



MAHATMA GANDHI AND THE SELF-RELIANT ECONOMY

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Abstract

The ideal of self-reliant economy, often captured in his concept of "Swadeshi," formed an integral part of Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy for India's freedom and social regeneration. By true independence, Gandhi did not mean merely political freedom but really economic autonomy resting on domestic production and self-sufficiency. His exhortation of the use of swadeshi goods and boycott of British products was not merely an economic resisters' technique against colonial rule; on the other hand, it was a much broader vision of a decentralized economy empowering rural India. For him, it was Gandhiji who symbolized this cause in the spinning wheel as a culmination of encouraging small-scale industries and cottage enterprises to satisfy basic needs without dependencies on outside forces. But at the same time, a local economy on its own was also a stand in morality against an exploitative character of industrial capitalism, dehumanizing people and as destructive to the environment as to the social fabric. It is through this self-reliant economy that, according to Gandhi, there would come fair distribution of resources, alleviation of poverty, and enhancement of community and dignity in labor. They remain relevant ideas for contemporary discourses surrounding sustainable development, asserting the need for local solutions within a globalizing world. The Gandhian model questions contemporary economic theories with the requirement of reviewing growth models so as to intertwine ethics, environmental sustainability, and social justice.

Keywords: Mahatma Gandhi, Swadeshi, self-reliant economy, local production, sustainable development, rural empowerment.

Introduction

Although Gandhi was not an academician, he had been a charismatic leader of the Indian National Movement, whose prime intention was to gain freedom from British rule and to re-establish self-reliance among India's population. He has always worked for the welfare of the Indian people who were suffering from the policies of East India Company during the era of the British's. Though he was not basically an economist, but

given his ideas on economic issues and always struggled against the exploitation policy of the British's. The Marxian doctrine of neutrality, with its emphasis on the "exploitation of labour" also influenced Gandhiji. Gandhiji was very much infatuated by Ruskin's heterodox doctrine that the wealth of a nation consisted, not in its production and consumption of goods, but in its people (Chavan,2013).

While Mahatma Gandhi is rightfully considered one of the most stalwart patriots ever to have fought for India's independence, his contributions toward economic thought were no less great. For Gandhi, the idea of a self-reliant economy, which was loosely based on swadeshi tenets, was really imbued with an idea of society that was free and just. He held the view that political freedom remained incomplete in the absence of economic independence. Further, he believed that self-sufficiency at the level of the individual and the community held the possibility for true liberation. Gandhi's economic philosophy was thus not a resistance strategy against colonialism, but rather a design for a viable, equitable society.

Gandhiji said that this economy was conditioned by the socio-political milieu of early 20th-century India. Under British rule, India turned into a supplier of raw materials and a market for Britain's manufactured goods. In this colonial model of economy, there was deindustrialization of India, especially in the textile sector, leading to poverty and unemployment. Gandhi himself saw the detrimental effects of British industrial capitalism on Indian society and wanted to set things right by popularizing Swadeshi, which emphasized the use of indigenous products and revived traditional crafts. The Swadeshi movement did not have its goal of merely boycotted British goods but pursued self-reliance and economic independence. To Gandhi, buying local industries, more so hand-spinning and weaving, would resurrect India's economy from the grass roots.

Gandhiji's economic ideas are understandable in his whole philosophy. The main idea of his philosophy has an aim at the socio-economic reconstruction of society. These days some people criticized the Gandhian thought as —not up to date and un-progressive. He thinks about total socio-economic reform, so his economic thought must be analysed in this context. He did not give any economic model regarding the development of economics but gave some basic canons based on which we can decide what kind of economic composition is most preferable for Indian economy (Ishii, 1994). Gandhiji has contributed the concept of useful work that would be helpful among all communities, lack of untouchability, ban liquor, small scale and village industries, focus on basic education, Gram Swaraj. These are the necessary social inputs; without them, economic development is not possible. Reconstruction in the rural areas is the main source of development in villages. In his views, each village is a totally independent and efficient which will fulfill their needs (Bhuimali, 2014).

Key Principles of Gandhi's Self-Reliant Economy

Swadeshi and Indigenous Production

Swadeshi, the pivot of Gandhian economic thought, lays emphasis on the nature of using those goods which have to be produced at least by one's own country and preferably by one's own locality. It is this reliance on goods

imported from other places which Gandhi regarded as a form of economic subjection which kept India on foreign powers. In local production, Gandhi promoted community empowerment and overcoming dependence on resources.

Cottage Industries and Decentralization

Gandhiji urged the development of cottage industries, especially hand-spinning (the charkha) and hand-weaving (khadi), as symbols of economic independence. He believed that small, household-based production would create employment for crores of people in India and hence would not, therefore, concentrate wealth and power in the industrial centers which would grow only in the urban areas. Key to Gandhi's vision of an economy that served the many, not the few, was decentralized production.

Economic Ethics and Trusteeship

Gandhi's economic philosophy was an extension of his moral and ethical precepts. He had distaste for the materialism and consumerism of Western industrial capitalism and commended an economy driven by the idea of working for needs and not gratifying greed. The concept he developed regarding this matter was trusteeship: the rich hold their wealth for the benefit of society acting as custodians, not private owners. This notion was aimed at steps used to decrease economic difference and make sure resources are utilized for the common good.

