



Gandhi's Ideas on Rural Reconstruction

Dr. Jyoti Arun

Associate Professor, Dept. of Political Science, SCRS Govt. PG College, Sawai Madhopur, Rajasthan, India

ABSTRACT: In the Indian context rural development may be defined as maximising production in agriculture and allied activities in the rural areas including development of rural industries with emphasis on village and cottage industries. It attaches importance to the generation of maximum possible employment opportunities in rural areas, especially for the weaker sections of the community so as to enable them to improve their standard of living. Provision of certain basic amenities like drinking water, electricity, especially for the productive purpose, link roads connecting villages to market centres and facilities for health and education etc. figure prominently in the scheme of rural development. Theoretically, Gandhian approach to rural development may be labelled as 'idealist'. It attaches supreme importance to moral values and gives primacy to moral values over material conditions. The Gandhians believe that the source of moral values in general lies in religion and Hindu scriptures like the Upanishads and the Gita, in particular.

KEYWORDS: Gandhi, rural, reconstruction, agriculture, idealist, Upanishads, Gita, community

I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of 'Rama Rajya' is the basis of Gandhiji's idea of an ideal social order. Gandhi defined Rama Rajya as "sovereignty of the people based on moral authority". He did not view Rama as a king, and people as his subjects. In the Gandhian scheme, 'Rama' stood for God or one's own 'inner voice'²⁸ Gandhi believed in a democratic social order in which people are supreme. Their supremacy is, however, not absolute. It is subject to moral values. The village is the basic unit of the Gandhian ideal social order. Gandhi succinctly pointed out, "If the village perishes India will perish too...."²⁷ We have to make a choice between India of the villages that is as ancient as herself and India of the cities which are a creation of foreign domination". Gandhi's ideal village belongs to the Pre-British period, when Indian villages were supposed to constitute the federation of self-governing autonomous republics.²⁹ According to Gandhiji, this federation will be brought about not by coercion or compulsion but by the voluntary offer of every village republic to join such a federation. The work of the central authority will only be to coordinate the work of different village republics and to supervise and manage things of common interest, as education, basic industries, health, currency, banking etc.¹

The central authority will have no power to enforce its decisions on village republics except the moral pressure or power of persuasion.²⁶ The economic system and transport system introduced by the British have destroyed the "republican" character of the villages. Gandhi, however, admitted that in olden times tyranny and oppression were in fact practised by feudal chiefs. But, "odds were even". Today the odds are heavy. It is most demoralising." In this way in the Gandhian scheme of things the ancient 'republic',² an Indian village without tyranny and exploitation serves as a model unit. Gandhi firmly believes that village republics can be built only through decentralisation of social and political power. In such a system decision-making power will be vested in the Village Panchayat²⁵ rather than in the State and the national capital. The representatives would be elected by all adults for a fixed period of five years. The elected representatives would constitute a council, called the Panchayat. The Panchayat exercises legislative, executive and judicial functions. It would look after education, health and sanitation of the village. It would be the Panchayats responsibility to protect and uplift 'untouchables' and other poor people. Resources for Gandhian Approach to managing village affairs would be raised from the villages.³

All the conflicts and disputes would be resolved within the village. And as far as possible not a single case is to be referred to courts outside the village. The Panchayat would play its role in propagating the importance of moral⁴ and spiritual values among the ruralites for bringing about rural reconstruction.³⁰ Apart from managing its own affairs the



village would also be capable of defending itself against any invasion. A non-violent peace brigade of volunteers would be organised to defend the village. This corps would be different from the usual military formation. They would repose the utmost faith in non-violence and God.⁵

Such a decentralised polity implies a decentralised economy²⁴. It can be attained only through self-sufficiency at the village level. The village should be self-sufficient as far as its basic needs – food, clothing, and other necessities – are concerned. The village has to import certain things which it cannot produce in the village. “We shall have to produce more of what we can, in order thereby to obtain in exchange, what we are unable to produce”.⁶

II. DISCUSSION

The village should produce food-crops and cotton in order to meet its requirements. Some lands should also be earmarked for cattle and for a playground for adults and children. If some land is still available,²³ it should be used for growing useful cash crops like tobacco, opium, etc. to enable the village to get in exchange things which it does not produce. Village economy should be planned with a view to providing full employment to all the adults of the village. Each man should be guaranteed employment to enable him to meet his basic needs in the village itself so that he is not forced to migrate to towns. In the ultimate analysis full employment should be linked with equality.⁷

Physical labour occupies a central place in the Gandhian concept of the self-sufficient village. In this respect he was highly influenced by Rus-kin and Tolstoy. According to Gandhi, each man must do physical labour to earn his bread. Physical labour is necessary for moral discipline and for the sound development of the mind. Intellectual labour is only for one’s own satisfaction and one should not demand payment for it²². The needs of the body must be supplied by the body. Gandhi said, “If all laboured for their bread then there would be enough food and enough leisure for all.” Shriman Narayan rightly observes, ⁸“Gandhiji recognised toil to be not a curse but the joyful business of life as it has the power to make man healthier, merrier, fitter and kindlier”. Gandhiji maintained that industrialization would help only a few and will lead to concentration of economic power. Industrialization leads to passive or active exploitation of the villages³¹. It encourages competition. Large scale production requires marketing. Marketing means profit-seeking through an exploitative mechanism⁹.

