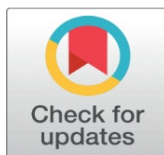
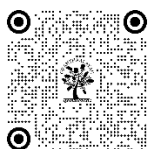


ECONOMIC VIEWS OF MAHATMA GANDHI: IMPORTANCE AND RELEVANCE

Mohammad Uzair 

¹Senior Research Fellow, West Bengal State University, India



Corresponding Author

Mohammad Uzair,
iammu000@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi is popularly known as Mahatma Gandhi or Gandhiji. He is a spiritual saint, politician, and freedom fighter with a unique personality and talent. Till the end of his life, his goal was to achieve the welfare of his nation through non-violent means. He tried to perform every economic, social, and political activity in a spiritual and non-violent way. Although Gandhiji offered various ideas on economic matters, he was never an economist, nor did he claim to be. We can understand his economic ideas in the context of his overall philosophy. He gave different opinions regarding the economy because of the various happenings. This article analyses the importance of Gandhiji's economic ideas. In addition, the relevance of his economic ideas in the context of the present time has also been discussed. Besides, the issue of how Gandhiji's economic ideas are gaining importance in the discussions of various economists in the present century has also been highlighted.

Keywords: Mahatma Gandhi, Rural Economy, Decentralization, Cottage Industry Importance, Relevance,

1. INTRODUCTION

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi is popularly known as Mahatma Gandhi or Gandhiji. He is a spiritual saint, politician, and freedom fighter with a unique personality and talent. Till the end of his life, his goal was to achieve the welfare of his nation through non-violent means. He tried to perform every economic, social, and political activity in a spiritual and non-violent way. He has a unique identity not only for the people of India but also for the people of the world because of his great activities. It may be mentioned in this context that, after taking the oath as the 44th President of the United States of America in 2009, Barak Hussein Obama was asked by a journalist who he would invite to dinner if he had the opportunity. In reply, he said one is Mahatma Gandhi of India and the other is Martin Luther King of the USA. And this is how Mahatma Gandhi's popularity spread across the world. Scientist Albert Einstein once commented, "Scarcely will future generations believe that such a man in flesh and blood walked upon this earth (Sahoo & Patnaik, 2015)." Although Gandhiji offered various ideas on economic matters, he was never an economist, nor did he claim to be. We can understand his economic ideas in the context of his overall philosophy. His economic thinking is based on his socio-economic principles and spiritual interpretation. He gave different opinions regarding the economy because of the various happenings. Later, some students and followers incorporated his ideas on economics. In recent times, one of his

followers, J. C. Kumarappa, has attempted to re-theorize Mahatma Gandhi's economic thought in contrast to Western economics as a whole. Gandhiji's economic thought was based on spirituality as well as non-violence, decentralization, and morality.

2. MAHATMA GANDHI'S ECONOMIC THOUGHTS AND PRINCIPLES

Gandhiji emphasized the implementation of various economic policies as a remedy for the poverty and oppression of Indians he witnessed during his career in South Africa and later in India under British rule. He was distressed by the way India's rural economy was collapsing and being exploited by the British under British rule and took various initiatives. He morally emboldened Indians to re-energize and make India's rural economy self-sufficient. He thought that all the people in the world had enough resources to eat and wear clothes. He highlighted the capitalist system as the main reason for the exploitation of society. Mahatma Gandhi's thinking on economics is completely different from Western thinking. He envisioned a happy, prosperous, and better society through his economic thinking. Basically, in his way of thinking, a combination of spirituality and reality can be observed. His economic thought describes economic prosperity, economic equality, economic freedom, the principle of loyalty and the utility of physical labour, industrialization, mechanization, etc. Gandhiji believed that God was found in the hearts of the poor. A hungry man thinks of satisfying his hunger first. He saw God differently from the various religions in the world. While defining economics, he said that true economics is never opposed to morals and high ideals of religion. Through this, efforts for social justice and the well-being of all can be observed. He refuted the theoretical thinking of economists about economics. Because such thinking encourages money to become a puppet of the powerful. Gandhiji does not give importance to economic thinking, which only has the desire to acquire wealth. Because if a person accumulates more money than he needs, then he has exploited someone or violated someone's rights. Economic violence can be observed in this case. On the other hand, Gandhiji's economic thought was based on non-violence. Wherein social justice, welfare of all, paving the way for the development of all, and equal distribution of wealth are mentioned. His economic thinking applies not only to India but to the entire world. The influence of Tolstoy and Ruskin can be seen in Gandhiji's ideas about economics.

