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## UNIT 10 CONSTRUCTIVE PROGRAMME

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## 10.1 INTRODUCTION

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The constructive programme was the product of Gandhi's vision of a non-violent society. It grew out of the knowledge he had grasped of the naked reality of our country at that time through his intense travels throughout the nation. These programmes were not a passing thought but a creation of well-planned and thoughtful strategy of his mind. It was Gandhi's firm conviction that self-reliant villages form a sound basis for a just, equitable and non-violent social order, which can be a guiding principle for all citizens, constructive workers and policy makers in India. According to him, re-building of the nation could be achieved only by reconstructing villages. He himself initiated such efforts at many places including Champaran (1917), Sevagram (1920) and Wardha (1938). With the passage of time, he visualised and developed an elaborate programme of constructive work, which included economic self-reliance, social equality and decentralised political system.

According to him, life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom, but will be an oceanic circle whose centre will be the individual always ready to perish for the village, the latter ready to perish for the circle of villages, till at last the whole becomes one life composed of individuals, never aggressive but ever humble, sharing the majesty of the oceanic circle of which they are integral units. Gandhi considered such action plans as an absolutely integral part for the freedom movement.

### Aims and Objectives

After reading this Unit, you would be able to understand:

- Gandhi's vision of a non-violent social order through constructive programme
- The agenda of constructive programme and its main elements
- Its relevance in the contemporary times.

## 10.2 THE VISION OF A NON-VIOLENT SOCIAL ORDER

Gandhi was not only a revolutionary but also a practical idealist and visionary. Revolutionaries try to change or remove from the existing system what they believe to be wrong or evil. But, they do not often have an alternate arrangement or future planning in the place of the old prevailing system. As a result, revolutions sometimes either remain incomplete or their consequences are totally averse to expectations. Gandhi, however, was a different and exceptional revolutionary in this regard. Gandhi could come up with alternate solutions. He was extremely clear about removing certain evils in the society and had equal clarity about the new changes that he wanted to bring about. The process of changing the old structure and preparing the base for a new social order was going in parallel in Gandhi's scheme of reforms.

For this purpose, according to Gandhi, three points were important: (1) Removal of exploitation of all kinds from the society, (2) Less governance, and (3) Constructive programmes, which were must, in order to remove the obstacles coming in the way of fulfilling the first two goals. In other words, the plan to uproot injustice or evils through non-violent struggle to establish a non-violent social order is called 'Rachnatmak Karyakram' or constructive programme. Gandhi visualised that Swaraj would be attained of its own accord by building up a self-reliant social order through constructive programmes.

Gandhi wanted to remove pauperism, unemployment, inequality, ignorance, filth and disease. But the slavery of the country being a major obstacle in the above task, he first thought of removing the same. Thus, his plan was to change the whole existing social order and to establish a new non-violent social order, of which he had a clear vision. But, he did not want to wait till the slavery was eliminated. In fact, he had in his mind a clear programme which would cast away the slavery, and which at the same time would construct the base of a non-violent society. That strategy was the constructive programme.

Gandhi believed that if this programme is practised in its fullness by the whole country, Freedom would automatically follow without even any need of offering a civil disobedience. In a way, it can provide a complete substitute for such a direct action in the form of civil disobedience. In 1942 he wrote, "If we wish to achieve Swaraj through truth and non-violence, a gradual but steady building up from the bottom upwards by constructive effort is the only way". He designed the constructive programme to generate the inner strength, to elevate internal growth in the masses, and to make them aware of their rights as well as duties.

Describing the efficacy of constructive programme he wrote in 1922, "It will steady and calm us. It will wake our organizing spirit, it will make us industrious, it will make us fit for Swaraj, it will cool our blood". It can be taken up by anybody. It is the drill of non-violent soldier and through it they can make the villagers feel self-reliant, self-sufficient and free, so that they can stand up for their rights. He said that as military training is required for armed revolt, in the same way the constructive work is needed for civil resistance, which he called as "national ammunition".

For Gandhi, social, economic and moral freedoms were far more important than political freedom, which was to come only through constructive programmes. That was why constructive activities were far superior to political work for Gandhi. He wrote in 1931, "...my work of social reform was in no way less than or subordinate to political work. The fact is that when I saw that to a certain extent my social work would be impossible without the help of the political work, I took to the latter and only to the extent that it

helped the former. I must therefore confess that work of social reform or self-purification of this nature is a hundred times dearer to me than what is called purely political work.” In the constructive programme there is no room for hypocrisy, compulsion and violence, and it does not provoke violent feeling in the opponent which may be aroused by direct action. Moreover, “the greater the cultivation of constructive non-violence, the less the need to offer civil- disobedience.”

