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THE LEGACY OF MAHATMA GANDHI

Sagar Simlandy
Sharmila Datta Banik



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Edited by
SAGAR SIMLANDY
SHARMILA DATTA BANIK

Foreword by
DR. SHAMSUZZAMAN AHMED
Principal, Sripat Singh College



PS OPUS PUBLICATIONS
New Delhi (India)

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First Published 2021

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ISBN 978-81-947318-5-6

Published and printed by Sumit Kumar Sharma for PS Opus Publications
A-11/1, Maujpur, New Delhi - 110053, India.
Watsapp: +919821950421,
e-mail : info@psopus.com
Website : www.psopus.com

LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

- A.ABIRAMI, Assistant Professor, SASTRA deemed to be university, School of law, Thanjavur, Tamilnadu, India.
- ABINAYA RAMESH, Assistant Professor, SASTRA deemed to be university, School of law, Thanjavur, Tamilnadu, India.
- ACHHIYA BEGAM, Academic Counsellor, Directorate of Distance Education, Tripura University (A Central University), Suryamaninagar, Tripura
- ALOK KUMAR BISWAS, Assistant Professor, Dept. of History, Vivekananda College, Madhyamgram, Kolkata, West Bengal.
- AMITA KUMARY. Assistant Professor, Dept of History, Sido Kanhu Murmu University, Dumka, Jharkhand
- ANIL KUMAR SARKAR, Professor, Dept. of History, Kalyani University, Nadia, West Bengal
- ANUPAM DAS, Assistant Professor, Department of History, Purbasthali College, Purba Bardhaman, West Bengal
- ARUNAVA KUMAR CHOUDHURY, Assistant Professor, Dept. of Economics, Sripat Singh College, P.O. Jiaganj, Dist. Murshidabad, West Bengal.
- ASHIMA SAHNI, Assistant Professor, HoD, Dept. of Political Science, Kanya Maha Vidyalaya, (Autonomous College) Jalandhar, Punjab
- BIDYUT KUMAR MISRA, Research Scholar, Dept. of History, Seacom Skills University, Birbhum West Bengal
- DIBYADYUTI SARKAR, PhD Associate Professor, Bangladesh and Liberation War Studies, Noakhali Science and Technology University, Noakhali, Bangladesh
- ENAMUL KABIR PASA, Assistant Professor, Dept. of English, Sripat Singh College, P.O.Jiaganj, Dist. Murshidabad, West Bengal.
- KALIKRISHNA SUTRADHAR, Ex-Student, Dept. of History, University of North Bengal
- KAUSAR ANSARI, Assistant Professor, Dept. of History, Government General Degree College, Pedong, District Kalimpong, West Bengal,
- KESHAB CHANDRA GHOSH, Assistant Professor, Dept. of History, Jangipur College, Jangipur, Murshidabad, West Bengal

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RELEVANCE OF GANDHIAN ECONOMIC PHILOSOPHY TO MODERN INDIA

KAUSAR ANSARI

Introduction

Gandhiji provided the moral foundations for economic ideas. He accepted the concept of economic equality and argued that true economics can never go against the highest moral values. Economic system needs to be filled with new spirit and full of justice. The person who attacks the moral welfare of the nations is immoral. Gandhiji made love-basis of traditional human relationship not the religion. He used to say that the work that the owner can do to his servant with loving behavior is not as much as economic temptation or pressure. According to Gandhiji, the economic laws should be done with the laws of nature accordingly. The laws of the nature are universal while the economic laws of a country are determined by the condition of climate and geological situation of that country.

Gandhiji advocated the principle of non-violence. Hence, his economic ideas can be called the economics of non-violence. The principle of non-violence is the principle of Gandhian philosophy. He believed that violence would in any form lead to more violence. He emphasized the dignity and sanctity of the conscience of the individual¹.

Gandhiji opposed capitalism because it exploited human labor. His approach was to 'constructive work' that include the promotion of Khadi and development of village industries².

He believed that nature produced enough to satisfy the desires of the people. Further he states that if everyone takes only what they need, then no problem arises.

Opposition to Industrialization and Western Civilization

Gandhiji has opposed the industrial revolution and the resulting centralized economy and challenged the foundations of modern civilizations. The establishment of large-scale industries requires huge quantities of raw materials and big markets for the sale of manufactured materials. Requirement of raw materials and big markets of large-scale industries lead to the birth of imperialism, commercialization and colonialism, which is against the human morality. Often, we have to depend on foreign countries for raw materials. This reinforces their imperialistic policy and expansionary hunger and begins economic and political exploitation. Thus, exploitation of undeveloped countries becomes an essential part of it.

