

Gandhian Views on Rural Development

Dr. D. Sandhya

Assistant Professor in Economics, Government Degree College (Autonomous), Narsampet
Dist. Warangal, Telangana State

Abstract

This article gives an insight about Gandhian views on Rural Development. Gandhi holds the view of the maximization of social welfare and for this he gives prime importance to the welfare of the individuals by reducing inequalities in income and wealth. According to Gandhi every person should be provided with bare minimum necessities i.e. food, shelter, and clothing. Concentration of wealth to a few groups of people certainly will shatter the dream of a society which will be socialist in nature. Gandhi is in favor of the self-sufficient village economy where the villages will be the independent economic units.

Keywords: Decentralization, Technology, infrastructural facilities, Mechanization, Self-sufficiency

Introduction

Rural Development in India forms the bulk of the overall economic development as nearly 3/4th of population in India today lives in villages and 2/3rds of workforce, directly or indirectly, is dependent on agriculture for its livelihood. The goals of the development set for rural India have not been realized due to the adoption of unsuitable development strategies in the post-Independence period. This led to the questioning of the path of development pursued so far in the country and also to the emergence of a number of schools producing alternative strategies of development. One such school, which has become very popular in our country, is the Gandhian School. This school has originated in Gandhian Philosophy and set a path of development which is supposed to be purely Indian in its context and oriented towards the needs and upliftment of the rural masses who are at the lower rung of the rural hierarchy. If we followed this path, the rural scenario would have been entirely different today. Rural development involves raising the socio-economic status of the rural population on a sustainable basis through optimum utilisation of local resources, both natural and human. While external help is necessary and appreciated, rural development can be achieved only when the rural people actively participate in the development process.

The essence of development is not in '*providing*' but in '*promoting*' the rural sector. The rural population should know how to sustain itself financially and gain economic independence. Therefore, the stress of rural development should be on self-reliance. Also, rural development should result in greater access to the rural population to goods and services.

Importance of Rural Development

The emphasis on the rural development in the most developing countries is understandable. The majority of the population lives in the rural areas. As such, their backwardness would be retarding growth in other sectors and in the economy as a whole. The growth of towns and cities will be possible; it is backed by prosperity in rural areas. Rural backwardness is the major cause for the falling demand (recession) for

most products. The stress on rural development is also due to many constraints facing the rural areas, which generally suffer from inadequate infrastructural facilities and technological advancements. The rural areas are not well placed in terms of even minimum needs like safe drinking water, primary health and road transport. Apart from this, the rural population suffers from indigence, ignorance and illiteracy. Their traditional outlook towards development has been preventing them from taking full advantage of the incentives offered by the Government. But with substantial exposure to media, both electronic and print media, the rural sector is moving towards self-reliance and economic independence. Also, the ownership of land and other assets has been heavily concentrated in the hands of a few. It is precisely for this reason that the benefits of rural development programmes failed to reach the rural population targeted for these benefits to the extent expected. Another disturbing trend in the rural sector is that the surpluses generated in the rural areas are being invested in urban areas for various reasons. While the government has stepped up its investment in rural areas, the rural surpluses are diverted to the urban areas. When rural services are heavily subsidised by the government, the rural rich have an obligation to step up their investment in rural areas.

Nature and Scope of Rural Development

Over the years, rural development has emerged as "a strategy designed to improve the economic and social life of a specific group of people-the rural poor. It involves extending the benefits of the development to the rural population who seek a livelihood in the rural areas. Rural development is three dimensional in nature. As a method, it seeks people involvement in all programmes. As a process, it seeks to modernize through the application of science and technology the traditionally oriented rural cultures. Its major objective is to bring about improvement in the quality of life of the rural people.

'Rural development' denotes overall development of rural areas with a view to improving the quality of life of the rural people. The concept is comprehensive and multi-dimensional in nature. It encompasses development of agricultural and allied activities, cottage and small-scale industries, traditional crafts, socio-economic infrastructure, rural manpower and improvement in community services and facilities. A single approach to the rural development would not be effective. Infact, rural development is the product of interaction between various physical, technological, economic, socio-cultural, institutional and environmental factors. Indeed, the rural sector should experience the required changes so that it can join the mainstream of national development and contribute its share for economic development. It has been rightly said, "In the end, however, rural development should not be seen as a package of specific needs but as a transformation of rural life and conditions".

