

GANDHIAN ECONOMICS

Mohan Das Karam Chand Gandhi (1869-1948)

Mahatma Gandhi, the 'Father of the Nation', was born in Porbander on October 2, 1869. In a way, the history of India's struggle for Independence is the story of Mahatma Gandhi's life.

Gandhi studied Law in England. After his return to India, he was called to the Bar. After two years, he went to South Africa as a lawyer. It was there that Gandhi learnt his first lessons in political education. It was there that he evolved the concept of satyagraha or non-violent agitation.

After his return from South Africa, Gandhi became the leader of the Indian Nationalist Movement. He started the non-violent, non-cooperative movement to attain the goal of Independence. In 1930, he led the Salt Satyagraha and in 1940 launched the Civil Disobedience Movement. In 1942, he started the 'Quit India' movement. He was jailed many times for his political activities. On January 30, 1948, Gandhi was shot dead by a fanatic.

Before studying the economic ideas of Gandhi, it may be worthwhile to take note of certain formative influences. Gandhi was influenced greatly by Tolstoy and Ruskin. Tolstoy's book, "The Kingdom of God is within you" and Ruskin's "Unto this Last" had a profound influence on Gandhi. From the Philosophy of Tolstoy, he derived the concepts of equalitarianism, simplicity and asceticism which later on became the foundation of his economic ideas. Further, the idea of 'bread labour' popularized by Tolstoy influenced Gandhi and strengthened his conviction that machine technology should be avoided. The concept of 'bread labour' made Gandhi believe that a man who did not do body labour had no right to eat. From Ruskin, he developed distaste for material progress. Anarchists like Prince Kropotkin developed in Gandhiji, hatred against centralization of economic and political power.

There is a vast literature on Gandhian economic thought. Dr. J.C. Kummarappa's "Gandhian Economic Thought" gives a complete idea of Gandhi's economic ideas. Besides, a number of pamphlets and articles such as cent per cent Swadeshi, Constructive programme - Its meaning and place, Economics of Khadi, Hind Swaraj written by Gandhi himself give us some idea about his economic philosophy. Shriman Narayan's "Relevance of Gandhian Economics" also tells us a good deal about Gandhian Economics.

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Gandhian Economics is based on ethical foundations. In 1921, Gandhi wrote, "Economies that hurts the moral well-being of an individual or a nation is immoral, and, therefore, sinful." Again in 1924, he repeated the same belief "that economies is untrue which ignores or disregards moral values.

According to Prof. C.N. Vakil, "One has to interpret Gandhiji's economic ideas and build up what may be described as Gandhian economic thought from what he did and said in

this connection. Gandhian Economic thought is based on four fundamental principles: Truth, Non-violence, Dignity of Labour and Simplicity. One principle that played significant role in Gandhi's life was: simple living, and high thinking. Gandhiji was a practical idealist. The economics of Gandhi might also be described as the economics of non-violence. Gandhi opposed modern capitalism because it is based on the exploitation of human labour. To Gandhi, moral progress is more important than material progress.