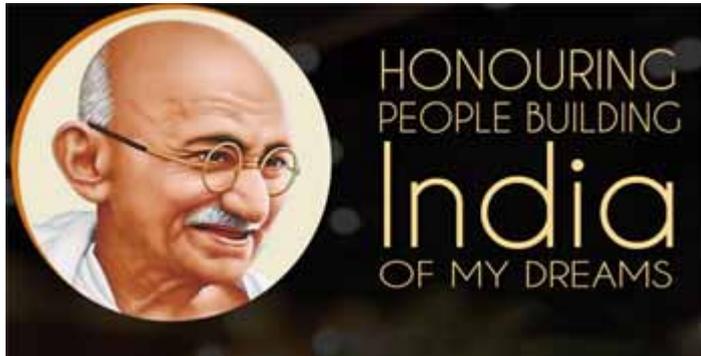


# Managing Covid-19 Crisis in India : Angelic Guidance of Mahatma Gandhi

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- Prof. Navin Mathur -

The whole world is reeling from Covid-19 crisis. Corona, which has suddenly become an infamous household name, and the most dreadful virus this world has ever identified, has caught the medical professionals and administrators off guard.



Covid-19 has arrested the attention of all and sundry- the rich and the poor, the government and the governed, the leaders and the led, the common and the uncommon man, all over the world. The tragic and untimely deaths of lakhs of people due to this disease and increasing number of corona positive cases has entailed fear and panic in public and has put government, policy makers and scientists on their toes. Every one is obsessed with

finding solutions to this most unexpected and crucial problem which cropped up in leaps and bounds in the first quarter of 2020. Scientists are preoccupied with finding a vaccine to counter this dangerous virus, singers are crooning to the TV viewers, yoga experts are busy telling people how to maintain the balance of mind and body, religious leaders are talking about spirituality and realities of life, educationists are busy in online teaching to students and psychologists are suggesting ways to cope with depression and loneliness. Covid-19 is the only topic of discussion in social media. Coronavirus news dominates in all newspapers and on TV channels.

Considering the pitfalls of this disease, many well-known economists and agencies have projected dismal picture of the Indian and the world economy. Undoubtedly, social and economic condition of masses is in doldrums. Poverty continues to be the most baffling problem. While social distancing, lockdown and curfew are the need of the hour, the fact remains that the closure of almost all industries and institutions has increased the problem of unemployment, hunger and malnutrition. The stringent administrative measures to combat spread of corona virus has further aggravated the problem of poverty. It is vital and relevant to deliberate upon the remedies available to face the socio-economic challenges posed by Covid-19. These challenges are profound in India as it is a big country, spread over two thousand miles from north to south and one thousand seven hundred miles from east to west with a population of one hundred thirty-six crores having a sizeable number of daily wage earners in the unorganized sector. That the number of deaths in proportion to population are very low in India in comparison to that in developed countries like the USA, UK and France should not give solace as the Indian philosophy is based on the premise of 'Sarvjan Hitay Sarvjan Sukhay'.

India has a great intellectual history and is the land of eminent saints, spiritual mentors, reformists and philosophers. Mahatma Gandhi, hailed as the Father of the Nation, as also Man of the Millennium, belongs to this league of saints and reformists who have always shown the path of enlightenment to everyone.

Gandhian thoughts on social and economic development, business management, life at home and work place and self-management are of immense value and practical use in dealing with the present pathetic

conditions created by Covid-19 disease. A legion of ideas can be derived from his public speeches, letters and writings as well as from his life style which are of tremendous significance in managing present crisis.

Gandhi, greatly influenced by Bhagwat Gita and Sermon on the Mount, preached and practiced truth and non-violence. Unfortunately, in this period of severe crisis, the country is witnessing fake news about cure of coronavirus on social media ( for example, drinking water every fifteen minutes can prevent one from catching the virus; one bowl of freshly boiled garlic water can cure corona virus). Cases have been registered against those spreading fake news which are misleading or wittingly promoting community clashes. For instance, in Rajasthan, 153 persons have been put behind bars on grounds of spreading fake news. Over two hundred cases have been registered in Maharashtra for fake news. Wrong information is circulated in international media too. China, the birthplace of Covid -19, is not supplying full and correct information about the coronavirus disease, forcing other countries to only speculate about the disease—its causes and cures.

Stone pelting, attacks on doctors and medical staff and other innocent “corona warriors” engaged in service to public are shocking. The attack on medical staff in Indore, killing of sadhus in Maharashtra, chopping off of hand of a police officer on duty in Punjab, attacks on police and doctors in UP, Tamil Nadu, Bihar and some other states are very heartbreaking, especially when these untoward cases are reported in the land of Gandhi. It is reported by ACLED (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project) that sixty eight percent of the total incidents of violence against doctors worldwide have taken place in India alone in about forty-five days since mid of February this year. These attacks have compelled the government to make law tougher for culprits and slap National Security Act in some states. Truth and non-violence, the two Gandhian Mantras, must be at the core of head and heart of every citizen.