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### 10.3 ORIGINS AND BACKGROUND

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When Gandhi returned to India from South Africa during the First World War, India was in the iron grip of the British Empire. It was straining under the unjust laws imposed by the Raj. The Indian society was blighted by fear, lack of confidence and even self-respect. There was the fear of army, the police, laws, landlord’s agents, and money lenders. It was this pervasive and strangling emotion that paralysed the people and enabled the British to keep the country under their unrelenting grip of oppressive rule. Gandhi saw the state of spiritual and moral degradation under the impact of corrupt and exploitative colonialism that gripped the entire nation in severe poverty and exploitation.

The Indian National Congress was already a 30-year-old organisation, founded in 1885 and dominated by middleclass professionals. The goal of freedom and all Congress activities were confined to a limited circle, and to learned discussions and resolutions by upper class intellectuals. There was no direct involvement or commitment of the masses for the country’s freedom. No attempt had been made to bring the masses into the mainstream of the National Movement. The Congress was a very middle class or pro-aristocratic institution, whose members dressed in western clothes, behaved like the English people, held meetings and gave speeches only in English which the masses could not understand. As a result, they could not identify with the masses and remained away and aloof from them.

Gandhi’s observation of the Indian situation led him to two crucial conclusions: Firstly, there was a strong opposition to the increasingly oppressive colonial rule and a widespread demand for representative institutions. Though Gandhi admired its courage and patriotism, he strongly disapproved of its violence on moral and prudential grounds. He believed that violence was not a practicable option to build up moral courage, cultural self-confidence, and the capacity for concerted action among the masses. According to him the method of Satyagraha which he had discovered and developed in South Africa was best suited to India.

Secondly, Gandhi’s study of India convinced him of its ‘degenerate’ status. The centuries of foreign rule had made the Indian people deeply divided, caste-ridden, conformist, fragmented, selfish, contentious, cowardly, demoralised, and lacking in a social conscience and civic virtues. Unless the country was revitalised and reborn, it could neither win nor sustain and deserve its independence. Accordingly, Gandhi worked out a comprehensive syllabus of national regeneration and reconstruction, which he appropriately called the ‘constructive programme’. It included both small and large items, covering different areas of life.

Gandhi carried the message of Swaraj to the masses and tried to bridge the chasm created by the Congress between it and the masses. So he went to the masses to understand them and their problems. To achieve this great task of identification, he transformed himself thoroughly and genuinely, physically as well as mentally, and spoke politics to the masses in their own language, using cultural and religious symbols. Thus,

he felt it necessary to communicate with the masses, and then sought their participation in the political activities.

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## 10.4 THE BASIC MECHANISM

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In 1920 Gandhi launched the constructive programmes through the Congress. Gandhi aimed at re-generating a new society on a non-violent basis by empowering the masses through training and discipline in constructive programmes, and to achieve the same, he laid increasing stress on the necessity of working on this programme by any Satyagrahi. He said, “Civil disobedience is not absolutely necessary to win freedom through purely non-violent effort, if the cooperation of the whole nation is secured in the constructive programme.”

It worked as the best propaganda technique for mobilising the masses, by disseminating his message among the people. Its strength lay in the universal appeal of its high moral objective and its downright adherence to truth. According to Gandhi, it is a step-by-step and a very gradual process. It awakens the inner strength of the people, and of a country as a whole. Constructive Satyagraha is nothing but “internal growth” and the concrete expression of truth and non-violence.

Gandhi put greater emphasis on constructive programme because it was his belief that without training in constructive work it was impossible to offer civil disobedience, i.e. the direct action. To fight with the opponent, a Satyagrahi needs to generate inner strength through self-suffering and self-purification by conscious cooperative efforts. It is a direct personal service of the masses, and collective purificatory effort through service. It includes organising and educating the people in a non-violent way, and thus creating an atmosphere of profound determination by self-service. Gandhi demanded of individuals and groups intending to offer civil disobedience, to undergo a rigorous discipline through adequate practice of the constructive programme to acquire non-violent control over the masses.

