Chapter-II

Gandhian Approach to Rural Development

No doubt the history of rural development indicates that it is not entirely a new idea. However, the way, we interpret it to day, has become a new phenomenon. In ancient times, the pattern of life, as pointed out and observed by many, was quite co-operative and complementary. They contained the concept of rural development in embryonic form. There was no organizational apparatus, the life span of programme was co-terminus with that of the benefactor. In this respect India was not an exception.

However, no person other than Mahatma Gandhi, now designated as the person of the twentieth century and the man of the millennium, had a proper and clear-cut understanding of rural development. He believed and repeated times without numbers that real India had to be found not in its few cities but in its 7,00,000 villages. The Gandhian Perspective of rural development seeks all-round development of every individual. The whole structure is based on the principle of democratic decentralization. It involves rebuilding of every aspect of
human life, i.e., social, political, economic and envisages a society based on self-supporting and self-governing villages. Regarding the increasing interest in urbanization, Gandhi does not see any need for the developing countries to discard their foundation of village life to build up urban euphoria. In fact, he was so emphatic about retaining the base that he had to declare, “If the village perishes, India will perish too. It will be no more India. Her own mission in the world will get lost.”

In fact, Gandhi’s view of rural development is based on his approach to constructive programme, which was unique one. He started it first at Champaran in 1917 and later on at Sevagram (Wardha). Basically, constructive programme is a continuing programme, which may be updated with social and technological changes keeping in view the changing requirements. Accordingly, it must be noted here that constructive programme is quite dynamic and not static one. Therefore, the economic parameters contemplate an ‘economy of permanence’ rather an ‘economy of predation.’

to such a village economy of permanence. Centralization according to Gandhi, is not compatible and, it is ruled out as it cannot be sustained without adequate force and is inconsistent with non-violent structure of the society.

Accordingly, Gandhian approach to rural development is very dynamic and comprehensive and it looks that it is synonymous with national development. As such, it is so much integrated that it will be disastrous to disintegrate the same into different segments. Besides, Gandhi was not only a man of ideals and ideas but also a person of great practical wisdom. That is why his thought in one sphere essentially covers other spheres of life. The village and the poor were the main concern of India, and no development, whatsoever was possible, realized Gandhi, unless the two were alleviated and upgraded. As a result, he took the whole life as one and his approach was wholistic and integrated one. This would be possible only through ‘Gram Swaraj’ ( Village self-government ) for attainment of an ideal social order based on Gandhi’s eternal gospel of truth and non-

5. Ibid., 28-6-1942, Vol. IX, pp. 201-02.
violence as man is not born to live in isolation but is essentially a social animal independent and inter-dependent. Therefore, when Gandhi speaks of village collectively striving for a self-contained system, he is advocating ‘integrated area development’, to invoke a term from the armoury of modern planning experts. Like Dadabhai Naoroji, Marx and others, Gandhi was fully convinced that poverty was a British legacy and the main factor of rural under-development. During the Non-Co-operation Movement in 1922, he expressed:

“I came reluctantly to the conclusion that British connection had made India more helpless than she ever, was before, politically and economically....before the British advent, India spun and wove in her millions of cottages, just the supplement she needed for adding to her meagre agricultural resources.”

As a matter of fact these cottage industries were most vital for India’s existence and the same were destroyed and ruined by incredibly heartless and inhuman processes as described by English witnesses. Little did town-dwellers know how the semi-starved masses of India were slowly sinking

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to lifelessness. Little did they know that their miserable comfort represented the brokerage they got for the work they did for the foreign exploiter, that the profits and the brokerage were sucked from the masses. Little did they realize that government established by law in British India was carried on for this exploitation of the masses. No sophistry, no jugglery in figures could explain away the evidence that the skeletons in many villages presented to the naked eye. “I have no doubt whatsoever that both England and town-dwellers of India will have to answer, if there is a God above, for this crime against humanity is perhaps unequalled in history.”

He was not an advocate of the glorification of poverty but he was all for levelling the society. J. D. Sethi called “economic poverty moral collapse of the affluent. Affluence co-existing with poverty is an absolute theft.”

Gandhi was of the firm view that if we wanted Swaraj to be built on non-violence, we would have to give the villages their proper

Similarly, he pointed out that not only that we could not build non-violence on a factory civilization, but it could be build on self-contained villages as rural economy did eschew exploitation altogether and exploitation was the essence of violence.

