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Relevance of Gandhian Principles in the Post Covid-19 World

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ABSTRACT

The planet earth faced one of the most severe health crisis ever recorded in the human history. The novel corona virus hit hard on the human population and engulfed the entire world regardless of any country or community. Though vaccines were being worked upon to control the spread of the virus and are now even being given to the people, but this pandemic left people to introspect on their lifestyle habits. Besides this the poor were more severely and harshly impacted due to this pandemic. During this catastrophic period, in order to seek an inspirational mindset, Mahatma Gandhi is one such personality whose thoughts have always been extremely relevant. He always preached to adopt a path of simple living high thinking which in the contemporary times is somewhere seem to be lost. This paper intends to focus on the thoughts and teachings of Gandhi which are extremely important in the present time and which can act as a guiding light in the post COVID-19 world order. Keeping in view the recent occurrences many of the warnings given by Gandhi have actually proved to be correct. His urge for cooperation and peace helped in dealing with the post COVID-19 scenario and extricated us from this contemporary impasse.

Keywords: Hind Swaraj, Covid-19.

I. INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 pandemic has made a few things clear. The first is precisely how interdependent we are on each other. With climate change reaching critical and irreversible levels, wholesale continue natural resource plunder and degradation of entire ecosystems, planet earth seems to be in a bad place. However, initially during the COVID-19 outbreak the law of unintended consequences applied; pollution levels decreased and environments were restored with flora and fauna, as long as human were unable to interfere.

II. DEJECTION OF MODERN CIVILIZATION

Gandhiji in Hind Swaraj staunchly criticised the modern civilization. He held a basic view that

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the British influence was making India vulnerable to greater problems of living. He openly rejected the modern parliamentary form of government of doing no good to anyone and considered it as a mere means in the hands of the party leaders to achieve their selfish ends. According to him the modern civilization had enslaved men by the luxuries and comforts of life. It had made the people irreligious and immoral. He asserted that modern developments like the railways, hospitals and even lawyers for that matter had led to the impoverishment of India. He condemned the railways for spreading famines and epidemics like the plague². Next, Gandhi himself being a lawyer criticized them for accentuating Hindu Muslim divide and considered their profession as indulging in luxury and laziness³. He even criticized the doctors for being responsible for making people careless about their body and health⁴. He even considered the western education system as false education and instead praised the ancient Indian system of education where character building was the primary education⁵. He was against the mechanised manufacture of goods and therefore rejected industrialisation by considering it as an evil. He supported the home grown and home made goods and propagated the idea of swadeshi.

III. DISEASE OF MODERN CIVILIZATION

Mahatma Gandhi condemned the modern civilization for its advanced and easily available amenities. People have resorted to all sorts of luxuries irrespective of the harm and its negative consequences. In Gandhi's views railways were responsible for spreading epidemics like plague and this holds actually true because even the corona virus had spread because of the easy locomotive ability throughout the world. Secondly, he was also against the modern medicines as it makes a person careless about his health and increases his dependency and reliability on the medicinal advantages. In case people were deprived of easy health facilities then people would have been immune to facing diseases. Gandhi also gravely opposed capitalism, which seems to be the real cause of all the problems⁶. Capitalism has converted this whole world into a single vast market which is the main reason for this over connectivity of all the regions around the globe, which has ultimately resulted in the spreads of the virus. Gandhi always stressed upon the need of a village economy but in contrast to this, processes like globalization have made the whole world into a global village. But this has threatened the very essence of a self sufficient economy as excessive inter connectedness, worldwide trade,

² M.K Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule* 40 (Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmadabad)

³ *Ibid* at 49

⁴ *Ibid* at 51

⁵ *Ibid* at 77

⁶ *Supra* note 2 at 80

accessible and fast mobility⁷ and overseas employment are some factors which have caused and even aggravated the spread of the this novel corona virus in the entire world. There are various positive impacts of a globalised world, but we must not ignore the negative aspects of it. The swift spread of corona virus was a result of the world being a global village as we are so interdependent that we cannot imagine our existence without one another. As the virus originated in China, but it had spread to some of the remotest parts of the world. It is being termed as one of the worst catastrophes in human history and could be the largest epidemic that has affected the entire country.

China performs a major role in the global supply chain and serves as a manufacturing hub for many international conglomerates. So this outbreak not only brought down the national economy but also the international growth. This pandemic affected the lives of everyone as trade and commerce were also affected and the global GDP growth also suffered a setback. So economies which were dependant on Chinese goods were already in a crisis when the virus was active in China and when the virus entered those countries then the situation worsened.

