

A FAILED GANDHI - STILL MOST RELEVANT IN PRESENT CRISIS

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ABSTRACT

In times of the Corona pandemic, the growing tension with China, the unprecedented economic fiasco, and the untimely presentation of the national education policy; the years 2020 and 2021 have witnessed the worst kind of events in the annals of Indian and world history. But history never stalls at one given point in time. It moves on incessantly. The sharp divide between the rich and the poor in terms of resources, techniques, and rights is fast changing the future trajectory. But some principles and ethical values are time-tested and remain almost the same even in the fast-changing contour of history. Gandhi is the most talked about, but less followed personality of the 20th century. Still, in the journey of the 21st century, he remains our best friend, philosopher, guide, and belief.

KEYWORDS: NEP, China, Economy, Developmental model, Neoliberal Colonialism, Moral Value, Gandhi

History is perhaps completing a circle of its own. Corona pandemic has given a point to ponder over this situation. Dealing with history is not an easy task. But remembrance with it is certainly a very interesting and meaningful endeavour. Our claim of being developed has become a hollow one. The whole 'developmental saga' is breaking like nine pins. The very simple character of society has been made a complex one. Will it survive for more decades? Certainly not. Lockdown of almost two and half months in India and elsewhere has impacted a lot of our lives. Due to complete industrial shut and subsequent purification of the air started cleansing the rivers, including Ganga and Yamuna. Corona has given us time to think over also. This is not only testing time but resting time also. We have to take a pause here. Any irrational step, at this juncture, will give us no second chance. Gandhi is ringing our doors once again. Discourse on Gandhi in his sesquicentennial year has become the concurrent and hot theme amid the Corona pandemic. What does all this development mean? The very structure of development is being questioned vociferously.

MORAL AND MATERIAL PROGRESS

On 22nd December 1916, Gandhi delivered a lecture titled '**Does economic progress clash with real signs of progress**' to the Muir College Economic Society, Allahabad. He opined, '*by economic progress, we mean material advancements without limit and by real progress we mean moral progress, which again is the same thing as the progress of the permanent element in us.*' (Parel, 1977, p 156) He further argues that a mismatch between the economic and moral progress ultimately lead to the fall of that society as

happened in the case of Rome, Egypt, or any other country of which we have no record. This happens because '*does not moral progress increase in the same proportion as material progress?*' (Ibid) Presently the whole world is stranded in the same predicament of the Corona pandemic. Where to move from here? What next, we have to achieve. Everything we have got except the inner satisfaction. COVID-19 is the testing time for human history of all its grandeur achievements and progress. The global village has come to a halt, thinking about its future course of action. Will it move in the same direction as earlier or take another route of progress? Coming days will answer this. But the way things and their developments are being questioned are giving us ample speculation about the future model of development.

GDP in the first quarter of 2020–21 is the worst in the history of independent India. Even in anyone's wild imagination, -23.9 percent, was unthinkable keeping the corona lockdown and its subsequent fallouts. Other countries except China have also gone into negatives, but this magnanimous negative figure is beyond any comparison; and what to talk of any kind of meaningful logic. Former Chief Economic Advisor *Arvind Subramanian* had already predicted an ICU Indian economy. He said that 'the Indian economy is currently experiencing a "second wave" of the Twin Balance Sheet (TBS) crisis, which is a great slowdown. The economy seems headed for the Intensive Care Unit.' (The Indian Express' December 15, 2019) TBS-2 is largely a post-demonetization phenomenon involving banks' NPA. As per the *trickledown theory*, economic benefits to the poor have failed in India. It is estimated that '5 percent of the super-rich

class have usurped and captured 78.6 percent of assets and resources of the country. For the top 10 percent, it stands at 86.3 percent, and one percent of the top possess 63 percent of resources.' Moreover, this gap is widening day by day keeping the LPG model of the economy. The whole concept of 'State and its role' is fast-changing not only in India but the world over. In conspiracy with corporates, a kind of authoritative state is emerging in almost every part of the globe. Corporates want a free and regulated market (by the state) without free voices. Policy makers, in conjunction with corporates, are making laws that suit them (corporates) most. A very serious kind of 'crony capitalism' is taking shape fast in India. Crony capitalism, in consonance with the power that is, never bothers about the lives of the workers except for its profit and calculation.

