

JOURNAL GLOBAL VALUES

A Peer Reviewed International Journal

Exploring Gandhian Ideology for Sustainable Rural Development in India

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Abstract:

India has achieved a remarkable sustainable socio-economic development since Independence. Unfortunately, this development has not been shared equitably by all. Some sections of the society have been left out and some areas like rural, tribal and remote areas, could not keep pace with the urban areas in development. If vast sections of society and areas are left out, it breeds unrest and is not conducive to a sustainable development of the country. Communication strategies of various types have been developed and used for motivating people and increase their participation in the pathway for rural development. The R&D organizations interested in accelerating the process of social change through communication of innovations have their goal in which the participatory process is expected to make the rural audience the makers of their own destiny. Participation and empowerment have thus gained wide currency in recent development literature, as if the ideas that people at the grass roots level are the real flag bearers have been discovered only today. People do act, it is for us to appreciate it and materialize it for participatory people- centric movements. Gandhi, as a development actor emerged long ago in the vision and action at Wardha. Gandhi being a national political leader had basically relied on mobilization of the masses and their economic uplift through the development of cottage and small scale industries. This Gandhian concept of Panchayati Raj was to be a communitarian habitat merging the individual self in a collective life- experience and forming the basis of a gradually expanding circle

of supra-local existences. Participation, in the Gandhian sense, was an organic and technical concept and not something artificially created on the prescription of higher level authorities, as is in today's scenario. To quote Gandhi, "In this structure composed of innumerable villages, there will be ever widening, never ascending circles. Life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom." Although, Gandhi was not a development economist, yet his theory is important to development. The Gandhian theory of development is based on the ideologies of Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi's ideas on development are embedded in his philosophy of life. The body of Gandhian thought on development is as follows:

- (i) Gandhian philosophy of economic concepts that are related to development*
- (ii) Gandhian principles of self-sufficiency*
- (iii) Gandhian theory of balanced growth*
- (iv) Gandhian doctrine of trusteeship*
- (v) Gandhian model of sustainable development*
- (vi) Gandhian Sarvodaya Plan*
- (vii) Gandhian concepts of austerity and abstinence.*

This paper highlights the role of Gandhian communication as part and parcel of human life, articulating their grievances on local problems. It attempts to explore the Gandhian model of development and examines the relevance or irrelevance of the same in the New World Order.

I. INTRODUCTION

Development means making a better life for everyone. In the present context of a highly uneven world, a better life for most people means, essentially, meeting basic needs: sufficient food to maintain good health; a safe, healthy place in which to live; affordable services available to everyone; and being treated with dignity and respect. Beyond meeting these needs, basic to human survival, the course taken by development is subject to the material and cultural visions of different societies. The methods and purposes of development are subject to popular, democratic decision making. Many people might agree that a better life for all is desirable goal and that development as its theory is time and thought well spent. But not everyone thinks development is universally realizable at the present time. And among those who think that the goal of a better life for all is practicable, there are broad disagreements on how to get there. Development understood as a better life is a powerful emotive ideal because it appeals to the best in people. What might be called the discourse of development has the power to move people, to affect and change us forever.¹ The concept of development is neither new nor old. Development is a changing and dynamic concept. As change is the law of nature, development also abides it by constantly taking different shapes and dimensions with the change of time. Different scholars have defined development with their own perception, arguments and justification. As development is a complex phenomenon comprising many dimensions social, cultural, economic, political, administrative and so on, therefore, we view

for social development, economic development, political development, and administrative development. So, while defining development it is mandatory to go for an integrated approach.

According to T.N Chaturvedi², it is a process which stands for transformation of society. There are certain theories and approaches of development as it's concept exists and varies by the scholars and theorists perception of the economic, social, administrative or political needs of a country. Communist model of development, diffusion approach, psychological approach, dependency theory, alternative development approach, Gandhian approach to development, human-need centered development, market-friendly approach and strategy are some major approaches to development that are needed to undergo litmus test in the 21st century notion of development.