In fact, it was a pre-requirement for Satyagrahi to implicitly follow the constructive work as an integral part of non-violence. It aimed at generating political power and awareness but not to capture it. Starting with few individuals, it becomes infectious. In Gandhi’s words, “What a few may do, others will copy, and the movement will grow like the coconut of the mathematical problem.” Its aim is to transform the existing social order along non-violent lines even before political power and state machinery are captured by Satyagrahis.

India is basically a country of agriculture, and most of the population is occupied in it. The aim of constructive work was to stop kisans and labourers being exploited and to make them aware of their rights. This work was a process of collective purification. The collective work must throw together the people and their leaders whom they would trust implicitly. Trust begotten in the pursuit of continuous constructive work becomes a tremendous asset at the critical moment. Constructive activities were far superior to political work because it displays to the masses the potentiality of Satyagraha which can end all kinds of exploitation and elevate their status. In Gandhi’s constructive programme, there was no room for violence but only a selfless service, non-violence, and unflinching belief in the power and utility of constructive work.

The function of the constructive workers was to train the masses for Satyagraha, to

universalise Khadi and to reconstruct the village on the basis of a handicraft civilisation. They have to identify with the villagers in order to win their hearts and confidence. Gandhi was fully convinced that if our 7 lakhs villages will begin work with such faith and energy, our slavery will disappear on its own, and each and every village will become self-reliant and free. This was the real Swaraj of Gandhi. It is not directed by antagonism towards anybody or to cause embarrassment to anyone. It is an urge to serve one's fellow-men and aimed at purifying the individual and society of the weaknesses and evils.

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## **10.5 THE AGENDA OF CONSTRUCTIVE PROGRAMME**

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Gandhi's comprehensive plan of national regeneration, which he named the constructive programme, aimed at establishing a social order, based on truth and non-violence. He wanted to abolish the exploitation of man by man, in any shape or form. This was perhaps more difficult than the achievement of freedom because in the process of establishing a new social order, there was a possibility of conflict between groups and classes of our own people.

Gandhi's constructive programme was based on the idea that foreign domination in India lived and prospered because of our negligence towards fundamental duties as a nation. The advancement of any nation crucially depends on the performance of such duties. He believed that when duties are fulfilled, the rights will automatically flow. The second was the efficacy of such a programme in organising the nation. Such an organisation is built on the work done in unity and cooperation. More real and more useful the work, the stronger would be the organisation built around it.

The items included in Gandhi's constructive programme were not arranged in order of their importance. He clarified that, if anyone finds that some important subject in terms of independence is left out, he can unhesitatingly add to the list. The reach of the programmes proposed was vast and the full programme included eighteen items, which were indispensable for the emancipation of the nation through non-violence. Gandhi did not follow a particular pattern in giving the programmes but he placed the issues according to their necessity. Through these programmes, he tried to touch many spheres of life, and many of them encompass more than one field of life, i.e. economic, political and social. We now discuss the agenda and aspects of the main programmes here.

### **10.5.1 Communal Unity**

As is known, Gandhi strove hard throughout his life to bring about communal unity. Many times, he resorted to 'fasting' to subside the communal violence. Whenever there was violence he reached the place without caring for his life.

According to Gandhi, communal unity does not merely mean political unity but should be an unbreakable unity of hearts, and can be achieved only by living like people and living with them as they live. This was what Gandhi did and achieved. That is why he wanted every Congress man to be one with the people and to represent in his own person every Hindu and non-Hindu to achieve such a unity. He wanted them to cultivate personal contacts and friendship with people of different faith other than his own, and to have the same respect for their faith as for his own.

Communal disunity and untouchability were the major hurdles in the way of establishing social unity in our society that created discrimination in the minds of the people. These social evils were age old and deep rooted in Indian social structure and the Indian

psyche. The British Government, taking advantage of our social situation, adopted the policy of 'divide and rule' and attempted to encourage and nurture the communal differences to retain and sustain their power and politics. Moreover, religious elements of our society purposely incited the poison of communal disunity in order to gain political advantages. Gandhi wanted to bring such practices to an end.

### **10.5.2 Removal of Untouchability**

Gandhi held that untouchability was a blot and curse upon Hinduism. It was an age-old social evil which had to be removed to establish social equality in the society. Gandhi endeavoured to abolish this evil. He started the 'Harijan' newspaper to explain his ideas to people and he travelled throughout the country to raise funds for Harijans. He also accommodated a Harijan family in his Kochrab ashram, thereby courting discontent of ashramites and an economic boycott from the rich.

