



Pandemic crisis and it's solution through Gandhian vision

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Abstract

Pandemic COVID-19 has brought the entire human race on its knees. Millions of people troubled, died, and being affected. People suffered from hunger, lost their jobs and to pay out for their basic needs they exhausted their lifelong savings. It is a big loss of human life and social harmony in the world society. In the context of India Pandemic has indelible impact on the Indian socio-economic and political system, Millions of migrant workers who left their home decade or two decade back for work rendered jobless with the lockdown. They forced to flee back to their homes due to their grim situation and socio-economic insecurity. Millions of poor workers migrated from urban to rural areas particularly they came back to Uttar Pradesh, Bihar. These states feed the industrialised states and labour from these areas work as domestic help and skilled and unskilled labour in construction workers. It is a great tragedy that system has not been able to stop the large number of migration from cities to the villages. Due to lockdown this section was not able to survive in the cities for long period. Economy completely collapsed due to lock down of labour intensive sector. Due to the labour coming from elsewhere to the rural areas burden on the agro-based rural economy has increased many times. Rural economy based on agriculture faced many difficulties. They were not able to sow, harvest their crops at the right time due to lockdown. There is challenge in the agricultural sector to get proper price and exportation of finished products. It is important to see how to deal with this global challenging situation and how to make life normal again. The present study attempts to highlight the impact of the nationwide lockdown on society and effort is made to find out the strategy through the Gandhian vision to meet the pandemic all over the world.

Keywords: rural economy, migration, socio- economic insecurity, lockdown

Introduction

Gandhi ji for Independent India dreamed a system in which the lowest and poorest be kept on the same pedestal where the richest and highest in the social order. In his proposed society village had prime position. He appealed to the masses to go back to villages; and asked the government of Independent India to reform and re-constructs the village (modernisation of the village) with the efforts of people's participation through the Panchayati Raj. He had visualized self-reliant villages, free from exploitation and fear, as an important part of the decentralized system. It would be really important to see that self – reliant India that Gandhi envisioned in his 'Hind swaraj' provide solutions to the problems and challenges of pandemic.

Questions: question addressed in this study are:

- What were the major challenges in Rural Area in the period of lockdown?
- How far PRIs were viable institutions to meet the challenge posed by pandemic in the rural India?
- Did the local government was empowered to deal with this type of the universal problem?
- How did the lockdown affect rural livelihood?

Objective of the study is to understand the following issues:

- Impact of Lockdown due to Corona Virus on Rural Livelihood;

- To access the role of Govt. agencies & PRIs in Lockdown to meet the crisis in the rural society;
- To look and observe the co-operation rendered by the rural masses and their support to government agencies to felicitate the services process initiated by the government;
- To study the impact of Lockdown on income generating resources in rural strata.
- To study the major changes in the rural economy in the context of migration of the labour class to their native place.
- To understand Gandhi as a propagator of sustainable development and beckon holder to check the draw backs of the menace of industrialisation and excessive use of technology.

Hypothesis

- Gandhi's 'Village society' is the way out to meet the challenges of contemporary world.

Methodology

This study is based on the secondary data: reports, news paper articles, various media houses report and public opinion and statistical data. An observational and statistical approach had been adopted to study the patterns and changes in socio-economic life style of rural masses and their concern related to covid-19. Researchers' participatory observation for a long time in native village during the Covid-19 period was also good source of

