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REVISIONING GANDHI'S SWARAJ AS AN ALTERNATIVE MODEL OF 'GLOBALISATION'

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ABSTRACT

On the face of it, the world seems to have entered a new, post-colonial phase of national self-determination. However the global geo-politics and economics argue the opposite. If one pauses to consider the wars and depredations, inequality and hunger now in process worldwide, it becomes difficult to believe that we have in fact moved into a new kind of world, smartly coined as 'globalisation' which misleads more than what it reveals as to its true face and nature. However the violence, deprivation, exploitation of man and nature both, cultural hegemony and global institutional arrangements that existed in the colonial era widely persist even today in various new forms and patterns. With the logic of globalization widely spread and boundaries erased by the advancement in information technology, the process of economic exploitation has become even more simplified with the emergence of the transnational corporations as a more stable and economically viable an entity than the nation state. In such a scenario Gandhi's Globalisation beautifully illustrated and explained in Hind Swaraj can be an authentic horizon to look at as an alternative for better living. It is the Gandhian philosophy of Swaraj that can embody and harmonise our personal and political aspirations because it foregrounds a certain vision of society which is free from exploitation, oppression, and violence, a society of self-regulating individuals of high moral character cooperating with one another in a free and non-violent manner. Just as each individual seeks swaraj, so does each nation, society, or country. So there is an urgent need to examine, understand and then appreciate, if possible, the various agencies of globalisation which have made inroads into our life and consciousness. After careful examination all these forces have to be negated in favour of Gandhian swaraj so as to ensure equilibrium and balance in the patterns of living.

KEYWORDS

Globalisation, hegemony, depredation, alternative, horizon, swaraj, authentic, sustainable.

1. INTRODUCTION

The last century has been witness to a lot of dramatic and traumatic changes in every domain of human as well social life. At the beginning of the 21st century it is high time to take stock of all these evolutionary and revolutionary shifts, and to examine as objectively as possible, the impact of this transformation in the modes of living. The economic crisis is now being felt worldwide, including in prosperous Europe and USA, with the recessionary tendencies on the rise with every passing day. On the cultural front, the fast emerging global socio-political and scientific-technological sequence of events, aided by a culture of greed, have dismantled almost in one go all humanity and all its finer values hitherto believed invincible. All of a sudden, economics has undermined and overshadowed all other branches of human discourse or endeavour. The most frightening aspect of this development is that man is nowhere in the reckoning now and has been pitifully reduced to the status of a consumer and commodity. This model of progress and growth based on machine and market threatens to further widen the existing socio-economic disparities which fuel an atmosphere of conflict and unrest. The unending quest for resources to perpetuate globalization is creating wars and conflict zones across the planet – wars over land, wars over water, wars over seed and wars over food. There is an increase in violence and militarization. Mother earth is in jeopardy at the rapacious hands of these forces. Corporate globalization has also undermined representative democracy making States representative of corporate interest rather than public interest.

OBJECTIVES

This paper is an attempt to examine the multiple layers of the crisis that globalization has unleashed – the socio-cultural, the economic, the ecological and the political crisis; and to relocate an alternative model of development as envisaged by Mahatma Gandhi in the first half of the 20th century. My humble attempt in this endeavour has been to examine the creeping changes in form and significance happening to us as a result of the processes of 'globalisation', and then try and find out an alternative horizon for fresh breathing and healthy life on the face of the earth.

DISCUSSION

The politics and philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi are more relevant today than ever before in finding ways to live peacefully, equitably and sustainably on this fragile planet. Physical science has already achieved a lot by making tremendous advances in its search and explorations about the physical and material reality during the 20th century. Almost all nature and natural systems are well understood and explained today. But this empirical knowledge has not yielded to any improvement at the existential level. People still fight like dogs. They still go hungry. There is no end to the regime of exploitation or suffering. We have not learnt how to cohere like molecules, to flock together like birds, to pitch together like in a musical concert, and establish a measure of 'sharing and symbiosis' like in natural system. In the absence of this existential knowledge, all empirical knowledge is not of much use. The paper makes an attempt to explore the contemporary relevance of Gandhi's key concepts of Swaraj, Swadeshi, Sarvodaya and Satyagraha. Gandhi's observation that the earth has enough for everyone's needs and not for some peoples' greed can be translated into emerging movements for the defence of the earth and people's rights.

