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on
Non-violent Economy and Peaceful World

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Non-violent Economy and Peaceful World

A. Introduction

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, architect of Indian independence and one of the greatest men of 20th century was a multifaceted personality. He was a politician, a philosopher, a reformer, a spiritual leader and above all a humble human being, always to be remembered for his selfless work and incessant struggle for the cause of humanity. He was a great reformer whose system brought ethical as well as social principles to the forefront, emphasizing the value of morality. He discovered a way of life which can be followed regardless of time, peace and prevailing culture. He is one of the most important Asian thinkers and spiritual masters of all time. Gandhi has contributions in many areas viz, ethics, education, economic, social, political etc.

There are different factors to shape Gandhi’s thought, family environment, Vedas, Upanishads, Ramayana, Mahabharat, Gita, Puranas, Jainism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, etc. influenced him deeply. He was influenced by Christ. He was influenced by Tolstoy. Gandhi borrowed the idea of civil disobedience from Henry David Thoreau, an American thinker. He holds that government is best which governs least. He was influenced by Ruskin for his idea of self-realization and service to humanity. Gandhi went to South Africa as a legal adviser of an Indian merchant. His experiences of racial discrimination committed by the White, changed the whole course of his life in South Africa. After coming back to India in 1915, Gandhi started to work for the independence of India. He evolved a new outlook of life based on the doctrine of ahimsa non-violence and tried to solve the social political and economic problems in the light of this principle. Gandhi does not believe in else war. He is not socialist and communist.

Gandhi was against social-economic order based on private property and free competition and wanted to establish a new order based on truth and non-violence in which the individual would enjoy the real freedom.

It is true that we do not have any definite scheme of economic thought evolved by Gandhi himself, which can be described as Gandhian economic thought. His economic ideas are part of his general philosophy of life; they are reflected in his writings and speeches mixed up with other related topics: they have to be discerned more in his action, which must be viewed in their entirety not merely in an isolated way. Gandhi’s economic thought may help the future generation to understand the things in a holistic manner. There is no such thing as the principles of economics of Gandhi. For Gandhi, economics is a part of a way of life. There are no governing principles which applies to economics alone. Two life principles, viz., truth and non-violence govern all economic, social, and other considerations of Gandhi.
Gandhi advocated non-violence and hence his economics may be called economics of non-violence. The principle of non-violence is the principle of Gandhian philosophy. As there was no industry and no activity without certain violence, he wanted to minimize it. He believed that violence in any form breeds greater violence. He defined a non-violent occupation as one “which is fundamentally free from violence and which involves no exploitation or envy of others.” The solution to Indian basic problems lies in the practice of non-violence. Gandhi opposed Capitalism as it resulted in exploitation of human labour. He believed that nature produced enough for the satisfaction of the peoples wants and there would be no poverty and starvation, if everybody took only that much that was sufficient to him.

B. Background and Purpose

In this paper, we make a study of the economic aspects of the philosophy of Gandhi, which like everything else in his life, were governed by ethical and moral considerations. It is an attempt to go beyond the stereotypical concerns of economics in analytical social, political and ethical implications of economic actions and policies. His stress on rural economy and emphasis on a simple life, coupled with his concern for the well-being of the poor formed the underlying strength of his unique views on economic empowerment. Gandhi’s economic models were based largely on the requirements of the Indian situations. His thoughts regarding the economy of the country were tied to special concerns. The idea of swadeshi was worked out by Gandhi primarily for economic upliftment of the masses. Gandhi endorsed swadeshi as one of the powerful tools against colonialism. He was not only spread it but the meaning, content and goals of swadeshi have been broadened, depend, considerably extended in its application effectively to alleviate poverty and retrieve self esteem. Gandhian philosophy of swadeshi is replete in all its aspects that include the metaphysical, ethical, political, cultural, economics, and religious. Gandhi was striving for creating a society based on equality, economic, religious, and social. He worked for economic simplicity and did not favour multiplicity of wants. It is only when material wants are limited that an environment can be created which will free the individual from external influences and enable him to discover him true purpose the mission of human life.

For Gandhi, the economy was meaningful to the extent that it opened out the possibility of well being for all people. That implied a system of production, of distribution and consumption defined by the essential needs of most deprived people in the society with the aims of supporting the highest values of human life, recognizing human dignity, non-violence and creative Labour. Gandhi’s notion of the ‘well being of all’ Sarvodaya, describes social and economic justice. His understanding of the path to sarvodaya was through a village economy which maximized the power of the traditional Indian handicrafts and merely employed modern machines that allowed for a production by the masses’ rather than mass production; in this light, Gandhi choose that he spinning wheel (Charkha) as a symbol not only of the battle in India for the liberation from British imperialism but also of economic independence. Gandhi’s economic thought is all based on his experiences gained to the freedom struggle. Gandhi’s theory has three main postulates self-sufficiency, swadeshi, industrialization. The fourth fundamental thought of Mahatma Gandhi was to raise the standard of the life of villages that’s why he gave the idea of back to the villages. Because 80 percent people this country live in villages. They had a very poor, they had a very little income.

