

Revisiting Gandhi in Current Pandemic Situation

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Abstract: *The present pandemic situation has raised various questions for the world community. These questions are related to socio-economic and psychosomatic diseases. The present pandemic situation has exposed the entire global development model and the lifestyle adopted by various countries. India is a developing country where a large number of population lives under below poverty line. According to the 2011 census, 69 per cent Indian population lives in villages where most of the population is engaged in agriculture. The International Labour Union, in its 2016 report, mentioned that around 82 per cent of India's population is employed in the unorganized sector. Another significant effect of the current pandemic can be seen on human health as well as human psychology. The uncertainty of jobs and fear for a better future has made Indians emotionally and psychologically weak. Our day-to-day lifestyle has also been affected by a global pandemic. It has forced us to rethink our daily lifestyle. Globalization attracted Indians towards western culture, but the current pandemic has exposed the drawbacks of western culture and has forced us to return to our own culture. Therefore, the current pandemic has affected a large number of the Indian population in different ways. This paper will highlight those questions that have been emerged because of the current COVID-19 pandemic and try to find the appropriate solution to those questions through Gandhi's view on development and human lifestyle. The contemporary pandemic situation has forced social thinkers and economic experts to rethink those questions that have been raised because of the pandemic situation. This paper will address these questions only in the Indian context and will also inquire how Gandhian way of lifestyle can be the guiding principle for the future of India.*

Keywords: Critique of Modern Civilization, Human health, Human Psychology, Peasants and Workers Empowerment, Village Empowerment

1. Introduction

In the present time, the world is passing through a severe problem that has emerged in the form of a global pandemic. This pandemic has been the cause of millions of diseased people and lakhs of deaths in the entire globe. This pandemic spread rapidly in the entire globe from the Wuhan city of China. This rapid spread of pandemic could be possible only because of modern public transport facilities like airplanes, railways, buses. Almost every developed and developing country of the globe is trying hard to make antidote of this pandemic, but none has been successful yet. The low immune system is one of the most important causes of human casualty. Precaution and a healthy lifestyle are the only solutions to this pandemic.

India is also one of those countries which have mostly affected by this pandemic. Though India has, to some extent, managed situations in the initial phase, but because of the migration of a large number of labourers from one state to the other, the situation has become severe. The only good thing for India is that the recovery rate of patients is high. Therefore, more than 48 percent of the diseased people have recovered. The percentage of deaths in India is around 3 percent. This epidemic has put a stop to all human activities. The entire economic activities have been put on hold by the Indian government; therefore, the economic development of India has very much affected.

In this context, the Gandhian lifestyle becomes essential. Gandhi presented his view on various issues related to day-to-day lifestyle that can be useful for India in the present pandemic situation. Gandhi's view on human health, sanitation, rural development, economic development, modernization, and culture can be the guiding principles not only for the government of India but also for the Indian society.

Current Socio-Economic Situation of India

It would be necessary to understand the structure of India's socio-economic situation and how the current global pandemic has disturbed the Indian socio-economic structure? The current pandemic situation has profoundly affected human social life. It has disturbed human's daily routine. The lockdown announced by the Indian government forced people to stay at their home. India is a country where people have a very intimate nature with their kith and kin and neighbours, and in the pandemic situation, Indian social structure has very much disturbed. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected human psychology, particularly of those who are suffering from this disease or those who are staying in quarantine. There are other certain factors like health concerns, financial implications, change in lifestyles, home quarantine etc. which have sent a mental shock to many people (Patnaik, 2020. 1-2).

