



The Pandemic: Challenges and an Opportunity to Revisit the Gandhian Perspective

Suchita Krishnaprasad

Department of Economics
Elphinstone College, Mumbai
drsuck@gmail.com

Abstract:

Humanity across the world today faces unprecedented uncertain times due to spread of Covid-19, which has disrupted every possible human activity. What began as a health crisis has soon turned into a devastating disrupter for trade and commerce wiping away millions of jobs due to varying degrees of lockdowns, which were announced in an attempt to control the spread of the virus. With the passage of time the trade-off between saving lives and saving livelihoods has grown starker. As governments struggle to balance between lockdowns and unlocking in their various versions, desperately waiting for an effective vaccine on one hand, and working out various combinations of fiscal and monetary packages for revival and recovery of the economy on the other, there can be no doubt that Covid-19 could be a milestone in at least the recent history of human civilisation. It has significantly transformed our consumption patterns, the pace of production, the channels of merchandise and the ways of living in general. Isolation of China, which had emerged as a central link to the global supply chain and leap into Industry 4.0, has pushed back the momentum of globalisation if not stalled it, and nationalism has grown as a popular sentiment. This onslaught of circumstances calls for an alternative way of managing human affairs and revisiting Gandhi and his thoughts might provide some valuable insights into how we might want to turn the page.

This paper attempts to relate the present crisis to the Gandhian way of thinking to arrive at some concrete take-homes. As a man of the masses, Gandhi worked out solutions by first letting them germinate in the ground. And this would be usually preceded by deep introspection and meditative ruminations by Gandhi himself. All his calls for the peoples' movements towards nation building and seeking political independence were first tested by him on the core values of truth, non-violence and non-covetousness, which he held very dearly. An attempt is being made here to retain that spirit of holding people at large as change-makers, of course without losing sight of the role of the government as a policy maker and provider of relief during the stressful times.

Section I provides a brief overview of the extent of crisis caused by the pandemic, globally and in India. The exodus of migrants followed by the stringent lockdowns and the untold hardships faced by them in the process bring out the neglected maladies of the India's growth story, which is covered in section II. This includes the lop-sided regional development, failure to ensure decent living and working environment to millions of workers, which speaks of reeking inequality, all of which are antithetical to the basic tenets of Gandhian economics. Section III explores into why this may be the right time to tweak the way we perceive economics giving it a Gandhian bend along with an enunciation of foundations of Gandhian economics. The paper concludes by pointing out how the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in fact speak the Gandhian message in a new style. In other words, if the SDGs represent the collective dream of the humanity, a sincere relook towards Gandhian thought becomes an imperative.

Key Words: Discretionary consumption, slow-down, unemployment, MNRGS, Cooperatives, Decent work, Austerity, SDGs, Covid Allowance

Introduction:

Covid19 has pushed the world into a pervasive crisis encompassing every aspect of human life. It has altered our consumption pattern, shocked our smart production systems, changed the modes of education and entertainment and has made

us take a serious relook at the 'social animal' definition of ourselves as a race that has increasingly learnt to dominate this planet. Arguably, the most fearsome feature of this pandemic is its uncertainty: from the symptoms and their absence, to the possibility of its return with a vengeance, and the serious after-effects on the 'recovered' cases in terms of possible long term damages it can cause to the vital organs of the patients, requiring persistent medical testing and appropriate interventions long after the infection has subsided. As every prediction about the 'flattening' of the curve and an end to the desperate search for a reliable and an affordable vaccine seems eluding us, it is time to introspect about the wrongs we have committed as 'civilised' inhabitants of earth which makes our ways of living so precarious, inequitable and unsustainable today. Beginning with containment of wants, Gandhian economics, grounded on the premises of non-violence, truth, and non-covetousness, is instantly antithetical to the mainstream economics. Dignity of labour, self-sufficient and strong village economy and the principle of trusteeship emerge as logical corollaries of this system of thought with an inbuilt thread of morality running through it to offer an integrated view of managing economy polity and society harmoniously. Gandhian thought can provide some critical insights during this exercise in introspection. This paper is an attempt in this direction.