Gandhian economic thought is very wide. Gandhi’s thought process is relevant today and also it was relevant in the past and in the future too. Because it touches the life of people. It is not
isolated thought, but it's all practical. It is based on living style of the people, it is based on how
new evolution and economic revolution can come in the lives of the people by pursuing policies,
which touch the development code and class route level. Gandhi's economic thought depended
very much on the English artist and writer, John Ruskin 1819-1900. In his outrage at the injustice
and inhumanity of industrialization, Ruskin denounced the savagery of Capitalism which
destroyed the social fabric and created poverty while ravaging society with an economy that had
no morality. He proposed to discover a different type of technology which was founded not only
on rationally but also on the spiritual life of the human being that which is true for science and
technology is also true for politics and the economy.

C. Non-violent Economy and Peaceful World

An economic system that becomes a hindrance in the moral well-being of an individual or a
nation as a whole is immoral and therefore, sinful. Gandhi regarded economics as a moral
science and laid great emphasis on its ethical aspect. No one's gain should be any body's loss-
financial, physical, moral or spiritual. This is the foundation upon which the structure of his
entire economic philosophy stands.

Gandhi had an innate sympathy for the poor and deprived. This coupled with the repercussions
of the exploitation of the poor peasants and the oppressed working class both in India and South
Africa led him to design an economic model that would bring about an emancipation in the
condition of the poor and the downtrodden section of the society. Gandhi believed that the high
Capitalist endeavors were at the root of all the suffering. Gandhi held that there is enough in this
world to feed and clothe all people. However, there is poverty and deprivation because one group
prosper on the labour and work put in by others. Gandhi strongly believed in the ethics of hard
work and that one is entitled to take from the system only as much as he is capable of producing.

According to Gandhi, this was the only way to fight poverty and to alleviate the economic
weaker section of India. Gandhi was not an economist in the conventional sense of the term.
Unlike other economists he had not studied economics academically. He did not present his
economic ideas in any systematic form or at any one place; his economic thoughts have to be
picked from innumerable passages occurring in his articles, interviews and speeches. Unlike
conventional economics Gandhi's approach was spiritual and moral and with the basic element
of his approach being an overall well-being and not just material prosperity. His economic
paradigm was entirely based on his love and will to emancipate even the poorest of the poor of
the nation.

Swadeshi is fundamentally an attitude concerning all aspects of life though it is often
misconstrued to be relevant only to the economic aspect. In another context, swadeshi can be
interpreted in the sense of neighbour lines as it is the philosophy of love through service of the
immediate neighbour. It is also perceived as a mutually elevating relationship within the family.
The meaning of swadeshi as self realization, self-respect, and self-reliance was not simply
glorification of established and native methods of production but an ingenious application of the
available resources significant to the society or the nation under consideration. Gandhi's vision
of the routes of economic empowerment is not pure material benefits but advancement of
humanity on its road to progress by strengthening the character and the development of the
personality of each individual engaged in such activity. Gandhi's economic thought is all based
on his experience gained to the freedom struggle. Gandhi theory has three main postulates self
sufficiency, Trusteeship, and industrialization.
In this light, Gandhi distinguishes the following

1) Self-sufficiency (swadeshi),

The idea of swadeshi was included into the Indian freedom struggle well before the advent of Gandhi. In the mid nineteenth century there are found to be some evidences of promoting swadeshi to avoid the exploitation of peasants and also as a reaction to the ruination of artisans of India. However, the idea of swadeshi started spreading to the masses of India, during the protests against the Bengal partition in 1905, and proved to be the most powerful method of protesting against the division of Bengal. The expanse of swadeshi includes political resistance, promoting cottage industries and rural industries, boycott of foreign goods, encouraging national education through indigenous means and giving up government jobs. The people of anti-partition movement decided to use only indigenous goods. They even picketed the foreign goods shops. Swadeshi was spread and preached by Nanaoji, Gokhle, Tilak, Ranade, Tagore and others by developing the philosophy and programme unique to itself. Swadeshi is a mode of production that is decentralized, home-based, modeled on handcraft, respectful of life (especially animal life) and of the environment, rather than the modes of production which are centralized, industrial and mechanical. Mass production requires people to leave their villages, their homes, their lands, their customs in order to work in a factory.

