



Gandhiji and Rural Development

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Abstract: *The problem of Rural Development has been attracting the attention of the planners and policy makers in India ever since the country has attained independence and wedded to planned economic development. Several strategies have been formulated and implemented from time to time to achieve rural development, primary objective being improvement of physical well-being and quality of life of rural poor and their contribution to the national economy. Further, rural development encompasses improved productivity, increased employment and higher incomes to the rural poor besides providing minimum acceptable levels of food, shelter and health. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi who was a great freedom fighter and popularly known as Father of Nation, had certain positive economic ideas which have considerably moulded economic thinking and economic policies in India. Prior to independence, Mahatma Gandhi started constructive programme of rural reconstruction and therefore he can be said to have conceived the idea of Integrated Rural Development much earlier. Gandhian approach to rural development involve rebuilding of every aspect of human life i.e., social, economic and political and envisages a society based on self-supporting and self-governing villages. An attempt has been made in this paper to review the ideas of Gandhiji on village reconstruction and rural development and its relevance to present India.*

Keywords: *Rural development, Rural poor, Self Reliance, Self Sufficiency, Village reconstruction*

Introduction

In ancient India, villages are self sufficient and self dependent. The economic organization of villages was satisfactory. India has been famous throughout the world for her achievements in small scale & cottage industries. But new problems were created in our country after the advent of British Rule. The organization of the villages was gradually disrupted. The economic life of the country underwent a drastic change and cottage industries declined, the causes being competition from machine industry, free trade policy of the Government, growth of middle men and export of raw materials. As a result of the decline of cottage industries,

a large number of workers become unemployed and their purchasing power was curtailed. People became poor and their conditions became deplorable. With the establishment of large scale industries, economic power came to be centralized in a few hands and unfair distribution of income and wealth took place. The rich became richer and the poor became poorer. Mahatma Gandhi was thus faced with the problems of appalling poverty, unemployment, concentration of economic power, low standard of living of the people, etc., in the village economy.

In fact, Gandhi never studied economics and he was not an academic economist. His economic ideas developed



gradually, as he begin to find out solutions to these problems. However as a visionary of India, Gandhi had a clear perception of its villages and believed that India lives in villages and said that "if village perishes, India will perish too". He found that the development of the country lies in the development of its rural villages.

Gandhiji – Rural Development:

Prior to independence, Mahatma Gandhi started "Constructive Programme" of rural reconstruction and therefore he can be said to have conceived the idea of integrated rural development much earlier. His constructive programme was a big undertaking which included 18 items namely Communal Unity, removal of untouchability, prohibition, Khadi, other village industries, Village sanitation, uplift of women, basic education, adult education, hygiene and health, economic equality, propagation of national language, provincial language, Kisans, Labour, Adivasies, Lepers and students. Gandhian approach to rural development involves rebuilding of every aspect of human life i.e, social, economic and political and envisages a society based on self supporting and self governing villages. According to him the village should be self sufficient as far its basic needs-food, clothing and other necessities are concerned. The village economy should be planned with a view of providing full employment to all the adult population in the village. Each man should be guaranteed employment to enable him to meet his basic needs in the village itself and so that he is not forced to migrate to town. Gandhian vision of rural development refers to the "Upliftment of the last man in the row". It has the principle of raising the

standard of living of the downtrodden in the rural areas. Gandhian strategy of rural reconstruction was based on the Village Swaraj and Swadeshi Movement. The basic principle of village swaraj as outlined by Gandhiji are trusteeship, Swadeshi, full employment, bread labour, self sufficiency, decentralization, equality, nai talim, etc. Therefore, it is quite reasonable to discuss these concepts in order to understand the Gandhian approach to rural development.