The postulates of Swadeshi, Khadi, Trusteeship, Bread – labour (truth and non-violence being constant value parameters), non – exploitation, non – possession and equality were also rooted in the structure of our society, the religious and social faiths of people. In order to build up a just and equitable social order, the development of villages is a necessity. Gandhi’s view about village was neither narrow nor he intended to preach for keeping intact the old village devoid of sanitation having old rotten houses, etc. Rather he visualized villages as productivity centers, applying adaptable technologies and having skillful workers and excellent environment. Therefore, “Swadeshi is that spirit in us which restricts us to use and serve our immediate surroundings to the exclusion of the more remote. Thus, as for religion in order to satisfy the requirements of the

definition, I must restrict myself to my ancestral religion. That is, the use of my immediate religious surrounding. If I find it defective, I should serve it by purging it of its defects. In the domain of politics, I should make use of the indigenous institutions and serve them by curing them of their proved defects. In that of economics, I should use only things that are produced by my immediate neighbours and serve those industries by making them efficient that such Swadeshi, if reduced to practice, will lead to the millennium...”

The basic unit of development of economic and political activity visualized him as village or call it a manageable small group of people who would, in the ideal, be self-sufficient (in the matter of their vital requirements) as a unit and bound together in bonds of mutual cooperation and interdependence.

In Gandhi’s scheme, in the structure composed of innumerable villages, there are ever-widening never ascending circles. Life is not like a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. But it is like an oceanic circle, whose center is to be the individual, always ready to perish

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for the village, and the latter ready to perish for a circle of villages.\textsuperscript{14} Gandhi hoped, “The individual being pure, sacrifices himself for the family, the latter for the village, the village for the district, the district for the province, the province for the nation, the nation for all”,\textsuperscript{15} a hope in consonance with his notion of oceanic circle. According to Gandhi, the rural and urban areas have complimentary relationship. They are now two sectors representing two groups or classes of people pitted against each other.\textsuperscript{16}

Gandhi’s conception of village was not anchored on the modern (urban-industrial) notion of “development” but on the post-modern perspective of “quality of life”, which today’s men of ideas realized only after having the experience of the catastrophe wrought by modern urban industrialism.

Generally, village may be (i) a source of raw material, (ii) a market for goods produced in urban areas, (iii) an entity in itself. It cannot flourish under (i) and (ii) approach. The third system alone makes the

\textsuperscript{14} Harijan, 28-7-1946, Vol. X, No. 5, pp. 236 – 237.
\textsuperscript{15} Young India, 28-5-1931, Vol. XIII, No. 22, p. 123.
villages as conceived by me is as strong as the strongest. My imaginary village consists of 1000 souls. Such a unit can give good account of itself, if it is well organized on a basis of self-sufficiency.”

He ceaselessly insisted on a pattern of village life wherein the quality was the crux: “my ideal village will contain intelligent human beings. They will not live in dirt and darkness as animal. There will be neither plague, nor cholera nor small pox, no one will be idle, no one will wallow in luxury. Everyone will have to contribute his quota of manual labour.”

Gandhi wanted to turn the village from “dung heaps” into “model villages”, or into “tiny gardens of Eden.”

In Gandhi’s view of society, a capitalist holds property as a trustee and the labour works to his capacity and joins strike, if necessary, which has to be based on non-violence and truth. In fact Gandhi wanted exploitation-free society based on justice. He elaborated, “I shall work for

an India, in which the poorest shall feel that it is their country in whose making they have an effective voice; an India in which there shall be no high class and low class of people, an India in which all communities shall live in perfect harmony. There can be no room in such an India for the curse of the intoxicating drinks and drugs. Women will enjoy the same rights as men....This is the India of my dreams... I shall be satisfied with nothing else.”

In order to put this ideal in practice he advocated that the reconstruction of the villages along these lines should start immediately. Furthermore, he was of the firm view that “the reconstruction of the villages should not be organized on a temporary but permanent basis.”

Role of Traditions and Values: Gandhi was against those superstitions, beliefs, social taboos and casteism which hindered the development of the villages. On the other hand, he wanted rural distinctions but also on social equality and sense of dedication towards the uplift of poor classes, which will result in the strong rural base and ultimately strengthen the national economy itself. He argued, “…We have to disabuse them of their


22. Ibid., p. 98.
prejudice, their superstitions, their narrow outlook and we can do so in no other manner than that of staying amongst them and sharing their joys and sorrows and spreading education and intelligent information among them”.

**Role of Village Assembly or Village Panchayat:**

Mahatma Gandhi strongly pleaded for decentralization of economic and political power through the organization of village panchayats. He was of the opinion that if this system worked on scientific lines, it could not only build up the social and economic strength of countryside but also strengthen forces of national defence against the risk of foreign invasions.

Actually he wanted the Indian village to be self-sufficient to fulfil the essential needs of the village community. That is why he suggested that “Independence must begin at the bottom.” If the Panchayats have full powers they must be capable of understanding the day-to-day problems better and solving them through the collective wisdom of their own members rather than to seek outside help.

