

GANDHI AND NEW INDIA

Mahatma Gandhi's role and influence in shaping New India is indisputable. In my opinion, he is still as relevant a person and a philosopher in the twenty-first century as he was in the previous one. For instance, in this globalized, tech-savvy world, the concepts of '*sarva dharma sama bhaav*', or all religions are the same, and '*sarva dharma sada bhaav*', or goodwill towards all religions, professed by Gandhi-ji, are essential to maintain an atmosphere of harmony and compassion and to realize his idea of '*vasudhaiva kutumbakam*' (the world is one family).

I recently attended a conference, where it was discussed that social media is progressively becoming a platform for spreading and propagating extreme views. And common people, like you and I, are suffering because of misinformation and extremities. In such a scenario, it is essential that we abide by *sarva dharma sama bhaav* and *sarva dharma sada bhaav*, that we follow Gandhi-ji's lessons to use compassion to counter extreme views. His ideas have become even more pertinent to our times.

Scottish historian Thomas Carlyle had coined the phrase 'dismal science' as another term for economics in the nineteenth century. This was apparently inspired by English scholar T.R. Malthus' prediction that populations would always grow faster than food production, thereby, dooming mankind to unending poverty and hardship. This is also referred to as 'economics' central problem: the mismatch between unlimited wants and limited resources. However, in India, we have always believed in rational consumption as opposed to unlimited wants, and therefore, consumerism hasn't been able to take roots that easily in our nation.

Gandhi-ji laid a lot of emphasis on preserving our ecosystems, on using everything organic and eco-friendly, reducing our consumption to not create any stress on the environment. For this, he even reduced his own consumption demands. Unfortunately, today, we have reached a stage where we have become a burden on nature and the goal of *vasudhaiva kutumbakam* seems unattainable. So we must follow in his footsteps, start a conversation around our fragile ecology and how we are inching closer towards destroying it, and discuss ways to rationalize our demands.

I feel we have put Gandhi-ji on a pedestal and worship him like a God. However, the time has come for us to make his thoughts and philosophy a part of our economic policy and day-to-day lives. This is essential to internalize and embrace the Gandhian way of life. And I'm glad to say the incumbent Central government is striving to make the Mahatma's vision and philosophy a part of its economic policy.

'I will give you a talisman. Whenever you are in doubt, or when the self becomes too much with you, apply the following test. Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man [woman] whom you may

have seen, and ask yourself, if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him [her]. Will he [she] gain anything by it? Will it restore him [her] to a control over his [her] own life and destiny? In other words, will it lead to swaraj [freedom] for the hungry and spiritually starving millions? Then you will find your doubts and your self melting away.'

This thought of Gandhi-ji has been echoed by the World Bank and many renowned economists, where they have emphasized that it is important to go down to the base of the pyramid. Former World Bank chief economist François Bourguignon had said the welfare of a country can be assessed by measuring the living standard of the last decile of its population. And, I think, this is what we should be doing in our country. This is the same concept of '*antyodaya*' that Deen Dayal Upadhyay had espoused, which is to take care of the person at the end of the queue. If the person at the end of the queue or at the bottom rung of the ladder is brought to the fore/lifted up, only then can a country develop. However, this has begun to change now.

A dualistic social and economic structure has been established in India. 90 per cent of our people are in the informal sector and a huge demographic is still below the poverty line. There is a divide between urban and rural areas, between the elite and the masses, between those who espouse the Western culture and those who don't. This duality is in stark contrast to Gandhi-ji's philosophy and we must try to close this gap. We must strive to raise the living standard of those who are at the bottom of the pyramid, at the end of the queue, in all aspects, be it education or health or economic benefit. Thankfully, and I'm happy to share this with you, according to a recent study by UNDP, in the past eight years, we have been able to lift 20 crore people above the poverty line. This is a big achievement. We are on the right track and hopefully, we'll be able to end poverty in my lifetime. But for that, we have to deep-dive into Gandhi-ji's philosophy.

