

## Mahatma Gandhi's Economic Thoughts on Agriculture

Dr. Subhash Shankarrao Pawar<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Associate Professor, Department of History, Arts & Commerce College, Warvat-Bakal, Tq:- Sangrampur, Buldana, Sant Gadge Baba Amravati University, Amravati, India

**Article History:** Received: 10 January 2021; Revised: 12 February 2021; Accepted: 27 March 2021; Published online: 20 April 2021

**Abstract:** Mahatma Gandhi has to be counted among the epoch-making philosophers in the history of India. He has a reputation as a pioneer of Satyagraha, a freedom fighter and a constructive social reformer. He believed that the labor-intensive life of farmers and artisans was the best life. Gandhiji wanted to improve the economic life of the common man in India. The majority of people in India live in villages. Insufficient land in the village and unemployment are the main reasons for their poverty. So he undertook the program of reviving rural industries and making agriculture a secondary business. He gave Swadeshi vows to his followers so that industries could be created in the village. Although the ideal of economic decentralization seemed appealing to many, including Gandhiji, he did not provide clear guidance to his followers. So their thoughts were limited to a few villages. As an alternative to the capitalist economy, Gandhiji proposed the idea of a self-sufficient village state in the medieval period. But with the establishment of capitalism in India, the economic exploitation of the common people began. Because the establishment did not support them. Gandhiji's decentralization of the economy, his opposition to machine culture, the decentralization of economic power, etc., necessitated a collective movement to put them into practice. Gandhiji was not able to set up such a movement in India or his followers. That is why even though Gandhiji's ideas were good, they could not be put into practice.

**Objectives :-** 1) To find out the reasons why the people of rural India are in the throes of economic and unemployment today. 2) To find out the real ideas of Gandhiji about the economic life of rural agriculture.

**Methodology :-** Using this analytical and comparative method of historical research, the article presents research based on primary and secondary historical tools.

**Keywords:** Decentralization, Economy, Machine Culture, Capitalism, Indigenous Industries

### 1. Preface

Mahatma Gandhi is immortalized in the history of India as a great political saint who made the oppressed Indians fearless for centuries, awakened their moral strength and self-confidence, committed them to fight against British rule, successfully led the nation to independence, won independence and was hailed as the "Father of the Nation".

Gandhiji was born on 2 October 1869 in the village of Porbandar in Gujarat. His father Karamchand Gandhi was the Diwan of Kathiyawad Sansthan. He was a big neutral and impartial householder. He was instrumental in the formation of Gandhiji. According to the custom of the time, they were married at the age of twelve. Passed the matriculation examination in 1888. He was sent to Bhavnagar for higher studies, but could not adapt to the environment there. He was later sent to England for higher studies. During his stay in England, he read Arnold's famous book 'Life of Asia' and the Bhagavad Gita. Also, after reading other scriptures, there is no doubt in his mind that the fundamentals of all religions are the same. From this, a religious and philosophical meeting of his mind was formed (Vaidya, 2001)

After graduating as a barrister from London, Mahatma Gandhi started his practice in Mumbai. In 1893. He went to South Africa to prosecute a Gujarati trader. There he fought against the racist policies of the British. For this, the 'Christmas Indian Congress' was formed on 22 August 1894. In 1906, he again staged a satyagraha against the black law passed by the South African government. The law required Indians to register their names in government gazettes and carry handwritten certificates. Russian writer Leo Tolstoy sent a letter to Gandhi congratulating him on his experiment (Vaidya, 2001). He returned to India in 1914 and the Gandhi era began in India's political history in 1920. During the history of India from 1920 to 1947, he had a great influence on the political and social developments.

"I have no set theory to go by. I have not worked out the Science of Satyagraha in its entirety. You can join me in my quest of it appeals to you and you feel the call (Mahatma Gandhi, 1939)

No matter how big a person is, he cannot fully shape social life as he imagined. Because society has its own pace. It is shaped by the interests of different sections of the society, their attitudes and their role on various issues. Gandhiji led the Indian independence movement in a certain period of time. But Gandhiji did not encourage the formation of farmers 'and workers' unions in post-independence India. Therefore, the political movement led by Gandhiji inevitably resulted in the establishment of capitalist rule in India.

