

Gandhi- A Spiritual Economist

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Abstract

As an economist Mahatma Gandhi was different from the main stream tradition due to his emphasis on ethical aspect to promote economic development as well as a rejection of materialism. Inspired by American writer Henry David Thoreau throughout his life Gandhi was in search to find the ways by which poverty, backwardness and other socio, economic problems could be solved. Here is an attempt made in this paper to present the economic thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi and analyze the relevance of these concepts in the present era. In this process this study analyzes the spiritual economic thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi for a post modern construction of India and examines his views on *Swadeshi*, decentralization of economics and self sufficient village economy as a means to attain and achieve the economic self sufficiency of the nation. Through his thoughts, actions, movement and life style he advocated that economic activities can never be justified without ethics and non-violence. The economic aim of Gandhi was *Sarvodaya*, self sufficient village economy, preservation of ecology and full employment which were quite different than conventional economic.

Key words : *Swadeshi*, Rural Economy, Gandhi's Economic Ideas, Ethics and Economics.

Mahatma Gandhi was the first spiritual economist of the world who had his original vision. Through his thoughts, actions, movements and life style he advocated that economic activities can never be justified without ethics and non-violence. The economic aim of Gandhi was *Sarvodaya*, self sufficient village economy, preservation of ecology and full employment which were quite different from conventional economics.

Objective

The main aim of the present study is to present the economic thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi and analyze the relevance of these concepts in the present era. In this process the study analyzes the spiritual economic thoughts of Gandhi for a post modern construction of India and examine his views on *Swadeshi*, decentralization of economics and self sufficient village economy as a means to achieve economic self sufficiency of the nation.

Methodology

The work is done entirely on the basics of secondary sources that include review of books, journals, research articles, reports, biography and other secondary sources.

Ethics and Economics

According to Mahatma Gandhi economics that hurts the moral well being of an individual or a country is immoral. In Gandhian economics "money" or "material" is given the second priority. He has given special emphasis on the ideology of "plain living" which helps in cutting down one's wants and desires. According to Gandhi man should make distinction between "standard of living" and "standard of life". The standard of living could be attained by material and physical standard of food, clothing and housing whereas a standard of life states cultural and spiritual values and qualities (Desai, 1993). Basically through his economic ideas he wants to promote spiritual development and harmony with a rejection of materialism.

Gandhi on Decentralization

Gandhi was the strong supporter of decentralization of economic system. According to him due to centralization the problem of unemployment and poverty in India exists. Through this process rich are becoming richer and poor are becoming poorer. The character of production should be determined by social necessity and not by the individual greed (Gandhi, 1994). He wanted to establish an ideal society of his own imagination and for this his economic ideas are closely associated with ethics and non-violence (Fisher, 1982). Through this way he wanted the development of mankind and specially the marginal section of the society.

Swadeshi – A way of living

Through his economic ideas which are very practical and relevant in the present era, Gandhi provided a practical and useful economic system. According to him European made products are not only a symbol of colonialism but also the source of mass poverty and degradation of the weaker and unprivileged section of the society. For the economic upliftment of his own country he advocated *Swadeshi* and pleaded for the use of *Swadeshi* goods. We should avoid foreign companies and foreign capital as much as we could do so. By using our own products we can respect and save our culture, traditions and values.

Gandhi as the supporter of self sufficient rural economy

Gandhi's economic thoughts were quite different from the conventional economic thoughts. His economic ideas were ethical, non-violent and truthful. For this purpose he advocated trusteeship, decentralization of economic activities, labour intensive technology and priority to weaker sections of the society (Narayan, 1978). He advocates that to be non-violent an individual should have a rural mindset. According to Gandhi the soul of India lives in village so the

development of our country depends upon the upliftment of Indian villages. The villages should be the independent units. The techniques which will be used in agriculture should be environment friendly and never pollute and deplete the environment. Fertilizers, pesticides and insecticides should be used minimum in agriculture. He was not in a favor of large hydroelectric projects for irrigation. He was against the *Zamindari* system. The land should go to the actual communal ownership of land for balanced cultivation.

Greatly influenced with the ideas of American writer David Thoreau, Mahatma Gandhi's socio economic ideas were closely associated with ethics. He wanted to solve the problems of poverty and backwardness through the spiritual way. All the basic goods and required services should be grown as developed within the village. The surplus products of the village should be distributed to the poor member of the society by every village and then the problem of poverty and starvation can be eradicated automatically. Every village should be self reliant and helpful. It is not possible that alone agriculture sector can solve the problems of poverty, backwardness and unemployment but he have to give the stress on the rural industries, like khadi, handlooms, sericulture and handicrafts for a wonderful prosperous economy (The Harijan, 1936). He believed that the growth of large scale industries lead to the concentration of wealth in the hands of few. For the growth of small scale industries only family labour and less capital are required which resulted in no conflict between labour and market. Large scale production leads to conflict between labour and capital because capital takes upper hand over labour. Large scale industries are also the root cause of over population and heavy pollution of air and water. This mindless industrialization resulted in monopolistic trends in several sphere. In contrast growths of rural industries help decentralization of economic

activities and wealth and growth of the personality.

Relevance of Gandhi's Economic ideas

In India, where huge regional disparity is a common feature it is important that every region should be developed equally. In this balanced context Gandhian economic ideas are relevant because they are supporting attainment of self-sufficiency for each region. Gandhi had given the stress on the attainment of cheerful, prosperous and balanced economy (Dogra, 2003). The total employment created by these industries were 39,70,000 in 1973-74, which rose to 1,29,80,000 in 1991-92 and in 2000-2001 it became 1,78,50,000. For employment generation and poverty alleviation, Gandhi's idea of self-sufficient rural economy is relevant. In order to improve the living conditions of the villagers it is essential to develop rural self-sufficient economy (Jha, 1961). When each and every person is employed then only the national income will increase.

CONCLUSION

As an economist Mahatma Gandhi was different from the main stream tradition due to his emphasis on ethical aspect to promote economic development as well as a rejection of materialism. Inspired by American writer Henry David Thoreau throughout his life Gandhi was in search to find the ways by which poverty, backwardness and other socio, economic problems could be solved. Here is an attempt made in this paper to present the economic thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi and analyze the relevance of these concepts in the present era. In this process this study analyzes the spiritual economic thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi for a post modern construction of India and examines his views on *Swadeshi*, decentralization of economics and self sufficient village economy as a means to attain and achieve the economic self sufficiency of the nation. Through his thoughts,

actions, movement and life style he advocated that economic activities can never be justified without ethics and non-violence. Through his economic ideas which are very practical and relevant in the present era, Gandhi provided a practical and useful economic system. According to him European made products are not only a symbol of colonialism but also the source of mass poverty and degradation of the weaker and unprivileged section of the society. For the economic upliftment of his own country he advocated *Swadeshi* and pleaded for the use of *Swadeshi* goods (Patil, 2012).

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