
RELEVANCE OF MAHATMA GANDHI'S ECONOMIC IDEAS

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Received: Sep. 2019 Accepted: Oct. 2019 Published: Nov. 2019

Abstract: Gandhiji's economic ideas are understood in his whole philosophy. His main idea aims at the socio-economic reconstruction of society. In the Gandhian economic thought human beings themselves were wealth, not gold and silver. "The final consummation of all wealth is in producing as many as possible, full-breadth, bright-eyed and happy-hearted human beings". He believed that, that country was the richest which nourished the greatest number of happy individuals, and that man was the richest who, after fulfilling the mission of his own life and perfecting its functions to the maximum extent, influenced the lives of others. Mahatma Gandhi held in economic motives and activities should be governed by ethical consideration. To him, economics and ethics were inseparable. In the West, people generally hold the view that the main duty of man is to promote the material happiness of the majority of mankind, and by happiness they simply mean physical happiness and economic prosperity. It does not matter very much to them if the laws of morality are broken for the sake of that happiness. To Gandhi, economics was a practical science which suggested practicable measures for the maximization of human welfare. He laid great emphasis on human values, and condemned the monetary basis of human relations. The paper discusses the relevance of the economic philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi in the present era.

Keywords: Human Welfare, Worker, Capital, Human Values, Labour, Welfare Economy.

Introduction: A study of Gandhi shows that when he took keen interest in national problems, he took an equally keen interest in the welfare of individuals as well. He became almost a guide, philosopher and friend, a nurse, a cook, a servant of whosoever came in his contact. He believed in raising the moral fibre of individuals and through them to build up a new man and a new society. It was because of this interest in the individual that he mesmerized the largest number of people and won unquestioned loyalty from even those who had nothing in common with him.

For Mahatma Gandhi, welfare includes material as well as spiritual. Full employment, economic equality and swadeshi constitute three major objectives of Gandhian economic system. Therefore, he advocated reduction in economic inequalities. To Gandhi, wealth does not mean welfare. His is the economics of basic human needs including food, clothing and shelter. He was against the concentration and acquisition of wealth beyond a point. According to him, it was necessary to voluntarily reduce wants particularly when majority of the people are living below poverty line. Gandhian economics is highly interlinked with ethics.

Objectives

1. To make a bird's eye view of the economic philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi\
2. To examine the relevance of Gandhian economic philosophy in the present era of globalization.

Gandhi advocated decentralised and market-negotiated economic system wherein economic decisions are taken by individuals. Under such a system, private property exists and production is owned by either private firms or by cooperatives of workers and farmers. Material incentives for the least paid numbers of the society and moral incentives for elite have been recommended as motivating force in the production process. Gandhi was against the use of labour-supplanting machinery in a labour surplus economy like India. Machinery is permissible if it does not deprive masses of people of the opportunity of labour, if it increases efficiency, and does not make people slaves. In Gandhi's view, true economics

cannot ignore moral values. The basic purpose of his meta-economics was to achieve economic self-sufficiency by restricting meta-needs. His idea was to save the labour force from being de-humanized by the onslaught of industrial civilization of his time.

A careful study of the trends and developments in almost all the countries of the world since the invention of the first machine, some 400 years back reveals in spite of great diversities, certain common factors. The poorer of the machine enamoured man and he, without bothering to stop and think for a moment, fell all out for industrialization thinking that it alone was the symbol of progress and could bring permanent happiness. When, on the one side the industrialized countries are vying with each other to industrialize themselves further in an increasingly shorter period, on the other, the underdeveloped or developing economies also want to join in the race and make their presence felt. This love for industrialization has brought in its wake, the ever-increasing large scale mechanized production, centralization, growth of cities and decline in the importance of villages, a growing demand for all important managerial and technician class, change in ownership from individual ownership to State ownership, through partnership, joint stock companies and cooperative ownership, dispute whether production should be motivated by profit motive or welfare motive (not knowing what this welfare really means), and the ever-increasing responsibility of the State in controlling and regulating things. Since these changes are readily adopted in search of human happiness, we are faced with certain problems created by these changes. For example, we are called upon to fight the demands of unemployment, of uneven distribution of wealth, of exploitation (of the poor by the rich, of labour by the capitalist and of one nation by another) of imperialism and colonialism, of world wars, of booms and slumps with all the evils associated with them, of food shortage and famines, of over-production and under-production, of military alliances, of hatred and jealousies, etc. Industrialization has accelerated the tempo of life and added to its tensions, but the goal of human happiness, of peace and prosperity, of plenty, of increasing leisure for artistic and noble pursuits still continues to evade man. Despite the talk of different types of economics -capitalist, socialist and mixed—and of the countries being on the different stages of development, the dream remains a distant reality.

The world has not become a happier and nobler place to live in. Gandhi, out and out a practical man, wedded to 'untainted' human happiness, saw all these changes and their consequences. Naturally he could not remain a silent spectator to these changes much less be a party to them. He, through his utterances, writings and actions, started giving a new picture of the production system of India of his dreams—a system which may work as a model for other countries of the world. It will, therefore, be advisable to study the views of Gandhi on some important problems connected with the production system of his dreams.

