

Contemporary Pandemic and Political “Ideologies”: Prospects From Gandhism

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Contemporary world is not the same, after the declaration by World Health Organisation to Covid-19 as pandemic on 11th March 2020. People’s life and all aspects of it are under the grip of a myriad of questions. Where we are and where will we go? In this stage of crisis, we are experiencing a vacuum, as all available political metanarratives are unable to satisfy our needs and fail to provide opportunities of leading a good life. Political ideologies give us structures, platforms, frameworks for systematisation of thoughts upon which we create our “worldview”. On the basis of these world views, economic and political systems are constructed. The present paper will inquire about how the existing world views are insufficient to create “human good” considering the case of globalization, the hyper state of which has accelerated the movement of goods, services, ideas, and people. But, this stage seems to be over by adding one more word in the list of free movements and that is “viruses”. It has created a stir in the whole world and threat to human security. Similarly, the ideology of neoliberalism has focused only on “economic growth”. But, it is evident now that only by developing economically, we cannot make our lives beautiful. Rather, it is lessening the rhythm and balance between human and nature day by day. The material growth has not been able to help us in contemporary pandemic so far, and there is no doubt that “matter” of this materialism alone does not matter in life. The ideology of materialism seems to get failed visualizing condition of developed world mainly America, Germany, and Italy. Communism has witnessed its downfall after the fall of USSR. Again, communist China has more or less created Covid-19 to make herself a “superpower”. History has shown us how communism has locked human freedom and adversely affected transparency of any system. The biggest problem is with the ideology of utilitarianism which endorses every activity of mankind on the basis of “utility” only justifying the idea of making “greatest benefit of greatest number”. This paper will inquire and critically analyse all the above mentioned ideologies and further suggest the Gandhian values, styles, and ideas for making the world a better place to live.

Keywords: ideology, globalization, neo-liberalism, materialism, communism, utilitarianism, Gandhism

Introduction

The paper analyses political ideologies in contemporary scenario. There is an urgent need to evaluate ideologies as this pandemic has made it clear that we, human beings, need to correct ourselves if human beings want to survive. The world is not the same, after the declaration by World Health Organisation to Covid-19 as pandemic on 11th March 2020. People’s life and all aspects of it are under the grip of a myriad of questions. Where we are and where will we go? In this stage of crisis, we are experiencing a vacuum, as all available political

meta-narratives are unable to satisfy our needs and fail to provide opportunities of leading a good life. It is hereby essential to look at existing ideologies and learn lessons from Gandhism.

Analysing Ideologies in Contemporary Pandemic Times

It is essential to understand what an ideology is. Any comprehensive and mutually consistent set of ideas by which a social group makes sense of the world may be referred to as ideology (McLean & McMillan, 2006, p. 256). Political ideologies give us structures, platforms, frameworks for systematisation of thoughts upon which we create our “worldview”. On the basis of these world views, economic and political systems are constructed. There are major five ideologies analysed here—materialism, utilitarianism, liberalism (neo), globalization, and communism. The ideology of materialism claims that material development alone will bring all happiness in life. Generally: belief that all matter is material welfare, as opposed to spiritual or other ideals. Specifically: Marx and Engels developed that they called “historical materialism” and “dialectical materialism” in reaction to the idealism of earlier 19th-century thinkers (McLean & McMillan, 2006, p. 341). The ideology of materialism seems to be failed seeing condition of developed world mainly America, Germany, and Italy in Covid-19 times. Extreme material development could not solve health hazard and developed world faced more than developing world in terms of human loss of life. They had to depend on the vary factor of the time as the process of vaccine development took a lot of time. Material prosperity of western world could not solve the problem at that moment.

The biggest problem is with the ideology of utilitarianism which endorses every activity of mankind on the basis of “utility” only justifying on the rule of making “the greatest happiness of greatest number”. The ideology of utilitarianism was propounded by Jeremy Bentham and James Mill. The problem with utilitarianism is in its basic idea that is “utility”. Every human act is justified on the basis of utility. For instance, humanities have started costuming everything available on earth as it has nutritional utility. No one thinks for the worth and intrinsic value of particular item. Zoonotic diseases are basically consequence of human utilitarian approach towards life. This homocentric approach has misbalanced nature. Without thinking and analysing non-vegetarian diet has worth or not, we have started using everything as it is accelerating human pleasure and minimising human pain. “Worth” rather than “utility” should be criteria of human act. The real cost of human act must be taken into account.

