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# GANDHI'S VIEWS ON MANAGEMENT OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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**Received: Sep. 2019 Accepted: Oct. 2019 Published: Nov. 2019**

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**Abstract:** After seventy years of Indian Independence it is worthwhile to examine and evaluate whether we are on the same path of development which our forefathers and leaders thought for us. They dreamt of a society which besides keeping its traditional values intact, could at the same time adjust with the latest developmental process. Nobody in the society is left out of the development process. The evils of the society are taken care of to build a strong self-sustaining society. Rural Development has now become a buzz word for government, NGO's, financial institutions etc. New programmes and policies are regularly framed to foster rural development. It is the need of hour to examine and evaluate how far and in what direction we stand in relation to the vision of our forefathers and freedom fighters who shed their life for the country, with respect to rural development. The present research paper makes an attempt to carefully understand the view of our father of nation Mahatma Gandhi regarding rural development.

**Keywords:** Rural Development, Self-Sustaining Society, Social Life.

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**Introduction:** The term 'Rural Development' connotes overall development of rural areas with a view to improving the quality of life of the rural people. In this sense, it is a comprehensive and multidimensional concept which encompasses also the development of agriculture and allied activities, village and cottage industries and crafts, socio-economic infrastructure, community service and facilities and, above all human resources in rural areas. As phenomena, rural development is the end result of interactions between various physical, technological, economic, social, cultural and institutional factors (Katarsing, 1999).

About 70 per cent of Indians live in villages. In other words any planning for the development of India could not be complete without embracing the rural chapter of India in its fold. Over the years, rural development has emerged as "a strategy designed to improve the economic and social life of a specific group of people, the rural poor. It involves extending the benefits of development to the poorest among those who seek a livelihood in rural areas" (International Labour Organisation, 1968: 56).

Gandhiji underlined the importance rural India by saying that 'India lives in villages'. Since then successive governments have been trying to develop the real India. In the various five year plans, development of rural areas has been one of the most abiding concerns. The government of India started its plan for the planned growth soon after the independence. Gandhiji in his various speeches and articles written throughout the freedom struggle spoke & highly of democratic decentralization and rural development. In the 22 July 1946 issue of Harijana, Gandhiji stated that "Independence must begin at the bottom" (Anil Dutta Mishra, 2002: 1). Gandhiji wrote in Harijana (29 August, 1936) "I would say that if the village perishes India will perish too . It will be no more India. Her own vision in the world will get lost. The revival of the village life is possible only when it is no more exploited" (Indian farming, 1978: 2 and 31).

**Conceptual Analysis of Rural Development:** The concept of rural development was born in the context of agriculture and it remained, for a long time, co-terminus with agricultural development in India. Since the 1970s the concept of rural development has undergone a change and has become more comprehensive. The World Bank defines rural development as a strategy designed to improve the

economic and social life of a specific group of people, that is, the rural poor. It involves the extending of the benefits of development to the poorest among those who are living in the rural areas. This group includes small-scale farmers, tenants, and landless. Rural development should include a mix of activities including projects to raise agricultural output, create new employment, improve health and education, expand communication, and improve housing (World Bank, 1975: 28 – 29). Thus the World Bank defines rural development in terms of an improvement of the economic and social life of the rural poor (S.R. Maheswari, 1995 : 18).

### **Gandhian Views on Rural Development:**

**1. Relationship between City and Villages:** It was Gandhiji who first understood the importance, role and place of Indian villages in the whole country. His objective assessment of villages in overall Indian economic and political sphere was the key which helped him to bring them to the main stream and ultimately win the freedom. The rural character of the economy and the need for regeneration of rural life was stressed by Mahatma Gandhi. He wrote in *Harijan* (4, April, 1936).

“India is to be found not in few cities but in its 700,000 villages. But we town dwellers have believed that India is to be found in its towns and villages were created to minister to our needs. We have hardly paused to inquire if those poor get sufficient to eat and clothe themselves with and whether they have a roof to shelter themselves from sun and rain”.

He was thus critical of the role of the urban setups as they did not share proportionate resources with their counterparts living in villages. He considered urbanisation as an evil insofar as (1) it is based on the exploitation of the countryside, and (2) is totally divorced from the rural way of life rooted in nature.

He said (in 1946), “I regard the growth of the cities as an evil thing unfortunate for mankind and the world, unfortunate for England and certainly unfortunate for India. The British have exploited India through its cities. The latter have exploited the villages. The blood of the villages is the cement with which the edifice of the cities is built”. He has asked whether it was possible to retrace the steps and, if this was possible, whether this would not be incompatible with progress. Gandhi gave a remarkably balanced answer to this question in the form of the following propositions: (1) “I want the blood that is inflating the arteries of the cities to run once again in the blood-vessels of the villages”; (2) “I do not want to depopulate the cities and send the city folk back to the villages. All I want is that they should re-adjust their lives so as to cease to sponge upon the poor village folk and make to the latter what reparation is possible, even at this later hour, by helping to resuscitate their ruined economy”; (3) “In my picture of the rural economy the cities would take their natural place and not appear as unnatural, congested spots or boils on the body-politic, as they are today.” (Ganguli, B.N., 1973: 187).