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23. Ibid., p. 92.
Accordingly, he was of the opinion that village Panchayats could not only understand the local problems better but also suggest the best solution to it as compared to the centrally based institutions.

Moreover, in a democratic form of government village bodies can play a very effective and important role. He very rightly argues, “True democracy cannot be worked by twenty men sitting at the center. It has to be worked from below by the people of every village.”

Sanitation and Pure Drinking Water:

Gandhi felt that the villagers were not clear about the meaning of sanitation. Though they kept their own houses clean but they were not interested in keeping the environment clean. As a result, disease could spring up due to lack of education about sanitation.

Accordingly, he pleaded for healthy environment for the villages. He felt the necessity of the ‘Rural Sanitation Programme’ for the all-round development and prosperity of the villages. Once, he wrote, “An ideal village will be so constructed as to lead itself to perfect sanitation. It will

have cottages with sufficient light and ventilation, built of a material obtainable within a radius of five miles. The cottages will have courtyards enabling householders to plant vegetables for domestic use and to house their cattle. The village lanes and streets will be free of all avoidable dust...."\textsuperscript{28}

However, Gandhi also realized that village sanitation was the most difficult task since no government could change the habits of people without their hearty co-operation. An awakening among the villagers was a must in this regard. He highlighted that the government could also join hands in the process of proper cleaning of tanks, wells, streets and lanes. There could also be a drainage system and proper arrangement for the disposal of dirt and refuse. He thought that this refuse and dirt could be turned into manure\textsuperscript{29}, so that every part of it could be utilized properly.

Rural sanitation is essential for healthy living because cleanliness is anti-dose to spreading of various communicable diseases. He writes, "I

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\textsuperscript{28} Gandhi, M. K., \textit{India of Dreams, op. cit.}, pp. 136-137.
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Gandhi wrote, “Every bone picked up is valuable from which useful articles can be crushed into rich manure.”
hold that where the rules of personal, domestic and public sanitation are strictly observed, due care is taken in the matter of diet and exercise, there should be no occasion for illness or disease."\textsuperscript{30}

Pure drinking water is a key to good health. To improve rural health, Gandhi felt the need of providing pure drinking water to all villages of the country.

**Significance of Education in Health and Hygiene:**

Generally it is seen that in the villages ignorance and neglect of the laws of health and hygiene are responsible for the majority of diseases. Right diet and balanced diet are necessary for healthy body, but villagers are usually not aware of it. Gandhi commented, ".... They give no thought as to how they eat. Let us not like most of them, cook anyhow, eat anyhow, live anyhow. Let us show them the ideal diet."\textsuperscript{31}

It is evident that healthy mind resides in a healthy body. For purity of mind, Gandhi suggested certain laws, such as: -

(i) Think the purest thoughts and banish all idle and impure thoughts.

\textsuperscript{30} Gandhi, M. K., Village Swaraj, op. cit., p. 184.

\textsuperscript{31} Gandhi, M. K., India of Dreams, op. cit., p. 92.
(ii) Breathe the freshest air day and night.

(iii) Establish a balance between bodily and mental work.

(iv) Stand erect, sit erect and be neat and clean in every one of your inner conditions.

(v) Eat to live for service of fellowmen. Don’t live for indulging yourselves. Hence your food must be just enough to keep your mind and body in good order. Man becomes what he eats.

(vi) Your water, food and air must be clean and you will not be satisfied with mere personal cleanliness that you will desire for yourself.32

By following these principles rural people will become healthier which will strengthen the whole nation.

**Education:**

Gandhi feels that literacy in itself is no education.33 It is the means through which one can be educated. He had a broader meaning for this term, he says, “By education I mean an all round drawing out the best in the child and man – body, mind and spirit.”34

33. Gandhi, M. K., Village Swaraj, op. cit., p. 80. He says, “Literacy is not the end of education, nor even the beginning.”
Though Gandhi was neither an academician nor an educationist in the rigid sense of the term; but he presented a new outlook regarding education before the world. He stressed that education should aim at human development without which we cannot solve the problems of nation or the world.

Similarly, education, he thinks should be a medium of social change and development. But at the same time it should serve as important factor in building up of the character of man.

Besides, Gandhi says that education is meant to transform village children into model villagers. That is why Gandhi introduced ‘Nai Talim’ (new education), which means education through handicrafts; which could provide both physical and mental exercise of the students. And to bring it in practice ‘village tools’ could be used while imparting education which would result in better understanding among the village.

35. Ibid., p. 188.
36. Ibid., p. 118. He comments, “Literary education is of no value if it is not able to build up a sound character.”
38. Ibid., p. 27. He says, “.... They need not slate and pencil and books but simple village tools....”
children.