Section I: An Overview of the Covid Crisis

The year 2019 ended with a few cases of infection of Covid-19, first in China, which soon gripped all the nations across the world in an unprecedented manner disrupting every possible human activity. Within months it took the form of the worst feared pandemic in the recent human history with the only known way to restrict its spread being lockdown social distancing along with scrupulous standards of cleanliness and hygiene. This in turn wiped away millions of jobs across the world, severely affecting global supply chains, and totally freezing certain sectors such as aviation and hospitality. Forced unemployment meant loss of income for many, and hence a severely constrained demand. With the two market forces losing their steam, there were predictions of a dip in global production, which have been revised downwards within a few months. Globally, a loss of nearly 400 million full-time jobs has been estimated in the year's second

quarter (April-June 2020) according ILO. An IMF estimate projected loss of 9 trillion dollars to the global economy and a dip of 3% in the global economic growth rate in the year 2020.

In India unemployment reached a record level of 27.1% by the end of April 2020. According to a CMIE report about 122 million workers lost their jobs by April end, of which nearly 70% were small traders and wage labourers. And though resumption of agricultural operations with the onset of monsoon helped in reducing unemployment in the following months, reports suggest a likely resurgence in unemployment once this peak activity in agriculture is over. This is borne out by the fact that just in the month of June, 62 million people demanded work under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) programme at minimum wages. Macro-economic Indicators reveal the bruises suffered by the economy. To take a snap shot, during the April-June quarter, India's GDP contracted by 23.9%. It is estimated that there could be a permanent loss of 13% of real GDP over the medium term and to catch-up with the pre-pandemic trend value of real GDP would require average real GDP growth to surge to 13% annually for the next three fiscals.

A sector-wise growth in GVA (Gross Value Added) presented in the monetary policy report of RBI (October 2020) provides a brief view of the economy.

TableI: Sector-wise Growth in GVA

Sector	2018-19 (FRE)	2019-20 (PE)	2020-21
			Q1
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	2.4	4.0	3.4
Industry	4.5	0.8	-33.8
Mining and quarrying	-5.8	3.1	-23.3
Manufacturing	5.7	0.0	-39.3
Electricity, gas, water supply and other utilities	8.2	4.1	-7.0
Services	7.5	5.0	-24.3
Construction	6.1	1.3	-50.3
Trade, hotels, transport, communication	7.7	3.6	-47.0
Financial, real estate and professional services	6.8	4.6	-5.3
Public administration, defence and other services	9.4	10.0	-10.3
GVA at Basic Prices	6.0	3.9	-22.8
FRE: First Revised Estimates; PE: Provisional Estimates. Source: NSO.			

Barring agriculture, forestry and fishing, every other sector has had a negative growth in GVA. Unsurprisingly, as noted in RBI report, both the customer confidence and the business sentiments have also been on the decline¹. When the two components of private expenditure slide down the gloom spreads from the real sector to the monetary sector and banks have to struggle with NPAs (Non-Performing Assets) on the one hand and poor demand for borrowings on the other, thus arresting the future economic growth.

What is further worrisome is the fact that the states which have a major share in India's GDP (~36%), Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, together accounted for ~54% of India's total confirmed cases as on September 7.

While all these numbers are enough to indicate the overall gloom that looms over the economy, one of the worst fallout of the pandemic was the flood of 'reverse migration' of workers back to their home states, by every possible mode of transportation including walking painfully for long distances across the subcontinent. Some have even compared it to the turmoil around partition time. Even if this is seen as an exaggeration, it cannot be denied that it has been a human tragedy of a colossal proportion, and that it does represent an indecent side of the India's growth story.

Section II: India's Growth Story:

It is well-known that the growth rate of the Indian economy crawled up to 3.5% in the first three decades of planning which have been boldly described as the decades of State control. A few notable achievements during this period were: a. setting up of major irrigation projects, b. setting up of IITs, c. the Green Revolution and near self-sufficiency in food production, d. the white revolution (Production of milk) and e. bank nationalisation, expansion of banks and rise in the saving rate. The eighties began with some window of opening up and India went in for the liberalisation privatisation and globalisation (LPG) through her New Economic

1 <https://www.rbi.org.in/Scripts/PublicationsView.aspx?id=19439> Accessed on 25/11/2019

Policy which ushered in a new era of a phenomenal expansion of opportunities along with of rising aspirations of her people.