Along with this, the present pandemic situation has affected farmers and labourers. In an interview with News 18, Dr. M.S. Swami Nathan said that India's economy is not prepared for the present pandemic situation. The migration of labourers from rural areas to cities and from poor states to rich states is also one of the most saviour problems before the Indian economy (ibid, 2). The contemporary pandemic situation has forced social thinkers, economic experts and policymakers to rethink the structure of rural development in India because the present pandemic situation has caused a massive migration of workers from urban areas to rural areas. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced worldwide thinkers to think over the future of the world economy. In the Indian context, where most of the population depends on agriculture and non-organized sector, the challenge is fatal. Since independence, Indian economic policymakers did not pay appropriate attention to the empowerment of villages, creating a large number of unemployed population. The unskilled education system of India also contributed to

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unemployment. Because of all these reasons, the less educated people migrated from villages to the big cities in search of a job. Unfortunately, most of the jobs in India are in the private sector, and most people work as labourers. In this situation, the COVID-19 pandemic has made the situation very worse. Now, the question comes that what India can do for the future where such kind of pandemic or any other like-wise situations cannot affect the Indian economy. Here, the Gandhian economic development model can be applied. Indian government should restructure its economic policies in which the economic structure should be based on villages. The Gandhian model of decentralized and village-centric economic model can be helpful in such situations in the future. The following points can understand the relevance of the Gandhian economic model in the future of the Indian economy (Tiwari, 2020. 352-353).

Gandhi's view on human health and his critique of modern Medicine

Gandhi explained the definition of being healthy. According to him, generally, the man who eats well and moves about and does not resort to a doctor is considered a healthy man. However, he did not agree with this definition. He was of the view that human beings can be diseased without his knowledge of being unhealthy. He said that perfectly healthy men hardly exist anywhere over this vast world. According to Gandhi, 'the man who has a sound mind in a sound body is a healthy man.' In this way, Gandhi emphasized the integration of mind and body with health. Gandhi related character with health and said that 'No man whose character is not pure can be said to be healthy'. Gandhi concluded his view on healthy men as,

'we may conclude that man along is perfectly healthy whose body is well-formed, whose teeth as well as eyes and ears are in good condition, whose nose is free from dirty matter, whose skin exudes perspiration freely and without any bad smell, whose mouth is also free from bad smells, whose hands and legs perform their duty perfectly, who is neither too fat nor too thin, and whose mind and senses are constantly under his control' (Gandhi, 1921. 9-11).

In this way, Gandhi had a profound understanding of human health. He included almost all aspects of the human body in his definition of health.

Gandhi wrote a book in 1909, which became famous as '*Hind Swaraj*,' where; he mentioned that he had a great love for the medical profession and wanted to become a doctor in his early life. However, later, he changed his view because he thought that the *Vaids* (medicine men) could not get honourable status in the society. Gandhi was of the view that the English physicians used their profession in India to get political profits. Gandhi criticized the modern medical profession and said that modern doctors have unhinged Indian. According to him, *Hakims* were better than the modern doctors. He said that modern doctors made us habitual of pills and capsules, and the continuation of indulging medicines made our mind weak. He visualized modern hospitals as propagators of sin (*Pap*) and European doctors as the worst doctors because European doctors do vivisection (the practice of performing operations on live

animals for experimentation or scientific research). Gandhi criticized modern doctors because, according to him, people become doctors, not for serving the people but for obtaining honour and becoming rich (Gandhi, 1938. 50-52). In this way, Gandhi supported the Indian traditional medical system and rejected the modern medical profession.

Gandhi's view and experiment of Naturopathy

Gandhi had faith in Indian tradition and had read very much about the Indian traditions. Therefore, his understanding of the human body was rooted in the traditional belief of Indian medical tradition. According to him, the human body is made of five elements- earth, water, air, fire, and ether. Furthermore, the human body needs all these elements in the proper amount. If anyone of these elements fall short of its due proportion, it becomes the cause of illness. Gandhi said that the stomach is the most crucial portion of the human body, and if it ceases for a moment, the whole body will collapse. He explained the functions of the stomach, heart, lungs, blood, and pulse in the body (ibid, 12-14).

Gandhi emphasized that we must know enough of our bodies. According to him, human being perform their activities using mind aided by ten senses. He divided senses into two parts, first, five senses of action such as hands, mouth, teeth, anus and the genitals. Another five senses are the senses of perceptions such as the nose, tongue, eyes, ears, and skin. Gandhi has accepted the mind as the central functionary part of the body. Gandhi explained the importance of air, water, and food. Gandhi emphasized on inhaling pure air so that, the proper oxygen can be reached in the body. He suggested to drink 5 lbs. of water in a day. Gandhi categorized food in three categories, vegetarian, flesh, and mixed. He said that there is a growing school of scholars who believe that anatomical and physiological evidence favours man being a vegetarian. Gandhi forbade Indians to take intoxicants because, according to him, intoxicants make our mind unbalanced (Gandhi, 1948. 3-25).