Let me give you an example: the actual freedom struggle began with the 1857 mutiny, which was an important but an unsuccessful event to wrest control of India from the East India Company. It led to the transfer of powers from the Company to the British Crown. This was followed by the establishment of the Indian National Congress in 1885 by Allan Octavian Hume. Till 1929, there was no mention of '*purna swaraj*' or absolute freedom. And it was only in 1942, during the Quit India Movement, that Gandhi-ji called for freedom and the independence struggle turned into a people's struggle. Every man and woman in every part of our country became a part of the freedom struggle. My grandfather was a matriculate but he never desired to be a government servant because it was against his ideology; likewise, many people, following Gandhi-ji's teachings, dropped their caste names. It was only when everyone, in some way or another, pitched in, that we, in the next five years itself, gained freedom.

Today, to realize the vision of New India—if we want our country to become more thriving and prosperous—development has to be an agenda for everyone, something that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has mentioned many times. We have to make development a people's struggle. So, as a student,

teacher or economist, all our decisions have to be motivated by this larger goal, and as Gandhi-ji had said, our actions have to be guided by the desire to uplift the poor and for the welfare of our nation. If we, as a people, internalize this goal, nothing in the world can stop India from becoming a five-trillion-dollar economy by 2022.

In this regard, NITI Aayog is preparing a vision document, according to which we must try to double our per capita income every five years. China has done so successfully, and so have we, from 2003–11. Suppose our per capita income is \$2000 today, then in the next twenty or thirty years, or by the time India celebrates 100 years of its independence in 2047, we would easily become a sixty-trillion-dollar economy and the second- or third-most powerful economic power in the world. However, we can achieve this only through a people's struggle. And for that, we have to see beyond ourselves and aim for the larger good. If we only clean our houses and not the stairway outside, then what's the point of Swachh Bharat? And if we can't shed our narrowmindedness, then we won't be able to achieve anything as a nation.

So how do we embark on Gandhi-ji's way? I've summarized it in ten points, which our government is trying to achieve. First is our economic policy, which needs to have everyone's participation, development and trust or '*sabka sath, sabka vikas, sabka vishwaas*'. Second, we want a clean India, third, a healthy India, and fourth, a capable India. Fifth, we want a prosperous country, sixth, our women should be empowered, and seventh, good governance. Eighth is swaraj gram and ninth is sustainable farming. The final point is a secure India that can appropriately respond to internal and external threats. Now I will elaborate on these, but in case you feel that we, in the government, aren't following the above goals or working against them, you must give us feedback on the same.

Sabka Sath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwaas

The most important and critical point among the above is *sabka sath, sabka vikas, sabka vishwaas*. It is imperative that the fruits of development are made available to all sections of society, including minorities, dalits, women and tribal communities; no one should be left behind. This is our humble effort. We at NITI Aayog are fully committed towards achieving this goal. In fact, if you've been observing the policies of this government for the past five years, you'd have realized that it puts a lot of emphasis on inclusion and strives to end all discrimination. *Sabka sath, sabka vikas, sabka vishwaas* is a goal towards which the government is working.

Swachh Bharat

Gandhi-ji had once said, 'Sanitation is more important than independence.' Following his words, for the first time in the history of this nation, a prime minister exhorted the citizens from the ramparts of the Red Fort on Independence Day to strive towards making India clean. It is no secret that sanitation

is a big issue in India, something that becomes immensely clear when one travels in a railway train. For those of us who stay in the national capital of Delhi, in a *swachh* or clean India, cleanliness might not be a big deal; however, it is a stark reality for many in this country. And to help them clean up, the government has built over 11 crore toilets in the past five years, and declared rural India open-defecation free on 2 October 2019. Yes, it's all right to point out that many of those toilets aren't working or there is no water in them; however, understand this, the effort in itself has created unprecedented mass awareness. The fact that when one goes to a village in the hinterland, the women don't have to go outside to relieve themselves is a testimony in itself. The dysfunctional toilets will be up and running soon but at least a solid foundation has been laid. This will have a huge bearing on the health of the children and women of this country. Swachh Bharat Mission, in fact, has helped reduce diarrhoea and malaria among children below five years, still birth, and low birth weight. Unfortunately, to date 38 per cent of children in India are malnourished, a major cause of which is waterborne diseases such as diarrhoea. However, to deal with such problems and to ensure every household gets water, the Jal Shakti Ministry has been carved out.