## 2. The status of agriculture and farmers in India today

Agriculture has a unique significance in the life of the nation and society. Agriculture provides the basic necessities of life to a person, whether he lives in the city or in the countryside. About 50 per cent of India's population is dependent on agriculture. Agriculture accounts for about 50 per cent of India's national income. Yet the plight of farmers has continued for centuries. They are now further enhanced by the new system and the new context (Narke Hari, 1993). In the 17 years from 1995 to 2011, about 7.5 million farmers committed suicide in India. In an advanced state like Maharashtra, more than fifty thousand farmers committed suicide. The highest number of farmer suicides in Maharashtra took place in Vidarbha, which is considered the cotton belt. The then Prime Minister of India Manmohan Singh announced a grant of Rs 110 billion to help farmers in Vidarbha. However, the number of farmers committing suicide in Maharashtra has been increasing day by day.

There are several main reasons for this poverty of the farmers. Debt is a major cause of suicide. In order to repay loans from nationalized banks, farmers need to have a good income in agriculture. India has very few facilities for agricultural irrigation. Agriculture is dependent on nature. In the rainy season, if the agriculture does not get the required water, the yield decreases. Also, farmers are not able to set up agri-supplementary businesses due to lack of capital. The high cost of production in agriculture is also a factor contributing to the poverty of farmers.

This article seeks to explore how relevant Gandhiji's ideas are today in the context of the above situation of farmers. Gandhiji's economic thinkers are in line with spiritual humanism in the social and political spheres.

## 3. Decentralization of Economy

A competitive economy makes man self-centered and selfish. When he came into close contact with the villages after her entry into Indian politics as an alternative, Gandhiji had the idea that a self-sufficient village in the village could be the foundation of a new decentralized economy, and he planned his constructive program accordingly. As a leading leader of the Indian independence movement, he had to take on the responsibility of safeguarding India's economic interests. From that, nationalism was added to his thoughts. After the First World War, the winds of socialist thought began to blow in India. Later, in 1934, when the Samajwadi Party was formed under the Congress, Gandhiji was interacting with people of different persuasions. While answering their questions, Gandhiji had to put aside many of his ideas. Their bitter opposition to the machines diminished. And the principle of nationalization of large enterprises. He asserted that the economy should be changed by awakening the people's power and changing the hearts of the capitalist class in a satyagrahi manner.

## 4. Opposition to machine culture

In 1909, in his book 'Hind-Swarajya', Gandhi translated the idealistic view of Carlyle and Ruskin from England. The cash flow of the above thinkers is more than the social injustices of capitalism, the undesirable tendencies that it has created in its personal life, especially the factory worker, remain a part of that machine, its enthusiasm, creativity, decision-making power. They were separated from nature. These thinkers say that the ease, peace and contentment of his life disappears (Pundit Nalini, 2006). That is why he advised to turn to nature to destroy the artificiality that came from machine culture. He gave more importance to human moral development than to material happiness. Therefore, he argued that self-reliance and cooperation of small groups could give impetus to capitalism and create an alternative social system by avoiding centralization of power. Gandhi criticized the modern machine culture for weakening the moral motivation of the European community and for focusing on suffering (Mahatma Gandhi, 1968).

The modern machine culture of India started during the British rule. Indian culture is basically sacrificial. In India everyone's business and income is fixed. Knowing that the real happiness and health of man depends on the use of his limbs, he emphasized on handicrafts. The Indians turned their backs on their traditional values by embracing British reforms. That is why it is seen that they are in misery today (Mahatma Gandhi, 1968). His belief in manual labor, simple living, village industry, decentralization, autonomous and self-sufficient village system remained till his death. He was fully aware that his goal of a self-sufficient village state was not to please the majority of Congressmen. However, as he approached the complexities of India's economic affairs, his opposition to machine culture diminished.

