



GANDHIAN APPROACH TO RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND DECENTRALISED PLANNING

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Rural development, Decentralised planning, regional planning, village planning

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ABSTRACT

Gandhiji, as we understood him, was a revolutionary and a most active idealist. During his effective lifespan he had established social institutions involving masses for overall development of the society. India being a vast land inhabited by diversified population groups, Gandhiji's approach of self-help and mutual trust is of greater relevance. His approach of rural development may be divided into three parts viz., City civilisation and rationale for separate attention to the village; Model of an ideal village community; and the measure of revitalisation of the existing villages. Local governments with the true spirit of decentralisation exist in several countries of the world; some pioneers among them are United States, United Kingdom, France and Germany. The main objective of this paper is to study the relevance of Gandhian approach to rural development and decentralised planning.

1. INTRODUCTION:

When Gandhiji entered the Indian scene, he could see the poverty of Indian villages very clearly. He read the analysis of Indian Economy written by R.C.Dutt and concluded, "That villages in India were being exploited by foreign government and city dwellers as well". As late as in 1944 he observed, "There are two schools of thought at present in the world. One wants to divide the world into cities and other into villages. The village civilisation and the city civilisation are totally different things". Huge profits and high wages in cities were possible by exploitation of cheap labour and raw materials mostly contributed by villages. The prosperity of the urban world in India could be possible because it drained off lifeblood of the village by dumping cheap and shoddy goods from foreign land. Thus according to Gandhiji, the basis of rural and urban relationship was conspiracy and exploitation of the former by the latter.

2. GANDHIAN VIEWS ON RURAL DEVELOPMENT:

According to Gandhiji villages have to fend for themselves by becoming self-sufficient and self-sustain. In Gandhiji words "My idea of self-sufficiency is that village must be self-sufficient in regard to food, cloth and other basic necessities". With the significance and performance of the village system in India, Gandhiji stated "if villages perish India will perish." Gandhiji has given a model of ideal village community. It is an organised community of persons, active, educated, health, intelligent, self-reliant and morally of a very strong fiber. Its population shall be engaged in farming and allied activities and industries based on handicrafts, self-sufficient in vital needs, undertaking dignified occupations and enjoying a close contact with nature, sharing non-violently equal duties, rights and opportunities of a really democratic society.

The ideal village provides diversified and flexible opportunities to earn and enjoying on par with the cities of today. It must maintain its own theatre, school, dispensary, public hall, water works, recreation and playground for adults and children, hall for worship and lanes and streets with free of dust. Railways, Post and telegraph and electricity should be provided by the state. Every individual in the village should be able to obtain a balanced diet, a decent house to live in with clean and hygienic surroundings. Adequate medical relief needs to be provided. All possible activities in such a community should be organised on the co-operative basis. Small scale, individual intensive cattle based farming should produce food grains, fiber, fruits and vegetables to meet the basic needs of the community. The balanced growth of animal, plant and human life for mutual benefit is stressed. Industries based on handicraft, employing local resources and simple labour intensive techniques should grow. Land utilisation must confirm to the needs of the village to produce food grains, pulses, vegetables and fibers which are

useful and non-harmful cash crops for non-exploitative exchanges. As an ideal, each one should own land to earn bread through family labour, land shall be reserve for cattle grazing, play grounds, public places, residential accommodation etc. Market must be local, in essence, consumption being guided, not by imitation but by the felt-needs of the community ownership of land should necessarily belong to those who till and on the principles of Swadeshi. Transport may be needed to clear cash crops and surplus of the village industrial goods.

As regards to the practicability of the ideal village, Gandhiji wrote in 1940, "the work to shape an ideal village was difficult", but if only one ideal village is produced, out of such effort will emerge a new wholeness, harmonious world of life worth imitating by the whole world. At present the Indian village life is far away from the village life of Gandhiji's dream. Our modern villages are the examples of exploitation and decay. The chronic poverty, illiteracy, inertia, insanitation, indifference and inadequate employment opportunities are the symptoms of our decaying villages. How to prevent this decay is a big issue. Since most of the elite live in cities, Gandhiji suggested that the city dwellers to pay their attention to the village's upliftment. Once their hearts are rooted in the villages, all other resources required for the village upliftment would follow automatically. The cities should serve as clearing houses of surplus village production. Thus the Gandhi and concept of village enlistment does not mean urbanisation of the rural area but to retain, develop, strengthen, stabilise and vitalise the village communities. Finally, the scheme of basic education provides the villager with all ideas and arts to equip themselves with the necessary foundations of self-reliance, prosperous life, dignified interdependence and well-informed basic school organiser.