Gandhiji said that as the competition increases, the exploitation of the rural areas will also increase due to the industrialization. We should therefore focus all our energies on the effort that villages produce goods for their consumption.

Hence, Gandhiji's reaction to industrialization and modernization was a western idea like Ruskin and William Morris. Because these western thinkers strongly criticized industrialization and modernization. According to them, industrialization and modernization leads to centralization of property. The Modern civilization was equivalent to darkness and disease³. Violence arises through this central attribution of property. However, it is worth mentioning that Gandhiji was not opposed to mere machine as he himself used the spinning wheel which is a machine. He is opposed to heavy mechanization. It is worth noting here that the ideal society of Gandhiji is a society formed from village. He laid great emphasis on physical work. According to him, educated intellectuals should also do physical work. Therefore, labor was considered as money and not metal. His ideas were influenced by Tolstoy's ideas of labor.

Gandhiji rejected the Western Civilization, method of production and use of machinery⁴. But many of his views were influenced by western civilization. He was highly influenced by the love and compassion of the Christianity. He had also a great impact by the ideas of Tolstoy – "The kingdom of God is inherent within the individual".

Decentralization of Industries

Gandhiji was not in favor of industrialization as it was responsible for exploitation of people and many social evils. He believed that the use of machinery in large scale creates drunkenness and dullness. He was in favor of a decentralized economy⁵. He wanted to take the production units to the house of the people especially in the villages. It will promote the employments of cottage craft industry and rural industries. Goods can be produced at very cheap rates as very few equipment will be required. There will be no storage problem. Transportation costs will also be negligible.

He mostly emphasized on small scale industries and also adopted the principle of swadeshi. According to him, the village economy would provide two significant objectives: -

- It will provide maximum employment and income to the people of the villages.
- It will generate freedom, economic equality and social justice.

Gandhiji was in favor of an industrial system in which the workers themselves were the owners. In this way, we can save the society from being exploited and there will be no place for violence. In Gandhiji's thoughts, industrial centralization will lead to the growth of population, pollution, social tensions and poverty. For these reasons, he wanted to develop rural and cottage craft industries instead of large-scale industries all over the country. He used to say that labor is respected in the rural industry while exploited in the Mills.

Opposition to Heavy Mechanization

Gandhiji's views is based on a humanist view. His economic philosophy is based on the 'goodness of human nature'⁶. Machines replace man and promote unemployment. There is no definite limit for their development. Hence, it can develop to extent where there is no human existence.

Man become constrained in front of the grandeur of the machine. Humans can't face them even if they want to because the machine has its own rules. The machine infests human labor and human soul.

Gandhiji was in favor of such systems of production in which the labor of every individual has been taken care of and at the

same time, his objective is to adapt to the favorable conditions in the country. He was not against the mechanization but his complaint was about the method of using machine. He was of the opinion that the use of machine would be said to be justified only when it would be for everyone not just for the few people. Machine has a place of its own but it is not proper to replace with human labor.

Assessing the situation of the country, Gandhiji opined that it will be a great mistake to use machine replacing man when crores of people are starving on the roads due to the lack of work. He was ready to accept formal mechanization to protect the interests of public welfare. He believed that where the use of large-scale industries and equipment would increase the number of unemployment while the same indigenous Charkha, cottage craft industry and small rural industry will provide employment opportunities. In this way, Gandhiji considered unnecessary mechanization as the main cause of unemployment, poverty and violence.

Gandhiji and Swadeshi Industries

Gandhiji's ideal word 'Swadeshi' simply means 'self-reliance'. Through Swadeshi, Gandhiji tried to inculcate the spirit of Swaraj among the people under which everyone could get true independence. In Gandhiji's views, freedom means freedom from all bondages where Swaraj has a different meaning. 'Swaraj' is a Vedic word meaning 'self-restraint' and 'self-rule'. The real swaraj will come not by few people gaining power but only when people have the ability to resist it if the power is misused by the people.

Gandhiji opined that only by using indigenous goods, we can maintain our 'self-reliance' and produced new things. According to Gandhiji, "our resources are sufficient for the needs of all, but not to satisfy anyone's greed". All persons should be supplied with the necessities to satisfy their natural needs. Thus, he urged people to voluntarily limit their own desires and needs.

He emphasized on the development of Khadi industry which symbolized the unity of Indian humanity of economic freedom and equality. 'Khadi' means decentralization of production and distribution of the requirements of human life. The khadi movement started only after Gandhiji's return from South Africa.

Gandhiji advocated the use of spinning wheel (Charkha). It requires a small amount of capital. He gave the slogan "Swaraj

from spinning". For the concrete realization of economic equality, it was essential to take recourse to the Charkha and the allied industries. He gave importance to the village economy⁷.