## 5. Nature of Economic Development

Aparigraha had a very important place in Gandhiji's conduct. That is why he advised the rich, political activists and social workers to unite with the poor and accept a life of sacrifice. In a poor country like India, as long as the basic needs of the common man are not met, it is unethical for some rich people to squander the country's wealth for their own comfort. "Everyone needs food, adequate clothing, shelter, education and a minimum of medical care to survive as human beings," he said. Explaining the idea of Swarajya, he said, "Every

village in the Swarajya will be an autonomous democracy. It will be self-sufficient in basic necessities. Cotton will be the first crops grown for food and clothing. He drew the picture that there will be pastures for cattle, playgrounds for children, schools, public halls and clean drinking water facilities." He had drawn such a picture (Prabhu, 1960).

Whether one accepts Gandhiji's idea of economy or not; In his concept of economic development, his approach to economic development from the egalitarian point of view of food, clothing, shelter, education and medical aid has to be accepted by any thinker as a priority. Gandhiji was the first pro-people political leader to pursue equality by attacking India's extreme economic inequality. Gandhiji believed that a society based on inequality could never be non-violent. That is why he emphasized on reducing economic inequality in India. Also, the economic gap between the working class and the intelligentsia was dangerous. Although intellectual labor is the source of social prestige, it cannot be a substitute for the food we eat. Therefore, it should be the moral duty of every human being to do physical labor for the sustenance of the society.

## **6. Protection of Indigenous Industries**

As a leading leader of the Indian independence movement, his primary duty was to safeguard national interests. The Industrial Revolution took place in England in the late eighteenth century. Due to the widespread use of machinery in industry, large scale production of finished goods started. With the arrival of finished goods from England in India, handicrafts in India could not compete with these machine-made goods. As a result, the traditional handicraft business in India declined. Mahatma Gandhi upheld the principle of protecting old and new industries in India from foreign competition. "Open trade is beneficial to England, which wants its share of the cost to be borne by the poor over its own goods. But this open trade has eroded India's rural industries and impoverished its farmers. Moreover, the new business cannot compete with foreign trade without government protection." The fact is that if Indian industries are protected from foreign competition, I would welcome it (Tendulkar, 1957). "he said at a time when the Tata Steel industry was being protected on August 8, 1924. The British government had assured the Indians that it would not interfere in India's internal finances after the First World War. From then on, small scale industries like textile, sugar, paper, firecrackers in India started getting protection from the British government. When Indians need capital and technical knowledge and it is not available in their countries, I have no problem using foreign capital and technology in India. However, Gandhiji was of the view that this capital should be under the control of Indians and should be used for the benefit of the common man (Kher, 1957).

Indigenous industries included both machinery and village industries. Gandhiji, however, gave priority to small village industries over large scale industries. He took the initiative for the revival of rural industries and established organizations like Akhil Bharatiya Charkha Sangh, Gramodyog Sangh. About 70% of the people in India depend on agriculture for their livelihood. Since agriculture is dependent on nature's rainfall, the production techniques used in agriculture are traditional. As a result, farmers are not able to extract large quantities of produce from agriculture. This is the main reason for the poverty of Indian farmers. With the end of the kharif season, farmers have no work. Gandhi described Charkha as a means of production in the spare time of the farmers. Moreover, the textile business flourished in medieval India with the help of Charkha. However, handicrafts took a turn for the worse during the British rule. So Gandhiji had come to the conclusion that rural industries should be revived to eradicate rural poverty. Food is so much a human being needs clothing. as a result, it was expected to provide employment to hundreds of people. This was his moral point of view behind the machine industries which he opposed in his book *Hind-Swarajya*. If the system is destroying unemployment in India, I will not oppose even the big systems, asserted Gandhiji (Tendulkar, 1957).

