



## GANDHIAN CONCEPT OF RURAL RECONSTRUCTION AND ITS RELEVANCE TODAY

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### ABSTRACT



Mahatma Gandhi had a great vision of rural economy and rural reconstruction of India. His concept of rural development contained self-sufficiency, inter-dependence and development of Village industries. He incorporated all the necessary activities under his 18-point Constructive Programme and considered it as the truthful and non-violent way of winning 'pooma swaraj'. This paper discusses about the Gandhian concept of Rural Reconstruction and its relevance today. It is the need of the hour for the Indians to go through the principles of Gandhiji with regard to the concept of rural reconstruction by Gandhiji. The constructive points offer solutions to problems which hinder the development of our country i.e., problem of untouchability, prohibition, village sanitation, environmental protection etc.

**Keywords:** Mahatma Gandhi, India, Rural Reconstruction.



## INTRODUCTION

Gandhiji's basic idea on bringing the rural reconstruction is purely scientific and spiritual. The village is the basic unit of the Gandhian ideal social order. Gandhi believed, "If the village perishes India will perish too..." In India, there are 7.50 lakhs of villages and maximum people depend on agriculture. Gandhiji firmly believed that self-reliant villages form a sound basis for a just, equitable and non-violent order. Gandhiji found the only way of bringing hope of good living to the rural people is by making the village the central place in the economic programme. Gandhi believed that the British rule entirely ruined the village based economy for their survival.

During 1942, after witnessing the degradation of the villages, Gandhiji spelt out the following.

"My idea of Village Swaraj is that it is a complete republic, independent of its neighbours for its own vital wants and get inter-dependent for many others in which dependence is a necessity". Thus every village first concern will be to grow its own food, crop and cotton for its cloth. It could have a reserve for its cattle, recreation and playground for adults and children. Then if there is more land available, it will grow useful commercial crops, thus excluding ganjai, tobacco, opium and the like. The village will maintain a village theatre, school and public hall. It will have its own water works ensuring clean water supply.

Gandhi was aware that the westernized industrialization process will definitely ruin the village structure and the economy. Gandhian strategy of rural reconstruction was based on village Swaraj and swadeshi movement. The basic principles of village Swaraj as outlined by Gandhiji are trusteeship, swadeshi, full employment, bread, labour, self-sufficiency, decentralization, equality etc. Thus the idea of ideal village of Gandhian dream was a comprehensive one, encompassing the economic, social, political and educational dimensions. Through his 18-point Constructive Programme, Gandhiji successfully implemented his rural reconstruction activities in Sevagram Centre near Wardha in 1935.

## 18-POINTS CONSTRUCTIVE PROGRAMME

18-points Constructive Programme suggested by the Mahatma for the village

**1. Trusteeship:** According to Gandhiji's holistic approach, "everything on this earth belongs to God and is from God. As land belongs to God and thus belongs to the community and therefore should be used for the welfare of the community. He felt that the hearts of landowners should be changed to accept the trusteeship idea. If this is not accepted by them, the poor should fight through non-violent, non-co-operation and civil disobedience struggle against them. He believed that the rich cannot accumulate wealth without the co-operation of the poor.

**2. Swadeshi:** It is nothing but the decentralized self-sufficient economic structure. The decentralised economic units would thus facilitate the best possible use of local raw materials, talents and man power, promote occupational equilibrium, ecological balance and co-operative living. The buyers and sellers having a concern for each other, jointly work for the development of their local areas using local resources. Gandhiji emphasised, "every village of India will almost be a self supporting and self-contained unit exchanging only such necessary commodities to other villages where they are not locally producible" The village would be able to produce whatever is required, with the help of local resources and would be intended with whatever has been produced in closer surrounding.

**3. Self-sufficiency:** Gandhiji advocated self-sufficiency of Indian villages. If the villages attain self-sufficiency they need not depend on others. Depending on others will lead to exploitation and slavery. He suggested that villages should produce their own food, clothing and other articles needed for meeting their basic needs. He insisted on the promotion of village or cottage industries and handicrafts because they can provide employment, necessary to meet the basic needs of the villagers and also facilitate village self-sufficiency. He recommended co-operative farming which would save labour, capital, tools and provide employment to all Villagers and increase production also. He also favoured spinners, co-operatives and co-operative cattle farming for promoting the national interest.



**4. Bread Labour:** Inspired by Leo Tolstoy and Ruskin's work, Gandhiji advocated that all should indulge in physical labour. According to him each man must do physical labour to earn his bread. He called this as Bread Labour. He opined that the Intellectual work should not demand pay.

**5. Gram Swaraj:** Gandhiji wanted to establish the Swaraj. The Gram Swaraj is nothing but Self-rule and self-reliant. Gandhiji's ramraj was not a religious one as propagated by the present day politics. As stated earlier, it should be self-reliance of the villages. Here self-reliance means, non-violent, production at the village level and social order.

