

# Gandhi's Idea on Self Sufficient Village Economy: Solution to unemployment and Poverty

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## ABSTRACT

Gandhi's economic ideas are governed by ethical and moral considerations. His economic models are humanitarian in nature and any model which ignores general well being of mankind should not be implemented. He believed that business without ethical considerations was considered evil and considered capitalist structure as the cause of oppression and exploitation. If people took which they earn from hard work and capable of production then only poverty and other economic woes can be eliminated. People need to be strong both physically and morally to gain big political or ideological goals. He had strong belief in village mode of production and thought that industrialization will harm age-old, indigenous village techniques heading towards unemployment. He realised that sole dependency on agriculture will not solve the problem of poverty and unemployment, therefore, stress on rural cottage and small scale industries such as khadi, handlooms, sericulture and handicrafts should be done. They involve family labour thus dependency on capital is less. This will prevent migration to urban industrialized areas with big industries preventing problems arising due to migration from rural areas to urban centres. Machinery should be used in such a way as to serve the villages and their crafts and not destroy them, should be socially controlled.

## 1. Introduction

Gandhi believed in maximisation of social welfare with focus on reducing inequalities and providing basic necessities to everyone. He believed that welfare of the human beings and not of systems or institutions is the ultimate consideration and can be achieved when every individual is an integral part of the community, when the production of goods is on small scale, when the economy is local and when homemade swadeshi handicrafts are given preference. He was against concentration of economic power in few hands, therefore, favours economic decentralization and considered villages as the basic economic units. Gandhi's Gram Swaraj is man centered, non exploiting, decentralized, simple village economy providing for full employment to each one of its citizens on the basis of voluntary cooperation and working for achieving self-sufficiency in its basic requirements of food, clothing and other necessities of life. He wanted Gram Swaraj in villages where there will be a village republic and management of affairs would be done by the people themselves. Everybody should get sufficient work to meet ones necessities and no one should be without food and clothing. It can happen only when the means of production to meet the primary needs of life are in the control of the people.

## 2. Gandhi's Village Economy

According to his idea of Gram Swaraj, each village should be basically self-reliant, making provisions for all the necessities of life- food, clothing, housing, education and self defence and all socially useful amenities required by a community. He believed that Independence must begin at the bottom and proposed to work from bottom upwards. Thus every village will be a Republic or Panchayat having full powers, ensuring people participation in the democratic decentralization at grass root level. Every village has to be self

sustained and capable of managing its affairs even to the extent of defending itself against the whole world. As a visionary of independent India he wanted confederation of self governing, self reliant, self employed people living in village communities dependent on the products in the village itself and anything which can be imported or exported from the village should be in the power of village assemblies. He believed that dependence of village communities on external market forces will make them vulnerable. Villages should have strong economic base and people should give priority to local goods and services. It should follow the spirit of extended family rather than as collection of competing individuals. He dreamt of village self sufficiency neither personal nor familial. Schumacher in his book Small is Beautiful said "Gandhi abhorred the industrial civilization because it was based on callous exploitation of non renewable resources. It made bodily welfare the sole object of life which reduced man to nothing but a clever animal". A locally based economy enhances community spirit, community relationships and community well being. He believed that mass production through big industries leads to rootless and jobless dependents who are expelled as soon as alternative of new machine and technology is explored. In the production by masses supported by Gandhi machines will be subordinate to workers and not allowed to become master dictating the pace of human activity. In Harijan in 1940 he wrote " I do visualize electricity, ship building, iron works, machine making and the like existing side by side with village handicrafts." Machinery should be used in such a way as to serve the villages and their crafts and not destroy them, should be socially controlled. Thus, in later years he favoured large scale technology in few sectors co-existing with small scale technology and handicraft. In communities practicing Swadeshi economics would not dominate society. An era of globalization drives people towards high performance, high

achievement and high ambition for materialistic success leading to stress, loss of space for personal and family relationships and loss of spiritual life. According to him industrialization leads to the material welfare of few people and leads to concentration of wealth. Machinery used in industries is capital intensive and displaces labour increasing unemployment and under-employment (Bhaimali Anil "Relevance of M.K. Gandhi's ideas of self sufficient village economy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in Sarvodaya Vol.1, No.5 Jan-Feb, 2004 [www.mkgandhi.org/articles/bhaimali.html](http://www.mkgandhi.org/articles/bhaimali.html)).

Gandhi established "All India Village Industries Association" at Wardha and devoted himself for reorganisation of Indian villages experimenting in rural life style for revival of village crafts and agro processing industries village cleanliness, diet reforms etc. He trained many workers in rural reconstruction work such as making Neera from palm trees, jaggery, dairy, leather work, pottery, oil pressing, beekeeping etc. He accepted village life but was not in favour of tolerating ignorance, uncleanliness, laziness, untouchability and jealousy in the villages. He preferred decentralisation of small units of production to the concentration of large scale units at few places. He was in favour of establishing production units in the homes of the masses, particularly in villages. It is easier to assess demand while producing at village level thus; there will be no overproduction and wastes of competition. Transport cost is almost negligible. Integrating cottage industries with agriculture engages them in spare time reducing seasonal unemployment and disguised unemployment. Village industries are self sufficient economic units.

