

## GANDHIAN PHILOSOPHY ON RURAL INDIA

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### Abstract

Gandhiji had an in depth study of the plight of the poor masses living in rural India who were having dependence on agriculture for their livelihood. Gandhiji was very much concerned about the problems of Indian farmers well as the Indian agriculture. His views on the state of Indian agriculture are very logical and seem to have relevance even in the present context of our economy. It was mainly because of his belief that India resides in villages. Current paper concentrates on Gandhian views on the problems of rural people of the economy .He was in favour of labour intensive methods of cultivation. Gandhiji was a strong critic of zamindari system and wanted the land to be transferred to landless farmers. Most of the land is concentrated in the hands of big landlords. In such situation, we will have to rethink the implementation of land reforms from Gandhiji's perspective.

**Keywords:** Collective Farming, Farmer, Land Reforms, Small Industry,

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## Introduction

Mahatma Gandhi is one of those few people who changed the course of history of India. He has done a lot of work on Indian economy. He has given his views on various aspects of Indian economy in his various articles, papers, and publications from time to time. He was of the opinion that development strategy of India should focus on reducing inequalities and eliminating exploitation of masses in the economy. He had an in depth study of the plight of the poor masses living in rural India who were having dependence on agriculture for their livelihood. Gandhiji was very much concerned about the problems of Indian farmers well as the Indian agriculture. His views on the state of Indian agriculture are very logical and seem to have relevance even in the present context of our economy. It was mainly because of his belief that India resides in villages. The present paper aims to analyse Gandhiji's outlook on Indian villages and its significance in the current scenario of our economy.

### Objectives:

The paper aims to study Gandhi's views pertaining to various aspects of the Indian agriculture specifically with the following objectives:

- To discuss Gandhiji's thought on the backwardness of Indian villages
- To study the causes of the poor condition of the rural masses and solutions as suggested by Gandhiji.
- To study Gandhiji's views on the ownership of agricultural land.
- To analyse the relevance of Gandhiji's views in the present context of India.

### Data Base and Methodology

The present paper is based on secondary data collected from various issues of Economic Survey published by Ministry of Finance, Government of India and information collected from various journals, research papers and books. The paper is divided into three sections. Section I concentrates on Gandhi views on the problems of unemployment and poverty in rural sector, its

solution given by him and relevance of his views in present context. Section II discusses the relevance of his views on the ownership of land in the present scenario of Indian villages. Section III summarizes the discussion and brings out important conclusions of the study.

### Section I

Gandhiji had a vast study on Indian agriculture. He was much concerned about the large scale prevalent unemployment and poverty in rural India. He was of the opinion that social and economic upliftment of the people should start from grass root level. The basic idea of his philosophy was that the poor must get food and cloth which is an indicator of his socialistic ideology. He therefore was in favour of cottage and village industry for the purpose of eradicating poverty and unemployment. In his opinion, village economy can not be complete without some of the basic village industries which include hand grinding, soap-making, paper making, match making, tanning, oil processing etc. Here we can very much find the idea of labour theory of value which is present in the writings of writers like Adam Smith, Karl Marx. Gandhiji was very much in favour of the belief that labour is the primary source of economic value. The views of Gandhi lay stress on the importance of cottage industry in rural areas. He was not much in favour of massive industrialization as according to him. It can lead to passive or active exploitation of labour due to the problems of competition and marketing. He was of the belief that modern machines cannot be used as a means of exploitation of others. He was so much sensitive with respect to the inequality found between rich and poor in India that he, in his views published in Young India (1925), says that my Animsa would not tolerate the idea of giving a free meal to a healthy person who has not worked for it in some honest way. To what extent Gandhi's views are relevant in the context of the problems of Indian villages, can be analysed by having a look on the data pertaining to the figures of poverty and inequality in the Indian economy. Data given in Tables below shows the number and percentage of poor i.e. below poverty line in India at three points of time which obviously puts light on the pitiable conditions of the small farmers in our country.

Table I

## Number and Percentage of Poor

Year	Number of Poor(in millions)			Poverty Ratio(%)		
	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total
1993-94	328.6	74.5	403.7	50.1	31.8	45.3
2004-05	326.3	80.8	407.1	41.8	25.7	37.2
2009-10	278.2	76.5	354.7	33.8	20.9	29.8

Source: Economic Survey-2012-13

Table I shows the data of numbers of poor and their percentage in rural as well as in urban areas and in India as a whole in different years. Table makes is clear that extent of poverty in India is a matter of concern for India as the number of poor in rural areas in India was 278.2 million in 2009-10 which althoug declined from 328.6 million in 1993-94 but still it a very big figure and amounts to one- third (33.8%)of the rural population. It is also clear that the extent of poverty in rural areas is even more than that found in urban areas.The problem of poverty is more acute in some of the major states of India which is shown in the Table II.

Table II

## State of Poverty in Major States

State	2004-05		2009-10	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
AP	32.3	23.4	22.8	17.7
Assam	36.4	21.8	39.9	26.1
Bihar	55.7	43.7	55.3	39.4
Gujarat	39.1	20.1	26.7	17.9
MP	53.6	35.1	42.0	22.*9
Oddisa	60.8	37.6	39.2	25.9
UP	42.7	34.1	39.4	31.7

<b>WB</b>	38.2	24.4	28.8	22.0
<b>India</b>	41.8	25.7	33.8	20.8

Source: Economic Survey-2012-13

Table II presents a very gloomy picture of some big states of India as far as the extent of poverty is concerned. Bihar leads the rest of the states where 55.3 percent population is below poverty line in 2009-10 which virtually didn't show any tendency to come down since 2004-05. Similarly in MP (42%), Assam (39.9%), UP (39.4%) and Orissa (39.2%) in 2009-10 present the similar picture. Moreover, it is also evident that in these states, poverty in rural areas is far more than poverty in urban areas. The poor standard of living of the farmers can be known from their expenditure on consumption. Table III puts some light on the low standard of living of farmers in terms of their low consumption levels.

