

Economic Inequality and Agriculture Welfare in Mahatma Gandhi's the Story of My Experiments with Truth

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ABSTRACT

Mahatma Gandhi firmly believed that prosperity of agriculture and farmers should pave the way for economic prosperity of the country. Gandhiji explains what an ideal society is where there are no economic Inequalities. The paper focuses on economic equality, accumulation of wealth, rural crafts and industries, economic doctrine, indiscriminate mechanical industrialization, Swadeshi and khadi. He believed that an economy based on nonviolence would promote social and economic justice, and reduce the exploitation of labor. Gandhi's social and economic philosophy was also the result of his disillusionment with the western way of life. He also held that there is enough in this world to feed and clothe all.

Keywords: exploitation, industrialization, economic, agricultural, labour, Swaraj Swadeshi and khadi

INTRODUCTION

The pivot of Gandhian philosophy is the spiritual, moral, economic welfare of India and the individual. Truth and non-violence which governs his social, political and other considerations also predominated his economic ideas. In other words, Gandhiji build his philosophical system on the cornerstones of truth and Ahimsa. The success of his economic thoughts depends on it. Gandhi's economics is the welfare economics. He envisioned a growing society in which balance should be maintained between economic progress and moral progress, between the rural and the urban, between large-scale and small-scale technology, between capital and labour, between physical work and intellectual work and in equal distribution of income. He dreamt of an India in which every individual will enjoy every form of freedoms without any inhibition.

Gandhiji saw that apart from the evil of foreign rule, two more evils in the country. "The autobiography is noted for its lucid, simple and idiomatic language and its transparently honest narration" (Mehta, Chandrakant 3869). The first was idleness and the second was poverty. The cure for idleness was work and for poverty were the mobilization existing resources, equitable distribution and limiting population moral restraint or Brahmacharya. He therefore, pleaded for simple living. He evolved the conception of service economy. Service economy is site only when rights disappear and duties take their place. "The first part narrates incidents of Gandhi's childhood, his experiments with eating meat, smoking, drinking, stealing and subsequent atonement" (Men of Turmoil, 384)

Gandhiji believed that the mad process of wasting the earth's rev could not go on forever. Soon all the oil, coal, lignite etc., will be exhausted by industrialization. He advocated for India's village industries, because he thought that the village industries will avoid all forms of exploitation present in large-scale factory production. In fact, Gandhiji was not opposed to industrialization but he disapproved machine industry because it has thrown thousands out of employment on the open streets to die of starvation. One of the most evil consequences of mechanical industrialization is the disappearance of village industries which gave employment to villagers. As a result, the villagers have run to cities leaving there homes and ancestral occupations. Thus, the village economy has been in doldrums. Gandhiji aimed at preventing the villages from the infection of mechanical industrialization. He wrote, "Mechanization is good when the hands are too few for the work. The problem with us is not how to find leisure for the teeming millions inhabiting our villages. The problem is how to utilize their idle hours, which are equal to the working days of six months in the year"(Gandhi, M. K. 1987). A pure technological civilization is no doubt supreme in the arts of life, but it is even more supreme in the arts of death. To become industrial in the western sense is suicidal for India.

Another evil of Mechanical industrialization is that it would create imbalance between production and distribution. He said, "Machinery would concentrate production in particular areas, so that you would have to go about in a roundabout way to regulate distribution, whereas, if there is production and distribution both in the respective areas where things are required, it is automatically regulated, and there is less chance for fraud, none for speculation" (Gandhi, M. K. 1987) However,

Gandhiji approved the use of those machines which benefitted every individual. To him, man is the supreme consideration. Man must be the master of machinery, not its slave. Thus, he accepted only appropriate technology in industry and limited use of machinery in the economic sphere.