Table 2: India's decadal GDP growth and investment rates Year

Source: Basu, Kaushik 2018

	Annual GDP growth rate	Investment rate	Savings rate
1951-61	3.91	11.82	-
1961-71	3.68	14.71	9.03
1971-81	3.09	17.86	12.96
1981-91	5.38	21.04	17.32
1991-2001	5.71	24.14	24.27
2001-11	7.68	32.44	31.42
2011-18	6.61	35.78	31.17

The table speaks well of the impressive economic growth achieved by India with both savings and investment rising hand in hand especially after opening up of the economy, which also did well to attract foreign direct investment (FDI) and to accumulate the foreign exchange reserves, as is visible in the following table.

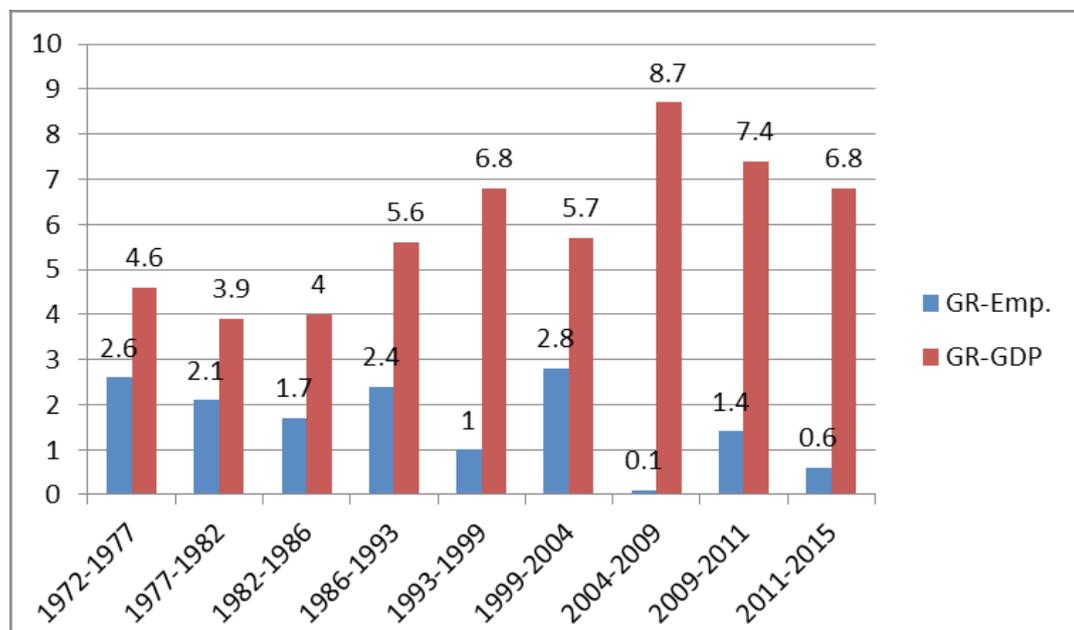
Table 3: Growth in FDI & foreign exchange reserves

Source: Basu, Kaushik 2018

India's foreign exchange reserves		Total reserves
Year	₹ billion	US\$ million
1954-55	9	1,873
1959-60	4	762
1964-65	3	524
1969-70	8	1,094
1974-75	10	1,379
1979-80	59	7,361
1984-85	72	5,952
1989-90	63	3,962
1994-95	798	25,186
1999-00	1,659	38,036
2004-05	6,191	141,514
2009-10	12,597	279,057
2014-15	21,376	341,638
2017-18	27,930	405,810

There was also a significant reduction in extreme poverty, and the fact that India could maintain her annual growth rate between 8 to 9% even during the years of global financial crisis, gave rise to the hope that India was about to emerge as an economic power in the world, especially with the so called demographic dividend in her favour.