So, we have humanitarianism attitude with our neighborhood and other countries. In this way, he formed the concept of non-violent state on the basis of indigenous origin and consent of the people in which every individual is his own owner and contributes to make the country prosperous and 'self-reliant'.

Gandhiji's View on Economic Organizations

Gandhiji has given an idea about the positive role of economic progress. He emphasized that the economy should not only be based on profit and competition but should also include moral and human values. For him, true economics stands for social justice and moral values⁸.

He has openly praised human labor and refused the property. He considered labor to be real property which would increase wealth. He believed that no one should take food for a single time without doing labor. This kind of mentality for workers will nurture economic dependence and this will make us fearless and boost our confidence.

According to Gandhiji, human values and economics are not completely different from each other. A system in which the moral development of a person or state is impeded, is defective. Real economics refers to social justice in which the well-being of all individuals is taken care of and includes the poorest people of the society. No person is deprived of bread, cloth and house. Real economics is not based on material possessions but on spirituality, moral values and human values. Hence, we can say that his economic system is based on 'self-reliance', simplicity, equality, decentralization, non-violence, importance of labor, rural units and human values.

Gandhiji's Sarvodaya Principle

Gandhiji was greatly influenced by Ruskin's book 'Unto This Last' which had deep impact on him. In his words, "if a book made significant creative changes in my life immediately, it is Ruskin's book, 'Unto This Last". Further he argued that I had seen the sprout of what was in my conscience, it is in Ruskin's book. Later he translated this book into Gujarati under the title 'Sarvodaya".

In this way, inspired by Ruskin's book, Gandhiji presented the concept of 'Sarvodaya' which is based on truth, non-violence and 'self-reliance'.

The idea of Sarvodaya is not imaginary but it is the attempt of those structures of human society by changes in human thought. It attempts to build a new society based on ancient, spiritual and moral values. The idea of Sarvodaya is not orthodox while it is the highest symbol of human love and psychological transformation of people.

Clarifying the idea of Sarvodaya, Gandhiji described it as different from Utilitarianism. According to him, the meaning of 'Sarvodaya' is.....

- (i) The good of all lies in the well-being of the individual.
- (ii) The value of the work of a lawyer is the same as the value of the work of a Barber and both have the right to fulfill their livelihood by their work.
- (iii) Worker's life and life of a handicraft artists are highly valued.

Thus, the spirit of 'Sarvodaya Hitay' is inherent in Gandhiji's Sarvodaya idea. According to him, the person who believes in Sarvodaya will work for the welfare of the people and will sacrifice everything for the purpose of this goal. Even he will devote his life for it so that the other can live happily.

Sarvodaya presents the concept of a society in which all men are equal. Although, everyone's abilities are different but everyone should get the opportunity. Everyone has an equal right to necessities of life, even animals and birds have the same rights.

Sarvodaya means a casteless society, classless and powerless society, free from all types of bondages and a society without discrimination. The concept of Sarvodaya, different from practical system of Democracy, is based on political, religious, moral, spiritual and economic revival of the society. It requires an ideological transformation of society to establish justice, equality, non-exploitation, righteousness and so forth⁹.

Through Sarvodaya, Gandhiji envisioned a social system that could make even poor people feel connected and they also felt their contribution in the creation of this society. Society should be free from all kinds of bondages and dependencies. There should be no gap between classes and people from all communities could live in co-ordination.

Women can also exercise the same rights as men have in the society. Minimum expenditure should be done on army and soldiers. No such work should be done which would harm the interests of majority number of people of the society.

Gandhiji's Trusteeship Principle

He rejected the collection of property and appealed to the Capitalists and Zamindars to become trustees and to give tenants and workers co-ownership in those properties. This view of Gandhiji is known as 'Trusteeship Principle'. The basic basis of trusteeship is socialization of property. He was against the unequal distribution of wealth and income in the society¹⁰. The capitalists should possess only that part of wealth which is necessary for living and use the remaining property in the interests of society. But Gandhiji was totally opposed to suppress capitalism through the scheme of trusteeship by force. In this way, he considered the society as the owner of all property, so that the wealth could be utilized in the interests of the society. Hence, we can say that Gandhiji's socialism was based on the principle of his trusteeship.

Relevance of Gandhian Economic Philosophy

Modern world is faced with a multi-faceted economic crisis, uncontrolled urbanization, environmental pollution, depletion of sources, inflation and other monetary and economic problems¹¹. Gandhiji did some constructive programs to uplift the society as prevention of untouchability, prohibition of alcohol, Khadi publicity, rural industry, cleanliness, basic education, health education, upliftment of women etc. The Gandhiji's dream was that everyone should have the right to live with dignity after independence.

