

The Gandhian Approach to India's Development

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Abstract

Gandhian approach is still quite relevant. What is important is the strong political will backed by imaginative and efficacious leadership as well as bureaucracy which can realize internal problems, tensions and turbulence of Indian people.

Keywords: Gandhi, India, Gandhian approach, socio-economic development.

Introduction

There are various approaches to development offered by a host of thinkers and policy analysis in India and abroad; and further explanations have been given to justify the relevance of a given model. In this paper, an attempt has been made to explain and analyse the implications of development in India through Gandhian model of development. Gandhi has been perhaps misunderstood and misrepresented by the Western political thinkers, academics and development strategists. However, there is a dire need for understanding Gandhian approach to India's socio-economic development in a correct perspective. Gandhi, in fact was a man of masses who felt the social pulse correctly. Gandhi was a man, who had lived with the masses, experienced their agonies and anxieties. It was he who had realized their internal problems, tensions and turbulence.

Aspects of Gandhian Analysis

In this paper, a critique will be offered to manifold aspects of Gandhian analysis of socio-economic development in India given the current politico-economic milieu.

Gandhi placed emphasis on value-laden politics and on philosophical essence of national politics, geared to eradicating socio-economic imbalances in Indian society. Gandhi defended egalitarian society based on the grass root principles embedded in Indian culture. He tried to convince that so long as we remain alienated and isolated from the masses, no goods can be delivered to them. It is for this reason that he lived with the masses and became the man of masses. He closely looked at the problems and perhaps understood them in the indigenous framework of the country's cultural heritage.

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Gandhi articulated his ideas of socio-economic development in the context of striking a proper balance between indigenous thought process and lifestyle. We seem to have lost poise between the thought process and lifestyle.

In order to achieve minimum requirements for human survival and better life, Gandhi stressed the need for ameliorating the conditions of the poor in Indian society. High-tech of the current century will not be relevant to the uplift of the poor. In fact, what we witness in India is a deep hiatus between the need of the masses and increasing fascination for high-intensive technology.

The current debate over the haves and have-nots has of course generated a lot of keen interest both in north and south regarding the growth strategy of development as well as better socio-economic conditions and improvement in environment conditions and ecological balance. This further reinforces our thesis that the developing societies will remain in a disadvantageous position long as resources are controlled by the rich North. Third world panel on equitable distribution of resources has fully endorsed the view that the Gandhian philosophy of economic justice to the people and especially the lower strata of society must be included in any programme launched for the qualitative improvement in their lifestyles. One of the leading economist and philosopher, Gunnar Myrdal, has very cryptically remarked that so long as indigenous resources are not tapped and channelized for the poor in developing societies in Asia, "you can hardly think of a real change" in their economic lives. Myrdal has further suggested that indigenous development should be tackled within the national parameters. Given the internal complexities, only the indigenous methods can be more helpful in alleviating the economic maladies.

Economic and political strategies adopted by the Indian leadership are not in consonance with the basic requirements of the people. As a consequence, an increasing gap between the lower placed masses and the higher placed affluent could be narrowed down. Although the government has launched new programmes of poverty alleviation as well as creating greater opportunities for employment etc, these are not related to the social problems and peculiar domestic conditions. Still antediluvian approach is being applied to the resolution of vast social-economic problems.

Gandhi, therefore, should be reconsidered for the multitude of problems facing the people at the village level. The political institutions like *Panchayati Raj* have failed to arouse social awareness among the people. On the contrary, they have been further exploited. Recent studies on political as well as bureaucratic culture clearly indicate that the two institutions have joined hands with each other to perpetuate their domination over the rest.

This is suicidal to the balanced development in the country and more fatal to the equitable distribution of wealth and resources. Had Mahatma Gandhi been alive today, he would have felt sore over the existing conditions in the country created by the Political leadership and bureaucracy. He would not accept it in any way unilinear approach of either politicians or bureaucrats to play with the lives of the masses.

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Gandhi wanted to reorder society in such a fashion that should suit the environment of the country. Environmental pressures continue to interact with the ethos and culture of the country and the failure to maintain harmony between the two will act as a great catalyst of change. But Indian political leaders at the time of independence perhaps undermined the significance or relevance of Gandhian doctrine to India's goal of rapid economic development. However, five year plans were introduced in the country to wipe out poverty, and accelerate the process of development ensuring social justice as enshrined in the directive principles of the constitution.

