

Introduction

If one ruminates over the question, what India has tried to achieve during the Twentieth Century, one finds that while her aim during the first half of the Century was Political Independence, it was Development during the second half. Whereas there was no ambiguity about the meaning and content of the first goal, there has been no such unambiguity about the meaning and content of the second goal, and about the method or strategy to achieve it. When India launched her "Development Enterprise" in 1951, "there was a legacy of pre-independence debate on India's development problems. This debate centered around the Gandhian approach, at one pole, and the 'modernizing approach' of Nehru at the other. The Gandhian approach has never been seriously discussed by either mainstream economists or by its left-wing critics ... both have largely accepted a 'commodity centered' approach. Thus, ... more goods are preferred to less; and a higher level of capital stock per worker has been considered unambiguously helpful in improving the standard of living" (Chakravarty, 1987, p.7). In other words, India embraced the Western Model of Development for rebuilding the Nation, and as a part of it, she has evolved a mixed economic system, with greater emphasis on Central planning till about 1985, and on progressively greater marketization thereafter.

During about 50 years of her "Development Age", India has been successful on a few fronts but has lost heavily on many others. Her nominal Gross National Product (GNP) and real GNP (1980-81 = 100), both at factor cost, in 1995-96 were 108 times and 6 times their respective levels in 1950-51. Similarly, her nominal per capita and real per capita income (1980-81 = 100) in 1995-96 were 39 times and a little more than twice their respective levels in 1950-51 (GOI, 1996-97, p. S-3). The output of foodgrains in India has increased from 50.8 million tonnes in 1950-51 to 192.4 million tonnes in 1997-98 (GOI, 1998-99, P. S-3). There has also been a substantial increase in the output of finished steel, cement, coal, crude-oil, electricity, and a wide variety of durable and non-durable consumer goods. A creditable growth

and diversification of industrial and financial sectors have also taken place. There has been a remarkable strengthening of the economic and social infrastructure. A lot has been achieved in respect of both the level and diversification (in terms of trading partners and composition) of exports and imports of goods and services. India has made a creditable progress in scientific and technological fields; technical, managerial, and skilled manpower has increased in a large measure. The total life expectancy (for males and females) has increased from 32.1 years in 1950-51 to 60.3 years in 1993-94. Similarly, the annual death rate per thousand has declined from 27.4 in 1950-51 to 8.9 in 1996-97. The total literacy rate has increased from 18.33 percent to 52.2 percent during 1951-91 (GOI, 1998-99, p. S-1 and S-2).

However, such positive features of progress have been accompanied by far too many negative features, and consequently the balance sheet of Indian Development can be said to have been grossly in the red. The goal of rebuilding of the Nation or the “tryst with destiny” at the time of Independence surely must not have meant only the economic growth. But even in economic matters, there have been highly worrisome failures.

As indicated above, the economic growth has taken place more in nominal terms than in real terms. The increase in nominal income has been achieved by investing huge capital or trillions of rupees, which means that the capital cost per unit of output has been very high. Both the internal value and the external value of the rupee has declined drastically. The consumer price index (1982 = 100) has increased from 17.00 in 1950-51 to 366 in 1997-98, i.e., by about 22 times (GOI, 1998-99, p. S-1); the value of one rupee in 1940 has now become less than Re.0.03. The rupee exchange rate has declined from about 1 US \$ = Rs.4.76 in 1949-50 to 1 US \$ = Rs.43.24 in the first week of July 1999. The internal and external public debt has accumulated to become mountainous.

The per capita per day availability of cereals has remained nearly the same (it was 334.2 grams and 450.9 grams in 1951 and 1998, respectively), while that of pulses has declined dangerously (it was 60.7 grams and 33.2 grams in 1951 and 1998, respectively). The per capita annual availability of cotton cloth has remained more or less the same (it was 14.4 meters and 15.9 meters in 1955-56 and 1997-98, respectively) [1]. It is estimated that the housing shortage was to the tune of about 9.0 million dwelling units in 1951 and that it would be about 39.0 million units in 2001 (The Indian Express, 30-1-1993).