Economic equality is one of the coordinational elements in Gandhian economic thought. Gross economic inequalities of India flabbergasted Gandhiji. He saw that a few were rolling in wealth, while the masses did not have enough to eat. He saw the capitalists exploiting the labourers, the industrialists exploiting the villagers. Mahatma Gandhi brought forth an ideal economic system to end all these iniquitous inequalities and disparities which make life ugly and hideous. In this system every individual will enjoy economic independence and there will be no exploitation. An atmosphere of non-violence and happiness will prevail. Everybody will be able to get sufficient work and there will be no hardship in life. He believed that the neglect of this simple principle is the root cause of all economic inequalities, but this principle can only be universally accepted when the means of production of the elementary necessities of life remain in the control of the masses" (Gandhi, M. K. 1987)

Accumulation of wealth is sinful, if it is not spent usefully. Gandhiji's aim was to destroy capitalism and not the capitalist. He said, "Earn your crores by all means, but understand that your wealth is not yours, it belongs to the people. Take what you require for your legitimate needs, and use the remainder for society" (Gandhi, M. K. 1987) In order to abolish capitalism he enunciated the doctrine of trusteeship and if the rich do not accept the principle of trusteeship, the poor have every right to use the means of non-cooperation and civil-disobedience. The rich cannot hoard wealth without the help and cooperation of the poor in society. The poor must also learn to free themselves by means of non-violence from the crushing inequalities which have brought them to the verge of starvation.

According to Gandhiji there should be an equalization of status between the capitalists and labourers. Capital and labour are not antagonistic to each other. In fact, they should help and supplement each other. According to the principle of trusteeship, the capitalists are not only the trustees for the material welfare of the labouring classes under them, but they should also look to their moral welfare. The working classes have been violated and treated as a lower class all these centuries. Thus, on the other hand the labour class should be organized and enlightened. Their ignorance should be removed and they should realize that labour is also the capital. The exploited labourers should non-cooperate with their exploiters. The conflict between the capital and the labour will be subdued when the labourer is allowed ownership over the means of production. If capital is power, so is labour. "He took on the labour, he informs us after his fellow workers had expressed a desire that he tell them something about his background and life. Initially he refused to adopt a book format, but then agreed to write it in a serialized form with individual chapters to be published weekly" (Malinar, 1975)

Ruskin's famous hook *Unto This Last* cast a magic spell on Gandhiji. The book captured him and made him transform his life. He derived idea of Sarvodaya from it which meant that everyone should labour and draw the same wage and promote the common good of all. On this idea he first organized the Phoenix settlement near Durban and later the Tokin Farm near Johannesburg. In India he founded the Sabarmati Ashrams on the same pattern.

Gandhiji looked forward to establish an ideal economic system of which should perform sufficient manual labour in order to produce life's principle of bread labour "Bread labour" means that each individual necessities. An individual who ceases to perform such work is a parasite pampering on the labour of others and he eats the bread of sin. Orwell found the book to indicate that Gandhi "was a very shrewd, able person who could, if he had chosen, have been a brilliant success as a lawyer, an administrator or perhaps even a businessman." (Orwell 1956) This shirking of essential physical labour results in exploitation, oppression and class division, which should be avoided.

Gandhiji pleaded to observe "Brahmacharya-moral restraint to control the growth of population which ultimately resulted in poverty. Gandhiji himself took the vow of 'Brahmacharya' and his main object was to escape having more children. Birth control by artificial means did not appeal to him. He believed in the internal effort as opposed to outward means. After taking the vow he realized the full impact of 'Brahmacharya' He then knew that the protection of the body, the mind and the soul lies in 'Brahmacharya'. It was not a process of hard penance but a matter of consolation and joy. "The autobiography itself has become a key document for interpreting Gandhi's life and ideas" (Malinar, Angelika 1973)