Swasth Bharat

A *swachh* India will automatically lead us to a healthy India. Gandhi-ji had said, 'Prevention is better than cure.' I've observed that among today's youth, the trend is to walk at least 10,000 steps in a day, which is barely 7 km or so, as opposed to the 18 km that Gandhi-ji walked every day in his life. During his campaigns from 1913 to 1948, he walked around 79,000 km! He firmly believed in staying healthy and fit, the echoes of which we find in the government's Ayushman Bharat Yojana. For the first time in the history of this country, 50 crore people have been assured that the cost of their hospitalization will be borne by the government. A great advantage of this scheme is that it will likely lead to the mushrooming of small nursing homes and hospitals in tier-II and tier-III cities, which hadn't happened earlier as the people in those areas couldn't afford such services. This would be a much-needed development to relieve the burden on hospitals in metropolitan cities in, hopefully, another 5–10 years. One need only visit Safdarjung Hospital in south Delhi to understand what I'm talking about. At any hour, on any day of the year, one finds a number of people squatting or sleeping outside the hospital on the roads.

I'm the Director of POSHAN Abhiyaan, which was started on 8 March 2018. It is a multi-ministerial convergence mission with the vision to ensure that India is malnutrition-free by 2022. A UNICEF report recently found out that malnutrition has come down from 38 per cent to 34 per cent in India in the past 5–6 years. However, we still have to address the remaining 34 per cent. To put it in perspective, one child out of three is still malnourished. To make it worse, so many of our women are still anaemic. According to the UNICEF report, I think, anaemia in Indian women has come down to 46 per cent, which is still an appalling figure. In fact, in as many as 200 districts across the country, nearly 65 per

cent women are still anaemic. Under POSHAN Abhiyaan, we are striving to reduce malnutrition by 2 per cent every year.

At NITI Aayog, I've laid a lot of emphasis on the need for an integrated medicinal course. It is time for us to stop thinking about Unani or Siddha or Ayurveda as inferior, not to mention Gandhi-ji championed these medicinal schools during his lifetime. I'm glad to say that for the past two years, I've focused a lot on this and we'll soon be having a medical science seminar along the same lines. We've also made an advisory committee, comprising representatives from AIIMS; Institute of Liver and Biliary Sciences; Dr H.R. Nagendra, the chancellor of S-VYASA; V.R. Kotecha, the secretary, Ministry of AYUSH; and Dr V.K. Paul, member, NITI Aayog. We are carrying out extensive research in Ayurveda and striving to publish our papers in the world's most-renowned and coveted journals. That Ayurveda works, people know; in fact, I am one of its beneficiaries. However, there isn't enough clinical evidence to prove the same. Our effort is to enable the recognition of the potential and value of Ayurveda, just like the Chinese have done for their traditional medicine, which has now been cleared by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for use in their country. To do the same, we have to take integrated medicine, our legacy forward, and not believe that our heritage is inferior. I am working very closely with my colleagues at NITI Aayog on this and am certain that we will be successful.

Saksham Bharat

Our fourth goal is to make India capable. In my view, Gandhi-ji always wanted India to be a prosperous and capable country and we have undertaken many steps to achieve this. Everyone must have heard of the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana, a financial-inclusion programme, under which over 37 crore bank accounts have been opened. It is unimaginable that till now 37 crore people in India didn't have bank accounts. Over one lakh crore rupees have been deposited in these accounts. Critics say the accounts lie unused. However, think about how easily and quickly a direct benefit transfer can be done now. Some 370 schemes have been implemented using this Yojana. Today, we are running pilots in which we can give fertilizer subsidy; tomorrow, we can do the same for food subsidy. All those who were earlier outside the purview of the formal banking system have now been included through Jan Dhan.

