CHAPTER – III

GANDHIJI’S ECONOMIC IDEAS
ECONOMIC EQUALITY:

All must have an equal opportunity. Give the opportunity, every human being has the same possibility for spiritual growth.¹

I cannot picture to myself a time when no man shall be richer than other. But I do picture for myself a time when the rich will spurn to enrich themselves at the expense of the poor and the poor will cease to envy the rich. Even in a most perfect world, we shall fact to avoid inequalities, but we can and must avoid strife and bitterness. There are numerous examples extent of the rich and the poor living. In perfect friendliness we have but to multiply such instances.²

Gandhiji do not believe in dead uniformity. ‘All men are born equal and free’ is not nature’s law in the literal sense. All men are not born equal in intellect, for instance, the doctrine of equality will be vindicated if those who have superior intellect will use if not for self-advancement at the expense of others, but for the service of those who are less favoured in that respect than they.³

Economic equality must never be supposed to mean possession of an equal amount of worldly goods by everyone. It does mean, however, that everyone will have a proper house to live in, sufficient and balanced food to eat. It also means that the cruel
inequality that obtains today will be removed by purely non-violent means.4

Economic equality of my conception does not mean that everyone would literally have the same amount, it simply means that everybody should have enough for his or her needs the elephant needs a thousand times more food than the amount, but that is not an indication of inequality. So the real meaning of economic equality is to each according to his need. That is the definition of Marx, if a single man demanded as much as a man with wife and four children, that would be a violation of economic equality.

Let no one try to justify the glaring difference between the classes and the masses, the prince and the pauper, by saying that the former need more that will be idle sophistry and a travesty of my argument. The contrast between the rich and the poor today is a painful right. The poor village are exploited by the foreign Government and also by their own countrymen the city dwellers. They produce the food and go hungry. They produce milk and their children have to go without it. It is disgraceful. Everyone must have balanced diet, a decent house to live in, facilities for the education. Of one's children and adequate medical relief. That constitutes Gandhi's picture of economic equality.

"I do not want to taboo everything above and beyond the bare
necessaries, but they must come after the essential needs of the poor are satisfied. First things must come first".\(^5\)

Gandhi's ideal is equal distribution, but so far as he could see, it is not to be realized. He therefore worked for equitable distribution.\(^6\)

The real implication of equal distribution is that each man shall have the where withal to supply all his natural needs and no more. A society based on non-violence cannot nurture any other ideal. "To the same extent as we progress towards our goal, we shall find contentment and happiness, and to that extent, too, shall we have contributed towards the bringing into being of a non-violent society".\(^7\)

**Supremacy of Man: Full employment:**

"The supreme consideration is man".\(^8\) Every human being has a right to live and therefore to find the where withal to feed himself and where necessary to clothe and house himself. But for this very simple performance assistance is needed from economists or from their laws".\(^9\)

"Through Khadi, we were struggling to establish the supremacy of man in the place of the supremacy of power-driven machine over him".\(^10\)
“We must utilize all available human labour before we entertain the idea of employing mechanical power”.

“Real planning consists in the best utilization of the whole manpower of India and the distribution of the raw products of India in her numerous, villages instead of sending them outside and rebuying finished articles at fabulous prices”.

“Every human being is a machine, only it should be kept oiled and in proper trim. That is what I am trying to do”.

“The hungry millions ask for one poem, invigorating food. They cannot be given it. They must earn it. And they can earn only by the sweat of their brow”.

“To a people famishing and idle, the only acceptable form in which God can dare appear is work and promise of food as wages”.

Gandhiji dared not take before them the message of God. “I may as well place before the dog over there the message of God as before those hungry millions, who have no luster in their eyes and whose only God is their bread. I can take before them a message of God only by taking the message of sacred work before them”.

“We should be ashamed of resting, or having a square meal, so long as there is one able-bodies man or woman without work or food”.
According to me the economic constitution of India and for the matter of that the world, should be such that no one under it should suffer from want 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 necessaries of life remain in 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. Their monopolization by any country, nation or group of persons would be unjust. “The neglect of this simple principle is the cause of the destitution that we witness today not only in this unhappy land but other parts of the world too”.18

Swadeshi:

Swadeshi is that spirit in us which restricts us to the use and service of our immediate surroundings to the exclusion of the more remote. Thus, as for religion, in order to satisfy the requirements of the definition, Gandhi restricted himself to his ancestral religion. That is, the use of his immediate religious surrounding. If had found it defective, I should have sent it by purging it of its defects.