Even after 50 years of Development, at least one-third of the Indian population lives below the poverty line, which itself has been fixed at a niggardly level. The deaths, particularly of children and women, by under-nourishment, malnutrition, and hunger have been quite regular, regionally widespread, and large in number. For example, it is reported that 324 and 125 children have died of malnutrition in Makhada-Jowhar near Bombay in 1992-93 and 1998-99, respectively (The Indian Express, 3-7-1999, p.7).

There is now a scarcity of clean, pure, potable, drinking water in the majority of cities and villages in all the States during a major part of each year. The free goods like pure air and water are now in the process of becoming costly economic goods in India.

There has been an utter failure to provide work or employment to all the able-bodied people in the country. The reserve army of the unemployed, underemployed, partially employed has now swelled into crores and crores of persons; and increasingly larger and larger proportion of the working population is now employed in unproductive, joyless, alienating jobs. More and more people are now “prostituting” their labour for “fabricating things that last half a season”. The disguised unemployment has now spread to every activity and sector in the economy.

The interregional and intraregional disparities in development have persisted and even grown over the years. The mass unemployment has led to mass migration from the rural to urban areas, which has impoverished the former and degraded the latter. Similarly, inequalities in salaries, wages, income, consumption, assets-ownership, property, and wealth have increased over the years. There has been a creation and entrenchment of the “dual economy” in India during the past 50 years. With the passage of time, mass poverty has assumed more serious proportions, the rural society has become more fragmented and unequal, and the majority of the poorest sections of population in most parts of the country have become more dependent, and less self-sufficient and self-reliant.

As in other countries in the world, India also is facing a serious environmental and ecological crisis; species and species of animals, birds, plants, trees, seeds have become either endangered or extinct due to various causes such as deforestation and desertification. The bio-diversity and cultural diversity have been important casualties in the process of Development.

The educational system in India has now become pathetically sick. At present, the Indian polity is democratic only in name and outward form. The criminalization has engulfed the entire society and polity. The cancer of corruption has reached all depths and breadths of Indian bodypolitic; even the investigative agencies have become afflicted by it. The morality has reached its Nadir; it appears to have become a matter to be decided wholly by the courts of law; the honesty as the basis of public morality appears to have completely vanished.

The religious, communal, lingual, riparian, ethnic, regional conflicts have increased; the social unrest has grown; and the private and State terrorism have become quite widespread. There has been a loss of peace within and without, and the violence stalks the people everywhere like the gargantuan beast of prey. Over the years, there has been a definite impoverishment and regress in cultural and spiritual spheres.

In short, the outcome of Development in India can be said to have been disastrous. For many, Development, as Schumacher has put it, has turned subsistence into destitution and hunger; marginal employment into unemployment; meagre self-sufficiency into dependence; rural simplicity into urban squalor; and contentment into family, community, and civil strife. As a result, the mood of the country today is one of disillusionment. The exemplary spirit of sacrifice, suffering, service, mass enthusiasm, and mass participation witnessed during the freedom struggle, have turned into feelings of betrayal, anxiety, insecurity, bewilderment, and despondency. Many people agree that today India is in the throes of unprecedented crisis

- economic, social, political, educational, environmental, ecological, ethical, moral, and spiritual.

India is not alone in getting herself entangled in such a predicament. Behind the illusion, mirage, and glitter of the material progress, prosperity, and cornucopia, the industrially advanced countries also are suffering from the economic, social, and cultural pathology. [2] While the “developing” countries are doing all their best to ape the “developed” nations, the sensitive people in the latter are highly worried about the plight of their societies. The world-view giving primacy to human self-interest, industrialism, technologism, modernism, and materialism has now been embraced and internalized widely not only in the West but also in the East. The East and the West have now met in an unbounded pursuit of materialism, and this has brought the whole human civilization to the brink of disaster. Let it be noted that this is not an isolated view, many sagacious people from both the East and West share it with equal conviction.

