Revisiting Gandhi's Vision of Society

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The third decade of the 21st century is going through a strange crisis of identity and self-respect. One would have assumed that with all the technological wherewithal, the world would have become one large homogeneous cultural unit where the boundaries of the countries would remain just on the pages of books and on political maps. The boom of the information technology and internet in the last years of 20th century and early years of 21st century gave confidence to many of the increasing irrelevance of the international borders. People started believing the world to become one global village. This confidence also saw its fruition in the formation of the European Union. But by the beginning of the third decade of the 21st century, the confidence in this global utopia was brutally shattered.

The United Kingdom left the fold of the European Union in 2020, giving the global village idea. The United States of America, which prided itself on being the land of the melting pot for being open to people from across the world, has started displaying insecure nationalist tendencies, which are reflected in the politics of the country where the Republican Party's rallying cry has become 'Make America Great Again. The very slogan shows that the political class in the country is preparing to guard its boundaries more zealously from outsiders. The global has been relegated to the backburner, and the 'national' identity has taken hold over the public discourse. The same can be said of many other countries that prided themselves on their democracy and support for international peace. Most of the countries have started looking inward and have started cementing their borders

against refugees and illegal immigrants. The utopia of global peace has also been shattered by armed conflicts between countries across the globe. The conflict between Russia and Ukraine and Israel and Palestine and low-intensity conflicts at the international borders of many countries, including India, have highlighted the fact that societies across the globe have failed to evolve to ensure peace and prosperity. This also highlights the hollowness of all economic and political models that claimed to usher in lasting prosperity and peace in the world, be it capitalism or communism in economic spheres or the idea of democracy in the political sphere. On closer inspection, it will be clear that these ideologies are the reasons for the proliferation of those very issues they claimed to be the remedy of. In such a scenario, it will be a fruitful exercise to revisit M.K. Gandhi's vision of an ideal society based on the principles of truth and non-violence.

The reason this paper seeks to revisit Gandhi's vision is that all the other visions of the society have led only to conflict and disparity of diverse kinds, along with the destruction of ecology at such a pace that the very survival of humanity is now being suspect. The only reason that people across the globe are not looking at ecological disaster as imminent is that the economic and political models have sold them the dream of unlimited and untrammeled development. As a result, the status quo continues, which benefits only the powerful political and economic class across the world, and everybody else has been reduced to mere pawns in this global consumer market. In the political sphere, democratic governments have ceded more and more space to fanatic majoritarian sections in their countries, which have reduced the very idea of a multicultural society to a useless one. The minorities, whether religious, economic, social, or cultural, have been reduced to the margin of the society, and their rights are continuously being impinged

upon daily by the hooligans of the majority community in collusion with the law enforcing agencies and the government at large. The entire scenario reads like a society going backward in time in terms of its socio-cultural composition, where only a priori ties matter and the rest are 'others' to be wary of and to be pushed out or, at best, reduced to second-class citizens.

This paper seeks to investigate what Gandhi's vision of society offers in these troubled times for restoring some semblance of values of justice, equity, equality, and a sense of fraternity in the times of deepening chasms between majority and minority. As Gandhi's writing covers almost all spheres of humanity and is spread over one hundred volumes of The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, for the sake of consistency, this paper focuses on Gandhi's 1945 text, Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place. The paper has been divided into three sections: Reading the Text, Gandhi's vision of the society, and Contemporary Challenges to Gandhi's vision.

Reading the Text

Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place has an interesting journey. The first edition of this book was published in 1941, and the revised edition came out in 1945. The third edition came out in 1948, after his assassination. Most scholars on Gandhian Studies use either the 1945 edition or the 1948 edition. The 1941 edition had 13 points, whereas the 'thoroughly revised' 1945 edition had 18 points. The 1948 edition carries two appendices. The table of contents in the 1948 edition reads as follows:

Foreword

Introductory

1. Communal Unity

2. Removal of Untouchability

3. Prohibition
4. Khadi
5. Other Village Industries
6. Village Sanitation
7. New or Basic Education
8. Adult Education
9. Women
10. Education in Health and Hygiene
11. Provincial Languages
12. National Language
13. Economic Equality
14. Kisans
15. Labour
16. Adivasis
17. Lepers
18. Students