However, this glorious growth story is not without its shadow. And there are several indicators of this. Malnutrition and high mortality among children², high rates of dropouts from school³ despite high enrolment⁴, growing gap in the rate of growth of profit vis a vis wages over the years, are only some of them. The graph below shows how India's growth has increasingly failed to create jobs



Graph: India's Jobless Growth

Source: Reports from Ministry of Labour and Employment, and Economic Surveys

Sluggish job creation means greater dependence on agriculture. More than 50% of India's population is dependent on agriculture, but the share of agriculture in

2 <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/68-of-under-5-deaths-in-india-due-to-child-maternal-malnutrition/article31570050.ece> Accessed on 25/11/2019

3 <https://news.careers360.com/dropout-rates-increasing-in-classes-9-and-10-in-some-states-mhrd> Accessed on 25/11/2019

4 https://www.mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/statistics-new/ESAG-2018.pdf Accessed on 25/11/2019

the GDP has been falling consistently. This means that nearly half of the people are trapped in low productivity and poor growth while the other half lives the story of prosperity and growth. This may be a broad representative of the urban-rural divide, but the divide within the rural sector itself becomes clear when we account for the iniquitous ownership of agricultural land. In that less than 5% of farmers control 32% of India's farmland and a "large" farmer has 45 times more land than the "marginal" farmer. Finally, 101.4 million people, or 56.4% of rural households own no agricultural land. This poverty and poor productivity in agriculture and the seasonality of employment explains migration, which is roughly estimated to be 10% of the population. According to the report of the Working Group on Migration (2017) only 17 districts from UP and Bihar together account for 25% of the total male out migrants in the country. Whether one understands it as a push or a pull factor, migration of this scale most certainly underlines the regional disparities and hence the pockets of abject poverty. Further, the growth that has increasingly added fewer and fewer jobs hints at the urban poverty and the fate of the migrants, who might still choose urban poverty in hope of more opportunities of earning a livelihood than the rural counterpart. Living in highly congested slums and surviving on poor wages with little safety at workplace largely under informally agreed terms of employment, or running a small commercial unit employing family labour, the migrant workers have been the hidden army providing support services to every sector and across the classes.

And when the lockdown was extended to ensure that people Stay Home and Stay Safe, people living in these Dickensian condition decided to flee because firstly their savings had dried up, and their congested dwellings with common toilets were hardly 'Safe Homes'! And this was a saga of massive hardships for millions who only knew they had to leave where they had survived so far but did not know how to reach where they wanted to, and whether they would live to see that destination.

Section III: Why Gandhian Thought? And Why Now

The market economy needs the fuel of bullish expectations. But profits rise when the market size expands and the market size depends on income distribution and

employment generation. Economists across ideologies have pointed out time and again that rise in unemployment would stunt the market size and hence the profit. Labour may be a factor of production, but as a consumer, the labourer should also be the 'King' of the market system; and here lies the crux of the dialectics of the growth process in a market economy. In other words, it may be possible to gather more profit by squeezing wages, but only in the short run. In the long run the same strategy will in fact usher in stagnation. Similarly regional disparities, iniquitous distribution of income and assets are equally loud announcers of unsustainability. Again, when only 7% of the workforce is engaged in organised sector with decent working conditions including right to organise unions, and 93% workers largely remain outside the ambit of security, growth would remain unaccompanied by development, and hence may prove unsustainable. To sustain the fruits of high growth achieved through market friendly economic policies we may need to ensure that more hands earn income, and decent income at that, to keep the demand burning.

This brings us to the Gandhian system of thought, which begins at a position that is totally antithetical to the mainstream economics. The textbook economics, aka positive economics, starts with the premise that wants in general are insatiable, and that the resources are limited. Gandhian system, steeped in normative thinking⁵, starts with the idea of containment of wants, because after all there is enough on this earth for everybody's needs but not enough for one man's greed. Greed breeds violence and gives rise to the need to exploit others, which is against the first primal principle of Gandhian system: non-violence. Squeezing wages and exploiting workers is also equivalent to violence. Unequal land holding is manifestation of greed, which was sought to be corrected through Bhoodaan movement by Gandhiji's illustrious disciple, Vinoba Bhave. Creating circumstances that force people to migrate because of poverty might amount to violence at a societal level. Gandhiji wanted to reverse this by making village communities stronger and self-sufficient. Empowering villages through a benevolent Jajmani system was his idea of nurturing the roots of India that lived mostly in villages. Well-being of rural India was of utmost importance to him and people who migrated after that had been achieved, would be exercising their choice.