Gandhi’s ‘basic education’ links the children, whether of the cities or the villages, “to all that is best suited to needs of villagers, we should take the Vidyapith to the villagers, we should convert it into a training school in order that we might be able to give practical training to teachers in terms of the needs of villagers.”39

Besides, he is in favour of free and compulsory Primary Education. He writes in village Swaraj, “The Course of Primary Education be extended at least to seven years.... It should equip boys and girls to earn their bread by the state guaranting employment in the vocations learnt or by buying their manufacture at prices fixed by the state.”40

Similarly, Gandhi laid great emphasis on the status of women and adult education41 of the village folks. He writes, “if I had charge of adult education, I should begin with opening the minds of the adult people to the greatness and vastness of their country.”42

40. Ibid., p. 79.  
42. Gandhi, M. K., Constructive Programme, op. cit., p. 16.
Thus Gandhi’s education aims at the development of physical, intellectual and moral spheres of man.

**Removal of Untouchability and Casteism:**

Though Gandhi idealized the ancient Hindu social order like Varnasharam in its pristine purity, but stoutly opposed untouchability which he considered to be “the greatest blot on Hinduism” and also against the Shastras. He also maintained the difference between Varnas and caste. “Varna refers to a person’s qualities of character and occupation – Caste deserves to be abolished, whereas varnas should be reformed.” Gandhi went further and also advocated inter-caste dining and even inter-caste marriages. He waged a war against untouchability throughout his life and at times staked his life. He led the movement for temple-entry for the Harijans and did a lot for them. To him Swaraj is a meaningless term if we desire to keep a fifth of our population under perpetual subjection and humiliation. He was disappointed a lot to see the poor plight of the so-called untouchables.

According to Gandhi, untouchability is a curse. It hinders the development of a nation. And since the so-called “Untouchables” live generally in villages, their development is largely affected. Gandhi says, “It
has stunned the growth of nearly 40 million human beings.”⁴³ Therefore, Gandhi gave a call to remove this evil practice.⁴⁴ He wanted to give them equal status and called untouchability a blot on Hinduism.

**Economic Equality:**

During Gandhi’s time economic inequality was the major cause of India’s under-development. He gave a call of economic equality. He did lot of efforts to abolish the eternal conflict of capital and labour through his writings and otherwise. He says, “...the levelling down of the few rich in whose hands is concentrated the bulk of the nation’s wealth on one hand, and the levelling up the semi-starved naked millions on the other.”⁴⁵ Working on the principle of Gandhi all will get equal opportunity so that the growth of the individual takes place in all spheres of life.⁴⁶ He reminded us that this economic equality, “ We not drop from heaven all of a sudden one fine morning.”⁴⁷ But we have to attain it gradually through

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43. Ibid., p. 9.
44. Ibid., p. 9. He says, “ At this time of the day it is necessary to debate upon the necessity of the removal of this blot and curse upon Hinduism.”
45. Ibid., p. 21.
46. Gandhi, M. K., Village Swaraj, op. cit., p. 37. He writes, “...given the opportunity, every human being has the same possibility for spiritual growth . ”
47. Gandhi, M. K., Constructive Programme, op. cit., p. 22.
However, Gandhi suggested equitable distribution since the equal distribution is difficult to achieve. His dream was that “the economic condition of India and for that matter of the world, should be such that no one under it should suffer for want of food and clothing.” Accordingly, Gandhi lived and died to achieve his goal.

**Swadeshi:** Swadeshi has been one of the most important principles of Gandhi’s economic thought as there exists a relationship between this doctrine and others which are fundamental doctrines of Gandhian economics such as non-violence, non-exploitation, non-possession, bread – labour and trusteeship. The most important principles which impressed Gandhi, and which even later became the guiding spirit behind all his ideas, was the principle of Sarvodaya-the good of all. As a matter of fact, this principle originated out of his reading of John Ruskin’s book ‘Unto This Last’ which advocated that the good of individual is contained in the good of all. Gandhi desired that the goods should percolate even to the last of the socio-economic ladder – the poorest of the poor. In this respect, the rural poor cannot be neglected. Given the goal of Sarvodaya, Gandhi was

sometimes confronted with the question of what kind of economic system the country should evolve for itself. It was in this context that his wider social ideas of Swaraj and village Swaraj, truth and non-violence inspired him to evolve an economic system which was consistent with his political and moral philosophy. Accordingly, from the idea of Swaraj emerged the ideas of Swadeshi and self-sufficiency. And, from the principle of truth and non-violence emerged a service of economic ideas like non-exploitation, non-possession, trusteeship, bread labour and so on. All these ideas which in fact having originated under different contexts, formed the founding pillars of his economic order.