Gandhi life was based on certain principles, and he followed those principles in his life. Gandhi did not make a difference in his words and actions. Therefore, he wrote his autobiography '*My experiments with truth*.' This book shows the relation between his views and experiments. Though Gandhi was not a naturopath doctor, he put forward his view on naturopathy and experimented with it in his *Ashram*. Gandhi had great faith in nature cure methods and explained about naturopathic use of earth, water, ether (*Akash*), sun, and air. Gandhi used to take fruit salt when he faced constipation. He did his treatment many times by diet regulation. He was in the habit of walking. Therefore, he admits that he did not take bed rest. Gandhi used mud therapy when he faced a headache and said that mud poultices cure ordinary boils and blisters. He also used mud therapy in the treatment of fever and advocated to eat clean soil to overcome constipation. Gandhi experimented with water therapy and found that hip bath can be helpful to bring down body temperature in fever. He explained about the treatments from water. For example, he said,

'In cases of cold feet and legs, the patient should be made to sit with his feet and legs immersed up to the knees in as hot

water as he can bear. A little mustard powder can be added to the water. The footbath should not last for more than fifteen minutes. This treatment improves the local circulation and gives immediate relief' (ibid, 43).

This statement shows Gandhi's in-depth knowledge about the use of water therapy. In the same way, Gandhi visualized the use of ether, sun, and air in naturopathic treatment. Gandhi considered five natural elements equally essential for human health and said that lack of any of these elements could be the cause of the disease (ibid, 35-49). Although Gandhi viewed and experimented with naturopathy, he believed that naturopathy could treat only the physical part of the body, but many diseases are because of human psychology. Therefore, he emphasized on the treatment of the human mind and soul.

Though Gandhi was not a doctor, yet he knew what the human body needs for its nourishment. Gandhi was of the view that vegetarian diets like grain, edible roots, pulses, tubers, leaves, and fruits provide complete nourishment to the human body. Human beings should have control over their diet and should take as much diet as their body needs to sustain. Gandhi suggested diet for human being and said that every human being should have 2lbs cow's milk, 6oz Cereals (Wheat, rice, bajri, in all), 3oz vegetables leafy, 5oz other vegetables, 1oz vegetable raw, 1 and half oz gree, 2oz butter and 1 and half oz Gur or white sugar. Gandhi also suggested that human beings should take fresh fruit according to their taste and purse (Gandhi, 1959. 7-8).

2. Relevance in Present Situation

In the modern Indian medical profession, many kinds of therapies are used like mud, water, heat, music, sunbathe. Many foreign companies are doing their business in the name of these therapies in India. Nevertheless, if we look into the history of ancient Indian medical sciences, these therapies were used as life-style. Ancient Indian Ayurvedic and naturopathic practitioners like Charaka, Sushruta, and Dhanavantry used these natural resources to treat the people. They never made these natural resources as a matter of business. Gandhi used modern natural therapies much before their modern introduction. Through his various writing and speeches, he explained his view on naturopathy. He not only wrote on naturopathy but also experimented it many times in his *Ashrama*. Gandhi gave equal importance to the mind and body. In this way, he tried to integrate mind body and soul. Gandhi found *Ramanama*, the best naturopathic treatment. However, Gandhi's understanding of *Ramanama* was not sectarian. For Gandhi, Rama, Allah, and God, all are equal. Even Gandhi found *Ramanama* more effective than Lord Rama (Tiwari, Pandey & Maheshwari, 2018. 89).

