



Gandhiji's Approach to Rural Development in Present Time Context

Dr. Surjya Chutia

Associate. Prof., Economics dept.

Tinsukia College, Tinsukia, Assam-786125, phone- 9954456991

1.0 Introduction:

In the long history of human civilization, the rural areas and its development have been playing dominant role. Until and unless the rural areas of a country are strengthened and developed, the country can not march on the road to prosperity. Precisely, no one can imagine a develop nation without a strong rural base of the country. The Indian society is basically rural in character as nearly 2/3 of the population lives in villages. By and large the Indian economy is also dependent upon agriculture. But unfortunately this sector has not been given due share in the development process of the country.

Mahatma Gandhi, the 'Father of the nation', was a great freedom fighter and practical idealist. He did not believe in any definite scheme of economic thought. According to him economics was a part of the way of life and hence his economic ideas are also a part of his general philosophy of life. To him economics and ethics were inseparable and all the economic activities and motives in society should be governed by ethical consideration. He laid great emphasis on human values; and condemned the monetary basis of human relation. The whole Gandhian philosophy is based on for cordial principles – Truth, Non-violence, Dignity of labour and Simplicity. One of the principles which played a significant role in Gandhi's life was "*simple living and higher thinking*".

Gandhi in his march towards nation building in modern India gave pace to develop of the villages as it plays the role of artery to the nation. Gandhi had very aptly said, '*India lives in its villages.*' Therefore rural development is intrinsic to Gandhian ideology, which seeks to largely initiate development from the grassroots level of society- the villages towards generating a self sufficient economy. Considering the event of historical evolution of human civilization, Gandhi advocated that a village should have the Swaraj, which may enable the village to a complete republic. He evolved various schemes for regeneration of the villages to bring all round development and make it's as self sufficient economic units.

But today after 72 years of the country's independence, the rural areas of the country faces many serious problems as like unemployment problem, lack of work culture, less importance to the village development, stagnant position of small scale industry, huge poverty problem etc. These problems can be regarded as the main barrier in the national development of our country may be solved as much as possible by adopting the approach of Gandhi this aspect.

1.2 Gandhi's Approach to Rural Reconstruction:

Gandhi's idea to develop the Indian society was based on his understanding of the society and hence based on the village system. He often said that the real India was to be found in

villages, not in cities and towns. Gandhi wrote in 1936, *"I would say if the village perishes, India will perish too. It will be no more India. His one mission in the world will get lost."* (Harijan 29.08.36). He wanted every village to develop in to a little republic, independent of its neighbors in so far as its vital wants are concerned. His concept of rural reconstruction is a comprehensive one, emphasizing on the economic political, social, educational, ecological and spiritual dimensions. He ceaselessly insisted on a pattern of village life, which will be man-centered and non-exploiting. The decentralized village economy should provide full employment to all on the basis of voluntary cooperation and work for achieving self-sufficiency in its basic requirement of food, clothing and shelter. In short, it can be said that rural reconstruction, according to Gandhi should not be merely concerned with raising the standard of living of village folk. Truth, non-violence, freedom, equality, full employment, bread labour, trusteeship, decentralization, swadesh and cooperation were perceived as cardinal principles for rural reconstruction. Talking specifically about an ideal village, he outlined the following conditions-

- a) There should be orderliness in the structure of the village.
- b) It should have fruit trees.
- c) It should have a dharmashala and a small dispensary.
- d) It should be self- sufficient in so far as food and clothes are concerned.
- e) The roads and lanes of the village should be kept clean so that 'in the land of bare- footed pedestrians' nobody should hesitate to walk.
- f) The temple/ mosque should be kept beautifully clean
- g) The village should be capable of defending itself from robbers and wild animals.
- h) The village should maintain a public hall, a school and a theatre hall.
- i) It should have an efficient water supply arrangement.
- j) It should have recreation facilities- a playground, a reserve for the cattle, etc.
- k) If some space is left, it should grow many crops except tobacco, opium, etc.
- l) Education in the village should be made compulsory up to the final basic standard.
- m) All activities of the village should be conducted on co-operative lines.
- n) The government of the village should be conducted by a panchayat of five persons duly elected every year by adult villagers
- o) The village panchayat would enjoy judicial, legislative and executive power.
- p) The service of village guards should be compulsory and they should selected by rotation.
- q) The caste system should not be practiced.

