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MAHATMA GANDHI: DEMOCRATIC LEADERSHIP AND HIS ECONOMIC VISION

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ABSTRACT

A day seldom passes without stories appearing in the newspapers about democratic leadership. Leadership does not end with the person who shows the characteristics. Leadership is a journey; moving from one point to another – Leadership is moving from one level to another; even if you return to the same point you will have a different level of thinking and understanding. Leadership needs followers, it requires dedication. This might be the reason why it is a bit complex to understand Leadership as a whole. India – the land of role models for leadership like Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore, Jawaharlal Nehru etc. Gandhi established the credibility by leading through example, he established himself as a real servant of the people of India, empowering the general public practicing what he preached even the small things like spinning yarn to make his clothes. He resorted to simple and poor living, just like millions in the country, hence people looked at Gandhi as one of their own, and they could see their own sufferings in him. Capitalism and Socialism are the two accepted economic systems with serious drawbacks. However, one very complete and well-thought-out alternative economic system is Gandhian economics. This paper tries to present the overall socioeconomic thoughts of Gandhiji as an origin of alternative development. The work explores his ideas for a "post-modern" construction of India, where his views on Swadeshi, his theory of Trusteeship and his images of an ideal village economy are examined. I am trying to locate the solution of recent economic situation through Gandhian economic vision, to re-examine the outstanding qualities of leadership that Gandhi provided and deconstruct the constituent components of his leadership to arrive at a better understanding of the qualities and effectiveness of leadership. This study explores the democratic leadership qualities of Gandhi in relation to economic vision.

KEYWORDS

Democratic leader, Mahatma Gandhi, capitalism, socialism, swadeshi, trusteeship, Swaraj.

INTRODUCTION

Today we are the citizens of a free and democratic country, India, but years back, India was not a liberated nation. British ruled India and a long struggle were carried out to achieve freedom for India. This Indian freedom struggle could have been an entirely impossible dream if it had not been people like Mahatma Gandhi, Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru, and Netaji Subash Chandra Bose. The whole India was guided competently by these people towards the attainment of independence. We call them leaders. The question here arises: why were these people chosen as leaders and what were their characteristics? Which policies were created them? During the course of democratic movement in liberating British ruled India, democratic leadership played crucial function. Therefore, appraising the definition of democratic leadership is essential in understanding both democratic leadership and the progress made in democratic movements. Here I am going to discuss the economic vision of Mahatma Gandhi; the vision that makes him a democratic leader.

A traveler, who came from Europe to India, was asked: 'What do you wish to see in India?' His reply was: 'The Himalayas, The Taj Mahal and Mahatma Gandhi.' It was neither wealth nor power that made Gandhiji so famous. He became famous for certain good quality that he possessed. He always practiced what he taught.

"Gandhiji was, above all, the astute political leader of a class the bourgeoisie, in whose class interests he always acted."

E.M.S. Namboodiripad

"The earth has sufficient resources to satisfy one's needs, but not for one's greed."

- M. K. Gandhi

OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER

The paper covers the following objectives:

1. To analyze the extent of Gandhi to be called a democratic leader.
2. To consider the parameter that defines a leader for the ordinary Indian – the masses.
3. To determine the Economic Vision of Gandhi that made him a democratic leader.
4. To locate the solution of contemporary economic situation through Gandhian economic thought.
5. To study the concept of alternative development in the current scenario.

RELEVANCE OF THE PAPER

Today, every economy is seeking to attain the economic growth. Numerous economists gave their economic theories. Confusion goes on...which policy to be opted and which one should be left. Getting the consent of all the denizens in every decision making is not possible. So to give a solution to this situation we select our representatives- our leaders, politicians and this is how the entire government is formed. India- the highest electorate and known for its democracy has and had multiple leaders. Many of them came, worked and left. But very few are remembered for long. One leader who followed every preaching of his own, led the life of the masses, may be an economist who is still found on the most crucial part of our economy- currency notes ...Yes I am going to discuss about the father of our nation- Mahatma Gandhi. He always said that True economics stands for social justice; it promotes the good of all including the weakest and is indispensable for decent life. For him, the economy was meaningful to the extent that it opened out the possibility of well-being for all people. The trade-off between utility and loyalty is exemplified in Gandhi's explanation of the principle of neighborliness. These paper discusses what made Gandhi a "Gandhi"? This paper is also going to discuss about the Economic thoughts that he carried which impelled us to call him a "democratic leader".