Gandhi firmly believed that Swadeshi could play an important role in the process of rural development. And, Gandhi rightly believed that the economic good of all was in following the principle of Swadeshi or self-reliance and self-sufficiency. Though he used the principle of Swadeshi earlier as a political weapon to boycott the foreign goods, especially of the British, it in fact, acquired economic overtones gradually.\textsuperscript{49} It must be noted here that the concept of Swadeshi inculcated gradually in the minds

of Indians the imperative and the value of self-sufficiency, both at the national and at the local (Village) level. Later on he used this concept along with the other economic ideas, namely, decentralization as a technique of building an economic system which was purely Indian and mass based. In respect of rural development his understanding and approach to Swadeshi seems to be very dynamic, scientific and more convincing. All that Swadeshi meant to him was a high degree of self-reliance at various levels—individual, social, political and of course economic which is essential for rural reconstruction. Being a dynamic concept, Swadeshi is much more relevant and significant in the present context in which multinational companies are entering in every nook and corner and the villages of developing countries are not an exception in this field. To avoid the unnecessary exploitation of the rural people, the use of Swadeshi is quite useful and significant one. It would be futile to think that the days of Swadeshi are gone in the present days of globalization and multinationals. No doubt the developing countries need rapid economic development, however, it is not possible without inculcating the spirit of Swadeshi, self-reliance, self-governing and self-confidence. Accordingly, Swadeshi is one
of the most important components of rural development in Gandhian planning.

Khadi: "Khadi is the Sun of the village solar system. The planets are the various industries which can support Khadi in return for the heat and the substance they derive from it."\(^{50}\) Gandhi introduced Khadi not only for the development of the villages but also for the economic freedom and equality of all in the country. According to him, it was a "symbol of unity of Indian Humanity."\(^{51}\)

He writes in his Constructive Programme, "Khadi mentality means decentralization of the production and distribution of the necessaries of life. Therefore, the formula so far evolved is, every village to produce all its necessaries and a certain percentage in addition for the requirements of the cities."\(^{52}\)

Moreover, production of Khadi itself gives birth to various small scale cotton industries such as cotton growing, picking, ginning, cleaning, carding, silvering, spinning, sizing, dyeing, preparing the wrap and the woof, weaving and washing. These, with the exception of dyeing are

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\(^{50}\) Mani, Mahajan P., and Bharthi K. S., op. cit., p. 167.
\(^{51}\) Gandhi, M. K., Village Swaraj, op. cit., p. 131.
\(^{52}\) Gandhi, M. K., Constructive Programme, op. cit., p. 12.
essential processes. Thus, production of Khadi can bring employment for many rural people.

**Village Industries:** Gandhi felt that villages were on the verge of destruction owing to the disappearance of village industries. They could be revived only by a revival of village industries. Among these industries the spinning wheel occupies center. Village economy, he thinks cannot be complete without the essential village industries such as hand-grinding, hand pounding, soap making, paper making, match making tanning, oil pressing, etc. Thus these various industries could solve the problem of unemployment among villagers. Actually, Gandhi was anxious to provide full employment to every able-bodied citizen and these could be achieved by “organizing village and cottage industries in the countryside in an efficient manner.”

He wanted to convert every village into a self-sufficient and self-

54. Gandhi, M. K., India of My Dreams, op. cit., p. 53. He writes, “To them God can only appear as bread and butter, well, the peasants of India were getting their bread from their soil. I offered them spinning wheel in order they may get butter.”
contained unit through the revival of village industries.\footnote{Ibid., p. 31. He says, “Industrialisation on a mass scale will necessarily lead to passing or active exploitation of the villagers as the problems of competition and marketing come in, therefore, we have to concentrate on the village being self-contained manufacturing mainly for use.”} In Harijan, he wrote, “The Village Industries Association is an experiment in willing bread labour.”\footnote{Harijan, 29-6-35, op. cit., Vol. III, No. 20, p. 156.}

Some other village industries were dairying, ghani oil, gur and Khandari, bee-keeping, tanning, hand made paper, ink etc. He also stressed the need of village exhibitions in order to flourish village industries.

**Heavy Industry:** He was against heavy industry so long as it hindered the progress and development of village industries. Charan Singh wrote that clear principle that he would have liked India to follow was that heavy or capita-intensive industry shall be established only for production of goods which could not be manufactured otherwise, and large scale mechanized projects undertaken only for purposes which could not be carried out by human labour on a small or cottage scale.