Place of Civil Disobedience

Conclusion

Appendices

I. Improvement of Cattle

II. Congress Position

Reading the above list gives a clear indication of Gandhi's vision of society. Gandhi is looking at society in its whole, and his idea of rebuilding the society encompasses all aspects, be it economic, social, cultural, or even religious. He is addressing the deep chasms in society. Social groups such as farmers, labourers, *Adivasis*, and lepers have been the focus of Gandhi's attention. Similarly, the severe problem of untouchability has been addressed, along with the stress on ending the enmity between Hindus and Muslims. The economic arrangement

has been discussed in two chapters, and one chapter has been devoted exclusively to the dangers of economic inequality. Language, which is a point of contention in a multilingual country like India, has been discussed in two chapters. Overall, this list of constructive programmes shows that Gandhi is grappling with the burning issues within the society. For him, the political independence of the country may be important but not more important than rebuilding the society from the bottom up. Before discussing how the text envisages the rebuilding of society, it will be helpful to go through the contents of each of the chapters. The rest of this section gives a summary of the text.

In chapter 1, "Communal Unity," Gandhi discusses the problem of the religious divide in the country between Hindus and non-Hindus. No amount of legislation can bridge the divide it the people do not understand this problem and tackles it at individual level where every individual "has to feel his identity with every one of the millions of the inhabitants of Hindustan".[1] Gandhi is clear that it is the responsibility of the Congress workers to bring out such transformation among the masses. He writes, "…every Congressman will cultivate personal friendship with persons representing faiths other than his own. He should have the same regard for the other faiths as he has for his own."[2] If this happens than the all the visible differences in the society such as 'Hindu water' and 'Muslim water' or 'Hindu tea' and 'Muslim tea' will disappear. Gandhi also looked forward to the disappearance of public institutions, such as schools, colleges, and hospitals, based on communal identities.[3] So firm is Gandhi's belief in this 'bottom up' approach that he rejects the very idea of a 'legislative solution' to such problems. Parliamentary affairs work only when members are on the same page as those of the majority of the population. But who will transform the majority of the population towards communal unity?

Although Gandhi rejects the idea that parliament can offer any solution to the communal divide, he does not reject it totally because Congress has to fight the election and send representatives to such bodies till the time there are 'undesirable candidates' in such bodies. That is to say, Gandhi does give a role to parliament, but the solution will come only by working on the ground with the masses, and this should be done by the Congressmen.

In chapter 2, "Removal of Untouchability," Gandhi uses the words "blot and curse upon Hinduism" for untouchability.[4] He blames the Congressmen for not looking at this question in all its seriousness. Congressmen look at this point just as a political necessity, and so they do not give absolute importance for the sake of the existence of Hinduism. He exhorts the Congressmen to work with the orthodox upper caste Hindus (*Sanatanis* in Gandhi's words) in a non-violent manner to nudge them towards getting rid of the idea and practice of untouchability. Clearly, Gandhi holds *Sanatanis* as responsible for the practice of untouchability, but they must not be confronted militantly; rather, they must be made to see the falsity of their position in a friendly manner. At the same time, Congressmen also need to support *Harijans* in their cause so that they can come out of isolation.[5] Gandhi understood the immensity of this problem and described it as something that the entire world had never seen. Unless this problem is solved, the goal of *Swaraj* can never be reached.

In chapter 3, "Prohibition," Gandhi stresses on non-violent ways in which addicted people can be weaned away from the addictions. He relies on the role that can be played by women and students who have sway over their family members to appeal to the addicted people to give up the addiction. Congressmen can start recreation booths where such people can be helped in their efforts

towards de-addiction and provide other recreational activities. Gandhi firmly believed that this activity could not be left for future government. This must be addressed immediately.

In chapter 4, "Khadi," Gandhi bemoans the lack of interest on the part of the Congressmen to work towards *Khadi* with the intensity it deserves. Colonialism ruined the economic self-sufficiency of the country. It killed village-level industries and pushed villages to become dependent on the cities for fulfilling their basic requirements. The only solution, according to Gandhi, was to gain economic self-sufficiency, where *Khadi* would play the central role. For him, *Khadi* was not only an economic activity but rather "…the symbol of unity of Indian humanity."[6] Furthermore, he writes:

Khadi mentality means decentralization of the production and distribution of the necessaries of life. Therefore, the formula so far evolved is, every village to produce all its necessaries and a certain percentage in addition for the requirements of the cities.

