Journal of Social Responsibility, Tourism and Hospitality
ISSN: 2799-1016
Vol : 03, No. 04, June-July 2023
http://journal.hmjournals.com/index.php/JSRTH
DOI: https://doi.org/10.55529/jsrth.34.51.60

Gandhian Thought for Rural Development

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Received: 05 March 2023 **Accepted:** 26 May 2023 **Published:** 03 July 2023

Abstract:** This paper focuses on the role of Mahatma Gandhi in promoting the concept of Gram Vikas or rural development. Mahatma Gandhi was a visionary leader who believed that the key to India's progress lay in the development of its villages. He advocated for self-sufficiency and decentralization as fundamental to achieving rural development and called for the use of local resources and skills to promote sustainable and equitable growth. Gandhiji firmly believed that the well-being of India's society was directly connected to the development of its rural areas. The study examines how Gandhiji's philosophy of non-violence and education influenced his vision of rural development. He emphasized the importance of promoting cottage industries, handicrafts, and the use of renewable energy sources to create employment opportunities and improve the quality of life for rural communities. Gandhiji's ideas of Gram Vikas are seen as a holistic approach to rural development, encompassing social, economic, and environmental aspects. This work highlight the relevance of his ideas in the context of modern-day challenges such as poverty, unemployment, and environmental degradation. The promotion of Gram Vikas or rural development is seen as a way to address these challenges and create a more equitable and sustainable society. The promotion of Gram Vikas or rural development is essential to achieving this goal, and the principles underlying Gandhiji's vision of rural development can be seen as a way to promote constitutional values of democracy, social justice and equality such as the right to education and gender equality. This paper emphasizes the importance of integrating Gandhian principles in rural development policy and policymakers adopting Gandhi's principles to achieve sustainable rural development. By incorporating these principles into policy formulation and implementation, policymakers can promote equitable and sustainable growth in rural communities. The paper concludes that policymakers must prioritize sustainability to achieve long lasting progress in rural areas and to retain this progress involvement of community and sustainable use of resources is necessary.

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Keywords: Rural Development, Gram Swaraj, Ahimsa, Sarvodaya, Village Panchayat.

1. INTRODUCTION

Economic thoughts of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was based on concepts like ahimsa, simplicity, self sufficiency, equality, decentralization, limited industrialization cooperation. Some of the well known economic concepts of Gandhian thought are gram swarajya, swadeshi, sarvodaya, trusteeship, bread labour etc. The aim of M.K. Gandhi's thought on economy was to remove poverty and unemployment, to end exploitation, to reduce economic inequalities, and to make village self-sufficient in terms of food, clothing, education, health, sanitation. Gandhi was very well aware that the idea of complete economic equality is not possible though it is desirable and we can continuously strive for reducing inequality among rich and poor. In the view of Gandhi, economic exploitation can be prevented if our society will be based on love, trust and contentment. Mahatma Gandhi's economic philosophy is very relevant today. He reconcile economic development and ethics.

"Rural development is the soul of development and foundation of a country's progress to empower future generations to become self sufficient and developed to fulfill their own needs." Rural development has been a priority in India for decades, with policymakers striving to improve the social, economic, and political conditions of rural communities. Mahatma Gandhi, revered as the father of the Indian nation, adopted the transformative power of rural development and emphasized the importance of Gram Vikas, or village development, as a means to uplift rural communities and promote sustainable growth. He believed in the power of rural communities to drive India's growth. According to him village society is the soul of India. For urban He believed that it is the major factor responsible for the growth of poverty and unemployment in India. He emphasized the importance of village development, as a means to achieve sustainable rural development. His philosophy of "Gram Swaraj" or self-governance emphasized the need for sustainable rural development through the empowerment of local communities. One of the key components of his philosophy was "Gram Vikas" which emphasized the importance of local self-sufficiency, non-violence, education, and women's empowerment.

