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PROSPECTS OF GANDHIAN WORLD ORDER IN A VIOLENCE- STRICKEN WORLD

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Abstract

The present day the world order is marked by increased competitiveness and hostilities. The onward march of neo-liberal globalization facilitates widespread consumerism and individualism which incommodes collective-spirited society that the Father of the Nation, M.K. Gandhi envisioned. The essence of Gandhian thought stands on the edifice of non violence and freedom. Contrary to that, the contemporary world order is heavily driven by the Darwinian dictum of the 'survival of the fittest'. In view of this, this article examines the relevance of Gandhian worldview that intends to develop a egalitarian society.

Keywords: *Gandhi, Violence, peace, egalitarianism, inequality*

Introduction

“The World will live in peace, only when the individuals composing it make up their minds to do so.”

-M.K. Gandhi (1995: 70)

The world has witnessed many wars, battles and hostility in the past whereby peace is strangled and tranquillity subdued. Such pernicious acts have happened at a time when scientific temperament and innovations endowed humanity with the roadmap of a rational world order. The onward march of neo-liberal globalization facilitates widespread consumerism and individualism which incommodes collective-spirited society that the Father of the Nation, M.K. Gandhi had envisioned. The essence of Gandhian thought stands on the edifice of non violence and freedom. Contrary to that, the contemporary world order is heavily driven by the Darwinian dictum of the ‘survival of the fittest’. The gap between the rich and the poor and vulnerable has been widened; millions are victimised by varied patterns of violence; environmental degradation and cultural disruption have become necessary corollaries of economic growth while the weaker and dispossessed sections are being further marginalised. The recent surge of violence and intolerance gripping most parts of the world reflects a deviation from world peace, co-operation and stability sought to be achieved in the Post Cold War period through international institutions and international law. Against these backdrops, this paper makes an attempt to re-locate Gandhi to interrogate alternative means of re-establishing international cooperation and mutual inter-dependence in the contemporary world order.

Has Violence become a norm?

Violence, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), is ‘the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development or deprivation.’¹ This definition of violence includes within its ambit both inter personal violence as well as armed conflict. Threats or intimidations against persons

or communities which poses serious risks to their security and well being also resemble violent behaviour. There is no single cause of violence. There is a multitude of complex inter -connections of cultural, social, economic and political factors influencing violence.

Global violence has increased manifold in recent times. Global peace is being hampered with increased incidences of violence. Civil war, increased militarization, terror attacks, crime against women and children and the elderly has been on the rise. It was reported by the Action on Armed Violence (AOAV) that 2461 deaths and injuries from 257 incidents of explosive violence around the world were recorded in June 2018 where civilians accounted for 67% of the deaths and injuries recorded.² Homicides in Mexico rose by 16% during the first half of 2018.³ Countries like Syria and Afghanistan have been torn apart by years of internal conflict. Military and security spending aimed at prevention of and containment of violence have had a considerable impact on global economy. At a time, when the countries have geared their policies towards sustainable development and have pledged to reduce global poverty, such staggering numbers of incidences of violence puts a question mark on their achievements. There is growing consensus that the world is on the brink of war. Rising violence in the aftermath of the Arab spring and the consequent mayhem in the middle eastern countries, rising fuel price, crisis in the European Union, brewing tensions between the US, Russia and China, trade war among countries etc. point to the rising insecurities in the world. On one hand there is power play in a multi polar world order with countries vying for protection of their sovereignty and national interests and on the other call for a greater democratization of public space. According to the Global Peace Index, 2018, the economic impact of violence to the global economy was USD 14.76 trillion in 2017 which is roughly 12.4% of world gross domestic product (GDP) or USD 1,988 per person.⁴

Violence has become so pervasive in the modern world that most of such incidents occurring on a daily basis attract scarce attention. We often debate about the spread of violence and how to contain it, but we end up prescribing more violence to address the wounds. The whole issue of arms proliferation is based on

the premise of promoting violence as a power and justifying use of weapons as a necessity to maintain peace, law and order. Is violence justified for a good cause? This is a critical question today and most people would react to it by pointing to terrorism, crime, the need for defence of vulnerable sections of society and so on. But history is witness to the fact that violence begets more violence.⁵ There exist varied patterns of violence. Three categories of it are being discussed here:

Occurrence of Violence because of the failure of the State

A cursory look into the incidences of violence occurred in our own country would facilitate one to gauge the existence of varied pattern of violence. Violence occurs because of lawlessness and failure of institutions. It may of communal violence, mob lynching so on and so forth. According to Home Ministry data, communal violence is on the increasing trend. It has increased 28 percent over three years to 2017 – 822 “incidents” were recorded that year – but it was short of the decadal high of 943 in 2008 (IndiaSpend: 2018).⁶ The National Crime Records Bureau reported that total cognizable crimes (as per Indian Penal Code) in India in 2016 alone stood at 29,75,711 (NCRB:2016), out of which 1,10,378 such cases are against women and perpetrated by husbands or other relatives.

