

An insight into the agenda of Gandhi's Constructive Programme

Amrit Kaur

P HD Research Scholar Department of Gandhian and Peace Studies Punjab
University Chandigarh India

Abstract

Constructive Programme is considered to be an important doctrine of Gandhi. Under the concept of Constructive Programme, Gandhi tried to include everything from education to removal of all evils of society. It has 18 elements such as women, students, labour and many more. These 18 elements were based on Gandhi's deep understanding of India that he learnt from travelling through-out the country at the instance of his political mentor Gopal Krishan Gokhale during the pre-independent India. Constructive programme was his solution to solve the problems of India at that time and also a guiding principle for future of India in order to make it self-sufficient and self-reliant. In this paper an attempt is being made by the author to have deep insight into the agenda of Gandhi's Constructive programme by studying it in different perspectives such as it is rooted in the core culture of society, it has broader objectives, a revolutionary concept to revolutionized the society by removing its ills and many more.

Introduction

Gandhi was one among the charismatic personalities of Indian society. He was a leader who was known as father of nation and also an architect of India's freedom struggle. He gave the concept of Constructive Programme which include 18 elements such as communal unity, removal of untouchability, promotion of Hindu- Muslim unity, village sanitation, education in health and hygiene and many more like that. Through this programme, he contributed a lot for the upliftment of the rural India and was successful in leaving a long-lasting influence over the contemporary socio-economic, cultural and religious forces. Along with this, he by his Constructive Programme also left a strong imprint over the emotions and inner soul of individuals and on humanity as a whole. His Constructive Programme was based upon his philosophy of life and was influenced by his own study of various religious texts such as Gita, Bible, Quran, by his personal experiences which he experienced at South Africa and in India. The 18 elements of Constructive programme due to their simplicity, embeddedness into the core culture of the society were proved successful in influencing his countrymen along with people around the world.

However along with the praise, Gandhian ideas are also being criticized by various scholars and critics who called him an incorrigible optimistic thinker, found contradiction in his ideas, criticize him for not organizing his ideas in a well manner, criticize him for being a utopian thinker. But despite of all this criticism the reality is that, Gandhi is still acknowledge universally as a great leader, great man, great thinker. He was a rebeller and a revolutionary against various evils of society.

Gandhi due to his 18 elements of Constructive Programme appears to be social revolutionist. In his constructive programme, he wanted to revolutionize the existing educational system. Being true to his culture, he was in favour of promoting Hindi as a national and expected Indians to feel a sense of pride while speaking and

communicating in Hindi language and also in their other provincial languages of their region instead of English language. He was of the view that Indians have to proud of their rich heritage and culture and should never be ashamed of it. He was the influence of western culture and love for English language. As a social revolutionist his objective was to unite the nation into a silken net of love by educating them irrespective of any distinction of their gender, age, caste, race and color. He wanted to make Indians vigilant about the vastness of India, about its history, greatness, harms of rule of an autocratic government over them in a long run and about its motive of preaching them English language, promotion of westernization, indigo cultivation and heavy industries. He wanted to revolutionize the minds of Indians regarding the need of unity among all religions, removal of untouchability.

A deep insight into the Gandhi's Constructive Programmes shows that, through this programme he was interested to bring change in the society by keeping intact the core culture of society that is why he promoted the principle of Hindu-Muslim unity by putting emphasis upon the moral and religious principle of equal respect for all religions. He criticized religious division among Hindus and Muslims and laid emphasis upon the identity of common interests, mutual cooperation for the welfare of both the communities. Along with this he was also not in favour of separating religion from politics as he believed religion provide purity to politics and its separation from politics will going to impact country's inhabitants. Apart from promoting the principle of Hindu- Muslim unity and integration of politics and religion, he also propagated for the boycott of irrelevant customs, traditions, rituals, deities, superstitions and dogmas such as untouchability and other caste-based barriers associated with religion.

Gandhi through his ideas was successful in touching the hearts of millions of rural Indians along with the individuals residing in the urban localities. The main reason for such popularity was his simple and appealing philosophy of Constructive programme, his ability to interlink with masses by communicating them in their own language and explaining them the importance of following 18 elements of constructive programme for making India self-sufficient and self-reliant, dressing up like them instead of western attires so that they connect with him. It was due to his charismatic personality and ability to be interlink with the Indians that he was during his time was successful in making people agreed to hold inter-caste marriages, decreasing the level multiplicity of castes, improving status of women in society, mutual cooperation among different communities. (Patil. 1989. 251-255)