In the domain of politics, Gandhi said that he should make use of the indigenous institutions and serve them by curing them of their proved defects. He thought of using only things that are produced by
my immediate neighbours and serve those industries by making them efficient and complete where they might be found wanting. It is suggested that such Swadeshi, if reduced to practice, will lead to the millennium.

Much of the deep poverty of the masses in India is due to the ruinous departure resources from Swadeshi in the economic and industrial life. If not an article of commerce had been brought from outside India, she would be today a land flowing with milk and honey. But that was not to be said that Indians were greedy and so was England. The connection between England and India was based clearly upon an error.

The Swadeshi doctrine is that, it would be the duty of everybody to find out neighbours whom can be supplied things where they do not know how to proceed, assuming that there are neighbours who are in want of healthy occupation. Then every village of India will almost be a self-supporting and self contained unit, exchanging only such necessary commodities with other village as are not locally producible. This may all sound nonsensical. Well, India is a country of nonsense. It is nonsensical to parch one's throat with thirst when a kindly Mohammedan is ready to offer pure water to drink.

It has often been urged that India cannot adopt Swadeshi in the economic life at any rate. Those who advance this objection do not
look upon — swadeshi as a rule of life. With them it is a mere patriotic effort — not to be made if it involved any self denial swadeshi, as defined here, is a religious discipline to be undergone in utter disregard of the physical discomfort it may cause to individuals. Under its spell the deprivation of a pin of a needle, because these are not manufactured in India, need cause no terror. A swadeshist will learn to do without hundreds of things which today he considers necessary.

Gandhi's urged that swadeshi is the only doctrine consistent with the law of humility and love. It is arrogance to think of launching out to serve the whole of India when he was hardly able to serve even his own family. It were better to concentrate his effort upon the family and consider that through them — 'I was serving the whole nation, and, if you will, the whole of humanity' said Gandhi. This is humility and it is love. The motive will determine the quality of the act. As for instance, he might accept an employment which enables one to extort money from people.

Even swadeshi like any other good thing can be ridden to death if it is made a fetish. That is a danger which must be guarded against. To reject foreign manufactures, merely because they are foreign and to go on wasting national time and money in the promotion in one's country of manufactures for which it is not suited, would be criminal folly and a negation of the swadeshi ill — will towards the
Swadeshism is not a cult of hatred. It is a doctrine of selfless service, that has its roots in the purest Ashimsa and love.\textsuperscript{19}

**Khadi and Hand-spinning:**

Khadi connotes the beginning of economic freedom and equality of all in the country. It must be taken with all its implications. It means wholesale swadeshi mentality, a determination to find all the necessaries of life in India and that too through the labour and intellect of the villagers. The letter will be largely self-contained and will voluntarily serve the cities of India and even the outside world in so far as it benefits both the parties.

This needs a revolutionary change in the mentality and task of many. Easy though the non-violent way is in many respects, it is very difficult in many others. It vitally touches the life of every single Indian, makes him feel a glow with the possession of a power that has lain hidden within himself, and makes him proud of his identity with every of the ocean of Indian humanity.

"Khadi to me is the symbol of unity of Indian humanity, of its economic freedom and equality and, therefore, ultimately in the poetic expression of Jawaharlal Nehru, the livery of India’s freedom".\textsuperscript{20}
Village Industries:

"Now I have no historical proof, but I believe that there was a time in India when village economics were organized on the basis of such non-violent occupations, not on the basis of the rights of man but on the duties of man, those who engaged themselves in such occupations did earn their living, but their labour contributed to the good of the community. A carpenter, for instance ministered to the needs of the village farmer. He got no cash payment, but was paid in kind by the villagers, they could be injustice, even in this system, but it would be reduced to a minimum".21

Bit by bit village people are being confined only to the hand-to-mouth business of scratching the earth. Few know today that agriculture in the small and irregular holdings of India is not a paying proposition. The villagers live a lifeless life. Their life is a process of slow starvation. They are burdened with debts.