Violence steered by the State

The state is a juridical entity, a legitimate power structure and authority. The prime responsibility of the state is to protect and preserve the interest of the people. We obey the diktats of the state as sacrosanct, also knowing the fact that state regiments us on many counts. Such regimentations sometimes become vicious and fatal. State resorts to the means of violence to stop ‘violence’. In the name of addressing insurgencies, terrorism, left wing extremism and other forms of activisms, state insidiously resorts to violence. The case of Armed Forces Special Powers Act, 1958 is one best example. Still operational in the Northeast region and in Jammu and Kashmir, the provisions of the Act (section-4) allows an officer above the rank of a *Havildar* to shoot a person if s/he suspects somebody to be disturbing peace. This is a clear indication of the violation of Article 21 of the Constitution of India that enunciates ‘Right to life’ as a Fundamental Right. Home to more than 200

ethnic groups, with roughly 45 million people (4% of the population of India), the North-eastern states have experienced a different kind of atrocities being legitimised by the Indian state. There are 72 Armed Groups in the Northeast, Government recruits 5,00,000 armed personnel to tackle conflicts, 20,000 widows have been crying for justice in Manipur, all youths (19-40) are treated as suspects in the AFSPA imposed areas (Nepram: 2015).

Violence at the Global level

The onward march of globalization has brought into fore a new kind of world order. Collisions and competitions for power have wrecked civilizations. The market driven neo-liberal economy has on the other hand impacted heavily on the ownership, control and realisation of resources making the global power equations more complex and critical. After the Cold war, the humanity has seen Iraq invasion, destruction of Afghanistan, the Syrian crisis, Rohingya crisis etc. Thousands of people were killed, thousands of homes destroyed in the name of exercising unbridled power. Most of the states today possess 'nuclear second strike capacity', i.e. if a country is wiped out of the map, even then, the victim country can retaliate with equal destructive force.

Is there any antidote to violence?

The antidote to violence is clearly to promote the culture of non-violence, what Gandhi called as *Ahimsa*. If non-violence is promoted as the highest ethical value, the world will transform into a heavenly abode. Non-violence means absence of aggression, presence of negotiation and discourse; and peaceful settlement of disputes. Spiritual awakening can help us live in complete harmony with fellow humans and nature.⁷

Gandhi idealized three significant movements- (i) Civic Disobedience to express dissatisfaction against the colonial dispensation, (ii) Non-Cooperation to expound the power of the common man in running the country and (iii) quit India- the most significant and popular among them all to root out colonial domination from the soil of the country. In doing so, what Gandhi did is quite overwhelming. Gandhi spiritualised politics, which is in fact, the core of Gandhian philosophy.

Freedom to him is central for human emancipation. And he quite brilliantly professed that freedom is not absolute, it corresponds to diversity.

Gandhi was aware that violence begets violence. He at many instances commented that mankind's greed over resources and material wealth are sources of many discords and disagreements. We have seen in the past how resource rich underdeveloped countries are being targeted by the powerful ones in order to exploit resources.

Though non-violence is a significant remedy to redress violence, the theory of Trusteeship, though utopian is quite relevant these days to address violence to a considerable degree. Since, resource is the source of all conflicts (some way or the other), the remedy lies in its judicious and sustainable use. Gandhi noted-

“Supposing I have come by a fair amount of wealth – either by way of legacy, or by means of trade and industry – I must know that all that wealth does not belong to me; what belongs to me is the right to an honourable livelihood, no better than that enjoyed by millions of others. The rest of my wealth belongs to the community and must be used for the welfare of the community. I enunciated this theory when the socialist theory was placed before the country in respect to the possessions held by zamindars and ruling chiefs. They would do away with these privileged classes. I want them to outgrow their greed and sense of possession, and to come down in spite of their wealth to the level of those who earn their bread by labour. The labourer has to realize that the wealthy man is less owner of his wealth than the labourer is owner of his own, viz., the power to work.” -Harijan, 3-6-1939, p. 145

The onward march of capitalism has brought into being a consumerist culture embedded in individualism and market economy. Consumerism has become so rampant that many modern states have even engaged in capturing the resources of other states which is best explicated in John Perkins's "The Confessions of an Economic Hitman: The shocking inside story of how America Really took over the world" (2005).⁸ Perkins illustrated how aid has been used by successive governments of the USA to control and manage the resources of the developing

and underdeveloped countries. Perkins highlighted that the 'US aid' often comes with the hidden expansionistic agenda of capitalism. Loans are granted initially at very cheaper rates only to entrap developing countries and then the resources of recipient countries are extracted. Perkins's contemplation corroborates the 'Dependency Theory' developed by Andre Gunder Frank. In his book 'The Development of Underdevelopment (1966), Frank explained that the rich countries are rich because of the resource exploitation by them from the poor countries.⁹ Jaffrey Sachs explained that the foreign aid has been flowing to the countries reeling under massive poverty. The United States of America and other donor nations agreed in the Monterrey Consensus, to "*urge all developed countries that have not done so to make concrete efforts toward the goal of 0.7 percent of gross domestic product as official development assistance*" as a matter of priority. Former U.S. President George W. Bush himself visited Monterrey to announce a surprising increase of U.S. foreign assistance in a new project known as the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA).¹⁰ In sum, though aid politics is tricky and a means to enter into the developmental field of the resource rich countries, but one thing is manifestly clear that countries care for the other countries reeling under massive poverty, hunger and underdevelopment. If this is the case, Gandhi's theory of Trusteeship can be translated into reality (of course with modifications appropriate to the present requirements).

