

Gandhi's Concept of Economic Philosophy

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Abstract: Gandhian economics do not draw a distinction between economics and ethics. Economics that hurts the moral well-being of an individual or a nation is immoral, and therefore sinful. Gandhiji himself was not a professional economist. Gandhian Economics is a school of economic thought based on the spiritual and socio-economic principles expounded by Indian leader M. K. Gandhi. Gandhi's economic philosophy was mainly concerned with individual dignity and the welfare of the poor people. Gandhi's stress on individual's liberty includes a sense of responsibility towards oneself, to others, to society and perhaps to the world beyond. Thus individual would have more choices of enterprises and prospects. This type of arrangements would ensure a smooth relationship between the labour and entrepreneur which may enhance efficiency with increased labour welfare. Gandhi's main idea aims at the socio-economic reconstruction of society.

Keyword: Philosophy, economy, labour welfare, resource, Khadi and Village industry

Introduction

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born on October 2, 1869, at Porbandar (Gujrat). In 1887, he went to England for his education in Law. In 1891, he was called to the Bar. From 1893 to 1914 Gandhiji rendered great service to the cause of racial equality in South Africa. His philosophy of passive resistance, as it was known then, against the unjust persecution of the Indians in South Africa won the hearts even of his opponents.

M. K. Gandhi appeared at a time when the national movement was gaining momentum. But Gandhiji's appearance changed its shape and direction. Those were the days when Indian intellectuals had complete faith in British justice. People were afraid of the British administration and the spirit of fearlessness had not developed in them. A command over the English language and the stamp of Oxford and Cambridge Universities were supposed to be the essential qualities of leadership.

Methodology

In order to achieve the objectives of these study secondary data have been used.

Secondary data are collected from books, newspaper, journal, magazine, internet, television etc. Moreover Internet (web resources) also will be an important source of Secondary data.

The method of analysis followed in this study is purely analytical.

Aims and Objectives

Assam is bestowed with rich natural- forest and agricultural resources. Most of the state's wealth lies untapped yet, and these could provide a strong base for industrial development. In order to make the study not only of academic interest but also of practical utility, the following objectives have been set.

- a) To examine the concept of Gandhi's Economic Philosophy.
- b) To highlight the role of Khadi and Village Industries.
- c) To find out the impact of Gandhi's Economic Philosophy in present society.

Result and Discussion

M. K. Gandhi did not believe in any definite scheme of economic thought. His economic ideas are found scattered all over his writings and speeches. To him, economics was a part of a way of life and hence his economic ideas are part of his general philosophy of life. It has rightly been said that "One has to interpret Gandhiji's economic ideas and build up what may be described as Gandhian Economic Thought from what he did and said in this connection."¹

Gandhi's economic philosophy was mainly concerned with individual dignity and the welfare of the poor people. Gandhi's stress on individual's liberty includes a sense of responsibility towards oneself, to others, to society and perhaps to the world beyond. Thus individual would have more choices of enterprises and prospects. This type of arrangements would ensure a smooth relationship between the labour and entrepreneur which may enhance efficiency with increased labour welfare.

Gandhi had an innate sympathy for the poor and deprived. This coupled with a direct observation of the predicament of the poor and the oppressed both in India and in South Africa led him to design an economic

model that would alleviate the condition of the poor and the deprived. He believed that the high capitalist endeavors were at the root of all suffering. He believed that business without ethical considerations was fundamentally evil. This led to discrimination, oppression and exploitation. Gandhi also held that there is enough in this world to feed and cloths all. However, there is poverty and deprivation because one group of people thrives on the labour put in by others. Gandhi strongly believed in the ethics of hard work and that one is entitled to take from the system only as much as he is capable of producing. This according to Gandhi, was the only way to fight poverty and to disarm the world of all its economic woes.

Gandhi did not isolate economics from other sciences, particularly from ethics. Economics should aim at material and moral progress of the society. It must help in producing and increasing wealth and also promote social justice and moral progress, “An economics that inculcates mammon-worship and enables the strong to amass wealth at the expense of the weak is a false and dismal science.” Gandhi considered economics as a practical science as it suggested measures for maximizing human welfare. He laid great emphasis on human values and condemned the monetary basis of human relations.

Gandhiji also strongly believed that laziness and lack of work can cause immense physical and spiritual deprivation among the populace. It is impossible to ignite the masses towards a revolution leading to a bigger political or ideological goal if they are weak, both physically and morally. He understood that the new industrial modes of mass and large scale productions that have been ousting the age-old indigenous village techniques are ultimately leading towards unemployment and laziness. Therefore, he worked hard for a resurrection of the village modes of production.

Gandhi considered human beings as wealth and not gold and silver. He said, “The final consummation of all wealth is in producing as many as possible, full-breadth, bright-eyed and happy-hearted human beings.” He considered a country to be richest if it nourished the greatest number of happy individuals. Thus in Gandhian economic thought, man occupied a prominent position than wealth.

The khadi programme was directed to bringing about a certain amount of non-violence and truth in our own lives. Gandhi’s great approach of self reliance and Swadeshi is playing a significant role for the improvement of human beings. The term Swadeshi which used by Gandhi consists to promoting and stimulating indigenous industries like small scale and cottage industry of Khadi, Handloom spinning and Weaving mills.