Khadi was so central to Gandhi's vision of India that he gave a detailed chart of how it can be used to make the villages self-sufficient through the All India Spinners Association (A.I.S.A.). Again, Gandhi exhorted Congressmen to take the lead in the popularization of *Khadi* by doing exemplary work in every village. Along with *Khadi*, in Chapter 5, "Other Village Industries," Gandhi gives a list of some allied and other cottage industries that can be run at the local level. He believed that if the Congressmen became village-minded instead of relying on imitating the Western machine-made products, they will be able to "develop a true national taste in keeping with the vision of a new India in which pauperism, starvation and idleness will be unknown."[7]

In Chapter 6, "Village Sanitation," Gandhi bemoans the lack of civic and community hygiene in Indians, which is seen in the bad state

of villages as well as the banks of the sacred river. Village sanitation must ensure that Indian villages become models of cleanliness in every sense of the word.[8] Chapter 7, "New or Basic Education," deals with the education of children, especially those in the villages. Gandhi's conception of education was based on linking children with the identity and culture of India and making them model citizens or model villagers. His education is pitted against the British education system, which has been designed without any regard for the requirements of the country or its citizens.[9] Along with education for children, Gandhi is also concerned with "Adult Education" in Chapter 8, where he envisages giving political education to the grown-ups on the colonial condition of the country and making them aware of the situation around them. This education will nullify the fear that an Indian feels towards British officers. This political education will be given along with basic literacy. Without this, there can be no *Swaraj*.[10] Gandhi's plan of education also includes "Education in Health and Hygiene," which he discusses in Chapter 10. Here, he links the high mortality rate among Indians to their ignorance of education in health and how to maintain hygiene.

Chapters 11 and 12 deal with "Provincial Languages" and "National Language," respectively. Gandhi blamed the popularity of the English language among the elite classes for the ignorance of the masses about the political situation of the country. The fight for *Swaraj* is being waged in a foreign language so "…masses can make no solid contribution to the construction of *Swaraj*."[11] Every provincial language in the country must be given equal respect, and the educated classes must carry out their work in the provincial languages. Similarly, in the diversity of provincial languages, Hindustani must be used as a national language for communication among different provinces. He again blames the Congressmen who are infatuated with the English

language and makes little or no effort to work with the masses in provincial languages or in Hindustani.

Chapter 13 on "Economic Equality" is the third chapter in the book apart from "*Khadi*" and "Other Village Industries" on the economic reconstruction of the society. Gandhi warned that if economic equality is not attained, then India will certainly face a "violent and bloody revolution."[12] He is aware of the fact that his concept of trusteeship is not given much currency in Congress or in the country, but his belief in the concept remains. He likens it to the concept of non-violence. Both are difficult things to inculcate, but once society decides to abide by them, they will see the benefits. He warns that economic equality cannot be postponed till the political independence of the country,

Those who think that the major reforms will come after the advent of Swaraj are deceiving themselves as to the elementary working of non-violent Swaraj. It will not drop from heaven all of a sudden one fine morning. But it has to be built up brick by brick by corporate self-effort.[13]

Economic decentralization is at the heart of Gandhi's vision of Indian society. Five chapters in the book have been devoted to those who are considered to be on the margins of society. Chapter 9 is "Women", Chapter 14 is "Kisans", Chapter 15 is "Labour", Chapter 16 is "Adivasis", Chapter 17 is "Lepers", and Chapter 18 is "Students." He gives importance to each of these groups not only in the national life of the country but also in social and familial spaces. He advocates for equal place and scope for women to realize their true potential.[14] He writes, "Women have been taught to regard themselves as slaves of men. It is up to the Congressmen to see that they enable them to realize their full status and play their part as equals of men."[15] Speaking on

