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Is Atmanirvar Bharat the New Incarnation of Gandhi's Sarvodaya?

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Abstract:

When COVID-19 pandemic broke out in India in 2020 accompanied by socio-economic crisis, the philosophy of 'Atmanirvar Bharat' was revived by our Prime Minister. Self-Reliant India is a campaign to make India and its citizens self dependent and self-reliant in all senses. It is a vision of our Prime Minister Narendra Modi to make a new India based on mainly five pillars: Economy, Infrastructure, System, Vibrant Demography and Demand.

Historically, the concept of Atmanirvar Bharat is not a new one. If we look back on the pre-independent India, its root can be traced in the Sarvodaya movement launched by for all', 'progress for all' or 'universal uplift'. 'Sarvodaya' as conceived by Gandhi, thus, aimed at an all-round development and welfare for all. The term 'all-round development' means development in all spheres of life, social, economic, political, spiritual etc. The philosophy of Sarvodaya aimed at building a plan of political and Sarvodaya fell on his ardent followers, Joy Prakash Narayan and Achariya Binoba Vabe who took various steps for the total uplift of the country.

The recent schemes like 'Make in India', 'Atmanirvar Bharat' are the new form of Sarvodaya. These schemes of the government of India are an effort to make Mahatma Gandhi's ideas a reality.

Keywords: 'Atmanirvar Bharat', Sarvodaya, Satyagraha, spiritual tolerance, Swadeshi, re-incarnation.

Gandhi. The term Sarvodaya was coined by Mahatma Gandhi which means 'well-being social reconstruction on the basis of ethical idealism. After Gandhi, the mantle of

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> Sarvodaya is a Gujrati term which means "wellbeing for all" "progress for all" or "universal uplift". The root of the term remains in Sanskrit word 'Sarva' (all) and 'Udai' (uplift). The term 'Sarvodaya' was first coined by Mahatma Gandhi and it may be translated into "well-being for all", "progress for all", or "universal uplift". We can describe the etymological meaning of 'Sarvodaya' as the welfare of all. In the words of Gandhi "the welfare of all should be the aim of all human activities" (Mathai MP, 2000, p.156).

While working as a lawyer in South Africa in 1904 Gandhi received from a British friend a copy of "Unto This Last", a book on political economy written by John Ruskin. He was very much influenced by this book. He wrote in his Autobiography that during the twenty-four-hour train journey to Durban from Johannesburg, he read this book and was moved so deeply that he could not sleep at all. He wrote afterwards, "I determined to change my life in accordance with the ideals of the book" (Gandhi, Autobiography). According to Gandhi, Ruskin's outlook on political-economic life derived from three central tenets. These are:

- 1. the good of the individual is contained in the good of all
- 2. a lawyer's work has the same value as the barber's in as much as all have the same right of earning their livelihood from their work
- 3. a life of Labour, i.e., the life of the tiller of the soil and the handicraftsman is the life worth living.

Gandhi said, the first of these I knew. The second, I had dimly realized. The third had never occurred to me. *Unto this Last* made it clear as daylight for me that the second and third were contained in the first. I arose with the dawn, ready to reduce these principles to practice (Gandhi, Autobiography).

The idea of Sarvodaya is not a new one. We can trace its roots in the ancient civilization of the world. In Vedic era Rishis had preached for 'welfare of all'. 'Sarvodaya', as conceived by Gandhi, aimed at an all-round development and welfare for all. All-round development means development in all spheres of life including social, economic, political, spiritual etc. Gandhi dedicated his life for development of Indian people with this ideal of Sarvodaya. It may be considered as "an unparalleled endeavour of men for the generation of human society" (Harijan,1947).

Gandhi formulated his idea of Sarvodaya from various sources, such as "Unto This Last" written by Ruskin, "The Kingdom of God is within you" by Tolstoy, "Civil Disobedience" by Thoreaus, the Bhagbad Gita, Isavesyopanisad, Buddhism, Jainism and Islam. In course of time, the concept of Sarvodaya became the main areas of Gandhian philosophy and action.