He founded 'Harijan Sevak Sangh' in 1932 after his 'Yeravada Pact Fast'. Its objective was total removal of the taint of untouchability in law as well as in practice from the Hindu Society. Gandhi first expected the members of the Harijan Sevak Sangh to remove the last trace of untouchability from their own hearts. Removal of untouchability was an inevitable and most important task, because without social equality it was not possible to bring Swaraj. He was appalled that the Congress men looked upon it as a mere political necessity, and not as an urgent, indispensable requirement. It was his appeal to every Hindu to make a common cause with them and befriend them in their awful isolation. Gandhi held that if untouchability lived, Hinduism, and with it India would die. Gandhi shook the very foundation of the curse of untouchability in the Hindu society. Though, he could not eliminate it completely, his efforts in this direction lightened the misery and restored the self-confidence of the depressed classes to some extent.

### **10.5.3 Khadi**

Gandhi presented Khadi as a symbol of nationalism, economic freedom, equality and self-reliance. It was his belief that reconstruction of the society and effective Satyagraha against the foreign rule can be possible only through Khadi. Khadi is the core of the constructive activities as recommended by him. He called Khadi the sun of the solar system of the village economy. According to him there could be no Swaraj without universal and voluntary acceptance of Khadi. In his scheme of reconstruction for free India, villages should no longer depend on cities. In the task of village upliftment, he gave first priority to khadi and other village industries. India being a country of agriculture, the farmers spend half the year without work in idleness. So Gandhi thought spinning was the best option for them as productive activity.

For Gandhi, spinning wheel was a symbol of identification with the poor. It was intimately related to basic requirements of millions, i.e. food and clothing. He wanted them to be self-reliant. He believed that poverty led to moral degradation. Thus, with Charkha, he wanted to help the unemployed and poor. Many of his tours were proposed to organise and finance the spinning wheel movement. The spinning wheel was at one time the symbol of India's poverty and backwardness. Gandhi turned it into a symbol of self-reliance and non-violence. Khadi enabled him to carry his message of Swadeshi and Swaraj to the people and to establish connection with them.

### **10.5.4 Prohibition**

In Gandhi's scheme of constructive programme, prohibition was a vital social and moral

reform. Gandhi attached much importance to this because the people in villages and cities would be incapable of moral effort which was necessary for Satyagraha unless they were free from the grip of intoxicants. He also felt that women and students had a special opportunity to advance this reform. By acts of loving service they could acquire on addicts a hold which would compel them to listen to the appeal to give up the evil habit.

He suggested that Congress Committee could open recreation booths for tired labourers where they can rest, get healthy and cheap refreshments and also find suitable games. This was a novel and non-violent approach towards Swaraj. In his efforts to build non-violent social order, Gandhi did not want to wait or depend on the Government. He directly dealt with the people and their problems and tried to arouse people's inner dormant strength and capacity through such programmes. He believed that constructive workers could make legal prohibition easy and successful. Gandhi felt so strongly about this addiction that he said if he was made a dictator for even sometime, he would first make a law for prohibition.

### **10.5.5 Village Industries**

For Gandhi, Khadi is the sun of the village solar system and other village industries are the planets. Khadi takes the Central place in the upliftment of village economy. Without khadi, the other industries cannot grow. Similarly, without the revival of other essential industries khadi cannot make satisfactory progress. In order to make the villages self-reliant, the development of both the industries is essential as they are inter-dependent. Village economy remains incomplete without the revival and growth of other cottage industries such as hand-grinding, hand pounding, paper, soap etc. The development of such industries will make the villages self-sustained units and will end the exploitation of the villages by the cities.

### **10.5.6 Village Sanitation**

Village sanitation occupied a prominent place in Gandhi's constructive programme. He bestowed supreme priority on sanitation and cleanliness. He was deeply pained and disturbed by the unhygienic and polluting habits of the people. He felt people were ignorant of the elementary laws of cleanliness, spitting, throwing food, refuse and peelings, etc. all over. All these dirty habits spread the disease and foul the air. According to him, a sense of national and social sanitation is lacking in our people. He said, "we do not mind dirtying the well, the tank, or the river by which side we perform ablutions. I regard this defect as a great vice which is responsible for the disgraceful state of our villages..."