He was not against mechanization as such, but he was against the craze for it. He felt that with it, it would concentrate production...
in particular areas.\textsuperscript{57}

\textbf{Agriculture:} The prosperity of not only the villages but the whole of the country largely depends upon agriculture. Agriculture has always been the basic activity among the rural people. Gandhi wrote, “Years ago I read a poem in which the peasant is described as the father of the world. If God is the Provider, the cultivator is his hand.”\textsuperscript{58}

But it is very sad in developing countries, the condition of villagers is very poor. Gandhi laid stress on improving the condition of these villagers. He said, “I am, therefore, thinking of ways and means of improving the condition of the people through a rehabilitation of agriculture, cattle breeding and all other village industries. My problem will be solved if I succeed even in half a dozen villages, for as is the part, so is the whole.”\textsuperscript{59}

Gandhi wanted to improve agricultural sector so that the village becomes self-sufficient and import of food grains from outside could also be avoided as much as possible. Growing of cotton, oil-seeds, sugarcane

\textsuperscript{57} Gandhi, M. K., India of My Dreams, op. cit., p. 30.
\textsuperscript{58} Gandhi, M. K., Village Swaraj, op. cit., p. 93.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., pp. 92 - 93.
etc. could be helpful for the village industries which could generate employment opportunities for the villagers.

Gandhi was against large farms as they were not in accordance with the social order. He thought of restructuring villages. He felt that surplus land should be given to the landless farmers. The small farmers themselves cannot bring rural prosperity so there is a need of co-operative farming.

The village should create its own stock of manure through better disposal of human, animal and farm waste.\(^60\) Besides, there is need of proper irrigation facilities. Electricity becomes essential for pumping water from the rivers and tanks for agriculture. Gandhi identified himself with an ordinary villager and remarked, “The remedy is to identify ourselves with the poor villagers and to help him make the land yield its plenty, help him produce what we need and confine ourselves to use what he produces, live as he lives, and persuade him to take more rational ways of diet and living.”\(^61\)

**Rural Electrification:** He had a selective approach towards electrification.

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60. Ibid., p. 14. He writes, “The daily waste, judiciously composted, returns to the soil in the form of golden manure causing a saving of millions of rupees and increasing manifold the total yield of grains and pulses.”

He was in favour of it as long as it did not curtail the employment opportunities of the villagers. However, he strongly felt that electricity would immensely improve the life of a villager by providing him water for drinking and irrigation, and electricity for domestic and public streets.

**Village Transport:** Motor cars were in existence during Gandhi’s time and he was fully aware of their benefits. At the same time he was also aware of the numerous uses of bullocks’ carts for the villagers. In Harijan, Gandhi quotes Shri Ishwarlal S. Amin of Baroda, “The machine will neither consume grass nor will it yield manure. Then the villagers has to have his bullocks; in any case he has his grass. And if he has a cart, he is maintaining the village carpenter and the blacksmith; and if he is keeping a cow, he is maintaining a hydrogenation plant converting vegetable oil into solid butter or ghee and also at the same time a bullock manufacturing machine—thus serving a twofold purpose.”

**Prohibition:** Mahatma Gandhi had declared many years before independence, that “if I were appointed dictator even for one hour for all India, the first thing I would do would be to close without compensation all

liquor shops." He believed that liquor was the invention of the devil.

Liquor has always been a curse for the nation and the mankind at large; but as for as rural people are concerned it ruins them very badly. There was two major reasons for this. Firstly, the villager, with his meager resources, can afford liquor by sacrificing hard earned resources meant for necessities of life. In certain cases the daily total could be at the cost of a meal of the whole family. Secondly, the deterioration of health due to the consumption of liquor as also the fatigue set thereof, could seriously hamper him by reducing his capacity to work as also the quality of labour. He pointed out that medical men could make an effective contribution to remove this evil. He emphasised in his Constructive Programme that Congress Committee could open recreation booths where the tired labourer would rest his limbs, get healthy and cheap refreshments, and find suitable games. Accordingly, he was a staunch supporter of prohibition.

**Government and the Villagers:** It has been observed that the villagers are very simple people and are not aware of choosing the right path. So the

64. Gandhi, M. K., Constructive Programme, op. cit., p. 11.
government officials should guide them the best way suited for their interest. Villagers often go after the small benefits but government officials should suggest them the way to large benefits for whole village according to their needs. He advised that each Provincial Government should tell the villagers that they manufacture their own Khaddar (rough cloth) for their own use. This brings in automatic local production and distribution.  

If Gandhi wanted villages to become self-sufficient, he also suggested that government should help the village to become one by providing raw material, for example good quality of cotton seeds or cotton for the production of Khadi. Similarly, government officials should guide the rural people to manufacture various things required for the village use. They should also organize guiding and training programmes as without the basic training the villagers are being starved for education. The initiative of the Government could help the villagers a lot.