Though Gandhi borrowed the concept of Sarvodaya from Jhon Ruskin, he was the first to use the term in modern times. The proper meaning of "Unto This Last" should be Antyodaya (uplift of the last) rather than Sarvodaya. Gandhiji believed that in a problem-ridden society like India only Sarvodaya can be the real panacea. Sarvodaya can provide an all-round development of the individual and the society through a countrywide decentralization of both political and economic powers.

The idea of Sarvodaya is based on the concept of happiness for each and all. The philosophy of Utilitarianism is based on the theory of greatest happiness of the greatest number. Here is the distinction between Sarvodaya and western Isms where we see three stages in the evolution of humanist thought. First of all, Darwin advocated the principle of the survival of the fittest, then Huxley preached the principle of 'live and let live'. In present day philosophy of Sarvodaya moves a step forward with the theory of 'Live in order to help others live'

Ideologies of Gandhi can be summed up in three words and they are Satyagraha, Sarvodaya and Anasakti (non-attachment) (Tandon Viswanath, 1965). If we have a glance at Gandhi's life and work, we feel that he treats Sarvodaya as the goal of his life, Satyagraha as a means and Anasakti as a way of training for self-discipline to gain power. Gandhi believed in the primary and ultimateness of God. He organized various programmes, political, economic or social to provide service to the poor. He believed that through such work man can change his heart to feel divine joy and thus feel the existence

of the Almighty. This belief in the supremacy of the spirit was the basis of the movement of Sarvodaya.

The word Sarvodaya itself aims at the upliftment or prosperity of all. So, the philosophy of Sarvodaya is based on universal good. According to this theory, there should be no discrimination between man and man and everybody should be respected and has right on his due share. Simultaneously, the main pillars of Sarvodaya are truth, non-violence, self-sacrifice and spiritual tolerance. Satyagraha is the sole weapon of social change and freedom. At the same time justice, equality and fraternity are the part and parcel of Sarvodaya. Supremacy and absoluteness of moral values is the foundation of Sarvodaya.

Sarvodaya may be described as the clarion call of Gandhi for equality, justice and generosity. Accepting individual differences Gandhi insists on equality and justice as the guiding principles of humanity. Gandhi thought that economic policies should be need-based and at the same time should have some relevant ethical perspective. It means that man should not run only for material life. According to him, material advance has a tendency to progress to moral decay. He said that western nations are groaning under the heel of the monster-god of materialism and their moral growth has become short. Gandhi advocated for an ideal economy which will be based more on truth than gold and where charity play an important role than self-love. Once he addressed his audience by saying "Let us seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and irrevocable promise that everything will be added with us. These are real economics. May you and I treasure them and enforce them in our daily life" (Harijon, 1937).

In his imagination, economic equality occupies the central place in Sarvodaya society. It "is an essential principle and indispensable condition" (Prasad, K.M.,1984) for the development of rural India. Gandhi derived his thought on economic issues from three sources. The first was his ethical-spiritual convictions. Secondly, he himself was involved deeply in the economic conditions of the people. Thirdly, the influence of John Ruskin's book *Unto this Last* and Tolstoy's *The kingdom of God* was profound.

Gandhi was hardly celebrated as an economic thinker but he had tried to apply the already existing economic principles to the Indian context. It has opened the door for a fresh look at the economics purely from a human perspective, economy with a human face or economy as if people mattered (Schumacher, 1973). Gandhi's economic strategies are to be evaluated from the point of an ideal social order which is based on non-violence, non-exploitative, humanistic, egalitarian Sarvodaya society. He was eloquent throughout his life for the principles of an alternative and more real human economy, which was outlined in his lecture "the lack of correlation between material expansion and genuine process, the need for an economics-cum-ethics that will enable moral growth and dignity for all, the fallacy of seeking happiness in individual acquisitive behavior, and the need for encouraging people to seek a life rich in self-esteem and genuine meaning" (Diwan R and Lutz M). According to Gandhi "True economics stands for social justice and moral values" (Tendulkar, D.G, 1960).

