He strictly prohibited the conflict between the laws of nature and laws of economy and offered a balance between both of them.
- **Non-violent economy:** Gandhi was primarily known for his non violence approach. He advocated his non violence approach in terms of economic perspectives as well. According to him there is no any industry without certain violence. Therefore, he wanted to minimize it. He also opposed capitalism as it resulted in human exploitation of human labor.
- **Gandhi's believes on Decentralization and Khadi industry:** Mahatma Gandhi believed in small scale decentralized and small scale cooperative organization to correct the evils of centralized industries. Gandhi was not in favor of large scale industrialization; instead, he was for the development of cottage and rural industries. He strongly believed that khadi industry would save millions of people from starvation and would supplement the earnings of poor people. Thus, he believed that

³ DEVDUTTA DABHOLKAR "ECONOMIC THOUGHT OF GANDHI" pp. 130-131. <https://www.asj.upd.edu.ph/mediabox/archive/ASJ-07-03-1969/dabholkar-economic%20thought%20gandhi.pdf>

the decentralization of economic power through the development of cottage and rural industries will obliterate the concentration of economic power in a few hands.

Gandhi quoted as "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 dacoits. So must huge factories. Rurally organized India will run less risk of foreign invasion than urbanized India, well equipped with military, naval and air forces."⁴

- **Village Sarvodaya or well-being for all:** Mahatma Gandhi advocated the philosophy of village Sarvodaya, which indicates a better quality of life and equal opportunities for the development of all. By his philosophy of Sarvodaya Mahatma Gandhi wanted the revival of ancient village communities, which ensure the balance between production and consumption as well as distribution and avoid harm on nature and its economic production.
- **Gandhi's views on trusteeship:** Gandhi's economic policies also believed in the trusteeship of wealth. The concept of his trusteeship implies the inherited of wealth which belonged to the entire society and generations and therefore they must be spent on the welfare of all. According to him, the ownership of the wealth is transferrable.
- **Gandhi's ideas on labor welfare:** Gandhi's economic ideas talks about the labor welfare as well. According to him, Capital should be labors served; not its masters. He always pleaded for shorter hours of work and more leisure so that workers might not be reduced to the condition of beasts.
- **Gandhi's views on simplicity in livelihood:** Mahatma Gandhi's economic ideas proposed a simple living style. He was against of western materialism and firmly believed that industrialization had increased human wants. According to him, happiness lay in the curtailments of wants, not in their multiplication.

4.2 The concept of Gram Swaraj and Self-sufficient village economy:

The concept of Gram Swaraj and the self-sufficient village economy was a crucial aspect of Mahatma Gandhi's vision for India's development and social transformation. Mahatma Gandhi, also known as the Father of the Indian Nation, was a prominent leader in India's struggle for independence from British rule. He believed that true independence and progress could only be achieved if the country's rural villages were empowered and self-reliant. Gandhi Denoted that The unit of society should be a village or call it a manageable small group of people who would, in the ideal, be self-sufficient (in the matter of their vital requirements) as a unit.⁵

Gram Swaraj, which translates to "self-rule of villages," was a fundamental part of Gandhi's vision for a decentralized and egalitarian society. He believed that the key to India's progress lay in the well-being of its rural communities. Gandhi advocated for the revitalization of villages through their self-governance and self-sufficiency. He envisioned a society where the power to make decisions and govern was decentralized, and local communities had a significant say in their own affairs.

⁴ Horijon, 30-12-'39, p. 391

⁵ Towards New Horizons, 1959, p. 8

4.3 Some of the core principles of Gram Swaraj included:

- ❖ **Swadeshi:** Gandhi emphasized the use of locally produced goods and resources to promote village industries and self-reliance. He encouraged people to boycott foreign goods and instead support locally made products.
- ❖ **Village Industries:** Gandhi emphasized the importance of promoting small-scale cottage industries in villages. These industries would provide employment opportunities for villagers and reduce the dependency on urban centers.
- ❖ **Khadi:** Khadi, hand-spun and hand-woven cloth, became a symbol of self-reliance and self-sufficiency. Gandhi promoted the use of khadi as a way to support village industries and reduce dependence on imported textiles.
- ❖ **Panchayati Raj:** Gandhi advocated for a system of local self-government known as Panchayati Raj, where decisions were made at the village level by elected representatives. This was intended to empower villagers and ensure their active participation in governance.
- ❖ **Decentralization:** Gandhi believed in decentralizing power and resources to the grassroots level to avoid the concentration of authority in the hands of a few. He wanted decision-making to be participatory and inclusive.
- ❖ **Agriculture and Sustainability:** Gandhi stressed the importance of sustainable agricultural practices and encouraged farmers to adopt traditional and eco-friendly farming methods.

The concept of Gram Swaraj was not just about economic self-sufficiency but also about achieving social and moral progress. Gandhi envisioned a society where people lived in harmony with nature, practiced non-violence (Ahimsa), and upheld principles of truth and non-exploitation.