**Table III**

**AVERAGE MONTHLY PER CAPITA EXPENDITURE ON CONSUMPTION (IN RUPEES)**

YEAR	CONSTANT PRICES(2004-05)		CURRENT PRICES(2011-12)	
	RURAL	URBAN	RURAL	URBAN
<b>2004-05</b>	558	1052	558	1052
<b>2009-10</b>	599	1200	927	1785
<b>2011-12</b>	707	1359	1281	2401

SOURCE: ECONOMIC SURVEY-2012-13

Table III shows that rural people were just spending rupees 558 on monthly consumption at constant prices (2004-05) which rose to just 707 rupees in 2011-12. At current prices too, the same picture is exhibited as not much difference is found. Rural people spent on an average rupees 558 in 2004-05 which although increased to 1281 in 2011-12 but still indicates the low level of living of farmers. But the average consumption level of people in urban sector is much higher i.e. almost double at rupees 1052 in 2004-05 and 1359 in 2011-12 at constant prices. In such a scenario, views given by Gandhiji seem to have relevance in the present scenario in the sense that it has been observed that massive industrialization has not improved the plight of the

poor masses in the economy. We see huge poverty and widening gap between rich and poor as shown by the figures given in the Tables.

## Section II

Gandhiji's views on the ownership of land in agriculture seem to have much of the importance in the present circumstances. He believed that land should not belong to a person or state rather the local community should have ownership of the land. There should not be any scope for the private ownership or monopoly of an individual on land. He was of the opinion that a person should have that much of land which is sufficient to meet his needs and which he and his family can cultivate. That amount of land should be manageable for him so that he is able to support his family, cattle etc. He further says that the labour intensive methods should be used to cultivate the land. He also stress on collective farming. It becomes clear when he says that those who are real farmers can join hands if they want so to form a community to cultivate their lands. Hence we see here that Gandhiji lays stress on cooperative farming which is a panacea for poor farmers who can not cultivate the land properly due to their inefficiency to do so on account of lack of resources available to them. He was severe critic of land in the hands of a few people. He wanted a Satyagraha to be started under the leadership of landless farmers. According to him such a satyagraha would not end till the end of zamindari system. He was of the firm belief that such a satyagraha would lead the government to make laws to ban zamindari system and redistribution of land among landless farmers. There are wide disparities in the income levels among the people in the rural India. According to an estimate of RBI, the top 10 percent of the people in rural areas get 25 percent of the national income while the bottom 20 percent of the people get only 9 percent share in national income of the country. A similar study conducted by NCAER also showed the presence of wide disparities in the income of rich and poor in the rural area. Even after the six decades of independence, government has not been able to either acquire the Land from big farmers nor could effectively distribute the land among the landless farmers. There seems lack of political will on the part of the government to do so as there is a strong lobby of influential people in the government and in the political sphere who are against any such move.

### Section III

Gandhiji was very concerned about the wide spread poverty, unemployment and inequality in the rural area. To contain these problems, he was not in favour of big industries rather suggested small and cottage occupations such as soap making, oil making, paper making, match making, hand grinding etc. As these occupations can absorb huge manpower. In cultivation also, he was in favour of labour intensive methods of cultivation. Gandhi's these views seem to have relevance in the present scenario of Indian economy. It has been observed that even after more than six decades of independence, planning and development; we have not been able to contain these problems of unemployment, poverty and inequality. In spite of fast industrialization, industry could not absorb our growing manpower. Now we are talking about inclusive growth admitting the fact that growth has not covered the poor masses of the economy. The fruits of development have not reached to lower section of the society. The growth we are experiencing is said to be a jobless growth. The policies of liberalisation, privatisation and globalization have made our small and cottage industries difficult to survive. In these circumstances, Gandhiji's concept of small occupations seems to have solution for our problems even in the present scenario especially in the rural sector where still more than two third of our population resides.

Secondly, Gandhiji was a strong critic of zamindari system and wanted the land to be transferred to landless farmers. He wanted a Satyagraha to be started under the leadership of landless and such a Satyagraha would not end till the end of the zamindari system. He believed that this Satyagraha would lead the government to legislate the banning of zamindari system and redistribution of land among landless. He further suggested that those who are real owners should join hands if they want so to form a cooperative or community to cultivate their land. Gandhi's these views put forth two very important implications for Indian agriculture i.e. The implementation of land reforms and practice of cooperative farming. Land reforms were implemented in India after independence which mainly included abolition of zamindari system and ceiling on land holdings. But these land reforms did not seem to have desired effect as there are severe inequalities in the ownership of land holdings in rural areas. Most of the land is concentrated in the hands of big landlords. In such situation, we will have to rethink the implementation of land reforms from Gandhiji's perspective. On the other hand, regarding his views on cooperative farming, we find that there is acute poverty in rural areas and inputs are

not available in the desired amount to the poor farmers due to which they are not able to cultivate the land effectively. collective farming in this case can help to tackle this problem. In the present scenario, these views given by him carry much weightage in the sense that 79% of the total land holdings in India are small and 70% of the farmers are not under cooperative cover. Therefore consolidation and collective farming do have importance for the farming community.

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