



IS GANDHI RELEVANT, EVEN NOW?

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ABSTRACT Globalization is a mega trend which significantly shapes contemporary economy and society. Globalisation in India came through economic reforms. With Liberalisation, Privatisation, Globalisation Model, we started increasingly integrating into the world economy, made many changes in the economy and have come a long way after LPG model. Our country yielded many significant benefits. Economic reforms in India in pursuit of globalisation have made the country a consumer society. Greater international cultural exchanges, spreading of multiculturalism and better individual access to cultural diversity are the impact of globalization. Social transformation is happening because the economic reform measures have affected the lifestyle of the Indians. Globalisation has led to a commercial culture, even a way of life, in which everything is valued on the bottom line of money. One may ask, "Is Gandhi relevant, even now?" The answer is, more so, than ever before. In globalized Indian economy, we are facing many challenges, he is the hope. Against this background, this paper has made an attempt to study Is Gandhi relevant, even now?

KEYWORDS : Globalisation, Development, Society, Poverty, Inequality, Mahatma Gandhi

Introduction

Globalization is a mega trend which significantly shapes contemporary economy and society. Globalization is the most commonly understood as a unitary process inclusive of many sub-processes (such as increased economic interdependence, increased cultural influence, rapid advances of information technology, and novel governance and geopolitical challenges) that are increasingly binding people and the biosphere more tightly into one global system. The rationale for globalization is that free flows of trade, finance and information will produce best outcomes for growth and human welfare.

Review of literature and objectives

Globalisation has a long history. Marx and Engels (1848) were among the first writers to treat the international economy as a dynamic category, in which both states and regions were affected by international trends. Ruskin's influence on Gandhi is reflected in his rejection of Western economics which were utilitarian and not based on any moral and ethical concerns. Gandhi's thoughts on economy were intertwined with his views on morality, which were not 'elegantly structured' and lacked 'theoretical rigour'; and 'Gandhi's insistence on pure theory was not always translatable into action' (Misra 2005). Today in the era of globalization, the global economic system is vastly different from what it was in Gandhi's time. This paper has made an attempt to study Is Gandhi relevant, even now?

Globalisation in India

Globalisation came in India through these economic reforms. With Liberalisation, Privatisation, Globalisation Model, we started increasingly integrating into the world economy, made many changes in the economy and have come a long way after LPG model.

Irrespective of how it is interpreted in the contemporary social and economic theory, globalization undoubtedly produces large effects on contemporary economic and social trends. They manifest themselves in the field of foreign trade, international investment and international finance. Interdependence and integration of world economy put significant challenges in front of the existing economic models in the world economic system.

In case of Indian economy, we have ascended a higher growth path; poverty has been reduced; the external sector is more than comfortable; industrial growth has been restored; and all this has been achieved with financial stability in the country. Now, we have greater access to an array of goods and services never seen before in human history. Economic reforms in India in pursuit of globalisation have made the country a consumer society. Greater international cultural exchanges, spreading of multiculturalism and better individual access to cultural diversity are the impact of globalization. One can see an emerging middle class with Americanized tastes and preferences in our country.

Social transformation is happening because the economic reform measures have affected the lifestyle of the Indians. Even institutions like marriage, family and age-old traditions and customs are under

threat. Children are assimilating new patterns more easily and act as guides in this era of technology. A young person is forced to choose between global and local (national, religious) value systems. Globalisation has led to a commercial culture, even a way of life, in which everything is valued on the bottom line of money. Not only is everything potential for sale but this is seen as the natural and only path to greater prosperity and progress. Cost of the crisis borne by those who haven't shared in the benefits. In spite of wiping tears, Globalisation has resulted into more inequalities across and within nations.

One may ask, "Is Gandhi relevant, even now?" The answer is, more so, than ever before. In globalized Indian economy, we are facing many challenges, he is the hope.