primary data. Informal talks with the rural masses helped to derive the facts regarding rural situation during the pandemic. The entire world is affected with the terminal corona virus. Covid-19 has emerged as a threat for human existence. In the state of emergency; schools, colleges and other institutions were closed. Businesses, especially small and medium enterprises and informal businesses was shut down. Millions of people lost their source of income. The virus has spread widely, and the number of cases is raising everyday as governments work to slow its spread. India moved quickly and adopted approach of the lockdown that limited social gathering, travel and encouraged social distancing, it proved the most effective measure to prevent the spread of Covid-19. 'To control the spread of this highly contagious disease, majority of the countries worldwide including India imposed quarantine and social isolation to check the problem. Quarantine and social isolation can be the major stressors contributing to widespread changes in the population lifestyle, (Hossain & sultana in Basu, Karmarker. *et al*: 1385-1409). It's adverse impact on the world wide economy has affected every aspect of social and personal life of the individual. Positively, lockdown prevents infection from spreading but it is having negative impact on the every aspect of human life. India has drastically curtailed everyday life and the economic activity because of lockdown and curfew. In the economic and business sector recorded the decrease in GDP due to the decrease in Gross Domestic Production. Due to this a large number of working class has to flee to the villages which undoubtedly caused change in the country's economy and socio-economic condition of life. On the basis of the spread of the corona virus in India, the entire country was divided into zones, (Red zone, Orange zone and Green zone) based on number of infected individual residing in these regions. Red zone is the area with substantial numbers of positive cases and highest case load districts contribute to greater than 80% of cases for each state in the country or the doubling rate seen is less than four days (Business Standard Web Team:2020) [3].

'Economic crisis induced by COVID-19 is deeper and more pervasive than any other pandemic-induced crisis since the 1900. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the world economy is expected to contract by 3 percent in 2020 in the baseline scenario, a change of nearly 6 percent compared with 2019. Advanced economies are projected to decline by 6.1 percent and emerging market and developing economies by 1.0–2.2 percent in 2020. Also, there is substantial risk of continued economic recession well into 2021. When viewed through a migration lens, the economic crisis induced by COVID-19 could be even longer, deeper, and more pervasive than these estimates imply. In host countries, the COVID-19 crisis has created additional challenges in sectors that depend on the availability of migrant workers. Crisis has disproportionately impacted food and hospitality, retail and wholesale, tourism and transport, and manufacturing. As the farming season begins in many countries, there are emerging signs of labour shortages in the agriculture sector of industrial countries that rely on migrant workers. Given the seasonality of agriculture, worker shortages have given rise to concerns about food security later in the year. The crisis has presented a challenge for the cross-sectoral mobility of workers, which could be particularly hard for low-skilled migrant workers, especially informal and undocumented workers. The number of internal migrants is about two-and-a-half times that of

international migrants. China and India each have over 100 million internal migrants. For the poor sections of the population, especially from under-developed rural areas, migration to urban economic centres provide an escape from poverty and unemployment. Remittances from these migrants, typically smaller amounts than those from international migrants, serve as a lifeline and insurance for families left behind', (www.KNOMAD.org.)

The World Bank said that corona virus crisis has affected both international and internal migration in south Asia region. According to the report '*Covid -19 Crisis Through a Migration Lens*' the magnitude of internal migration is about two and a half times that of international migration. Lockdown, loss of employment and social distancing promoted a chaotic and painful process of mass return for internal migrants in India and many countries in Latin America. The lockdown in India has impacted the livelihoods of large proportion of the country's nearly 40 million internal migrants. Around 50,000-60,000 moved from urban centres to rural area of origin in the span of few days.

According to ILO nearly half of the entire global workforce is in immediate danger of having their livelihoods destroyed by the pandemic, the risk fell on those worker in the informal and three-quarter of them, some 1.6 billion people were at risk in the second quarter of 2020. Developing countries like India, where 68.84% of total population lives in rural area. Agriculture is the primary source of livelihood for about 58% of total population. According to the World Bank 43.21% employment (of total employment) is agricultural based that contributes 15.4% of GDP. The Indian food and grocery market are the world's sixth largest, with retail contributing 70 % of the sales. 'As a result of COVID-19 pandemic, agriculture in terms of crop production, food and animal production sectors will be adversely affected. Consequently, food crises are expected. The impact of COVID-19 on food security depends on the availability of different food items. Additionally, it depends on the estimated time frame to contain the COVID-19 pandemic. 'Closures of restaurants and food services, logistic restriction on tourism, as well as shipping disruptions are likely to impact livestock and poultry sectors, in terms of supply and distribution chain', Seleiman, Selim & Alhammas:2020). The reduction in rural economy because of COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the agricultural production and market. There are worries regarding how cash crop and livestock production units will progress. Rural livelihood that is based on agriculture and livestock, at serious risk. However, the biggest effect of the lockdown in rural area creates so much uncertainty on floriculture production units. This impact creates much instability and panic around the world. Numerous experiences and studies from the field indicate that a significant proportion of rural household incomes from migration and daily-wage labourers from cities like Delhi, Bombay and industrial cities of Punjab and the informal industry in cities being badly affected and has resulted in loss of rural income.

