



doi: <https://doi.org/10.20546/ijcrar.2021.910.002>

On the Role of the Gandhian Economic Approach towards Large Farmers in the Midst of Covid-19

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Abstract

The Covid-19 and its resultant uncertain conditions have impacted all dimensions of life, be it at the individual level, societal level and at the national level. In the midst of the pandemic situation, let us revisit the domain of agricultural sector, the backbone of India. With the objective of improving the conditions of the small and marginal farmers, the Government is channelizing its effort from production-centric approach to income-centric approach and are implementing a number of effective schemes. The paper brings out the need and the implications of persuading large farmers to imbibe and implement the Gandhian economic philosophy for the growth and development of the agricultural sector. Towards this end, the paper expounds the Gandhian economic principles of Simplicity, Non-possessiveness, Non-violence, Trusteeship and Sarvodhya. The relevance of these economic principles to large farmers is also presented. With proper implementation, every Indian village would turn out to be a self-sufficient and democratic unit. The paper concludes by stating that a synthesized paradigm may be evolved wherein the Governmental agricultural policies may be employed for small and marginal farmers, the Gandhian economic perspectives may be persuaded to be implemented by the large farmers, in the agricultural sector of India. Such a synthesis would make Indian villages a qualitatively better place to live in for the entire farming community and would propel India as a self-sufficient and self-reliant nation, even in the midst of Covid-19.

Article Info

Accepted: 18 September 2021

Available Online: 20 October 2021

Keywords

Covid-19, Governmental Agricultural Policies, Small and Marginal Farmers, Large Farmers, Gandhian Economic Philosophy.

Introduction

Covid-19 has adversely affected all sections of the Indian economy. The pandemic has disrupted the pattern of production, distribution and consumption in the Indian agricultural system. The production and distribution is affected by financial, labour and logistical constraints, while negative income, restricted access to markets and increased prices of food commodities have affected the consumption pattern (1,2). Hence, there arises a need to

revisit the domain of agricultural sector in the midst of the pandemic situation.

The Three Sectors of the Indian Economy

Indian economy consists of three main sectors, namely, the agricultural sector, the industrial sector and the services sector. The agricultural sector includes agriculture, forestry, fishery, etc. The industrial sector includes mining, quarrying, manufacturing, electricity,

gas, water supply, construction, etc. The services sector includes trade, transport, communication, finance, banking, insurance, real estate, community services, social services, personal services, etc.

Importance of Agricultural Sector in India

It is often said that India lives in its villages and agriculture is still the backbone of our nation. The truth behind the statement may be made clear with the following facts:

Agriculture sector provides employment to the vast army of uneducated and unskilled labour in Indian villages

Agriculture sector contributes to the gross domestic product (GDP) and per-capita income of our country

Agriculture sector reduces poverty in Indian villages

Agriculture sector mitigates inequalities of income and wealth in villages

Agriculture sector creates demand for goods and services produced in the non-agricultural sectors (ie. industrial and services sectors) of our economy

Agricultural sector earns valuable foreign-exchange through export of surplus agricultural products

Agricultural sector endeavour to create a self-sufficient and dynamic India.

Classification of Indian Farmers

Based on operational land holdings, Indian farmers are classified under Five categories, namely:

Marginal farmers: less than 1.00 hectare

Small farmers: 1.00 - 2.00 hectares

Semi-medium farmers: 2.00 - 4.00 hectares

Medium farmers: 4.00 - 10.00 hectares, and

Large farmers: 10.00 hectares and above

It must be pointed out that the majority of Indian farmers fall under the categories of marginal, small and semi-medium farmers. Some of the vital present issues faced by them are: (1). Inadequate finance/capital (2).

Inadequate storage facilities (3). Small and fragmented land-holdings (4). Exposed to the vagaries of nature-drought, floods, etc. (5). Decease in the varieties of crops and livestock produced (6). Loss of agricultural land due to soil erosion, soil degradation, conversion for urban use, etc. (7). Lack of irrigational facilities (8). Inadequate marketing facilities (9). Perennial poverty (10). Inequalities of income and wealth.

Governmental initiatives for Small and Marginal farmers

With the objective of improving the condition of the small and marginal farmers as well as double the income of farmers by 2022, the Government is channelizing its effort from production-centric approach to income-centric initiative. Towards this end, some of the schemes that are implemented by the Government, includes:

Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY)

Soil Health Card Scheme (SHCS)

Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY)

National Agriculture Market Scheme (E-NAM)

Pradhan Manthri Krishi Sinchai Yojana (PMKSY)

Farmer Producer Organization (FPO)

Financing of Joint Liability Groups (JLGS)

National and State Disaster Relief Fund (NSDRF)

Coordinated programme on Horticulture Assessment and Management (CHAMAN)

National Food Security Mission (NFSM)

Rashtriya Gokul Mission (RGM)

Attracting and Retaining Youth in Agriculture (ARYA)

Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY)

Fisheries and Aquaculture Infrastructure Development Fund (FAIDF)

Animal Husbandry Infrastructure Development Fund (AHIDF)

Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN)

Neem Coated Urea (NCU)

Rainfed Area Development under National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA)

National Mission on Oilseeds & Oilpalm (NMOOP)

Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH)

Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY)

National Mission on Agriculture Extension & Technology (NMAET)

Other Schemes

Kisan Call Centres (KCC)

Agri-Clinics and Agri-Business Centres (ACABC)

Agri-Fairs and Exhibitions, and

Kisan SMS Portal.

