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Economic management philosophy of dr. Rajendra prasad

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Received-07.07.2025,

Revised-14.07.2025,

Accepted-21.07.2025

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Abstract: *Dr. Rajendra Prasad served our country in different capacities. From being a great freedom fighter to a trend-setting president and statesman, he showed his mettle in different domains and contributed immensely in various arenas. However, his contribution to this country as an educationist often goes unnoticed. He was instrumental in the establishment of several educational institutions in the country. His outlook and philosophy of education still seem relevant. Whether his idea of imparting education in the mother tongue, or his idea of giving skill-based education, or that people should become self-reliant and should not just become job-seekers (encouraging entrepreneurial spirit) still resonates with the policy-makers of our times. His philosophy on education impacted the recently adopted National Education Policy 2020, which is still under the process of implementation. The importance of Indian languages, skill enhancement, emphasis on Indian culture and heritage and encouraging entrepreneurship are some of the common features of Dr. Rajendra Prasad's vision of education and the National Education Policy 2020.*

Dr. Prasad was futuristic in his approach by employing his vision that breaking the salt laws may have different implications for specific groups and communities.

Constitutionalism refers to the principles and practices of government that are based on formal provisions and prescriptions. Under constitutionalism, a set of fundamental laws and principles that govern a country contains the structure of government, the rights and duties of citizens and the powers and limitations of government officials. The idea of constitutionalism includes rule of law, separation of power, limitation to the government and protection of individual rights. The rule of law is a basic principle of constitutionalism which states that each individual is subject to the law, including government functionaries. The separation of powers is divided into different levels, such as the legislative, executive, and judicial branches. This principle helps to prevent the concentration of power in any one branch of government and promotes accountability and transparency.

Dr. Prasad was an excellent mind with legal acumen. He presided over the Constituent Assembly that gave rise to the constitution of our country. At the election of the permanent chairman of the constituent assembly, J B Kriplani proposed the name of Dr. Rajendra Prasad which was seconded by Vallabhabhai Patel.

Key words : Economic Development, Self Reliance, Global Economy, promotes accountability, power .

Introduction - Dr. Rajendra Prasad (1884–1963), the first President of independent India, was not only a statesman but also a thinker deeply rooted in India's social and cultural ethos. Born in Bihar, he was trained as a lawyer and soon rose to prominence in the Indian freedom movement under the guidance of Mahatma Gandhi. His life was a blend of scholarship, service, and political leadership, culminating in his pivotal role in shaping the socio-political foundation of modern India.

Dr. Rajendra Prasad's intellectual orientation was shaped by India's colonial context, traditional values, and the liberal, nationalist atmosphere of the early twentieth century. Raised in a rural middle-class family in Bihar, Prasad was exposed early to the challenges of agrarian life. His education at Presidency College, Kolkata, imparted both academic rigor and exposure to the ideas of self-reliance, Swadeshi, and social change. His deep engagement with the Dawn Society and Gandhian movement later cemented his resolve for Indian independence and socio-economic upliftment. While his constitutional contributions are well known, Dr. Prasad's socio-economic ideas are equally significant. He lived during a period when India was striving to liberate itself not only politically but also socially and economically from colonial exploitation. Understanding his philosophy offers valuable insights into India's developmental trajectory-rooted in self-reliance, morality, and inclusive growth.

Dr. Prasad was deeply influenced by Gandhi's emphasis on truth, non-violence, and swaraj. Like Gandhi, he believed that India's regeneration lay in strengthening its villages, promoting cottage industries, and encouraging simple living. He emphasized moral values in economics, arguing that development must be guided by ethics rather than blind industrialization.

Dr. Prasad considered the village the backbone of India. He advocated for agricultural reforms, rural education, and self-sufficient village economies. In his vision, true independence meant not only political



freedom but also the empowerment of the rural poor through land redistribution, cooperative farming, and local self-governance.

For Dr. Prasad, governance was inseparable from morality. He insisted that public life must be based on honesty, accountability, and service to the people. His speeches as President often reminded leaders that power was a responsibility, not a privilege. He envisioned a state that would act as a trustee of the people's welfare, blending modern institutions with traditional ethical frameworks.

Dr. Rajendra Prasad's socio-economic philosophy cannot be understood in isolation from the realities of colonial India. British rule had left the Indian economy deeply impoverished—marked by deindustrialization, exploitative land revenue systems, and widespread poverty. Agriculture, the primary livelihood of the majority, suffered from fragmentation, indebtedness, and recurrent famines. Education was limited and often alien to Indian traditions, while social structures perpetuated inequality and exclusion. This backdrop of economic stagnation and social stratification shaped Prasad's deep concern for rural upliftment and his advocacy for indigenous models of development.