He believed that production of Khadi will save millions of people from starvation and supplement earnings of poor people. It is spun through which does not require huge capital and is simple to operate. His scheme of Khadi required:

- Compulsory spinning at all primary and secondary schools.
- Increasing cultivable land under cotton.
- Multipurpose cooperative societies should organise weaving.
- Imposing ban on use of mill cloth in areas where land woven cloth was abundant.
- All Government, textile and weaving departments should promote use of hand spun cloth.
- Ban on import of foreign yarn and cloth.

He was not against machinery but objected labour saving machinery as it will lead to unemployment, poverty and starvation. He favoured instruments and machines which saved in individual labour and lightened the burden of millions of cottage workers. He was against large scale production of only those things which village can produce easily Machine was harmful for production of those commodities which can be produced by most of the people. He wrote "mechanization is good when the 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" In Harijan (1938) he wrote "If I could produce all my country's wants by means of 30,000 people instead of 30 million, I should not mind it, provided that the 30 million are not rendered idle and unemployed". His ideas are relevant in this context as after so

many decades of planning we see machine using and power driven economic development has not solved the problem of unemployment. His ideal of village Sarvodaya required orderliness in the structure of village, have Dharmashala and small dispensary, self sufficient in food and clothing, roads and lanes kept clean, places of worship beautiful and clean drainage system well planned, protection against robbers and wild animals, should have public hall, school and theatre hall, playground, cattle sheds etc. cash crops and fruit trees should also be cultivated, cooperation in rural activities, efficient water supply, village panchayats enjoying judicial, legislative and executive powers, every village having village guard and caste system need to be abolished. Despite this idea of ideal village he realised that it was not easy to establish.

Gandhi's economic ideas are governed by ethical and moral considerations. His economic models are humanitarian in nature and any model which ignores general well being of mankind should not be implemented. He believed that business without ethical considerations was considered evil and considered capitalist structure as the cause of oppression and exploitation. If people took which they earn from hard work and capable of production then only poverty and other economic woes can be eliminated. People need to be strong both physically and morally to gain big political or ideological goals. He had strong belief in village mode of production and thought that industrialization will harm age-old, indigenous village techniques heading towards unemployment. He was of the view that consumers should high quality, cheaper goods but should also see which section of the society is getting benefits from such investments. He had strong belief that imported goods will degenerate entire village economy. He realized that capitalist mode cannot be halted but proposed that nations with less population can use advanced mechanization process but countries with high population like India this will not solve its problems. Britishers ruled India with their economic interests and Gandhi wanted to breakdown their motive but knew it was very difficult in such a situation to enthuse Indians to be economically self sufficient. By producing example through his life he and his followers in Sabarmati Ashram practiced believing in dignity of labours and work and act as independent self sufficient economic unit fulfilling all needs. His stand for the cause of handicrafts and handlooms and promotion of the idea that everyone should spin their own cloth, 'Charkha' and Khadi became symbol of nationalism. All forms of rural handicrafts were encouraged by Gandhi. His economic model was followed not only in India but in various parts of the world with varied success rate at that time. According to him industrialization and globalisation will be disastrous for India as it will adversely affect village industries as they will not be able to compete with international goods, lead to migration, urbanization and by displacing labour through mechanization will increase misery, unemployment and poverty. Production, distribution and consumption should be such as to meet essential needs of the most deprived people in the society.

Gandhi was influenced by English artist and writer John Ruskin who criticised savagery of capitalism and believed that it destroyed social fabric, increased poverty and promoted economy with no morality. He wanted that different type of

technology need to be explored which was based on rationality and spirituality. He was also inspired by American activist and writer Henry David Thoreau and Russian Writer Leo Tolstoy in developing his own concept of non violence, simplicity of needs, means to achieve end, sharing of wealth among all people, and focus on grassroot self organization of decentralized and democratic communities. He believed that both economics and politics should be the means to the realization of spiritual and cultural goals. He believed that goods should be consumed where produced unnecessary circulation of goods causes wastage by increasing the role of brokers, speculators, national politicians and others grabbing the products on which local people are dependent. The goal should be development of human person, their peace, spiritual elevation and liberation rather than economic development.

His economic philosophy was individual dignity and the welfare of the poorest of the poor. A man earns his dignity by working and earning his bread and livelihood thus, economic system adopted to provide employment for everyone. Everybody should be able to get sufficient work to enable him to get at least food clothing and it will happen when means of production remain in control of the masses. He opposed machines in Indian context due to its huge population and unemployment.