farmers, Gandhi stresses the importance of organizing farmers through non-violent methods where they can get redressal for their plight. It is for Congressmen to see to it that the farmers are not used for political purposes. *Kisans* must be guided in ways so that they are never again exploited by anybody. Regarding the question of labour, Gandhi showed the Ahmedabad Labour Union as a model for labourers across the country. Here again, Gandhi is against the political use of labourers by the Congress or any other political party. He exhorts Congressmen to work for the uplift of the Adivasis in different parts of India following the examples of Thakkar Bapa, Jugatram Dave, and Shri Balasaheb Kher.[16] In the chapter on "Lepers," Gandhi writes, "If India was pulsating with new life, if we were all in earnest about winning Independence in the quickest manner possible by truthful and non-violent means, there would not be a leper or beggar in India uncared for and unaccounted for.[17] If we do not care for those who require the utmost care, what good can *Swaraj* achieve? The last chapter is on "Students," where Gandhi exhorts them to shun the fashion of English education, which is totally false and is a sin. English education for students is just a waste of precious years of their lives. Students, who are going to be future leaders of the country, must think for the country, and Gandhi proposes 11-point action for them to work for the country. They must serve society straight away through constructive programmes, spread the message of love for the country, and propagate the use of *khadi*. The 11-point action programme must be conducted along with a continuation of their studies. Only in this way can they serve the country in its freedom movement.[18]

This, in brief, is the content of the text. The following section will offer a detailed analysis of the text to cull out Gandhi's vision of society.

Gandhi's Vision of Society

Reading Constructive Programme carefully gives an outline of Gandhi's vision of society. He calls it "construction of *Poorna Swaraj* or complete Independence."[19] Complete independence is not only the political independence of a country, but it also means independence of each unit of the country. It does not mean mere transfer of power but rather it seeks to ensure freedom, equality, equity, and dignity to each and every person in the country through transformation of social, economic, cultural, and political organizations. Gandhi seeks to achieve this transformation by empowering every single individual in the country to be an active citizen working in individual capacity to bring out changes in personal, familial, and social life. One may not be powerful enough to bring about social revolution, but bringing change in personal and familial life is in the purview of every individual. For instance, treating women in the family with respect and giving them equal place in all spheres of life is within the purview of every male member. If they practice it, the society as a whole will see the transformation in gender roles through transformation in every family. Not only will it free women from a position akin to slavery, but it will also free men from the burden of running the family single-handedly. It will allow for fluidity in gender roles. This is just one example of how Gandhi imagines the transformation of society from the bottom up. Constructive Programme is offered to bring change from the bottom up to ensure its permanence. Gandhi uses the analogy of decentralization to drive his point home. Governments are powerful entities that have centralizing tendencies to function linearly. A government can destroy the centralized production of *Khadi*, but it cannot destroy the decentralized production of *Khadi* where every individual is making and using *Khadi*. Gandhi is imagining decentralization in this radical

way where systems should work in such a way that it becomes impossible for the state to disrupt it.

Dhananjay Rai, in his "Introduction" to Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place, describes this text as a demonstration of Gandhi's practical philosophy. Rai uses two terms, philosophy proper and philosophy practical, for two of Gandhi's texts, *Hind Swaraj* and Constructive Programme, respectively.[20] *Hind Swaraj* outlines Gandhi's philosophy through conceptual frameworks for decolonization, whereas the Constructive Programme outlines the list of practical activities to achieve decolonization. In each case, Gandhi's decolonization means *Poorna Swaraj* or complete Independence. The difference between *Swaraj* and *Poorna Swaraj* is that of change of political power from foreign rulers to native rulers, and the other means that each individual is in complete control of one's own life and circumstances. The political class that rules the country or forms the ruling power of the 'state' tends to perpetuate its control over the life of people without being accountable to them in any way. Gandhi understood this clearly. As M.P. Mathai writes, "Socio-political developments in the post-colonial world corresponded with the Gandhian prognosis. The post-colonial Indian state started showing signs of becoming authoritarian under the pretext of becoming the adequate instrument of serving the people."[21] As Gandhi understood it clearly, he insisted on the idea of *Poorna Swaraj*. Even in *Hind Swaraj*, which came out in 1909, Gandhi made a distinction between *Swaraj* and political independence. For him, political independence was meaningless if the life of the ordinary people of India remained the same. He gives a two-fold meaning to *Swaraj*: one, rule of the self, i.e., rule of India by Indians; and two, rule over the self, i.e., nobody political power should have rule over the individual's life. Sovereignty of the self