Gandhi's philosophy on Gram Vikas can be described as holistic, sustainable, empowering, and community-driven. His emphasis on non-violence, education, and women's empowerment highlighted the need for a comprehensive approach to rural development that considers social, economic, and environmental factors. Gandhi's vision for Gram Vikas prioritized the needs and perspectives of rural communities, promoting a bottom-up approach to development that encourages community participation and ownership. Gandhi envisions a limited state that doesn't interfere in daily life. Village republic are vital in India, acting as democratic centers. The core focus of Gandhi is social reconstruction. According to Him centralizing political power in a small group does not promote participatory democracy. His concept of sarvodaya emphasizes small republics where people manage their own affairs without relying on the state. In this model, village panchayats (local councils) plays a crucial role in policymaking, consisting of capable individuals from diverse backgrounds. Gandhi believed in utilizing India's traditional institutions such as village republics to strengthen

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democracy. According to him political institutions can help to manage local resources in which wealthy individuals can donate surplus land to village panchayats, who distribute it to those who need and the labor community contributes their work to the village fund here the role of individuals is central in this system, as their initiatives creates social wealth and they contribute their surplus wealth for the community welfare in this model village panchayats are responsible for the village's economy, which promotes the prosperity of the people. He argued that western democracy should be adapted to Indian conditions, incorporating indigenous institutions. Gandhi recognized that colonization had damaged the fundamental institutions of Indian village society. Gandhi's visions of sarvodaya society industrialization and technological advancement have a place as long as they remain under human control and do not harm the ecological foundation of society. However they should not disrupt the village society, which Gandhi considers the essence of India. He believes that industrialization leads to the concentration of economic power, which undermines democracy. When economic and political powers are concentrated in the hands of a few, it enables them to undermine democratic institutions. Gandhi opposes the centralization of economic power in rural India and advocates for the distribution of land as both an economic and political objective. He promotes self sufficiency by weaving khadi (handspun cloth) for their own needs, reducing dependence on the urban economy. Through individual initiative, a strong sense of community is fostered, enabling collective efforts to meet the needs of the village community.

In recent years, there have been some positive developments in the field of rural development in India. The government's flagship program, the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMJSY), aims to connect all rural habitations with all-weather roads, which has helped to improve connectivity and reduce isolation in remote areas. The National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) has also been successful in promoting entrepreneurship and income-generating activities in rural areas, empowering women and marginalized communities. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) to provide employment opportunities to rural households. Additionally, several non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) have been working towards rural development through grassroots initiatives. Moreover, initiatives such as the Kisan Credit Card scheme and Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana have provided financial assistance to farmers and helped to improve agricultural productivity. These policies have contributed to the overall development of rural areas, improving the standard of living of the people living there.

However, there have also been negative impacts of some policies on rural development. For example, the NREGA has been criticized for its implementation, leading to corruption and delays in payments to workers. Similarly, the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan has focused on constructing toilets, but the issue of open defecation still persists in some areas due to the lack of behavioral change and inadequate maintenance of toilets. There are also challenges to achieving sustainable rural development in India. For example, there is a lack of adequate infrastructure in many rural areas, which can hinder economic growth and development. Additionally, the government's policies and initiatives have not always been successful in promoting sustainable rural development, and there have been instances of corruption and mismanagement. Moreover, the Green Revolution, which aimed to improve agricultural

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productivity through the use of high-yielding crop varieties and chemical fertilizers, has had adverse environmental impacts, such as soil degradation and depletion of groundwater resources. It has also led to the displacement of small farmers and the concentration of land ownership in the hands of a few large landowners.

Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of rural development and his advocacy for Gram Vikas or village development can be likened to a fairy tale in today's India. But His beliefs in the power of rural communities to drive India's growth and his emphasis on the principles are key drivers of social and economic development in rural areas are more relevant today than ever before. Some of the case studies prove successful rural development initiatives based on Gandhi principles on various places like the Barefoot College founded by social activist Bunker Roy in Rajasthan to promote sustainable rural development through education and skill-building it trains rural women in solar engineering, rainwater harvesting, and other useful skills and empowers them to become leaders in their communities, Shri Mahila Griha Udyog Lijjat Papad is a women's cooperative that produces and sells papads and other food products it is based on Gandhian principles of self-reliance, self-help, and non-violence, and has empowered thousands of women across rural Maharashtra, the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) is a trade union that organizes and empowers women workers in the informal sector it is based on Gandhian principles of self-reliance, self-help, and non-violence, and has been successful in promoting the economic empowerment of rural women in Gujarat, the Jamsetji Tata Trust in collaboration with the government of Jharkhand has implemented a successful rural development program that is based on Gandhian principles of self-reliance, decentralization, and community participation this program has focused on building rural infrastructure, promoting agriculture and livelihoods, and improving access to healthcare and education., Kudumbashree is a women's self-help group movement that has been successful in promoting the economic empowerment of women in rural Kerala this movement is also based on Gandhian principles of self-reliance, self-help, and community participation which has helped thousands of women across Kerala to become self-sufficient and financially independent.