Gandhiji realised that after urbanisation whatever land is being cultivated by farmers is not producing profits to farmers rather they suffer losses. Pessimistic attitude was gripping villages, they are not full of life as used to be, no enthusiasm and activity. Hunger and misery is hovering around them and they are distressed under the burden of loans. Sahukars give loan to them continuously otherwise their whole money will drown if farmers do not produce and get return. Farmers takes on getting loans and caught in its vicious cycle and even after close investigation could not decipher the exact situation of loan burden and its causes of perpetuation. Village, industries need to be protected otherwise village will perish. He said on the advice of Western followers who suggested that innovative minds of people if like America control the powers of nature and utilise it then villages will progress as west is utilising full potentials of water, air, oil and electricity likewise we should also do to liberate villages from poverty. Gandhiji opined that by doing so people will become slaves of their needs while enslaving nature.

We do not have question that people are overburdened with work and have to be given leisure time but people do not have any work for months and have to be utilised while idle. He asserted that mills in the villages are actually grabbing employment of people and proving destructive for them. What one labour in mill can do work that was done by ten labours. Thus, we can say that by stealing away the employment of other nine this one labour is earning more what he was earlier earning in the village. Spinning mills have stolen away major source of living of village people. He was against the argument in favour of these mills that they produce better quality of cloth and at cheaper rates. He argued even cheaper and finer quality of cloth has to be sacrificed and is of no value if it has rendered many people unemployed and affected their living. If villagers make khadi for themselves and use it will not be

costly for them. The work which is being done by cloth and rice mills is grabbing employment and living of men and women and also adversely affecting their health, because mills produce fine flour and polished rice which are pure not nutritious as flour and rice processed through hand. Solution is that whatever industries were run by them should be revived to improve their condition. Some people criticise that through traditional means every human being can meet his needs but not that of community. But Gandhiji said it is a myth villagers produce products in their cottage but they can be also stored and their profit can be distributed. Villagers can work under the supervision for particular plan and they should be given raw material from public storage. If community work feeling is developed in villagers then cooperation, division of labour, time saving and work efficiency they have sufficient leisure time. Daily needs should be met through things produced in villages and those thing which are not available in the village should be made through union and some profit can be earned. While earning profit people should not just think of their benefit but that of villagers also. May be initially the quality produced is not very good but if others cooperate with them and help them its quality can be improved with time. He said that he was not interested in restarting hand grinding and winnowing traditional practices without reason but to solve the problem of idle villagers and so that they can better utilise their time. Villagers have also become untouchables in the eyes of urban people they do not recognise or value them and do not want to live in villages and if reaches any village want to establish his urban life. If reviving village industries forced unemployment and poverty removal is impossible then dream of converting all the villages into cities is also impossible. Therefore, we should strive for reviving the village life. If we will ignore our villages then will invite our own destruction. The urban people should do away with their guilt of destroying village life by raising the demand of their products and Gramsevaks will go in the villages and assure them that their products will be sold so they should produce them. This will meet the real economy of our country. Villages should be made self reliant and self sufficient and then they can use contemporary tools and instruments which they can produce and buy themselves. They should not be made to loot others. Vanishing village industries will also lead to destruction of art and culture associated with it. For transport bullock-cart for short distances is very useful as it will provide employment to carpenter and blacksmith and will provide gobar for making manure to be used in the fields. Thus, it is self sustaining and has engaged time of villagers who otherwise will be left idle. Cow is very useful as it will provide milk, milk products, more nutritious than vanaspati ghee, provide manure through gobar and reproduce bulls for cart and to be used in field activities. If we provide commodities and goods from outside villages then will increase unemployment in villages. Gandhiji advocated that for election campaign instead of motor cars bullock carts should be used as they will raise the demand and use of carts will increase employment and profit of villagers on one hand and campaigners can connect to them more closely by giving them more time. The quality of bullock carts can be improved. If campaigners will spend more time in villages they can understand their problems more intensely and try to find solutions. He was in favour of volunteers known as Gramsevaks who can work for the benefit of people teach

them the importance of health, hygiene, education, morality ethics and peace. They should be epitome of hardwork. He was in favour of teaching village people healthy hygienic living so that they do not fall sick.

### 3. Conclusion

According to Gandhi Swadeshi was a spiritual imperative as in ancient times India was not only prosperous but also favourable to philosophical and spiritual development. He believed in communal ownership of land for balanced cultivation and surplus land should be distributed to the rest in the village community, villages should act as self-sufficient independent economic units. Whatever is surplus in the village it should be distributed to the poor villagers, in this manner no one will die of hunger. If surplus is distributed to the fellow

beings, poverty can be eliminated and people can live in harmony happily together. He realised that sole dependency on agriculture will not solve the problem of poverty and unemployment, therefore, stress on rural cottage and small scale industries such as khadi, handlooms, sericulture and handicrafts should be done. They involve family labour thus dependency on capital is less. This will prevent migration to urban industrialized areas with big industries preventing problems arising due to migration from rural areas to urban centres. Machinery should be used in such a way as to serve the villages and their crafts and not destroy them, should be socially controlled. Thus, in later years he favoured large scale technology in few sectors co-existing with small scale technology and handicraft.

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