Influenced by Tolstoy's concept of 'bread labour', Gandhiji opposed machine technology in the context of India (Kataria, 2016). Because it will destroy local small industries and increase unemployment in a populous country like India. He was influenced by Ruskin's book 'Unto This Last' and said that in all professions in society, whether it is the lawyer profession or the barber profession, everyone has an equal right to earn a living (Kumar & Rao, 2020). He respected both professions equally. He opposed modern capitalism. According to him, in modern capitalism, a mountain of profit is built by exploiting human labour in various ways. Basically, till the end of his life, Gandhiji tried to overcome the socio-economic problems, the scourge of poverty, and the backwardness of Indians. He always wanted to help poor people. He wanted to develop the economic system in such a way that every man could independently earn his livelihood. He always emphasized the cottage industry. One of Gandhiji's statements regarding the economy is, "According to me, the economic constitution of India and, for the matter of the world, should be such that no one under it should suffer from a lack of food and clothing (Madavi, 2022)." Some important principles of Mahatma Gandhi's economic thoughts are discussed below:

3. TRUSTEESHIP

One of the principles of Gandhiji's economic thinking is the concept of trusteeship. This is Gandhiji's basic concept. While working on the social reconstruction of India, he introduced this concept by facing the real experience of Indian society. Gandhiji developed this concept based on non-violence, equality, and swaraj. He thought that a just and non-violent society could not be built without economic equality. It is an economic system that emphasizes equitable distribution in society. He emphasized creating a trust where everyone in society would be able to meet the financial needs of themselves and others. He said, "All people having money and property should hold it in trust for society (Kataria, 2016)." The waste of money and resources in the capitalist system is opposed. A person can enjoy as much as he needs. Attempts to control exploitation can be seen through this economic system. Gandhiji states that rich people should not waste their excess wealth and use it for the welfare of other people in society. The owner of any resource is the whole society. The wealthy will consider themselves trustees of society. But it is through their consent that any part of their wealth should be used for the benefit of society, not through the use of force.

4. VILLAGE INDUSTRY

Gandhiji emphasized rural reconstruction and wanted to rebuild India on this basis. Gandhiji emphasized rural industries as a means of employment for Indians. He opposed large-scale industrialization. According to him, they were exploitative. Gandhiji emphasized those industries where an individual can produce his own to satisfy his needs. He emphasized rural development and progress. He emphasized weaving, handicrafts, khadi, sericulture, etc. for the development of the village. He believed that the development of rural cottage industries would reduce the pressure on agriculture. He emphasized the use of rural produce. He thought that rural people would get employment in their respective villages if employment increased through rural industries. As a result, there will be no migration of rural people to cities. He wanted to reduce the dependence of rural people on cities. He also emphasized meeting the needs of urban people through rural industries. In this case, his statement is, "Every village is to provide and use all its necessities, as well as its contribution to the requirements of the cities (Shikhare, 2014)."

5. DECENTRALIZATION

Gandhiji has always opposed centralization. Because, according to him, it is always against the formation of a non-violent society. He emphasized self-reliance through village-based decentralization in India. He believed that if decentralized, self-reliant villages were formed, simplicity, sociability, cooperation, love, and other qualities would develop in human life. He emphasized a decentralized economy. According to him, as a result of decentralization, small industries and businesses will begin to spread to villages, thereby enabling all people to become self-reliant. He emphasized the decentralization of economic power through the development of cottage industries. He believed that the growth of big industry would further increase the disparity between money and wealth.