5 <https://www.mkgandhi.org/momgandhi/chap41.htm> Accessed on 25/11/2019

Gandhiji's ideas about choice of technology have been much debated, but the key idea of optimally using the local resources and skill are the basic tenets of any text book trade theory. Machines are useful. But they should not impact the dignity of labour. Gandhiji's concept of dignity of labour has several dimensions⁶: Firstly, it means that no labour is menial. In fact he strongly recommended a few hours of manual labour every day. That would ensure physical and mental fitness besides sensitising the employers of manual workers appropriately. Dignity of labour also means more importance to the man behind the machine. It means the need to treat that man with decency. Decency would include healthy and clean working conditions and reasonable wages. His intervention in the Ahmedabad textile workers' strike can be seen as an attempt to ensure decent work. He was not against industries. Industries would be necessary for progress, and they would have to make profit in order to survive, but again the profits belong to the society, that provided every possible resource to an industrialist, who is therefore a mere trustee of this wealth. It becomes his obligation to look after the needs of the society. Using profit towards larger social good, which is the crux of Corporate Social Responsibility, can thus be traced back to Gandhiji's idea of Trusteeship.

Although his ideas never fail to appeal to higher consciousness, it is customary to applaud them as legends that can only be admired from a distance⁷. It is also an easier way to escape the responsibility of implementing them or even experimenting with them.

However, the current pandemic has paved way to possibility of such experimentation, and there are several grounds to justify this position.

Changing Consumption pattern: The pattern of consumption has changed significantly especially during the lockdown periods. Studies have noted a substantial reduction in 'discretionary' (read as conspicuous) consumption. Consumers are less blinded by the 'brand-value' and are increasingly alert

6 <http://gandhiashramsevagram.org/voice-of-truth/gandhiji-on-dignity-of-labour-bread-labour.php> Accessed on 25/11/2019

7 <https://indianexpress.com/article/world/uks-labour-party-group-mahatma-gandhi-future-leaders-plan-6556198/> Accessed on 25/11/2019

about distinguishing between essential and non-essential consumption, even while choosing a brand⁸. This is a form of ‘containment of wants’, though forced by circumstances. Nudging households to choose healthy lifestyle to bolster immunity in the face of Covid is another blessing in disguise. Preferences are shifting to natural and herbal remedies and learning about their goodness and lasting effects. Ceremonies have become Spartan since huge gatherings are dangerous. More time at home is a ‘Razor’s Edge kind of a situation. On the one hand there are studies of higher incidence of substance abuse, alcoholism anxiety and depression⁹ and on the other innovative and creative ways are being devised to make home-stay more bearable. These include online learning programs from those aiming at honing untapped skills to the ones on self-healing, and discovering inner peace. It is true that the deaths and morbidity associated with the pandemic along with the financial stress and being largely home bound has led to more cases suffering from depression and anxiety, but it is also true that more and more people in our society are willing to acknowledge these cases as ‘normal’, and are willing to reach out to provide assistance at least through social media.

Indeed the Subjective Well Being (SWB) can swing in either direction, as brought out by an exhaustive study based on a cross sectional survey of over 1000 participants in China¹⁰, and how we tweak the support systems towards choosing a healthier life style now can have a critical impact for the times to come.

Changing Patterns of Production: As the world grapples with the problem of fragmentation of the supply chain, the necessity to restart in whatever manner

8 For a detailed survey of changing consumption pattern, see: How the coronavirus is changing consumption patterns (livemint.com) Accessed on 25/11/2019

9 The next pandemic: COVID-19 mental health pandemic Evelyn Parrish: The next pandemic: COVID-19 mental health pandemic - PubMed (nih.gov), The assessment of lifestyle changes during the COVID-19 pandemic using a multidimensional scale (nih.gov), Effects of COVID-19 Home Confinement on Eating Behaviour and Physical Activity: Results of the ECLB-COVID19 International Online Survey - PubMed (nih.gov) Accessed on 25/11/2019

10 Impact of the COVID-19 Epidemic on Lifestyle Behaviors and Their Association With Subjective Well-Being Among the General Population in Mainland China: Cross-Sectional Study Zhao Hu1, MD ; Xuhui Lin1, MD ; Atipatsa Chiwanda Kaminga2,3, MD ; Huilan Xu1, PhD See: JMIR - Impact of the COVID-19 Epidemic on Lifestyle Behaviors and Their Association With Subjective Well-Being Among the General Population in Mainland China: Cross-Sectional Study | Hu | Journal of Medical Internet Research Accessed on 25/11/2019

possible, producers may be forced to relocate their sources of supply. An UNCTAD economist, P. Fortunato, in his study on How COVID-19 is Changing Global Value Chains (September 2, 2020), observes a trend towards relocation of the GVC (Global Value Chain) in favour of a greater use of local skills and materials. Compelled by the pressures of circumstance we might redevelop production systems of the kind that Gandhiji advocated strongly to promote self-sufficiency.