CHARACTERISTICS OF DEMOCRATIC LEADERSHIP

Anderson (1959) defined the democratic leader as one who shares decision making with the other members. He asserted that democratic leadership is associated with higher morale in most situations. Hackman and Johnson (1996) supported Anderson's explanation of the relationship between democratic leadership and productivity. Democratic leadership is associated with increased follower productivity, satisfaction, involvement, and commitment (Hackman & Johnson, 1996). Member satisfaction and nominations for leadership are greater under democratic leadership (Bass, 1990; Stogdill, 1974). As noted earlier, participation is a core characteristic of democratic leadership; and the ideal of democratic leadership is friendly, helpful, and encouraging participation (Luthar, 1996). Chemers (1984) also defined democratic leadership as emphasizing group participation. Thus, participation is the major characteristic of democratic leadership (Bass, 1990). On the other hand, Kuczmariski and Kuczmariski (1995) cited the characteristics of a democratic leader as knowledgeable, influential, stimulating, a winner of cooperation, a provider of logical consequences, encouraging, permitting of self-determination, guiding, a good listener and respecting, and situation-centered. Gastil (1994) defined the characteristics of democratic leadership as distributing responsibility among the membership, empowering

group members, and aiding the group's decision-making process. This paper deals with the economic thoughts of Gandhi and whether these thoughts created him as a democratic leader?

GANDHI: A MASS LEADER, A DEMOCRATIC LEADER AND AN ECONOMIC VISIONARY

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948) developed a vibrant critique of the mode of development and also of the very idea of 'civilization' as it was then exemplified by the western nations. This model of ideology, as he argued, rested on violence and exploitation (slavery and then colonization), and abandoned both morality and spirituality, while creating new needs which were impossible to satisfy. The industrialization and globalization of the economy, he argued, a disaster for India. For Gandhi, the economy was meaningful to the extent that it opened out the possibility of well-being for all people (Sarvodaya). That implied a system of production, of distribution and consumption defined by the essential needs of most deprived people in the society (Antyodaya—'the least') with the aim of supporting the highest values of human life. His understanding of the path to sarvodaya was through a village economy which maximized the powers of the traditional Indian handicrafts and only employed modern machines that allowed for a 'production by the masses' rather than 'mass production' (Friedman, 2008).

The three concepts so central to Gandhi's Economic idea:

- *Swaraj* is political and economic independence but also the liberation of the human being from all systems and ideologies which would undermine human dignity.
- *Swadeshi* Gandhi's vision of a free India was not a nation-state but a confederation of self-governing, self-reliant, self-employed people living in village communities, deriving their right livelihood from the products of their homesteads. Maximum economic and political power - including the power to decide what could be imported into or exported from the village - would remain in the hands of the village assemblies.
- *Trusteeship*, predominance given to ethics and the common good. It provides a means by which the wealthy people would be the trustees of trusts that looked after the welfare of the people in general. Gandhi believed that the rich people could be persuaded to part with their wealth to help the poor. Putting it in Gandhiji's words "Supposing I have come by a fair amount of wealth – either by way of legacy, or by means of trade and industry – I must know that all that wealth does not belong to me; what belongs to me is the right to an honourable livelihood, no better than that enjoyed by millions of others. The rest of my wealth belongs to the community and must be used for the welfare of the community." (Godinot, 2010)

Seven criteria characterize economic independence according to Gandhi:

- Elimination of poverty and the minimizing of wealth.
- Self-sufficiency of each unit in its basic needs.
- Identification of basic human needs and the means of meeting them.
- Agriculture that is respectful of the environment as a basis for the creation of a durable economy.
- Production that is based as far as possible on small groups.
- Control and elimination of distorted views by basic education and technical formation.
- Limitations to the concentration of economic power. (Godinot, 2010)

Two features of the Gandhian mode ought to assure for it a very special place in the history of economic thought. First, Gandhiji advocated the precept of limitation of wants to take care of one's need and not greed. This is a counterpoise to the entire edifice of mainstream economic thinking which is based on the notion of a continuous expansion of the goods space to satisfy unlimited wants. It is conceivable that this may yet turn out to be the single major Gandhian insight that could dictate the agenda of the long-term sustainability of the ecosystem. The second has to do with the idea of focusing on the well-being of the poorest and weakest member of society that is contained in Gandhiji's talisman. This was one of the last notes that Gandhiji left behind in 1948. This was an intrinsic part of Gandhiji's moral view of the world. (Nayak, 2005)

Mahatma Gandhi never created a body of literature known by the name 'Gandhian Economics'. He neither claimed to be an economist nor was trained in Economics. He was not a voracious reader of economic literature. Nevertheless, he expressed his views on economics at various points of time in his life. His reflections on Economics found expression in his writings and thoughts. Students of Gandhian thought and writings collated his reflections on economics and created a body of literature known as 'Gandhian Economics'. The literature thus created is known to be enormous enough to be unparalleled in the history of modern Indian economic thought. The synthesis of the ideas of Mahatma Gandhi with the ideas of the modern world will create a more holistic and integrated society. It will deliver more happiness, generate more altruistic economic surplus and bring about a more egalitarian society than what is now available to us.

Gandhi claimed that "True economics never militates against the highest ethical standard just as all true ethics must also be good economics.... True economics stands for social justice; it promotes the good of all including the weakest and is indispensable for decent life". Subhash Mehta writing on Gandhi's economic philosophy says that, Khaddar economics was based on ethics and self sufficiency. That the ideal of man is spiritual progress first and last and no economic progress can violate this principle. Gandhian economics lay emphasis on spiritual satisfaction. Spiritualism holds sway over consumerism. Gandhi emphasized on minimizing wants and keeping away from luxuries. (Mehta, 2004).

Gandhi never advocated the destruction of factories and machines but sought regulation of their excesses. He felt that production and consumption must be decentralized and both these functions must take place near the source of production. Gandhi had explained that his small scale rural based economic system was not based on the rejection of machinery but on objection to the craze for machinery. Gandhi wanted people to consume locally produced goods and particularly village industry produced goods instead of imported or factory goods. Diwan and Lutz point out that Swadeshi demands the sacrifice of utility for the sake of loyalty. The trade-off between utility and loyalty is exemplified in Gandhi's explanation of the principle of neighborliness. He said, "I refuse to buy from anybody anything however nice or beautiful if it interferes with my growth or injures those whom nature has made my first care" (Swadeshi and Nationalism, Young India, 12 March, 1925).

According to Gandhi's theory of trusteeship, the rich will be free to possess their wealth but will use only that part of their wealth which is required to satisfy their needs and hold the rest in trust for the use of the society. Non-violence was subsumed in the principle of trusteeship and if the rich did not come forward to help the poor by holding their surplus wealth in trust, Gandhi had the weapon of non-cooperation for he believed that the rich cannot accumulate wealth without the cooperation of the poor. Gandhi wanted to delegitimize gross accumulation of wealth and follow trusteeship as a principle of economic conscience. Gandhi felt that the rich could be persuaded through moral pressure to become trustees. And if the capitalists still refuse to act as trustees, ownership of wealth can be regulated through legislation (Harijan, 25th October, 1952). Gandhi wanted capitalism to be replaced by trusteeship where in no person will accumulate wealth beyond his needs and part the balance of his wealth to the trust and production will not be guided by desire but by need. Mr. Jamnalal Bajaj was greatly inspired by the Gandhian idea of trusteeship and went on to set up the Jamnalal Seva Trust at Wardha in Maharashtra.