Objectives

The rural development programmes, in the Indian context, have aimed at achieving a number of objectives. These include:

- Changing the attitude of the rural people towards development/transformation of the village community;
- Promotion of democratic leadership at the grassroots level by setting up local self- governments;
- Provision of basic needs such as drinking water, health care, better sanitation, housing and employment;
- Development of both farming and non-farming activities so as to generate gainful employment without adversely affecting the environment;

- Improving infra structural facilities in villages, particularly transport and communication facilities and
- Ensuring a tension-free life for the rural population by promoting communal harmony and unity, levels of literacy, education and cultural activities.

Rural development involves generating employment "opportunities for the rural people so that they are able to meet their basic needs and ultimately become major agents of economic progress and social change. A climate has to be created which enables the rural poor to realise their full potentialities to attain a higher quality of life with economic security to sustain them. This alone can prevent the rural exodus.

Future Task

Rural development is a complex process. It can, therefore, be achieved only through concerted efforts on various fronts. It is rightly said, "It seems that of major weak links in the rural development planning are absence of total approach at the strategy level, lack of co-ordinated planning at the programme level and weak planning component of individual programmes." The rural development programmes cannot be successful without adequate regional planning, strong central co-ordination, effective local level organization and people's active participation at the planning and implementation stages. Even the well conceived rural development schemes have run into rough weather because of inefficiency and corruption at various levels, which are again attributed to the absence of proper accountability and deterring punishment for failures.

The rural development can be possible if only there is proper balance between service-oriented programmes and development-oriented and self-reliant centered programmes. The importance attached to service-oriented schemes, besides retarding rural development, has also resulted in the wastage of precious resources

Gandhian Approach to Rural Development

Gandhiji's views on rural reconstruction are an integral part of his philosophy of life which is characterised by truth and non-violence, respect for human nature, dislike for all kinds of injustice and exploitation. True economics, according to Gandhiji, must be life-oriented and a servant of humanity at large. Gandhiji was not a pessimist. He declared: "Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's need but not for every man's greed." On the economic plane, Gandhiji strongly believed in certain principles. These include: (i) The aim of economic planning is self-sufficiency, full employment and decentralization of power; (ii) The promotion of the village industries is basic to the economic development of the country and (iii) The principles of 'trusteeship' and 'cooperation' are capable of achieving both growth and social justice.

Labour and Mechanization

Gandhiji's views on mechanization have not been properly understood. Gandhiji was against machines if they keep people idle, if they create an employment problem for them. Otherwise, mechanization is welcome. Gandhiji made his stand clear when he declared in *the Harijan*: "Mechanization is good when hands are too few for the work intended to be accomplished. It is an evil when there are more hands than required for the work as is the case in India. The problem with us is not how to find leisure for the teeming millions inhabiting our villages. The problem is how to utilize their idle hours which are equal

to the working days of six months in a year. "According to Gandhiji, machines should help man improve his productivity, but they should not throw men out of employment. Man should handle machine at will without being its slave. Gandhiji wrote: We should not substitute lifeless machines for the living machines scattered over the seven lakh villages in India. The machine is well used if it aids men's labour and simplifies it. Today it is used to pour wealth in the pockets of the chosen few. Little attention is paid to crores of people from whom the machine snatches away their bread. Gandhiji was clear on the actual place of machinery. He declared that in a labour surplus economy like ours, too much dependence on machines will create problems for the labour, and this would adversely affect the performance of the economy sooner or later.

Village -Economy

Gandhi advocated a self-sufficient village economy and 'self reliant village community' and emphasised the full utilization of local resources for development purposes: 'The villages would be self sufficient as far as their basic needs like food, clothing, shelter, education, health etc. are concerned. In certain matters, inter-dependence would also be necessary. No village can be totally self-sufficient, but it would strive to attain that goal.' According to Gandhiji, as far as possible, every activity should be conducted on cooperative basis. Gandhiji favoured cooperative cattle farming because individuals cannot raise cattle in a proper and scientific manner, Cooperative activities, said Gandhiji, would develop fellow feelings and would abolish poverty and idleness from the villages. Gandhiji thought of villages as republics, completely free to manage their own affairs and united by mutual help.

Rural Industrialization

Gandhiji believed that rural prosperity can be ensured by setting up a large number of small industrial units in villages. Gandhiji observed: "When our villages are fully developed, there will be no dearth in them of men with a high degree of skill and artistic talent." Gandhian economic units have a degree of specialization, according to the natural skill talent aptitude and capabilities of its inhabitants. Gandhiji pleaded for revival of khadi arid village industries. He gave 'charkha' the highest place of honour. Promotion of village industries will not create heavy demands on capital. A policy of decentralization and modernization of rural industries would provide immediate solution to the problem of open unemployment. If industrialization is spread to the villages, it has many advantages. It facilitates integration of villages and towns. It curbs economic disparities - inequalities in income and wealth. It also reduces regional disparities in development.