GANDHI AND GLOBALIZATION

When one at the beginning of the 21st century tries to have a relook at Gandhian principles and percept and carries out an dispassionate analysis of their relevance and impact in the context of Globalisation in its contemporary form and shade, it is very important to attain a certain level of conceptual clarity and the process of communication. Before we begin our debate on the issue, let us try to find what the greatest scientist of the 20th century, Albert Einstein have to say about Gandhi: "Generations to come will scarcely believe that such a man ever in flesh and blood walked upon earth." There are huge volumes of words written on Gandhi's thoughts and actions in almost every sphere and stream of life from village to global level. Gandhi was a complete man with an integrated vision of life, a unified vision of humanity. He entered the world during the times of great conflicts and confusions. His entire endeavour is to address the issue of bringing about a new era in human civilisation founded on the principles of truth, non-violence and peaceful coexistence. In comparison there many of his contemporary thinkers and political leaders tended to get segmental and fragmented during the 20th century. How can social action contribute to coherence and peace when the thought process turns segmental and fragmented?

If one looks at the evolutionary march of human civilization, one finds one is amazed to witness the process and patterns of evolving culture, great advances made in the field of physical sciences, phases of planned development and representative democracy. The understanding of the basic elements of nature through scientific research has contributed a lot to the emergence and sustenance of life on earth. It was indeed a global process of evolution starting from the mono-cellular through the plant and animal to the human species. As life takes a firm footing on the solid and stable surface of mother earth, one finds that 'change' has also been a constant and continuous pattern on a global scale. With these shifting patterns of ideas and living, one witnesses the emergence of diverse modes of analysis and experimentations. At political front we see this evolution in the form theocracy, dictatorship, monarchies, democracy. At socio-economic level transformation takes place in the form of ideological shifts such as communism, socialism, capitalism, caste and class.

This change and transformation at the material and non-material level also underlines one basic feature of life i.e. conflicting interests between individuals and groups. As people struggle to have a sure and sustainable grounding on earth, they encounter forms of resistance from the other contending elements. Thus diversity, differentiation, discrimination, mutual hostility and conflict emerge as a 'natural' consequence in such a situation. By the end of the 20th century some intellectuals have already announced the 'death of God' and the 'end of history'. The global discourse during the last decade of the 20th century has brought out one common refrain, political democracy and economic liberalisation as the main stream of globalisation. However, democracy, though still widely hailed and accepted as an ideal and as a virtue, too has come under tremendous strain at the rapacious hands of capitalist mode of polity. Capitalism too is facing a tremendous challenge in the first decade of the 21st century with the emergence of recessionary tendencies at the global stage. It is the context of this global change that contemporary discourse on globalisation as a phenomenon has emerged to the fore and assumed critical proportion.

It can be argued, empirically, that after the emergence of humans, the process and path of evolution has taken a turn from the physical to the social, that had witnessed the emergence of political organisation of power, economic organisation of tools of production and exchange of goods and services (barter), and the diverse elements of non-material culture. However some major fault lines, structural fault lines have emerged in the process of social evolution, such that can be resolved through spiritual, ethical, moral, humanist norms as a universal scale. Jayprakash Narayan writing a Forward to J. D. Sethi's book says:

"I do not deny that there has been considerable progress in the past thirty years in the economic fields and that remains our very valuable asset. But along with that our problems and liabilities have become far more serious and menacing. The polity and its institutions have been seriously eroded. Some institutions have been destroyed just to satisfy the lust of power of one or a few individuals..... The moral fibre of our society has been shred to pieces" (Sethi, VIII)

Human society is in need of a spiritual shift for the resolution of its fault lines. This is Gandhian spiritualism. In the midst of crusades and jihadis, and the rise in religious fundamentalism Gandhi has envisaged a society founded on spiritualism, as a cure to the civilizational ills of human society. Gandhi failed in his life time. His assassination itself has demonstrated the malaise of human civilization. Gandhi, as we realise today, was ahead of his times. Almost six decades after his death, the world has woken up to the Gandhian thought and made as a corrective to the civilizational ills of globalisation. Fusion is the path. Fission is annihilation of human civilization.

Gandhi's vision of life on earth is founded on the ethical principles of truth, equality, peaceful coexistence. Gandhian Globalisation is not opposed to material growth and prosperity but its main theme is the kind of progress where growth contributes to human welfare for the larger number. In Gandhian scheme of things man is the only measure of development. Gandhi's universalism can be traced to his idea and ideal of *swaraj*. Rajamohan Gandhi (1995) in his chapter titled *Hind Swaraj* notes the following in the context of Gandhian *swaraj*.