Prasad was not only an active participant in the freedom struggle but also a strategic thinker about the kind of society that should emerge after independence. He played a pivotal role in the Champaran and Kheda Satyagrahas, supporting farmers and addressing their exploitation by British landlords, foreshadowing his agrarian concerns. These formative experiences built his sensitivity toward rural distress, peasants' rights, and the need for economic justice. Prasad's intellectual and political journey was closely intertwined with the freedom movement. Initially a lawyer by profession, his active participation in the Indian National Congress exposed him to debates on political independence, social reforms, and economic reconstruction. The struggle for swaraj expanded his outlook beyond political emancipation to envisioning a self-reliant society. His imprisonment during the non-cooperation and Quit India movements offered him time for reflection, strengthening his resolve to link political freedom with socio-economic transformation. For him, freedom was incomplete without addressing poverty, illiteracy, and inequality.

The turning point in Dr. Prasad's socio-economic vision came with his close association with Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi's emphasis on truth, non-violence, and village-centric development profoundly influenced him. Under Gandhi's leadership, Prasad learned to see villages not as sites of backwardness but as reservoirs of moral strength and self-sufficiency. He embraced Gandhi's call for khadi, cottage industries, and constructive work, translating these ideas into his own emphasis on rural empowerment, cooperative movements, and ethical governance. His later role as President also bore Gandhian imprints, as he consistently highlighted simplicity, integrity, and service as the foundations of governance.

Dr. Prasad's philosophy was rooted in Gandhism—a steadfast belief in non-violence, village-centric development, cottage industries, and self-reliance as the basis for India's economic future. He asserted that industrialization must not sideline the traditional fabric of Indian society. To him, economic advancement was inseparable from social harmony, self-sufficiency, and moral values.

- Emphasis on khadi, village industries, and sustainable agriculture.
- Advocacy for decentralized planning, local self-governance, and participatory community development.

Stress on bridging disparities between urban and rural India so the majority of Indians could share in the nation's prosperity.

Dr. Rajendra Prasad's active role in the Champaran (1917) and Kheda (1918) satyagrahas marked the beginning of his transformation from a lawyer to a people's leader. Under Gandhi's leadership, he organized volunteers, mobilized peasants, and gave voice to the exploited farmers suffering under oppressive indigo cultivation and unfair taxation. These struggles sharpened his awareness of the deep link between economic injustice and political subjugation. They also reinforced his conviction that genuine independence required uplifting the rural masses who bore the brunt of colonial exploitation.

Prasad's political career was defined by a steadfast adherence to non-violence and justice. He believed that freedom achieved through violent means would not bring lasting peace or moral legitimacy. His emphasis on self-reliance (swadeshi) extended beyond economic production to encompass moral self-discipline and civic responsibility. For him, non-violence was not merely a political tactic but a socio-economic principle: it demanded respect for human dignity, cooperation instead of exploitation, and development rooted in ethical values.

Dr. Rajendra Prasad strongly endorsed Gandhi's idea that India's strength lay in its villages. He believed that rural India was not merely a geographical space but the moral and economic backbone of the nation. For him, the village economy needed to be revitalized rather than replaced by unbridled industrialization. He envisioned villages as self-sustaining units where agriculture, local crafts, and



community-based institutions would secure both livelihood and dignity for the majority of Indians. This village-centric economy was seen as the foundation for a just and harmonious society.

Prasad was a staunch advocate of *swadeshi*—the principle of self-reliance in economic life. He actively promoted the use of indigenous goods and discouraged dependence on foreign imports, which he saw as instruments of economic exploitation. Inspired by Gandhi, he popularized the spinning of *khadi*, not just as a symbol of resistance to colonial rule but as a means of providing employment to millions of rural poor. He supported grassroots industries like handloom weaving, pottery, and other cottage crafts, which could absorb surplus rural labor while preserving traditional skills. For Prasad, *swadeshi* was both an economic strategy and a moral duty, rooted in dignity of labor and national pride.

A key aspect of Dr. Prasad's socio-economic vision was the decentralization of power and resources. He believed that development should not be imposed from the top but should emerge from local needs and capacities. *Panchayati raj* institutions, cooperative societies, and village-level self-help groups were central to his idea of participatory governance. By empowering local communities to plan and execute their development, he hoped to ensure both efficiency and equity. In this framework, the state acted as a facilitator rather than a controller, allowing rural communities to shape their own destinies.

Before becoming the first President of India, Dr. Rajendra Prasad served as the country's first Food and Agriculture Minister (1946–1947) in the Interim Government. This role allowed him to directly apply his socio-economic philosophy to the urgent challenge of food scarcity. India, still reeling from colonial exploitation and the devastating Bengal famine of 1943, faced widespread hunger, poor agricultural productivity, and dependence on food imports. Prasad advocated comprehensive agrarian reforms, seeing agriculture not just as an economic activity but as the foundation of national stability and rural prosperity.