II. ELEMENTS IN THE NEW DEVELOPMENT

If the alternative path of development is really to be for these teeming millions mired in poverty, then, to start with, everybody has to be guaranteed a living, which usually means employment. Living on wages for one's own productive work, rather than on doles, will not only ensure economic security but also lead to recognition of social worth. In course of time, these citizens will take an interest in shaping their own development as well as that of fellow citizens; will find their voice and eventually the confidence to intervene locally and nationally in the participatory political and economic democracy that India ought to be. This complete economic, social and political transformation arising from full employment has been termed, Development with Dignity.³ There are many alternative pathways to development. While their exact combination would be somewhat different in every nation, some of the main elements in this newer conception began to emerge as:

1. The equality of distribution of information, socioeconomic benefits, and so forth. This new emphasis in development led to the realization that villagers and urban poor should be the priority audience for development programs and, more generally, that the closing of socioeconomic gaps by bringing up the lagging sectors was a priority task in many nations.
2. People participation in self-development planning and execution, usually accompanied by the decentralization of certain of these activities to the village level. Development came to be less a mere function of what national governments did to villagers, although it was recognized that perhaps some government assistance was necessary even in local self-development.
3. Self-reliance and independence in development with an emphasis upon the potential of local resources. Mao Tsetung's conception of national self-development in China is an illustration of this viewpoint, including the rejection of foreign aid as well as the decentralization of certain types of development to the village level. Not only may international and bi-national technical assistance be rejected, but so too are most external models of development leading to a viewpoint that every nation, and perhaps each village, may develop in its own way. If this occurs, of course, standardized indexes of the rate of development become inappropriate and largely irrelevant.

4. Integration of traditional with modern systems, so that modernization is a syncretization of old and new ideas, with the exact mixture somewhat different in each locale.

The integration of Chinese medicine with Western scientific medicine in contemporary China is an example of this approach to development. Acupuncture and antibiotics mix quite well - in the people's minds as shown by this experience. Such attempts to overcome the "empty vessels fallacy" remind us that tradition is really yesterday's modernity. Until the 1970s, development thinking implied that traditional institutions would have to be entirely replaced by their modern counterparts. Belatedly, it was recognized that these traditional forms could contribute directly to development. Development is change toward patterns of society that allow better realization of human values, that allow a society greater control over its environment and over its own political destiny, and that enables its individuals to gain increased control over themselves.⁴

To summarize with, the newer concept of development could be "development is a widely participatory process of social change in a society, intended to bring about both social and material advancement (including greater equality, freedom, and other valued qualities) for the majority of the people through their gaining greater control over their environment."

III. GANDHIAN MODEL OF DEVELOPMENT

Although, Mahatma Gandhi was not a development economist, yet his theory is important to development. The Gandhian theory of development is based on the ideologies of Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi's ideas on development are embedded in his philosophy of life. The body of Gandhian thought on development is as follows:

(i) the Gandhian philosophy of economic concepts that are related to development (ii) Gandhian principles of self-sufficiency (iii) the Gandhian theory of balanced growth (iv) the Gandhian doctrine of trusteeship (v) Gandhian model of sustainable development (vi) the Gandhian sarvodaya plan (vii) Gandhian concepts of austerity and abstinence

1) The Gandhian Philosophy of Economic Concepts Related to Development

We observe that globalization has failed to remove the problems of many important socio-economic sectors. Apart from these failure, globalization has other possible negative effects like loss of economic independence of India, fear of dumping, destruction of domestic industries, resource depletion etc. But India is already hooked on to globalization. So whether to globalize India or not is not the important question now. The important question is how the deficiencies and harmful effects of globalization can be adequately made up by the application of Gandhian economic principles so that a full-fledged growth can be achieved. The modalities of applications of Gandhian Economics can be chalked out in the following manner:

Capital: According to Gandhi, capital is the source of all wealth. It is required for producing commodities and paying wages to the workers. Capital is of two types: money capital and labour capital. A labourer's skill is his capital. Both money capital and labour capital are necessary for production. An entrepreneur's power to exploit labour depends upon the extent of concentration of capital in the hands of capitalists. Gandhi suggested two methods to reduce the evil effects of the concentration of capital. According to him, "the ownership of capital should be decentralized; and if the concentration of capital is considered essential, the state should have the full control over the use of capital." and "Capital should be labourer's servant not its master".⁵

Labour: The exploitation of labour is an evil of the capitalist system. It causes unrest among the workers, and, if it persists for a long time, it provokes them to revolt against the system. According to Gandhi, whenever a worker is paid less than the basic wage rate, or the minimum living wage rate, he is said to be exploited. The exploitation of labour is a normal feature of capitalism. The capitalists, in their effort to increase profits, tend to reduce wages. The extent of exploitation can be minimized by stabilizing the wage rate at a reasonable level. The ultimate solution lies in bridging the gap between the capitalists and the workers. His view was that people should not lose their independence, identity, and thus, their creativity.

Profits: In the Gandhian view, with the introduction of machinery, the entrepreneur's profit increases, while the workers face unemployment, and reductions in wages. Gandhi did not consider profit to be essential for the survival of a firm.

Employment: Gandhi emphasized employment. The full employment of human resources is the primary need of a country. By full employment, Gandhi meant the employment of each and every individual. Full employment cannot be attained through the development of large scale industries. These industries generally use capital intensive and labour saving technologies, and do not provide sufficient employment opportunities. Moreover, most unemployed people live in rural areas. The cause of rural underemployment is the seasonal nature of agriculture. The agricultural workers work on land for six months and for the other six months they remain idle. It will be disadvantageous for the mechanized industries to employ such underemployed casual labour. Again, the underemployed agricultural workers have religious, cultural and social attachments with rural life, and, therefore, cannot be expected to leave their homes easily for employment in the urban industries. Thus, mechanization and large scale production provides no solution to the problem of unemployment in the agriculture-based, over-populated economies.

As Gandhi pointed, "*Mechanization is good when the hands are too few for the work intended to be accomplished. It is an evil when there are more hands than required for the work, as is the case in India.*" The problem of unemployment, according to Gandhi, can be tackled only by developing village and cottage industries. These industries are capital-saving and labour using. They take

employment opportunities to the doors of the unemployed and ideally fit in with the rural conditions.⁶ (Harijan, 1934).

Production: Gandhi advocated production by the masses. He wanted to carry the production units to the homes of the masses, particularly in villages. One advantage of the village and cottage industries is that they increase employment. Another advantage is related to the consideration of efficiency. There are many reasons to believe that it is cheaper to produce any commodity in small and cottage industries because: (a) no separate establishment charges are required (b) integration of cottage industries with agriculture (c) very few tools are needed; (d) problems of storage; (e) negligible cost of transporting goods to the consumer (f) no waste - duplication - due to competition, and (g) no problem of over production. All these factors make the production by the small units economical. Small is beautiful. This is the logic behind the Gandhian scheme of decentralization of village and cottage industries. Gandhi's concept of decentralization was not an isolated concept but the outcome of his religious-ethical, socio-political and economic concepts and ideas. The concept of decentralization occupies paramount importance in Gandhian scheme of rebuilding India from below upwards.

Technology: "There is enough on earth to satisfy everyman's need but not to satisfy anyone's greed"-Gandhi.⁷ It is erroneous to think that Gandhi was against technology. The essence of science is acquiring knowledge through experimentation. He had no objection to the use of machinery to increase production and improve the condition of the workers. But he did not approve of machinery that, in his view, produced goods along with starvation. He was against the indiscriminate multiplication of machinery. Gandhi said, *"What I object to is the craze for machinery, not machinery as such. The craze is for what they call labour saving machinery. Men go on 'saving labour' till thousands are without work, and thrown on the open streets to die of starvation."* For Gandhi, human consideration was supreme, and that of science and technology was secondary.