However, the implementation of Gandhi's philosophy has faced various challenges in modern-day India. While there have been positive developments in rural areas through various government policies, such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, which provides employment to rural households, there are also negative aspects such as the widening gap between urban and rural areas and the neglect of certain regions. Despite these challenges, the legacy of Gandhi's philosophy of rural development continues to inspire policymakers and development practitioners to prioritize Gram Vikas and create sustainable and equitable rural communities. The recent initiatives such as the Digital India and Skill India Mission are aimed to bridge the rural-urban divide and empower rural communities with the power of technology and education.

By focusing on local resources and traditional knowledge, Gandhi's philosophy supports sustainable development that is both culturally and environmentally appropriate. Overall, Gandhi's philosophy on Gram Vikas is characterized by a deep respect for human dignity and a commitment to creating a just and equitable society. Gandhi's theory of rural development may seem like a fairy tale, but with the right policies and implementation, it can become a reality and a powerful force for positive change in India's rural communities.

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Gandhian Principles on Rural Development

Gandhian principles refer to the teachings and beliefs of Mahatma Gandhi. These principles, which include non-violence, self-sufficiency, and decentralization, can be highly relevant for rural development. He believed that India's development should be based on the improvement of rural communities. Some of the key principles of Gandhi on rural development are:

1. **Swaraj or self-rule:** Gandhi believed in the concept of self-rule where people govern themselves rather than being governed by a centralized authority. This principle emphasizes the importance of empowering individuals and communities to make their own decisions and take control of their lives.
2. **Swadeshi or self-sufficiency:** Gandhi advocated for the production and consumption of goods within India rather than relying on imports from other countries. This principle promotes economic self-sufficiency and creates employment opportunities within the country.
3. **Village industries**: Gandhi believed that rural development should be based on the promotion of village industries. This would create employment opportunities and generate income for the rural population.
4. **Decentralization:** Gandhi emphasized the importance of decentralization of power and decision-making. He believed that local communities should have control over their own resources and should be empowered to make decisions that affect their lives.
5. **Non-violence or Ahimsa:** Gandhi believed in the power of non-violent resistance as a means to effect social change. He believed that non-violent resistance was a morally superior way to achieve justice and equality.
6. **Education:** Gandhi believed that education was essential for the development of rural areas. He emphasized the importance of promoting literacy and providing education to rural communities.
7. **Panchayati Raj or local self-government:** Gandhi believed that the government should be decentralized and power should be given to local self-governing bodies. He believed that local self-government would allow for better decision-making that is tailored to the specific needs and circumstances of the community.
8. **Satyagraha or non-violent resistance:** Gandhi believed in the power of non-violent resistance as a means to effect social change. He believed that non-violent resistance was a morally superior way to achieve justice and equality.
9. **Gram Swaraj or village self-rule:** Gandhi believed that villages should be self-sufficient and that their development should be based on their own needs and resources. This principle emphasizes the importance of empowering rural communities to take charge of their own development.
10. **Sarvodaya or the welfare of all:** Gandhi believed that the welfare of all members of society was important. He emphasized the need to promote social equality and empower marginalized communities.
11. **Trusteeship or the responsible use of wealth and resources:** Gandhi believed in the responsible use of wealth and resources. He believed that individuals and communities should not waste resources and that they should be used judiciously for the benefit of all.