### **10.5.7 New or Basic Education**

Gandhi was clear that the education of citizens is a backbone of any society. So he envisaged a new educational system for non-violent society of his dream and experimented it for many years. Basic Education should be connected with life and should lead to the development of mind, body and soul. It was Gandhi's unflinching faith that there are abundant power and potentiality in children. The nature and surroundings of society in which the children are born and brought up can itself be very educative for their life and development. They can learn many things by dealing with practical work and by direct experiences.

Gandhi's concept implies that nature, society and crafts are huge mediums of education. According to him, "true education is that which draws out and stimulates the spiritual, intellectual and physical faculties of the children. This education ought to be for them, a

kind of insurance against unemployment". The Basic Education which was imparted through the medium of handicraft was specially designed to transform the village children into model villagers, which keeps them rooted to the soil and links to all that is best and lasting in India.

#### **10.5.8 Adult Education**

For Gandhi, adult education means not only to teach illiterate to read and write but also to open their minds to the vastness and greatness of their country. As the villagers sometimes know nothing about their country except their own villages, Gandhi wanted to develop and broaden their vision and wanted them to know about the rich and magnificent cultural heritage of their country. Gandhi's adult education means, true political education of adult by word of mouth so that they can know that foreigner's presence is due to their own weaknesses and ignorance of power they possess to get rid of it. Through this programme, Gandhi aimed at generating this awareness in them.

#### **10.5.9 Upliftment of Women**

In his mission of Swaraj, Gandhi needed the cooperation of women, kisans, labourers and students. So, he had planned to work amongst them through constructive programme, which was a concrete plan to generate awareness in them and get their support in the freedom struggle. He believed that the movement cannot succeed without the active participation of women.

The movement of 1930-32 generated unprecedented awareness in women. It was only due to Gandhi's efforts that women came out of their houses for the first time in the history and participated in the Indian political struggle. Gandhi wanted to give women equal status as of men. He believed that men should consider themselves as women's friends and co-workers and not as their masters. He clarified that men are responsible for the suppressive state of women by custom and law. He said, "In a plan of life based on non-violence woman has as much right to shape her own destiny as man has to shape his". Gandhi wanted to change customary and legal status of women in order to put them on an equal footing with men.

#### **10.5.10 Education in Health and Hygiene**

Gandhi gives equal weightage to health and hygiene saying that ignorance and neglect of the laws of health and hygiene are responsible for the majority of our diseases. To keep our minds and bodies healthy Gandhi suggests some rules to be observed which include purity of air, water and food, personal cleanliness and of surroundings, to maintain the balance between physical and mental work; to stand and sit erect, be neat and clean in every act, which must become an expression of our inner condition.

#### **10.5.11 Provincial Languages**

Gandhi realised that our craze for English language in preference to our own mother tongue has created a rift between the educated and political minded classes and the masses. If the masses do not understand each step with all its implications, they cannot ably make their direct contribution to the freedom movement which is inherent in Swaraj based on non-violence. So, it is absolutely inevitable to explain the steps in their own languages.

#### **10.5.12 National Language**

Gandhi felt that India needs a common language, which is known and understood by a

large number of people and others can easily pick up. This is Hindi. He was sure that English can never be our national language, because “it (Hindi) has long been accepted as the lingua franca of India and much work has been done for its propagation and instruction in it by Prachar Sabha all over the country”.

#### **10.5.13 Economic Equality**

Gandhi holds that economic equality is the master key and the only solution to non-violent independence. So long as there is a gulf between the rich and the poor the construction of non-violent society is clearly impossible. A violent and bloody revolution is bound to happen unless there is a voluntary abdication of rich. Therefore, Gandhi suggests the way of equal distribution of wealth through his theory of Trusteeship, which implies that the rich people are not the owners of their wealth but they are only trustees.

#### **10.5.14 Kisans**

India being an agricultural country, kisans are in majority in its population. Gandhi believed that if they are made conscious of their strength, no power on earth can resist them. The effective method of organising kisans is displayed by Gandhi’s kisan movement in Champaran, Kheda, Bardoli and Borsad.