'With the announcement of the final tranche of Atamnirbhar Bharat approach is visible. And that is to give a strong supply-side push by boosting availability of capital on easy terms, keep income and wage support schemes to the minimum, empower constituencies ranging from farmers and worker to business and finally the most important, keep the damage to the fiscal as low as possible. Government has done well in increasing the budget for MANREGA by two- third, adding another Rs.40, 000 crore.

With migrants now returning to their villages, MANREGA can be leveraged to keep them occupied with meaningful work. Demand of the State of higher borrowings limit has been granted but with clear reform milestones that they have to meet. It remains to be seen if States are enthused to fall in line. Government has also used the opportunity to unleash some much-needed reforms in agriculture marketing, open up more sectors for private participation, enhance foreign direct investment in defence, corporatize the monolith Ordnance Factory Board and so on, how much of these announcements of intent are followed through seriously will have to be watched. In sum, the package has several notable features all of them are not for COVID-19 relief. While it is impossible to pandemic situation, it is said that the government has taken a huge gambling by refusing to borrow and spend more on boosting demand. If the strategy of boosting supply works, it is fine. But if it does not, the government will be faced with a bigger problem down the line.'(The Hindu: May 19, 2020).

Ongoing developments in the country indicates rising unemployment which is highest in the last ten years, GDP has reached lowest in 2020. Gap between rich and poor has widened. All these developments need serious thinking to meet the needs of vulnerable sections of the society alongwith sustainable development.

Gandhi in the Contemporary World

Gandhi believed that the revival of the village is possible only when it is no more exploited. He was against the exploitation. According to him industrialization on a mass scale will necessarily lead to passive or active exploitation of the villagers as it involves competition and marking. Therefore, Gandhi says, "we have to concentrate on the village being self-contained, manufacturing for use." He had suggested a comprehensive economic programme to revitalise the exploited and suffering villages so that the people could be mobilised for a kind of movement that the nation desired. Once, Gandhi was asked, how to eradicate rural poverty? He replied, "By spreading the message of knowledge and cleanliness". 'Gandhi holds the view of the maximization of social welfare and for this he gives prime importance to the welfare of the individuals by reducing inequalities in income and wealth. According to Gandhi every person should be provided with bare minimum necessities i.e. food, shelter, and clothing.', Jani @www.mkgandhi.org). 2020 was the year when a section of the society was not able to meet their basic needs. Migrant labour. People who were working in the unorganized sector lost hope in the cities. They decided to come back to their villages where they would get at least two times meal. Gandhi in Hind Sawaraj time and again appealed to the west and east to decentralize the economy and discouraged the process of industrialisation which gives birth to the slum areas. Slums feed the industries and cater the needs of urban people at the cost of their dignified life. Covid-19 was the demonstration of the dysfunctional effects of the development of the present world. On contrary to the existing model Gandhi's empirical vision has answers to the queries of 2019. 'His approach is holistic and aims at the socio-economic reconstructions of society. Reconstruction of village economy based on "Gram Swaraj" is the pillar of economic development in his vision, each village is a totally autonomous and self-sufficient unit which will be totally self-reliant in fulfilling the basic needs. He was against

the greed and consumerism which is the basic principle of the economic culture of globalised world. A cluster of mutually dependent (in some matter) villages forms the basis of economic order. In Gandhi's vision of Gram Swaraj, human beings will be most important, labour will be given due importance, there will be decentralization of power and owner of property will consider themselves as trustees.(www.mkgandhi.org).Gandhi is in favor of the self-sufficient village economy. Village society will cater the needs of village community. There will be harmony in the village. People will treat each other as human beings. Gandhi holds the views of the maximization of social welfare and for this welfare of the individuals by reducing inequalities in income and wealth', (Thakur@ www.mkgandhi.org). Some of his critics consider his concept of trusteeship an ideal. During Covid crisis his thesis proved relevant. From lowest echelon to the richest person contributed for the needy and welfare of the humanity. It is observed in the villages that the masses took care for the jhungi jhopri people. Regularly they were given food, cloth and medicine for months together. In India people donated generously. Corporate houses made every effort to meet this critical situation.