If all villages of the country could come up to the ideal conceived by him, Gandhi was confident that India would be free from most of her worries.

Gandhi opposed modern industrialization which leads to concentration of wealth in a few hands. He clearly said that the small scale industry on various productions can be the important means of the village economy by which the nation can be developed. According to him the development of small scale and cottage industries is one of the most appropriate programmes for rural development and is suited to the indigenous conditions and resources. These industries have the vigor and can certainly prove as a sheet anchor in uplifting the economic status of the rural poor sections of the society.

1.3 Relevance of Gandhi's Approach:

Gandhi was a practical idealist and he had full knowledge of the problems faced by the nation at his time. His approach on the socio-economic development of the village areas was very

clear. As a whole he urged the people for setting up the village swaraj in particular and with this basic foundation he wanted to make self-reliance of the nation in general. Some of his critics tend to dismiss Gandhian approach as utopian in nature. They regard Gandhi as a medieval mystic who try to put back clock of human progress. But much of the criticism is based on gross misunderstanding of Gandhi's views. However, many of his principles remain valid even today and applied worldwide. His ideas are not medieval and out of date. Gandhian approaches on rural development have significant relevance in the context of present day India on the following grounds-

Gandhi wanted every village to develop in to a little republic and self sufficient unit. It is true that today in the period of globalization; developing country like India cannot contemplate progress ignoring the large rural sector. The rural sector has to be made self-sufficient; otherwise all efforts of development would be short lived. Sustainable rural development can only be made possible if the rural masses are made to participate in the process of development. Self-sufficiency of villages, promotion of small and cottage industries, control on the import of consumption goods, improved agriculture etc, are some of the ways to reach our goal. Importance should be given to the qualitative improvement of human resources; education and health are to be given top priority. Better sanitation, better living condition and better life, can be achieved only through the Gandhian ways today.

It is often thought that Gandhi was essentially a religious ascetic who was adverse to the fruits of modern science and technology. It is an unfortunate misconception. He was not against machinery as such. His view was that in a country like India where capital was scarce and labour abundant, it would be profitable to use labour intensive industries. He was afraid that use of machinery on a large scale would result in technological unemployment. However two basic components of Gandhian development – self-sufficient villages and decentralization of economic and political power gave a very important place to development of Khadi and village industries. Gandhi said, "*If the government could provide full employment to our people without the help of Khadi and village industries, I shall be prepared to wind up my constructive programme in this sphere.*" Even today the small scale and cottage industries have been given priority for solving the problem of unemployment and rural underemployment.

It is true for all time that a sustainable society has to aim at working in partnership with nature and conserve resources and energy, reduce wastes and avoid degradation of renewable. It should produce goods that are easy to recycle, reuse and repair after use. The method of growing food and raising livestock have to be based on the use of soil and water conservation, bio-fertilizers, biological control of pests. Hence, resources should be utilized prudently and the basic need of people is to be met without any serious detriment to the environment. In this context Gandhiji's thought, shall always remain relevant for the smooth global development.

Gandhi opposed large scale industrialization and urbanization on the ground of social justice and environmental quality. He thought it would result in the concentration of economic power in a few hands degradation of environment quality. Today income inequalities and environmental pollution is slowly becoming the main problems of the highly industrialized & urbanized nations of the world. Amidst all sort of problems such as rapid population growth, degradation and depletion of natural resources affecting the life support system (air, water, soil, and bio-diversity), unpredictable global climate change, ozone layer depletion, economic

inequality, social injustice, big polluted cities etc. are found in these countries. In the ideal social order based on village economy, environmental pollution is not a problem.