6. SARVODAYA

Sarvodaya means the welfare of all. Sarvodaya is a society where all have equal opportunities to develop and live a better life. A society where there will be no exploitation or oppression. There will be equality among all. Sarvodaya's goal is to establish a classless, colourless, and exploitation-free society. And it will come with practice. It is a society where every individual and community can develop their full potential. Through this, spiritual progress will also be made along with the worldly progress of people. Social justice is an important aspect of Sarvodaya. One of the aspects of Gandhiji's economic thought was local-based development using local resources. As a result, job opportunities will be created for all, and the needs of all will be met. That is, the welfare of all will happen, which is the main idea of Sarvodaya. The main goal of Sarvodaya is overall development.

7. OPPOSED TO MACHINES AND LARGE-SCALE INDUSTRY

Gandhiji opposed large-scale industry because of India's problems. According to him, the use of big industries and big machines would not be beneficial for a populous and poor country like India. Because of this type of industrialization, production is concentrated. All necessary raw materials are transported from villages to cities. As a result, the rural economy collapsed. According to him, large-scale industrialization will increase competition. As a result, small rural industries will not be able to survive this competition. That is why he wanted to make the villages self-sufficient instead of concentrating on industrial production so that they could be self-sufficient in producing products. Besides, he said that as a result of big industry, economic inequality, class hatred, and class exploitation increase. The entire wealth is concentrated in the hands of a handful of individuals.

8. IMPORTANCE AND RELEVANCE

Most of those who have criticized Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy do so because of a misunderstanding of his thinking. To understand any thought, including Mahatma Gandhi's economic concept, deep thinking and moral knowledge are required. Moral values are involved in his every thought. He mainly realized the real picture of Indian society and expressed his thoughts. He expressed his thoughts in the context of the misery he witnessed in Indian society under British rule. If Gandhi's thought is properly understood in the context of Indian society, then Gandhi's philosophy will seem relevant even today. Many people think that he is against modernity and scientific technology. But such an idea was not right for him. He was not against the machine. But he was opposed to the machinery that robs and idles labour. In the context of India, he thought that if the big machines and technology are used, the sufficient labour that is available in India will not be used anymore. As a result, unemployment will increase rapidly. He believed that the use of technology

and large machinery would increase poverty on the one hand, and on the other hand, a small class would become richer and richer through profiteering. In Mahatma Gandhi's economic concept, the interests of hardworking farmers and workers were given importance. Concerned about poverty and unemployment and expressed various economic plans as solutions, which have already been discussed. His approach to economics was humanistic. He was quite active in eradicating poverty and unemployment in India. He emphasized a rural-based economy. He envisioned villages as self-contained democracies. He wanted to improve the rural economy through cottage industries and small-scale industries like khadi, weaving, handicrafts, etc. He believed that through the rural economy, rural people would get employment and be able to earn well. Besides, he wanted to establish equality, freedom, and justice in society based on the rural economy. He denied the distinction between manual labour and mental labour. He gave equal importance to both labours. He spoke about the moderation of excess demand compared to human needs. He said, "Nature produces enough to meet the needs of all the people, but not enough to satisfy the greed of any man (Sasikala, 2014)." He emphasized manual labour. He believed that the ownership of the goods needed by society should be under the control of the people. Gandhiji always thought of the welfare of the most backward poor people in society. He was always striving for the betterment of this class of people. He thought that poverty would not be seen if every person in society used exactly the number of resources and goods they needed. For the welfare of poor people, his statement was, "Recall the face of the poorest and weakest man you have seen, and ask yourself if this step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him (Diop, 2019)." He always thought that centrally, the largest production was profit-oriented. In this kind of production, wealth and power are concentrated among a few, which is very detrimental to society. That is why Gandhiji talked about decentralization of production so that development opportunities could reach the people at the rural level. He wanted to eliminate the evils of large-scale centralized production by decentralizing production.