**6. Constructive Programme:** In 1935, Gandhiji started his rural reconstruction activities in Sevagram to implement his idea of Constructive Programme which included items such as the use of Khadi, promotion of Village Industries, Basic and Adult Education, Rural Sanitation, upliftment of the Backward Classes, the welfare of Women, Education in Health and Hygiene, Prohibition and propagation of the Mother tongue.

So to attain the above, Gandhiji suggested 18 points programme as follows: They are

1. Communal unity
2. Removal of untouchability
3. Prohibition
4. Khadi
5. Other Village industries
6. Village sanitation
7. New or basic education
8. Adult education
9. Women
10. Education health and hygiene
11. Provincial language
12. National language
13. Economic equality
14. Kisans
15. Labour
16. Adivasis
17. Lepers
18. Students.

**Communal Unity:** Gandhiji rightly pointed out that there should be a harmony between the religions, very particularly between Hindu and Muslim. For the attainment of communal unity, every social worker should aim at developing and encouraging the bond

of love and regard among the Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Zoroastrian and Jew members and cultivate a unity based on such mutual love and regard. Gandhiji opined that the leaders of the both community should join together and solve the problems. The problems should not be treated as communal. The people should be treated as same and equal.

**Removal of untouchability:** Gandhiji has the opinion that no one is born as untouchable and unequal. The practice of untouchability is a sin against God as the Harijans and non-Harijans are the children of the same God. He found untouchability as the worst evil effect of Hinduism and worked for their temple entry for religious equality.

In the words of Mahatma, It is the duty of the represented communities to provide representation to those communities which are unrepresented or inadequately represented. In Gandhian concept of Swaraj, none should be high or low but all are to be equal citizens and this Swaraj society is free from any social exploitation and domination.

**Prohibition:** Gandhiji considered drinks, intoxicating drugs and gambling as the social evils. Gandhiji felt that the government should completely ban the use of liquor. The government should not bother about the income. This income should be adjusted from some other sources.

Hence, Gandhiji expect the Government the following:

It is the moral duty of the Government to introduce prohibition even if it comes to loss huge resources from the sale of liquor. People can save their money if prohibition is introduced and can use their savings for constructive and creative purposes. The Government must implement prohibition throughout the country with the zeal of the social reformers and should convert every liquor shop into refreshment shop and concert rooms.

The social workers have a great role in fulfilling the idea of prohibition. Gandhiji suggested the social workers to visit the homes of the addicts and dissuade them from drinking habit. The liquor shop owners should be requested to close down their business and to take up some other occupation. The social workers should carry on picketing before liquor



shops to persuade the addicts and shop owners. Public opinion should be cultivated against liquor business and drinking habit. Besides the Social Workers, Doctors, Women especially house wives and students should also have the responsibility to save the country from this evil effect.

**Khadi:** According to Gandhiji, Khadi alone can solve a number of economic and other problems of India as shown below.

Under Khadi economy, the capital is under the control of the labour and supremacy of man over machinery can be established. Khadi is the only industry which can absorb largest number of people and can provide employment to the unemployed at any time of the year without much difficulty.

**Other village industries:** According to Gandhiji village economy cannot be completed without the essential village industries such as hand-grinding, hand pounding, soap-making, paper-making, match-making, tanning, oil-pressing etc. The village industries give employment to millions of people and provide an outlet for the creative skill and resourcefulness of the people. Large scale industries will eliminate the spinning wheel and the handloom, and through the large-scale industries, the wealth will be concentrated in the hands of a few. On the contrary, the village industries will lead to distribution of national income among the millions of people in thousands of villages.

**Village Sanitation:** The ideal village envisaged by Gandhiji could be constructed on the basis of the principles of public hygiene and sanitation. The houses which are to be built with locally available material will have sufficient light and ventilation. Each house or a cottage shall have a courtyard to grow vegetables for domestic consumption and to house cattle. The village streets and lanes will be kept clean. Each village shall have its own waterworks to ensure clean water supply. The constructive workers shall make the villages models of cleanliness by teaching the villagers to maintain cleanliness in and around the village, including public wells, tanks and rivers. Gandhiji's Idea was not confined only to the removal of garbage from the lanes and streets of the villages but also to put the same to the productive use. If the garbages are scientifically converted into manure, the villages can not only make use of

productive manure to grow more food but also keep the villages clean.