Further, the ideology of neoliberalism works on market fundamentalism. It believes in the market, reflecting the belief that the market mechanism offers solutions to all economic and social problems (Heywood, 2009, p. 52). Market, ultimately reverses the role of state from welfare state (governmental intervention) to minimal state. Man, in this society has become one-dimensional man (Herbert Marcuse) who is only thinking on economic lines and adopting consumerist culture in affluent industrial society. But, it is evident now that only by developing economically, we cannot make our lives beautiful. Rather, it is lessening the rhythm and balance between human and nature day by day. The material growth has not been able to help us in contemporary pandemic so far, and there is no doubt that “matter” of this materialism alone does not matter in life. Environmental degradation is result of extreme industrialization and urbanisation. In the period of lockdown, it was clear that lessening human activity relaxed environment too. Therefore, neo-liberal state has to be tuned up with nature and social responsibilities.

The free-market-liberalism is spreading across borders as we know it today by the name globalization. We are living in global village. The world is one. Globalization is the emergence of a complex web of interconnectedness that means that our lives are increasingly shaped by events that occur, and decisions that are

made, at a great distance from us. The central feature of globalization is therefore that geographical distance is of declining relevance, and that territorial boundaries, such as those between nation-states, are becoming less significant (Heywood, 2007, p. 143). The hyper state has accelerated the movement of goods, services, ideas, and people. But, this stage seems to be over by adding one more word in the list of free movements and that is “viruses”. It has created a stir in the whole world and threat to human security. Covid-19 could not have spread as pandemic very fast without the rapid speed of globalization. There is an urgent need to recheck the speed of globalization.

The virus originated in china and speeded due to hyper state of globalization. It is very well clear that China has more or less created Covid-19 to make herself a “superpower”. China is a communist country. Communism has witnessed its downfall after the fall of USSR till it’s prevalent in its tendencies in country like China. There is a centripetal tendency of power. The principle of “democratic centralization” is adopted in communist country. History has shown us how communism has locked human freedom and adversely affected transparency of democratic system. Even, in this contemporary pandemic time, international institutions like UNO and WHO were informed on time; Chinese government very hardly tried to hide the real situation. This system is undemocratic based on centralised and secretive power.

An appraisal of all these western ideologies makes it clear that they should not be adopted blindly. We need to look all these critically. Economic prosperity is essential in human life. But, only economic growth is not essential. There are other parameters of human life. At the times of lockdown, everyone was searching for answers. Despite having extreme material growth, advancement of science and technology and human freedom were locked because of virus. What can be another idea for making the world better place to live? Here, there is role of Gandhian thought.

Prospects From Gandhism

Gandhism is more relevant as a constructive ideology for individual, community, and society. The need is to search prospects from Gandhism. Gandhism is basically a way of life. Taking the case of human hygiene, it is very much relevant in pandemic times and Gandhiji has already compared cleanliness to godliness. From the scientific point of view also, the use of wild animals demands a lot of cleanliness and maintenance in the wild animal markets. But, our markets strive for the cheaper price of meat to achieve their short-term economic goal. Whether it is a global seafood market or local meat shops, all are lacking standard of sanity and maintenance. Without proper hygiene, it is very risky to operate them. The maintenance demands high cost which neoliberal economies will not afford. The paper suggests that we should change our narrow mindedness and learn a lesson from the outburst of contemporary zoonosis in the form of Covid-19 and raise the speedy demand for a global ban on wild animal markets. It is high time when human beings need to control the excessive consumerist attitude and raise their level of consciousness for the existence and survival of human species on this planet.

Pandemic taught us that we need to make balance with nature. For Gandhi, man is not atomic entity but he has correlation with ecosystem. It is unethical and morally wrong to use everything available on earth and exploit its natural resources unwisely and indiscriminately. Before making use of them, human beings must think of their worthiness and decision should then be taken based on it rather than the sole purpose of utility. Excessive poaching and killing of wild animals just for the sake of consuming their body parts is creating imbalance in nature by disturbing the entire food chain. We are only a link in different food webs operating in the biosphere on earth. Every creature is not made to be used by humans. Further, it can be unhealthy and futile exercise for

humans as our body is not designed and adapted to intake anything. The ultimate is the greed based ideology of neo-liberalism.

Conclusion

Gandhi was always against western civilization and ecological imbalance. We cannot go back, but a corrective approach is required. Lessons for health, diet, and hygiene are of utmost important. Scholars need to be conscious from being Eurocentric and narrow. The paper confirms that there are various prospects of Gandhism as an ideology, the academicians’ needs to search more and more ways on how Gandhian tactics can be applied to this neo-liberal world.

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