Economic thought of Gandhi

An important axis of the economic thought of Gandhi was the self-limitation of desires. Gandhi made a clear distinction between basic needs and others. He insisted to take care of one's need and not greed. Supreme consideration was given to man rather than money. "To live simply so that others can simply live"; "It is necessary to bring an end to this mad rush that drives one to always want more money"; "In what concerns my rule of life, I must say that I have never dared to possess that which I did not need". "The earth provides enough to satisfy every one's needs but not for anybody's greed." As resources of the earth are limited, we will not be able to provide affluence to all people of the earth. Even if resources are available, the delicate eco-balance of the earth's environment will be disturbed and destroyed by the industrial processes necessary for taking affluence and high standard of living to all people. "If by abundance you mean every one having plenty to eat and drink and to clothe himself with, enough to keep his mind trained and educated, I should be satisfied. But I should not like to pack more stuffs in my belly than I can digest and more things than I can usefully use. But neither do I want poverty, penury, misery, dirt and dust in India.

Gandhi was not opposed to all technology, indeed, he recognized that it could ease the suffering of people. He was full of admiration for the bicycle and the Singer sewing machine. As he himself had stated, what he was against was the craze for machines and not machines as such. He was not in favour of labour saving machinery. He stood for a technology that could be "put in the homes of the millions." He was very critical of heavy industry. He argued, "to favour production by the masses rather than mass production". For Gandhi, a machine-based civilization was not a civilization. A society in which workers were chained to their work, where animals were treated with cruelty in farm factories, and in which economic activity led to ecological destruction could not be considered a civilization. "The craze of wanting to make everything 'by the dozen' is the cause of the world crisis we are experiencing. Gandhi suggested that only by avoiding unnecessary automation and resorting to labour-intensive methods of production, India will be in a position to provide employment to the unemployed. Industrialization will ruin villages. If villages perish, India too will perish.

Gandhi saw the importance of the rural economy. Gandhiji wanted to re-establish India from the lowest level. Therefore, he gave an idea to reconstruct the villages. He had imagined self-reliant villages, free from dependency on big cities. The villages ought to be more important than the cities. He has also strongly advocated for decentralization of economy. He thought that poverty could be eased by stimulating village economies of agriculture and labour intensive production by using simple technologies on a ground level. Gandhi observes: "You cannot build non-violence in a civilization of factories, but it can be built in self-limiting villages. You ought therefore to have a rural mentality and to have that you should have faith in the method of weaving."

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. The 'charakha' or the spinning wheel and the khadi, or the homespun coarse cloth became the very symbol of nationalism and a sign for the support for national economy. Production must be based as much as possible on locally available resources.

Gandhi called his ideal society Sarvodaya. It is a society that ensures the welfare and wellbeing of all its members. Its emphasis is on all the three components of well-being material, mental and moral-spiritual. He considered the craze for material affluence created by the industrial development paradigm unrealistic, unnecessary, undesirable and counterproductive.

His 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.

Trusteeship provides a means of transforming the present capitalist order of society into an egalitarian one. It is based on the belief that all things come from God and belong to God. Gandhi believed that all human beings must hold their property and talents as trustees. As all wealth and talents are socially created they truly belong to the whole society and so they must be managed accordingly. Those who hold them can use only what they need for their upkeep but the rest must be used for the welfare of society. "The true economy is never in opposition with the highest ethical principles, in the same way that true ethics, to deserve that name, has to become at the same time a good economics... The true economy defends social justice; it promotes the good of all through an equality that includes the weakest; and it is indispensable for a good life"; "The fact of extending the law of non-violence to the domain of the economy signifies nothing less than taking moral values into consideration when determining the rules of international commerce"

Gandhian economics ideas were based on ethics and directed towards spirituality. He did not recognise the separation of economics from ethics. He wanted to achieve an ethical ordering of the economic life of society. Gandhian economic goals are not materialistic or individualistic but ethical-spiritual and community oriented. Gandhi rejected 'economism', which believed in the creation of a paradise of material plenty, in raising the standard of living. Economics that hurts the moral well being of an individual or a nation is immoral, & therefore sinful? Gandhiji was asked, how to eradicate rural poverty? "By spreading the message of knowledge and cleanliness".

Conclusion

Gandhi's views on economics were simple and straight. They were based on knowledge of Indian economy. They have even been criticized at various levels from being utopian to regressive. To think globally is to take into account together three aspects of our common good:

- the economic aspect (producing goods to satisfy human needs)
- the social aspect (protecting the interdependence of society and the dignity of all) and
- the ecological aspect (preserving the life and the biodiversity of our planet).

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