#### **10.5.15 Labour**

Gandhi considers Ahmedabad non-violent labour union as a model for India to copy. Labour should have its own unions. The Union should have its own schools, hospitals and a crèche for workers’ children. It should also have a maternity home, its own printing press, khadi depot and residential quarters. Moreover, the union should run night schools for the general and scientific education of workers. They should teach the workers the science of conducting a successful strike. Besides, capital should be labour’s servant and not the master. The aim of constructive programme was to elevate the status of labour.

#### **10.5.16 Students**

According to Gandhi, the current education is unnatural and to acquire knowledge in foreign language in the place of mother tongue is a waste of time for students. Gandhi set out a clear programme to train and prepare the students, who are the future leaders of the nation, as to what they should do and should not do. Students, in his opinion, should keep away from party politics, political strikes and coercive and secret ways. They should take to spinning, use khadi and village products, learn the national language and enrich their mother tongue.

#### **10.5.17 Adivasis**

Service of Adivasis was also included in the constructive programme. Gandhi clarified that this work is not merely humanitarian but it is a national service.

#### **10.5.18 Lepers**

Gandhi felt that we urgently need to pay our attention to this long neglected condition of the lepers and our inhuman behaviour towards them. If we are to construct non-violent social order, we will have to cultivate compassion, love and service towards the economically and physically weaker and diseased people. Non-violent society is not possible unless everybody enjoys the equal status and opportunities.

In order to generate non-violent strength among the masses through constructive work,

Gandhi had established many institutions, each with a specific goal. The main function of these organisations was to promote, encourage and supervise the activities of constructive programmes.

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## 10.6 SUCCESSES AND FAILURES

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Close to the epoch of freedom, Gandhi suggested dissolution of the Congress into Lok Sevak Sangh. He wrote that, "Congress has won political freedom, but it has yet to win economic freedom, social and moral freedom. These freedoms are harder than the political..." Gandhi did not believe in political power. Instead, he had tremendous faith in the power of the people. He clarifies, "If they (Swarajists) had power or office, it must be by virtue of service, not by manipulation of the vote. The vote is there, no doubt. But it must come, if it is to come, without asking. Is it not easy enough to see that service requires no power, no office, no prestige? I would like every one of us to be a mere servant of the nation".

Unfortunately, his basic social or political ideas were often not understood or followed by even his close disciples. They reluctantly followed him or differed from him on the ground that there was no integral relation between constructive work as defined by Gandhi, and the Congress policy of non-violent mass action. Therefore, they wanted the resolution on constructive programme to be split into parts, to which Gandhi strongly disagreed.

While the Congress worked for the programmes mainly as propagandists, the actual educational part of the work was carried out by three organisations, namely the All India Spinners' Association, All India Village Industries Association and All India Harijan Sevak Sangh. It was decided to integrate the Khadi work with all round village uplift work by linking it with village industries and basic education. A joint board was created for these institutions, and all three were linked to agriculture which would be the base.

The main function of this Coordination Committee, working under the direct guidance of Gandhi, was to act as a watch and ward committee in regard to the constructive work, and point out deviations from the principle of non-violence. However, it could not work satisfactorily. The All India Spinners' Association succeeded in constituting "the biggest voluntary cooperative society in the world" with a capital of nearly ten lakhs of rupees and an outturn of Rs.12, 002,430 worth of cloth. It drew together around 3,024,391 spinners and 354,257 artisans spread over some 15,010 villages of India, and the total wage of Rs.46, 030,081 was paid to the artisans by the association during the first eighteen years of its existence.

The Association, however, passed through different phases. In the first phase, the emphasis was given on the awakening of the mass consciousness, in the second on the fulfillment of social justice by introducing the standard minimum wage. This trial achieved a striking success in the first and a limited one in the last.

During the 'Quit India' Movement of 1942, the British used violence against the people and even against the constructive institutions. Though Gandhi tried to keep away these institutions from politics, they functioned under constant government glare and even the Ashrams' premises were also occupied by the police all over the country. Gandhi's hope that their non-political status would secure them against Government's repression was shattered.

