Gandhian economic ideas are part of his general philosophy of life. He was attempting to organize life in a manner that is innately equipped for protecting, preserving and promoting life. And out came a methodology of nonviolent economy, which is all about optimizing the transactional relationship of life so that life is served at its best, not at the human spear alone but in the context of life on earth.

**Basic Belief**

The foundation of all these ideas is the unalterable faith he had in the principles of Truth and Nonviolence.

Gandhi believed ‘Truth is God’, and ‘Life is the closest manifestation of Truth’. Realization of Truth is possible only through life, to be precise ‘living’. Because Truth and Life are complementary terms, he inferred, all that promotes (preserve and protect) life are part of Truth and all that compromise life are untruth. Nonviolence which favors life as against violence which disfavors, therefore, is the ‘Law’ of life.

His pursuit of Truth led him to realize the indispensable oneness of human. Life is realized by individuals only through collective living. For Gandhi, collective living is the essence of Truth realization. And his search for Truth led him to explore it in society, and all walks of social living. Life can be achieved not by competing with one another but by each cooperating with others.

**Economy of life**

Socially humans attempt to produce, distribute and consume essential commodities and services that are essential for life. We call this Economics, which is an integral part of social living. And he endeavored to make economy a reflection of Truth and its law – nonviolence, so that life is made possible in equal measure to all members of a society.

If life is primary, then the economy that supplies wherewithal for life, has to be in tune with life. To explain, J. C. Kumarappa categorized economy into five types. The predatory economy (hunting others), the parasitic economy (hunting others’ produce), enterprising economy (producing one’s own requirement), egalitarian economy (keeping the produce for collective good) and Service economy (serving others without expectation of return)

Gandhi found that a blend of ‘service economy’ with ‘egalitarian’ and ‘enterprising economy’ best suits human living.

**Sarvodaya**

Economy to be pro-human, has to be guided by profound principles; drawing from John Ruskin, Gandhi proposed three basic principles:

1. That the good of the individual is contained in the good of all.
2. That a lawyer's work has the same value as the barber's in as much as all have the same right of earning their livelihood from their work.

3. That a life of labour, i.e., the life of the tiller of the soil and the handicraftsman is the life worth living.

These principles represent certain foundational propositions:

a. Life is experienced at individual level; the good of individual is primary concern;

b. Social life is imperative; as life is possible only by mutual support;

These two are reciprocal propositions, which are represented by the first of the three basic principles.

c. All human are equal;

d. Every human has equal right to life, therefore to livelihood; hence

e. The work of every individual is to be accorded equal value, not variedly.

We find the second of the three basic principles reflecting the above three propositions.

f. Equality is maintained better only when the tool of earning livelihood given to individuals, is equitable. Ruskin proposed human body as a tool for physical need earning for individuals.

g. Physical work for material need fulfilment is a tenet of justice and equality. By means of physical work, individual can earn only as much as one need and not more than any fellow human can do so. This ensures an innate social order of equality as aggrandizement and the consequent gulf between haves and have-nots become practically improbable.

h. There is also an innate interconnection between physical labour and quality of life. Life is constituted of body, mind and soul (wisdom). Healthy mind in a healthy body is considered as a mark of successful life. Health of body depends mostly on the active engagement of body. Sarovdaya principles thus bring yet another reciprocal proposition. That is, working hard physically will earn for one his/her physical need fulfilment; and such hard work will keep one's body healthy.

The third principle represents the above said three propositions. There is more to it.

i. Gandhi's oft quoted wisdom, 'Earth has enough for every one's need; and not for even one man's greed', is yet another proposition represented by the third principle. Dependency on physical labour for physical / material need fulfillment (Gandhi called it 'Bread Labour'), curbs individual ability to appropriate wealth more than what is required for a healthy human life, and leaves scope only for equitable utility, thereby leaves nature's abundant resources un-encroached, enabling earth to maintain equilibrium among all lives'.

j. About the mind, Gandhi said, 'mind or intelligence is for social good, spiritual realization'. He called for 'appropriate use' of mind. He was cautioning against the 'aggressive utilization' of intelligence which leads to cancerous growth and reckless exploitation of nature and fellow humans, which in turn jeopardize life of all. At the immediate social level, it establishes unbridgeable inequality by creating 'rich' and 'poor'.

This is not to call for a static, bodily life. Nature has designed a life for humans as it did for every living beings. The Law of nature guides us to lead one such life in tune with nature. Violations lead to unforeseeable, irretrievable natural consequences, such as climatic change. If we can harmonize our life with the Law of Nature we may grow without destroying nature.

Harmonizing life has few precepts.

1. Strike a consistency between 'Thought, word and deed';

2. Individual life in tandem with the rest of the society (fellow humans who are co-participants in the pursuit of life)

3. Harmonize life with the Law of Nature, the Law of Nonviolence
First one makes individual an honest human; first and second together make individual a perfect social being (Just and equitable); Synchronizing the first two with the third one makes life perfectly nonviolent and Truthful.

A life style that acknowledges the primacy of every individual, and their right to life is what Gandhi called ‘Sarvodaya’, which means welfare of all.

Swadesh

Gandhi brought in a functional model for such a life. It is called ‘Swadeshi’.

