

# GANDHIAN VIEWS ON ECONOMY AND POLITICS: A UNIQUE PERSPECTIVE

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## Abstract

*People of the world, especially of India consider Gandhi as a freedom fighter, advocate of non-violence, truth-lover and savior of untouchables. It has conveniently been forgotten that Gandhiji read nearly three hundred books on economy of the nations. Few researchers attempted holistic research on Gandhi's economic philosophy, especially concepts of ideal structure of Indian economy, industrialization, concept of labor and socialism. The current research paper attempts to interpret some of his views and concepts on economic philosophy. The first part of the paper discusses his views on the ideal structure of Indian economy; the second part deals with his vision on industrialization and the final part of the paper attempts to summarize his ideas on labor and socialism.*

**Keywords:** Gandhian Economics, Indian economy, economic structure, socialism, labor

## INTRODUCTION

Gandhiji's contribution to the freedom of India is globally acknowledged. His peaceful protests earned him the title of 'Father of Nation'. His active participation in Champaran Movement (1917), Kheda Movement (1918), Khilafat Movement (1919), Non-cooperation Movement (1920), salt march (1929), quit India movement (1942) and many such movements made him a fatherly figure and earned him the title 'bapu'. The most praiseworthy part of all such protests was that they all were conducted with the principle of non-violence. The contribution of Gandhiji in India's freedom from British rule cannot be undermined. But claiming that he contributed only in Indian freedom fight would be belittling his contribution in other fields such as social reforms, education and economy. It seems that he had intensely read Karl Marx, Adam Smith and Edmund Snell. His extensive readings shaped his principles on the ideal structure of Indian economy, socialism and labor. The following sections of the research paper discuss the views of Gandhiji on the above concepts and try to manifest that Gandhiji was not only a freedom fighter but a staunch believer in equal distribution and consumption of wealth, believer in equal work and equal pay.

## A MODEL STRUCTURE FOR INDIAN ECONOMY

In 'India of My Dream' (The Navjivan Trust, 1947), Gandhi dreamt of India without any conflict between rich and poor, capital and labor and nation with a self-sufficient economy. To say it in his own words, "I shall work for an India in which the poorest shall feel that it is their country in whose making they have an effective voice, an India in which there shall be no high class and low class of people; an India in which all communities shall live in perfect harmony ... Women will enjoy the same rights as men. Since we shall be in peace with all the rest of the world, neither exploiting nor being exploited, we shall have the smallest army imaginable. All interests not in conflict with the interests of the dumb millions will be scrupulously respected, whether foreign or indigenous .... This is India of my dreams. ... I shall be satisfied with nothing less." (Gandhiji, Young India, 10<sup>th</sup> September, 1930)

Gandhi's concept of Swaraj speaks volume about his ideal vision of Indian Economy. His definition of the word 'swaraj' itself indicates his views about perfect governance, "The Government by the consent of the largest number of the adult population, male or female, native born or domiciled, who have contributed by manual labor to the service of the State and who have taken the trouble of having registered their names as voters.. . This is political self-government and distinguished from individual self-government. In other words, the attainment of such a government does not mean that authority is to be implemented by a few alone, but the acquisition of the capacity by all to resist authority when it is abused. So the real swaraj lies in acquiring the capacity to regulate and control authority." He defines swaraj as complete political and economic freedom. He was advocating a society without economic classes as he believed that the necessities of life should equally be enjoyed by kings, princes and common men.

Gandhiji advocated self-sustaining villages. India lives in villages and so he believed that they should not depend on any outside forces for economic well-being. He says clearly that the rich can continue using "their riches wisely and usefully and not squander them in increasing their pomp and worldly pleasures". (Gandhi, Young India, March 25, 1939.)

Gandhi's concept of egalitarianism was centered on the safeguarding of human dignity rather than material development. The another important principle of Gandhian economic thought, known as trusteeship principle, is a concept where a person voluntarily gives up or renounces his right on the money earned by him and dedicates it for the welfare of the poor section of the society. The haves should be held as a trust for the welfare of all, particularly of the poorest and most deprived (have-nots).

Thus, Gandhi's welfare thoughts, though not forming any well-knitted economic theories, were aimed at bringing overall good for the deprived section of the society. At that time when India was under British rule, he advocated such economic objectives that could benefit the poorest of the poor.