Gandhi had built up these institutions with the hope that they would themselves become a symbol of non-violence and that way guide the enthusiasm of the people. Addressing the Trustees of the A.I.S.A, Gandhi said, "The Spinners' Association was brought into being to give a concrete shape to this thought of mine. I had hoped that through the Association I would be able to bring home the capacity of the spinning wheel to every village and every home and thereby extend to the world a place that the spinning wheel can occupy in the foundation of a non-violent society. But judging from the work done during all these years, I have realized that the Spinners' Association has not been able to fulfill this aim of mine. Let alone the question of introducing a spinning wheel in every home. It has not been able to do so even in every village...What power on earth could have crushed it if the Spinners' Association had spread itself far and wide in the seven lakhs of villages of India? No Government can either imprison the 40 crores of people or shoot them. Even if we imagine for a moment that the Government may shoot one crore of people, still it cannot stop the progress of the aims and ideals for which the Spinners' Association stands".

The Spinners' Association had treated khadi as an economic activity and not as a symbol of non-violence as Gandhi had envisaged and became quantity and commercial-minded regarding the khadi work. As a result, although khadi had fulfilled all expectations of economic relief, its significance as a symbol of non-violence was side-tracked. Many of the workers engaged in khadi work did not understand the implications and higher mission of khadi and the truth of non-violence in their own lives. As a result, they naturally could not infect the masses.

The success of khadi should not be measured in terms of its production and sale figures and not even by the number of people wearing khadi. What mattered was the number of people who are taught to be clothed themselves through their own efforts with a clear and conscious understanding of the ideals of Ahimsa, Self-reliance and Self-sufficiency. Khadi should be pursued not as an isolated economic activity, but as a means of the revival of the entire village economy. And also many had taken to the spinning wheel out of their reverence and faith in Gandhi. Gandhi wanted them to link their faith with knowledge so that it can resist any attack. For Gandhi, non-violence was a principle of life, whereas for the Congress, it was only a policy which can be changed or used as expediency. He pointed out in 1939 that non-violence does not seize power. It does not even seek power, but power accrues to it. There was a rise of groups in the Congress which had no faith in non-violence or constructive programme. Still they stuck to the Congress because its name rendered the strength to their appeal to the masses.

The intrusion of internal corruption in Congress, influence and power, false entries in Membership register and resorting to violence at the party elections have all weakened the spirit of Satyagraha. In the process, the constructive programme and discipline were neglected. In this way, even the Congress lagged behind and failed to rise to Gandhi's expectations in respect of non-violence, by attaching much importance to the numbers, at the cost of depth.

There is also a criticism, as pointed out by Dhawan, that constructive programme works as reformist and reactionary, which blunts the edge of popular discontent, side-tracks the main issues, and postpones the revolution. According to Bhikhu Parekh, Gandhi believed that, struggle for Indian political freedom and for Indian regeneration must go in parallel. That means if the political freedom was given more importance than the latter, there was a risk of valuing political power, prestige and office-holders compared to grass-roots

workers. Both the struggles had different logics and they came into conflict. Also the freedom struggle involved Satyagraha as well as working within the institutions provided by the colonial state and these sometimes pulled in different directions. The other Indian leaders had their own views and they did not agree with Gandhi on his priority to moral regeneration and constructive programme.

Gandhi opined that different individuals had different capacities and talents. Some were more suited for Satyagraha, while others were for constructive programme or conventional politics. The freedom to do what they were best at and the accommodation of this plurality in the political struggle ensured that division of work which was required for the Indian freedom and regeneration.

According to some members, political freedom was the first requirement for moral regeneration. Gandhi judged a Satyagraha from the point of view of its effect on Indian society and its regeneration, while they judged it on the ground of how it affected conventional politics and advanced their demand for representative institutions. As pointed out by Bhikhu Parekh, "Since Gandhi had not clearly worked out the relationship between conventional politics, Satyagraha and the constructive programme and since it had to be constantly redefined in the light of changing circumstances, his overall strategy remained somewhat incoherent, rendering his leadership occasionally erratic, unpredictable and a source of controversy".

As pointed out by Kishorlal Mashruwala, many Congress men and constructive workers were very confused about the manner of working out of the constructive programmes. As such they were enthusiastic about Gandhi's plans and were eager to advance them. But, when they approached Gandhi with their own plans and ideas, they felt, he was not very encouraging and appreciative. So, they felt very confused.

