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GANDHI AND THE DISCOURSE ON SUSTAINABILITY

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By any standard, Jayaprakash Narayan (JP) was an outstanding personality and thinker of our times. A Marxist to begin with, JP turned to Socialism which he thought had a more human face, and finally settled for the Gandhian doctrine of Sarvodaya, which he deemed even superior to socialism, since, unlike socialism, it stood for political and economic decentralization which alone assured man of genuine freedom. Underlying all JP's ideological switches was his burning passion to reconstruct society in order to ensure present and future human wellbeing.

JP was a man of wide ranging concerns. Freedom for man was one of them; but there were others too. He wanted to regenerate man and make of him a new moral being. But, argued JP, this regeneration is impossible under the present, vitiated atmosphere of materialism. To quote him, "materialism robs man of the means to be truly human". JP equated materialism with sustaining a political economy which would satisfy the ever-growing and never-ending demand for more and more material wants, and firmly believed that materialism, so understood and measured in terms of annually rising Gross National Product (GNP), would not only destroy man morally, but also make for unsustainable futures. When therefore, Prof. Ali Ashraf the Director of the Gandhian Institute of Studies wrote to me, requesting me to deliver the JP memorial lecture on any theme or topic relevant to the Institute and its founder, who is none other than JP himself, I reflected and finally concluded that it would be most appropriate to deliver an address on the theme of "Gandhi and the Contemporary Discourse on Sustainability."

The nineties have indeed been a momentous decade. It has seen the collapse of Communism, a global ideology that inspired third world intellectuals for nearly a century; and the triumph of the ideology of Liberal Democracy premised on free markets. This, in turn, has given rise to the debate on "Endism", whether it be the end of ideology (Bell), or the end of history (Fukuyama). The time has come for us to examine more closely, the implications of the triumph of the Liberal Democracy ideology.

Liberal Democracy precisely because it is premised on the doctrine of free enterprise and free markets is not an unmixed blessing. It is not an unmixed blessing for two reasons. Firstly, it has bred a class of economists (many of whom have served on the World Bank) who have come to equate efficiency and productivity blindly with an ever rising Gross National Product (GNP). Secondly, in the name of rising GNP, it has permitted over-exploitation of finite resources to such an extent that today we are faced with the grim prospect of an unsustainable future.

Therefore, I would first like to examine the contemporary debate or discourse on sustainability and then proceed to indicate how the Gandhian economy and polity are in fact premised on the philosophy of sustainable future development or growth. Finally, I conclude with trying to draw lessons for ourselves, relevant to our times, from the two discourses — the Gandhian Discourse and the Discourse on Sustainability.

The Contemporary Discourse on Sustainability

Expressed in the simplest possible terms, sustainability refers to the carrying capacity, a concept normally used to describe the maximum population size that the given environment can support. Since people can only live in a region which has to sustain them in terms of food and other resources, it stands to reason that no people can so afford to spoil the region as to render it incapable of sustaining them any further. The goal of sustainable development must necessarily be the management of resources for maximum continuing production. Kindly note that we have used two terms—maximum and continuing. In other words, production based on resources must not only be maximum but also continuing. But, if production has to be both maximum and continuing we cannot afford to define efficiency in terms of maximum production only, because maximum production today, which exhausts a non-renewable resource, leaving nothing for future generations, cannot be continuing in the sense of sustaining future growth. We are now beginning to realize that something was very wrong with the classical economic definition of efficiency which made productivity the sole criteria for measuring

efficiency. Contemporary neoclassical normative economists admit that the criteria for measuring efficiency has to be modified to accommodate not only social and income distribution effects but also environmental concerns.¹

It has been a long standing practice with the World Bank Publications to rank the countries of the world according to their per capita GNP. The implicit message is that rapid growth in per capita GNP is an important goal of economic development. Now, this in many respects is a seriously flawed argument.

In the first place, while the Gross National Product may give us an idea of the region's total produce, it tells us nothing about how the produce or the income accruing therefrom, is actually distributed. In other words, GNP fails to measure the material well-being of the bulk of the population of the region or country.