Mechanization is good when the hands are too few for the work intended to be accomplished. It is an evil when there are more hands than required for the work, as is the case in India.

The way to take work to the villagers is not through mechanization but that it lies through revival of the industries they have hitherto followed.22
"We shall have to see that the villagers become first of all self-contained and then cater for the needs of the city-dwellers".23

I am not asking the city dwellers to go to and live in the villagers. But I am asking them to render unto the villagers what is due to them. "Is there any single raw material that the city-dwellers can obtain except from the villagers? If they cannot why not teach him to work on it himself, as he used to before and as he would do now but for our exploiting inroads".24

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 sustenance they derive from it. Without it, the other industries cannot grow. "But during my last tour I discovered that, without the revival of the other industries".25

"The pursuit of the charkha must become mainspring of manifold other activities like village industries".26

Gandhi regarded charkha as the centre of village uplift. In addition, the worker will have to see what other village crafts can prosper in his village. The first in order among these crafts will be the bullock-oil-press, our workers would have to know its technique which has now been scientifically improved at Maganwadi. Another industry which may be introduced is hand made paper.
Next to oil and hand made paper the hand-chakki (grinding stone) a vital thing in every village must be reviewed. Similarly in regard to rice, “we must get our people in the villages to take to hand-pounding of rice or hand chakkis for husking paddy, for it is a well-established fact that the white polished rice put out by mills is harmful to health”.

Efforts must be put in with the objective of allround village uplift. Even if the present activities are to be slackened or reduced to nought for sometime on account of these changes, it does not matter. Some sentiment has been located about khadi among the people. But if there is some error in what is told the people about the significance of khadi it is to be rectified.

“I would ask city-dwellers to produce their own khadi. I would forgo the temptation to supply khadi to them. We shall go and settle in the villages. In case workers went to leave us on account of this change we shall let them go. (Unless our head and heart are converted to this extent we cannot achieve the desired result. By decentralizing our works as much as possible, we shall free ourselves from day to day khadi work completely. Thereafter we shall concentrate our energy and attention on the other activities or crafts carried out in the vicinity of the village we settle in. (Only then will the real substance
of our work be realized. Today our main concern should be to lay the foundation for this work as deep as possible.28

"I am 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."29

**Decentralised Economy:**

Gandhiji suggest that, if India is to evolve along non-violent lines, it will have to decentralize many things. Centralization cannot be sustained and defended without adequate force. Simple homes from which there is nothing to take away require no policing; the places of the rich must have strong guards to protect them against dacoity. So must huge factories. Rurally organized India will run less risk of foreign invasion than urbanized India, well equipped with military, novel and air forces.30

"You cannot build non-violence on a factory civilization, but it can be built on self contained villages. Rural economy as I have conceived it, eschews exploitation altogether, and exploitation is the essence of violence."31
"I must dissent from the view that the core of planning is centralization. Why should not decentralization lend itself to planning as well as centralization".32

"The end to be sought is human happiness combined with full mental and moral growth. I use the adjective moral as synonymous with spiritual. This end can be achieved under decentralization. Centralization as a system is inconsistent with a non-violent structure of society".33

Dignity of labour: Bread labour:

"God created man to work for his food and said that those who ate without work were thieves".34

"Bodily sustenance should come from bodily labour and intellectual labour is necessary for the culture of the mind. Division of labour there will necessarily be, but it will be a division into intellectual labour to be confined to one class and bodily labour confined to another class".35 "You must teach the people to labour with their hands and realize the dignity of work".36

"Leisure is good and necessary up to a point only. God created, man to eat his bread in the sweat of the brow and I respect of our being able to produce all that we want, including our foodstuffs, out of a conjurey's hat".37
If all laboured for their bread and no more, then there is enough food and enough leisure for all. Then there would be no cry of over-population, no disease and no such misery as seen around. Such labour will be the highest form of sacrifice. Men will no doubt do many other things either through their bodies or through their minds, but all this will be labour of love for the common good. There will then be no rich and no poor, none high and none low, no touchable and no untouchable.