Gandhi had a very comprehensive perception of non-violence. He vehemently opposed killing of animals. He was a staunch follower of vegetarianism and said that meat was not man’s food. SARS coronavirus, identified in 2003, is believed to have moved from horse-shoe bats to cat-like civets before infecting humans. Sadly, the world did not learn a lesson then and wet market continued to flourish, and use of non-vegetarian food went on unabated in many countries. It is high time that the world realizes the necessity of use of vegetarian food, the importance of which was underlined by Gandhi.

Gandhi also advocated self-discipline. Self-quarantine, social distancing and other forms of self-discipline are of utmost importance in fighting corona virus. While the Indian government issued advisory for all travellers coming from abroad to self-quarantine, many disobeyed the same. As a consequence, some travellers infected a legion of people including their near and dear ones. A few persons who came from abroad infected a very large number of people in Pink City of India, making it a hot spot of coronavirus. Gatherings in marriages, religious functions, cremation grounds and in other celebrations, getting out of house for fun in spite of lockdown and curfew, that too without mask, exemplify lack of seriousness about self-discipline. The assembling of a very large number of migrant workers and of a community in Delhi in spite of lockdown and slapping of Section 144 took everyone by surprise. Police force is awkwardly busy all the time in dealing with such law violators. Over a thousand cases have been registered against lockdown violators in Rajasthan alone during one month of lockdown. Over one lakh vehicles have been seized in the state. However, the remedy is not police action but self-discipline as advocated by Gandhi.

Another lesson is for business houses. Gandhi propounded the concept of trusteeship. His advice to businessmen was, “ we should regard ourselves not as owners but as trustees of our wealth and use it for the service of society, taking for ourselves no more than a fair return for service rendered.”. He opined that this earth provides enough to satisfy every man’s needs, but not every man’s greed. But, regretfully, in India and elsewhere too, most of the wealth is in the hands of a few persons. Millions of people sleep hungry every day all over the world while rich enjoy a lavish life style and wish to acquire as much wealth as possible by all means, ethical or unethical, lawful or unlawful. The only temporary solace is that business houses and celebrities have donated a huge amount to government and other bodies to control coronavirus disease in India. In future too, corporates and other business organizations, big or small, must

think of society and poor people first and work as trustees of their wealth as advised by Gandhi.

Gandhi had a great respect for women. It is distressing to note that during lockdown the number of cases of crime against women have increased significantly. For example, in Punjab, cases of domestic violence against women increased by twenty-one percent during lockdown. The National Commission for Women has expressed deep concern over rising cases of violence against women in India during lockdown. When the country is celebrating the 150th anniversary of Gandhi, the people of India should resolve to respect women.

During Covid-19 crisis and lockdown labour is worst hit. Gandhi always believed that capital and labour should supplement and help each other. They should be a great family, living in unity and harmony. After lockdown, industrialists should create a cordial working environment and take full care of the health of workers.

Gandhi also underlined the importance of quality in products. FSSAI has already pointed out adulteration in milk and milk products as well as in other items like paints, detergents, etc. After sudden lockdown, there was tremendous spurt in the demand of sanitizers, food items and other essentials. This led to supply of adulterated and poor-quality products in the market. A racket involving production of fake sanitizers was busted in Hyderabad after it sold one lakh bottles of sanitizers to the tune of over one crore rupees. Fake sanitizers were seized in many states including J&K, Haryana, Karnataka, and Maharashtra, to mention a few. Recently, questions were raised about quality of rapid testing kits supplied by China. According to Gandhi, products must have nobility or benevolence in its making, operating or its disposal. He went beyond functional, symbolic and esthetic values of a product and pleaded for spiritual values in it.

“Cleanliness is next to godliness” was not just a slogan for Gandhi, but a gospel truth which he advocated passionately all his life. In the contemporary times, the government has realized the importance of this maxim and has promoted it through projects like Swachh Bharat Abhiyan and, it now it has become a major weapon against coronavirus, the world over. What a visionary Gandhi was.

Gandhi advocated inclusive growth and self-dependent villages. There are over six lakh villages in the country and most of the people live in villages. In spite of a wide array of socio-economic programs initiated by the central and state governments in the country, villages could not become self-dependent and villagers flocked to urban areas to seek employment. It is pertinent to point out that Abdul Kalam, the Missile Man and former President of India, suggested adoption of PURA model (Providing Urban Amenities to Rural Areas). As a sequel to coronavirus disease in big cities, people have gone back to villages and are facing problem of unemployment. Cottage and tiny industries have almost vanished in most of the villages. Lack of infrastructure and transport facilities, shortage of power, water and irrigation facilities and illiteracy have restricted the economic growth of villages. Things would have been different today had the Gandhian model of development of villages been at the core of country's economic policy.

The thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi are invariably valid and relevant in 2020 and are of perennial significance as they are based on humanity and aimed at welfare and progress of human beings. In fact, Gandhi's instinctive love for mankind, especially for the poor, innate nobility, humility and quest to serve the country made him rise in life and gave him a moral stature that nation needs to adore in present crisis caused by Covid-19.

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