Further, experts highlight compulsions to turn to green technology¹¹. The Confederation of British Industry, for instance, has urged the government to invest in green technology and jobs¹². In a significant move to ensure sustainability in post-Covid scenario, the UK government has even announced Green Recovery Challenge Fund¹³. Interestingly, investment in green technology can unleash a significant multiplier effect with a high employment potential as noted by ILO¹⁴.

Empathy towards the deprived: The migrants reaching their home states on foot, by legitimate or illegal means¹⁵ has been a heart-wrenching story¹⁶. But it has also led to individuals and NGOs rising to the occasion to support of these unfortunate fellow beings through supply of food packets and other materials to ease their agony. The State Union governments did arrange Shramik trains to

11 Clean, green and better: Policy priorities in a post-COVID-19 world | Climate Investment Funds Accessed on 25/11/2019

12 'Create green post-Covid recovery' urges UK industry body - Positive News - Positive News Accessed on 25/11/2019

13 Building back a green and resilient recovery - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk) Accessed on 25/11/2019

14 Microsoft Word - Methodologies for assessing green jobs March 2013 (ilo.org). Also see: Looking-for-green-jobs_the-impact-of-green-growth-on-employment.pdf (lse.ac.uk) Accessed on 24/11/2019

15 <https://www.thestatesman.com/coronavirus/18-migrant-workers-trying-to-reach-home-hiding-in-cement-mixer-held-in-madhya-pradesh-1502883244.html> Accessed on 20/09/2019

16 <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-india-migrants-spe/special-report-indias-migrant-workers-fall-through-cracks-in-coronavirus-lockdown-idUSKBN2230M3> Accessed on 20/09/2019

ensure safe return, but the role of individuals¹⁷, NGOs¹⁸ and religious institutions¹⁹ that extended a helping hand so spontaneously cannot be overemphasised. If the reverse migrant movement is akin to partition, so is the extent of support and help from various quarters of the society. Gandhiji would have not only appreciated this spirit of empathy but would have perhaps succeeded in processing into institution building to sustain it longer.

When the existing patterns of socio-economic systems are shaken, they create a space for a paradigm shift. It is also an opportune time to correct the previous malfunctions of the system. For example:

Reducing Rural-Urban imbalance: Greater dependence of our population on agriculture indicates non availability of non-agricultural jobs. Providing more jobs in the non-agricultural sector, and more so in manufacturing is a need of the hour²⁰. Promoting agro-based and related commercial activities such as fisheries and food processing can go a long way in providing more opportunities of gainful employment in the rural sector, which would be a step in Gandhian direction: reducing circumstances that force people to choose migration as a last option to survive.

Domestic violence and the gender issue: It is a well recorded fact that there is an increase in violent, abusive, impulsive, compulsive, and controlling behavior and aggression directed towards women during the periods of economic hardships. Studies suggest an astonishing rise in the harassment of women behind closed doors. While everyone in the household may be living under a potential threat to life, financial stress, lack of opportunities to socialise, frequent violent outbursts among men desperate for alcohol or tobacco seem to be considered socially

17 <https://www.hindustantimes.com/sex-and-relationships/this-is-how-good-samaritans-are-helping-delhi-survive-in-lockdown/story-MPp9nxZ34zCCBg1ELZACL.html> Accessed on 25/11/2019

18 <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/dehradun/good-samaritans-social-organisations-come-forward-to-help-those-hit-by-lockdown/articleshow/74901311.cms> Accessed on 25/11/2019

19 <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/agra/gurdwara-along-nh2-has-fed-over-a-million-people-during-lockdown/articleshow/76163085.cms>, and <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/punjab/dsgmc-launches-langar-on-wheels-for-migrants-86473> Accessed on 25/11/2019