This may be an unattainable ideal. But that doesn't wear that peace should cease to strive for it. Even if, without fulfilling the whole law of sacrifice, that is the physical labour is performed enough for the daily bread, men should go a long way towards the ideal.

"If we did so, our wants could be minimized, our food would be simple. We should then eat to live, not live to eat. Let anyone who doubts the accuracy of his proposition try to sweat for his bread, he will derive the greatest relish from the productions of his labour, improve his health, and discover that many things he took were superfluities." 38

"Let me not be misunderstood. I do not discount the value of intellectual labour, but no amount of it is any compensation for bodily labour which everyone of us is born to give for the common good of all. It may be, often is, infinitely superior to bodily labour but it never is or can be a substitute for it, even as intellectual food, through for superior
to the grains we eat, never can be a substitute for them. Indeed, without the products of the earth, those of the intellect would be an impossibility”.39

Intelligent bread labour is any day the highest form of social service.

The adjective ‘intelligent’ has been prefixed to labour in order to show that labour to be social service must have that definite purpose behind it. Otherwise every labourer can be said to render social service. He does in a way, but that is meant there is something much more than that. A person who labours for the general good all serves society and is worthy of his hire.40

Compulsory obedience to a master is a state of slavery, willing obedience to one’s father is the glory of sonship. Similarly, compulsory obedience to the law of bread labour breeds poverty, disease and discontent. It is a state of slavery, willing obedience to it must bring contentment and health. And it is health which is real wealth, not pieces of silver and gold.41

“My ahimsa not tolerate the idea of giving a free meal to a healthy person who has not worked for it in some honest way, and if I had the power, I would stop every sadavatara where free meals are given. It has degraded the nation and it has encouraged laziness, idleness, hypocrisy and even crime. Such misplaced charity adds
nothing to the wealth of the country, whether material or spiritual, and gives a false sense of meritoriousness to the donor. How nice and wise it would be if the donor were to open institutions where they would give means under healthy, clean surroundings to men and women who would work for them. I personally think that the spinning wheel or any of the processes that cotton has to go through will be an ideal occupation. But if they will not have that, they may choose any other work; only the rule should be 'no labour, no meal'.

The place of machinery:

"Machinery has its place. It has come to stay. But it must not be allowed to displace the necessary human labour. An improved plough is a good thing. But if by some chance, one man could plough up by some mechanical invention of his the whole of the land of India, and control all the agricultural produce and if the millions had no other occupation, they would starve, and being idle, they would become dones, as many have already become." 

"That use of machinery is lawful which subserves the interest of all".

"I would unhesitatingly say 'yes'; but I would add that scientific truths and discoveries should first of all cease to be mere instruments of greed. I am aiming, not at "you are against this machine age, I see". To say that is to caricature my views. I am not
against machinery as such, but I am totally opposed to it when it masters use”.

“You would not industrialise India? Gandhiji would indeed, in my sense of term. The village communities should to the Indian towns and cities all their wants. India become impoverished when our cities became foreign markets and began to drain the villages dry by dumping cheap and shoddy goods from foreign lands. “You would then go back to the natural economy”.

“Yes, otherwise I should go back to the city. I am quite capable of running a big enterprise, but I deliberately sacrificed the ambition, not as a sacrifice, but because my heart rebelled against it. For I should have no share in the spoliation of the nation which is being on from day to day. But I am industrializing the village in a different way”.

When production and consumption both become localized, the temptation to speed up production, indefinitely and at any price, disappears.

“Then, you do not envisage mass production as an ideal future of India?”

“Oh yes, mass production, certainly, but not based on force. After, the message of the spinning wheel is that. It is mass
production, but mass production in people's own houses. If you multiply individual production to millions of times would it not give you 'mass production' on a tremendous scale? But I quite understand that your "mass production" is a technical term for production by the fewest possible number through the aid of highly complicated machinery. I have said to myself that is wrong. My machinery must be of the most elementary type which I can put in the homes of the millions.⁴⁶

The evil of industrialism:

Industrialisation on a mass scale will necessarily lead to passive or active exploitation of the villages as the problems of competition and marketing come in. "Therefore, we have to concentrate on the village being self-contained manufacturing mainly for use. Provided this character of the village industry is maintained, there would be no objection to villagers using even the modern machines and tools that they can make and can afford to use. Only they should not be used as a means of exploitation of others."⁴⁷

The present distress is undoubtedly insufferable. Pauperism must go, but industrialization is no remedy, the evil does not lie in the use of bullock carts. It lies in the selfishness of men and want of consideration for the neighbours. If there is no love for the neighbours, no change however revolutionary, can be of any good.
Indeed, the west has had a surfeit of industrialism and exploitation. The fact is that this industrial civilization is a disease. It is all evil. More are not be deceived by catchwords and phrases.