According to Gandhiji, "to believe that the sexual act is an independent function necessary like sleeping or eating is the height of ignorance. In fact, the sexual act is an act of generation, and it should be controlled for the ordered growth of the world. This realization will be helpful in the mental physical and spiritual well being and also will be beneficiary for the generations yet to come. "In the early 1920s Gandhi led several civil disobedience campaigns. Despite his intention that they be peaceful, on several occasions, incidents of violence broke out. (Malinar, Angelika, 1978)

The main programme of Gandhian economic doctrine was Swaraj, Sarvodaya and Swadeshi. Swaraj means that the basic necessities of life should be provided to all. Sarvodaya or the welfare of all can only be attained through Swaraj and for its realization, the practical application of the concept of Swadeshi is essential. Mahatma Gandhi launched the Swadeshi (home made goods) movement 'with the object of stopping the outflow of money and encouraging the decaying indigenous crafts of India' (Gandhi, M. K. 1987). The opinion 'When we buy goods from abroad we get the goods and the foreigners get the money, when we buy goods made of home we get both the goods and the money' was the Gandhi's cult of Swadeshi. He launched the Swadeshi movement and gave first place to Khadi among village crafts. Khadi to him was the symbol of unity, of Indian humanity and of Indian's economic freedom.

Mahatma Gandhi was a front rank rural and agricultural economist who disapproved indiscriminate mechanical industrialization because it was eating into the vitals of village economy by absorbing the rural industries. Gandhiji insisted on the economic self-sufficiency of each village at least in the production of physical necessities. According to him, economic Independence was essential for the progress of villages. The spectacle of destitution, hunger and starvation in 7,00,000 villages in India shocked him and he evolved the concept of village Swaraj. To him a village is complete republic independent of its neighbours for its vital wants, and yet interdependent for many others in which dependence is a necessity. Food crops and cotton for cloth. Economically every village will be a self and sufficient unit.

Gandhiji aimed at reviving the rural crafts and industries which had remained neglected during the British period. The idea behind the village industries scheme is that the villagers could attain self reliance and self-sufficiency. The affluence of the cities is based on the exploitation of poor villagers. This self reliance would end their exploitation. Therefore, the village craftsman, carpenter, blacksmith, house-builder, jeweller, cobbler, farmer, barber, weaver, spinner, scavenger, dyer, potter, painter, singer, dancer etc., should develop such a high degree of skill, that articles prepared by them should command a ready market outside.

Khadi-Gandhiji placed Khadi among the first in village crafts. To him Khadi was the symbol of unity, of Indian humanity, of Indian economic freedom and equality. He concentrated on the revival of the Khadi and the spinning wheel with the intention of restoring spinning to its ancient position as a universal industry auxiliary to agriculture, resorted to by the village folk when they have time to spare from agricultural operations" (Gandhi, M. K. 1987).

Mahatma Gandhi had not actually seen a spinning wheel when he returned to India from South Africa in 1915. For manufacturing Khadi revival of handloom or spinning wheel was necessary. It was a means to utilize the enforced idleness of villagers and it was also a recognition of the dignity of labour. When the Satyagraha Ashram was founded at Sabarmati a few handlooms were introduced and several new weavers were trained made from Swadeshi yarn only and discarded the use of mill woven cloth. Gradually the inmates of the Ashram resolved to wear hand woven cloth and Khadi attained its position.

Agriculture is the back-bone of rural economics. The agricultural land belongs to the farmer who tills the soil with the sweat of his brow and not to the landlord or Zamindar who idly sits at home. He pointed out that cooperation was essential for agriculture. He was distressed to know that the educated class, among them, succumbed to the temptation of urban life and flocked to the cities. As Gandhiji was a great rural and agricultural economist, he opposed mechanical industrialization. To him, a big country like India in which majority of population living in villages should not copy the Western model of mechanized industrialization. It should concentrate mainly on agriculture to attain complete Swaraj. Defining village Swaraj, he wrote that it is a complete republic, independent of its neighbours for its vital wants and yet interdependent for many others in which dependence is a necessity. The Swaraj of Gandhiji's conception is 'the poor man's Swaraj in which the poor will enjoy all the ordinary amenities of life that a rich man enjoys'.