Gandhi offered khadi as a sign of patriotism, equal opportunity and independence. It was his idea by using khadi India can defeat the British rule and which can also rebuild of the Indian society. Therefore, he has started his movement for khadi in 1918. He suggested that if we wear and produce such type of clothes then British cloth must be abolished from the Indian market and India become an independent economy. He imposed small scale and cottage industry in India which would beneficial to Indian economy because these industries are based on family labour and low investment. Raw material is easily available in villages from agricultural products like cotton, food and many other crops. So this would lead indigenous market. Gandhi gives pressure on the growth of the rural industries like khadi, handlooms, sericulture and handicrafts.

Every Indian needed at least 13 yards of cloth per year. Gandhiji believed that multiplication of mills could not solve the problem of cloth supply; therefore he stressed the development of khadi industry. According to Gandhi, khadi was the “symbol of unity of Indian humanity of its economic freedom and equality.” Khadi means the decentralization of production and distribution of the necessities of human life. Khadi movement began only after Gandhiji’s return from South Africa. Gandhi believed that Khadi industry would save millions of people from starvation and would supplement the earning of poor people. He advocated the use of charkha due to its advantages. Charkha requires a small amount of capital; it is simple in operation. It is a source of steady income; it does not depend upon monsoon; it helps in solving the problem of unemployment. Charkha was considered to be the symbol of non-violence.

Gandhi’ slogan was “swaraj through spinning.” Gandhi said, “khadi is the only true economic proposition in terms of millions of villagers until such time, if ever, when a better system of supplying work and adequate wages for every able-bodied person above the age of sixteen, male or female, is found for his field, cottage or even factory in every one of the villagesa in India; or till sufficient cities are built up to displace the villages so as to give the villagers the necessary comforts and amenities that a well-regulated life demands and is entitled to.”

Gandhi’s khadi scheme included the following:

- i. Compulsory introduction of spinning in all primary and secondary schools,
- ii. Cultivation of cotton in areas where it was not grown.
- iii. Organization of weaving by the multipurpose co-operative societies,
- iv. All employees in the education and co-operative departments, municipal and district boards and gram panchayats should be required to pass a test in spinning, otherwise they may be disqualified,
- v. Control of prices of handloom cloth woven of mill yarn,

- vi. Imposition of a ban on the use of mill cloth in areas where the hand-woven cloth was in abundance,
- vii. Use of hand-spun cloth in all government and textile and weaving departments,
- viii. The old cloth mills should not be allowed to expand, and new ones should not be opened, and,
- ix. The import of foreign yarn or cloth should be banned.

Conclusion

M. K. Gandhi's economic ideas, much like everything else in his life, view governed by ethical and moral considerations. His stress on rural economy and emphasis on a simple life, coupled with his concern for universal well-being formed the foundation of his unique views on economics. Gandhi's economic models were based largely on his understanding of the Indian situation. The most unique of Gandhi's economic model was he wanted to turn the entire flow of profits from the pockets of the big industrialists to the workers. He believed that the consumer should not only be concerned with acquiring high quality, inexpensive products, but also consider which sections of society are profited by his investment. Though foreign cloths may be better and cheaper than the home-spun khadi, but the relentless use of the imported fabric would lead to unemployment of thousands of villagers who have traditionally earned a living by spinning and weaving home-made cloths. While the same logic extends to agro-based products as well. Choosing such imported goods would lead to a degeneration of the entire village economy, which was the backbone of Indian economy, Gandhi believed.

Gandhiji was a practical economist and a socialist. His socialism recognized the freedom of the individual and was based on non-violence. He was not against capitalists but he wanted wealth to be accumulated on trusteeship basis. Gandhi's chief contribution to Indian economic thought has been his insistence on the establishment of socio-economic and political order on philosophical foundations.

The Khadi and Village Industries programme plays a predominant role in providing employment opportunities to rural artisans more specifically the socio-economic weaker strata of the society. Since agriculture sector has been losing its ability to generate additional employment opportunities for the fast increasing workforce in rural areas, the importance of Khadi and Village Industries has increased to find an alternative and appropriate employment for rural people. At present, it seems to me that most of the rural Khadi and Village Industries of Assam have been running in uncertain future. They have the potentiality to work, but yet they are in a vulnerable state due to various obstacles and lack of attention on the part of Government's policy measures. No serious attempts have been made for rural development through Khadi and Village Industries since independence although there exist a different institutional framework within this organization which have the potentiality to generate income and employment for poorer sections of the rural community. So it is an urgent need to make a systematic study of the problem which can lead to take policy making for revival of Khadi and Village Industries and to preserve the Gandhian views of an Economic Philosophy.

There may be various reasons for which the Khadi and Village Industries are failing to fulfill their aims and objectives in rural areas of Assam. The reasons for this are, like, lack of - proper management, infrastructure, financial support, non-availability of raw material, etc. Transportation, marketing are some of the areas which served as sweeping ingredients to make this institution a failure. Moreover, lack of awareness on Gandhian economic philosophy and the Khadi and Village Industry is one of the important causes for their poor performance.

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