No denying the fact that something basic has gone haywire. Gandhian concept of minimum and rational use of resources is the only answer for future consumption. Instead of a market-based economy, we should once again adopt the *need-based economy*. Market and consumerism have played havoc with the invaluable natural resources of the globe. Calculation of GDP and related aspects will automatically wither away once we start calculating and fulfilling the actual need of the people. The economy as a whole should not be based on production but real consumption. We have enough to fulfill our needs, but very difficult to fulfill our greed. Our assumption regarding the **development** and understanding of societal needs has been miscalculated. The distribution of resources in society has not been done properly. After Second World War, we have invested manifolds in war and warfare, but very little in peace and peacekeeping. How could one think of a proper society based on the grand ideas of equality, tranquillity, and sub-limit? Gandhi always stood for these ideals practically. But the elements of self-aggrandizement and hatred have played havoc over the years. Humanity, the basic tenet of society, is being tortured repeatedly without any halt. Something very serious in our whole thought process has crept in. Till recently, we were writing off Gandhi, but due to this corona-driven crisis of humanity and development; suddenly, he is being eulogized out of this panicky not because of any sympathy but out of no choice and alternative.

CIVILIZATIONAL IMPACT ON ECONOMY

Development for what and for whom? Without inner development of oneself, we can't think of societal development. But the way things are being driven in India is not keeping a good reputation at all. Instead of embarking upon the path of cooperative and community development programs, the government is still doing the same error-driven model of privatization. Definitely, our thought process has become handicapped. Development does not necessarily mean the LPG model. This could be only one of the options;

that's too in a limited way. We all know well that at this juncture, what options are we left with – naked capitalism, insane communism, or simple humanism? 'Gandhi was anxious to teach the Indians that 'modern civilization posed a greater threat to them than did colonialism. They appeared to him to take it for granted that modern civilization was an unmixed blessing and colonialism an unmixed evil, forgetting that colonialism itself was a product of modern civilization'. (opsit at no. 1) Moreover, Gandhi emphasized the need for ethical living by abdicating worldly pursuits, because this way of life had no room for violence in any form against any human being, black or white. In 1929, he once again quoted his words of Hind Swaraj and reinforced his idea of ethical living, "The Western civilization which passes for civilization is disgusting to me. I have given a rough picture of it in Hind Swaraj. Time has brought no change in it". (Collected works of Mahatma Gandhi – no 40, page 300) The way Corona pandemic has catapulted the world ethical norms generally and India particularly requires no testimony anymore. Our aspirational livings in the contemporary age are posing all kinds of psychological and societal problems. Simplicity has been replaced by complexity, cooperation by the corporation, and peace by piece. The everlasting effect of ambition and selfishness is like the ongoing Chinese aggressive policy towards India and other neighbouring countries per se. could you or any country think of a natural right over the oceans? Certainly not. But China is doing so. It is claiming a natural right over the domain of the *South China Sea*. Such is the insanity that has crept into our thinking. Had Gandhi been alive today, he would have certainly emphasized his idea of peace and mutual cooperation without bothering much about territorial questions. His stand on Pakistan regarding the debt issue with India after independence speaks volumes of his commitment to his ethical standing.

CHINA AGGRESSION AND POWER EQUATION

In the lust for gaining power – economically, politically, and militarily – every nation is trying to create the route of success. For a comparatively greater period, this model worked. But the bitter questions of poverty, unemployment, and underdevelopment still hold the ground affirms. The US, over the last 70 years, symbolized the final signature of development and greatness. Almost every other country wanted to be alike. But none could imagine its futility and fatality so early. China, though a communist regime ideologically, has also emulated the US model economically. Currently, it is going great guns. But the element of vanity and attitude has overshadowed the elements of peace and cooperation in its attitude. Sooner or later, it will have to realize the futility of this developmental saga. In a bid to become the strongest power on the earth, China is foolishly building enemy towers all around. The recent standoff in Galwan with India on June 15 is perhaps going to have a very

long-term implication on the overall global power structure. The Indian think tank, too, seems to be in this race – but once again at the cost of peace and human lives. After several rounds of talks at a diplomatic and military level between the two estranged neighbours, nothing concrete has come out. Even in a fresh attempt, China has made inroads in LAC area of Pengong Tsu. A heavy congregation of armed forces are being built upon this area. Finger 4 and the Chusul area is heavily loaded with war weapons from both sides. Even ‘first time in 45 years, shots fired at LAC as troops foil China bid to storm key height’.(The Indian Express September 9, 2020) The situation is so tense enough that it could lead to a kind of full-fledged war between the two countries. If happens so, this might turn out to be the deadliest *third world war* also, and its consequences and catastrophes regarding human lives could be manifold. Alas, both countries could follow the Gandhian principle of mutual respect, trust, and cooperation with each other. But this time, India is not in a mood to relent due to its historical loss in 1962 and China, being the possible culprit in international eyes regarding the corona pandemic.

The whole thought process of the world has poisoned to an extent of no return. Unless devastated completely, the ears of the world are not willing to listen to any kind of logical, ethical, and moral voices. Gandhi, alas, could you once again reincarnate in the same attire to convince the insane of their futile and fatal wishful thinking, because you are the only viable answer to them. For decades they have abdicated you, plundered you, and murdered you. But you always take rebirth in times of crisis. This time the crises are bigger than the previous ones. We have no options except you.