The sad thing is that even today in many parts of the country, discrimination is being done in the name of religion and caste. Despite being the same religion, people belonging to different castes and communities settle in different parts of village and go to different temples even today. It is true that the Constitution of India enshrines equality of people of all sections of the country, but the common man should never forget caste discrimination in their social life.

Gandhiji was highly influenced by Marxist thought. He was very much attracted by the Marxist concept of classless society. He subscribed to the Marxian formula, "To each according to his needs". According to nationalist thinkers, the economic condition of India destroyed due to imperialist policy of exploitation during

the British rule. Its only remedy was freedom from bondage of British rule. Whereas, according to Marxist thinkers, there is capitalist's exploitation at the root of this plight which leads to economic inequality and injustice in society. But Gandhiji believed that the reason of India's economic plight was the destruction of rural economy due to urban development. It was an exploiting of villages by cities for him. He believed that there is a need for such production system in India in which more and more people get work and rural economy will developed. A man should have such equipment over which he has control in the true sense. If the device cripples a person's work, it is not acceptable to Gandhiji. Because, the message of 'Charkha' is – 'control machine' and 'rural governance'.

For Gandhiji, the Charkha was not only a machine but a symbol of the dignity of labor. He was opposed to production by machine and industrialization. He rejected modern civilization in his book 'Hind Swaraj' which was published in 1909. In 'Hind Swaraj' he opposed large scale Industrialization and mechanization and condemned western commercialism, imperialism and secularism as 'disease'. For this reason, he is often criticized.

In this period of globalization, the problem of unemployment is appearing all over the world. Economic inequality is constantly increasing all round. Today, everyone believes that every hand should get work which was the basic mantras of Gandhiji. He was against the use of labor replacing machineries which should create technological unemployment in countries like India where manpower was surplus¹².

Hence, we can say that Gandhiji was anti-unrest of uncontrolled development. He advocated a return to simplicity and plainness of nature. Today, even though no one is ready to accept Gandhiji's simplicity and low expenses, but when the means are limited, then simplicity seems to be inevitable. Man is engaged in excessive exploitation of nature and destruction of environment for progress and fulfilment of needs. If we study the development and destruction of the last hundred years, we have to accept that the use of machines has indeed brought this civilization to the mouth of destruction. If every sections of the society wants development and to succeed in the future, then it is necessary to limit their needs for everyone. According to Gandhiji, people can control the means but not the ends¹³. Earth has enough wealth for our needs but not for our greed. These things said by Gandhiji

draws our attention towards the protection of the environment and forces us to think about an alternative way of development.

Although, Gandhiji was not an economist, he had presented his economic outlook. If implemented, it would have relieved India of many social and economic problems. Today, Gandhian economic concept is considered very effective for the eradication of poverty, unemployment, economic inequality, social struggle and backwardness in developing countries.

Conclusion

We know that Gandhiji strongly condemned industrialization, commercialization, mechanization, modernization and collection of property. While he openly supported small scale industries and rural industries. It is true that some of Gandhiji's views are absolutely unclear. As a political diplomat, there is a contradiction of his realism and ideological idealism. But there is no doubt that Gandhiji raised many such questions which are relevant in modern civilization even today. These questions are still being asked today – increasing power of the states, bureaucracy, oppressive measures, violence and side effects of use machines and techniques. Hence, we can say that criticism of modern civilization presents deep insights. His views on the inter-relationship between means and results are particularly very serious.

His greatest contribution was the emphasis on decentralization of economic and political powers. These ideas of Gandhiji have been included in the "Directive Principles of State Policy" in our Constitution of India. In India's Eight Plan, some concessions were made to Gandhism in the shape of helping the villages through increased budgetary allotments for rural relief including food subsidies and fertilizer subsidies¹⁴. The United Nations General Assembly also announced to celebrate Gandhiji's Birthday on 2nd October as 'International Non-Violence Day' which is a matter of pride for the people of India.

In the end, we can say that no one else has discussed these points yet as Gandhiji has done so far.

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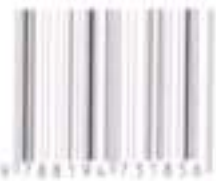
PUBLISHERS OF SCHOLARLY BOOKS

A-11/1, Maujpur, New Delhi-110053 [India]

Whatsapp : 9821950421

email : info@psopus.com Website : www.psopus.com www.psopus.online

ISBN: 9788194731856



9 788194 731856

₹ 1195