Poverty and Inequality: Gandhi was not an economist. But he had a clear understanding of the issues of poverty and income inequality. Poverty is not created by the poor man himself. According to him, poverty and inequality are very well connected. Man's greed has resulted in poverty, and it is the cause of persistence of poverty in the economy. According to Gandhi, economics which disregards moral values is untrue. He introduced moral values as a factor in regulating all economic transactions and international commerce. He was not advocating socialism per se but humanistic values.

2) The Gandhian Principle of Self-Sufficiency

The goal of Gandhian development is to build a self-sufficient society. Each community should be self-reliant. Throughout his life, Gandhi sought to develop ways to fight India's extreme poverty, backwardness and socioeconomic challenges, as a part of his wider involvement in the Indian independence movement. Gandhi's championing of Swadeshi and noncooperation was centered on the principles of economic self-sufficiency. Gandhi sought to target European-made clothing and other foreign products, as not only a symbol of British colonialism, but as the source of mass unemployment and poverty in India. European industrial goods had left many millions of India's workers, craftsmen and women without a means of livelihood. By championing homespun khadi clothing and Indian-made goods, Gandhi sought to incorporate peaceful civil resistance as a means of promoting national self-sufficiency. Gandhi led the farmers of Champaran and Kheda in a satyagraha against the mill owners and landlords who were supported by the British government. He wanted to end oppressive taxation, and other policies that forced the farmers and workers and defend their economic rights. A major part of this rebellion was a commitment from the farmers to end caste discrimination and oppressive social practices against women. With that objective, he launched a cooperative effort to promote education, health care, and self-sufficiency by producing clothes and food that were made locally. Gandhi made a trenchant critique of machinery, saying that it was a grand, yet awful, invention. Modernization is, in both theory and practice, more exclusive and less inclusive process. In Hind Swaraj he observes, "It is machinery that has impoverished India". Further, he says: "Machinery is the chief symbol of modern civilization; it represents a great sin". Gandhi's concern was not trivial. One needs to address the question of the appropriate choice of technique when looking at a real economy. Foreign trade does not play a significant role in the Gandhian type of self-contained community. The consumption needs of the community are such that they can be satisfied by the commodities available with the community. Similarly, the production technology is also based on the availability of different factors of production. Thus, aggregate supply is equal to the aggregate demand, and there is no over production or under production. Imports in such a system, are allowed only if there is surplus output of equal value to be exported in exchange. In this way, only bilateral trade is permitted with areas outside the self-contained region.

3) The Gandhian Doctrine of Trusteeship

Gandhi's idea of trusteeship was an innovative way of reconciling the psychological need for incentive or reward for skills and entrepreneurship on the one hand and the social need to take care of the deprived on the other. Gandhi in the beginning echoed such conservatism in his concept of trusteeship which was defense of property that applied equally to the industrial capitalist.⁸ The doctrine of trusteeship is based on the idea that everything is from God, and belongs to God. Therefore, it is for God's people as a whole, and not for a particular individual. Thus, if an individual possesses more than his proportionate share, he becomes a trustee of that surplus amount for God's people. As to the question of the determination of the successor of the trustee, Gandhi replied that the original trustee is to be allowed to make his choice, but that choice is to be finalized

by the state. Thus, under state regulated trusteeship, an individual will not be free to use his wealth for selfish satisfaction or in disregard of the interest of society. Thus, a check is put on the state as well as on the individual.