is supreme in Gandhi. However, Gandhi was unable to press on the difference between political independence and *Swaraj* in his political career in India. That may be the reason why he uses the qualifier '**Poorna**' before **Swaraj** when he writes the 'Foreword' of the 1945 edition of Constructive Programme. In this text, Gandhi focuses on the implementation of the components of *Poorna Swaraj*. This process is more important to Gandhi because it can be achieved by Indians without any hindrance by the English rule. This sounds easy, but it is difficult to achieve because Gandhi's vision requires total transformation of all spheres of Indian social, political, cultural, and religious life. Nowhere in the world has the transformation of society been an easy task. But for Gandhi, this is only a task that is a worthwhile undertaking, and that is why, in each chapter of the text, he exhorts Congressmen to do it. The following paragraph examines this exhortation of Gandhi to cull out its implications.

The very idea of society is premised on the division of work between people, and an efficient society is that which divides the work among its members based on their skills and temperament. Any macro political arrangement is divided into two: those who govern and those who are governed (either by consent or by coercion). Most of those who govern believe that all their actions are done in the interest of the masses, but any analysis will find it to be false. If the political equilibrium of the society gets tilted massively in favor of the rulers, then the only scope left for regaining the equilibrium is to organize the masses against the rulers. By their very nature, the masses go about their business of surviving in the world without taking much interest in the political arrangement in the society or country. It is left to a relatively small number of people who feel the inequality of power balance to organize the masses and work towards overthrowing the

rulers and creating a new ruling class that is more amenable to the interests of the people. In Marxist theory, the bourgeoisie leads the revolution of the proletariat against the capitalist class to create a classless society. Even Marx did not believe that the masses would rise against their oppression without any external impetus. The task of organizing the masses, educating them, and training them to fight the oppressor is to be done by the vanguard. Frantz Fanon explains this in his text The Wretched of the Earth. Although Fanon's context is different, he is also looking to decolonize Algerian society after the formal independence of Algeria from French rule. Being a Marxist, Fanon believes that decolonization is a violent process, and it must change all the existing structures of colonial rule.[22] In the Indian context, Gandhi saw the Indian National Congress as that vanguard party that has the responsibility of organizing the masses against the colonial rule of the British Empire. The reason the Indian National Congress could do this massive task was its spread in every nook and corner of the country. It was the party that was working at the grassroots level to organize the masses. Now, as Gandhi was aspiring for decolonization and *Poorna Swaraj*, he could see that the task of reforming and transforming the society could not wait till the attainment of political independence. For him, transformation of society becomes an immanent goal and to achieve that goal, he fell back on the Congressmen or Congress volunteers at the grass-root level to educate the masses towards the social, cultural, and economic problems inherent in the society and thus make people change their attitude towards problems in the society and work towards rectifying them. Congressmen could do that by demonstrating in their own daily life and work what a truly free society looks like. That is why the burden of transforming the society is being placed on Congressmen.

Finally, the vision of society that Gandhi has in the Constructive Programme is one where all the members have equal position and respect in the society. No social, cultural, economic, or religious groups should feel at the margins. It means that no one group or community will occupy a central position. This society will be a caste-less society which have no place for untouchability. Gandhi's ideal society would be free from communal clashes between Hindus and Muslims or between any other religious groups. This society will give prominence to its most hard-working groups such as farmers, labourers, and tribals. The people who require service and care of the society will be given utmost care and affection, such as those suffering from dreaded leprosy, etc. The society will be a gender-just society where women will be given equal respect and recognition for their duties. Women will become active partners in public life as well. The very basis of Gandhi's ideal society is the economic self-sufficiency of each village of the country. This economic self-sufficiency can be achieved only through *Khadi* and other allied village industries, apart from agriculture being the backbone. This society will have minimum use of large-scale factory manufacturing of things. Here, people will be producers instead of mere consumers. The education of each and every member will be ensured, and that education will develop all the faculties of the population. Students will be active workers in this building of the ideal society.