Need for Persuasive Approach towards Large Farmers

It is indeed laudable that the Government (Central and State), with the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), are taking great effort to uplift the standard of living of small and marginal farmers through implementation of various income-generating schemes. These schemes involves, among others, increasing productivity of various agricultural crops through promoting the practice of multiple cropping, inter cropping and integrated farming systems.

Bare Necessities Index (BNI)

According to the *Economic Survey 2020-2021*, the agricultural sector is expected to grow by 3.4%. Even though it is a healthy growth rate in the given economic conditions, the disturbing feature lies with regard to the Bare Necessities Index. This index takes into account five dimensions, namely, (1) Access to water (2) Housing (3) Sanitation (4) Micro-environment, and (5) Other facilities (electricity, cooking gas, etc.). The value of index range from 0-1 and higher the value, better the access to the bare necessities. According to the *Economic*

Survey 2020-2021, only Four States, namely, Punjab, Kerala, Haryana and Gujarat have the highest (above 0.70) BNI.

The rest of the 24 States and 8 Union territories have only Medium (0.50-0.70) and Lowest (below 0.50) BNI. This clearly shows high inequality in the access to the bare necessities for both urban and rural India. This would be a great hurdle in the growth and development of the agricultural sector.

In the context of the above scenario, it may be stated that while the government machinery is focusing its entire effort on addressing the issues of small and marginal farmers, there is an imperative need to persuade the large farmers to actively and effectively participate in the growth and development of the agricultural sector, especially during the present pandemic crisis engineered by Covid-19.

This persuasion of large farmers is to be effected through non-violence and an appeal to the higher ethical values of large farmers. Hence, we resort to the perspectives of the Gandhian Economic Philosophy.

The Gandhian Economic Philosophy

By 'Gandhian Economic Philosophy', we refer to the economic thoughts based on the spiritual and socio-economic principles expounded by Mahatma Gandhi.

His economic ideas are part of his general philosophy of life in which the combination of economic, moral and spiritual well-being of 'man' is of supreme consideration. Therefore, Mahatma Gandhi's economic philosophy revolves around an individual, his attitude and behavior at the village level.

Some of the economic ideas of Mahatma Gandhi that would enable to persuade the larger farmers are:

The Economic Philosophy of Simplicity

According to Mahatma Gandhi 'simple living and high thinking' should be the guiding principle of a man's life. Happiness is a mental condition. The mind is a restless bird and the more it gets, the more it wants and still remains unsatisfied.

The famous statement of Mahatma Gandhi is that: The earth provides enough to satisfy every man's needs but not for every man's greed.

Relevance to Large Farmers

By making a clear-cut distinction between want and need, Indian villages would be free from unnecessary/unwanted and harmful goods and services. It would also bring about a pollution-free environment in the villages. As far as Large farmers are concerned, they would avoid unscrupulous consumption. They may be persuaded to utilize their savings for providing common irrigation, storage and other agricultural facilities for the welfare of the entire village (3,4). This would address the problem of inadequate finance as well as poverty experienced by small and marginal farmers. This would enhance their health and also make them debt-free. It is often said that an Indian farmer is born in debt and die in debt. Simple and contented life would also pave the way for their happiness and peace.

The Economic Philosophy of Non-possessiveness

Along with simplicity, Mahatma Gandhi emphasized the quality of non-possessiveness as the bedrock for the emancipation of the Indian masses/poor. By 'non-possession', Mahatma Gandhi does not refer to complete renunciation of every possession of man. Non-possessiveness is contentment and non-acceptance. Mahatma Gandhi states that the tendency to possess things is the root cause of all evils. Therefore, one must cultivate the discipline of living with what one has and with what one needs.

Relevance to Large Farmers

Non-possessiveness on the part of Large farmers, as a policy, would lead to automatic and natural redistribution of income and wealth in the village communities. This would put an end to class-struggles and ensure smooth and harmonious functioning of the village-activities. Non-possessiveness would mitigate unchecked desires, greediness, crimes, etc. of Large farmers. This would also enhance their physical, moral and spiritual well-being.

The Economic Philosophy of Non-Violence

According to Mahatma Gandhi, non-violence must be practiced in thought, word and deeds. Even though no activity is possible without a certain amount of violence, Gandhi advocated activities with least possible violence. Gandhiji's economics may be called as non-violent economics. Mahatma Gandhi states that a non-violent occupation is one which is fundamentally free from

violence and which does not involve exploitation or envy of others. The basis of capitalism is the exploitation of human labour to create surplus value. Society must be based not on exploitation but on justice.