4) The Gandhian Model of Sustainable Development

It is held that Gandhi's model of non-violent development satisfies the requisites of sustainable development.⁹ We are living part of Earth's life, owned and operated by the Earth. Our attitude towards the earth is defective and dangerous. Our deepest folly is the notion that we own it and can exploit it to our advantage. Gandhi's ideas are relevant for protecting the environment and to preserve the carrying capacity of Mother Earth. Gandhi emphasizes three aspects: economy, society and environment. He says, the present materialistic lifestyle has to be changed for sustainable development. Gandhian economics guides us towards a sustainable lifestyle. The Gandhian model suggests the following steps to attaining a sustainable lifestyle.

i) Sustainable agriculture: We should give up chemical fertilizers and pesticides and substitute them with bio-manures and bio-pesticides.

ii) Khadi and village industries are eco friendly: They create employment and alleviate poverty. So we should promote *khadi* and products of *village* industries.

iii) Appropriate technologies: We should adopt technologies which are simple, and which our villagers are able to comprehend and operate themselves. The use of electricity should be avoided, or kept to the minimum.

iv) Renewable energy sources: Coal and petroleum are nonrenewable energy sources and are getting exhausted very fast. Solar energy is limitless and inexhaustible. We can harness solar energy for heating and lighting. Water and wind energies can also be harnessed for producing electricity.

5) Gandhian Sarvodaya Plan

Gandhi was convinced that the salvation of the Indian economy depends on rural development. Rural development depends on agricultural development, which is the integration of both, the farm and nonfarm activities of the village economy. He never accepted the inherent contradiction between economic development and human development. So he thought of integrating and establishing harmony between both the two, through *sarvodaya*. Having set the goal, he also worked out schemes for achieving it. For achieving the goal of non violent socialism, Gandhi presented the *sarvodaya* plan. The *sarvodaya* plan provides the foundations, on which the economic organization of a nation striving for the ideals of socialism is to be built. *Sarvodaya* means all round wellbeing of all. He argues for the combination of purity of ends and nobility of means. Truth and non-violence are cardinal points in Gandhian concept of Sarvodaya plan.¹⁰

The objective of the *sarvodaya* plan is the establishment of *sarvodaya* social order on the principles of non violence, truth, love, and cooperation.

The *sarvodaya* plan includes:

(a) economic equality and communal harmony, (b) full attention to the cultivators and the labourers, (c) all cultivators organizing their own committees, (d) all labourers forming their own unions, (e) education for all (technical or basic), (f) hand-spinning in every family Gandhi's *sarvodaya* is essentially a programme for the regeneration of the Indian villages. The revitalization of the village economy, among other things, includes measures such as the development of village and cottage industries, the improvement of village sanitation, protection from robbers and wild animals, the development of agriculture, conducting all activities on co-operative basis, the constitution of village panchayats, self-sufficiency in basic requirements, the removal of illiteracy, and the abolition of the caste system. Special attention would be provided to the development of village industries, sanitation, and hygiene.

In short, the basic objective would be to develop the village into a complete, self-sufficient republic. This is a long range programme. The immediate task is to establish *sarvodaya* at the village level. To start with, social order should change according to *sarvodaya* principles in each village. Therefore, Gandhi evolved schemes for the regeneration of villages and revitalization of village economy. Gandhi's struggle against poverty and unemployment, and his work of national reconstruction starts from the village. The purpose is to bring all-round development of the village and make it a self-sufficient economic unit. *Sarvodaya* Movement, which sought to promote self sufficiency amidst India's rural population by encouraging land redistribution, socioeconomic reforms, and promoting cottage industries. The movement sought to combat the problems of class conflict, unemployment, and poverty while attempting to preserve the lifestyle and values of rural Indians, which were eroding with industrialization and modernization. *Sarvodaya* also included *bhoodan*, or the gifting of land and agricultural resources by the landlords to their tenant farmers in a bid to end the medieval system of *zamindari*.

6) Gandhian Concepts of Austerity and Abstinence

Gandhian opinion was that the nature has managed it in such a way that there will be a balance in the eco-system, and that everybody gets enough of what they need, in order to have good life. Unfortunately, man being greedy, violates nature's rule and exploits others in order to fulfill his greed. He appealed to human beings to be austere and follow the principle of abstinence for the welfare of all.

