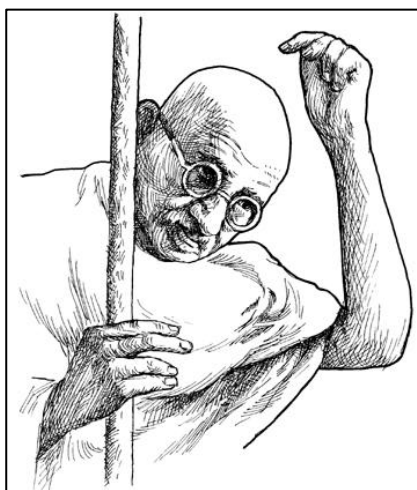




Gandhian Constructive Programmes : The Mantra of Socio-Economic Development

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Mahatma Gandhi was not only a freedom fighter, but a socio-economic reformer also. He had before his vision a society which would provide for the essential needs to the common people. In his view India's greatest curse was poverty and hunger. To combat these two evils, Gandhiji evolved a programme by which the minimum needs of the society could be made available. This programme is called constructive programme. While *Hind Swaraj* gives the general outline of Gandhiji's political philosophy, the 'Constructive Programme' originally addressed to the members of the Indian National Congress. It discusses some of the concrete steps by which that philosophy may be implemented. According to Gandhiji every sound political philosophy ought to have its corresponding constructive programme, one that contributed to the betterment of the lives of members of civil society. The constructive programme may otherwise and more fittingly be called construction of *Purna Swaraj* or complete independence by truthful and non-violent means. It means the independence of every unit, be it the



humblest of the nation, without distinction of race, colour or creed.

Constructive work played an important role in the Gandhian strategy. It was primarily organized around promotion of *Khadi*, Spinning and Village industries, National education and Hindu-Muslim unity, struggle against Untouchability and social uplift of *Harijans* and boycott of foreign Cloth and Liquor. Above all it meant going to villages and identifying with villagers. Constructive work was symbolized by hundreds of *Ashrams* which came up all over the country, almost in the villages and in which social and political workers got practical training in *Khadi* and Yarn production and in work among lower castes and tribal people. It played a crucial role during the passive phase in filling the political space left vacant by the withdrawal of mass movements, while mass movements were sporadic, constructive work was to be carried on all the time. It provided an alternative of continuous and effective work. It had also the advantage of involving a large number of people. Parliamentary and intellectual



work could be done by relatively few, constructive work could involve millions.¹

Gandhiji put all his emphasis on the agrarian rather than industrial development. He thereby wanted to achieve the social and economic regeneration at the grass root level. Thus Gandhiji's constructive programme was that the poor must get food and cloths. The best way for that was to himself grow food and himself to make his own cloths. His constructive programme is geared towards village reconstruction.

Nearly 75 per cent of the Indians were engaged in agriculture. The agriculturist in India was without work for atleast three months in a year. The landless labourers whose number was ever on the increase would find work only in the sowing and reaping seasons. This unemployment and underemployment was the cause of Indian poverty. To combat this problem Gandhiji suggested revival of Swadeshi movement as it would resolve the problem of consumption and production and production would increase the quantum of employment. Gandhiji followed the programme of the revival of cottage and village industries for this purpose the All India Village Industries Board was formed.²

The constructive programme was devised to reform our national character. The first item of this reform was the removal of untouchability. Untouchability in our country, as the race and colour problems in the west rests upon the idea of the superiority of one section of people over another on account of their birth. Gandhiji setup an organization, the '*Harijan Sevak Sangh*' which was to work for the removal of all their disabilities.³ As a result of efforts made by Gandhiji untouchability has been abolished by law after independence.

Gandhiji was against all inequality to women. He severely criticized pernicious system

of child marriage. He was against *Purdah* system. He was a great critic of dowry system and also against heavy expenditure in connection with marriages. Gandhiji invited women of India to participate in the Satyagraha movement as they possess infinite patience and uncomplaining and silent suffering.

In the opinion of Gandhiji village economy cannot be complete without essential village industries, such as hard-grinding, hard pounding, soap-making, paper-making, match-making, tanning, oil pressing etc. *Khadi* to Gandhiji is the symbol of unity of Indian humanity of its economic freedom and equality. Moreover, *Khadi* mentality means decentralization of production and distribution of the necessities of life among the vast population of India, which was predominantly rural.

From the nineteen twenties until his death in 1948, Gandhiji gradually shifted the emphasis of his work from non-violent resistance to constructive schemes for the welfare of all. The constructive programme focused upon constructive ways of rebuilding a demoralized society. It sought to re-orient a servile nation habituated to sectional loyalties and social apathy towards a fearless community of mutual service and sacrifice in which every individual identified with others, especially the poor.

The constructive programme consists of several apparently unconnected independent activities. But they are connected within the context of creating evolution of new social order. Within the Indian context, this meant –

- ☛ Nurturing communal unity
- ☛ Abolishing untouchability
- ☛ Fostering adult education
- ☛ Systematic improvement of village
- ☛ Upliftment of the peasants



- ☛ Development of Non-violent labour unions
- ☛ Promotion of cottage and small scale industries
- ☛ Eradication of social evils.
- ☛ Prohibition of Alcohol.
- ☛ Promotion of *khadi*
- ☛ Promotion of Basic education
- ☛ Upliftment of women
- ☛ Promotion of education in health and hygiene
- ☛ Propagation of *Rastrabhasa*
- ☛ Treatment of lepers.⁴

Gandhiji devised his constructive programme and setup a number of constructive work organizations to work it out in order to knit together in a common bond of fellowship the millions and weave the pattern of non-violent conduct into their lives. According to Joan Bondurant, the constructive programme is a positive aspect of *Satyagraha* in action, and is the concomitant of resistance action”.⁴ Gandhiji described constructive programmes as the permanent part of the non-violent effort. From this effort is created the capacity to offer non-violent resistance called non-cooperation and civil disobedience. This work would raise the status of people and bring home to them the power of non-violent social change for the ending of exploitation.⁶

Moreover, for a variety of reasons, not all could go to jails, but constructive work was within the reach of any one who was desirous of contributing his mite to the cause of the country.⁷ The constructive workers were Gandhiji's steel frame. They were the arteries through which the leadership kept in touch with the rural people. One of the secretes of Gandhiji's uncanny political

instinct was his contact with the people through the constructive workers. Constructive workers were sturdy secularists and their work for Hindu-Muslim unity helped to unite the people. The uplift of *Harijans* and *Advasis* by constructive workers made them self-reliant and enabled some of them to join the freedom struggle and in the struggle for their own social-economic development.

The constructive programmes if carried out in the right direction, Gandhiji believed would result in the ideal Sarvodaya Samaj. Constructive work as planned by Gandhiji are something that every one can participate in. If all kinds of people actively participate in the constructive programme, then it will provide a common experience and be a symbol of democratic common endeavour, it will bridge the gap between the classes and the masses.⁸

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