**2. Co-operative Form of Enterprise:** Gandhiji’s conception of a new economic order in the villages included a programme of cooperative farming in agriculture. Many raised their eyebrows when Gandhi declared in 1942: “I firmly believe that we shall not derive the full benefits of agriculture until we take to cooperative farming. Does it not stand to reason that it is far better for a hundred families in a village to cultivate their lands collectively and divide the income there from than to divide the land anyhow into a hundred portions? As we have seen, Gandhi was thinking in terms of wind-mills, power-generation by village communities and rural electrification. He favoured the use of electricity for operating rural tools and implements. In 1941 he explained his own conception of rural industrialisation. He wished to revolutionise the ‘Khadi mentality’ which had by then become part of a strange cult. This he explained that this mentality “means a wholesale swadeshi mentality, a determination to find all the necessities of life in India and that through the labour and intellect of the villagers.... it means the decentralisation of the production and distribution of the necessities of life. Every village is to produce and use all its necessities and, in addition, to produce a certain percentage as its contribution to the requirements of the cities. Hereby industries will necessarily be centralised and nationalised. But they will occupy the least part of the vast national activity in the villages”. (Ibid : 156).

The present co-operative movement in India, except for a few exceptions has gone to threads. It is marked by corruption, instability, nepotism etc., to name a few evils.

**3. An Ideal Village:** In 1919 Gandhi wrote for the *navjivan* a series of articles on the condition of Indian peasants and the means of ameliorating it. The English translation appeared in the *Young India*. Gandhi said: "Mr. Lionel Curstis' description of an Indian village as a collection of insanitary dwellings constructed in a dunghill is not much exaggerated. There should be some system about the structure of a well ordered village, there should be some order about the village lanes, and the roads should be so scrupulously clean in this and of crores of barefooted pedestrians that nobody need not hesitate in walking or even sleeping in the streets. The lanes should be mechanised and have gutters for letting out water. The temples and mosques should be kept so beautifully clean that the visitors should feel an air of tranquil holiness about them. The village should, as far as possible, be full of shade giving trees and fruit bearing trees in and around them. It should have a dharmashala, a school and a small dispensary. Washing and privy arrangement should be such as may not contaminate the air, water and roads of the village. There was a time when the Indian village satisfied most of these conditions. Every village should be self-sufficient, so far as its needs of foods and clothing are concerned and should be capable of defending itself against robbers or wild animals. An ideal village should approximate to the description I have given for. Only such village could be called self governing, and if all Indian villages could come up to that ideal, India should be free from most of its worries... It is my firm belief that these small units are easily capable of being well ordered and organised" (Ibid: 150).

Gandhiji thought of a casteless egalitarian rural society against the stark background of a caste-ridden village community. This was a contradiction. He not only faced it, but also tried to resolve it by means of a progressive interpretation of the ancient differentiation of social functions, which, in the course of social decay, and in his view, degenerated into a hide-bound, caste ridden social order." (Ibid: 150 – 151).

**4. "Village Republic", A Vision of Gandhiji:** This picture of a new India which Gandhi presented in Harijan article must be delineated in his own words as follows. Only the paragraphs have been rearranged for convenience of analysis. Indian independence must begin at the bottom. Thus every village will be a republic or panchayat having powers. It follows, therefore, that every village has to be self-sustained and capable of managing its own affairs, even to the extent of defending itself against the whole world. It will be trained and prepared to perish in the attempt to defend itself against any onslaught from without. Ultimately, it is the individual who is the unit. But this does not exclude dependence on the willing help from neighbours or from the world. It will be free and voluntary play of mutual forces.

Gandhi was thus thinking of village republics, completely free to manage their own affairs, and united by mutual aid even to the extent of joint defence against any external aggression. A village panchayat, if it has to be a republic, must be an egalitarian organisation in which 'ultimately it is the individual who is the unit'. The relations between individual must rest upon equality, mutual aid and willing cooperation. Their relations with the outside world will be governed by the same principles of solidarity. But such solidarity can neither be established nor sustained, unless consumption is maintained at a level that every individual, however humble, can reach. In other words, if there is poverty that also has to be shared equally. Gandhi, therefore, said:

"Such a society is necessarily highly cultured in which every man or woman knows what he or she wants, and what is more, knows that no one should want anything that others cannot have with equal labour". In Gandhi's view the essence of culture lies in knowing what one really wants. Also, if one wants anything that cannot be had with equal labour, there is an element of exploitation which means violence as well as inequality that violence helps to sustain.

In this structure composed of innumerable villages there will be ever-widening, never-ascending circles. Life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. But it will be an oceanic circle whose centre will be the individual always ready to perish for the village, the latter ready to perish for the circle

of villages till at last the whole becomes one life composed of individuals, never aggressive in their arrogance, but ever humble, sharing the majesty of the oceanic circle of which they are integral units. Therefore, the outermost circumference will not wield power to crush the inner circle, but will give strength to all within and derive its own strength from it.

Gandhi was aware that by presenting a picture of republican village India he was exposing himself to ridicule in a political atmosphere in which politicians of the urban classes were dreaming of power-politics and power-structure of the usual run of democracies, while reflecting on the content of independence in conventional terms". Gandhi's conception of an "oceanic circle" as opposed to a pyramidal structure of society, and his almost mystical idea of ever-ending, but never ascending, concentric circles that signify interdependence, mutual support, and solidarity, without there being any relation of coercion, on the one hand, and dependence, on the other, as between the periphery and the inner circles."

**Conclusion:** The views of Gandhiji on rural development have been classified as Utopian by some thinkers. But as we realise that some of these are fully successful and some are partly successful i.e., co-operative movement in giving right direction to rural development. The ideas are of the same relevance as they were at the time of presentation. The rural development of India leaves a lot to be fulfilled in respect to the vision of Gandhiji. His meticulous and in depth understanding of social stratification and structure of Indian society could help a lot in designing an appropriate rural development programme.

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