

MODULE 7: GANDHIAN MODEL OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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MODULE 7: GANDHIAN MODEL OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Introduction:

Mahatma Gandhi as a visionary of India, had a very clear perception of its villages and made an emphatic assertion that 'India lives in her seven and half lakhs of villages'. He further believed that India will have to live in villages, not in towns, in huts not in palaces. He held this conviction by saying that 'If village perishes, India will perish too. Gandhi, played the leading role in securing for India political independence from the British Raj, through organizing and mobilizing Indian people from all walks of life in a peaceful and non-violent manner. He is therefore rightly called the 'Father of the Nation'. Gandhiji's approach to India's rural development was holistic and people-centred. It was rooted in his conviction in the tenets of truth, non-violence and the goodness of human-beings. Influenced as he was by Tolstoy, Ruskin and the teachings of the Gita, he placed more emphasis on moral and spiritual values than economic motives as a means of overall development. He found that the progress of the country lies in the development of majority of its rural villages, develop rural economy, industry and rural skills. Gandhiji found the only way of bringing hope of good living to the rural people is by making the village the central place in the economic programme Rural development as outlined by Gandhiji contained self-sufficiency, inter-dependence for other wants and development of Village Industries. He wanted to bring about rural reconstruction with sound scientific and spiritual values. Through his 18-point Constructive Programme, Gandhiji successfully implemented his rural reconstruction activities in Sevagram Centre near Wardha in 1935.

Gandhian Dream of Indian Villages:

Gandhiji's ideal village belongs to the pre-British period, when Indian villages were the small republics undisturbed by the periodical visitations of barbarous hordes. This republican character of the villages was destroyed by the British rule. Therefore, in Gandhian plan of rural reconstruction, the ancient republican village without any kind of exploitation served as a model unit³. Gandhiji aimed at the attainment of Village Swaraj and said in 1942,

"My idea of Village Swaraj is that it is a complete republic, independent of its neighbours for its own vital wants and get inter-dependent for many others in which dependence is a necessity. Thus every villages' first concern will be to grow its own food crop

and cotton for its cloth. It could have a reserve for its cattle, recreation and playground for adults and children. Then if there is more land available, it will grow useful money crops, thus excluding gunga, tobacco, opium and the like. The village will maintain a village theatre, school and public hall. It will have its own water works ensuring clean water supply”.

Gandhiji fully understood the consequence of western type of industrialization in India. He was conscious of the fact that far industrialization would destroy the Indian society by eliminating our decentralized rural industries and further leads to improvement. The once self-sufficient and self-contained rural villages have been drained progressively. He wanted to reverse this trend and bring about a rural reconstruction based on sound scientific and spiritual values. He said,

“my ideal 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, none will be idle, no one will wallow in luxury. Everyone will have to contribute his quota of manual labour... . . . It is possible to envisage railways, post and telegraphs and the like’

Gandhian strategy of rural reconstruction was based on village swaraj and swadeshi movement. The basic principle of village swaraj as outlined by Gandhiji are trusteeship, swadeshi, full employment, bread labour, self-sufficiency, decentralisation, equality, Nai Talim etc. Thus the idea of ideal village of Gandhian dream was a comprehensive one, encompassing the economic, social, political and educational dimensions. Gandhiji gave emphasis on truth and non-violence in every aspect of human life and said, "the swaraj of my opinion will come only when all us are firmly persuaded that our swaraj has got to be won, worked and maintained through truth and ahimsa alone.

Values Underlying of this Model

The Gandhian Model of rural development is based on the following values and premises :

1. Rural India is found not in its cities, but in its villages.
2. The revival of villages is possible only when the villagers are exploited no more. Exploitation of villagers by city dwellers was ‘violence’ in Gandhiji’s opinion.
3. Simple living and high thinking, implying voluntary reduction of materialistic wants, and pursuit of moral and spiritual principles of life.

4. Dignity of labour : everyone must earn his bread by physical labour , and one who labours must necessarily get his subsistence.
5. Performance to the use of indigenous (swadeshi) products, services and institutions.
6. Balance between the ends and the means : Gandhiji believed that non-violence and truth could not be sustained unless a balance between the ends and the means was maintained.