IV. CONSUMERISM VS. SELF-DENIAL

According to Gandhiji self should avoid being consumerist and should avoid consuming items unnecessarily. He said that if a person practices self reliance and self accountability then his or her dependence tends to decrease on the machinery. He believed that humanity will thrive if humans practice self denial. With the closure of all businesses, sectors and industries, there has been an emphasis on increased self-sufficiency, as people relied more on themselves with minimum exposure to others. Individuals, who have not previously done so extensively, have needed to cook, clean and maintain other daily household chores. After the ease of the initial panic, when shelves were shopped bare, people showed themselves to purchase more frugally according to what they need in the shorter term rather than to hoard or mass consume. This reflects a shift in relation to perhaps more “human” than “consumer” behaviour

V. HUMAN LIFE AND DIGNITY

In order to curb the spread of the corona virus India had imposed the largest lockdown in history as social distancing and frequent sanitization was the need of the hour. But amidst this the migrant labourers and the stranded poor suffered the most. The biggest example of unequal treatment could be seen during the mobility of migrant workers. Throughout out the lockdown evacuation flights were arranged for the Indian citizens who were stuck abroad but the stranded

⁷ *Supra* note 2 at 40

migrant workers did not get any assistance. The poor were detained and humiliated for breaking the curfew and were made to pay full fares for the trains which were arranged for them to come back to their homes. When some migrant workers returned to their homes in Uttar Pradesh they were sprayed with sodium hypochlorite disinfectant⁸ for the purpose of sanitisation which was not viable on humanitarian grounds. Gandhiji said that the truest test of civilization is culture and dignity and he truly upheld the value of human life. This was a disease which was spread by the upper class but had a detrimental impact on the poor population of India.

VI. NEED FOR SWADESHI, SWACHHTA AND SARVODAYA

These three important principles are the foundation of Gandhian thought. Swadeshi means boycotting foreign goods and encouraging the use of domestic products. Swachhta means cleanliness and Sarvodaya means welfare of all. India in order to avoid any future spread of a disease must follow the path towards Swadeshi, Swachhta and Sarvodaya economy. With modernity's shining gloss getting unmasked as a deceptive mirage, it is dawning on us that our globalised lifestyle has made us weaker than ever from a Gandhian perspective morally as well physically. Free trade, cheaper flights and social media have brought us closer than ever but they are also making us more vulnerable. India in the post COVID-19 period should work in the swadeshi aspect of its economy as it is not easy to open up trade with outside nations in one go. According to Gandhi, the economic salvation of India lies in encouraging and reviving the indigenous industries. A self supporting and self contained economic system where there is an organic relationship between production, distribution and consumption is an ideal situation for India. Gandhi's swadeshi⁹ in healthcare also advocates a new system of healthcare wherein one follows the laws of nature with regard to diet, physical exercise, hygiene and a new lifestyle based on self restraint, For mitigating the spread of the virus, for which the allopathic medicine was not offering a cure, people adopted naturopathy to use effective preventive treatment and household remedies, practiced excellent personal hygiene and restricted themselves to their localities by avoiding long distance travel and attendance at public assemblies. India ought to follow the same in the post COVID-19 period.

Coming on to the aspect of Swachhta, Mahatma Gandhi had cleanliness and sanitation closest to his heart. India has already embarked the path of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan. In the post COVID-19 time it requires more stringent so that no further disease is contracted. Gandhi always used to emphasise on a Sarvodaya system, which means progress for all. In the

⁸ Migrant workers sprayed with disinfectant, *available at*: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/migrant-workers-sprayed-with-disinfectant-in-up/articleshow/74888075.cms> (last visited at February 2, 2021)

⁹ *Supra* note 2 at 81

Sarvodaya social order, Gandhi emphasised on the establishment of a whole network of self supporting village communities. In the present period also the villages across the nation are a part of awareness campaigns and in future also the focus on village republics is of utmost importance, as the grass root level of governance forms the foundation of the nation. Many states involved the local bodies for control and management of the pandemic to ensure the control at the local level. As it could be seen in Rajasthan and Odisha where there could be seen effective governance in collaborating with the Panchayati Raj Institutions and community based response which enabled the states to control the spread of the virus to a great extent.

Rather than indulging in a globalised lifestyle, we should endeavour to respond to Gandhiji's call for putting into practice a variant of localisation through which we learn to experience the entire world within the boundaries of our immediate village or neighbourhood and to live in harmony with our environment by giving up exploitative practices as far as possible. Due to this catastrophic disruption caused in the global economy it would be an ideal moment to focus on regenerating our rural economy so that it brings about Gandhi's cherished dream of gram Swaraj.