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12. **Sustainability and conservation of resources:** Gandhi believed in the importance of environmental sustainability and the conservation of natural resources. He emphasized the need to use renewable sources of energy and to conserve resources for future generations.
13. **Empowerment of marginalized communities, such as women and Dalits:** Gandhi believed in the empowerment of marginalized communities. He believed that their empowerment would lead to a more just and equitable society.
14. **Participatory decision-making and community involvement in development initiatives:** Gandhi believed in the importance of participatory decision-making and community involvement in the development process. He believed that this would lead to better decision-making that is more tailored to the specific needs and circumstances of the community.
15. **Promotion of rural entrepreneurship and innovation:** Gandhi believed in the promotion of rural entrepreneurship and innovation. He believed that this would create employment opportunities and generate income for the rural population.
16. **Recognition and preservation of traditional knowledge and practices:** Gandhi believed in the importance of recognizing and preserving traditional knowledge and practices. He believed that this would help to preserve cultural heritage and promote
17. **Emphasis on the dignity of labor and the value of manual work:** Gandhi emphasized the dignity of labor and the value of manual work. He believed that all types of work were equally important and that everyone should be valued for their contribution to society.
18. **Prevention of migration from rural to urban areas through rural development initiatives:** Gandhi believed in the prevention of migration from rural to urban areas through rural development initiatives. He believed that if people had access to employment and resources in rural areas, they would not have to migrate to urban areas in search of better opportunities.
19. **Use of appropriate technology and methods that are affordable and accessible to rural communities:** Gandhi believed in the use of appropriate technology and methods that are affordable and accessible to rural communities. He believed that technology should be used to improve the quality of life in rural areas without harming the environment or disrupting traditional ways of life.

Non-Violence and Its Role in Promoting Social and Economic Development in Rural Areas

According to Gandhi, non-violence, or ahimsa, is a fundamental principle for promoting social and economic development in rural areas. Gandhi advocated non-violence throughout his later phase of life and therefore his ideas on economics can be called non-violent economics. For him the main cause for solution of various basic problems of people are non-violence. Non- violence is a concept which runs throughout the entire philosophy of Gandhi be it socio-political economic or religious Here are some of the ways in which he believed non-violence could promote rural development:

1. **Conflict resolution:** Non-violence can help to peacefully resolve conflicts and disputes in rural communities, which can create a more harmonious and stable society.

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2. **Empowerment:** Non-violence can help to empower individuals and communities, particularly marginalized groups such as women and lower castes, by giving them a voice and promoting their rights.
3. **Sustainable development:** Non-violence can promote sustainable development by emphasizing the responsible use of natural resources and promoting conservation efforts.
4. **Economic development:** Non-violence can promote economic development by encouraging entrepreneurship, self-sufficiency, and the development of rural industries.
5. **Social justice:** Non-violence can promote social justice by advocating for the rights and welfare of all members of society, regardless of their caste, gender, or economic status.
6. **Non-violent resistance:** Non-violent resistance, or Satyagraha, can be used as a tool to bring about social and economic change in rural areas, such as resisting unjust land laws or oppressive economic policies.
7. **Trust and cooperation:** Non-violence promotes trust and cooperation among individuals and communities, which is essential for building strong and resilient rural societies.
8. **Education:** Non-violence emphasizes the importance of education in promoting peace, social justice, and economic development in rural areas.
9. **Community building:** Non-violence emphasizes the importance of building strong and supportive communities in rural areas, which can provide social and economic opportunities for all members.
10. **Environmental protection:** Non-violence emphasizes the importance of protecting the environment and promoting sustainable agricultural practices in rural areas, which can help to mitigate the effects of climate change and preserve natural resources for future generations.

Education and Its Impact on Rural Development

Mahatma Gandhi believed that education was critical for the development of rural areas. Here are some of the ways in which Gandhi emphasized the importance of education in rural development:

1. **Self-reliance:** Gandhi believed that education should promote self-reliance and self-sufficiency among rural communities. Education should equip individuals with the skills and knowledge necessary to support themselves and their families, rather than relying on outside assistance.
2. **Character development:** Gandhi believed that education should not only focus on academic knowledge, but also on character development. Education should promote values such as truthfulness, non-violence, and respect for others.
3. **Rural industries:** Gandhi believed that education should promote rural industries and crafts, rather than encouraging migration to urban areas. Education should equip individuals with the skills necessary to create and sustain rural industries and promote economic growth.
4. **Non-violence:** Gandhi believed that education should promote non-violence and conflict resolution. Education should equip individuals with the skills necessary to peacefully resolve conflicts and promote social harmony.