Gandhi was also accused of leaving not much scope for his followers or co-workers to work independently with their own responsibility and according to their own light. Even the details of their private and personal conduct were laid down by him or had to be previously approved. This nurtured diffidence. Gandhi often gave detailed instructions for the work and it had become impossible for them to reach any decision without consulting him. But if we try to judge from Gandhi's point of view, he repeatedly says that, Congress has not paid enough attention to the constructive programme. Talking about removal of untouchability he says, "I am sorry to have to say that many Congress men have looked upon this item as a mere political necessity and not something indispensable". At other place he says, "Congress men have not taken the interest they might have taken in this (prohibition) very vital social and moral reform." Again he says, "This (Adult Education) has been woefully neglected by Congress men." About the National language he said that "...we have the shameful spectacle of Congress men insisting on speaking in English and compelling others to do likewise for their sake." Regarding kisans he says, "The method that some Congress men have followed to organize kisans has done them no good and has probably harmed them. Anyway they have not wed the non-violent method".

It should be clearly understood that social change is a very slow and gradual process. Many of the social evils like untouchability, communal disunity and so on, were age old and deep rooted in the Indian psyche. Perhaps, it was not possible to eliminate them within a limited frame of time. This made the success of the programme difficult.

Gandhi's personality was constantly developing and evolving. This also made difficult for his followers and co-workers to keep pace with Gandhi's dynamism. Gandhi could generate tremendous awareness and could highlight the problems very powerfully and effectively. Whether people agreed or disagreed with his ideas, whether they believed or not in spinning wheel, but Gandhi's message of inevitability of achieving economic independence was conveyed and reached to them clearly. And this can be considered as a success of the constructive programmes.

To sum up, perhaps it would not be fair to call it a failure as considerable work was done on constructive programmes. As told by Gandhi, it was a tremendous task of regeneration of India and so some deficiencies, lack of efforts, and differences of opinion were quite natural and part of the process due to plurality and diversity of individuals. The work has had to pass through various phases and circumstances, and even today it is continuing in one or the other form.

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## **10.7 RELEVANCE IN CONTEMPORARY TIMES**

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Even after more than sixty years of independence, we have not yet succeeded in removing untouchability from practice, communal disunity, commercialisation of education ignoring the development of body, mind, and soul, craze for foreign language that widens the gap between the educated class and the masses. We have also neglected our provincial languages and National Language; we disconnected ourselves from our culture. Gandhi's dream of villages becoming self-sufficient, self-reliant and free from exploitation remains unfulfilled. Today, our villages are neglected and exploited and cities have become congested due to urbanisation and industrialisation, creating more problems like insanitation, filth, and spread of diseases, epidemics and environmental degradation. There is no well-defined policy on Prohibition.

If we look into the history of the last hundred years, it is difficult to find a parallel to Gandhi's constructive programme. It was unique and universal, and was like a power house to extract strength for Satyagraha. Without constructive programmes, the Satyagraha movements would not have been successful in achieving the goal of the country's freedom. It played important role in the non-violent struggle for India's freedom. It provided strength and impetus to Satyagraha movements when it seemed to weaken on the surface. It carried the workers to the remote villages throughout the nation, carrying the message of Gandhi and prepared the concrete base for Swaraj by erecting new centres of constructive work at various places.

Economically, it provides a decentralised system to prevent exploitation by keeping away the middle man from production and sale. Politically, it calls for the participation of majority of the people of the society, which can be possible only in politically small units with equal distribution of responsibility. Educationally, the citizens will secure the development of body, mind and soul. Culturally, it will raise the level of every citizen through the values like love, compassion and service. Gandhi had designed the constructive programmes keeping in mind the situation of our country at that time. But, they seem no less relevant in the current scenario and modern times, as today we have created many more problems through profligate life-style and wasteful patterns of consumption. The basic principles used there still look worth emulating.

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## 10.8 SUMMARY

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Through Constructive Programme, Gandhi aimed at not only the political freedom of India but also its socio-economic-cultural regeneration. He viewed it as a means of establishing non-violent society, self-reliant and self-sufficient in all aspects. The constructive work, to him, was an absolutely integral part of the freedom movement. It was the 'national ammunition' to fight the oppressive rulers, and a full substitute for armed revolt. It would generate an expression of complete independence by the millions of masses fighting non-violently to seek their rights towards an independent nation. It was also an instrument to move determinedly towards regenerating the society and enabling its citizens to live up to their non-violent and truthful 'Swaraj'.

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## 10.9 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

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1. Why was the constructive programme initiated by Gandhi?
2. Describe the agenda of the constructive programme.
3. Do you think the constructive programme is relevant today? Why?
4. Explain the successes and failures of the constructive programmes.

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