Relevance to Large Farmers

Violence in any form is always attended by completion, exploitation, alienation, hatefulness, etc. Violence breeds greater violence. This leads to a number of problems that affect the production and distribution of goods and services, in society. When Large farmers are persuaded to perform their activities with non-violence, it leads to a harmonious development of social, economic, cultural and political well being of the entire village community. Labour-intensive tools and machinery mitigate exploitation of labour and concentration of wealth in the hands of few. Non-violence ensures a smooth give and take policy among all farmers, thereby bringing peace and prosperity to the individual and community. True democracy and real growth of human personality are only possible in a non-violent community.

The Economic Philosophy of Trusteeship

Mahatma Gandhi's belief in trusteeship comes from his belief in non-violence and non-possession. According to him, trusteeship, a socio-economic philosophy, involves wealthy people to consider themselves as trustees of their wealth and utilize it for the welfare of the entire community. Mahatma Gandhi states that if an individual has acquired large amount of money through inheritance or from trade, the entire amount of money does not belong to that individual alone, but also to the entire community. One who had accumulated that money is entitled to only that part of it which is necessary for an honourable living. The rest of the accumulated wealth belongs to the entire nation and must be spent for the welfare of all. It must also be noted here that Mahatma Gandhi was against the idea of confiscation of wealth from the wealthy and the capitalists, by using force or violence. The rich could be persuaded through moral pressure, non-cooperation and through legislation.

Relevance to Large Farmers

Mahatma Gandhi addresses the problem of economic inequality and the concentration of wealth, through the principle of trusteeship. Possession of wealth necessarily implies storage of wealth and violence is inevitable in defending the stored wealth. Thus, the concept of trusteeship ensures economic equality. At the same time,

trusteeship also leads to the elimination of classes in society. When the Large farmers are persuaded to adopt the doctrine of trusteeship, it mitigates the problem of poverty in society. They would feel morally satisfied that they are doing the right action and the needy small and marginal farmers would feel that they are also recognized and not alienated in community. This ensures smooth functioning of the entire village community.

The Economic Philosophy of Sarvodaya

Mahatma Gandhi perceived Sarvodaya, meaning 'upliftment/welfare of all', as a tool to revive the system of village self-governance in India. He felt that Sarvodaya would enable every Indian village to be prosperous in agriculture as well as decentralized small scale and cottage industries with participation of people at all levels. His earnest desire is that every Indian village should be converted into a little self-sufficient republic. Mahatma Gandhi's Sarvodaya principle is based on the values of freedom, equality, justice and fraternity.

Relevance to Large Farmers

The sarvodaya society would function as an organic whole rather than being disjointed into economic classes or social classes. The practice of non-violence, respect for other religion, serving others and eradicating untouchability are the core principles of Sarvodaya. When Large farmers are persuaded to understand, adopt and implement the policy of Sarvodaya, it would change the entire structure of the village society. The idea of village self-governance would address many issues faced by small and marginal farmers. Sarvodaya society ensures that production is for immediate use and not for distant market. This would address the issue of inadequate storage and marketing facilities. The revival of village Panchayats with prosperous agriculture and decentralized small-scale/cottage cooperative organizations would ensure better use of small and fragmented agricultural lands, better soil conservation and irrigation facilities, generating adequate/needed finance, reduces inequalities of income and wealth, thereby, poverty, both at the individual and village levels.

From the foregone discussion, we are able to clearly understand the vital potency of persuading Large farmers to imbibe and implement Mahatma Gandhi's economic

philosophy in order to mitigate the problems faced by the agricultural sector, in general, and the small and marginal farmers, in particular. We are also aware of the steps/efforts taken by the Government to enhance the agricultural sector in India.

In this situation, we propose to moot a Synthesized paradigm that would involve both the policies of the government as well as Gandhian economic perspectives in order to revive the agricultural sector of India. While the Governmental agricultural policies may be employed for small and marginal farmers, the Gandhian economic perspectives may be implemented as a persuasive tool towards Large farmers, in the agricultural sector of India.

Such a synthesis would enhance the growth and development of Indian villages as well as the entire agricultural sector of our country, during the present pandemic times. This would ensure a high standard of living and standard of life for all farmers, thereby, evolving Indian villages as a qualitatively better place to live in for the village masses. It would also propel the growth and development of industries and service sectors of India. This would go a long way in ensuring India as a self-sufficient and self-reliant nation, even in the midst of Covid-19.

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How to cite this article:

Siva Kumar, K. S. 2021. On the Role of the Gandhian Economic Approach towards Large Farmers in the Midst of Covid-19. *Int.J.Curr.Res.Aca.Rev.* 9(10), 7-12. doi: <https://doi.org/10.20546/ijcrar.2021.910.002>