Take the case of China on the one hand and Brazil or Algeria on the other. China for instance has met the basic needs of the great majority of its population at very low levels of per capita GNP. In contrast, Brazil and Algeria attempted or targeted for much higher levels of GNP and rapid growth rates, but have comparatively failed to meet the basic needs of many of their citizens. And, this is not surprising, for, what GNP does, is that it measures only market transactions and not self-sufficient production. When households grow their own foods without using seeds or chemical fertilizers or pesticides and biocides, purchased from the market, the value of their production is not reflected in GNP accounts. In many developing countries such self-sufficient production still prevails and is, in fact, to be preferred to market oriented production for a variety of environmental and social reasons.

Secondly, the GNP may measure aggregate level of economic activity but often such activity does not reflect actual well-being. For example, the more rapid obsolescence of consumer products can increase the GNP without necessarily increasing well-being. To illustrate, take the case of Mr. X who buys five stoves in ten years, discarding one every two years, and of Mr. Y who buys one stove which lasts him for ten years. Both the consumers X and Y have got the same level of utility, that is, ten years worth of cooking service. However, thanks to the more rapid rate of obsolescence and replacement in case of Mr. X, than in case of Mr. Y, X will have contributed more to the GNP account than Y. In fact, since in ten years, Mr. X would have purchased five stoves as against one by Y, in terms of GNP. X would have contributed five times more than Y.

I give another example (a trifle more absurd) to indicate how divorced GNP calculations can be from considerations of well-being. Imagine a society in which everyone owned a car and everyone had an accident with it involving extensive replacement of parts, if not the car itself. In such a society, GNP would certainly go up; but by no stretch of the imagination, could we say the same of well-being, namely, that well-being has also gone up. On the contrary, well-being would be higher in a society with fewer cars and fewer accidents. Such examples can be multiplied.

Thirdly, our modern capitalist round-about mode of production is so crazy or skewed that we first go about freely destroying or contaminating our environment and then indulge in further economic activity (which also adds to GNP) to restore or replace or compensate for the environmental damage. For example, we first adopt a mode of production that causes water pollution by preventing the natural recycling of human waste into organic fertilizers; and then make heavy investments in sewage treatment plants to counter or reduce the resultant water pollution. Or, to give another example, we first produce artificial, calloric rich foods for consumption (chocolates and ice-creams) and then invest in medicine and health care to reduce the damage caused by consuming such foods. Now see what is the effect of adopting such a life-style on GNP: society first registers an increase in GNP by producing artificial, but calloric rich foods; and then further increases GNP by investing in health care and in the production of medicines, to reduce the effect or damage caused by consuming these foods. In contrast, a society that followed the Gandhian dictum of simple living and consuming wholesome natural foods would have a lower GNP, but be better off in terms of well-being.

Finally, I consider the tendency to measure economic development in terms of higher and higher GNP to be flawed in another very important respect. GNP measures economic "flows" rather than standing or asset value of natural resources. Now this fact obviously tempts economists, who believe that rapid GNP growth is desirable, since it is a measure of successful development, to seek to liquidate their natural resource base or stock (whether forest wealth or minerals) in order to convert it into a measurable economic flow.

To sum up, it is untenable to measure economic development merely in terms of economic productivity calculated in terms of GNP. Such development cannot be sustained once the natural resource stock is exhausted. Sustainable development as a normative concept has three distinct categories of values. The first is economic efficiency, measured

in terms of productivity, that is the Pareto Optimality principle. The second is equitable distribution of economic resources and income not guaranteed by the Pareto Optimality principle. And, third, non-economic values like, for example, spiritual concerns, human dignity, pride, aesthetics and civil liberties.

The contemporary debate on sustainable development has veered round to the conclusion that we need today to bring about such social and structural-economic transformation (or development) which optimizes the economic and other societal benefits available in the present, without jeopardizing the likely potential for similar benefits in the future. In other words, our goal has to be a level of well-being, that is both reasonable and equitable and which can be perpetuated continually for many human generations. Sustainability implies a transition from economic growth based on depletion of non-renewable resource stock, and towards progress based more on renewable resources. What we need are not just market oriented consumers, but socially minded citizens.

Gandhi and Sustainable Development

I turn now from the discourse on sustainability to Gandhi. It is not my contention that Gandhi had consciously developed a well reasoned thesis on sustainability. Gandhi had neither the time nor the patience and inclination to formulate theories. He wrote voluminously. He arrived at several concepts almost intuitively. He would make extreme statements and often then proceed to qualify them in many ways. Nevertheless, his political and economic ideas or his political and economic perspectives, provide us with the raw materials for subsequent theorising.