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5. **Social justice:** Gandhi believed that education should promote social justice and equality. Education should empower marginalized communities such as women and lower castes, and promote the welfare of all members of society
6. **Practical education:** Education should be practical and relevant to the needs of rural communities. By focusing on practical skills and knowledge, education can help individuals to improve their lives and the lives of their communities.
7. **Universal education:** Education should be available to all, regardless of their caste, gender, or economic status. By promoting universal education, Gandhi believed that rural communities could become more empowered and self-sufficient.
8. **Respect for tradition:** Education should respect and preserve traditional knowledge and practices. By recognizing and preserving traditional knowledge and practices, education can help to promote cultural diversity and maintain the unique identities of rural communities.

Overall, Gandhi believed that education was critical for the development of rural areas. By promoting self-reliance, character development, rural industries, non-violence, social justice, practical education, universal education, and respect for tradition, education can help to create sustainable and equitable rural communities.

Women's Empowerment and Its Impact on Rural Development

Women's empowerment is critical for sustainable rural development. Empowering women in rural areas can have a significant impact on their lives, their families, and their communities. Here are some ways in which women's empowerment can contribute to rural development:

1. **Economic empowerment:** When women are empowered economically, they are better able to support themselves and their families. This can result in increased income, improved access to resources and services, and greater economic resilience.
2. **Education:** Empowering women through education can help to break the cycle of poverty. Educated women are better able to make informed decisions about their health, their families, and their communities.
3. **Health:** Women's empowerment can improve health outcomes for both women and their families. When women have control over their own health and well-being, they are better able to care for themselves and their families.
4. **Political participation:** When women are empowered to participate in politics and decision-making processes, they can help to ensure that their voices are heard and their needs are addressed.
5. **Social change:** Women's empowerment can help to promote social change in rural communities. Empowered women can challenge gender norms and stereotypes, promote gender equality, and help to create a more equitable and just society.
6. **Improved agricultural productivity:** Women play a critical role in agriculture, both as farmers and as agricultural laborers. When women are empowered, they can access resources such as land, credit, and technology, which can help to improve agricultural productivity and increase food security.
7. **Reduced poverty:** Women are more likely than men to live in poverty, and poverty disproportionately affects rural women. Empowering women can help to reduce poverty in

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rural areas, as women are better able to access resources and services that can improve their economic and social well-being.

8. **Improved maternal and child health:** When women are empowered, they are better able to access health services and make informed decisions about their health and the health of their families. This can help to improve maternal and child health outcomes, which are critical for sustainable rural development.

9. **Increased social capital:** Women's empowerment can help to increase social capital in rural communities. Empowered women can build networks and relationships that can help to promote social cohesion and collective action.

10. **Sustainable development:** Women's empowerment is critical for achieving sustainable development in rural areas. When women are empowered, they can help to promote environmentally sustainable practices and ensure that development initiatives are socially and environmentally responsible.

Overall, women's empowerment is essential for achieving sustainable rural development. By empowering women, we can promote economic growth, social justice, and environmental sustainability in rural areas.

2. CONCLUSION

Gandhian philosophy about rural development provides a valuable framework for achieving sustainable rural development. The theory of rural development adopted by Mahatma Gandhi in the form of gram vikas is a powerful concept that has the potential to transform rural communities in India. Gandhi's philosophy emphasized the importance of self-sufficiency, education, and empowerment, and it continues to inspire policymakers and development practitioners today. Despite some challenges, such as limited funding and lack of political will, there are many positive developments that give hope for the future of rural development in India. The government's renewed focus on the rural sector through initiatives like the Digital India and Make in India campaigns, coupled with the rise of social entrepreneurship and innovation, offer promising opportunities for sustainable rural development. However, it is important to recognize that rural development is a complex and multi-faceted issue that requires a holistic approach and the involvement of all stakeholders, including the local communities themselves. The implementation of effective policies, programs, and initiatives must be accompanied by a deep understanding of the social, cultural, and economic factors that shape rural India. In this context, Gandhi's legacy and philosophy of Gram Vikas provide a powerful framework for rural development in India, and should be studied and applied in the context of modern-day challenges and opportunities. The continued pursuit of sustainable and equitable rural development is not only a moral imperative, but also a key driver of India's future growth and development. There is a need for greater community involvement, equitable distribution of resources, and sustainable use of natural resources to ensure the sustainable development of villages.

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