Gandhiji's entire life and deeds, indeed is an environmental bequest for whole mankind. He was a true practitioner of environmentally sustainable development in the real sense. It is seen in his personal life-style; he has adopted in his day-to-day life. He was in harmony and peace with environment and himself, although his all life was spent locked in an unequal battle with the mighty British Empire. His strength came to him on account of his spirituality and practice of non-violence and truth. In wider sense, these are the critical elements for the success of practicing sustainable development in true spirit. In brief, his whole life was his message and a lesson on "*protecting and conserving Environment along with the development process,*" not only for Indians, but also for the whole world to follow at large.

If we compare between the Gandhian model of bottom up rural development and Nehruvian model of top-down industrial development; we can visualize that Gandhian models lead to an economy of permanence and based largely on renewable, where damage to the environment is minimum and manageable, while the latter is based largely on non-renewable and causes environmental pollution. Moreover, in reality what we find today even after 63 years of independence, the rich have become richer and the poor have become poorer. In 1963, after more than a decade of planning Nehru, the first prime Minister of India, noted that still there was a good number of people who had not been profited by planning and whose poverty was most painful. He said, "*I do think that some methods should be found to remedy the situation.*" In that context he observed: "*I begin to think more and more of Gandhi's approach.*"

Gandhi advocated cent percent prohibition. He regarded the use of liquor as a disease rather than a vice. He felt that it was better for India to be poor than to have thousands of drunkards. Gandhi did not agree with those who held the view that introduction of prohibition would cause a steep fall in the revenue of the state. It would be better thing today if state governments have continued the policy of prohibition without looking at it as a profit or loss account.

Gandhian philosophy is based on various ethical principles such as: non-violence, practicing and preventing truth, shunning the use of materials obtained by illegitimate means, celibacy- as a means of population control, sanitation of body, mind and surrounding, contentment with available resources austerity, introspection and meditation and even fasting for self-purification and any dereliction of duties towards nature including human beings. One of the basic and profound tenants of Gandhian philosophy, is that - "*the earth provides enough to satisfy everyone's need; but not for anyone's greed.*" Today it is realized by all that the weakening as well as degradation of human values has been creating a series of problems as like corruption, indiscipline, violence, selfishness etc in the present society. In spite of tremendous scientific development in this 21st century, people are still grip of immorality. Men are becoming too much materialistic and narrow minded, forgetting the art of living a happy life with others.

1.4 Conclusion:

Gandhi's approach to rural development was evolved over a period of time, though success in its implementation was less than desirable. But it does not imply that the ethics of Gandhian legacy are farcical. It has been realized that to emerge as a strong and modern nation and to secure its rightful place in the comity of nations, sustainable development in rural areas is a pre-

requisite. In order to correct the developmental imbalances and accord due priority in rural areas, the central as well as the state governments has been implementing a number of programmes aimed at sustainable development of rural areas with a focus on weaker and vulnerable sections. We try much today to defend modernization initiatives through liberalization, a fact is that more than fifty percent population of India still lives below the poverty line. This is a shame even after sixty-three years of independence of the country. There are inherent truths in the Gandhian ideology which would be the only key to understanding the maladies of rural India, and towards finding a permanent cure to its ailments. We may conclude with the words of Louis Fisher, a great admirer of Gandhi: "*If man is to survive, if civilization is to survive and flower in freedom, truth and decency, the remainder of twentieth century and what lies beyond must belong not to Lenin or Trotsky not to Marx or Mao or Ho or Che, but to Mahatma Gandhi.*"

References:

Garg, V, K.(1992), '*Rural Economics*', Premier Book Company Publisher, Daryaganj,
New Delhi-110002.

Srivastava S. K.(1992) '*History of Economic Thought*', S Chand& Company Ltd, Ram
Nagar, New Delhi-110055. p-649,650.

Loknathan, V. (1992) '*History of Economic Thought*', S Chand& Company Ltd, Ram
Nagar, New Delhi-110055. p,288-290.

Saikia, K.(1997), '*Arthanaitic Bhabdharar Buranji*' (in Assamese), Banalata,
Dibrugarh, Assam .

Das Sangeeta, '*Mahatma Gandhi: a visionary of rural development*' (article), published
in 'The Assam Tribune', 2nd October 2010.