Gandhi believed that man was a single integral personality whose life could not be compartmentalized into different lives like the religious and the secular, the political and the economic. Man lived life as a whole and hence, he urged, that we adopt a holistic view of life. Gandhi found modern man dehumanised and suffering from a pervasive feeling of loneliness and helplessness in a hostile world, and attributed this to the prevailing social, political and economic structures we had adopted. Gandhi saw his countrymen crippled by colonialism, and society corrupted by such practices as untouchability and incessant caste hostilities. He found the contemporary Westminster parliamentary model of government and the capitalist economy based on large scale production stifling and operating as constraints on the individual's liberty and his capacity to realize his potential or best self. Worse, he considered the present civilization, based on the desire to have ever rising standards of living, destructive of the well-

being of future generations. After Gandhi, it was JP, who was to warn fellow socialists along similar lines. He cautioned them against making the mistake of allowing the capitalist mode of production re-entrench itself under the grab of democracy and constitutionalism.²

As I see it the basic tenets of the Gandhian discourse are three. First, that capitalist production exploits man and nature. Second, that a strong moral case exists for limiting wants and for restructuring the economy on the basis of limited wants. And, third, that we need a compatible political order.

Capitalist Production Exploits Man and Nature

In Gandhi's perspective swaraj meant the power of the people to solve the problems of poverty, exploitation and employment. The masses do not conceive freedom in terms of more representative assemblies and constitutions. To the worker and the peasant, ground down by landlordism, swaraj or independence could only mean freedom from that system.

Gandhi, with rare insight saw that both the systems, socialism and capitalism, had elements of exploitation built into them. Exploitation stemmed from the method or large scale production that was a common feature of both the economic systems. The only difference between the two systems lay in the fact that large scale production gave rise to private enterprise capitalism in one system, while it paved the way for state-capitalism in the other. Gandhi foresaw that exploitation was built into any system that sought to centralize power.

Centralization of power, not only exploited man, but also denied him freedom. The upsurge now sweeping the once highly centralized communist regimes proves how correct Gandhi was. In fact one of Gandhi's oft repeated charges against his Communist friends was that they sought to add economic power to the already centralized political state. JP in his booklet, "From Socialism to Sarvodaya" (1959) regarded the socialist state as worse than the bourgeoisie state, for while the bourgeoisie state remained content with the monopoly of political power, the socialist state, in addition, demanded the monopoly of economic power. According to Gandhi, the capitalist mode of production exploited man and constrained his freedom in numerous ways. Based on the principle of economies of scale, the capitalist mode naturally resulted in larger and larger units of production. Such centralized production concentrated power in the hands of the few who owned or managed the large enterprises. That is why Gandhi claimed that it was machines that divided society into two classes

of haves and have-nots, of the owners managers of industry and the workers. In *Young India* of 13th December 1924 Gandhi wrote, "Today machinery merely helps the few to ride on the backs of millions. The impetus behind it all is not the philanthropy to save labour, but greed."

Now I need not labour here on a point already made by many before viz. that Gandhi was not against machines *per se*. He was against machines that exploited. If I may once again quote him, "I consider it a sin and injustice to use machinery for the purpose of concentrating power and riches in the hands of a few. Today the machine is used in this way."³ And when used in this way it causes unemployment. To speak in Gandhi's words, "It is not man whose needs dictate what should be produced, so that they might be run with, profit to the owner."⁴ Marx too was aware of this tendency to replace labour and attributed it to what he termed as "the raising of the organic composition of capital." He, however, felt that under socialism, since capital would be socialized, it would not be allowed to impoverish the worker. Gandhi's perceptive mind could see that this was not likely to take place. Gandhi was convinced that indiscriminate use of western technology would only produce more unemployment, than is either good or safe, especially since the size of the population of India is much larger and its growth rate much faster than in the West. For Gandhi, it was much more important that we provide people with productive work than merely aim at higher GNP. Gandhi quite justifiably argued that people need both bread and work and that is why even if it is possible to provide them with bread without work, it would be unwise to do, so because nothing could be more corroding than enforced idleness.