Sustainable Development and Environmental Harmony

Even though the term "sustainable development" was not in use during Gandhi's time, his economic ideas were inherently sustainable. He preached the gospel of simple living, saving resources, and harmonious relations with nature. He believed that the profligate exploitation of natural resources by the industrially advanced societies was the cause of environmental degradation and social injustice. His model of self-reliance promoted a balanced relationship between human needs and the environment.

Gandhian Economic Vision in Practice

These ideas of Gandhian self-reliant economy were put into action through various initiatives during the course of the Indian independence movement. A metonymic artifact for both resistance and empowerment is the spinning wheel, or charkha. Through it, millions of Indians joined in to produce khadi, a hand-spun and hand-woven cloth. The promotion of khadi thus proved to be both an economic and a political act, since it provided employment in the rural areas to artisans and simultaneously attacked the market for British textiles.

Gandhi also founded ashrams—self-sufficient rural communities that lived by the principles of his self-sufficiency. This involved farming, handicrafts, and self-sufficiency within those communities to act as examples of a decentralized and sustainable economy.

He was of the opinion that large-scale industries are always capital-intensive; hence concentrate wealth into the hands of few. If small industries are introduced at village levels, then people would never face the problem of production and external market. On that scale, small-scale industries help to provide employment opportunities for the Indian scale economy. The major problem catering to the Indian economy is the mounting pressure of population, and, therefore, employment opportunities are required. Only the small-scale industries will be there to eliminate the problem of unemployment because, by nature, small-scale industries are labor-oriented. The small-scale sectors provide equal distribution of income and wealth among the labors. This is mainly because compared to large-scale industries; small-scale industries are far-reaching and have a considerable amount of potential for employment. These are the industries with the ability to create or attract more innovation. They provide ample opportunities to provoke changes in technology. The role of entrepreneurs in small industries is geared towards the growth of new innovation and products, which makes it easy to transfer the technology from one to another. Consequently, the economy gains an advantage from the small units.

In the era of globalization, there is a deferent scene in India due to mass effect of globalization. India becoming is an emerging economy and plays a significant role in global world. Actually, in the 21st century, the economic views of Gandhi were not adopted by the Indian government. Jawaharlal Nehru gave other ideas of development that were not only an indigenous growth of small industries and villages. It is happening with the significant effect of fast westernization and industrialization in the recent past. (Baviskar,1999). Therefore, India also emphasizes the industrial growth which might be enhancing the healing of India. The development of industrial sector results in a more usage of natural resources that have conveniently available in the specific country as a consequence, manufacturing of products and services has raised employment opportunities has been created and enhanced the standard of living of general people. In the continuing process of globalization country framed many policies for the development of industries in the public and private sectors.

The main effects of globalization in the Indian economy are that many foreign companies established industries in India. The benefit of Globalization on Indian economy is that the foreign companies acquire highly advanced technology and this would help to make the Indian economy more technologically advanced. But the real picture is totally different because this is one sided development in India. Due to the effect of Globalization small scale sector has abolished its existence from Indian economy. Large scale industries have use capital intensive technique which would increase unemployment because India is a most populated country and people wants more jobs. However with the effect of globalization or technology based industrial expansion and use of machines have created more unemployment in country. The rapid growth of large industries due to globalization has not passed benefits to everyone. It has tremendously increased in the informal sector which affected the working population. The informal sector is not included in the labour legislation because these workers have not good health, terrible working situation and more burdens. Profits are gone to only entrepreneurs therefore gap between the rich and the poor has been increased. Apart from this, large scale industries has also ruin of environment through pollution which affects the health of human beings.

While people have greatly admired Gandhi's view of an independent economy, a good number of people criticized it. Some put forward the argument that he had idealistically and impractically emphasized small-scale industries and rural self-sufficiency in the face of modern industrialization and globalization. Others point to the fact that, although ethically sound, Gandhi's ideas about the economy are not adequate to handle the problems of a modern economy.

Others have further criticized the fact that Gandhi's emphasis on rural economies inadvertently contributed to the negligence of urban development and industrialization, which are equally important in economic growth and development. Other limitations noted of this model by Gandhi are that it is hard to scale up small-scale industries faced with population growth and competition in the present world.

Relevance of Gandhi's Economic Philosophy in the Modern World

Yet, all these criticisms notwithstanding, Gandhi's ideas on self-reliance and local economies find fresh relevance in the 21st century. At a time when globalization has brought to the forefront economic and ecological imbalances, it is Gandhian ideas on sustainability, ethical economics, and community empowerment that assume importance.

The Gandhian ideal of swadeshi and self-reliance thus joins concerns of the contemporary global movement for sustainable development, fair trade, and local economies. His critique against industrial capitalism and consumerism assumes a place in discourse on climate change, resource depletion, and social justice.

Conclusion

The vision of Mahatma Gandhi toward a self-reliant economy stood definitely contrary to the dominant models of economies that were in vogue during his time. It was based on Swadeshi, decentralization, and ethical economics, aiming at empowering individuals and society, promoting sustainability, and assuring social justice. Though his economic thought has also been open to criticism, it nevertheless goes on inspiring movements working toward economic independence, sustainability, and equity in the contemporary world. The vision of Gandhiji provides us with an ethical and moral dimension of economic development in the context of which to rethink our practices, reminding us that any progress that does not fundamentally base itself on inclusive justice and sustainability cannot be called true progress.

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