



Gandhian Model for Rural Development: Relevance after Economic Reform

KEYWORDS

Gandhian model, Self-sufficient, Rural Economy, Rural Reconstruction

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ABSTRACT *This article is an attempt to characterize the rural development approach evolved in Gandhian Philosophy and explained its significance in this globalised era. The series of ideas stemming from Gandhi have provided the theoretical ground for hundreds of thousands of grass root development activities all over the world. There is a lot of argument regarding the applicability of the Gandhian thought in village development across the world. The study concluded that the Gandhian model would be much reliable to reduce the gap between the well-offs and have-nots, instead of replicating the Western models of economic development. Gandhiji's ideas are more relevant today than ever before, specially his philosophy of self-reliance and decentralization.*

Introduction

Many thinkers doubt the economic ideology of Gandhi, since they believe that it is not a suitable method either as a policy or as an approach. But gradually this way of thinking has been changing across the world. Some argue that Gandhian economics is quite appropriate for the present-day crisis in rural development in India. While India started formulating planning strategies in 1951-52 there was intense debate on India's development policy and strategies issues because economic development of a country depends on the proper utilization of natural and human resources. India was an economy with a low level of social, economic, and technological development, low per capita income, slow pace of development of economic institutions and obsolete techniques of production in all the sectors of economy, at the time of independence, and most of the symptoms are still persist in the economy.

In this context this article is an attempt to characterize the rural development approach evolved in Gandhian Philosophy and explained its significance in this globalised era. The Gandhian village development model is analyzed in the first section. The backdrop of current setbacks in rural development is critically described in the second section. The third section elaborates the necessity of the alternative method and finally the conclusion and future pathway is explored in the last section.

Gandhian View for Self –Sufficient Rural Economy

According to Gandhi every person should be provided with bare minimum necessities i.e. food, shelter, and clothing. An increase in personal income is an indication of the growth of national income. But the opposite may not be true i.e. the growth of national income may not always benefit every man in society.

Agricultural sector alone cannot solve the problem of rural poverty and unemployment. That's why Gandhi gives stress on the growth of the rural industries like khadi, handlooms, sericulture and handicrafts. He opines that large-scale industries make people lazy and help concentration of wealth in the hands of few. On the contrary, rural industries are based on family labour and required less amount of capital. Raw materials are also collected from local markets and the goods thus produced are sold in the local markets. Therefore there is no problem of production and mar-

ket. Large scale production creates conflicts between labour and capital. Such conflicts may not occur in the case of rural industries. Gandhiji wanted diversified economic activities in the villages and thus stood for all round development of rural India.

II. Obstructions in Rural Development of India in present century

At the turn of the millennium, most developing nations are confronted by increasing poverty, illiteracy, population, environmental degradation, crime, corruption and social unrest. Liberalization of economies and globalization are often being projected as the panacea for all these problems. Facing bankruptcy, the developing and under developed nations have opened their economies to the global market. This is giving a false sense of prosperity but the basic problems of poverty, illiteracy, population, environmental degradation and social unrest continue to plague them. The current scenario is quite disappointing as some glimpses are described below:

Present scenario of under development:

(i) Poverty Level

Though a lot of time and effort has been spent in improving these in the post-independence period, the poverty alleviation programmes are numerous in the rural areas across the nation, yet the poverty levels continue to be quite high. As per the press release of the Planning Commission, the poverty estimates report 21.6 crores (25.70 %) in the rural areas for 2012-13.

(ii) Health Conditions

In rural India, the existence of infant mortality rate (IMR) was 51 per 1000 in 2010. It shows the level of health amenities for the rural people in India. The per capita per day intake of calories (2147 Kcal) in 2009-10 divulges still a lower level.

(iii) Education Status

The literacy rates are still dwindling and show a long haul ahead since the rates are 68.91 per cent, 78.57 per cent, and 58.75 per cent for persons, males and females respectively in the 2011 Census. The human development index was 0.467 in 2007-08 and the quality achieved in rural India is very low when compared to other developing countries

iv) Employed and Unemployed Levels

As per the 66th NSS round, the male and female employed on Current Daily Basis (CDS) were 50.1 per cent and 18.2 per cent in that order and the unemployed on the CDS basis were 6.4 per cent and 8.0 for males and females respectively.