- i. Gandhiji's conception of Trusteeship was that all social property should be held in trust. It should be used for the welfare of the people. According to him everything on this earth belongs to God and is from God. Therefore it was for the people as a whole not for a particular individual. Everybody on this earth has a natural right to atleast the basic necessities of life. If an individual had more than his proportionate share, he was a trustee of that portion of God's people.
- ii. Swadeshi movement was a mass movement to encourage people to develop a habit of consuming Indian products rather than foreign products. In other words it refers to the consumption of local products. Practice of swadeshi leads to decentralized self-sufficient economy. People as buyers and sellers having a concern for each other, collectively work for the development of their local areas using the local available resources.



- iii. According to Gandhi, the main purpose of rural development should be self sufficiency. Therefore he suggested that villages should be self sufficient. They should produce their own food, clothing and other things required for meeting their basic needs. He insisted on the promotion of village or cottage industries and handicrafts because they can provide employment, necessary to meet the basic needs of the villagers and also facilitate village self sufficiency.
- iv. The Divine law of Bread Labour propounded by Mahatma Gandhi emphasizes the fact that man must earn his bread by his own labour. He said that God has given everyone the capacity to work and earn more than his daily bread. If all people labored for the bread, there would be enough food and clothing for all. People would be healthier and happier and there would be no problem of food shortage and no scope for unemployment. Further the doctrine of bread labour laid emphasis on dignity of labour.
- v. Gandhiji advocated a decentralized economy with decentralized production i.e, production at a large number of places on a small scale production at their houses. Gandhiji wanted the revival and development of cottage industries so that millions of people will get employment.
- vi. Gandhiji firmly believed that modern technological civilization was responsible for human frustration, violence and war. It was also responsible for the multiplication of material wants. He believed that the large scale use of machinery was a great sin and it creates unemployment and also causes for uneven distribution of income and wealth. But he was not against the use of all sorts of machines. He objected the way in which machines were used. His main consideration was that workers should not be rendered unemployed on account of the machinery. He welcomed those machines which are helpful to increase the efficiency of workers.
- vii. In the words of Gandhiji "My idea of village swaraj is that it is a complete republic, independent of its neighbors for its own vital wants and get inter-dependent for many others, in which dependence is a necessity. Thus every village's first concern will be to grow its own food crops and cotton for its cloth. It could have a reserve for its cattle, recreation and play ground for adults and children. Then, if there is more land available, it will grow useful money crops, these excluding ganja, tobacco, opium and the like. The village will maintain a village theatre, school and public hall. It will have its own water works, ensuring clean water supply." He further said "My ideal village will contain intelligent human beings. They will not live in dirt and darkness as animals. Men and women will be free and able to hold their own against anyone in the world."



Thus the ideal village of Gandhian dream was a comprehensive one, encompassing the economic, social, political and educational values.

Conclusion:

Based on the ideology of Mahatma Gandhi, even today several rural development programmes or schemes are being launched by the Government of India from time to time for the upliftment of the rural population in various aspects such as Rural Reconstruction Programme, Minimum Needs Programme, Food for work programme which is renamed as NREP, Jawahar Rozgar Yojana, Prime Minister Rozgar Yojana, Drought Prone Area Programme, Tribal Area Development Programme, Integrated Rural Development Programme, Employment Guarantee Scheme, etc.

On the occasion of 68th Independence Day, Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi announced "Samsad Adarsh Gram Yojana" – a holistic comprehensive sustainable approach to empower Indian villages and make it a model. He has urged the Members of Parliament to adopt one village of their choice that should include all interventions of health, education, infrastructure, sanitation, Hygiene, Livelihood and social aspects of human development. Also on 2nd October, 2014, Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi launched the "Swachh Bharat Abhiyas". Both these missions can particularly be combined to work for betterment of the rural Indian population and realizing the Gandhian dream of an ideal village. Gandhiji's sublime vision gives us a rare insight into the future of mankind.

Gandhiji belongs to the future and not for the past. Finally we can conclude with the words of Shriman Narayana "Gandhi is not dead, his message is eternal and shall live as long as sun shines in the vast open skies".

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