Gandhi dedicated his life to struggle against India's poverty, backwardness, and socio-economic challenges. He tried to improve the socio-economic conditions of the people by campaigning for Swadeshi and non-co-operation. He believed that these principles are the basis of economic self-sufficiency. He desired to promote national self-sufficiency by civil resistance. Gandhian economics is based on simplicity, non-violence, decentralization supported by ethical and moral considerations. His main aim is to provide full employment to the poor and engage the total workforce so that they can provide for their own necessities on their own capacity with dignity without depending on other's charity.

According to Gandhi, the basic problems of India can be solved by practicing non-

violence. He believed that nature has sufficient resources to fulfill people's needs and if everybody takes according to his requirements there will be no poverty or starvation, for the laws of nature are universal and have no conflicts with the laws of economics. Gandhi was against capitalism because in capitalism human Labour may be exploited.

It is the idea of Swaraj that has a great role in shaping Gandhi's economic thought. Gandhi advocated for Swaraj that is the end of British political control but at the same time he was worried for economic self-sufficiency and Indian values like simple living and high thinking. He observed that political dependence of the country led to economic subjugation and ultimately provided the foreign rulers an opportunity to exploit India. Attraction for foreign goods developed among Indians passion for a life of material comforts. The foreign rulers took the opportunity to exploit India. Gandhi observed ruefully that this tendency plunged his countrymen into poverty, hunger, misery, destitution and deprivation. While thinking of Swaraj, Gandhi was fully aware of these problems of millions of people. He wrote in Young India "The Swaraj of my dream is the poor man's Swaraj".

Gandhi advocated certain policies to develop Indian agriculture, industries, Swadeshi etc. To him economics is a practical science as it suggested some measures for human welfare. He offered some constructive programmes for village regeneration keeping in mind the ideal of Sarvodaya.

Some of the economic ideas of Gandhi were based on certain beliefs which may be the model of economic development and are still relevant in modern India. It would not be possible to understand Gandhi's economic ideas without reference of Swadeshi. In Gandhi's word Swadeshi is that spirit in us which restricts us to the use and service of our immediate surroundings to the exclusion of more remote. Thus, as for religion, in order to satisfy the requirements of definition, I must restrict myself to my ancestral religion. That is, the use of my immediate religious surrounding. If I find it defective, I should serve it by purging it of its defects. In the domain of politics, I should make use of the indigenous institutions and serve them by curing them of their proved defects. In that of economics, I should use only things that are produced by my immediate neighbours and serve those industries by making them efficient and complete where they might be found wanting. It is suggested that such Swadeshi, if reduced to practice, will lead to millennium (Prabhu and Rao 1960).

We can trace Gandhi's economic thoughts as developed in three phases: (i) the first phase is up to 1919. In this phase criticizing the western pattern of economic development, Gandhi adopted a non-materialistic attitude, incorporated in his book Hind Swaraj (1909). (ii) The second phase is 1919-1934, when he presents the ideal of Swadeshi as the alternative of western civilization. In the third phase (1934-1948), Gandhi became more practical to formulate his constructive programme for village regeneration and put forward the ideal of Sarvodaya (Savitha, 2015).

The economic ideas of Gandhi were very much simple and straight forward. He had formulated these principles to make India economically self-sufficient, manufacturing and satisfying its own needs in domestic market, home-grown ways. It would improve the composition of rural economy of India and make India self-sufficient. He spread this ethics of economic self-sufficiency all over India during British period. Khadi and village industry were the pivot of his economic thoughts. Gandhi had in his vision a self-reliant village which will depend on its own resources and brought an end of British exploitation of Indian people. He advocated strongly for decentralization of economy. He said that, if we want Swaraj to be built on non-violence, we will have to give the villages their proper place. According to him, the development of the village is dependent on their own self-sufficiency which is only possible when there is no more exploitation. He felt that each village should be self-reliant to have all the necessities of life such as, food, clothing, clean

water, sanitation, housing, education etc. Gandhi tried to promote indigenous industries like small scale and cottage industry of Khadi, handloom spinning and weaving mills, which will rebuild village economy and at the same time the Indian society. These small-scale industries will also create employment opportunities as these are Labour oriented. Raw materials would be easily available in villages from agriculture and production would be easily marketed in villages or adjacent villages.