Moreover, industrialization replaces manpower and hence it adds to unemployment. In a country like India, where millions of labourers in the villages do not get work for even six months in a year, industrialization will not only increase unemployment but force labourers to migrate to urban areas. This will ruin villages.²¹ In order to avoid such a catastrophe, village and cottage industries should be revived. They provide employment to meet the needs of the villagers and facilitate village self-sufficiency.³² Gandhians are not against machine per se if it meets two aims: self-sufficiency and full employment. According to Gandhi, there would be no objection to villagers using even the modern machines and tools that they could make and could afford to use. Only they should not be used as a means of exploitation of others.¹⁰

Gandhiji was not against the institution of private property. But he wanted to restrict the right of private property to what was necessary to yield an honourable livelihood. For the excess he prescribed the principle of trusteeship.¹¹

III. RESULTS

Gandhiji emphasized the principle of trusteeship in social and economic affairs. He firmly believed that all social property should be held in trust. The capitalists would take care not only of themselves but also of others. ²⁰Some of their surplus wealth would be used for the rest of the society. The poor workers, under trusteeship, would consider the capitalists as their benefactors; and would repose faith in their noble intentions. Gandhiji felt that if such a trusteeship were established, the welfare of the workers would increase and the clash between the workers and employers would be avoided. Trusteeship would help considerably “in realising a state of equality on earth.”¹²



Gandhiji firmly believed that land should not be owned by any individual. Land belongs to God. Hence, individual ownership of land should be shunned. For that a landowner should be persuaded to become a trustee of his land. He should be convinced that the land he owns does not belong to him. Land belongs to the community and must be used for the welfare of the community.¹⁹ They are merely trustees. By persuasion the heart of landowners should be changed and they should be induced to donate their land voluntarily. If the land owners do not oblige and continue to exploit the poor workers, the latter should organise non-violent, non-cooperation, civil disobedience struggles against them. Gandhiji rightly held the view that “no person can amass wealth without the cooperation, willing or forced, of the people concerned”.¹³

If this knowledge were to penetrate and spread amongst the poor, they would become strong and learn how to free themselves from the crushing inequalities which have pushed them to the verge of starvation. But the oppressed should not take recourse to violent methods. In the Gandhian scheme of things¹⁸, the principle of cooperation, love and service is most important and violence has no place in it. Violence is against “moral values” and civilized society is inconceivable in the absence of moral values. Gandhiji’s concept of development is oriented to the uplift of the common man. He preferred village habitats to megalopolises and Swadeshi craft to imported technology for the economic well being of the common man.¹⁴ He stressed the need for cottage industries in place of gigantic industries and advocated for a decentralised economy instead of a centralised one.¹⁵

IV. CONCLUSIONS

He realised the need for integrated rural development and believed that education, health and vocation should be properly integrated. He emphasised the need for education and training which he called ‘Naitalim’¹⁷ (New training) for rural reconstruction. In fine, Gandhian approach to rural development strives to reconstruct village republics which would be non-violent,³³ self-governed and self-sufficient so far as the basic necessities of ruralites are concerned. Apart from creating a new socio-economic order, it Endeavour’s to transform man; otherwise the changes in the socio-economic order will be short-lived.¹⁶

REFERENCES

1. "The Mahatma – Life Chronology". Gandhi Ashram.
2. ^ "Mahatma Gandhi Biography". Social Justice & Special Assistance, Government of Maharashtra.
3. ^ "Definition of Gandhi | Dictionary.com". www.dictionary.com. Retrieved 20 February 2018.
4. ^ Prashad, G.; Nawani, A. (2006). Writings on Nehru: Some Reflections on Indian Thoughts and Related Essays. Northern Book Centre. p. 92. ISBN 978-81-7211-204-2. Mahatma Gandhi was the greatest absorbant and the greatest personality of modern India
5. ^ Blamberger, G.; Kakar, S. (2018). Imaginations of Death and the Beyond in India and Europe. Springer Nature Singapore. p. 3. ISBN 978-981-10-6707-5. Mahatma Gandhi, modern India's greatest icon, elevated his search for moksha above any of his social or political goals, including India's freedom from colonial rule.
6. ^ Carson, C. (2001). The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr. Grand Central Publishing. p. 108. ISBN 978-0-7595-2037-0. Gandhi is not the only the greatest figure in India's history, but his influence is felt in almost every aspect of life and public policy.
7. ^ "Gandhi not formally conferred 'Father of the Nation' title: Govt". The Indian Express. 11 July 2012. Archived from the original on 6 September 2014.
8. ^ "Constitution doesn't permit 'Father of the Nation' title: Government". The Times of India. 26 October 2012. Archived from the original on 7 January 2017.
9. ^ Todd, Anne M. (2012). Mohandas Gandhi. Infobase Publishing. p. 8. ISBN 978-1-4381-0662-5. The name Gandhi means "grocer", although Mohandas's father and grandfather were politicians not grocers.
10. ^ Gandhi, Rajmohan (10 March 2008). Gandhi: The Man, His People, and the Empire. University of California Press. ISBN 978-0-520-25570-8.