Gandhian View & Self Sufficient India

'Gandhian view of self-sufficient village economy is also relevant in the context of reducing poverty and unemployment in rural India. It is true that national income will increase if each and every persons (whether skilled or unskilled) is employed fully. This cannot be possible only with the development of large-scale industries because of their labor-saving nature. Village and small-scale industries have been playing an important role in Indian economy in terms of employment generation and poverty alleviation. This is due to fact that these industries are labour-intensive and capital saving. Agricultural sector too cannot solve the problem of unemployment or underemployment due to its seasonal nature. Therefore mechanization and large scale production cannot provide the solution to the problem of poverty and unemployment. Self-sufficient village economy is an alternative solution and in this context the role of institutions in the rural sector like the village panchayat and rural multipurpose co-operative can play a vital role. In order to improve the conditions of the rural poor it is necessary to expand rural industries further at a rapid rate. At the same time it is essential to review seriously the rural anti-poverty programmes in the light of lapses noticed and in the context of formulating new economic plan. (Anil Bhumali@www.mkgandhi.org). Migration in the last one year took place from the city slum areas like Dharbi in Bombay and slum areas of Delhi to Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Migrated people were not able meet both ends meal in the cities. Gandhi was always against the 'mass production, he favored production by masses'. It is possible in his 'Self Sufficient village' based on the principles of labour intensive cottage industry. WHO time and again pointed out the cause of this kind pandemic is climate change and pollution. Gandhi was sensitive about these issues in 1909 when he wrote 'Hind Sawaraj'. He cautioned the coming generations and the western industrialized countries regarding the dy-functional aspects of the industrialisation. Covid spread in the city areas rapidly due to thick population cover as compare to the villages. Gandhi emphasized on the growth of agro based economy. He discouraged excessive investments in the infra-structure:

railways. In his perspective large migrations to the cities would lead to the slum problems, pollution and diseases. He favored modern village laced with rational institutions and limited machines which are useful for the human being but not substitute of human capital.

Role of Local Government and Mass participation to Meet the Challenge

During the long stay in village Basa of District Mandi and Jal Gran of District Una in Himachal Pradesh it is observed that the Panchayats, local administration, other govt. agencies, NGOs and different religious organisations are committed to deal with the epidemic and lockdown, on the other hand the common masses also fully supported the govt. policies and protocols. In each villages, a safety committee consisting of ASHA worker, Anaganwari workers, medical staff, panchayat head and members ect. They are very active in their areas after a year of Covid. Panchayat Pradhans and ward members have been working day and night to identify the cases. They provided regular food supplies to the needy families and those who were in the isolation. Schools, colleges and public buildings have been quarantine centres and large numbers of people have been kept there who were out of their homes for some reason or the other. Administration has been helping people in every possible way. This includes providing primary services to people, collecting the details of suspects, sanitization of villages and informed people about the precautions to be taken to deal with the virus. Every section of society has been influenced by the lockdown. A survey was conducted to find out its impact on rural area. Gandhi's idea of village as unit has been empirically tested. On the micro level village as a unit for the last one year successfully checked the pandemic. Mass participation and the panchayats became primary agencies to facilitate the efforts of the higher bodies in the period of crisis. Gandhi's idea of Gram Panchayat as an institution to manage the village life is relevant today.

Covid-19 shooked the world society. In India most pathetic condition was of the migrated labour. Society at large played important role to meet the challenge. Gandhi's notion of 'trusteeship' became the reality where each one in the society contributed according to one's capacity. Panchayats in all parts of the country proved their birth as primary units of governance. Their role cannot be ignored in checking the pandemic. Gandhi's perspective of clean society based on the concept of sustainable development is answer to the contemporary situation.

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