One of Prasad's most significant initiatives was the "Grow More Food" campaign, launched in 1947 to address acute food shortages. The campaign encouraged farmers to bring fallow land under cultivation, adopt better seeds, and increase crop yields through cooperative efforts. It was not merely a technical program but also a socio-economic movement, designed to instill a sense of collective responsibility and self-reliance. While the campaign faced challenges such as limited infrastructure and resistance to new methods, it succeeded in raising awareness about food security and highlighted the central role of agriculture in nation-building.

Prasad's approach to agricultural development balanced tradition with modern science. While respecting rural customs and community practices, he emphasized the need for scientific methods in agriculture—improved irrigation, crop rotation, soil conservation, and the use of modern tools. He recognized that sustainable food security required not just increased production but also equitable land distribution, fair pricing, and cooperative farming models. His advocacy of agricultural research institutions and farmer education laid the groundwork for later advancements, including the Green Revolution. For Prasad, ensuring food security was not just an economic necessity but also a moral imperative to safeguard the dignity and well-being of every citizen.

Dr. Rajendra Prasad's role in the framing of the Indian Constitution was pivotal. As President of the Constituent Assembly, he guided debates with fairness, patience, and vision. He saw the Constitution not only as a legal framework but also as a moral charter for social and economic justice. Later, as the first President of India (1950–1962), he continued to champion the values of simplicity, ethical governance, and service. His speeches consistently reminded lawmakers and administrators that political freedom must be matched by social welfare and economic empowerment of the masses.

As the first President of India (1950–1962), Rajendra Prasad was central to shaping India's early constitutional and economic framework:

- Advocated for a balanced approach to state intervention: while the government assumed a pivotal role in planning, Prasad discouraged bureaucracy and over-centralization.
- Supported land reforms, abolition of *zamindari* (landlordism), and redistribution as vital to justice and productivity.

Encouraged the mobilization of resources for education, irrigation, health, and scientific research, underlining that human development was at the heart of economic advancement.

Prasad's economic vision steered a middle path between unregulated capitalism and excessive state control. He supported government intervention in critical sectors—such as land reforms, food security, and rural development—while also valuing individual initiative and community participation. For him, development had to be people-centric, rooted in the needs of villages and the aspirations of the common



citizen. He stressed that economic planning should be humane, ethical, and inclusive, ensuring that growth did not come at the expense of social justice.

Dr. Rajendra Prasad, though primarily focused on India's domestic development, recognized the importance of an ethical and independent foreign policy. He strongly supported the doctrine of non-alignment, which emerged as a guiding principle for newly independent nations during the Cold War. For Prasad, aligning with any power bloc would compromise India's hard-won sovereignty and distract from its developmental priorities. Instead, he envisioned India as a bridge-builder, advocating peaceful coexistence, disarmament, and cooperation across ideological divides. His approach reflected the same values that shaped his socio-economic philosophy-self-reliance, justice, and moral responsibility in the global arena.

Prasad also believed that India had a special role to play in supporting other Asian and African nations breaking free from colonial rule. He emphasized solidarity among post-colonial societies, grounded in shared experiences of oppression and common aspirations for dignity and development. In his public addresses and diplomatic engagements, he highlighted the importance of mutual cooperation in areas like agriculture, education, and industrial growth. By encouraging partnerships among emerging nations, he sought to promote an alternative model of global relations based not on domination but on equality and collective progress.

Prasad's ideas continue to resonate in contemporary debates on India's development path. His stress on rural upliftment aligns with ongoing concerns about agrarian distress, migration, and the widening rural-urban divide. Similarly, his insistence on ethics in governance appears strikingly relevant in times when corruption, partisanship, and erosion of public trust are pressing issues. His example suggests that economic policy must be guided not only by efficiency but also by justice, sustainability, and moral responsibility.

The legacy of Dr. Rajendra Prasad lives on in various aspects of Indian socio-economic policy. Land reform efforts, the promotion of cooperative movements, the encouragement of cottage industries, and the focus on panchayati raj institutions all bear the imprint of his vision. His advocacy for education, food security, and social justice also set the foundation for many post-independence policies. Beyond specific programs, his greatest legacy lies in his insistence that development must be people-centric, ethical, and inclusive, a principle that remains a guiding light for policymakers even today.

Dr. Rajendra Prasad's socio-economic philosophy was a synthesis of Gandhian ideals, traditional Indian values, and pragmatic statecraft. At its core were the principles of village-centric development, self-reliance, ethical governance, agricultural reform, social justice, and education as empowerment. He viewed economic independence as inseparable from political freedom and insisted that growth must serve the common people, especially the rural poor. His approach was marked by a balance-embracing modern science and planning while safeguarding India's cultural ethos and moral fabric.

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