Mahatma Gandhi was the apostle of decentralization, for the thought that the village was the safe unit of human association, while the city was a hideous cancerous growth that bred evil fast and spread its infection faster. He wrote: "We notice that the mind is a restless bird: the more it gets the more it wants, and still remains unsatisfied. The more we indulge in our passions, the more unbridled they become. Our ancestors, therefore, set a limit to our indulgences. They saw that happiness was largely a mental condition. The rich are often seen to be unhappy, the poor to be happy. Millions will always remain poor. Observing all this, our ancestors dissuaded us from luxuries and pleasures. They further reasoned that large cities were a snare and a useless encumbrance, and that people would not be happy in them. They were, therefore, satisfied with small villages" (Gandhi, M. K. 1987).

Economic equality is one of the cardinal elements in Gandhian thought. It is characterized by the principle "to each according to need." Equal distribution means that each man shall have enough to meet all his natural wants and nothing

more. Equal distribution can be attained only through a non violent society in which man would reduce his wants minimum. bearing in mind the poverty of India. Gandhian economic doctrine is "a doctrine of dynamic equilibrium in the pattern of income distribution so that exploitation is reduced to the minimum. Today the problem of income distribution is generally not considered. Gandhi was fully aware that a high rate of growth does not necessarily guarantee an equitable distribution of income. Thus he opposed the Western-style economic progress through urban-oriented large-scale industrialization. He settled for a slower rate of growth for the sake of greatness diffusion of technology and productive capacity to re vitalize the rural economy and also for the sake of a greater regional balance in the distribution of income. Central to the concept of economic equality was the idea that all labour has equal value. The work of the farmer, the artisan, the merchant, the lawyer, the doctor, the teacher and the government official should all be considered at par and should be compensated accordingly.

Gandhiji disapproved the indiscriminate mechanical industrialization because it was obscuring the rural industries Gandhiji insisted on the economic self-sufficiency of each village at least in the production of physical necessities. Gandhiji's aim was that economic independence was essential for the progress of villages. With this aim in view he evolved the principle of localized production and consumption. When production and consumption become localized, the temptation to speed up production disappears. It would also end all the difficulties and problems we confront the present day economic system.

Outside trade of non-essential items will continue but Swadeshi would be the governing principle of the pattern of trade and commerce. The following of the principle of Swadeshi will automatically result in a decentralized economy. This will also be a personalized economy because the producer and consumer would feel a responsibility to each other. Thus, practices of exploitation, fraud, production of inferior goods etc., will all come to a stop.

Mahatma Gandhi gave practical shape to all his rural economic doctrines. His first successful experiment in rural reconstruction was at Champaran in 1916. In Champaran he organized the farmers who were being exploited by land owners. By the application of the weapons of non- violence, non-cooperation and civil disobedience, he liberated the Champaran tenants from the tinkathia system, which was the cause of their economic slavery and exploitation. He also started the mass education programme with the help of devoted workers, though he had to face many problems. He launched the Swadeshi movement and started All India in 1934. His sincere efforts and determination gave birth to Khadi, which Spinners Association in 1925 and All India Village Industries Association was called the Swadeshi movement in the beginning

CONCLUSION

Mahatma Gandhi's economic doctrines were enunciated in the context of the peculiarities of the Indian economy and, therefore, they may not be generalizable. Economic stagnation, industrialization coupled with rural de-industrialization, large scale rural poverty, urban unemployment and under-employment, gross inequality of income distribution, heavy dependence of rural population on urban industries, concentration of industrial power and productive capacity in urban centres, heavy reliance on imported, large-scale technology, and inter-sectoral imbalance reflected in urban affluence and rural poverty are some of the important characteristics of the Indian economy that influenced the orientation of the Gandhian doctrine of growth and employment.

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