**New or Basic Education (Nai Talim):** Gandhiji developed the idea of Nai Talim, for the 'all round drawing of the best in child and man, body, mind and spirit". According to him literacy itself is no education; it is not the end of education. His philosophy of education was based on his experiments with physical, literary and moral training at the Tolstoy Farm in South Africa. Thus the gandhian scheme of education is meant to bring about a silent socio-economic and political revolution through the medium of village handicrafts. It removes unemployment through the vocational training and provides economic and social security to the people. It checks the gradual decline of village economy and reconstructs village industries with new perspectives. The new education ensures smooth transformation of the present village economy without imported machinery and technical skill. The economic destiny of the country will not be placed in the hands of specialized talents but will be placed in the hands of skilled masses. The education aims at mass production by masses. Decentralized production paves the way for decentralized political system. The education which encourages sense of dignity of labour, self-reliance, useful literary knowledge, moral uprightness, social awareness and responsibility stimulates healthy political awakening among the students.

**Education in Health and Hygiene:** According to Gandhiji it is the duty of the social workers to explain the simple rules of health and hygiene to the villagers. The way of life of the social workers should be a living message to others in health and hygiene. They should maintain good health by following the rules of health and nature cure. They have to make attempts to get purified water for the villagers.

To maintain public sanitation and hygiene in the villages, the social workers should take up brooms, pick axes and baskets to clean the public places, including tanks and wells. If they take up these implements with the same pride and dignity as they do with the pens, the problem of finance would not arise in maintaining cleanliness and hygiene in the villages. If they engage themselves in public cleanliness as self-appointed sweepers, the villagers



will voluntarily join the movement for cleanliness in their villages and will definitely learn the lessons in public hygiene.

**Provincial Languages:** Gandhiji was in favour of regional languages as media of instruction at all stages of education. Gandhiji recognized English as the language of international commerce and diplomacy and appreciated the English literature but he recommended it would be taught as one of the subjects and gave importance to the regional languages as it is the language of the rural masses. Mother tongue is a natural means to develop the mind of the child. It is a mere superstition to believe that a particular language is incapable of expression of scientific ideas. Russia and Japan have achieved all their scientific progress without English as their medium. Hence the Indian languages are to be properly developed and the useful English books should be translated into regional languages for the sake of majority of the Nation.

**Kisans:** Gandhiji was in favour of farmer's organisations but which are to be directed to redress the grievances of the peasants. But it should not be used for low-level competitions for political gains of certain individuals.

**Students:** Gandhiji expected that the students should possess the following qualities:

1. The students must have initiative, they must not be imitators
2. They must possess freedom. However, they must exercise freedom with restraint and humility.
3. They should have purity of heart which ensures the purity in personal life.
4. They must maintain self-control in thought, word and action and should preserve the vital energy.
5. They should cultivate the sense of service to the community

**IRDP: A Gandhian Critique:** Gandhiji was very much critical of Economic planning. He was not interested in planning as a system of development and it was natural that he should have disapproved of the system of planned economy. The Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) is an integrated effort of rural development based on the Gandhian vision of Antyodya which refers to "the

upliftment of the last man in the row". It has the principle of raising the standard of living of the downtrodden in the rural areas.

Before 75 years Mahatma advocated the above points for reconstruction of the Indian villages for the development of not only the villages and also the country. If we think about the foresight of Mahatma, one can recall certain things. The destruction of communal harmony will hurt both the social and economic development of a country, what is happening now. Rather than taking them as a political one, as stated by Gandhiji, it is the responsibility of the leaders of the religion to put the fire. The removal of untouchability is slowly working, but it needs the transformation of mind from the so called upper caste people. They should realise that all are equal in the eyes of god. When they produce and distribute the goods to all, they should not be considered as untouchables.

With regard to prohibition, rather than income to the state, welfare of the people is necessary. Not only the Government, people should also come forward to avoid the liquor. There is a possibility of changing trend. For example, what is happening in Tamil Nadu?

Now, people are very much worrying about the sanitation even at villages. After the introduction of the Swachh Bharat Programme and Unnat Bharat Programme, people got awareness on sanitation. Now, the women at villages are talking about the sanitation and clean water. Gandhiji was very much concerned about the environment. Now at Indian level, the quantum of pollution is going at the maximum level. As advised by Gandhiji, when we go on concentration on village industries, automatically the level of pollution will come down and we need not expect the climate changes and its impact.

Gandhiji recommended the use of Mother tongue. He supported this, because, he used to say that the inventions are more in Japanese and other foreign languages. Because, they are very strong in their mother tongue and the scientific things are translated in to their mother tongue. Due to their expertise in their own language, they are able to occupy the scientific world. Finally, as noted by Gandhiji, the Integrated Rural Development Programme will give solution to the rural poor.



Apart from all, Gandhiji was confident that students are the strongest pillars of the future country. What Gandhiji suggested for the students, it should be well taken by the students and the teachers should help students inculcate those habits.

Hence, it is concluded that the principles of Gandhiji are always relevant not only to the present day but also to the future for the sustainable development of the countries of the world.

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