Gandhi had a conception of work very different from that of western economists and thinkers. Quite some western economists and thinkers have condemned work as something unpleasant that mankind can seek to avoid with the help of machinery and technology. (Herbert Marcuse for instance wanted machines to take over all man's drudgery so that he could have free time to be creative, "to make love in the meadows" etc.). Gandhi on the other hand deemed work to be an integral part of the concept of a Good Life. It was an avenue for establishing solidarity and harmony with nature. Work is like a prayer. One can get satisfaction only by praying oneself and not by hearing recorded *bhajans*. Likewise, it is only when man himself labours that he has a feelings of serving society. This is the real meaning of the Gandhian concept of "Bread Labour." Bread labour meant not only labouring to earn your bread. It meant many more things. It sought to involve man in work which gave him an experience of creativity and of service to society. It sought to give him control over

production. In this regard, Gandhi, like Hanan Arendth, made a distinction between the tool and the machine. The machine, as Arendth pointed out, determines the workers's response; but when he uses a tool he is the originator of the activity.⁵ In short, for Gandhi Bread Labour was a psychological term, an identity giving activity.

The capitalist mode of production also results in another kind of exploitation, that of the village by the city. Large scale production necessarily leads to the passive or active exploitation of the village as the problems of competition and marketing come in. Today, as huge food manufacturers are emerging on the scene, the small agro-based industries are getting destroyed, compelling villagers to move out to the towns or reducing the villages to mere appendages of cities.

It is interesting to note here that in England to begin with, towns and country had developed in a complementary fashion. Adam Smith in *The Wealth of Nations* devotes a full chapter to discussing how "the commerce of the towns contributed to the improvement of the country." Unfortunately, in our country the British themselves established commercial towns and trading centres that produced just the opposite effect. Instead of helping the process of development, the towns exploited and drained the hinterland of its resources and talented men. And the process continues unabated even today. This is why Schumacher, in his book *The Roots of Economic Growth* (Published by this Institute in 1962) lamented that the rise of Indian cities has begun to afflict the country-side with a peculiar sickness.

Finally, the capitalist mode of production not only exploits man for profit, but also exploits nature. It is indeed to Gandhi's credit that he foresaw, much before the neo-classical normative economists and the advocates of sustainable growth, the fact that mankind cannot survive if it does not learn to live in harmony with nature. A moral order as Gandhi saw it, was one which neither exploited man nor nature. Just as a father ought to be concerned with not only providing the present needs of his wife and children but also with providing for their future needs, in like manner must the community think not only of the present generation but also of future generations. But the community can provide for future generations only if it follows what Gandhi called the Law of Return viz. return to the soil in organic from what is taken from the soil.⁶ Ofcourse Gandhi was talking in the specific context of agriculture and a cattle based economy, but the argument he was making has wider ramifications. It has universal implications. What Gandhi was saying was that if a community or

economy wanted to ensure the welfare of future generations it must restrict consumption as far as possible to renewable resources and use as little as possible of the resources it cannot give back to nature. Gandhi's lament was that the capitalist mode of production, with eyes glued only on productivity measured in terms of output and profit, was indulging in an indiscriminate exploitation of non-renewable resources. Thus he lamented the fact that in industry we were increasingly relying on non-replenishable resources like oil and coal; while in agriculture we were indulging in an improvident denudation of forests for greedy exploitation of their timber wealth. In like manner he issued warnings against overgrazing by cattle, indiscriminate use of fertilizers and mechanical tractors which deprived the soil of its protective covering and made it an easy prey to destructive action of wind and rain that swept over the unprotected soil.⁷

The Gandhian Economy: An Economy Built on Limited Wants

If the capitalist mode of production is so damaging to human welfare, is exploitative of both man and nature, and a constraint on human freedom and creative work, how come it has persisted so long? Why is it that both the economic systems, the free market and socialist (planned economies), have opted for it? Gandhi's answer is : Man's insatiable greed, or, his desire to have ever more and more in the name of rising standards of living. In a material civilization, Gandhi argued, man has no rational incentive to be truly human. He squarely blamed the West and its materialist, acquisitive philosophy, for the invention of labour saving technologies and the preference for the mode of large scale production based on economies of scale.