Human Psychology and Gandhi

Here, in the present pandemic situation, Gandhian lifestyle and his spiritual philosophy can be the guiding forces for those facing psychological problems. Gandhi's social, as well as political life, was guided by religious beliefs. Gandhi accepted this fact many times in his writings. Here we can take his four essential concepts such as *suchas and tapas* (austerity and penance), *swadhyaya* (study of self),

ishwar pranidhan (surrender to the almighty through prayer and meditation and dedication of all action unto the universal spirit), and *Ramanama Chikitsa* (treatment through *Ramanama*) (Parida, 2000. 186). Gandhi's understanding of *suchas and tapas* was to focus on self-suffering and purification of body and mind. For Gandhi, *tapas* make the human body pure and increase moral power (Arai, 2009. 169). The meaning of *swadhyaya*, i.e., study of self, means the knowledge of the nature of our own body and mind. Gandhi always believed that human beings should know the nature of their body and should act according to that. Gandhi's concept of *Ishwar Pranidhana* is influenced by the *Shreemad Bhagwad Gita*, the holy book of Hinduism. The *Shreemad Bhagwad Gita*, according to Gandhi, teaches us the dedication of all our actions and activities to God. It teaches us to do duties without thing about its result. Gandhi believes that if our action is good, then the result will always be right (Tiwari, Pandey, & Maheshwari, 2019. 7). Furthermore, for the treatment of mind and soul, Gandhi suggested the *Ramanama Chikitsa*. Gandhi was of the view that fear is one of the most crucial reasons behind mental illness. This fear can be eradicated through *Ramanama*. Gandhi said that the chanting of *Ramanama* makes us fearless. He believed that faith in God could remove all obstacles of life. Gandhi found *Ramanama* as the best naturopathic treatment. In other words, he found *Ramanama* as naturopathy (Gandhi, 1949. 1-32).

Gandhi's view on Village Empowerment and its Relevance in Present Pandemic Situation

Gandhi always put villages in the center of his socio-political and economic ideas. He believed that the real development of India depends upon the development of Indian villages. Gandhi talked about the holistic development of villages like socio-political and economic development. Gandhi's concept of *Swaraj* also focuses on the village empowerment. He said that the meaning of complete *Swaraj* is to provide equal rights and opportunities for peasants, landless tiller of the soil, and all sections of society. Gandhi was of the view that the real India exists in its 7,00,000 villages. However, Gandhi was worry about seeing the situation of the villages. He argued, 'we have hardly ever paused to inquire if those poor folk get sufficient to eat and clothe themselves with and whether they have a roof to shelter themselves from sun and rain' (Harijan, 04-04-1936). Gandhi was worry about seeing the exploitation of village resources and villagers by the town-dwellers. However, Gandhi could see the better possibilities of a healthy and peaceful life in villages. He was of the view that villages have the situations to keep body and soul together. Gandhi argued that the cities are self-dependent and capable of taking care of themselves, but villages are not, therefore, it is the responsibility of those who stay in cities that they should go to the villages and should disabuse them of their superstitions, prejudice, and narrow outlook (Gandhi, 1947. 11-12+79).

Gandhi was of the view that the real *Swaraj* embraces four freedoms, such as political, economic, social, and moral. For political freedom, Gandhi said that it could be achieved when India would get independence. But, he presented his

view on who should be the political structure of India? For Gandhi, every village should be self-dependent, and less political control should be in villages. The government should be ruled by the consent of people. His economic freedom focused on the freedom of the domination of capitalists, and it urged for economic equality. Gandhi's social freedom stands for eradication of all social distinctions based on birth, sex, caste, creed or colour. Moral freedom, according to Gandhi, is necessary because the weakest member of society can rise to his fullest moral height (Kher, 1967. 13-14).