Principal Components of the Model

The Principal components of the Gandhian Model are discussed in below in brief

Self-sufficient Village Economy

Gandhiji's concept of self-sufficiency was not a narrow one, nor was it that of selfishness or arrogance. He realized the need for villagers to get those things from outside the village, which they could not produce in the village.

Gandhiji insisted on the self-sufficiency of Indian villages. Self-sufficiency was advocated by him as a basic principle of life because dependence brings in exploitation which is the essence of violence. The poor is exploited by the rich, the village by the city and the undeveloped country by the developed ones due to lack of self-sufficiency"

He suggested that villages should be self-sufficient i.e. they should produce their own food, clothing and other articles needed for meeting their basic needs. He insisted on the promotion of village or cottage industries and handicrafts because they can provide employment, necessary to meet the basic needs of the villagers and also facilitate village self-sufficiency.

Gandhiji said that it was not the British rule but the modern civilization nourished by the rule, which was the real cause of economic, distress i.e., poverty and unemployment. He further said, "if the British rule were replaced tomorrow by the Indian rule based on modern methods, India would be no better". "Against this, he envisaged India's salvation in the revival of its ancient civilization which prescribes for man the path of duty and observance of morality"

Gandhiji's self-sufficient and non-violent village society could only be built on the basis of co-operation and not on conflict. According to him as far as possible, every activity in the

village will be conducted on co-operative basis. Even in the field of agriculture, Gandhiji recommended co-operative farming which would save labour, capital, tools and provide employment to all adult Villagers and increase production also. He said, "we must attempt to prevent further fragmentation of land and encourage people to take to co-operative farming". He noted that when dependence becomes necessary in order to help society to maintain good order it is no longer dependence but it becomes co- operation.

Decentralisation

Gandhiji believed that human happiness with mental and moral development should be the supreme goal of society, and that this goal should be achieved through decentralization of political and economic powers.

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 Panchayat 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.

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 moral and spiritual values among the ruralites for bringing about rural reconstruction.

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.

Panchayati Raj

Gandhiji envisaged that each village in India would be a republic, where the village panchayat would have the full power of managing its affairs, including defense. He expected the panchayat to perform the legislative, executive and judicial functions necessary for smooth functions of the village economy. Various developmental activities such as education, health and sanitation would also be taken up by the village panchayat. The vehicle that was most ideal to initiate both political and economic democracy at the grassroots level was the Panchayat Raj system. Mahatma Gandhi's tours all across the country reinforced his convictions that India would benefit if the villages were governed by Village Panchayats based on the principal of "simple living and high thinking". These were village republics which were self-contained and self-reliant and having all that people want. These were the institutions where minimum standard of living could be accorded to all human beings. An individual had maximum freedom and opportunity to develop his personality to the greatest extent. In these republics there would be a diminution of the state and the roots of democracy deepened. According to him centralization cannot be sustained as a system without adequate force.²

The affairs are to be managed by Panchayats consisting of five persons elected annually. Gandhi aimed at the individual the centre of the local administration. People are expected to take personal interest and turn up in large numbers at the meeting to deliberate problems of common interest such as village industries, agricultural production, obligation and planning. It is good, and in conformity with Gandhiji's views, that India now has made panchayati raj institutions statutory bodies by passing the 73rd (Constitution) Amendment Act, 1992. It is hope that Gandhiji's dream of local self-governance through village panchayats would now be fulfilled.

Khadi and Village Industries

For Gandhiji, khadi was an instrument of decentralization of production and distribution of the basic necessities of life, and of ensuring 'work to all'. He also favoured the promotion of other village industries, such as hand grinding, hand pounding, soap making, paper making, metal making, oilseed crushing, tanning, etc. He advocated the use of manual labour and opposed the introduction of machined, fearing that they would displace human labour. But he appreciated the role of new technologies if they were appropriate, indigenous, and did not effect the level of employment and standard of living.

Khadi mentality means decentralization of production and distribution of the necessities of life. Khadi has to play an important role in the village economy of India. It can fulfil the poor's three basic necessities: cloth, work and self-confidence to articulate themselves.