20 See Reviving Jobs: An Agenda for Growth (ed) by Santosh Mehrotra (2020)

acceptable. Being trapped in a space with violent or manipulative individuals could lead to increased rates and intensity of threats, physical, sexual and psychological abuse, humiliation, intimidation, and controlling behavior, which is heightened by the lockdown. And this is true of developed countries as well²¹. In the first five weeks of lockdown, Pune police reported an increase in the cases of domestic violence by 12 times²². These numbers have justified the term 'parallel pandemic' to domestic violence, underlining the dark gender impact of the pandemic, but they have also brought out the issue of gender disparity and the disenfranchisement of women in a manner that can no longer be overlooked. That family, which ideally the basic nurturing cell in the society should exhibit its stark opposite during such hard times especially to the very agents that provide the nourishment, is a strong and shrill alarm the pandemic has played, which needs to be heard.

Treatment to the Reverse Migrants: States which have had a pressure for accommodating reverse migrants now have an opportunity to deploy their expertise at home. Many such States have reportedly undertaken skill-mapping, which had never been thought of before. These States can use this experienced labour force to work on improving infrastructure, building industrial estates, for setting up new MSMEs, etc. to attract more business. In fact the initial employment generation can take place through such investment, which can push up the economic growth through multiplier.

As for migrants with experience of running tiny or home-based businesses, it is possible to bring them together into clusters to form co-operatives. This is simply because migrants who have returned back are more likely to tune and team up with each other, and such trust would prove a strong foundation for

21 The number of reported cases of domestic violence has risen in the first quarter of 2020 by 30% in France, by 100% in Singapore, 25% in Argentina and 33% in Cyprus. In China, one police station in Hubei province saw a tripling of domestic violence reports during the quarantine in February 2020.

22 According to the Crime in India Report 2018, published by the National Crime Research Bureau (NCRB), a crime is recorded against women in India every 1.7 minutes and a woman is subjected to domestic violence every 4.4 minutes. This might have only worsened during the pandemic.

a new enterprise especially in the form of co-operatives.²³ There are successful examples of migrant workers' co-operatives that emerged as a response to crisis in many countries. States can benefit by collaborating with ILO which has a rich experience of hand-holding many such projects across the globe²⁴. Finally, co-operatives are important because they facilitate decentralisation of the process of growth, which is Gandhian in spirit.

Urban Development: Covid has emphasised the need for cleanliness and hygiene like never before. It has compelled the urban local bodies to improve and expand their health services. It is also a wake-up call to transform slums and the living conditions therein. Ignoring hygiene or treating it as welfare or a charitable act is not going to help because these are necessary for everyone's survival now. In a way ensuring decent living conditions, which is implicit in dignity of labour is thrust upon us as a need for survival. One thing the pandemic has taught us is that an infection anywhere is a threat to health everywhere.

Decent Wages and The Covid Allowance: States from where the migrant workers have moved out have had to raise wages due to severe shortage of labour. There are instances where workers have been given air tickets to return to work²⁵! These may be anecdotal instances, but they do echo the need to treat workers with dignity though under duress. One only hopes that at least some such benefits last long enough to emerge as new practices. This should take us to Gandhiji's intervention in Ahmedabad textile strike to negotiate in the issue of plague allowance²⁶. In my opinion there are several reasons that necessitate thinking of a Covid allowance and determining some standards to calculate it, and these are:

23 See: <https://mfasia.org/migrant-workers-cooperatives-as-a-crisis-response/> for Indonesian experience of migrant workers co-opertives. Accessed on 14/05/2019

24 https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---emp_ent/---coop/documents/publication/wcms_221743.pdf Accessed on 14/05/2019

25 <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/3-times-more-pay-air-travel-how-migrants-are-being-woed-back/articleshow/76210270.cms>. And <https://www.indiatvnews.com/news/india/construction-firms-migrant-workers-air-tickets-sops-623400> Accessed on 25/11/2019

26 <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/ahmedabad-textile-laborers-win-strike-economic-justice-1918>, <https://dialogueden.com/2020/blog/from-the-1918-influenza-pandemic-time-and-gandhis-role-as-an-arbitrator/> Accessed on 25/11/2019

1. The virus is very likely to stay longer than was initially feared. That makes it systemic and not temporary, and hence the need to institutionalise the support through designing a Covid allowance.