For example, in this context, Radhakrishnan has said, “... by general admission something is wrong with it (contemporary world). We are living in a singular moment of history, a moment of crisis, in the literal sense of the word. In every branch of our activity, material and spiritual, we seem to have arrived at a turning point” (Radhakrishnan, 1956, p. iv). Articulating the confusion of the West, it has been rightly said, “Everywhere in the West one hears those responsible for the guidance of public life – Statesmen, ... magistrates, Churchmen, and teachers - asking themselves in dismay: “What has gone wrong with our ‘progress’? Where is the error in our social calculations and scheme of things?” ... the most thoughtful and sensitive minds in the West are now disturbed and baffled by the drift of things” (Mitrany, pp. ix-xii).

In the same vein, the present state of humanity has been described as “... we are living in the most atheistic epoch of all times.... We all have a feeling of having arrived at a critical juncture in history.... We feel ill at ease, lined up as we are behind row upon row of machines, and dismayed to discover that technology has led us into a dark, unpleasant tunnel where we can scarcely breathe.... Like an epidemic ... evil has invaded the whole body of mankind. It is above, it is below, it is within and without, it is everywhere.... Everything is quiet for the moment - but all ready to explode. Yes, I truly believe we could be on the eve of the apocalypse ... unless” (Caretto, 1983, pp. 11-14).

Different people have given different answers about the cause and cure of the ailing human civilization. Gandhi has been the most prominent among them. In this hour of universal crisis, at this juncture of man’s doubt, confusion, bewilderment, bafflement, Gandhi’s message, his mission and vision, are of supreme value for the survival of humanity. Gandhi tells us that we, who constitute the social order, are the disease, and we must change if civilization is to improve. He has offered many idealistic-cum-realistic solutions to the myriad problems of the mankind. Many people from a wide cross-section of humanity have recognized the significance and relevance of Gandhian thought and programme, and have recommended it for saving the present disoriented civilization, and for transforming it into something which we can call as our home. This is well reflected, among other things, in many tributes paid to Gandhi

on various occasions, viz., his Seventieth Birthday, and his martyrdom. It would be useful and instructive to quote [3] a few of them here:

*" ... it was good and well that at least he should come to his end not by some chosen fast, but by meeting the unreason of the universe..., so signifying that, at the last, unreason and tragedy itself shall be transformed by the conquest of unresisting love. He is not dead... today we of the West salute an India reborn, an India in which his spirit lives, and of which we shall not live to see the full fruition" (p. 320).

- L.W. Grensted

*"...Now that atomic and bacteriological warfare threaten all with annihilation,... the world waits, with the sands running out, for spiritual and political leaders in both East and West who will learn from Gandhi the indispensable condition on which influence for good is granted to men" (p. 383).

- Roy Walker

*"The example and teaching of Mahatma Gandhi have left indelible marks upon our times. We of this generation have to make that choice between material and moral forces which is also the choice between the death and the life of the human species. By the perfection of our instruments of destruction we have laid this duty unavoidably upon ourselves. It is only through the lives of such as Gandhi that we can hope to discharge it... We need guidance, and beacons to show the paths which we must take. To the most turbulent age the earth has ever seen both these things have been given in the person of the greatest Indian of our day. Now, in the pain of Gandhi's death, it is possible to realize how lasting and how strong is the faith he preached. Now we can see that the light which was kindled in the East has not been put out, but is made one with the "white radiance of eternity". In that light many feet will walk in certainty and safety. And from the faith which burns there, untold thousands of men will find the strength which can abate the storms in the human heart and turn it toward that fuller life, knowledge of which is our distinctive heritage" (pp. 437-438).

- News Chronicle

*"It is a strange paradox in the problem of human nature, that of this man, whom millions love and revere ... we cannot yet be faithful followers ... the spiritual simplicity of Gandhi seems utterly out of place in the over-sophisticated world of today: his honesty too uncompromising to form the basis for any practical policy. Yet the sword of his spirit pierces to the very heart of the moral problem with which modern civilization is now confronted, and unless something of that spirit is

accepted and made practical politics, civilization as we know it may be doomed” (p. 444).