Like the modern advocates of sustainable development and welfare economics, Gandhi had opined that an economy worth the name must aim at promoting the happiness of both the present and future generations. But happiness and welfare for all are not synonymous with more and more material prosperity. The mind, said Gandhi in *Hind Swaraj* is "a restless bird; the more it gets, the more it wants and still remains unsatisfied. The more we indulge in our passions, the more unbridled they become." Peace and happiness are mental states or conditions which are better realized when we set limits to our indulgence. Peace emanates from contentment and hence like the Vedic *rishis* (sages), Gandhi preached that man should learn to live content with his real needs. He should not crave for more than what is necessary in order to live a life of reasonable comfort. What Gandhi objected to was unlimited wants which establish an imbalance in

human life. Gandhi claimed that an economy based on unlimited wants was bound to prove a disaster for mankind. It would give rise to newer and more exploitative technologies. It would lead to indiscriminate exploitation of non-renewable resources like iron, coal and oil. It would engender endless strife and competition, not only within national societies but also between and among nation-states, with the more technologically advanced seeking to dominate over and dump their goods and products on the less developed. In Yerwada Mandir Gandhi observed: "Civilization in the real sense of the term, consists not in the multiplication but in the deliberate and voluntary reduction of wants. This alone promotes real happiness and contentment and increases capacity of service." We may add: this alone ensures a sustainable future.

Restructuring an Economy based on Limited Wants

What kind of an economic blue-print did Gandhi visualise to ensure and secure a sustainable future. Since to Gandhi, human greed was the villain of the peace, it was human greed or wants that had to be, first and foremost, limited. Since man's insatiable greed for more and more wants had given birth to the capitalist mode of large scale production, to the development of newer labour saving technologies and the over exploitation of the finite stock of non-renewable resources, man must now learn to limit his wants by deliberately opting to live a simple life small, autonomous (or near self-sufficient) agro-industrial village communities.⁸ The key units in the Gandhian restructured economy are the village and the small unit machine which may be run by electricity, oil or solar energy. Such an economy will imply a revolutionary break with the way technological advance has taken place till date. It will imply inventing new machines with a definite principle and aim. The principle on which new machines will have to be built will be, to use Gandhian terminology, "immediacy in operation and output." In other words, machines which will aim at immediate local production for more or less immediate local consumption. Such a machine will be the embodiment of the principle of decentralization in space and time. Machines built on this principle of immediacy will end the exploitation of the countryside by the city by not allowing cities to produce anything which (to quote Gandhi) "can be equally well produced by the villagers." This is what the Gandhian emphasis on the *charkha* actually meant. The *charkha* symbolized the small unit machine. It stood for such supplementary industries that reduced the villagers' dependence on outside production. JP in his "Plea for the Reconstruction of the Indian Polity" emphasises the imperative need for setting up small, autonomous and near self-sufficient agro-

industrial communities, which would have their own locally operated systems of transport, credit facilities, primary education and vocational training centres. It is only when society is so reconstructed that life can be lived intensely, creatively amidst peace and green-grass.

In the light of the Gandhian discourse we need to more closely examine the belief that big industries are a boon to the poor and that they generate employment in backward areas. Take for instance the case of Bihar and Punjab. Bihar has some of the heaviest industries in the country. The giant private and public sector iron and steel units are located here, not to speak of the many cement and heavy engineering units. Yet in terms of the welfare and standards of living of its people, Bihar is one of our poorest states. The huge profits made are shared by a handful of well trained, technical man-power and farflung share holders. In contrast to Bihar, Punjab hardly has any concentration of heavy industries. Yet, thanks to its enterprising people who have embarked on innovative agricultural practices and concentrated on small and village industries, it is today the most prosperous state in India. Punjab is a good example of a state adopting appropriate technology, which has enabled everybody to produce something rather than allow a few people to produce everything.

Today we can think of innumerable applications of appropriate technology. In the backward northern states, we still see a large number of poor whose only means of livelihood is drawing hand rickshaws or operating cycle rickshaws. Does it not make sense to manufacture small motors that could be attached to these rickshaws (so that they become power driven) rather than go in for the production of more and more cars, or, to take another example, why should we go in for more and more giant fertilizer factories and then be faced with the problems of distribution, subsidy, fair price and transport bottlenecks. Instead we could, as Gandhians urge, seriously consider developing a net work of compost-cum-gas manufacturing units (a superior technological variation of the earlier crude *go-bar-gas* plant). Such plants, which can easily be set up in every village, would ensure local employment, do little damage to the ecology and bring prosperity to local farmers and villagers alike. One can go on multiplying such examples of appropriate technology, such as taking resort to solar energy* instead of setting up polluting and dangerous atomic power plants. etc.