While the complete realization of Gram Swaraj remained a challenge during Gandhi's time, his ideas and principles continue to inspire various grassroots movements and development initiatives in India and beyond. The idea of empowering rural communities, promoting self-sufficiency, and decentralizing governance remains relevant in the pursuit of sustainable and equitable development.

4.4 Relevance of Gandhian philosophy in the present day context of Indian economy:

The great economic ideology of Gandhi enhanced the development of rural areas and minorities by giving them equal and sustainable earnings, therefore question presents itself: What is his relevance of economic thought of Gandhi today for Indian economy. Although many economists tend to dismiss Gandhian Economics as utopian in nature. They regard Gandhi as a medieval mystic who tried to put back the clock of human progress. But much of the criticism is based on gross misunderstanding of Gandhi's views. It requires sympathy, understanding and vision to appreciate Gandhi's economic philosophy. Gandhian economics is based on ethical values and the dignity of man and it is regarded as the only enduring alternative to prevalent western notions of scientific socialism and communism.

For a developing country like India Gandhi's economic philosophy is much relevant in terms of modern economic perspectives. His economic philosophies basically, swadeshi and khadi, The Sarvodaya or well-being for all as well as individual welfare.

Gandhian philosophy remains relevant in the present-day context of the Indian economy for several reasons. Despite significant socio-economic changes since Gandhi's time, many of his principles and ideas continue to hold value and offer valuable insights to

address contemporary challenges. Here are some aspects of Gandhian philosophy that are relevant today:

Sustainability and Environment: Gandhi's emphasis on sustainability, conservation, and respect for nature is highly relevant in the face of environmental challenges and climate change. His advocacy for simple living and self-sufficiency aligns with the growing awareness of ecological balance and the need to transition to greener practices.

Rural Development and Self-sufficiency: India's economic growth has been largely concentrated in urban areas, leading to rural-urban disparities. Gandhi's focus on empowering villages and promoting local industries through self-sufficiency can help address these disparities and foster inclusive development.

Inclusive Growth and Poverty Alleviation: Gandhi's vision of Gram Swaraj and decentralized governance can contribute to inclusive growth by giving a voice to marginalized communities and ensuring their active participation in decision-making processes.

Ethical Business Practices: Gandhi's emphasis on truth, non-violence, and ethical conduct in all aspects of life, including business, can be a guiding principle for responsible corporate behavior and sustainable economic practices.

Employment Generation: Gandhi's promotion of small-scale industries and cottage enterprises can be beneficial in generating employment and addressing the issue of unemployment and underemployment in India.

Rural Entrepreneurship: Gandhi's encouragement of village-level entrepreneurship and self-reliance can serve as a foundation for promoting local startups and enterprises, contributing to economic growth and reducing migration to urban areas.

Swadeshi and Make in India: The concept of Swadeshi (using and promoting locally made products) aligns with the modern-day "Make in India" campaign, which aims to boost domestic manufacturing and reduce dependence on imports.

Community-based Development: Gandhi's idea of Panchayati Raj and local self-government resonates with the growing emphasis on community-based development and participatory governance in various policy initiatives.

Non-violence and Conflict Resolution: In a diverse and complex country like India, Gandhi's principles of non-violence and dialogue can help foster social cohesion and address conflicts peacefully.

Well-being and Happiness: Gandhi's focus on the holistic well-being of individuals and communities, rather than merely economic growth, aligns with contemporary discussions on measuring progress and development beyond GDP.

While not all aspects of Gandhian philosophy may be directly applicable to the complexities of the modern Indian economy, the core principles of sustainability, self-reliance, inclusivity, and ethical conduct continue to provide valuable guidance for a more equitable and sustainable economic development in India. By integrating some of these principles into policy-making and individual actions, India can move closer to Gandhi's vision of a harmonious and self-reliant society.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, Mahatma Gandhi's economic thought was deeply rooted in principles of sustainability, self-reliance, and inclusivity. His vision of a self-sufficient village economy, known as Gram Swaraj, emphasized the empowerment of rural communities and the promotion of small-scale industries. Gandhi's economic philosophy transcended mere material growth, focusing on the holistic well-being of individuals and communities, driven by ethical conduct and non-violence.

Gandhi's ideas continue to hold relevance in the present-day context of the Indian economy. Concepts like sustainable development, environmental conservation, and community-based initiatives find resonance in the pursuit of a more equitable and ecologically responsible future. His emphasis on ethical business practices, the promotion of local industries, and the uplifting of marginalized communities offers valuable insights for fostering inclusive growth and poverty alleviation.

Though challenges in implementing his complete economic vision persist, Gandhian principles remain a source of inspiration for policymakers, entrepreneurs, and activists alike. By blending Gandhian ideals with modern approaches, India can chart a path towards a more balanced, self-sufficient, and harmonious economic future, in line with the timeless wisdom of one of its greatest leaders, Mahatma Gandhi.

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