

8. Law of Bread Labour:

The Law of Bread Labour was propounded by T.M. Bondaref and popularized by Ruskin and Tolstoy. This law emphasises that man must earn his bread by his own labour. To Gandhiji the law of bread labour related to agriculture alone. But as every-body was not a cultivator, he could earn his bread by doing some other work.

If all people laboured for their bread, there would be enough food and clothing for all, they would be healthier and happier, and there would be no problem of food shortage, no disease and no misery. He strongly believed that without physical labour no one was entitled to get his food. He advised the rich also to do bodily labour for the bread.

9. Food Problem:

Gandhiji had seen the worst famine of his life during 1943-44, when Bengal suffered heavily owing to the country-wide shortage of food. To start with, Gandhiji thought that this scarcity of food had been artificially created. But after visiting Madras, Bengal and Assam, he arrived at the conclusion that the shortage of food was real and not artificial.

He suggested the following measures for solving the problem of food shortage in India:

- (i) Every individual should curtail his or her requirements of food to the minimum and as far as possible the consumption of food grains and pulses should be reduced to the minimum by substituting vegetables, milk, fruits, etc., for them;
- (ii) Every flower garden should be utilised for cultivation purpose;
- (iii) The consumption of food grains and pulses by the army personnel should be economized;
- (iv) Black-marketing should be stopped;
- (v) Deep wells should be sunk by the government so as to provide irrigational facilities;

(vi) Export of oil seeds, oil cakes, etc., should be stopped. Gandhiji was against food controls, because he thought that it not only created artificial scarcity, but made the people to depend upon others. They become spoon-fed. That is why, in November, 1947 he asked the Government of India to remove food controls.

10. Population:

The most important problem which attracted the attention of Gandhiji was the rapid increase in population. Gandhiji opposed the use of contraceptives as its use in India would make the middle-class male population imbecile through abuse of the creative functions. Gandhiji was in favour of birth control through self-control or brahmacharya and not through the use of artificial methods. He considered self-control as the “infallible sovereign remedy”.

He wanted the propagation of sex passion. He criticised those who argued that birth control was needed for solving the problem of overpopulation. He said, “In my opinion, by a proper land system, better agriculture, and a supplementary industry, this country is capable of supporting twice as many people as there are to-day”. Gandhiji was against the sterilisation of women, as it was inhuman. But he was not against vasectomy, especially in the case of those men who suffer from chronic diseases, because he thought that it was men who were the aggressors.

11. Prohibition:

According to Gandhiji, the use of coffee, tea, tobacco, and alcohol was detrimental to the mental, physical, and moral development of an individual. In his opinion, the use of liquor was a disease rather than a vice. He had no objection to the use of liquor if taken under medical advice. He would have preferred India to be reduced to a state of pauperism than have ‘thousands of drunkards in our midst’.

In one of his articles, he wrote that if he were appointed dictator of India, only for an hour, he would, in the first instance, close all the liquor shops without compensation, and compel the mill- owners to start refreshment rooms to provide harmless drinks to the

workmen. He thought that the evil of drinking liquor could not be eradicated by legislative measures alone.

Other measures suggested by him are as under:

(a) Public opinion should be educated;

(b) Refreshment rooms should be opened for selling harmless drinks;

(c) The income derived from the sale of intoxicants should be used for cultivating public opinion in favour of prohibition. He did not agree with those who contended that by prohibition, the revenue of the government will fall and it would not be able to incur expenditure on nation- building activities like education. He said that if the evil was removed, other resources of revenue could be developed without much difficulty.

12. Labour Welfare:

One of the important fields where Mahatma Gandhi extended his right for economic equality was the factory. He saw that workers were subjected to gross injustice and the treatment meted out to them was below dignity. To him, the employment of children was a national degradation. He always pleaded for shorter hours of work and more leisure so that workers might not be reduced to the condition of beasts. He also demanded safety measures inside factories.

Mahatma Gandhi laid emphasis on the welfare of the worker, his dignity and proper wages. In the Harijan dated June 9,1946 he wrote that all useful work should bring to the worker the same and equal wages. Until then, he should be paid at least that much which could feed and clothe himself and his family.

In order to improve the condition of the worker, first of all he laid claims on a minimum living wage so that a family of 4 to 6 members might live a human life. He wrote as far back as 1920 that the worker should get more wages, and should be given less work to do so that the following four things might be guaranteed to him — clean house, clean body, clean mind and a clean soul.

In so far as the relation between labour and capital is concerned, Mahatma Gandhi always suggested harmony between them. He argued that if the distinction of high and low disappeared, it would have a healthy reaction on all aspects of life. Consequently, the struggle between labour and capital would come to an end; and would give place to co-operation between them.

According to him, “capital should be labour’s servant, not its master”. Moreover, he believed in the formation of labour unions. If the rights of workers were not conceded, they could go on a strike which should be based on non-violence and truth.

13. Simplicity:

Mahatma Gandhi was against the multiplication of human wants. In order to lead a simple life — a life untouched by immorality, untruth and political gain, he did not want many things. He eventually succeeded in complete renunciation. He firmly believed that Western materialism and industrialisation had increased human wants. He always pleaded for a simple life, life of plain living and high thinking, so that the requirements of such a life could be satisfied easily.

To Mahatma Gandhi, happiness lay in the curtailment of wants, and not in their multiplication. As he observed — “The less you possess, the less you want, the better you are, better not for the enjoyment of this life but for the enjoyment of personal service to one’s fellow beings, service to which you dedicate yourself, body, soul and mind”.

14. Exchange Economy:

Gandhian idea on exchange economy is based on the swadeshi spirit. Every Indian village should be a self-supporting and self-contained unit exchanging only necessary commodities with other villages where they are not locally producible.

The person who has accepted the discipline of swadeshi would not mind physical discomfort or inconvenience caused by the non-availability of certain things which he has been using. He would

gradually learn to do without those things which up to this time he has been regarding as necessary for his life.

Mahatma Gandhi asked people not to worry about the non-availability of such things as pin and needle, because these were not manufactured in India. He was prepared to buy from other countries those commodities (like watches from Switzerland, surgical instruments from England, etc.) which were needed for the growth of the country; but he was not prepared to buy an inch of cotton of the finest variety from England or Japan or any other country of the world because the importation of cloth had caused the ruin of the home industry – it had harmed the interests of the millions of inhabitants of this country.

The guiding principle that he laid down in respect of all foreign goods was that those things should not be imported which were likely to prove harmful to the interests of the indigenous industry.

Mahatma Gandhi recognised money as a token of exchange only. In the economy envisaged by him, commodities were to be exchanged with commodities. The part played by money was insignificant. It became instrumental in the exploitation of the weak by the strong. To him, money was as useful as labour. He suggested that in order to make khadi universal, it should be made available in exchange for yarn, i.e., yarn-currency.

15. Untouchability:

Gandhi believed that untouchability was a sin against God and man. It was “like poison slowly eating into the very vitals of Hinduism”. It degraded both the untouchables and the touchables. He felt that Swaraj had no meaning if about 4 crores of people were kept under perpetual subjection; and were deliberately denied the fruits of their labour and national culture.”

Mahatma Gandhi admitted that untouchability was an old institution; but as it was an evil, it could not be defended on this ground.