

Gandhian Paradigm of Indian Villages

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Mahatma Gandhiji was not an academic economist whose contribution to economics could be seen in terms of one theory or the other. He wrote on wide ranging issues of significance in economics. But from the point of economic development, his writings on 'Swadeshi' and 'Gram Swaraj' are of great importance.

In news: Gandhian philosophy and relevance to Indian society

Placing it in syllabus: Society

Static Dimensions:

- Gandhiji – an Economist?
- Gram Swaraj
- Ideal Village
- Basic education
- Hygiene and health
- Antyodaya to Sarvodaya
- Cooperation
- Khadi, Village Industries and Technology
- Economic Equality and Sustainable Development

Content

Gandhiji – an Economist?

To summarize the qualifications of being an economist, Neo-Classical economist **Alfred Marshall** said that nearly all **founders of modern economics** were **men of gentle and synthetic temper**, touched with the **enthusiasm of humanity**. They **cared little for wealth for themselves**; they cared much for **wide diffusion of wealth** among the people.

- Gandhiji **incorporated goodness of common people** in his speech, writing and action.

- He wrote about the **challenges of practising what one preaches**.
- He also thought of hundred ways to realise his dreams for a healthy and a better society.
- Gandhiji realised that **reconstructing villages from the grassroot level** was one of the important **ways of removing poverty in rural areas** and improving the quality of life of people.
- He **took up the cause of farmers** and tried to **revive the village economy**.
- He clearly saw the tendency towards urbanisation and the **exploitation of villages for the benefits of urban areas**.
- According to him, **If villages perish, India will also perish**.

For these reasons, E F Schumacher termed **Gandhiji as the greatest people's economist**.

Gram Swaraj:

- Gandhiji called **self-governance of villages** as 'Village Swaraj' or 'Gram Swaraj'.
- Gram Swaraj, or village self-rule, was the **centerpiece of his vision of economic development in India**.
- Gandhiji's Gram Swaraj was **not the reconstruction of the old village** but the formation of **fresh independent units of villages having self-sufficient economy**.

The basic features of Gandhiji's Gram Swaraj are as follows:

- The government of the village should be conducted by the **panchayat of five persons annually elected** by the village adults, men or women, possessing minimum prescribed qualifications.
- It is **decentralisation of power** and the **power is in the hands of the people of the village**.
- The **village is a complete republic independent of its neighbor** for its basic needs, and yet interdependent for

many others in which dependence is a necessity.

- The **basic concern of every village is to grow its own food grains**, fruits and vegetables, leafy vegetables, pulses, herbal plants and cotton for its clothes.
- The village should have Gomalas, a reserve for its cattle; recreation and playground for adults and children.
- In the village, there is **no provision for harmful plants** such as ganja, tobacco, opium and the like.
- The village should maintain a village theatre, school and public hall.
- It **should have its own waterworks** ensuring safe and clean water supply. **Education should be made compulsory** up to the final basic course.
- **Every activity** in the village should be **conducted on the co-operative basis** – bringing harmony among the people
- Only after providing all of the above, **if enough land is available then, the village can grow essential commercial crops.**

Therefore, **self-reliance and self-sufficiency of every village is the cornerstone** of Gandhiji's conception of Gram Swaraj.

Concept of Ideal Village:

Gandhiji had pictured to himself an India continually progressing along the lines best suited to the country's genius.

Gandhiji's concept of ideal village:

- Consists of **about 1000 persons**
- Has **cottages with sufficient light and ventilation** built of a **material obtainable within a radius of five miles** of the village
- Has village **lanes and streets that are free of all avoidable dust**
- has **wells** according to its needs and **accessible to all**

- has **houses of worship for all**
- Also has a **common meeting place, village common land for grazing** its cattle, a **cooperative dairy**
- has primary and secondary schools in which **industrial education** will be central fact
- will have **panchayats to settle disputes**
- will **produce its own food** – grains, vegetables and fruits; and **its own Khadi**
- will have **intellectuals and open minded people**. Those people will not live in dirt and darkness. There will be village poets, village artists, village architects, linguists and research workers, village architects, linguists and research workers

In short, an ideal village is **organised on the basis of self-reliance and self-sufficiency**

Concept of Basic Education:

According to Gandhiji, **education should be aimed at harmonious development of the body, mind and soul of the people.**

Gandhiji called his **scheme of education – ‘basic education’**.

Concept of ‘Basic Education’ is centered on the following:

- It is about **the art of living and creation of productive labor.**
- It is basic and **craft-oriented education.**
- Along with **vocational training**, rural people receive **instruction in elementary history, geography and arithmetic.**
- Craft-centred education is self-supporting in which **academic subjects are to be taught through productive activities** in the form of organic farming, gardening, rural industries, cooperative cattle farming, etc.
- Students **learn the principles of self-help, self-reliance, and dignity of labor** along with their academic subjects

Thus, Gandhiji **desired that the medium of education should be creative labor and not**

textbooks. He felt that job-oriented education is very much needed in rural areas.