Gandhi defined swadeshi as: “Swadeshi is that spirit in us which restrict us usesservice of our immediate surrounding to the exclusion of the more remote. Thus, as for religion, in order to satisfy the requirements of definition, I must restrict myself to ancestral religion. That is the use of my immediate surroundings. If I find it defective; I should serve it by purging it of its defects. In domain of politics, I should make use of the indigenous institutions and serve them by curing them of their proved defects. In that of economics, I should use only things that are produced by my immediate neighbours and serve those industries by making them efficient and complete where they might be found wanting.”

Following the principle of swadeshi, everything that is made in a village should be used above all by the members of the village. Exchange between villages, between villages and cities and even more between nations should be limited to the minimum. Swadeshi thereby avoids the use of unnecessary transportation which is unhealthy, unproductive and destructive of the environment. In order to avoid separating the economy from the profound spiritual foundations of life, it is best when each individual participates as much as possible in their own community, when the production of goods is kept to a small scale, when the economy is local, when the preference is given to handcrafts and local manufacturing.

2) Trusteeship

The Gandhian idea of trusteeship emerges from his faith in the law of non-possession. It is based on the belief that all things come from God and belong to God. All the resources of the universe therefore are ordained for humanity as a whole and not for particular individuals. When an individual obtains more than their respective share, they become a trustee of that portion, they have control of it for the sake of all of humanity.

In essence, Gandhi is proposing this idea as a solution to the financial inequalities of inheritance and income, a sort of non-violent solution to resolve the social and economic conflicts in the world. It is the dignity of the human being, and not their material prosperity, which the centre of
Gandhi's economic thought. The Gandhian economy envisages a redistribution of material wealth as way of guaranteeing human dignity.

- Private property is not absolute but is subordinated to the common good.

- An individual cannot retain and used their wealth for egotistic satisfaction, ignoring the interests of society.

- The differences in income ought to be reasonable, equitable and variable over time—with the tendency toward reducing the discrepancies.

- Production should be determined by need and not by personal whim. In many texts, Gandhi illustrates the connection between ethics and economics:

  “The true economy is never in opposition with the highest ethical principles, in the same way that true ethics, to deserve that name, has to become at the same time a good economics...The true economy defends social justice; it promotes the good of all through an equality that includes the weakest; and it is indispensable for a good life”; “The fact of extending the law of non-violence to the domain of the economy signifies nothing less that taking moral values into consideration when determining the rules of international commerce.”

Gandhi was far from hostile to science whose methods he admired so much that he attempted to transpose them into the context of his life and action. He did not criticize science itself but rather the uses that were made of it by modern civilization and industry.

At the same time, Gandhi was not opposed to all technology; indeed, he recognized that it could ease the suffering of people. He was full of admiration for the bicycle and the Singer sewing machine. Yet he wanted machines to remain subservient to the worker and he recommended small machines that could be used by a greater number rather than large machines aimed at mass production. He was very critical of heavy industry. It is necessary, he argued, “to favour production by the masses rather than mass production”, that is to say to give work to all through small enterprises in agriculture, industry or handicrafts and to limit the control of machines.

For Gandhi, a machine-based civilization was not a civilization. A society in which workers were chained to their work, where animals were treated with cruelty in farm factories, and in which economic activity led to ecological destruction could not be considered a civilization. Its citizens are neurotic, the world is being transformed into a desert and its cities are jungles of concrete, pavement and steel. “The craze of wanting to make everything ‘by the dozen’ is the cause of the world crisis we are experiencing. Suppose for an instant that a machine could meet all human needs. Production would find itself concentrated at certain points in the world so that it would be necessary to organize a complex distribution network to supply those needs of humanity. On the contrary, if each region produced what it needed, the problem of distribution would be automatically solved.”

In Trusteeship idea Gandhi gave predominance to ethics and the common good. A non-violent economy presupposes the autonomy of everyone, the right and the inspiration the inspiration of everyone to begin an undertaking according to their own action while at the same time maintaining as the ultimate objective and rule of action, the interests of the community.
3) Industrialization

Gandhi was opposed to any massive drive for the industrialization of India. The economy of self-sufficiency must be the ideal for the underdeveloped world if foreign domination and starvation were to be avoided. Gandhi did not intend to suggest that India retreat to a stage of primitiveness, but only that she should follow the call of her real nature. India had always been an agricultural society, and Gandhi's ought to strengthen this economy in the face of increasing mechanization and industrialism, which, he felt, breed greed and materialism, violence, and unscrupulousness. He feared that large-scale production and industrialization would destroy not only India's villages, but her mission to the world. Under the Gandhian system, the main centers of production would be the thousands of villages whose economy would be regenerated through the programs of khadi and nai-talim, or Basic Education. Gandhi submitted the following general arguments in defense of his khadi or cottage industries programme.