VII. PEACE, NON- VIOLENCE AND UNIVERSAL LOVE

The world has been fighting the corona virus pandemic together with mutual aid and assistance by various nations. This has eventually helped in bringing down the rate of corona infected persons. Gandhiji forever preached universal love and cooperation. Gandhi was critical of capitalism because it was based on competition. According to him capitalism thrives because of competitive market and competition eventually leads to enmity among individuals and that indeed is violence according to Gandhi. He believed that if cooperation would have been there then civilization would have developed differently. As there would have been less enmity and less rivalry. India has always tried following this path. But the havoc created due to the unprecedented lockdown created disturbances and violence across the country. The poor and the unemployed in order to reach their hometowns were victims of police brutality on their way. But globally all nations stood together in fighting off the corona virus. But internally India needed to follow a more planned and non violent path to ensure the safety of its citizens. After this pandemic ends there is a need for peace and global cooperation which needs to prevail throughout the world. India too needs to work with its other member nations to ensure a sound economic and political order in the world.

VIII. NEED FOR SUSTAINABLE CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT

The post COVID-19 world definitely needs to be changed in contrast to the times before. The

humanity needs to be redeemed on the planet earth so that such a situation never occurs again. Mahatma Gandhi's way of living is the best example of sustainable development for the world. In the words of Gandhi, "*Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's need but not for every man's greed*"¹⁰. Therefore, after the pandemic, in order to revive the economy various nations will follow the path of reckless exploitation of resources like they did in pre corona times. Due to lockdown in many countries industries had to halt their production which had led to the flourishing of the environment. The human race needs to follow the path of sustainable development in a serious manner and not merely make laws for the same,

The corona pandemic is the biggest lesson to be learnt by mankind. We need to maintain an ecological, moral, economic and social balance in every task we undertake. The change from the pre-corona period to post corona period should be sustainable and effective in nature. The world now demands equitable, protectionist and secured economic growth. The international institutions need to play an effective role for the same. The world needs to work together to eradicate poverty, unemployment and other ills which occurred due to corona virus. We ultimately need to follow the four normative principles by Gandhi of non-violence¹¹, S

IX. COVID-19 AND GANDHIAN VALUES AS SEEDS FOR A BETTER WORLD

When COVID-19 struck our daily and mundane world changed with terrific repercussions that are still being felt and will continue. A literary critic Betty Govinden in her contribution to the Gandhi anthology shares the question posed by Vandana Shiva as to how the seeds for a better world can be sowed. The answer was that every person should recognize that working with their hands, and their hearts and their minds- and being interconnected-is the highest evolution of our species. Working with our hands is not degradation, it's our humanity. This is the radical equality that Gandhi aimed for. Radical equality refers to solidarity with the poor masses. This was the change of thinking that Gandhi sought to infuse in others, advocating the equality for all, getting to know and understand the peasant masses and their needs.

X. CONCLUSION

COVID-19 provides us, as humanity with a timely opportunity to sit and reflect, and through introspection – and once we are able to turn out of ourselves towards others and towards this world that is in need of care. The socio economic effects that we are witnessing in terms of a severe downturn and global recession will hurt many homes and individuals. But again there

¹⁰ Quote by Mahatma Gandhi, *available at*: <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/30431-earth-provides-enough-to-satisfy-every-man-s-need-for-not> (last available at February 3, 2021)

¹¹ *Supra* note 2 at 70

exists an opportunity for a non-violent Gandhian life philosophy to thrive. We are able to turn to home industry and craft, and in some cases revert to local community instead of hard monetary exchange. This speaks of the value of setting swadeshi in the present context of 2020 and beyond. The state, private and civil society appear to be working together in what might be termed as “whole of society” response, that prioritised most in need. This is a scheme which aspires to provide care for the wellbeing of all, conceived as Sarvodaya. Our current situation provides us with the possibility of controlling the self and by ruling over ourselves more ethically, as Swaraj¹² implies to promote the good for all. So we should wear masks in public places and should not disregard the same. Finally in terms of Satyagraha, or the power of non-violent truth or soul force¹³, the current crisis also holds much possibility for transformational changes from fleeting violence to sustainable peace. This requires a change of heart, and a sustainable movement from thought to deed, in living daily life. It seems fitting therefore, in rounding off this reflection on COVID-19 that we together in being present move forward in pursuing the Gandhian legacy of peace and care for all.

¹² *Supra* note 2 at 26

¹³ *Supra* note 2 at 65