Swadeshi means, ‘Neighbourhood economy’; a life in dependence with neighbourhood producer / consumer group. Economics which is a social arrangement of material production, distribution and consumption, has ‘mutual welfare’ (of both producer and consumer and nevertheless nature) as primary objective, and not ‘wealth’ or ‘profit’ or ‘utility’ as modern economics has come to aim at. The ‘welfare’ is best only when the nature of relationship between consumer and producer is ‘social’ and not just ‘materialistic’. A healthy social relationship (a relationship guided by love) ensures besides economic utility, a number of social dividends such as fairness, concern and mutuality between the two parties. In Gandhi’s purview such transactional relation is called ‘Swadeshi Economics’. Dependence for material good, on people who are not socially connected, tends to be asocial a practice, for such relationship are unlikely to be bound by social principles.

Trusteeship

He brought in the concept of Trusteeship to facilitate the present world ridden with ‘rich’ and ‘poor’ gulf. May the ‘rich’ hold their wealth in ‘trust’, Gandhi opined, and behave as trustees of the wealth given by the society, guard the wealth and put it in the service of all humans. The real taste of trusteeship comes when individuals cease to lay their hands on things that are beyond beyond their need. All those beyond the optimum consumption would be deemed as ‘exploitation’ or ‘misappropriation’10. A physical labour based life anyway does not yield any more than the daily need, and seldom for the accumulation of wealth. In this sense he added two important values to his ten-one Vows which he recited every day in prayer: ‘Non-possession’ and ‘Non-stealing’.

Decentralization

He proposed, village industries, cottage industries which are aptly supported by ‘appropriate technologies’11 as the best economic order. Decentralization of production is a precondion for ‘non-exploitative’ life12. Decentralization makes people as the centre of power, and they become the controller of their economy. However such an economic order behoves a fairly uniform distribution of knowledge, awareness and sense of responsibility. Creating such discipline in society too is part of satyagraha endeavor.

Bread Labour

Striving physically to earn material or physical needs of life is found to be in tandem with the law of nature, as it gives, on the one side, scope for both body and mind to work to achieve the sustenance, and keeps the body and mind healthy, is, on the other side, does not give scope for individual a acquire more than one can control physically. This bounds life sustainably within the confines of human optimum, and leaves the riches of nature to the service of life at large. Investing intellectual capacity to make material riches allows individuals to possess unlimited world resources, at the expense of millions of hapless masses, especially when intelligence is not uniformly distributed among humanity. We witness now, that investment of intelligence not only has created an anthropocentric world at the peril of other species, it also made the world generation centric at the expense of future life on earth. Bread labour, using optimized tools to realize an appropriate life, therefore appears sensible way to ensure life more sustainable.

Concluding Remarks

Gandhian nonviolence is a way of life, where material transaction is an integral part of social living, guided by the values and principles that govern life at large. It is a methodology of optimizing life. Our needs are made compatible with our bodily requirements, relationship is made in tandem with fellow humans; and life is harmonized with the law of nature. In such a living the scope for exploitation, inequality and injustice are brought down to the level of individual to cope with and alter it. Life of such
kind creates a society that ensures justice and peace to all in equal measure. Hence nonviolent economy is called as the ‘Economy of Permanence’.

Notes and References

1. Truth is my God and Ahimsa is my God. When I look for Ahimsa, Truth says, ‘Find it through me.’ When I look for Truth, Ahimsa says, ‘Find it out through me.’ Young India, 4-6-25

2. Humans learn to live as a society primarily because it helps individuals address much of their livelihood issues – food, shelter, health, security and learning. While life is experienced at individual level (every individual being unique), living is easy in society than when pursued individually. Cultivation of food, manufacturing and sharing of goods and services are made possibly only by human’s coming together as society.

3. Gandhi as a practitioner of nonviolence claimed himself to be a ‘pragmatist’. He set his nonviolence in the format of Society. When it came to protect the crops in his Ashram at Sabarmati, from monkeys, he instructed his companions to drive them away by scaring them. He explained to the complaining Jains (a community traditionally believed in Nonviolence as the way to redemption) that ‘as a social being it is my delimiting priority to serve my fellow humans first. I am searching for a life style which does not require to drive the monkeys away. As of now, I have not found one’. However, this should not be read as an exclusion of other lives, but as a way of prioritizing responsibilities. Prioritizing responsibility is necessitated because, he was convinced, that humans are ‘limited’ being, absolute nonviolence is beyond human scope so long as we live in flesh and blood.

4. ... in equal measure to all members of society, without infringing upon the space of other lives.

5. Serving others without expectation of return may not work at individual level; only when a sizable number of members in the community are convinced and start practicing, it works effectively. So active nonviolence means practicing its tenets and educating others on such practice too.

6. ‘All Men (Human) are Equal was a book Gandhi wrote to emphasis the principle of Universal equality.

7. In a world of bread labour, the much dreaded natural consequence of modern development such as ‘depletion of natural resources’, ‘climatic change’ etc., would not have been a reality.

8. Tools and technology the modern science has gifted humanity are ‘concepts’ of mind. ‘They are blessings when put to appropriate use. When used inappropriately, they become instrument of exploitation and destruction.

9. Wealth is accumulated only by means of employing innumerable humans physical and conceptual services.

10. In a national economy, every citizen is a shareholder; and by the dictates of the Constitution, one becomes an equal stakeholder. When it is so, in a democratic society, consumption beyond the national average becomes anti national (exploitative...) economic action.

11. Technology that assists humans to earn the wherewithal optimally without adding to one’s exploitative propensity; a technology that assists and not replace humans is called appropriate technology.

12. Decentralization reduces the necessity for exhaustive transportation of material both raw and finished, therefore avoids the much dreaded carbon foot print, while at the same time empowers people at the local with enormous natural resources.

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