

Self-reliant India: A gandhian mission based on village industries

Devendra Kumar

Associate Professor, Department of History, Ramlal Anand College, Delhi, India

Abstract

In the midst of the worldwide pandemic Prime Minister Narendra Modi unveiled “Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan” (Self-reliant India Mission) during the announcement of the Corona Virus pandemic related economic package saying that the country should view the Covid-19 crisis as an opportunity to achieve economic self-reliance. He stressed the importance of promoting local products to boost small and local business. The prime minister’s call for self-reliance reminds us of Mahatma Gandhi’s concept of Swadeshi, self-reliance in the spirit of universal love and service. The ideas of M.K. Gandhi help us to understand the underlying reality of ‘global citizenship’ and its various facets by articulating the thoughts of the voiceless multitudes lying dormant in the heart of India and seek to provide resolutions for building a better society. The purpose of this paper is to describe Gandhi’s ideas of economic Self Reliant India based on village industries.

Keywords: self-reliant, swadeshi, khadi, industrialization, spinning, employment

Introduction

The large majority of people in the country lived in villages under poverty and fearful distress and no progress can be made unless effective measures are taken to enable them to obtain the necessities that human life requires for maintenance and positive growth. MK Gandhi's aim of khadi movement was the Revival and development of hand spinning on the one hand to help the rural population to be self-sufficiency in respect of their cloth requirements and on the other to provide necessary relief by way of suitable occupation to large numbers of villages who are suffering because of enforced idleness. Khadi and its transformation into a national symbol acquired new significance as a fabric of not only the village but also the nation in mass Nationalist politics in the early 20th century. Gandhi promoted Khadi as both a commodity and a symbol of Swadeshi movement, which sought to establish India's economic self-sufficiency from Britain at the basis of self-government. Gandhi, ask the people to sacrifice their liking for European fineries and be satisfied with fabrics woven on Handlooms out of yarn spun by Indians in their own Cottages. For him, Swadeshi was a sacrifice in which every man and women could take part.

The idea of economic inclusiveness brings in the concept of development and equal opportunities to all for their growth. It provides the same level of chances and advantages to all so that everyone can participate in the economic life of their country as consumers, producers, investors and entrepreneurs in every possible role. The integral idea of Economic Inclusion is opening up of all available economic, socio-economic and financial opportunities for all, especially for the undeserved sections of the society. The idea of inclusion growth not just involves the provision of economic opportunities for all but also allowing every individual to get engaged in decision making activities which can improve the effectiveness of their economic potential. The father of the nation never emphasized for the economic dependence based on external or foreign market

forces which mainly weakens the village community. He was strong promoter of village based production activities because of the fact that the villages are self-sufficient in the sense that these have enough natural raw materials and resources which can lead to production of almost all kinds of consumer and producer goods. According to him villages are totally independent and self-reliant which can fulfil their own needs. According to him these small manufacturing units are the keys of employment generation. He was of the opinion that every person of our country should get employment and food otherwise a free India shall not, indeed, be free.

Gandhiji opposed western civilisation as it has given rise to an industrialisation based on exploitation of man by man and domination of one nation over others and has subjected natural resource to the increasing consumerist lust of humanity. The developed world is encouraging its multinational corporations to gradually establish. Control over the markets, Gandhi’s long term agenda is set out in Hind Swaraj. In it, he denounced western industrial civilisation. But being a Universalist, he was not anti-west. He learnt greatly from John Ruskin, the British Socialist, whose book ‘Unto This Last’, he himself translated even before he wrote his own book. He was a great admirer of Leo Tolstoy, and regularly corresponded with him till the latter’s demise. As for civilisation, he was fully committed to a humanist civilisation based on truth, morality and love, and in which human beings respected the rights of other living and non-living species. Gandhiji always rejected Rationalism for its materialistic approach, and he aimed to promote spiritual development and harmony, based on moral values. According to him, Supreme consideration has to be given to ‘man’ rather than to ‘money’. He never emphasized for the economic dependence based on external or foreign market forces which mainly weakens the village community.

According to Gandhi, a free India shall not, indeed, be free until every person gets employment and food. Not only

almost two-fifth of the population lives below the poverty line, the number of unemployment continues to grow. These conditions have become closely aligned with the global economic scenario. The onslaught of the WHO and international financial institutions like the World Bank and the IMF on our economy has to be with stood. This can only be done if the union government decides to change course, radically. The youth should understand the trend of the market and its ultimate logic of growing unemployment and a very uncertain employment and take the lead. Yet, while this resistance must grow, the constructive side of this struggle has to be firmly kept in view. His emphasize was on the labour using techniques for the production task rather than labour saving methods. Thus his economic thought aims at increasing employment options and such ways of producing goods which will not be labour displacing. Ironically, Gandhiji never opposed the machine-based technology or new innovations, infact, he cited the example of the coming Singer sewing machine in India as a welcoming step. His main objective was to hold on the dignity of labour by criticizing the society's contemptuous attitude towards manual labour.

Gandhiji also emphasized on the social responsibility of individuals towards the welfare of society. He claimed that the part of the population which has the sole objective of creating new economic enterprises for their living and which accumulates surplus wealth more than what is necessary for their needs and wants should be held for their trustee' for the equitable welfare of others especially poor and vulnerable sections of the society. He was the founder of the idea of "Swadeshi" which consisted of stimulating and enhancing the small-scale production that can satisfy local consumer and producers needs, at cottage and village-based industries. This was initiated to make villagers and non-urban areas self-reliant and self-dependent and could lead onto the path production and making on their own. At present in India, the provision of self-independent ministry for medium and small scale industries and for local manufacturing units and the proper flow of funds towards their working and betterment in all the financial union budgets in the sign of the relevance of Gandhian thought which has been the key focus of the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises.

According to Gandh 'the poor of the world can not be helped by mass production but can be helped by production of the masses.' His idea of economic self-sufficiency played very significant role in the Congress program. The earliest reference to this activity in the Congress program is to be found in the resolution of the special session held in Calcutta in 1920 , which prescribed hand spinning and weaving of Khadi as "measures of discipline and sacrifice for every man, woman and child" and this Resolution was later clarified by the annual session held at Nagpur. In 1921 congress session, at Baiswda session drew up a program of action to distribute twenty lakh of Charkhas along with enlistment of 1 crore members and collection of 1 crore of Rupees through "Tilak Memorial Swaraj fund". After the Ahmadabad session of the Congress held in late 1921, the Khadi clothes and their production were exhibited all the time.

There is no doubt that the real reason which led Gandhi to popularize his mission based on village Industries was his concern for the misery of agricultural masses. He has pointed out how they are without any work for 4 to 6

months in the year and how he purchase of machine made cloth deprives their means which they could utilise for feeding themselves. The development of village industries was intended to help the poor in the villages, guarantee them gainful work, and arrest migration to the cities. In order to provide full employment opportunities to the people, he emphasised spread and expansion of khadi and village industries network in the country.

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