1. Discuss the Gandhian concept of voluntarism and rural reconstruction during freedom struggle.

Ans: Mahatma Gandhi stimulated the voluntary movement at turn of the century. He introduced a “constructive programme” to make villages self-sufficient by encouraging people to use the spinning wheel (charkha), hand-woven cloth (khadi), and village industries (gramodyog), which aimed at solving the problems of rural India. From 1920, his concept of Sarvodaya was formally embedded in this programme, of which the initial elements were community cooperation and unity, removal of untouchability and the promotion of village industries. Constructive workers lived in villages and introduced a social reconstruction programme based on self-help and self-reliance. The training of workers emphasized an austere personal life, development of attitudes and pursuit of skills suitable to the local industry.

Mahatma Gandhi’s monumental visions for the resurgence of rural India; so that millions of Indians who live in numerous villages across the country can become an important stakeholder in India’s economic progress in the 21st century. Gandhi said that India lives in her villages, and this is one of the greatest truths that confronts us today seventy years post independence. Without including the villages and rural communities within the economic framework of India, it will be difficult for the nation to move forward and lay a stronger foundation of the economy for her future generations.

Some humble recommendations for rural reconstruction of India are provided below:

1. Rural development and rural administration need to be given a priority with emphasis on necessary modifications of the village Panchayati Raj system.
2. The roots of corruption and administrative failures under the existing rural governance system needs to be investigated by a parliamentary committee and amended accordingly to benefit larger section of rural community members.
3. Electoral reforms are also necessary for better functioning and working of rural governance, rural administration and rural development.
4. Social security of Indian villagers and remote rural communities, forest residents, fringe forest dwellers, tribals, marginal farmers and land laborers together with necessary land reforms will be important.
5. Empowerment of rural women in the real sense of the term.
6. Encouragement for developing all female working group or cottage industry groups, or micro financing groups in rural areas can also help building rural economy comprehensively.
7. Establishing proper rural infrastructure through rural electrification, by developing motorable rural roads connecting adjacent villages as well as nearest towns and municipalities, and district headquarters can transform Indian villages as new power houses supporting the vigorous growth of the Indian economy.
8. Developing necessary bridges and pools across rivers, tributaries, streams and lakes to cut down on distances between adjacent villages and making them easier and safer with respect to business and transportation.
9. Need for establishing more primary, secondary and higher secondary schools and under grade degree colleges and vocational training institutes to make education and training accessible to rural populations even in the remote rural border areas, forested and fringe forest areas, villages across different islands, creeks and channels and remote mountainous regions as well as deserts and other inhospitable terrains and locations.
10. Many rural communities are settled along vulnerable areas in earthquake or tsunami prone zones or in areas with high cyclonic activities. Rural infrastructure should also include building shelter homes at appropriate places to accommodate rural communities during natural calamities and save precious lives.
11. It is important to include rural community members as parts of border management forces in sensitive, remote international border areas, forest protection forces and also in village security forces for better protection and security of rural communities.
12. Establishing adequate health centers, police stations, banks and post offices in rural areas to provide better and higher coverage on ground to different villages and rural communities.
13. Highest priority must be to be given towards mass education and awareness in rural areas to make people aware of various aspects of rural governance and administration, state and central government socio-economic programs for rural communities, ecological and environmental issues pertinent for rural communities, regarding health and hygiene, banking and postal system, sensitization against superstitions, religious and socio-cultural prejudices, regarding modern agricultural practices and farming methods, soil conservation for establishing sustainable agricultural production system, modern forestry practices, social forestry, to educate and train rural communities for being ecologically and socially sensitive, supportive and proactive towards local issues and concerns.
14. It will be important to design special educational programs and curricula for the rural areas that can cater to their daily rural area based problems, issues and challenges and provide necessary training and guidelines to cope with these situations.
15. Mass education and literacy campaigns must be emphasized to bring education to the door step of the rural poor, socioculturally backward communities, tribals, marginal farmers, oppressed castes and communities as well as illiterate rural adults and seniors.
16. Local and regional infrastructural development, social and industrial forestry, forest and wildlife conservation, agricultural work opportunities through fruit and tree orchards, tea gardens, organic agriculture, pisciculture (fish farming), sericulture (silk production), laciculture (lacca production), apiculture (commercial production honey and other by products), health, education and mass awareness programs and rural development will need year round supply of laborers, workers, porters and volunteers.