Moreover, Gandhi was in favour of agro-industrial village economy. To achieve this objective, he emphasized on revival of Khadi and other village industries which were providing employment artisans from centuries but in present scenario is facing degradation as a result of extensive use of machinery, westernization and urbanization. It was in his opinion was responsible for poverty, destitute and impoverishment of Indian artisans and a serious sit-back to Indian home industries. He in his Constructive programme advocated for the revival of Indian home industries so that Indians would be provided with better employment opportunities in which they have expertise with a broad objective of keeping the Indian culture, ancestral occupations and professions intact. However, he opposes the large-scale industries in his Constructive programme but along with this as a modern thinker, he was also in favour of the use of appropriate technology that would be beneficial to artisans such

as the use of singing swing machine, electricity. He was against those machinery that will lead to human misery in future and make them poor and unemployed. (Patil.1989.255)

He supported the concept of welfare state that put emphasis upon the dignity of its individuals, ensures minimum standard of living and provides meaningful employment to all. (Patil. 1989.257)

Gandhi through Constructive Programme wanted to change the traditional habits of Indians. He pleaded the Indian citizens to realize the importance of keeping their surroundings clean, importance of hygiene in their day to day life activities such as eating, bathing, washing and cooking. For this reason, he included village sanitation and education in health and hygiene as one of the two important elements of Constructive Programme in order to preach the Indian masses the ideal art of living a life away from diseases and dirt.

Another aim of Gandhi's Constructive Programme was to spiritualize the masses. His 18 elements of Constructive Programme were all meant to awaken the soul force in the masses of India and to spiritualize them, that would contribute towards a world where individuals would lead a life of love, brotherhood and selfless service, that would result in eliminating all types of disharmonies such as communal and linguistic. Constructive Programme was his way of human development. (Mishra. 1989.160)

Constructive Programme as envisaged by Gandhi can be termed as comprehensive one in its scope also creative in its nature and it can be actually realized by only few faithful constructive workers in its true sense as dreamed by Gandhi. It is a comprehensive one as it is not limited to any single activity but aims to co-ordinate each and every activity for the welfare of individuals. It has a broad objective of uplifting and reviving every aspect of society from our neglected folk arts, dance, music, handicrafts, drama and education. (Vaswani. 83)

Through, Constructive Programme, Gandhi wanted to uplift and integrate the humanity and it was his life mission. Regarding religion, he argued that, there is only one religion in his that is the religion of love. Apart from this, he considered humanity is the only caste which is important for individuals and other castes were man-made not god-made. He believed in the language of love over all other languages. To him God is omnipresent and he is one who is called by different names. (Mishra. 1989. 159)

Gandhi by his advocacy of Constructive Programme preached the Indians the lesson of self-service, dedicated and devoted work to uplift the humanity from the chains of evil caste and religion based practices and superstitions. Constructive Programme is a way to lead a life with patience and toleration, a means to conquer greed and undesirable passions in the interest of all, it taught the path of liberation from individual's known and unknown fears, desires, sufferings and sorrows. It is a way to salvation. Even after a hundred years of independence, his philosophy of Constructive Programme is strongly flowing in the nation and will continue to flow. (Vaswani. .81)

Communal harmony which is one of the important elements of Gandhi's Constructive Programme can be termed as an antidote to the evils of society. Indian society is a society where people speak different languages, follow and practice variety of religions, observe distinct traditional customs and rituals. It was his antidote to integrate the nation into the silken net of love away from mine and thine theory and in order to promote peace and prosperity within the society. It was an antidote to preserve national unity which was at danger at the time of freedom struggle. (Mishra. 1989. 145)

The study of Constructive Programme in details provides an insight that Gandhi was in favour of establishing a holistic world order. He was against the compartmentalization of individuals on the basis of religions and castes. His principle of truth and non-violence possesses the quality of relatedness and interlinking with all individuals in their life and in all future events. Gandhi in Constructive Programme was in favour of purity of means and ends and in present times, world strongly needs this approach when incidents of terrorism, environmental pollution, progressiveness of physical power and atomic power is increasing day by day around the world and are threatening the whole humanity. To tackle these problems, whole humanity is in urgent need of accepting the various basic principles of Constructive programme advocated by Gandhi such as spirit of compassion, oneness, love, non-violence, truth, mutual cooperation, discipline selfless service, voluntary efforts in the interest of all and many more such things propagated by Gandhi is what today's world requires the most. To make Constructive Programme successful, it is essential to mentally prepare Indians for the change by imbibing these elements and seek to put them into practice. It is a practice that needs to be practiced by health as well as by intellect. (Bharathi. 1995. 79)

Constructive programme has a broader objective of emancipating Indians not only from the rule of an autocratic imperial government but also emancipation of fellow countrymen from religious orthodoxy, poverty, unemployment, narrowness, selfishness and enables them to enjoy freedom equality and fraternity with a pure means of truth and non-violence. It provided a self-managed socio- economic, cultural, religious and political structure under which social harmony would be the main motive of life. It can be defined as an updating and new approach of sustained and non-exploitive development of our society. It is designed to build the men and nation from bottom to top in a hierarchical manner.