2. The lockdown inspired by the pandemic has led to what is being called as the New Normal of working from home. This mode saves the variable costs of his establishment such as power charges, use of computers, maintaining canteen facility, and overall housekeeping etc. for the employer, while the employees bear a higher cost in real and money terms. This is because: i. Employees might now work for longer hours, being available 24x7, ii. They have to face the stress of managing the work-space and home-space together, and iii. They might have to make an additional investment to upgrade infrastructure. It is important to compensate the employees for this.

3. Employees who travel to their workplaces during these times run a high risk of contracting the infection themselves if they resort to public transport. Opting for 'safer and more personalised travel to workplace, on the other hand is sure to hike their travel expenses.

4. It is now becoming clear, that those 'recovered' from Covid are indeed far from danger, as there are cases showing serious damages affecting vital organs of the patients even after recovery. The expenditure on testing and medicines is likely to rise unpredictably for those who contacted the infection even once.

5. Lastly of course the ability to pay of the employer would have to be taken into account, because harmony in employer employee relationship is crucial to Gandhian view of industrial relations.

Environmental Concerns: Lockdown reportedly reduced the air and water pollution substantially²⁷. It would be up to us to maintain it with as much caution as

27 <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2020/07/200716101621.htm>, Accessed on 25/11/2019

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0048969720323378>, <https://www.timesnownews.com/mirror-now/in-focus/article/covid-19-lockdown-leading-to-significant-drop-in-ganga-river-water-pollution/574016> Accessed on 25/11/2019

possible. For instance there might be greater possibilities of shifting to more eco-friendly urban transport system and manufacturing systems to enable reduction in the carbon emissions along with creation of more employment opportunities.

Conclusion:

Any attempt to engage in greater sustainability is Gandhian in spirit, because it can be achieved only by rising above the baser instincts of greed, violence and petty self-importance. In a truly Gandhian perspective the 17 Sustainable Development Goals can be seen as an integrated vision stemming from for a peaceful and harmonious coexistence of human beings with each other, with nature, and other beings supported by nature, which Gandhiji might have longed for. The crisis of the pandemic has opened up opportunities to tweak our ways of living on this planet in a wiser and more compassionate way. The choices we make now can have long term effects on our well-being.

Bibliography:

Basu, Kaushik 2018: A short history of India's economy A chapter in the Asian drama

United Nations University UNU WIDER Working Paper /124 October

Bondurant, Joan V. Conquest of Violence 1958: The Gandhian Philosophy of Conflict. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Chakrabarty, Bidyut. 2006: Social and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi. London ; New York: Routledge,

Chandra, Sudhir 2020: Thinking of Gandhi Today Vol. 55, Issue No. 38.

Chatterji Rakhahari 1976: The Indian Journal of Political Science Vol. 37, No. 4 pp. 42-57

Dasgupta, A.K. 1975: The Economics of Austerity Oxford University Press.

Desai, Mahadev. A Righteous Struggle: A Chronicle of the Ahmedabad Textile Labourer's Fight for Justice. Ahmedabad, India: Jivanji Dahyabhai Desai, 1918.

Erikson, Erik H. 1969: Gandhi's Truth: On the Origins of Militant Nonviolence. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc,

Patel, Sujata. 1984: *Class Conflict and Workers' Movement in Ahmedabad Textile Industry, 1918-23*. *Economic and Political Weekly* .Vol.19, No. 20/21 (May 19-26), pp. 853-855; 857-864. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4373280>

Mehrotra, Santosh Ed.2020 *Reviving Jobs: An Agenda for Growth*, Penguin

Nayak Pulin B 2017: *A K Dasgupta on Gandhi and the Economics of Austerity* Vol. 52, Issue No. 50, 16 Dec, 2017

Spodek Howard 1965: *The "Manchesterisation" of Ahmedabad March 13*, *The Economic Weekly* 483-490

Spodek, Howard. 2011: *Ahmedabad: Shock City of Twentieth-Century India*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press

Vyas, M. (2020): *The jobs bloodbath of April 2020*, CMIE, Mumbai

Weber Thomas 2020: *Gandhi and the Pandemic* EPW Vol. 55, Issue No. 25, 20 Jun