Unfortunately the weaker sections of the society did not get due justice, despite the innovative programmes introduced by the government from time to time. These were used as a means to capture power rather than doing anything concrete. Moreover, the feudal structure of society and economy in the country was hardly replaced by a more progressive, dynamic society and economy in the country. Gradually but surely the impact of this process of development dealt a serious blow to the socio-economic fabric of the country.

Growing fascination for technology as a means of transformation in the Third World societies has more or less become a reality. The leadership in these societies tries to relate the indispensability of technology to the removal of socio-economic imbalances. To some extent, it might be true that technology plays a crucial role in the rapid development. Gandhi was not against the use of technology as a means for change. What was his central objection was that we should not be the servant or slave of machinery. For, Gandhi basically realized that most of the people of India lived in villages and their economy was primarily dependent on agriculture. He, therefore, laid stress on agriculture development first and industrialisation later. Gandhi in fact believed that due to the growing industrialisation, cities would not solve the problems of the rural populace. On the contrary, he firmly held the view that metropolitan development at the cost of the rural one will increase the gap between the rich and the poor more rural intensively.

He, therefore, proposed for the small-scale industries and the promotion of the handicraft's and village industries as a means to remove the poverty at the grass-root. This is the high time, when India's policy makers and planners must review the development priorities while keeping the basic problems of the rural people in mind. Mere introduction of programmes like NREP, DPDT, RDP will not be automatically contributing to the alleviation of poverty and increase employment opportunities. We have witnessed miserable failures of the government in the implementation of the programme as well as chalking out the plans or the programmes in consonance with the peculiarly indigenous but heterogeneous character of the rural problems.

Gandhian philosophy, therefore, has to be reviewed afresh and proper thinking in this direction needs concerted and conscious efforts. Only then rural development in social and economical fields could be achieved and realized. Whatever limitations or constraints, Gandhian logic of developmental parameters for the rural sector has to be taken into account to relate it to the overall development in the country.

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He wanted rural transformation. Unless rural development is achieved, no real transformation in Indian economy could be possible. The crux of the argument is that rural development is an integral part of Indian economy in a totalistic perspective. Therefore, the western model of development is unsuitable for India.

What Gandhi wanted was to relate the economy to the ethos and culture of the nation. He wanted to uplift the downtrodden and the poor. To him every home and village should become self-reliant. Gandhian philosophy, especially with regard to multitude of socio-economic bases, has not found favour with the bureaucratic elite as well as political leadership in the country.

Our attitudes and approaches have not undergone the brisk change in accordance with fast changes in socio-economic milieu in India. Only lip sympathy is paid to Gandhi on ritualistic occasions. Snags have therefore appeared in the developmental path.

The obstructionist approach of bureaucrats in India has been mainly responsible for not implementing the various strands of Gandhian philosophy for uplift of the Indian masses. As a consequence, Gandhian ideology is not being reconsidered despite the repeated call from the Congress party in power. Now the time is up when the government must rededicate itself to the Gandhian doctrine as well as approaches to the socio-economic development in the country. In the absence of this, we will not be able to translate the Gandhian principles into reality. We may, of course, boast of entering into the 21st century. We shall be faltering in our instrumental and imaginative plan approaches to the uplift of those who are really at the lowest place in the society or in the family. The Indian Government has of course reiterated its stand of giving top priority to the most neglected among the neglected people. But this idea has not yet fructified.

The Indian government have launched a set of measures and schemes to banish poverty. For instance, IRDP was launched in 1978 with an emphasis on uplift of the poor, improvement in the overall conditions of the rural women and generate self-employment for the rural youth. The government have launched new schemes like NREP and TRYSEM with a view to generating greater opportunities for the rural youth for the employment in different sectors of Indian economy. As a result, villages have started showing signs of improvement. The rural people have been getting loans and subsidies from national banks. Scheduled caste and scheduled tribe people are being given priority in the employment as well as loan disbursement schemes.

Several programmes are under active consideration at the central government level. This is a significant step in the direction of realizing Gandhian dream of "wiping out the tear from everybody's eye."

Conclusion

New trends and patterns in the government policies indicate that Gandhian approach is still relevant and useful for Indians in spite of the infrastructural development and modernization in the country.

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Rural areas are developing rapidly and connecting with urban townships. Facilities in villages are enhancing from government policies focused with Gandhi's approach, 'Real India lives in its villages'.

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