Gandhiji, in his economic thinking, emphasized overall socio-economic restructuring because of the real problems. Therefore, his economic ideas should be analysed from this perspective. As mentioned earlier in this study, Gandhiji did not provide any theoretical model or theory like other theorists in economics. He talked about some basic principles in the actual context of Indian society, based on which it is understood what kind of economic structure is needed in any given society. For example, he talked about the restructuring of the rural economy based on Gram Swaraj, based on which the development of the rural economy will take place. He said that every village should be self-governing and self-sufficient to meet its own needs. In his opinion, he said that labour should be given due importance. In his economic concept, ideas like job creation, self-sufficiency in food production, reducing income inequality, etc. are very important to deal with the economic problems of the present world. He said that instead of concentrating on production centrally, emphasis should be given to production by the people in a decentralized manner where employment will also be created and demand will also be created. The relevance of these thoughts of Gandhiji emerges when we look at present-day India as well as the world. At present, economists think that the emphasis should be placed on new employment. Because it will generate income and demand in a new way, Gandhi's ideas seem to be reflected in the work of the Indian government today. Because the government has taken steps to support and encourage job creation in sectors like cottage industry, textiles, construction, etc. Today, many Gandhian thinkers and economists think that Gandhi's thoughts on economics can be found in the direction of solving the economic problems of India and the world. Many Western economists, such as Schumacher and Arnold Toynbee, shared Mahatma Gandhi's concerns about technology, saying that only those technologies would be relevant if they were compatible with the socio-economic, cultural, and moral principles of a society (Jani, 2018). Schumacher also said the current rate of waste or abuse of resources must be curbed. That's why we have to change our lifestyle. Because the waste of resources will gradually push the human race into crisis. He thinks that spiritual knowledge is also needed to deal with it. Gandhi's economic ideas are being echoed by Western economists many years after Gandhi's death. Economists like Arnold Toynbee, in his book "Future of Asia and Africa," expressed their views in favour of Gandhiji's philosophy. Louis Fisher opined that if we do not follow Gandhian principles, then the handful of capitalists in the world will gradually become stronger and the level of exploitation will intensify (Nandela, 2018). Fisher's statement proves to be true only when looking at countries such as Asia and Africa today. He also said that if the countries of Asia and Africa try to be self-reliant without succumbing to capitalism, they will be able to retain their independence; otherwise, they will sink further under the coral of capitalism. In "The New Industrial Estate," Prof. J.K. Gandhi expressed a similar view to Gandhiji, saying that people are gradually becoming slaves to machinery. In "Asian Drama," Prof. Gunnar Myrdal opined those Asian countries, including India, should never blindly follow Western countries and their models. These countries should make themselves self-reliant by increasing production and utilizing their large populations. So, it can be said that even after many years since Mahatma Gandhi's death, the relevance of

Gandhiji's economic philosophy has emerged in the discussions of economists in many countries, including the Western world.

9. CONCLUSION

Mahatma Gandhi's economic thought was based on his holistic philosophy. Just as he gave importance to issues like morality, spirituality, sympathy for the poor, etc. in his social, philosophical, and political thought, these issues also gained importance in his economic thought. In Gandhiji's economic concept, people are given more importance than money. Emphasis is placed on the moral well-being of individuals or nations. His thought emphasized 'plain living', which emphasizes reducing an individual's growing needs and becoming self-reliant. The main objective of his economic plan is to protect the dignity and welfare of the individual. His economic plan states that the economic system should be developed in such a way that adequate employment opportunities are created and people can be self-reliant. He never supported living a life of luxury. Gandhiji's economic ideas apply not only to his time but also to the present and the future. There is no room for doubt that his philosophy is eternal. At present, states should follow the new economic system based on Gandhi's philosophy to achieve the overall welfare of the entire community, including dignified financial resources for the people, equitable distribution of income and wealth, and environmental improvement. I would like to end this article with a quote from Louise Fisher, one of Gandhiji's followers. Louise Fisher wrote, "If man is to survive, if civilization is to survive and flower in freedom, truth, and decency, the remainder of the twentieth century and what lies beyond must belong not to Lenin or Trotsky, not to Marx or Mao or Ho or Che, but to Mahatma Gandhi" (Kataria,2016).

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None

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None

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