Gandhiji considered Khadi as an inevitable means for the all-round development of the Nation. He said in 1921, "Just as we cannot live without breathing and without eating, so it is impossible for us to attain economic independence and banish pauperism from this ancient land without reviving home-spinning. I hold the spinning wheel to be as much as a necessity in every household as the hearth. No other scheme that can be devised will ever solve the problem of the deepening poverty of the people.

In 1934 Gandhiji wrote in Harijan, "Khadi is the sun of the village solar system. The planets are the various industries which can support Khadi in return for the heat and substance they derive from it. Without it, the other industries cannot grow . . . and also without the revival of the other industries, khadi could not make further progress. For, villagers to be able to occupy their spare time profitably, the village life must be touched at all points."

According to Gandhiji, Khadi alone can solve a number of economic and other problems of India as shown below

- i) Under Khadi economy, the capital is under the control of the labour and supremacy of man over machinery can be established
- ii) Each village can be self-sufficient through the welfare of these villages, India will also prosper.
- iii) The villagers can take up all the stages of Khadi production for earning wages which can supplement their meagre resources.
- iv) Spinning wheel give employment opportunities to village carpenters, Blacksmiths, Weavers and can create self-sufficiency in all villages in India. Khadi alone can give encouragement to other village industries.
- v) Spinning is an honourable and leisurely occupation for the women of India. With the popularization of spinning wheel, women need not go out of their houses for earning their bread.

- vi) Khadi industry has great organizing potentialities in India. Millions of people are involved in production, distribution and consumption of Khadi.
- vii) Spinning is easy to learn and requires no outlay of capital. The farmers can easily learn and operate the spinning wheel and can spin during their leisure hours to supplement their meagre resources.
- viii) Khadi is the only industry which can absorb largest number of people and can provide employment to the unemployed at any time of the year without much difficulty.
- ix) Khadi industry provides work to the people during famine period. The state should be purchase the products of Khadi during the famine. It is an Insurance against the adversity of famine conditions.
- x) The spinning wheel provides the people food, cloth and make them self-sufficient.

Cooperatives

Gandhiji saw a great virtue in cooperation as an instrument of rural development. He assigned specific roles to cooperatives in the field of agriculture, commending the promotion of cooperative farming and thereby preventing further fragmentation of landholdings. He also advocated the establishment of other types of cooperatives, such as credit cooperatives, weavers and spinner's cooperatives and dairy cooperatives. In this matter also, we have perhaps lived up to the expectations of Gandhiji. India now has the world's largest network of cooperatives, which occupy an important place in India's rural economy. The Operation Flood programme is a living example of what cooperatives can do to promote agricultural and rural development in India. There is, therefore, need for us to adopt the cooperative part to rural development, as advocated by Gandhiji.

Trusteeship

Gandhiji considered trusteeship an instrument of transforming the capitalist order of society into an egalitarian one. In his opinion, all the land belonged to God, that is, the community, and therefore he advocated that land and other natural resources should be collectively owned by, and operated for, the welfare of the community. Landlords should merely be trustees of land and other natural resources and capital assets. He saw in the principle of trusteeship a

non-violent method of persuading landowners to donate their land voluntarily for community welfare purposes, and of avoiding class conflicts.

According to Gandhiji, trusteeship is a way of life rather than just a method to achieve a particular end. According to his holistic approach, "everything on this earth belongs to God and is from God. Therefore, it was for this people as a whole not for a particular individual. Everybody on this earth has a natural right to at least the basic necessities of life, just like the birds and the beasts have. If somehow, an individual had more than his proportionate share, he was a trustee of that portion for God's people" As land belongs to God and thus belongs to the community and therefore should be used for the welfare of the community. By peaceful non-violent persuasion, the hearts of landowners should be changed to accept the trusteeship idea. If this is not accepted by them, the poor should organise non-violent nonco-operation and civil disobedience struggle against them. He believed that the rich cannot accumulate wealth without the co-operation of the poor.

He said,

"The moment the cultivators of the soil realise their power, the Zamindari evil will be sterilized. What can the poor Zamindar do when they say that they will not simply work the land unless they are paid enough to feed and clothe and educate themselves and their children. In reality the toiler is the owner of what he produces. If the toilers intelligently combine, they will become an irresistible power"

Village Sanitation:

The ideal village envisaged by Gandhiji could be constructed on the basis of the principles of public hygiene and sanitation. The houses which are to be built with locally available material will have sufficient light and ventilation. Each house or a cottage shall have a courtyard to grow vegetables for domestic consumption and to house cattle. The village streets and lanes will be kept clean. Each village shall have its own waterworks to ensure clean water supply.