Sarvodaya means the rising of all in the society. In the economic context, it means the economic welfare of all. Gandhi believed that the followers of non-violence will not stop at the utilitarian principle 'greatest good of the greatest number' but move ahead and achieve the greatest good of all. Reflecting on the problems of industrialization, Gandhi observed that "any machinery which does not deprive masses of men of the opportunity to labour but which helps the individual and adds to his efficiency and which a man can handle at will without being its slave was a good thing" (A discussion, Harijan, 22nd June, 1935). In 1928, Gandhi said, "According to me, the economic constitution of India and for that matter the world should be such that no one under it should suffer from wants of food and clothing. In other words, everybody should be able to get sufficient work to enable him to make the two ends meet. And this ideal can be universally realized only if the means of production of the elementary necessities of life remain the control of the masses. These should be freely available to all as God's air and water are or ought to be, they should not be made a vehicle of traffic for the exploitation of others. This monopolization by any country, nation or group of persons would be unjust. The neglect of this simple principle is the cause of destitution that we witness today not only in this unhappy land but other parts of the world too". (Mehta, 2004).

CONCLUSION

Gandhian economics represent an alternative to mainstream economic ideologies as a way to promote economic self-sufficiency without an emphasis on material pursuits or compromising human development. Gandhi's emphasis on peace, "trusteeship" and co-operation has been touted as an alternative to competition as well as conflict between different economic and income classes in societies. Gandhian focus on human development is also seen as an effective emphasis on the eradication of poverty, social conflict and backwardness in developing nations.

Now if we think about democracy or democratic leader, both works for the development of nation and masses. Gandhian economic thought centres on sustainable growth focus on man against machine and reducing economic inequality. Even well-known Economist like Arnold Toynbee in his book, "Future of Asia and Africa" advocates the same philosophy that Gandhi advocated. Louis Fisher opines, "The Institution of Parliament has lost its relevance. Violence threatens to engulf Asian and African sub-continent." In this situation, with every passing day, Mahatma Gandhi's influence is increasing. Fisher feels that unless we follow the Gandhian model, we are leading to a situation where Capitalists – a microscopic minority of society – will become all too powerful. In the present context of Globalization of Indian Economy, it can be said that Fisher's words are more true today than ever before. He had submitted that countries of Asia and Africa must retain their own uniqueness and not submit to the blind growth Capitalism. Today's economic policies are at the behest of international pressures and the common man finds no need for them. Gandhiji wanted to build social justice and welfare amalgamated with economy where as today's economic policies dictates terms on its own, not evolving out of any social means but for political pragmatism.

Mahatma Gandhi, who wished for a stateless democracy fully based upon non-violence, more or less, supports the system of the day on the one hand, and he expressed his desires to work continuously for improvements until it comes within the domain of Ahimsa on the other. Democracy, according to the best definition of Abraham Lincoln, "is the government of the people, for the people and by the people."

In democracy, there is a greater possibility of peace in comparison to any other form of the system. It is because people are connected with the system directly as well as indirectly at every level; it provides maximum opportunity to people for progress or development and, above all, its people can themselves decide the mode of their welfare. And it is for this reason that today a big portion of the world happens to be under democratic system of government. From beginning to end economic vision, Gandhi was tried to make an environment where everybody has a right to create their own space for development, think for nation building through Swaraj, Swadesh, Trusteeship, Sarvodaya and Antyodaya. We cited the characteristics of a democratic leader as knowledgeable, influential, a winner of cooperation, a provider of logical consequences, encouraging, permitting of self-determination, guiding, a good listener and respecting, and situation-centered. So these are the attributes that altogether made Gandhi a "Gandhi". Now it's not easy to deny calling him a great, ideal and national leader who throughout his life worked for the masses. This impelled us to agree that his economic thought made him a democratic leader.

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