Village empowerment was at the center of the Gandhian economic model. Gandhi was of the view that villages can play an essential role in national wealth. He supported small-industries for villages and said that true Swadeshi consists of encouraging and reviving these home industries. The problem of unemployment, according to Gandhi, can be solved by establishing small-industries in villages. He argued that our daily needs could be fulfilled at the local-level through village-industries. Gandhi was aware of this fact that big industries could never employ the millions of unemployed. It was because the primary aim of the owners of big-industries was to get profit. Therefore, they would focus on large production through less labour. Gandhi advocated to use and manufacture *Khadi*, because it could help to make villages self-dependent. He said, "*The organizers of Khadi and other village industries don't hope in the near future to affect the big industries. They may hope to bring a ray of light into the dark dungeons, miscalled cottages, of the villagers. . . . They are designed to well utilize the leisure hours of the idle millions*" (Harijan, 14-09-1935). Gandhi was of the view that the spinning wheel could be used as a weapon against those challenges that have been emerged before villages. He said, "*I feel convinced that the revival of hand-spinning and hand-weaving will make the largest contribution to the economic and the moral regeneration of India. The millions must have a simple industry to supplement agriculture. Spinning was the cottage industry years ago, and if the millions are to be saved from starvation, they must be enabled to reintroduce spinning in their homes, and every village must repossess its own weaver*" (Young India, 21-07-1920). Gandhi not only presented the village economic model but also specified its management. He advised to appoint a separate minister for the proper organization of the village-centric economy. Gandhi never supported the mass production of goods. He was of the view that the production should be decided by our demand, so that the waste of resources could be minimized (Gandhi, nd. 1-17).

The present pandemic situation has created the kind of situation where the urban based economic structure has exposed. The complete lockdown in various countries including India has been the cause of downfall of economic development. The large number of migration of labours from cities to villages has forced us to rethink over Indian economic as well as social structure. In this situation, the Indian government should look towards Gandhian development model that was village-centric. Gandhi's village *Swaraj* that is *Panchayat Raj* which according to Gandhi was, 'a non-violent self-sufficient, economic unit with fullest political power' (Gandhi, 1962. 10).

Through Gandhi's view on village economic model, he tried to suggest a kind of model that could fill-up the gap between rich and poor, and villages and cities. For Gandhi, the economic equality means the abolition of conflict between capital and labour. He was of the view that economic equality could only be brought through the decentralization of economic structure and the empowerment of villages. Economic equality, for Gandhi, was necessary to resolve conflict within the society, and it could also stop many bloody revolutions which could be emerged because of economic inequality. Peasants (*Kisans*) and labourers were at the center of the Gandhian development model. He believed that without upliftment of peasants and labourers, the real freedom could not be achieved. Therefore, Gandhi began his political action in India from a peasant movement at Champaran in Bihar. He also suggested the Congressmen to bring peasants in the Congress so that their representation can be ensured in politics. Gandhi supported the worker's unions and said that 'Ahmedabad labour Union is a model for all India to copy' (Gandhi, 1945. 14-17).

Gandhi's Critique of Modern Civilization

Gandhi was deeply influenced with culture and civilization. His book 'Hind Swaraj' Published in 1909 that deals with his views on civilization. His understanding of modern civilization was different from his contemporary debate on civilization. Gandhi explained a general understanding of modern civilization and said, "One man can plough a vast tract by means of steam engines and can thus amass great wealth. This is called a sign of civilization." Gandhi believed that the modern understanding of civilization is measured with scientific or technological advancement. However, his understanding of civilization was different than his contemporary, traditional thinking about civilization. Gandhi considered such thinking about civilization as a self-destroyed for the human being (Gandhi, 1938. 30-31).

Many Indian thinkers and leaders were of the view that the British were civilizing India through their educational and technological advancement policies. They were thinking that the advancement in the field of railway, medical, education, law, and governance, was making India develop; therefore, many of them supported the British government. However, Gandhi did not agree with this argument. He believed that such advancements could not be useful for the better future of India. Therefore, he criticized these advancements. Gandhi believed that railways, lawyers, and doctors were impoverishing India, and if Indians did not wake up in time, they would be ruined by these professions. One of the main reasons for the critique of railways was that Gandhi believed that the railway was spreading the bubonic plague. He considered railways the carriers of plague germs. The leading cause of Gandhi's medical professional critique was that he believed that doctors had unhinged Indians. He believed that the modern profession of medicine is making human beings a subject to earn wealth. According to Gandhi, human beings have become dependent on doctors. Gandhi criticized lawyers because, for him, this profession was more immoral than any other profession. This profession had become the source of earning money (ibid, 39-51).