It is a concept rooted in our roots. For instance, he emphasized on truth and non-violence which were as old as hills and mountains and were in practice by sages and seers since the time immortal and they achieved spiritual heights by following these two principles. To him truth and non-violence are personal virtues that are essential for making constructive programme successful and for solving social, political and economic problems of nation. To him they are creed of life.

Constructive Programme can be termed as an open-ended process. A process which was related to his own life, his identification with country fellowmen, his own journey to perfect his own self, his experimentation with truth and non-violence. It was synthesis of spiritual truths, living without any frills or luxuries, social, moral, bureaucratic and civil action. (Swami. 2010.1)

Gandhi was a propagator of peace and wanted to establish a peaceful society where all individuals contribute their share for the welfare and development of all. In this peaceful society, he wanted to ward off hunger, malnutrition and conflicts aroused by the weaker and disadvantaged group. He laid significant emphasis upon raising the consciousness of masses about violence, war, local conflicts. He is in favour of peaceful co-existence of individuals irrespective of any distinction of caste, creed or color. (Mishra.1989.125)

He believed peace and happiness emerge from internal gratification, satisfaction and contentment, for this it is essential for anyone who is in search of peace and happiness to lead a life which is based on true human values such as community service, morality, non-exploitation, non-possession, social discipline, truth, non-violence, self-control, patient suffering and sacrifice, collective living, collective action and collective responsibility. Gandhi in his Constructive Programme desired to put down this mantra of peace and happiness in human personality. He laboured for bringing utmost difference in human nature. He worked for changing the hearts of individuals in which there is only place for love and non-violence instead of selfishness, jealousy and hatred. He argued that individuals must have to pay attention to control their unbridled sensual pleasures. (Mishra.1989.158-159)

Gandhi believed that Constructive Programme is nothing but another form of Satyagraha. It was his weapon in which he put 18 different elements such as communal harmony, adult education, women, students and many more into a single doctrine entitled Constructive Programme. It is a road to economically uplift the India. It is a satyagraha in the defence of outcaste individuals such as the tribals, the Scheduled castes or Harijans, the leprosy patients, landless, artisans, unemployed and so on. (Gangrade 1999: 44)

For Gandhi, the far-reaching achievement of Constructive Programme is complete independence. Gandhi envisioned a picture of India where all the individuals of nation are contributing their share in the whole of the Constructive work which was outlined to develop the country from the very bottom upward all through strong commitment towards truth and non-violence. (Swami. 2010.192)

The task of Constructive Programme in Gandhi's opinion, would be completed only with the direct contact with the masses and by involving them in public activity. It is a selfless task away from selfish egoistic motives. Through, Constructive Programme, Gandhi tried to teach Indians about their shortcomings and strength. It was a device to connect leaders and masses together for broader objective of attaining complete independence and to solve grassroot problems of nation. (Mathew. 2012. 598)

Gandhi was of the view that Constructive Programme will be beneficial to Indians in various aspects. For, instance, it will provide them liberty over the slavery of imperial autocratic government, self-reliance over economic and social deprivation and cooperative living over state of alienation. His agenda of Constructive Programme is to establish non-authoritative and non-exploitative in which the aim of the State is not to acquire more and more power but the welfare of its citizens.(Gangrade 1999: 58)

Conclusion

Constructive Programme can be termed as Gandhi's most potent weapon to revolutionize the Indian society and economy. It is not just an ideology but a movement and vision too. Through Constructive Programme, Gandhi showed a path of development. It is a type of social order which believes in the greatest good of all, equal status for all, mutual respect, liberty, equal opportunities of development. If it is properly followed, it will act as a panacea for all of India's ills. It is the symbol to bring awareness, removal of illiteracy and ignorance persisting since centuries as well to provide productive work to idle hands to increase the income and prosperity of rural India. It is a unique and fundamental contribution of Gandhi. It is nothing other than showing the way for the moral regeneration of Indians and political emancipation of modern India. It is a product of Indian environment as it is based on his empirical understanding of rural society and its psyche.

References

- Bharathi, K.S. (1995). *The social thought of Gandhi. In Thought of Mahatma (Vol.4)*. Nagpur: Dattsons. 79.
- Gangrade, K.D. (1999). *Gandhi since 50 years of azadi*. New Delhi: Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti. 44-58
- Mathew, Bindu (2012). *Mahatma Gandhi's Constructive Programme: some reflections (Vol. 73)*. In *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress: Indian History Congress*. 598
- Mishra, R.P. (1989) (Ed.). *Gandhian model of development and World peace*. New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company.125-160.
- Patil, V.T. (1989)(Ed.). *New dimensions and perspective in Gandhism*. New Delhi: Inter- India Publications. 251-257
- Swami, D.N. (2010). *Gandhigiri- a modern thought*. Jaipur: Shree Niwas Publications. 1-192
- Vaswani, K.N. (n.d.). *Gandhian literature*. New Delhi: East Panjab Printing. 81-83.