Gandhiji developed a well organised and all embarrassing village reconstruction programmes by confirming to his concept of an ideal village. As it is broadly adopted, it includes corporate sanitation, basic education, adult education, women and child welfare, propagation of principles of health, economic quality, self-sufficiency, agricultural development, Khadi and village industries, handicrafts etc., This can be achieved only by activating the most inherit talents of the community. This is a huge task as it requires restructuring of all inherited organisations, socio, economic and political, so that the shortcomings and inabilities of the individuals and groups are removed.

The railings of Ruskin against the accepted cannons of political economy prompted Gandhiji to evolve his own scheme of economics to have human salvation on the triple principle of i) Self Regulation, ii) Trusteeship and iii) Productive systems evolved for the uplift of those that were at the lowest strata of the society. With these cardinal principles as guidelines, Gandhiji formulated a programme consisting of 18 items of

work for the emancipation of seven lakhs of villages viz., promotion of village industries such as paddy husking, gurm-making, oil crushing, weaving, manufacture of hand-made paper, woolen blankets etc., basic and adult education, rural sanitation, upliftment of backward tribes and women, education, public health and hygiene, propagation of Rashtrabhasa, love for the mother tongue, organisation of kisans and use of reforms through extra income made available to them.

Gandhiji said "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 the subsistence they derive from it". He wanted to spin his way to Swaraj and his ideas are portrayed in the sentence, "I saw in a flash that without the spinning wheel there was no Swaraj". He said "Mechanisation is good when hands are too few; it is an evil when there are more hands than required for the work". The most urgent problem in India is the underemployment of the peasant.

3. DECENTRALISED PLANNING:

In India planning has largely been sectoral with macro approach and hence highly centralised and importance was given to prepare sectoral plans for agriculture, industry, transportation, health, education etc., In this context, the formulation and implementation of plans deserve keen analysis as it has bearing on the regional planning process, which again is to grow from concept into a practical proposition. Both at the State and National levels, sector planning has dominated all these years and a very limited importance is given to spatial planning and village planning. The concept of balanced regional development was suggested to reduce regional imbalances in the country and consequently more attention was paid for the development of backward states through sectoral approach. It is true that planning and administrative agencies at the regional and local level are inadequate both in number and quality to prepare development plans for regions and sub-regions. Planning Commission also did not give much thought to create and utility of regional planning techniques. In order to bring quicker spatial growth in the economy for the removal of regional imbalances in the country, regional planning or village planning is very important.

3.1. REGIONAL PLANNING:

Regional planning is an important and essential as local and national planning, whether in India or in any progressive country irrespective of its geographical character and political philosophy. In a region for regional planning, the different regional factors interact and operate in mutual actions and reactions, and any changes in one normally lead to change in others, thus setting up a chain reaction. In fact, there is a two-way chain reactions; one internal, within the region, and the other external, with the neighboring region. Positive, quicker and continuous action on regional planning should become the policy goal of central government to be followed by planning commission and state governments. Micro level plan is considered as an effective means of reducing regional disparities and removing absolute poverty at the grass root level by encouraging people's participation. The rationale for micro level planning for rural development may be stated to be four fold.

- Better perception of the basic issues at the grass roots level with the specific attention to the rural poor and formulation and execution of projects for their solution;
- Better exploitation of growth potentials of an area for improving productivity and increasing production;
- Opportunities for direct participation by the local population, particularly the poor majority in development decision making directly at the lowest levels and
- mobilisation of local resources mainly surplus labour.

4. VILLAGE PLANNING:

During the struggle for Independence, Mahatma Gandhi pleaded for a decentralised administrative system with village as basic unit. Mokshgundam Visweswarayya, the Dewan of the then Mysore State suggested a four-tier planning in the state. The first five year plan launched in 1951, envisaged that planning would be done at the National Level, States, Districts and Local Community Levels. The success of village level planning depends upon the availability of necessary infrastructural facilities such as credit, agriculture, inputs extension, roads, market facilities, communication, education, health, recreation and cultural etc., and effective and full use at this level.

5. CONCLUSION:

Gandhian views on rural development and decentralised Planning are relevant to the present needs of the society. Although many of the anti-poverty programmes are beneficiary oriented the real poor are missing in that beneficiary list. The reality as experienced by the poor living on the margin of existence is often different from the assumption made by the administrators. It requires village level basic planning to comprehend such basic issues in Rural Development. It is an undisputable fact that India has achieved some progress in atomic energy and information technology and science and technology. Yet, the government is faced with enormous resources crunch. When we look back, we find that the lot of poor has not improved despite of anti-poverty schemes. Is it because, we are drifted away from the Gandhian Path of rural development?

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