The final draft of the Trusteeship theory as envisioned by Gandhi reads as follows:

1. Trusteeship provides a means of transforming the present capitalist order of society into an egalitarian one. It gives no quarter to capitalism, but gives the present owning class a chance of reforming itself. It is based on the faith that human nature is never beyond redemption.
2. It does not recognize any right of private ownership of property except so far as it may be permitted by society for its own welfare.
3. It does not exclude legislative regulation of the ownership and use of wealth.

4. Thus under State-regulated trusteeship, an individual will not be free to hold or use his wealth for selfish satisfaction or in disregard of the interests of society.
5. Just as it is proposed to fix a decent minimum living wage, even so a limit should be fixed for the maximum income that would be allowed to any person in society. The difference between such minimum and maximum incomes should be reasonable and equitable and variable from time to time so much so that the tendency would be towards obliteration of the difference.

- Harijan, 25-10-1952 *

Under Gandhian economic order the character of production will be determined by social necessity and not by personal whim or greed. In sharp contrast to capitalistic worldview, Gandhi idealised a society free from inequality and injustice. His contemplation on trusteeship chalks out a plan where property owning class surrenders their resources for a noble cause. The individualistic and consumerist culture would certainly stand as obstacle in its materialisation; however, if realised, it would certainly do away with the mad race. The world's eight richest billionaires control the same wealth between them as the poorest half of the globe's population, according to a charity warning of an ever-increasing and dangerous concentration of wealth. Oxfam reported that 'it was "beyond grotesque" that a handful of rich men headed by the Microsoft founder Bill Gates are worth USD 426 billion equivalent to the wealth of 3.6 billion people.'¹¹ The world's millionaires are expected to do the best in the coming years. There are now 36 million millionaires in the world, and their numbers are expected to grow to 44 million by 2022. Precisely 1% population own 50% of the total world's resources.¹²

Gandhi was concerned about such inequalities prevail in our societies. He visualised a means through which inequality could be abolished. Gandhi while answering the question 'whether the accumulation of capital possible except through violence whether open or tacit' (Harijan, 16-2-1947, p. 25) noted that such accumulation by private persons was impossible except through violent means but

accumulation by the State in a non-violent society was not only possible, it was desirable and inevitable.

Conclusion

Gandhi was a humanist, a true believer and practitioner of non-violence. Gandhi's worldview postulates freedom and egalitarianism as core values. The contemporary world witnessed divisive politics, fragmentations on the basis of caste, religion, language, sex and colour. Violence becomes the order and in order to contain violence 'more violent means' are being employed. In a way, the world has turned into a hotspot of violence. There are no remedies that can cure the ills unless people imbibe the principles of non-violence, peace and tranquillity- the core values of Gandhian philosophy. Gandhi's trusteeship theory today becomes more relevant where the rich denounces resources to the cause of humanity. Though utopian it seems, it has true potential to address challenges concerning humanity.

Notes :

¹ World Report on Violence and Health (2002), World Health Organization, Geneva, p 3 accessed from http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/world_report/en/abstract_en.pdf on 20.08.2018

² <https://aoav.org.uk/2018/explosive-violence-in-june-2018/>

³ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jul/23/mexico-crime-homicides-violence-up-report>

⁴ Global Peace Index (2018). Institute for Economics and Peace, <http://visionofhumanity.org/reports>

⁵ <https://www.speakingtree.in/blog/relevance-of-non-violence-in-today-s-times>

⁶ <https://www.firstpost.com/india/communal-violence-rose-by-28-from-2014-to-2017-but-2008-remains-year-of-highest-instances-of-religious-violence-4342951.html>

⁷ <https://www.speakingtree.in/blog/relevance-of-non-violence-in-today-s-times>

⁸ Perkins, John, “The Confessions of an Economic Hitman: The shocking inside story of how America Really took over the world” Random House: London, 2005.

⁹ Banerjee, Abhijit V. and Esther Duflo, (2011), *Poor Economics*, Noida: Random House India, p.4

¹⁰ Sachs, Jeffrey. D, (2005), *The End of Poverty*, New York: The Penguin Press, p. 218

¹¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2017/jan/16/worlds-eight-richest-people-have-same-wealth-as-poorest-50>.

¹² <https://www.cnbc.com/2017/11/14/richest-1-percent-now-own-half-the-worlds-wealth.html>.