In 1929 saw a worldwide Great Depression. England did not escape. It was during this period that Gandhiji went to England for the Round Table Conference. At the time, they had seen firsthand the devastating effects of unemployment on the lives of ordinary people. So when analyzing their economic thinking, the background of the recession in the global economy should also be taken into account. In the nineteenth century, handicrafts in India declined due to the competition of mechanized entrepreneurs in England. Following in the footsteps of the British, the capitalists gradually set up large factories. But the cottage industries here could not compete with them. Therefore, on the one hand, while big industries were being set up in India, on the other hand, the unemployment of the artisans increased. In a country with a huge population like India, it will never be possible for Indians to accumulate so much capital that machinery can provide employment to all. That is why Gandhiji used to say that we should take care of rural industries in terms of employment (Mathur, 1962).

After India's independence in 1947, Gandhiji's ideas may have seemed unrealistic and impractical to the ruling classes in India. That is why after independence, they set the goal of industrialization and the government emphasized on setting up big industries in India. But even after seventy years of planned economic development, the problem of unemployment and underemployment in India is becoming more and more serious and complex.

It has to be acknowledged that Gandhiji's insistence on prioritizing economic development to eradicate unemployment with the welfare of the common man in mind was not wrong.

## 7. Decentralization of economic power

Gandhiji's award for cottage industries was based on the idea of solving the problem of unemployment in India as well as decentralization of economic power. If easy and convenient business is started from the villages, the families of the artisans also get involved in it. They have no fixed time constraints or acceptance of anyone. Gandhiji did not mind improving the techniques of village industries while maintaining their original appearance. He also emphasized on increasing the productivity of rural industries. He was of the view that the freedom of the artisans would not be hindered as technology evolved. It was in the interest of the village that the village would become self-sufficient and self-sufficient in terms of necessities of life. Therefore, he was of the view that the government should have control over the means of production such as electricity, iron and coal, and means of transport such as railways.

In order to increase the productivity of labor, intellectuals have to be nurtured. The British created clerks and secondary officers through the modern education system implemented in India. But it is not useful for the majority of the people in India. In order to increase the productivity of labor, vocational education should be combined with literacy (Mahatma Gandhi, 1937). That is why he started 'Wardha Shikshan Yojana' (Nayi Talim) on 23rd October 1937.

For centuries, manual labor has been hated in the social and cultural traditions of India. This tendency of hatred in a caste-divided society was a major obstacle to India's economic progress. Physical labor or sweating was the legacy of the Shudras. In this caste-divided system, Brahmins had the means of productive labor. As a result, the villages were neglected due to the gap between intellect and labor. So Mahatma Gandhi sent thousands of Congress workers to the village to uplift the village through constructive work. Gandhiji hoped that a decentralized economy could be built on the basis of the division of labor between farmers and artisans and by reducing the shortcomings of the traditional village system based on spontaneous co-operation. In the traditional rural economy of India, since every product is made by a single person, they did not get the benefits of community production and division of labor. If a spirit of co-operation is created among the people of the village, there will be a lot of scope for labor and time will be saved and productivity will increase (Kher, 1957). In 1942 they will not get the full benefits of agriculture unless they adopt community farming. The same rule applies to land as well as capital (Prabhu, 1960). In the political arena, Gandhiji rewarded a rural state based on community farming and industry. Gandhiji's writings show the belief that if a village state is established in India on the principle of democracy, then socialism can also be established here through awakened Lokshakti (Prabhu, 1960).

## 8. Conclusion

Although Gandhiji's economic concepts are pro-people and socialist in nature, he does not seem to have grasped the social realities of India. The importance of Charkha for public relations during the Indian independence movement was recognized by the senior Congress leaders. However, after independence, Gandhiji's charkha did not have much political significance as the attitude of the rich towards him changed. The rich class of India wanted to imitate the westerners and get more and more his comforts. As a result, instead of decreasing, their needs increased day by day. That is why rich manufacturers used new technology to produce a large number of luxury goods. The cottage industries have not been able to compete with the government subsidy. During India's economic planning period, the economy became more and more centralized, resulting in higher unemployment in the country. His followers never felt the need to scientifically treat the nature of capitalism in India, the direction of its development, politics and sociology. Therefore, those who took up the work of village industry according to Gandhiji's ideology were disappointed. So the political movement led by Gandhi eventually resulted in the establishment of capitalist rule in India.