During his entire life, Gandhi worked towards the realization of an ideal society. Whether it is the establishment of Tolstoy Farm and Phoenix Settlement in South Africa or his Kocharab Ashram, Sabarmati Ashram, and Sevagram Ashram in India or his texts such as *Hind Swaraj*[23] and *Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place*, Gandhi sought both to establish the theoretical conception of ideal society as

well as show the world by putting into practice those ideal societies in the microcosms of his *Ashrams*. It is equally true that none of his political coworkers or lieutenants gave much thought to his vision of an ideal society. As a result, his vision was never realized by the ruling classes in India.

During the early decades of independence, there were some token initiatives by the government and mostly by Gandhian workers to realize his vision in piecemeal fashion. But in the contemporary era of globalization and massive industrialization of the economy and the consumerization of the public, Gandhi's vision of the ideal society has vanished from the public consciousness. The following section discusses some of the contemporary challenges to the realization of Gandhi's vision of an ideal society.

Contemporary Challenges to Gandhi's Vision of Society

The contemporary world is identified through many labels. Some of these labels are globalized world, corporatized world, global village, connected world, and so on. All these labels can be traced back to the world economic order. After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1991 and the disintegration of the USSR in 1991, the world economy moved towards the single ideal of capitalism. Even those countries who identified themselves as socialists and communists moved on the path of a capitalist economy in different degrees. After 1991, the world was envisioned as a single marketplace where anyone could buy or sell whatever they wanted. It was a grand vision and did not work out totally, but the world became a marketplace for all the major capitalist economies such as the USA, most of the European countries, the USSR, and now China.

These economies killed the local production capacities of most of the countries of the world, especially those in the developing or poor

countries category. India, too, faced the same problems of the globalized economy. When India opened its economy to the world in 1991, it was seen as a historic step that catapulted India into the top five economies of the world in the next 30 years. This story is still celebrated in the economic circles in India as well as the world. What is conveniently ignored is the wholesale destruction of local production units across the country in the same period. This massive closure of the production economy resulted in large-scale unemployment in the country. This rate of unemployment has been increasing for many years now. How is one supposed to even think of Gandhi's vision of society in such a scenario? The rest of this section enumerates some of the prominent challenges to his vision of society.

1. Destruction of local production units

The onslaught of global imports due to the opening of Indian markets for global manufacturers killed the local production units. As these units always operated on low capital, they were not able to upscale the quality of production or keep their rates low; they were pushed out of business by the global brands in all sectors of production. This killing of local production units has resulted in a massive unemployment crisis in India. Any society facing such a huge challenge can never be assured of a harmonious social and cultural order. The peace of the country is forever in danger.

2. Making agriculture a loss-making enterprise

The government policies during the last 30 years have reduced the farmers to the condition of paupers. There is no clear-cut agriculture policy in the country. The most important component of the country's economy is running on auto-pilot mode. There is little or no government protection to the farmers against the vagaries of either weather or the market. Crop insurance is a sham, and the number of

farmers who are the beneficiaries of the crop insurance is hard to even find out. As far as the market forces are concerned, the government actions are never pre-emptive, but it is always found late in securing the interests of the farmers.

3. Turning citizens into consumers

Full-scale globalization has filled the Indian markets with cheap goods of all varieties. Indian citizens are now just consumers who purchase the goods and use them. There is no focus on turning citizens into producers of goods. The country's economy is rescued only by the service sector, which is the largest part of the GDP. Even these services are at the low end of the value chain. In their book, *Breaking the Mould: Reimagining India's Economic Future*, Rohit Lamba and Raghuram Rajan highlight this aspect as something that does not do India much credit in the long run. They advocate providing high-end services instead of low-end ones.[24] But the picture of India which emerges now is that of a consumer society and not a producer society.