On the contrary, he believed that large scale industries are capital oriented and may create competition associated with problem of marketing. It would also be the cause of concentration of wealth in the hands of a few. India's dependence on import from other countries was the main reason for India's misfortune. Gandhi was paying attention to the development of common people and more significantly the development of the depressed and needy group of people (Kaur and Dhapali 2015 and Mathur 2011).

In Gandhian economics a clear demarcation line has been drawn between economics and ethics. Moral wellbeing of an individual is more important than money. Therefore, special emphasis of Gandhian economic thought is on plain living which helps to cut down one's wants and become self-reliant. Wants oriented modern economic theory becomes the source of rat race, creating a psychological scarcity and poverty because all wants can never be satisfied.

In India, unemployment is growing fast. Large-scale industries and monopolistic pattern of ownership of means of production at the national and the international levels have created glaring inequalities between the rich and the poor, between those who live in the villages and in cities. Such a system resulted in the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few, and poverty and misery for the vast majority of people (Friedman, 2008)

If we analyze the economic situation, we can see a three-tier economy is prevalent in India, the urban, the rural and the underworld economy. Urban economy is revolving on the concentration of wealth and resources in the cities. It helps a few to be richer and poorer, the poorer. "Underworld economy is the by-product of the exploitative and corrupt system that exists in cities. Thus, modern industrialization has created miseries in slums and villages, and black money has created islands of immoral and luxurious life in urban centers. There is a direct connection between underworld economy and the urban economy. The mushroom growth of urban and underworld economy has paralyzed the normal and gradual growth of rural economy. Rural economy, as a result, is not growing fast and it is not able to compete with the industrial economy. The farmers and agricultural labourers are marginalized and exploited. Growing population and mechanization have further aggravated their problems. Large-scale industries cannot sustain large populations and cannot provide employment for all (Singh Mishu, 2016).

The wave of Covid 19 pandemic in 2020-21 dealt a severe blow to Indian economy. It has deteriorated economic conditions of the country along with various social crises. To take some supportive measures to handle such unusual situation was the need of the time. In this situation the age-old concept of self-reliant philosophy has been reincarnated. In 2020, Covid 19 pandemic revived the philosophy of 'Aatma Nirbhar Bharat. On May 12, 2020 at 8p.m our Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched it as a campaign for 'Aatma Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyan'. Though some politicians criticized this nationwide campaign as an advertising tactic, it has some similarities to the Swadeshi movement launched on 7th August, 1905.

In his inaugural speech at the India Global Week 2020, Prime Minister of India explained "......Aatma Nirbhar Bharat is not about being self-contained or being close to the world, it is about being self-sustaining and self-generating. We will pursue policies that promote efficiency, equity, and resilience......" He opined that this self-reliant policy does not aim to be protectionist and rolled a red-carpet invitation to global investors to invest in core

sectors of the Indian economy like agriculture, logistics, defense, and space etc. (*Outlook* India, 2020). The Prime Minister stressed on five pillars of 'Aatma Nirbhar Bharat' — **Economy, Infrastructure, Technology-Driven Systems, Vibrant Demography and Demand.** He reassured again that at the core of Aatma Nirbhar Bharat is to create wealth and values not only for ourselves, but for the larger humanity as India always believed in 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' (The Economic Times, 2021).

With the outbreak of Covid 19 pandemic the life and living of people, not only in India but also in the entire world were disrupted. The race for vaccination followed by 'vaccine nationalism', developed a tendency of storing vaccine among the countries, especially in rich countries. But India in compliance with her age-old mantra 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' generously shared vaccine with her neighbours.

The idea of self-reliance does not mean 'policy of isolation or protectionism' rather it may be described as a policy of support to make India understand its real potentiality. After Covid 19 'Self Reliant theory' has been recognized as more relevant for the New Global Economic Order (NGEO). "Internal and external development of nations can only be achieved by being true to oneself i.e. (knowing own strengths) and 'being connected', i.e. close cooperation among the developed and developing nations (EI Namaki, 2020; Gammage and Akinkugbe, 2020)."