(1) It does not require capital or expensive implements. The raw material and tools are cheap and can be obtained locally.

(2) The skill required is no more than the ignorant and poor can do.

(3) Children and old people can do it. The tradition of spinning is still alive.

(5) It is universal and permanent. Ready market exists for it.

(6) It is independent of the monsoon.

(7) It is not opposed to religious or social customs,

(8) It is a ready means to fight famine.

(9) It prevents disintegration of the family by carrying the work to the cottage. An unlimited and

(10) It restores the benefits of the village community.

(11) It can provide a stable and permanent basis for the handloom industry, which supplies most of India's clothing from mill-yam.

(12) It would revive village industries.

(13) It would ensure equitable distribution of wealth among India's people.

(14) It solves the problem of unemployment (both the partial unemployment of the agriculturist. Gandhi was of the view that social and economic freedom had immense significance along with political freedom from the colonial rule. To achieve this freedom and to cater to the minimum needs of the society, Gandhi gave a constructive programme, which was an integral and positive aspect of his philosophy of swaraj and of the educated) since the movement requires organization and direction.

Seven criteria characterize economic independence according to Gandhi

- Elimination of poverty and the minimizing of wealth.
- Self-sufficiency of each unit in its basic needs.
- Identification of basic human needs and the means of meeting them.
Agriculture that is respectful of the environment as a basis for the creation of a durable economy.
Production that is based as far as possible on small groups.
Control and elimination of distorted views by basic education and technical formation.
Limitations to the concentration of economic power.

D) Criticism

Gandhi had mainly two 'difficulties' in relation to the village industries. His first worry was how the products of the village industries could be qualitatively improved through the development of better and better techniques. His other problem was that apart from Khadi no other industry could be universal. The Charkha was an ideal solution in the sense that it could be plied at any time, any place by any person within any age-group. It provided, therefore, a sort of an answer to the problem of unemployment and underemployment which was also universally present in India. The Charkha had its own limitations in adding to the income of the worker. Gandhi had no illusions on this score. But he was happy if he could place even some small income into the hands of the poverty-stricken villager. It is amazing how Indians themselves are not often aware of the depths of poverty in their own country. We develop a faculty of not seeing what we do not like to see. But, as Arthur Koestler remarked after his visit to India, "Poverty in India is fathomless. Like the unconscious of the mind the deeper you go the still deeper levels are being endlessly revealed." As for Gandhi, "he was a man who used to notice such things: he was a man who had an eye for such mysteries."

Gandhi'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.

E) Conclusion

It is difficult to exaggerate the significance of Gandhi and Gandhism in modern world. By most standard he was a great man, and the impact of his ideas has been felt throughout the world. He developed a highly sophisticated technique of non-violent struggle for social and social change; that he developed a libertarian philosophy which championed man's freedom from the made of modern bureaucracy and a very large state; that he raised a powerful voice against machiavellism in politics and against an economy that took no cognizance of ethical values and the welfare of the poor; and finally, that he launched a strong protest against violence and aggression in the realm of national and international affairs.

According to Gandhi, a non-violent society, the achievement of which was his final goal, cannot be compatible with the existence of a wide range of economic inequality. In keeping with his spiritual Sarvodaya approach the final goal of his policy would of course have been "from each according to his capacity to each according to his needs." Every man should give his best (of time, talents and work) to the society and the society should provide for his normal needs. He said: "My ideal is equal distribution, but so far as I can see, it is not to be realized. I therefore work for equitable distribution."

Lastly, I can say that in the storm of annihilating material power, a great spiritual responsibility rests on India. We have incurred a rather formidable obligation to Gandhi. I mean the obligation to go on setting an Indian example of non-violence to rest of the world. If India were ever to fail
to live up to this Indian ideal which is the finest and therefore, the most exacting legacy, in our Indian heritage, it would be a poor lookout for a mankind as a whole. And in Gandhi's own words, "The highest honour that friend can do me is to enforce in their own lives the programme that I stand for, or to resist me to their utmost if they do not believe in it".

There may be some kind of failure in Gandhi, as it is with every human being. But to speak of total failure of him has no meaning. Gandhi may have lost a battle, but Gandhi's war is not lost, and it must not be allowed to be lost.

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