11. ^ Guha, Ramachandra (15 October 2014). Gandhi before India. Penguin Books Limited. p. 42. ISBN 978-93-5118-322-8. The subcaste the Gandhis belonged to was known as Modh Bania, the prefix apparently referring to the town of Modhera, in Southern Gujarat
12. ^ Renard, John (1999). Responses to One Hundred and One Questions on Hinduism By John Renard. p. 139. ISBN 978-0-8091-3845-6. Retrieved 16 August 2018.
13. ^ Gandhi, Mohandas K. (2009). An Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments With Truth. p. 21. ISBN 978-1-77541-405-6.
14. ^ Ganguly, Debjani; Docker, John (2008), Rethinking Gandhi and Nonviolent Relationality: Global Perspectives, Routledge, pp. 4–, ISBN 978-1-134-07431-0 Quote: "... marks Gandhi as a hybrid cosmopolitan figure who transformed ... anti-colonial nationalist politics in the twentieth-century in ways that neither indigenous nor westernized Indian nationalists could."
15. ^ Gandhi before India. Vintage Books. 16 March 2015. pp. 19–21. ISBN 978-0-385-53230-3.
16. ^ Guha 2015 pp. 19–21
17. ^ Misra, Amalendu (2004). Identity and Religion: Foundations of anti-Islamism in India. p. 67. ISBN 978-0-7619-3227-7. Gandhi, Rajmohan (2006). Mohandas: A True Story of a Man, His People, and an Empire By Gandhi. p. 5. ISBN 978-0-14-310411-7. Malhotra, S.L (2001). Lawyer to Mahatma: Life, Work and Transformation of M. K. Gandhi. p. 5. ISBN 978-81-7629-293-1.
18. ^ Guha 2015, p. 21
19. ^ Guha 2015, p. 512
20. ^ Guha 2015, p. 22
21. ^ Sorokin, Pitirim Aleksandrovich (2002). The Ways and Power of Love: types, factors, and techniques of moral transformation. Templeton Foundation Press. p. 169. ISBN 978-1-890151-86-7.
22. ^ Rudolph, Susanne Hoeber & Rudolph, Lloyd I. (1983). Gandhi: The Traditional Roots of Charisma. University of Chicago Press. p. 48. ISBN 978-0-226-73136-0.
23. ^ Gandhi, Rajmohan (2006) pp. 2, 8, 269
24. ^ Arvind Sharma (2013). Gandhi: A Spiritual Biography. Yale University Press. pp. 11–14. ISBN 978-0-300-18738-0.
25. ^ Rudolph, Susanne Hoeber & Rudolph, Lloyd I. (1983). Gandhi: The Traditional Roots of Charisma. University of Chicago Press. p. 17. ISBN 978-0-226-73136-0.
26. ^ Gerard Toffin (2012). John Zavos; et al. (eds.). Public Hinduisms. Sage Publications. pp. 249–57. ISBN 978-81-321-1696-7.
27. ^ Guha 2015, p. 23
28. ^ Guha 2015, pp. 24–25
29. ^ Rajmohan Gandhi (2015). Gandhi before India. Vintage Books. pp. 24–25. ISBN 978-0-385-53230-3.
30. ^ Louis Fischer (1982). Gandhi, his life and message for the world. New American Library. p. 96. ISBN 978-0-451-62142-9.
31. ^ Rajmohan Gandhi (2015). Gandhi before India. Vintage Books. pp. 25–26. ISBN 978-0-385-53230-3.
32. ^ Sankar Ghose (1991). Mahatma Gandhi. Allied Publishers. p. 4. ISBN 978-81-7023-205-6.
33. ^ Mohanty, Rekha (2011). "From Satya to Sadbhavna" (PDF). Orissa Review (January 2011): 45–49. Archived from the original (PDF) on 1 January 2016. Retrieved 23 February 2012.