Mahatma Gandhi laid emphasis on the welfare of the worker, his dignity and proper wages. In order to improve the condition of the worker, first of all he laid emphasis on minimum living wages. So that a family of 4 to 6 members might live a human life. He wrote that the worker should get more wages, and should be given less work to do so that clean house, clean body, clean mind and clean soul might be guaranteed to them. In so far as relation between labour and capital is concerned. Mahatma Gandhi always suggested harmony between them. He argued that if the distinction of high and low disappeared, it would have a healthy reaction on all aspects of life. Consequently, the struggle between labour and capital would come to an end; and would give place to co-operation between them. According to him, "capital should be labour's servant, not its master". Moreover, he believed in the information of labour unions. If the rights of workers were not conceded, they could go on a strike which should be based on non-violence and truth. Therefore, the main focus of this paper is analyzing the welfare economic scenario from the Gandhian economic perspective.

Relevance of Gandhi's Views: The relevance of Gandhi's basic principles i.e. non-violence, truth, satyagraha, cooperation, and trusteeship as a means to attain harmonious industrial relations and resolve the conflict between labour and capital in the 21st century are questioned on the following grounds: (i) The proposition of trusteeship theory as a way to solve most of the labour problems is based on the belief in essential goodness of human nature whereas in practice, we observe selfishness in

human nature. Under such circumstances, it becomes difficult to put many of the Gandhi's ideas into practice. (ii) When a few who ought to hold the economic power in trust for others from whom they derive it, use it for their own cause, and to the detriment of the rest, the inevitable result will be the deprivation of the few. Under such a situation, Gandhi's advocacy for trusteeship theory and cooperation between employer and employee will not work. (iii) In the materialistic worldview wherein maximum consumption, utility maximisation, wealth acquisition and expansion are highly valued, the success of trusteeship theory and Satyagraha appears to be difficult. (iv) The caste-ridden social stratification and vote bank politics in the name of caste and religion further widens the gap between different communities making Gandhian way of solving the problems more difficult. The experiment with truth and non-violence was proposed to be carried out in a system that became explosively violent and aggressive not only during alien rule but also against the internal socio-economic inequalities, exploitation and injustice. Even Gandhi himself could not control the mob-violence in the case of outbreak of violence in August 1942. In spite of the above arguments, certain Gandhian views on labour are/ will be relevant in the 21st century in the following manner.

- (i) In the wake of rapid changes in the information technology and consequent speed up of globalization process, competition has become a key factor for entrepreneurs' survival in the global market. For that bringing efficiency and productivity have become unavoidable for entrepreneurs, which in turn, demand the cooperation between employers and employees. It is, therefore in the changed context of 21st century challenges that Gandhi's view about cooperation between employers and employees has become highly relevant. Similarly, in order to update the workers with the fast changes in the technology, workers need to be trained and retrained from time to time.
- (ii) The developed countries have opted for the materialistic approach as a way of life and the developing countries are being tempted to move towards that direction. A careful scrutiny of the facts will reveal that this materialistic approach, to a significant extent, has been instrumental in generating the passions for more and more goods. The roots of today's serious problems (like climatic change, environmental degradation, widening gap between the rich and the poor, jobless growth, tensions, etc.) lie in adhering to this approach in an unquestioning manner. In such a situation, Gandhi's advice to control the excessive consumption and minimising the wants is the need of the hour and highly relevant.
- (iii) Gandhi was not simply an ideologue. He was a practitioner and demonstrated the efficacy of non-violence, truth, Satyagraha and cooperation, by putting an end to the labour exploitation of Indigo workers under 'Tinkathia' system in Champaran by way of satyagraha and non-violent means. Organizing the labour in Ahmedabad and his several movements in South Africa for the cause of labourers illustrate the working of his ideas in practice.
- (iv) Gandhi's ideas against child labour are relevant and international agencies like International Labour Organisation and UNICEF have passed conventions against child labour. Various NGOs and other national and international agencies have also been working towards the elimination of the child labour.
- (v) Similarly, Gandhi's views on wages and strikes have been well-endorsed by different organisations and are and will be relevant in the 21st century.

Conclusion: Gandhi's views on labour are part and parcel of his economic ideals and trusteeship theory based on truth, non-violence, non- possession and welfare of all. As a background, it is desirable to have an overview of his basic economic ideas and trusteeship principle in mind before knowing Gandhi's views on labour. In the Gandhian stream of thought, economics and ethics are interlinked. Trusteeship theory has been the guiding force for harmonious relationship between the employer and the employees. Labour has four components – (i) bread labour (manual labour), (ii) intellectual labour, (iii) labour as an instrument, and (iv) labour as a method of service for others. Gandhi had high respect for the dignity of labour. The dependency of labour on capital with unequal power relations and goal incompatibility are the two important reasons for the conflict between labour and capital. Gandhi advocated cordial relationship between capital and labour by way of fair and just treatment to the labourers. He favoured the formulation of trade unions in different places. He recognised the strikes as an inherent right of the workers for securing justice with the rider that the moment employers accept arbitration, strike must be considered as a crime. He was for the payment of enough wages to the

workers and a respectable proportion between dividends, wages and prices. Gandhi advocated reduction of working hours from twelve to ten hours. He was against child labour, and argued for improvement in working conditions. Gandhi's views about cooperation between the employer and employees, elimination of child labour, workers' right to strike, curbing consumption, fair wages to the workers etc. are/ will be highly relevant in the present era.

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