"I for one am unable to accept the sweeping statement: The tendency of the Indian Civilisation is to elevate the moral being, that of the Western civilization is to propagate immorality. The latter is godless, the former is based on a belief in God' (Ch. 3). The torch held by *Hind Swaraj's* author does not throw an even light on the terrain under examination. Some portions remain in darkness while the shape of others is distorted or exaggerated. Yet no study of the historic encounter between the Indian and the Western civilizations can ignore *Hind Swaraj*; neither can any study of the workings of Gandhi's mind (P 139)"

Though the concept of *swaraj* as envisaged by Gandhi was india specific, it is as relevant to the rest of the people or societies in its applicability and efficacy as it is to india. He himself explained it: "I submit that *swaraj* is an all-satisfying goal for all time. ... It is infinitely greater than and includes independence," (YI, 12 January 1928). Main features of Gandhian *swaraj* are freedom (from hunger and disease) decentralised, participative and consensual mode of decision making in public affairs, egalitarianism (without prejudice or discrimination), harmony (between individuals, groups, communities and nations), *Antyodya* and *Sarvodya* (last man first while pursuing the welfare of all). Gandhi states that "*Swaraj* for me means freedom for the meanest of our countrymen. I am not interested in freeing India merely from the English yoke. I am bent upon freeing India from any yoke whatsoever. I have no desire to exchange 'king log for king stork (YI, 12-6-1924, 195)". He further explains: "Self-government means continuous effort to be independent of government control, whether it is foreign government or whether it is national (YI, 6-8-1925, 276)." These two statements clearly say that *swaraj* for Gandhi is not simply a self-rule or freedom from foreign rule; it denotes an important inner domain of truth and non-violence as a necessary prerequisite. Gandhian *swaraj* means the capacity of the individual to rule over his/her own self as a prerequisite in order to establish self-rule at the societal, national or global level. His concepts of *sarvodya* and *satyagrah* too are to be viewed as predicates to implement the vision of *swaraj*. *Swaraj* leads to a nation which contributes to *sarvodya* or a more humane and equitable order. Thus, for Gandhi, *swaraj* begins at the unitary level, at the bottom; not at the top:

In this structure composed of innumerable villages, there will be ever widening, never ascending circles. Life will be a pyramid, with the apex sustained by the bottom. But it will be an oceanic circle whose centre will be the individual always ready to perish for the village, the latter ready to perish for the circle of villages, till at last the whole becomes one life composed of individuals, never aggressive in their arrogance, but ever humble, sharing the majesty of the oceanic circle of which they are integral part. (Harijan, 1946, 10)

Gandhian *swaraj* envisages complete freedom for an individual who lives in complete harmony with others around; who is free from any exploitation; who has self-restraint in abundance even in the face of the gravest provocation. Gandhian *swaraj* also means a society based on the values of truth and non-violence, with God as the presiding deity, a society which does not allow the dominance of machine over man. It is this connotation of *swaraj* which can bring about a meaningful change in the contemporary patterns of living bordering on mutual conflict, cut throat competition, oppressive tendencies and militarization. The political, the economic, the socio-cultural and the spiritual aspects are thus integral to such a process of development, not sequential.

Thus, Gandhi's call is for a 'culture of need' in place of the 'culture of greed'. The natural law of environmental sustainability is emphasised in meeting the needs of all while denouncing the greed of some which leads to deprivation and discrimination against many. Such a development is based on upholding harmony and balance not only between different people at any point of time but also as between generations. Gandhian concept of social equity and harmony are thus not only humanistic but also universal and eternal. Poverty anywhere is a threat to prosperity anywhere. So is the case in the disorder, conflict and insecurity. Gandhian concept of harmony and justice are based on *Vasudevya Kutumbakam* (the universal family of man), not polarised, bipolar or multi-polar. Thus truth, harmony, *Sarvodya*, *Antyodya*, peace and humanism represent the core of Gandhian mould of integral development. It is integral as it encompasses all spheres of life on earth. It is cosmic in its convas, with man at the centre of everything.

CONCLUSION

The last century has been the story of traumatic changes in the history of mankind. It has been an era of conflict, brutal violence, human suffering and mass killings, dehumanisation of people on a mass scale and state terrorism. It has witnessed the death of ideology, and the death of God. However, what we witness is not the evolutionary change based on humanist and universal norms of harmony and peace, propounded by Gandhi who had tried to shape the movement of true freedom. Gandhi failed in his life time to give concrete shape to his idea of true globalisation because the ground realities were not appropriate for the materialisation of a vision of people centric development and a world without boundaries. The soil was not fertile enough to give birth to his universal humanism, where man would be the measure of development. The logic of Gandhian humanism miserably failed to take off even in India which proudly calls him the father of the nation. Gandhianism probably will have to wait for some more time to attain its criticality to usher in a more authentic and more sustainable mode of development. It was rightly commented that Gandhi was a hundred years ahead of his times.

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