

Economic Views of Mahatma Gandhi

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Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, popularly known as Mahatma Gandhi, was not only a social thinker but also an economist too. He was not a systematic thinker but was a peace-maker, mentor and an inspired teacher. He himself admitted that he was not giving any new philosophy. "I learnt by my errors well of my philosophy, if it might be called by that pretentious name is done in what I have said, you will not call it Gandhism, there is no 'ism' about it". This paper aims to study his economic views.

Mahatma Gandhi followed the principle of truth and non-violence throughout his life. With the help of these tools he struggled against the British Empire and made India free from the bondage. His economics is based on the concept of non-violence. He knew that no industry can be without violence and so he wanted to minimize it. He said that non-violent occupation is free from violence and involves no exploitation or envy of others. He opposed capitalism because it involves exploitation of human labour. He firmly believed that nature produced enough for the satisfaction of the people's needs and there would not be starvation if everybody took only that much he required.

Mahatma Gandhi did not favour large scale industrialization because it creates many socio-economic evils. According to him, large scale use of machinery led to drudgery and monotony. So he advocated de-centralized economy. In such economy, there would not be an exploitation of labour. India had enough human resources, but capital supply was poor. Hence, labour intensive technology was the need of the time. There should be the production at a large number of places on a small scale. He said that there should be the development of cottage industries. He firmly believed that decentralization was necessary for maintaining democracy and for the formation of a non-violent state. There should be production units in the homes of the masses, especially in villages. He knew that cottage and village industries would solve the problem of unemployment. Production of commodities would be cheaper. There would be requirement of very few tools. There would be no problem of storage and transport cost would be negligible. It would provide work to the farmers in their spare time and it would remove poverty and unemployment from the villages. Villages would become self-sufficient units.

According to Mahatma Gandhi, every Indian needed at least 13 yards of cloth every year. Multiplication of mills would not solve the problem of cloth supply. Hence he laid emphasis on khadi industry. He said that use of khadi means decentralization of production. khadi movement started when he returned from South Africa. He knew that khadi industry would save millions of people from starvation as it would provide earning to them. He advocated the use of charkha as it requires a small amount of capital and it is simple in operation. He said that charkha is a source of steady income. It does not depend on monsoon and it is the symbol of non-violence. This khadi scheme is as given under:

- i) There should be compulsory spinning in all primary and secondary schools.
- ii) There should be cultivation of cotton where it is not grown.
- iii) There should be co-operated societies for weaving.
- iv) All employees should pass the test of spinning.
- v) There should be ban on the use of textile mills in areas where handloom clothes are available.
- vi) There should be use of hand-spun cloth in all Government and textile and weaving department.
- vii) New textile mills should not be opened and old mills should not be allowed to expand.
- viii) There should be ban on import of foreign yarn or cloth.

He gave importance to the development of villages rather than developing cities. His emphasis was laid on agricultural development and cottage industries. He said that there should be co-operative organizations and everybody should participate in it. He was aware of the fact that real India was to be found in villages. So it was essential to convert every Indian village into a little self-sufficient republic. So he appealed people to move towards villages. He put forth the model of ideal village. He said that every ideal village must fulfill the following conditions:

- i) The structure of village should be in a proper order.
- ii) Fruit trees should be there.
- iii) Dharmashala and small dispensary should be there.
- iv) The village should be self-sufficient in matters of food and clothing.
- v) Cleanliness should be there.

- vi) The places of worship should be beautiful and clean.
- vii) There should be well maintained gutters for draining of water in every lake.
- viii) The villages should be protected from robbers and wild animals.
- ix) There should be a public hall, a school and a theatre hall.
- x) There must be sufficient water supply.
- xi) There should be a play-ground and cattle sheds.
- xii) Cash crops excluding tobacco and opium may be grown.
- xiii) There should be compulsory education up to basic standard.
- xiv) Rural activities should be organized on co-operative basis.
- xv) Panchayats should administer and govern in rural area.
- xvi) Village panchayat should have judicial, legislative and executive powers.
- xvii) It should be compulsory to have village guard in every village.
- xviii) Caste system should be removed.

Gandhiji opposed industrial revolution. According to him machinery is a great sin. He knew that modern technology is responsible for human frustration, violence and war. It increased material needs. The use of machines made some people wealthy. As a result, there was unequal distribution of wealth. But he agreed to make use of simple machines like spinning wheel. His objection was to the use of machines which saved labour on large scale resulting into the problem of unemployment. Because of excessive use of machines, people would become jobless and would die of starvation. So he opposed the large scale production by making use of machines. According to him, machinery was harmful when the same thing could be done easily by millions of hands.

Mahatma Gandhi wanted everyone to live a simple life. He was against the multiplication of human wants. He said that the western materialism and industrialization increased human needs.

Gandhi favoured exchange economy which was based on the swadeshi spirit. According to him, every Indian village must be self-supporting and self-contained and there should be an exchange of necessary commodities with other villages. The person who is habituated to use swadeshi things would not feel physical discomfort caused by the non-availability of certain things. But he told people not to worry about the non-availability of such things. Even he allowed to use watches from Switzerland and surgical instruments from England which were essential for development. But he did not allow to buy cotton from England or Japan or any other country of the world as the import of cloth would badly affect the home industry. He said that money was a token of exchange. According to him, commodities should be exchanged with commodities.

Gandhiji said that the capitalist who collected a large sum of money is a thief. In fact, entire amount he had collected did not belong to him. It is the wealth of entire society and so it should be spent for the welfare of all. According to him, the capitalists should play the role of trustees and they should take care of people. The workers would keep faith in them. Thus, there would be mutual trust and confidence and economic equality would be maintained.

Gandhiji experienced the worst famine in 1942-1944. There was shortage of food in West Bengal. He suggested some measures as given under:

- i) Everyone should reduce his or her requirement of food. Vegetables, milk and fruits should be used more.
- ii) The use of food grains in the army should be minimized.
- iii) There should be ban on black marketing.
- iv) For good irrigation deep wells should be sunk.
- v) Oil and oil cakes should not be exported.

The most burning problem, according to Gandhi, is the problem of population explosion. He did not favour the use of contraceptives. He thought that when people start making use of contraceptives, they would abuse the creative function and as a result male population would become imbecile. According to him self control or brahmacharya was a proper way of birth control. He opposed the sterilization of women because it was inhuman. But he did not oppose Vasectomy, especially in case of males suffering from chronic diseases.

In fact, Gandhi was a spiritual person and so his economic thoughts are also based on spiritualism. According to him, all men and women are the children of God and so they should behave like brothers and sisters. It means his economic views are based on the principles of equality. In fact, it is difficult to follow Gandhian principles of Economics, but if they are implemented properly, the nation would definitely

become strong in every sense. It is unfortunate that our leaders did not follow the Gandhian Economics and as a result, India could not become a strong nation in the world.

Reference

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