The constructive workers shall make the villages models of cleanliness by teaching the villagers to maintain cleanliness in and around the village, including public wells, tanks and rivers.

Gandhiji's Idea was not confined only to the removal of garbage from the lanes and streets of the villages but also to put the same to the productive use. If the garbage is scientifically converted into manure, the villages can not only make use of productive manure to grow more food but also keep the villages clean from dust, dirt and bad smell.

Removal of Untouchability:

Untouchability is a social evil and should not be looked upon as a mere political necessity. The socio-economic evils associated with this system must be abolished. According to Gandhiji, there should be perfect social equality among the people in the society. No social superiority should be entertained by any individual or by a section of the society on the ground of birth or knowledge or religion or any other consideration. Gandhiji fought against social superiority in any form and carried on his crusade against the doctrine of racial superiority in South Africa and evil practices of untouchability in India.

He has the opinion that no one is born as untouchable and unequal. The practice of untouchability is a sin against God as the Harijans and non-Harijans are the children of the same God. He found untouchability as the worst evil effect of Hinduism and worked for their temple entry for religious equality.

In 1932, Gandhiji introduced Harijan Sevak Sangh, a non-political association for their self-improvement. He suggested their economic self-reliance through the adoption of spinning and weaving. He advocated non-violent methods to be adopted by them for their self-employment and for proper realisation of their rights.

Gandhiji was not in favour of representation to the Harijans in all administrative bodies. He recommended representation under two conditions:

- i) If the Harijans are purposely kept out by the Influential castes, they should be given representation
- ii) It is the duty of the represented communities to provide representation to those communities which are unrepresented or inadequately represented

Gandhiji wanted the caste Hindus to sacrifice and struggle for the all-round development of the Harijans and wished that they should be assured of decent standard of living as respectable equal citizens of the country.³³ For this, cleanliness, good habits, thrift,

industry and moral courage are to be inculcated among them. 'She awakened Harijans should make serious attempts for self-improvement in all walks of life. In Gandhian concept of swaraj, none should be high or low but all are to be equal citizens and this Swaraj society is free from any social exploitation and domination

Nai Taleem

Gandhiji had no faith in modern education, which emphasized only literacy and acquisition of information. In his opinion, modern education was 'debauchery of the mind'. Hence, he developed a new system of appropriate education and training which he called Nai Taleem. He believed that Nai Taleem would help develop the full potential of children and adults, through full development of their bodies, minds and spirits. He wanted to see Nai Taleem to be self-supporting and practice-oriented. It is unfortunate that India has not yet geared its education system to the needs of the country, and that is why its human resources remain under-developed and less productive, as compared to other countries which have given the highest priority to education and total literary programmes have received higher priority than in the past, with a view to achieve the national objective of 'Education for All' by the year 2000. Similarly, vocational education at the post-high school (10th class) level is now being considered as an alternative to the present traditional general education. This shows that we have now realized the relevance of Gandhiji's Nai Taleem.

Pros and Cons of this Model:

The Gandhian model, like any other development model, has both its proponents and opponents. The proponents argue that under the prevailing sociocultural and economic conditions in India, the Gandhian model is still relevant, and is the only alternative available for bringing about equitable and sustainable rural development. They assert that panchayati raj institutions and cooperatives are still as relevant as when they were in Gandhiji's days, and that the role of appropriate education cannot be overemphasized even in the present Indian context. The critics argue that Gandhiji's ideals of swadeshi, voluntary curtailment of one's wants, trusteeship, self-sufficient villages, and use of manual labour in preference to machines sound obsolete these days, particularly in the weeks of India's new economic policy characterized by privatization, liberalization, and globalization. As a matter of fact, by adopting an economic growth-oriented development path and by following the Western model of industrialization, both under the influence of Jawaharlal Nehru, India had

abandoned the Gandhian model long ago, they assert further. To conclude it could have been said that Gandhiji wanted India to travel east, but India decided to travel west, and it is known that 'the twain never meet'.