**Students and the Villages:** Gandhi believed that students can perform very important and significant role in transforming the village environment. Therefore, students should begin village work even when they are studying.

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Especially during the vacations they should stay in the villages, conduct classes for the adults, teach them the rules of sanitation and attend to the ordinary cases of illness. They should themselves work with the villagers and as well as teach them about the value of every minute. However, the students of Graduates Volunteer Center of Thammasat university are doing well in this respect and they should continue this service in future also. Their interaction with the village people is in right perspective and helping them in various ways.

Accordingly, students should work in all walks of village life such as economic, health and hygiene, sanitation and eradication of diseases by keeping the village clean. And for this, manual and hand labour is required from them. Social aspect includes that they should persuade the people to give up bad habits and customs such as untouchability, infant marriages, unequal matches, drink and drug evil and many local superstitions. And for the political sphere a student is expected to study the political grievances of the villagers and teach them the dignity of freedom,

67. Gandhi, M. K., Rebuilding our Villages, op. cit., p. 94. He comments, “The village work I have mentioned is easily the best form of recreation and light instruction. It is obviously the best preparation for dedication to exclusive village service after finishing the studies.”
self—reliance and self—help.

**Women and the Villages:** To remove the evil of child marriage, an awakening among the village women is required. “It is the mothers who have to be educated to understand their privilege and duty of refusal.” But this can be done by the women only. So he felt that All India Women Conference (A.I.W.C.) should work for the upliftment of rural women. The matter of violence against women should be looked into very seriously to check their humiliation, harassment and physical torture. The village women should be given due respect and be educated in health, hygiene and other domestic matters.

**Cow Protection and Rural Development:** Mahatma Gandhi stressed the urgent need for developing cow wealth as the base of our rural economy. It is cow who gives us wholesome milk, useful bullocks for farming and also plentiful organic manure for enriching the soil. Machines can neither give milk nor manure and rural economy is affected with it. Hence cow can serve dual purpose. No doubt, now new technological agricultural implements have taken the place of bullocks, yet most of the farmers depend upon their wealth of cow and bulls for milk and ploughing

purposes respectively.

**Sarvodaya**: Gandhi’s plan of rural reconstruction is based on Sarvodaya meaning welfare of all; which emphasizes;

(a) that the good of the individual is contained in the good of all;

(b) that a lawyer’s work has the same value as the barber’s work in as much as all have the same right to earn their livelihood from their work;

(c) that the life of a labourer i.e. the life of a tiller and the handicraftsman is the life worth living.

So with these ideas in mind Gandhi wanted to reframe villages. He wanted to turn every village into a model village. He was immensely pained to realize that village-folk did not get fresh air though they were surrounded by fresh air, they did not get fresh food though they were surrounded by the freshest foods. He commented, “I am talking like a missionary in this matter of food, because my mission is to make village a thing of beauty.”

He worked a lot for the downtrodden people of the country. Being a practical idealist he always stressed that the reconstruction of the villages

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See also Harijan, 1-3-35, op. cit., Vol. III, No. 6, p. 21.
along these lines should begin immediately. Moreover, the reconstruction of the village should not be organized on a temporary but permanent basis. Besides, Gandhi's ideal village as noted earlier, contains intelligent human beings with good health. They are not expected to live in dirt and darkness as animals. Men and women are free and able to develop their all-round personality in the world. There should be neither plague, nor cholera, nor smallpox; and no one will be idle and even allowed luxury. Everyone is supposed to contribute his quota of manual labour. It is a village which would, then, consist of village poets, village artists, village architects, linguistics and research workers. They will be like tiny gardens of Eden where dwell highly intelligent folk whom no one can deceive or exploit.

By initiating a great deal in respect of rural development Gandhi has contributed a lot and he did remind the power that be regarding the neglect of the rural areas and the plight of the poor people. Later on it became the psyche of the intellectuals and realized their guilt. After independence, the voters in the rural areas (the villagers) became increasingly more aware of the power they could think or wield. Here Gandhi becomes quite relevant because rural reconstruction was impossible without rural development and rural education. He rightly believed that
only non-violent mass action by conscious and fully disciplined Satyagraha 
and education could change the present exploitative and oppressive social 
order. The problem is that the village culture has also been a much 
neglected item and neither village self-government nor village self-
sufficiency will be real without the solid influence of village culture. The 
study of village traditions and habits, village institutions and history, study 
of folk songs, folk tales and folk art, recovery and improvement of artistic 
handicrafts and village art in general; organization of village festivals and 
important religious occasions to strengthen the unity of village life without 
distinction of caste and community; organization of village libraries, 
village museums and village study circles; provision of open air recreations 
like games, folk dance, excursions etc. can be taken up for rural awakening. 
In order to achieve all this successfully, we require a village movement and 
that is exactly what Gandhi did. Even in his last testament before his last 
moments of his life, he visualized to form ‘Lok Sevak Sangh’ to usher a 
village movement.