In the New Economic Global Order, it is thought that developing countries must try to do as much as possible by themselves, by using their own resources and own initiatives. But simultaneously, these countries must utilize a very possible advantage to maximize the positive effects of the NGEO by cooperating with each other. Self-reliance is, thus, taken here to mean autonomy of decision-making and full mobilization of a society's resources under its initiative and direction. It also means rejection of the principle of exploitative appropriation of other's resources (Hope, 1984). Collective self-reliance is an extension of the concept of self-reliance to embrace truly cooperative relations among self-respecting mobilized societies. In other words, it is self-reliance reinforced by collective solidarity (Hope, 1984; Leach et al, 2021).

Being vocal for local, as pointed out by our PM Modi is the acknowledgement and promotion of inherent strength of Indian entrepreneurship. "Swadeshi should be reinterpreted as a bridge between robust localization and inevitable globalization, complementary to one another and not diametrically opposed. The argument that we can suddenly become world-beaters by turning self-sufficient is not convincing. We need, instead, a combination of the best from wherever it is available when required, and make arrangement locally for our normal needs. Indians should not be forced to settle for second- or third-rate products or services just because they have the made-in–India tag. (Shikhare, G.S., 2020). We must know that there should be no compromise for quality and competence. This is the time to take initiatives for reviving local industries and follow the economic policies to produce welfare, sustainable incomes, and job creation. This will help us to produce quality goods and be self-reliant.

The concept of Atma Nirbhar Bharat or self-reliant India as announced by PM Narendra Modi is a new version of Gandhi's Swadeshi economics. Gandhi visualized such an economic and social order where people reside in a peaceful, non-exploitative social order. To reduce burden on agriculture Gandhi advocated for cottage industries which will act as a good support system for the villagers.

Only a self-sufficient village economy at rural level can ensure an all-round development of the villages resulting in increase of production, employment, income and wealth and naturally the improvement of standard of living of the rural people. Simultaneously, it will help to stop outmigration and reduce the burden of the cities.

The recent schemes of government of India like 'Make in India', 'Atmanirvar Bharat' are

the new forms of Sarvodaya, as visualized by Mahatma Gandhi. At the time of independence movement, a "Charkha" symbolized "Self-reliance" and "Swadeshi". Similarly, in modern context, a small rounded spectacle symbolizes the government's vision of "Swachh Bharat". The Indian government initiates various policies based on simple ideas of truth, non-violence, swadeshi and self- reliance as designed by Gandhi. Moreover, the theory of 'self-reliance' 'development of Bharat', 'healthy India', 'khadi', etc. have been incorporated in various schemes, such as, Make in India, Fit India, Promotion of naturopathy and yoga, promotion of khadi as a global brand etc.

The concept of Swadeshi as depicted by Gandhi is based on love and compassion. It does not mean disfavor or exclusion of distant people. It does not mean a mere refusal of foreign manufacturers only because they are foreign. It is against Swadeshi spirit to invest time and money to promote those manufacturing product which are not suited to country's interest. Thus, we find a re-incarnation of Gandhi's ideal of Swadeshi in Prime Minister Modi's concept of "Aatma Nirbhar Bharat".

Covid 19 pandemic hit hard and destroyed interlinkages among the global countries. It was a serious threat to the countries especially to those who are dependent on others to meet their local needs. To deal with this crisis India tried to transform it into an opportunity to be self-reliant. India has launched the Aatma Nirbhar Bharat Programme. As a result, India successfully ensured the production of two lakh PPE kits and two lakh N95 masks per day within two months. This success story inspired the government to follow the same principles in other areas to make the country 'aatmanirbhar' to meet its own requirements.

Both the concept of Aatma Nirbhar Bharat and Gandhian economics conjure up an ideal situation in which each and every person will be able to develop his or her personality in an ambience of real Swaraj. Like Gandhi's concept of Swadeshi Modi's concept of Aatma Nirbhar Bharat based on love and compassion would try to raise the local brands to the global level. "Aatma Nirbhar Bharat" may, thus, be described as 'old wine in a new bottle'. In fact, Gandhi's dream of 'Sarvodaya', 'wellbeing for all' and 'wellbeing unto the last' seems to have found its re-incarnation in Modi's concept of 'Aatma Nirbhar Bharat'.

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