(iv) Lagging Agriculture

The pathetic conditions of cultivators generate a number of questions. A large proportion of the agricultural land is without irrigation facilities. We find suicides of farmers, huge debt burden, and low level of incomes, market problems. Thus a galaxy of problems exists in agriculture in rural India. A major segment of the population depends on agriculture, its growth rate in the recent past (10 years) has been low—not more than 1.5 per cent (crop). It certainly affects the incomes of a vast segment of the population. There is hardly any appreciable development in the economic condition of the small and marginal farmers.

(v) Indebtedness

It is reported the indebtedness of all rural people was 25 per cent and 47.30 per cent for 1999-00 and 2004-05 respectively. For labour households, the indebtedness reports that for all households average indebtedness per household is Rs 4852 in 2004-05 and the average debt per indebted household (for all) is Rs 6049 and Rs 10,259 in the similar period. Farmers' suicides from 1997 (13,622) to 2006 (17,060) have been persisting. The rate of suicides during 1996-2005 reported as per lakh population from 1.42 per cent to 1.55 per cent.

III. Need for Alternative model for Village's makeover in India

There is a dire need to take the message and practice of Gandhian thought in both planning and implementation to render a real change in village life. Where the old policies have failed to guarantee welfare to all, an alternative policy must be devised. Since the gloomy situation, as discussed earlier, stand in the way of ensuring peaceful and harmonious life for vast segments of Indian peoples, it is necessary on the part of policy makers to consider the Gandhian ideology of village transformation, and helps to ameliorate the prevailing conditions.

The economic models of India are hardly successful to remove the maladies on the rural front; rather these have paved the way for transfer of resources from rural to urban in the form of humans and raw material. It is high time to formulate a new model, which is based on the Gandhian ideology (Mishra,2009; Rangarajan and Rajkumar, 2009) .

The Gandhian model would be much reliable to reduce the gap between the haves and have-nots, instead of replicating the Western models of economic development, which lead to drastic inequalities and too much capital concentration in a few hands (Naik J.P. 1983) There are certain objections to the adoptability of Gandhian rural reconstruction, since certain academic and political groups express the view that rural social stratification and social hierarchy may become obstacles for the development of the underprivileged and backward sections in society. But at same time, they argue strongly for a new approach for the welfare of the huge masses of rural India. (Suryakant Waghmore, 2008 and Surinder S. Jodhka, 2002. Though there are doubts over the working of the Gandhian economic ideology, we should be ready to accept the ground realities of the present scenario of economic failure in ensuring well-being for a large chunk of our fellow men. Therefore, Mathur B.P. (2011) clearly articulated: "It is time we abandon a model whose foundations rest on materialism, consumption and greed."

Notwithstanding the controversial aspects of the Gandhian model, one can hardly deny its relevance in the current turbulent and violent-prone societies. It is the right time to adopt the Gandhian model in the interest of 84 crores of the rural population. Hence, our rural development policies are to be given shape through the prism of Gandhian rural reconstruction. What we need today is to devise a new model of economic development based on the Gandhian ideology.

IV. Conclusion

Rural regions in our nation are still deprived of basic necessities. Poverty in rural areas has resulted in suicides of a large number of farmers. A number of schemes and programs have been made for providing employment opportunities to the rural youth over the years but due to poor implementation of the programs and the absence of proper monitoring almost all the schemes have not shown expected results. Thus the Gandhian Paradigm of social progress needs to be followed effectively in our villages.

India need a new matrix of economic development, in which progress is measured in terms of development of human capability, dignified employment for everyone, equitable distribution of income and wealth, ecological sustainability and social well-being of the community. Gandhiji's ideas are more relevant today than ever before, specially his philosophy of self-reliance and decentralization.

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