## IEWS ON INDUSTRIALIZATION

It is generally believed that Gandhi was against machines and industrialization. When asked whether he was against machines, he replied, "How can I be when I know that this body is also most delicate piece of machinery? The spinning wheel is a machine; a little toothpick is a machine. What I object to is the craze for machinery, not machinery as such....I want the connection of the wealth, not in the hands of a few to ride in the backs of millions. The impetus behind it all is not philanthropy to save the labor, but greed... Take the case of Singer sewing machine. It is one of the few useful things ever invented." (Gandhi, Young India, November 13, 1924)

He never aimed at eradicating the machines but limited use of it. He believed that the increased use of machinery would benefit only the privileged few and bring out the intricacy of competition, imbalance between mass manufacturing and distribution and ultimate exploitation. He strongly believed that all the machines should be small and inexpensive, whereas larger machines should be operated and controlled by the state only and that too for the welfare of the society.

Gandhi believed that over-industrialization would harm the natural resources of India. Mass production of things using machines may damage the environment. So industrialization, according to him, may not be a valuable policy for the happiness of the society in the long run.

## CONCEPT OF LABOR

Gandhi's definition of labor is wide and not merely restricting to working class. So long a person works for himself, he is a laborer and, in such sense, we all are laborers. He considered himself as a laborer and he called the labor the 'great power'. His concept of labor has foundation in his stay in Africa and his reading of the book 'Unto this Last'. (John Ruskin) This reading truly transformed his life. He said that this book provided him three concepts. 1. The welfare of an individual lies in the welfare of all. 2. The value of lawyer's work is as good as that of barber's work. 3. Life of the laborer or tiller of the soil is the life worth-living. He decided to put these principles in practice. The result was the phoenix farm near Durban where all the people labored and earned good lives. Before Gandhi's worship for labors came his strong belief in fulfillment of some duties of mankind. Giving proper and honest services, working and taking pride in the establishment as if it were their own and maintaining good relations with owners and the labors are some of the duties. Gandhi strongly believed that the relationship between the mill owners and laborers should be of 'father and children' rather than 'master and servant'. Gandhi's concept of 'minimum wage' was based on the criteria of providing for the workers enough for a reasonably balanced diet. This concept was so justified that it was adopted by International Labor Organization as one of the most important standards for fixing the wages. He was a staunch campaigner of 'equal wages for equal work'. He believed that those who are unable to pay standard wages to the workers should be closed down. And most importantly, he never instigated the workers to demand such standard wages by force but by satyagrah (non-violent resistance).

## GANDHI ON SOCIALISM

Gandhi's concept of socialism thrived on the belief of economic and political equality of men. What Gandhi found appreciable in socialism and communism was their concern for the masses in terms of making provisions for fulfillment of the basic needs of the people. In the words of Gandhiji, "Socialism is the system in which all the members of society are equal, so are the members of the society. As the members of the individual body are equal, so are the members of the society. This is socialism." The source of Gandhi's socialism probably found in his experiences with European civilization. His reading of the books like Das Capital and Handbook of Marxism by Karl Marx have probably the great influence on his concept of socialism. His definition of socialism explains, 'from each according to his capacity to each according to his needs'.

Gandhi differed with other socialists in defining the economic equality and the means to achieve it. He believed that the means lied in the dispersal of industry where as socialism found the remedy in eliminating private property. Though Gandhiji didn't like the idea of private property, he disagreed with other socialists who wanted to eradicate private property.

Another striking difference is that the socialists believe in imposing political, economic and social equality, even by violence. Whereas Gandhiji truly propounded the concept of non-violence.

Gandhiji believed that non-violence and persuasion were only two means that could achieve the individual freedom. The first step therefore should be to introduce to the people the value of labor and human dignity with love and truth. Then the realization would automatically make people leave all the luxuries for the love of the human race and equality of all. And this would be the establishment of true socialism.

## CONCLUSION

After a careful scrutiny of Gandhi's thoughts on socialism, industrialization and ideal structure of Indian economy, it can very well be concluded that for Gandhi, solution to almost every single problem lied in non-violence. In order to achieve the economic equality, political stability (swaraj) and welfare for all (sarvodaya), Gandhi firmly believed that non-violence was the most effective weapon. These concepts were severely criticized as impractical ways but it certainly held the potent of bringing fair change in the society. Some of his concepts may seem over-idealized and fuzzy as he was not a skilled economist. But it can be said without doubt that his economic philosophy, especially his views on rural economy and socialism were quite consistent with the condition prevailing in India at that time and at the moment.

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