NEP-2020 AND SOCIETAL NEEDS

‘National Education Policy 2020’ called ‘*one nation, one education*’ has been framed and enacted in the challenging times of COVID-19. “This Policy proposes the revision and revamping of all aspects of the education structure, including its regulation and governance, to create a new system that is aligned with the aspirational goals of 21st-century education, while building upon India’s traditions and value systems.”(NEP, 2020, p3) But there are a lot of contradictions in the policy. All these ideals will be achieved through the privatization process. One of the important provisions of this policy is the implementation of online education up to twenty percent of the whole education system. As of now, online education is being carried on in almost every part of the country. As a policy, there is nothing wrong in it. But situational reality and complexity do not warrant us to implement it unless and until the ground reality is transformed. Sadly enough, students from rural backgrounds are lagging drastically in terms of digital infra, technique, accessibility, and finance. Gandhi always kept villages in his

entire thought process, but modern education is illtreating the essence of our country. This is not fair keeping the urban and rural profile of the country. Still, 68 percent of the people residing in villages. That means this new national education policy is generating a new kind of *imbalance and inequality* among the citizens. A new kind of *neoliberal colonialism* and subjugation – *based on the principles of uneven and unequal access to resources and techniques in the domain of knowledge* – is being erected. Notably, this neoliberal colonialism is being advocated in the name of nationalism and national character. This must be resisted and opposed at any cost. Government must “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” by 2030.(Ibid) Gandhian concept of *bunyadi siksha* is missing or has only symbolic reference in the new education policy. In the name of holistic and integrated education, diversity – the basis of society – has been relegated to the backburner. Everything is being handed to the private players including education. The top hundred universities of the world will be invited to open their campuses in India. A similar proposal also gained momentum during UPA second regime from 2009 to 2014. But the moot question is – who will decide the rankings – rating agencies or the government itself? And who will ensure the quality as well? Something very serious and alarming is happening in the name of education.

As per UN resolution and our own commitment, 6 percent of the GDP has to be utilized on education; but never done accordingly. In the changed circumstances, how will government Ensure this expenditure? Is it through the private players or market borrowings? In either case, this is not going to serve the purpose. Education and health are two primary responsibilities of the government. Both of them are connected with the lives and livelihood of society. Government cannot arbitrarily change the avowed principles of the constitution. RTE 2009 gives a fundamental right of education in a healthy and hygienic environment to all between the ages of six to fourteen. This age is being reshuffled from age three to eighteen. But the new policy is silent on the funding issue of education. Only lofty ideals and words have been inserted into it. The action plan is missing totally or dependent upon the private players only. It has to be seriously debated. Despite the fact of Gandhi and his legacy being with us, we have once again neglected him. Still, even after 73 years of independence, we are experimenting with our education system though we all are very much aware of Gandhi’s ‘Nayi Talim’. His talim is based on the concept of the moral development of the person. His model of basic education is an embodiment of an ideal society consisting of small, self-reliant communities living cooperatively.

PUBLIC SPACE AND DEMOCRACY

Use of public space and sphere as tools of democratic voice, Gandhi is matchless. We had imagined a future India on this democratic principle. Diverse views, howsoever diametrically opposite to each other, were been respected till recently. But the very ethos of the Indian diversity and voices are being pruned to the advantages of a particular section and gang. Social media platforms are being checked regularly. Data are being leaked. Voices on visual media are being crushed. Is this India of our dream? Power and authority have become everything. Gandhi vehemently opposed any kind of power and force structure among the people. For him 'there is a difference between the use of 'soul-force' and that of 'brute force'. (Parel, 1977, p79) He believed in the political equality between Indians and Britons. But a sharp difference has cropped up in our country owing to the status of one's political power. The bigger the post, the bigger and great his/her personality is. In *Hind Swaraj*, the reader argues, "Is there any historical evidence as of the success of what you have called soul-force or truth-force? No instance seems to have happened of any nation having risen through soul force. I still think evil-doers will not cease doing evil without physical punishment."(Ibid, p88) The editor answers – Tulsidas has said, "Of religion, pity or love is the root, as egotism of the body. Therefore, we should not abandon pity so long as we are long. This appears to me to be a scientific truth. I believe in it as much as I believe in two and two being four. The force of love is the same as the force of the soul or truth. We have evidence of its working at every step. The universe would disappear without the existence of that force.

...the fact that there are so many men alive in the world shows that it is based not on the force but the force of truth or love".(Ibid) But the way things are happening in the country does not suggest good for the future. Gandhian legacy has been abdicated. Democratic norms are being flouted more than ever. In the name of nationalism, the gang of people has captured the power structure from top to bottom. If any rational person asks even generously, he is touted to be anti-national. Is this the way of doing administration and treating people? Gandhi always preached affection and love even for one's adversaries. But the situation is somewhat different altogether this time.

A failed Gandhi is perhaps the best of answers in the worst of times.

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