- Laurence Houseman

*”... In the evolution of civilization, if it is to survive, all men cannot fail eventually to adopt his belief that the process of mass application of force to resolve contentions issues is fundamentally not only wrong and useless, but contains within itself the germ of self-destruction. Mahatma Gandhi, however, was one of those prophets who lived far ahead of time” (p. 446).

- General Douglas MacArthur

*”Mr. Gandhi was a man whose greatness belonged not only to his lifetime but to history.... His death must bring home to us all the peril in which we stand, from which the issue can only be won by following the precepts on which his whole life was founded... I believe that like other prophets his greatest work is still to come” (pp. 454-455).

- R.T. Hon. Philip Noel-Baker

Such tributes, however, reflect only one side of the phenomenon called Mahatma Gandhi. Paradoxically, Gandhi has been one of the most venerated and despised persons; this messenger of love has been intensely hated by some. Gandhi could not gain acceptance from many caste Hindus, Muslims, socialists, communists, “*dalit*” leaders, and intellectuals in his own life time. He used to be grossly denounced, denigrated and condemned by some of these people even when he was alive. The criticism and hatred against him have erupted afresh in the recent past. The willful and wanton desecration of his “*samadhi*” and statues, heaping of the worst kind of abuse on him, objecting to his being called the Mahatma, questioning his idiom such as “*harijan*” and “*Ramarajya*”, assaulting Gandhians physically, and so on have been witnessed in recent times. Gandhi was and is still misinterpreted, misrepresented, and misunderstood beyond measure, and these, quite often, were and still are quite deliberate and political.

In such a situation, for the believers in the power of the word, there is no alternative but to explain, in a true Gandhian spirit, again and again the significance and relevance of the Gandhian vision and mission or the Gandhian Alternative. The present book seeks to be a humble effort in this direction. It is hoped that the essays it contains would help to clarify the Gandhian perspective on various issues of contemporary relevance, viz., development, environmental protection, social and economic equality and justice, choice of technology, secularism, peace, etc.

The book is a collection of 18 essays, 13 of which were published earlier, and 5 (essay number 1, 11, 12, 14, and 16) of which have been written for this book. The most of 13 essays published earlier have now been revised in different degrees by adding new material, deleting some matter, and changing certain terms, expressions, and arguments for their inclusion in

this book. The separate introductions to various essays have now been abridged. The earlier manner of giving references and footnotes in different essays has now been changed to make it uniform in all the essays.

Gandhian thought is an integrated whole; various Gandhian concepts, themes, programmes are closely interrelated. This, in addition to the fact that the essays in this book have been written at different points of time, has resulted in a degree of recurrence and repetition of certain ideas, arguments, and expressions in the book. It has also not been possible to follow a perfect scheme of sequencing the essays while presenting them in this book. The readers' indulgence is requested for these limitations. The essays have not been arranged chronologically. Broadly, the essays explaining Gandhian perspective on the State and Market have been presented first, followed by the essays on his personality, his views on consumption, technology, environment, socialism, swadeshi, secularism, peace, and non-violence in that order.

There has been much use of Sanskrit and other Indian terms in various essays in the book. As it is well-recognized, there are no exact equivalent or parallel words in English for many of such terms. It is quite difficult to communicate the precise meaning of such terms to those who are not familiar with them. To focus attention on them, they have been generally given in inverted commas and underlined, or given in italics. For translation of such terms into English, V.S. Apte's Sanskrit-English Dictionary (Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1982) has been relied upon.

Notes

1. All the figures in this paragraph are from GOI, Economic Survey, 1998-99, pp. S-24 to S-26.
2. For discussion with evidence on this issue, See Chapter 5 in this book.
3. The page numbers given at the end of quotations are from Radhakrishnan, 1956.

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