In fact, the Gandhian Institute of Studies at Varanasi, has done some pioneering work in clarifying and propogating the idea of appropriate

* or using wind power to generate electricity, or setting up hybrid systems of wind and solar energy.

technology in India. In 1974 an Appropriate Technology Cell was established here with the help of the Intermediate Technology Development Group of London. Jayaprakash Narayan, while inaugurating the 5th Conference of the International Peace Research Association at Varanasi on 8th January 1974, listed the main concerns behind this initiative thus: a) to provide employment, b) to upgrade primitive technology, c) to limit the scale of industrial establishments so as to control among other things, concentration of economic power, d) the evolution of an agro-industrial civilization and e) to forestall the evils of environmental pollution and disturbance of the ecological balance.”⁹

The Gandhian economy based on small unit machines, does not totally preclude the setting up of large scale units of mass production. But there is a big difference in the approach adopted towards large scale production by the Gandhian economy and the Capitalist economy. In the capitalist economy, the large scale units of production, or centralized mass production for achieving economies of scale, are the first choice, since they add to profits. In contrast, in the restructured economy that the Gandhians visualise such large scale units would be set up only where certain minerals happen to be concentrated in certain areas and require heavy centralized equipment for their exploitation. Similarly, an exception to the principle of production for local consumption, would have to be made in case of certain agricultural commodities, which are exclusively grown in certain areas like rubber, tea or coffee.

One other point needs to be made clear. Whenever such big industries have to be set up, the Gandhian preference was certainly against their being nationalized or state owned and managed. They were to be run on the principle of trusteeship. JP preferred such industries to be put under the joint trusteeship of managers, workers, and consumers of products.¹⁰ In case where big industries are inevitable JP also suggested setting up a “Standing Committee on the Social Responsibilities of Business”, which would supervise the use of capital for social good. In fact JP became the patron of such a Committee set up in 1969, but the experiment did not amount to much. However, taking a leaf from the experiment we should consider setting up a kind of National Audit Board which would (with reference to large scale industries) have the twin tasks of (a) giving guidance to businessmen and (b) acting as a watchdog on business norms and social responsibilities. The setting up of such an Audit Board would be a step towards Gandhi’s cherished ideal of operating big industries, deemed inevitable, on the principle of trusteeship.

To sum up then, Gandhi's Economy based on limited wants when translated into practice means an economy based on small agro-industrial, autonomous communities. Such an economy is actually a blue-print for a sustainable future and a healthy and creative present, claimed Gandhi and JP. The plus points of such an economy are many. In the first place it seeks to promote human happiness rather than mere GNP. One best serves the community through the service of neighbours, that is, by patronising their goods and establishing socio-economic ties with them in preference to distant residents. As Gandhi himself explained this is the ideal of *swadeshi* which is the spirit in us "which restricts us to the use and service of our immediate surroundings to the exclusion of the more remote."¹¹ Secondly, such an economy reduces the complications of transport, currency and exchange to the minimum. Thirdly, the production of consumption goods for immediate use and not for distant markets, would promote economic security, more just distribution, better occupational equilibrium and co-operative living. While, finally, an economy based on small, autonomous, agro-industrial communities would be free from the crippling dependence on a central government for necessities of life and would be a truly decentralized democracy in which the people would experience the true glow of freedom since the small communities would be self-governing in the real sense of the term.

A Note on the Compatible Political Order

I think a word is here necessary regarding a compatible political order. Quite obviously economic restructuring cannot be done in isolation. Economic decentralization is impossible with political centralization. Once it is decided to have small, near self-sufficient, agro-industrial communities operating on the principle of immediacy in production and non-exploitation of both man and nature, it logically follows that we do not need a centralized federal structure. Instead we need a federal anarchist polity in which all real power will belong to the local communities or village panchayats and then be delegated upward to taluqa, district, state and national panchayats for the purpose of achieving certain common goals. Today planning and development are highly centralized and decisions taken at the top are simply transmitted down for implementation to village panchayats. Gandhi urged that this topsy-turvy pyramid (or power structure) be set right and put on its base with power moving from down upwards. This alone will ensure that both economic and political development take place along the lines of self-regulation, self-reliance and non-violence. (Gandhi considered rule by brute majority or imposition from above as constituting violence). In other words, the

present state with its persistent tendencies towards concentration and centralization will have to be replaced by a loose federation, and growth of maximum number of voluntary agencies and associations of both producers and consumers for meeting the various needs of citizens. Such a restructured polity would certainly reduce the pervasiveness of politics-without-morality, a politics which seeks power without a commitment to, or, sense of dedication to service.