Concept of Health and Hygiene:

According to Gandhiji, the **first step to rural reconstruction is undoubtedly attention to every person's health and hygiene**. According to him, most of the diseases occur to people on account of insanitation and unhygienic living.

He suggested the following measures for ensuring health and hygiene in villages:

- The **judicious utilisation of waste** to keep the surroundings neat, dirtless and clean.
- **Conversion of excreta of animals and people into organic manures**. He said that "organic manures ever enriches; never impoverishes cultivable land".
- **Maintaining cleanliness** because it promotes health of the people
- **Living according to the laws of nature** in regard to diet, fresh air, exercise, clean surroundings, and a pure heart.
- **Wholesome and balanced diet** as an integral part of natural cure – by adding leafy vegetables in food to build up immune system, and get vitamins
- **Relying less on drugs and doctors; and more on nature**.

He had always been **in favour of vegetarian food**. He **did not oppose meat eating**, and said that **people cannot practise non-violence in full**. Also, he **did not consider it violence to permit the fish-eater to eat fish**.

Antyodaya to Sarvodaya:

Antyodaya for Gandhiji was the **Swaraj for the poorest man**.

For the swaraj to become poor man's Swaraj the following must be achieved:

- **All people** should **fulfill their basic necessities**.
- Everyone should have enough clothes, enough food including milk and milk products, decent accommodation, healthcare and cultural facilities.
- In a village organised on the principle of Swaraj, **everybody occupies the same status**.

For achieving Antyodaya Gandhiji **advocated for fixation of minimum wages**. It must be sufficient to ensure all workers- a reasonably balanced and adequate nutritive food; minimum clothing needs and better accommodation and ordinary comforts.

The Sarvodaya is a comprehensive concept because:

- It includes **all aspects of rural life and activity in the sphere of sustainable rural development**.
- Rural development does not only involve agricultural development. It has to **include all productive activities of primary sector, secondary sector, and tertiary sector**.
- His idea for rural development is known as **Samagra Grama Seva**.
- It includes integrated and multiple cropping organic agriculture, animal husbandry, forestry, fisheries, basic education, adult education, development of weaker sections, empowering of women, education in public health sanitation/hygiene, social harmony, prohibition, naturopathy, infrastructure development etc.

Gandhiji felt that the **society should attain Sarvodaya after the attainment of Antyodaya**. Thus, his intention was **to establish Sarvodaya through Antyodaya**.

Thoughts on Cooperation:

- According to Gandhiji, **cooperation is a means for**

achieving economic equality and the common good for all.

- People should live in cooperation and should work for the common good.
- Gandhiji advocated **cooperative farming for getting full benefits of agriculture.**
- He told that selected and improved varieties of seeds should be sown by farmers for getting higher agricultural productivity.

Ideas on Khadi, Village Industries and Technology

- Gandhiji advocated **Khadi and Village Industries (KVI)** for **solving problems** of **poverty, unemployment and rural backwardness.**
- He felt that **Khadi could not make progress without the revival of village industries** like beekeeping, soapmaking, pottery, carpentry etc.
- So revival of village industries was an extension of Khadi program.
- Gandhiji desired that **technology should promote full employment, economic growth and social justice.**
- **Technology must not be allowed to displace necessary human labour** – i.e. machinery should subserve the interest of all.
- Any machinery that helps the individual and adds to his efficiency and which man can handle at will without being its slave has a place.
- He felt the **individual should be the supreme consideration of technology**, saving labour of the individual should be just an object.

Ideals of Economic Equality and Sustainable Development:

- Gandhiji accepted that **material things are** of real **importance** but **only to some extent.**
- There are three distinct economic conditions – **Paucity, Sufficiency and Surfeit.**
- According to Gandhiji, economic condition of **paucity and**

surfeit are undesirable

- **Sufficiency is the ideal and appropriate economic condition** that man could enjoy.
- **Beyond sufficiency, it becomes evil**, destructive and uneconomic.
- He also believed that humans should **live in harmony with nature**.
- He **wanted people to plant trees** and add to the forest wealth of the country.

In this way, the Gandhian paradigm **promotes the welfare of all**.

Mould your thought: Elaborate on the dimensions of Gandhiji's concept of Gram Swaraj. How do they promote the welfare of all people?

Approach to the answer:

- Concept of Gram Swaraj in brief
- Dimensions under Gram Swaraj
- Write about Antyodaya as a means for Sarvodaya
- Conclusion