"They are in no way indispensable for the permanent welfare of the human race. Now that we know the use of steam and electricity, we have learnt to avoid industrialism. Our concern is therefore to destroy industrialism at any cost".48

"What is the cause of the present chaos?"

It is exploitation, I will not say, of the weaker nations by the stronger but of sister nations by sister nations. And my fundamental objection to machinery rests on the fact that it is machinery that has enabled those nations to exploit others. In itself it is a wooden thing and can be turned to a bad purpose as we know".49

"Industrialism is, I am afraid, going to be a curse for mankind. Exploitation of one nation by another cannot go on for all time. Industrialism depends entirely on your capacity to exploit, on foreign markets being open to you, and on the absence of competitors. It is because these factors are getting less and less every day for England that its number of unemployed is mounting up daily. The Indian boycott was but a flea-bite. And if that is the state of England, a vast country like India cannot expect to benefit by industrialization. In fact, India, when it begins to exploit other nations as it must if it begins it
becomes industrialized will be a curse for other nations, a menace to the world.\textsuperscript{50}

Pandit Nehru wants industrialization, because he thinks that, if it is socialized, it would be free from the evils of capitalism. "My own view is that the evils are inherent in industrialism, and no amount of socialization can eradicate them".\textsuperscript{51}

God forbid that India should ever take to industrialism after the manner of the west. The economic imperialism of a single tiny island kingdom is today keeping the world in chains. If an entire nation of 300 million took to similar economic exploitation, it would strip the world bare like locusts.\textsuperscript{52}

\textbf{Economics and Ethics:}

The whole grant of man's activities today constitutes an indivisible whole. "You cannot divide social, economic, political and purely religious work into watertight compartments. I do not know any religion a part from human activity".\textsuperscript{53}

Gandhiji must confess that there is no sharp or any distinction between economics and ethics. Economics that hurts the moral well-being of an individual or a nation is immoral and, therefore, sinful. Thus the economics that permits one country to prey upon another is immoral. It is sinful to buy and use articles made by 'sweated labour'. It is sinful to eat American wheat and let the neighbour, the grain dealer, store for want of customer. Similarly, "it is sinful for me to
wear the latest finery of Regent street when I know that
worm the things woven by the neighbouring spinners and
would have clothed me, and fed and clothed them".\textsuperscript{54}

True economics never militates against the highest ethical
standard, just as all true ethics to be worth its name must at the same
time be also good economics. An economics that inculcates Mammon
worship, and enables the strong to amass wealth at the expense of the
weak, is a false and dismal science. It spells death true economics, on
the other hand, stands for social justice, it promotes the good of all
equally including the weakest and is indispensable for decent life.\textsuperscript{55}

That economics is untrue which ignores or disregards
moral values. The extension of the law of non-violence in the domain of
economics means nothing less than the introduction of moral values as
a factor to be considered in regulating international commerce.\textsuperscript{56}

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moral value. The extension of the law of non-violence in the domain of
economics means nothing less than the introduction of moral values as
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"I venture to think that the scriptures of the world are far
safer and are sounder treatises on laws of economics than many
modern text books."\textsuperscript{58}
You know how Adam Smith in his "wealth of nations", after laying down certain principles according to which economic phenomena are governed, went on to describe certain other things which constituted the 'disturbing factor' and prevented economic laws from having free play. Chief among these was the 'human element'. Now it is this 'human selfishness, Adam Smith’s pure economic motive’, constitutes the 'disturbing factor' that has got to be overcome”.

"Khaddar economics is wholly different from the ordinary. The latter takes no note of the human factor. The former wholly concerns itself with the human".
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3. Harijan, 6-10-46, p.338.
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