Gandhi supported that civilization, which rooted in the cultural and religious ethos of the ancient Indian civilization. He was worried to see that their followers forgot almost every ancient civilization like Roman and Greek. The West had adopted a new civilization and had left its ancient roots. In the same way, Greece shared the same path and left its ancient cultural roots. Gandhi believed that, to some extent, Indian civilization was rooted in its ancient religious culture. Gandhi defined civilization as 'that mode of conduct which points out to man the path of duty.' For Gandhi, civilization means 'good conduct.' Gandhi was of the view that 'the tendency of Indian civilization is to elevate the moral being' (ibid. 53-54).

Now the question comes that what is the relevance of Gandhi's critique of modern civilization in a contemporary pandemic situation? It is not difficult to understand that the pre-pandemic society was governed according to those points that had been criticized by Gandhi. It is common to understand that the sign of modern civilization and progress of any country is measured with technological advancements in science and humanity. However, the current pandemic situation has exposed all scientific and technological advancement, and therefore, the developed countries like America, England, France, Italy, etc. have come on their feet in the contemporary pandemic time. India has also blindly followed the west; therefore, it has become difficult for India to come out of this pandemic situation. Though, it can be said that, to some extent, India is in a better position, and this better position is only because Indian society has not left its cultural roots entirely.

3. Conclusion and Suggestions

The outgoing COVID-19 pandemic situation has raised several questions related to day-to-day human life. These questions are related to human actions and lifestyle in modern times. The term 'modern' becomes significant in the current situation because it has contributed a lot to bring this pandemic. In the present, the modernity and progress of any nation or civilization is measured by the development of science, technology and lifestyle. As some of the world's leaders trying to find the reason for COVID-19 pandemics, they are claiming it is a manmade pandemic. Nobody knows the reality, but if this is true, then we can imagine that how human psychology has changed? This change of human psychology is only to get wealth, and it indicates human desire to get anything at any cost. The human nature and behaviour are affected by the surroundings. The current pandemic has brought specific problems related to the socio-economic and psychology of human beings. The human body works properly if the body has good coordination with the mind.

In this situation, Gandhi's lifestyle can be the guiding force to the human beings. Gandhi had faith in ancient Indian civilization and religious culture; therefore, Indian civilization and culture were guiding force for him. The current challenges related to human survival can be managed with Gandhian principles of life. Gandhi never believed in modern medicines and always treated himself and his relatives by naturopathy. Even now, in the current pandemic situation, India is showing its faith in naturopathy and

homeopathy. India is a country where almost every person has faith in any religion or sect that shows the beliefs of Indians in God. In the Gandhian lifestyle, the role of God was crucial. He often used to say that his every action is guided by God. He believed in the concept of *Ishwar Pranidhan*, i.e., the devotion of all our actions to God. This belief helps to release the mental pressure of human beings. Gandhi believed in the treatment of various diseases through chanting the *Ramanama*. Gandhi named this treatment the *Ramanama Chikitsa*. Gandhi believed that the chanting of *Ramanama* makes us fearless. It is essential to understand that Gandhi's *Ramanama* was not sectarian or religious. He believes that the chanting of Allah, God, or any religious god is equally useful.

The current pandemic has brought economic challenges as well. The migration of labourers from cities to villages has exposed the lacunas of the Indian economic development model. The centralization of the economy in particular cities has made this situation very pathetic. In this situation, the Gandhian development model can be used as a role model for the Indian economy in the future because this model is not only based on the concept of sustainable development but also provides job surety at the local level. The Gandhian model of trusteeship can provide a management structure to the village-centric economy. The village-centric economy would provide a job at the local level and help to reduce unemployment and the migration from villages to the cities. Gandhi believed in the old economic structure of exchanging of goods in which the money did not play an important role. The relevance of the exchange and trade model is that the villages can fulfil their essential needs at the local level. The Gandhian economic development model can help to sustain the Indian economy in any world-wide pandemic or war-kind situations.

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