Conclusion

I would like to conclude with some comments regarding the liberal democratic model (premised on free markets) and the Gandhian model and, attempt to take a stand regarding these vis-a-vis the debate on sustainability.

The Liberal Democrat rejects the capitalist economic model of growth which equates growth or development exclusively with an ever rising GNP, and opts instead for sustainable development. But this does not mean he accepts the Gandhian model in toto. The Liberal Democratic model and the Gandhian model are both concerned with sustainability but there is a crucial difference in their approach to the problems of sustainable growth. The Gandhian model is holistic, unlike that of the Liberal Democrat. In the Gandhian paradigm, sustainability, can only be sustained (so to say) in a holistic framework. Thus for Gandhi sustainable development implied taking a certain moral stand and making certain presumptions regarding human nature. The moral stand is that we must limit wants to those necessary for sustenance or for existence, because, firstly wants have way of always being insatiable; and secondly because unlimited wants, in the long run, can only mean material development at the expense of the moral. Coupled with this moral stand is the belief that human nature is basically truth-loving and non-violent and hence once the veil of ignorance (in the form of materialism) is removed, man will almost instinctively opt for limiting wants, for "Simple Living, High Thinking."

Given this moral stand and view of human nature, it was easy for Gandhi to conclude that life must be fully and wholly lived in small self-contained communities, in small self-governing, agro-industrial communities.

However, both the Gandhian emphasis on limited wants as well as his doctrine of human nature, can be questioned on several grounds. Gandhi took it for granted that in most modern societies, material welfare has become the main objective and test of civilization. Consequently in such societies, whose economics are geared to the satisfaction of as many

material needs as possible, nothing but moral degeneration can set in. As against this, the Liberal Democrat may well postulate that wealth is an indispensable prerequisite of culture and higher values, and argue that nothing improves the moral level of a community as much as an increase of wealth and nothing lower it so much as diminution of wealth.¹² The liberal Democrat, in brief, may not be enamoured with the doctrine of limited wants.

Another serious practical difficulty with accepting the doctrine of limited wants is that we immediately run into the complex problem of determining what wants constitute reasonable sustenance which would be compatible with moral development. Gandhi considered the following to be the necessary material requisites of well being viz, a balanced diet, adequate clothing for the protection of the body against heat and cold, and a clean ventilated house to live in. The Sarvodaya Plan drawn by the Sarvodaya Plan Committee in 1958 considered that an annual income of Rs. 3,000/- per annum at the price level that obtained in 1955, would be adequate to satisfy these necessary wants.¹³ However, opinions can differ and it can be argued that many more wants than those enumerated by Gandhi, are compatible with moral development.

Thirdly, this raises the vital question of who will decide what minimum material wants are compatible with moral development, especially when there are marked clashes of preferences regarding listing the necessary wants. To leave it to a few moralists to decide the issue run the grave risk of ushering in moral authoritarianism. And if I may be permitted to say so, of all kinds of tyranny, I consider moral tyranny to be the worst.

Fourthly, there is a sense in which limited wants can put a break on innovativeness and on expanding our horizons of knowledge. In keeping with the doctrine of limited wants, Gandhi wanted an, appropriate technology based on small unit machines which would generate maximum employment and operate on the principle of immediacy, that is produce immediately for local consumption. Now such an appropriate technology may be a necessary, short term response to India's present high unemployment levels. It may also be an appropriate response to our lopsided pattern of urban growth due to unending migration from the countryside. But in the long run, once population, rural poverty and unemployment are reduced, new technologies must be allowed to sustain higher standards of living. Our goal should be machines or technologies which raise standards of living (by producing more products of superior finish) and which produce leisure without causing unemployment.