Decentralization

Gandhiji chose the village to be the basic operational unit in India to be developed along the lines of decentralization and self-sufficiency. He wrote: independence must begin at the bottom, thus every village will be a republic or panchayat having full powers. Gandhiji strongly believed in the principle of decentralization not only to step up growth but also to ensure distributive justice. It ends concentration of economic power. It also promotes local initiative. According to Gandhiji work places have to be created in the areas where the people are living now. This would create demand for labour and generate employment opportunities. Production should be mainly from local materials and mainly for local use. When Gandhiji talked of self-sufficient village units, what he had in mind was that a village community should not depend on the higher government for those needs, which it could satisfy with

local resources and local efforts. He visualised decentralized planning with local participation. This would put pressure on local representatives to respond to local needs. Decentralization curbs all kinds of exploitation, restores human freedom and dignity and promotes human values like fellow feelings and cooperation. According to Gandhiji, the essence of non-violence is decentralization.

Self-sufficiency

Such a decentralized polity implies a decentralized economy. It can be attained only through self-sufficiency at the village level. The village should be self-sufficient as far as its basic needs – food, clothing, and other necessities – are concerned. The village has to import certain things which it cannot produce in the village. “We shall have to produce more of what we can, in order thereby to obtain in exchange, what we are unable to produce”. The village should produce food-crops and cotton in order to meet its requirements. Some lands should also be earmarked for cattle and for a playground for adults and children. If some land is still available, it should be used for growing useful cash crops like tobacco, opium, etc. to enable the village to get in exchange things which it does not produce. Village economy should be planned with a view to providing full employment to all the adults of the village. Each man should be guaranteed employment to enable him to meet his basic needs in the village itself so that he is not forced to migrate to towns. In the ultimate analysis full employment should be linked with equality. Physical labour occupies a central place in the Gandhian concept of the self-sufficient village. In this respect he was highly influenced by Rus-kin and Tolstoy. According to Gandhi, each man must do physical labour to earn his bread. Physical labour is necessary for moral discipline and for the sound development of the mind. Intellectual labour is only for one’s own satisfaction and one should not demand payment for it. The needs of the body must be supplied by the body. Gandhi said, “If all laboured for their bread then there would be enough food and enough leisure for all.” Shriman Narayan rightly observes, “Gandhiji recognized toil to be not a curse but the joyful business of life as it has the power to make man healthier, merrier, fitter and kindlier”.

Conclusion

Gandhian approach to development is based primarily on the goal of "Sarvodaya" i.e., the good of all. But this goal can be achieved only through "Village Swaraj". Truth and Nonviolence are the two instruments to be used to attain the goal if the politico-economic order of the society deviates from its path to attain the goal. Expressing views on Gram Swaraj, Gandhiji says, "My ideal of Gram Swaraj is that it is a complete republic. Independent of its neighbours for its vital wants, and yet inter-dependent for many others in which dependence is necessary. Thus, village's first concern will be to grow its own food crops and cotton for its cloth. It should have a reserve for its cattle, recreation and play ground for adults and children. Then if there is more land available, it will grow useful money crops, thus, excluding Ganja, Tobacco, Opium and the like. The village will maintain a village theatre, school and public hall. It will have its own water supply ensuring clean water supply. Education will be compulsory up to the final basic course. As far as possible, every village activity will be conducted on a cooperative basis. Thus, the village was the basic unit of restructuring Indian society. Unlike the modern concept of urbanism, which is the consequence of western development models, Gandhi firmly believed in ruralism and hated industrialism based on the western technology. The western model of development which basically relies on the large scale industrial development is also not conducive for conservation of environment". But Gandhian model believes in conservation of nature. According to Gandhi, conserving

nature is not for nature's sake. It is for the sake of human individuals as the humans cannot develop and realize themselves without the help of animals and plants, stones and stars. Gandhi's call to save nature is ultimately a call to save man. Gandhi was not against all types of modern technology but only that which displaces human beings and depletes the natural resources. Influenced by Gandhian ideas, Mr. E. F. Schumacher, the famous author of the book *Small is Beautiful* had advocated Gandhian values in the choice of technology with the human face which replaces mass production by masses and meant for masses.

Gandhian economic ideas are becoming increasingly relevant to the world today, particularly the third world countries. Economic development ought not to be the job of the government alone. People should know how to utilise precious resources. Economic growth alone is not important. Equally important are fair distribution of income and wealth, and also protection of the environment.

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