The Gandhian model is based on an integral transformation of Man and society. In the Gandhian conception, the processes of individual transformation and political transformation are inevitably

inter connected. The Gandhian concept basically pursues the unity of the individual and the social order. Gandhi stresses the unity of private and public life. In the Gandhian view, private life must be transparent, and in that transparency, we can see the public life, too. In Gandhian thought, the stress is on the unity of the individual and social praxis. The Gandhian view may be seen as the 'Unity of Existence'. The social, economic, and political subsystems are closely interwoven as an

organic whole, and the poor man remains outside that enclosure. His voice, his priorities, and his problems remain unheard. The Gandhian model advocated the idea of decentralization, which ensures the people's participation. The Gandhian decentralized approach strengthens the feedback system which ensures self-correction and self-direction. It emphasizes *gram swaraj* (village autonomy) and human values. It emphasizes production by the masses, but not mass production. It emphasizes labour intensive technology, small scale village and cottage industries, handicrafts, charkha and the use of renewable energy, and ecological balance.

According to Gandhian thought, “*rural development is not a tailor made programme, or a process which can be triggered by outside agencies and authorities.*” The advantages of decentralization are:

- a) It allows better political and administrative penetration;
- b) It raises efficiency and better implementation of development plans;
- c) It facilitates better coordination between central, state, and local agencies;
- d) It raises sensitivity and flexibility, and institutionalizes peoples' participation;
- e) It reduces red-tapism and the diseconomies of scale, inherent in centralization; and
- f) It ensures greater equity in resource allocation and income distribution.

Gandhian economic thought for sustainable rural development in India appears to be very logical and impressive. However, it suffers from following deficiencies:

- 1) Gandhi was not an economist in any professional sense. His economic ideas lack systematization, and lay scattered here and there in his writings. He attempted no economic analysis and presented no theoretical model.
- 2) In fact, Gandhi has not studied the writings of the western economists. He only studied Marx and that, too, late in his life during his detention in 1942. Whatever he wrote or said about economics was the natural outburst of his ethical and philosophical thought, and was not adopted from any book.
- 3) His thinking on economics does not contain any technical knowledge that has analytical value. He was a practical idealist and was immediately interested in solving the problems of poverty and inequality in his country.
- 4) The solutions he suggested called for a socioeconomic revolution through non-violent means. According to him, to achieve this objective, the country must act according to *sarvodaya* principles. This is a most unpractical solution. It is a great fantasy to expect that the rich would shed their acquisitive tendencies and would help their poor brethren to ameliorate their poverty.

5) With the acceptance of *sarvodaya* principles, the rich are unable to free themselves from the lust for profit. And production does not expand due to obsolete methods of production. It leads to perennial stagnation.

6) Universalizing the idea of non-violence, he hoped, would bring about a change of heart. However, to think that all countries would follow the path of non-violence is mere wishful thinking.

IV. CONCLUSION

Despite the generally inoperative nature of Gandhian philosophy, Gandhi must be credited for emphasizing the role of small scale industries and agriculture in the development of the Indian rural economy. Almost all the economists recognize the importance of small scale industries, and the need for their decentralization in an overpopulated and rural based underdeveloped country. Gandhi also correctly realized that in such an economy, reorganization and revitalization of agriculture is a pre-condition to economic development. Development has to evolve from the people. Gandhi further, conceived a broader view of rural development and asked people to cultivate rural mindedness, fully utilize the local resources for becoming self-reliant and these together constituted the Swadeshi movement. In exchange of letters with Nehru he drew a beautiful picture of the ideal village.

*“My 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. There will be neither plague nor cholera, nor small pox; no one will be idle, no one will wallow in luxury. It is possible to envisage railways, post and telegraph and the like”.*¹¹

Gandhi’s imagined ideal village, his conception of rural development may not be permanent panacea for the multiple crises of the modern state. In present milieu today’s cure may be tomorrow’s disease. But these days and for some times the Gandhi-like post-modern slogan of thinking globally and acting locally seemed suited to the needs and temper of the 21st century.¹²

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