4. Continuous marginalization of minorities and other disadvantaged groups

The communal clashes in India have increased significantly in the last 30 years. The promise of capitalism and globalisation was that of a world of peace and prosperity. Even the basic premise of peace has not been secured. Muslims in India have been relegated to further marginalization. They are beaten up by any Hindu vigilante group on any pretext, and their houses and workplaces are destroyed by the government agencies on the flimsiest of reasons. The same reason is not applied to the majority Hindu society. The *Dalits* and Tribals in the country are fighting for their dignity and identity. The Tribal lands are being taken up and given to corporate houses without following the

proper laws of the land.

5. Slow rate of progress towards gender-just society

There is no denying the fact that the condition of women in India has improved, as is visible in the significant growth in public participation. Education for women is now a normal idea, and it is reflected in the enrolment numbers and ratio as well. Women are getting employed in diverse fields. But the masculine mentality of the society refuses to die down. This is reflected in the organization of the office spaces according to the male normative structures. The requirements of women workers are never even thought of. Women are expected to 'adjust' in these male-dominated spaces in every sense of the word and are expected never to demand anything extra. Moreover, the cases of sexual oppression and assault in the workplaces are so frequent that it seems that there is no law-and-order situation in the country. Very few such cases make headlines in the mainstream media, and those that do garner attention only for a brief period. Apart from working outside, women are expected to carry out their traditional roles in their homes, making them double-duty labourers. Also, the respect they get in their families is because of the extra money they bring in, and most of the time, they have no control over their earnings.

6. Transformation of the education system to serve the market interests

The education system in the country has moved away from making informed and critical citizens who can contribute to the overall growth of society. All that the education system now seeks to do is to train the students to serve the interests of the market. Any attempt towards critical questioning is now being scuttled inside the educational institutions themselves. Students are arrested simply for asking questions and raising slogans. The aim is to transform them into

docile bodies (in Agamben's terms) whose only aim in life is to serve the interest of the capital.

We can evaluate the points in the light of Gandhi's *Constructive Programme* to see how far behind we have left his vision of society. Globalization has destroyed the very idea of village self-sufficiency or the production of material in the vicinity. Even the seeds for agriculture are being purchased from the market. No economic activity is possible in the face of such a massive onslaught of capital. If the factory-based production could not survive, what chances does an individual-based production have? Although Gandhi imagined a decentralized *Khadi*, there is no system in place to support the *Khadi* industry. In a country where land for agriculture is being depleted at a very high speed, what chances can there be for people to use it to grow cotton for individual use? Similarly, locally produced items or cottage industries are getting closed down as cheaper replacements are available in the market. The self-sufficient economy, which is the bedrock of *Poorna Swaraj*, has collapsed today.

Gandhi's vision refused the vertical hierarchy of communities, either caste-based or communal-based. Today's India is seeing increasing hierarchy. The growing prosperity of the city has not weakened these primitive structures. Rather, they are being newly reinforced. The new housing complexes in the cities do not allow *Dalits* or Muslims in them as these are owned by upper caste Hindus. City spaces are now being ghettoized more and more.

How are they to develop social equality and harmony? Education, which according to Paulo Freire, is culture action for change, is bringing no positive change. Now, the education system is enforcing the socio-cultural status quo. Society is further disintegrated.

The relationship between people has been reduced to that of dehumanized economic exchange. There is no space for even thinking about Gandhi's vision of an ideal society. The institutions that were working for the uplift of the poor have been either shut down or placed with huge economic challenges just to keep themselves afloat against all kinds of government harassment. Activists and other social workers are kept in jail for years without any kind of trial. The Constitution of the country and justice system seem to give no hope in contemporary times.

Conclusion

Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place is a text that represents the practical demonstration of making an ideal society based on the idea of *Poorna Swaraj*. The text exhorts the volunteers and the social-political workers at the grassroots to work towards transforming the society through making changes in their own lives and daily engagement with different sections of the society. That vision of Gandhi never got fulfilled, although there were efforts made by different people in different parts of the country to follow some of the works listed by Gandhi in the text. But there never was a systematic effort to realize his dream. Whatever little was achieved in the first six decades of the country's independence is now shattered by the onslaught of globalization and the government's preference for large-scale corporate capital instead of small-scale local and individual enterprise. This paper has sought to detail the challenges to Gandhi's vision of an ideal society. As of now, the entire political, social, economic, and cultural scenario of the country gives no hope for envisioning Gandhi's ideals.

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