## References

1. Alqazzaz S, Sun X, Yang X, Nokes L. (2019) *Automated brain tumor segmentation on multi-modal MR image using SegNet*. *Comput Vis Media*;5(2):209–19.
2. Balamurugan, K., Uthayakumar, M., Sankar, S., Hareesh, U.S. and Warriar, K.G.K., 2019. Predicting correlations in abrasive waterjet cutting parameters of Lanthanum phosphate/Yttria composite by response surface methodology. *Measurement*, 131, pp.309-318.
3. Bhasha, A.C., Balamurugan, K. End mill studies on Al6061 hybrid composite prepared by ultrasonic-assisted stir casting. *Multiscale and Multidiscip. Model. Exp. and Des.* (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41939-020-00083-1>

4. ChinnamahammadBhasha, A., Balamurugan, K. Studies on Al6061nanohybrid Composites Reinforced with SiO<sub>2</sub>/3x% of TiC -a Agro-Waste. Silicon (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12633-020-00758-x>
5. Kher V. B., *Economic and Industrial Life and Relation*, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahamadaba, 1957, pp. 144-145.
6. Latchoumi, T.P. and Kannan, V.V., 2013. Synthetic Identity of Crime Detection. International Journal, 3(7), pp.124-129
7. Loganathan, J., Latchoumi, T.P., Janakiraman, S. and parthiban, L., 2016, August. A novel multi-criteria channel decision in co-operative cognitive radio network using E-TOPSIS. In *Proceedings of the International Conference on Informatics and Analytics* (pp. 1-6). <https://doi.org/10.1145/2980258.2982107>
8. Mahatma Gandhi (Editor), *Harijan*, Newspaper Deted. 27 May 1939.
9. Mahatma Gandhi, *Hind-Swarajya* , Navajivan Publishing House, Ahamadaba, 1968, pp. 65-66.
10. Mahatma Gandhi, *Hind-Swarajya*, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahamadaba, 1968, pp. 75, 90.
11. Mahatma Gandhi, *Harijan* ; Newspaper Dated, 31 July 1937.
12. Mathur J. S.; Mathur A. S., *Economic Thought Of Mahatma Gandhi* ; Chaitanya Publication House, Allahabad. 1962. , pp. 297.
13. Narke Hari (Editor), *Mahatma Phule : Literature and Thought*”, Higher and Technical Education Division, Maharashtra Govt. Mumbai, 1993, First Edition, pp. 29.
14. Prabhu R. K.; Rao Y. R., (Editor), *The Mind Of Mahatma Gandhi* ; Navajivan Mudranalay Ahamadaba, 1960, pp. 292.
15. Prabhu R. K. ; Rao Y. R. (Editor), *The Mind Of Mahatma Gandhi* ; Navajivan Mudranalay Ahamadaba, 1960, pp. 374-375
16. Prabhu R. K.; Rao Y. R., (Editor), *The Mind Of Mahatma Gandhi* ”; Navajivan Mudranalay Ahamadaba, 1960, pp. 357.
17. Pundit Nalini, Gandhi , *Granthali Publication*, Mumbai 2006, 3rd Edition, pp. 240
18. Tendulkar D. G. (Editor), *Mahatma The Publication Division*, Ministry Of Information and Broadcasting Govt. Of India, New-Delhi, 1957, Vol. 3, pp. 292-293.
19. Vaidya Suman , Kothekar Shanta, *History Of Modern India* , Shri Sainath Publication, Nagpur, 2001, 4th Edition, pp. 347.
20. Vaidya Suman ; Kothekar Shanta, *History Of Modern India* , Shri Sainath Publication, Nagpur, 2001, 4th Edition, pp. 348.