Fifthly, I think there is a certain amount of romantic unrealism in the Gandhian emphasis on living exclusively in small, autonomous, self-sufficient, agro-industrial communities. Such communities, even if deemed desirable from the point of view of Gandhian ethics (man should exploit neither fellowmen nor nature) are not easily feasible. Attempts were made by Sarvodaya workers, to set up centres which would try to achieve self-sufficiency (*swawalamban*) in meeting daily needs of the villagers but Sarvodaya workers have themselves confessed to the near impossible nature of the task. The Sarvodaya Scheme Evaluation Committee frankly admits of failure when it says that not much headway could be made in any of the centres. Another dedicated Sarvodaya worker, Mr. A.S. Sahasrabudhe in his report on Gramdan in Koraput frankly observes, "I confess that my ideas about self-sufficiency have undergone some change. The romantic ideas I had accepted all these years, has become, if I may say so, more realistic. It has passed through the fire of an actuality..... I admit it is a confession that we cannot create conditions of self-sufficiency even in regard to basic everyday needs."

But even if it be assumed that the economy can be restructured along strictly Gandhian lines, the best one can say for it, is, that it will be sustainable and may even ensure full employment, but could end up being a stagnant economy. Now such a stagnant economy could be the first choice of those who subscribe to the moral value of the doctrine of limited wants and believe that it is immoral to crave for more than sustenance necessities, or, that high thinking is possible only in the context of simple living. But quite obviously it will not be the first choice of those who want sustainable development compatible with gradually rising standards of living.

A liberal democrat who seeks both, sustainable growth and rising standards of living and comfort, need not accept Gandhian holism which links sustainability with a certain view of human nature as well as with the moral doctrine of limited wants and a significant emphasis on small unit machines. Again as a liberal democrat I fear holistic approaches since such approaches tend to be fraught with the dangers of ushering in moral absolutism and authoritarianism. I prefer to opt for sustainability, being committed only in a broad way to democracy, pluralism and free markets.

At the same time, as a liberal democrat, who chooses to benefit from the Gandhian discourse, I would like to conclude with drawing certain lessons which we must learn from that discourse and which I deem relevant to our times.

Firstly, we must learn to treat environment as a resource like any other capital asset. The tendency to regard environment resources as free in current economic exercises (when actually they have positive accounting prices) has led to biases in the design and installation of new technology. It is only when we learn to treat environment as a resource with a price, that the social profits of projects which do not degrade the environment will get due weightage in the selection of projects: and an incentive be provided for agencies to develop technologies which economise on the use of environmental resources. In short, environmental resources must be brought into line with other capital assets and made to enter national income accounting.

Secondly, we need to change laws which today favour "polluters" in the name of property right and free enterprise, so that law also begins to protect "pollutees". Today, a timber merchant who has obtained the right to fell trees in the upland forests, inflicts damage on the farmers in the lowlands, but is under no obligation to compensate them for the damage. We need to modify these laws to incorporate the rights of "pollutees" so that the timber merchant is compelled to compensate the farmers in the lowlands.

Finally, we need to evolve within nations and even globally, patterns of monitoring and controlling the use of common property resources. Open seas are common global property as are usually village ponds and fuel woods. In third world countries in particular, a large proportion of income of poor families depends directly on common property resources. The erosion of common property resources and their conversion into private property resources, today, is largely due to many complex factors such as predatory governments and "thieving aristocracies" on the one hand, and technological progress and shifting populations (due to the growth process itself) on the other hand.¹⁴

Anthropological studies reveal that ancient societies had evolved elaborate controls over common property resources. Today the need to monitor and regulate the use of common property resources is even greater, because so much more is at stake, not just equitable distribution but sustainable growth itself. In other words, we need to revert to some of the ancient communal controls over common property. The only desirable way in which this can be done is by restructuring the polity along broadly decentralized and participatory lines; along the lines I have outlined while dealing with the compatible political order.

Summing up my position, I am unable to accept the capitalist economic model of growth which measures development exclusively in terms of rising GNP. Such a narrow economic model runs the grave risk of inviting unsustainable futures by the greedy exploitation of finite resources for current prosperity. At the same time I am unable to accept the Gandhian package — the economy based on limited wants — in its entirety since it ensures sustainability but can at the same time spell stagnation. As Liberal Democrat, I opt for sustainable development while staying broadly committed to democracy, free markets and rising standards of living. I think the most valuable lesson the Liberal Democrats can learn from the Gandhian Discourse is to take a firm stand regarding man's relationship with nature, a relationship which would be at the same time benign and non-exploitative.

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