The beauty of Gandhi’s approach is that he keeps man at 
the center of all reconstruction and development. As a matter of fact man 
cannot grow in vacuum because he lives and grows with his fellow human
beings and nature. Accordingly, unless he develops a suitable productive technique which can ensure the development of such a spiritual man in harmony with his community and nature, he is likely to face crisis after crisis. There is a close relationship between technology and ideology. In the traditional archives of knowledge, religion, sociology and economics have all been reserved their separate and exclusive spheres. Man has been divided into various watertight compartments. The left hand is not to know what the right does. Nature does not recognize such divisions as she deals with all life as a whole. Hence, Gandhi’s scheme of rural development is inspired by an integrated approach to life. It does not consist only economic development but also concerns social, political, educational, medical and cultural development. His quest was to relate our spiritual and higher self back to life so that the daily routine of mundane existence may be regulated in accordance with the dictates of our better self, and to find a way of life that will lend purpose for existence and action to such as have no use for the present day traditional religion because of its other worldliness from humdrum of every day life.

When we try to trace out the ideological foundation of Gandhi’s approach to rural development, we have found that Gandhi’s
Hind Swaraj is the master key to think and discuss the main issue. Hind Swaraj has been considered the emancipation of the villages from exploitation. He, however, faced a dilemma. At one level, he was terribly concerned with the problems of poverty and unemployment and he knew fully well that the Western pattern of industrialization involved per capita investment of a magnitude which India could hardly afford to generate unless it took to authoritarian or totalitarian methods. Even then, it could not be possible to provide employment to all those unemployed at one stroke. Even at a modest calculation, the investment of capital was bound to be incalculable. Hence, he was convinced that the problem of poverty and unemployment cum under-employment could not be tackled through the western method of large-scale industries, which by very nature tended to displace human labour, which was in abundance in India. It is in this context or background of ideology and pragmatic considerations which compelled Gandhi to take up the work of rural reconstruction and rural development and revive cottage and village industries. But he was not in favour of static and archaic mode of production prevalent in villages. On the other hand, he welcomed every improvement in the village craft if it is let to increase in productivity without creating unemployment among the
people. Once he announced a big reward for those who would give an improved design of the spinning wheel. He was even prepared to accept the use of energy, i.e., electricity etc., if it could be useful for village industries, in case the villages owned the plant.

The ongoing analysis reveals that Gandhi's scheme of rural development is not his personal fad or an irrelevant philosophy of development. In his view, the so-called under-developed nations suffering from chronic poverty and unemployment would never be able to solve them unless they followed an altogether different development pattern and different technology with lesser investment of capital labour-intensive character to ward off present civilizational crisis. Therefore, Gandhi's approach to rural development is quite significant and relevant for all times to come, because his approach is quite logical, dynamic, scientific and moreover practical one. He himself experienced and observed the hardships faced by the villagers. Poverty, unemployment and illiteracy are the basic problems which require immediate attention for their eradication and Gandhi's focus has always been to reduce their extent to the minimum. Villages are the backbone of a country which must be strengthened for a strong and healthier nation.
As a matter of fact, Gandhi’s philosophy of development revolves around man, society and nature and their respective and simultaneous development. Accordingly, he had a philosophy of work, wealth, happiness and satisfaction of man in line with the religious and ethical philosophies of the East as well as of the West. His philosophy, in fact, was governed by two fundamental and inter-related principles—truth and non-violence. In recent years, his vision of life, society and civilization has been increasingly shared and practised in various parts of India and the world including Thailand with reference to several basic and contingent problems, like poverty, violence, discrimination based on caste, colour and creed, ecology, centralization of wealth and power. This has created a tremendous interest in the people to know and understand his philosophy of development.

The above analysis clearly shows that Gandhi’s view of development is quite convincing and satisfactory. In his autobiography he had clearly explained that to see the universal and all pervading spirit of truth face to face one must be able to love the lowliest of creation as oneself and one must reduce himself to zero. In this respect, Gandhi has
given the Talisman to the planners, policy-makers and all those who matter in the development process which says:

“I will give you a *talisman*. Whenever you are in doubt or when the self become too much with you, apply the following test. Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man whom you may have seen and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him. Will he gain anything by it? Will it restore him to a control over his own life and destiny? In other words, will it lead to Swaraj for the hungry and spiritually starving millions? Then you will find your doubts and your self melting away.”