I was in the United Nations in July and realized many people in the world today are appreciating this scheme. Jan Dhan can become an example for other countries. Apart from Jan Dhan, there is Skill India, under which the National Skill Development Corporation India (NSDC), a public-private-partnership company, has been set up with the primary mandate of catalysing the skills landscape in India. The Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY 1.0) was launched in 2015 to provide employable skills to the youth of the nation. Under PMKVY 1.0, a total of 19.85 lakh candidates have been trained. Owing to the success of PMKVY 1.0, the scheme was relaunched in October 2016, called PMKVY 2.0. As on June 2019, a total of 52.12 lakh candidates had been trained under PMKVY 2.0.

To make India more competent, we also have Start-up India. We have emerged as the second-largest start-up economy in the world, and according to the Department of Industry Policy and Promotion, there are over 24,000 start-ups in India today. Through NITI Aayog's Atal Innovation Mission, we are trying to further this cause. We have set up forty-seven incubation centres for facilitating the inception of more start-ups.

A capable or competent India means that every person should be able to enable themselves in such a way that they can pursue their livelihood. To make our citizens more able, the government has also started the Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana, under which more than 20 crore loans have been given to date and the amount sanctioned is Rs 9.8 lakh crore. So, I believe, that with these schemes, we will be able to lift those at the bottom of the pyramid.

This is the picture of changing India, moving in the direction that Gandhi-ji had envisioned.

Samridh Bharat

Atal Innovation Mission is a flagship initiative set up by NITI Aayog to promote innovation and entrepreneurship across the length and breadth of the country, based on a detailed study and deliberations on innovation and entrepreneurial needs of India in the years ahead. I must also mention that all ministries and state governments are designing and implementing schemes to achieve Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

Mission Chandrayaan-2 is the second lunar exploration mission developed by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), after Chandrayaan-1. The scientific objective was to map and study the variations in lunar surface composition, as well as the location and abundance of lunar water.

The private sector is integral to fostering innovation and entrepreneurship and ensuring the progress of our economy. Private sector investments provide necessary infrastructure that is sustainable and reliable. It uses modern technology to create new products and services. And public-private partnerships need to channel private sector funds into crucial areas of development. The Indian government has introduced various formats in order to attract private investments, especially in roads and highways, airports, industrial parks and higher education and skill development sectors. For example, the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana, which was started by the previous government, has ensured there is a paved road in every village now. All villages have now been electrified. Soon, all houses will be lit up too.

In order to make India more prosperous and reach our goal of becoming a five-trillion-dollar economy by 2025–26 and double our personal income and per capita income every five years, we have to work very hard. But this is based on the criterion that the able men and women of our country will find work.

If there is unemployment in the country, if the youth sits idle at home, we won't be able to achieve any of our goals. At NITI Aayog, we are trying to achieve our employment target.

Our education system should be such that it churns out employable people. Unfortunately, the condition of our higher education is not very good at this time. We are trying to improve it. And a prosperous India would mean that in 2047, our nation would be the third-largest economy in the world.

Sashakt Naari

Gandhi-ji was the foremost proponent of women's empowerment. He openly advocated that girls should be educated, widows should be remarried and the purdah system should be abolished. He drew women out of their homes and into the mainstream. They formed his army of supporters in the mass movement for freedom struggle.

There is an old adage, '*Yatr naariyaan poojyante tatr ramante devata*,' which means where women are worshipped, the gods reside. Shiva is inert until Shakti is with him. We must make our economic policy and country as non-discriminatory in terms of gender as possible. To drive home this awareness, the government started the Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao Yojana. Then, under the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala scheme, 8 crore women were given gas connections. Critics will point out that the women aren't able to buy a second cylinder. Yes, I know, we are working towards resolving that problem. We are trying to provide bigger cylinders under the scheme. For this, I have approached Indian Oil and HP to make 5 kg cylinders. But, at least, a foundation has been laid, we will work on it to make it better.

To ensure the safety of women, the Government of India has also come up with the Nirbhaya Fund. But the biggest game changer, in my view, is education. We must educate our girls; they must study till Class XII. For that we can provide incentives to their parents so they aren't taken out of school to work or for marriage. This will require a lot of work. Some states have already done something similar and we are talking to the others about the same.

Suraaj

Gandhi-ji had dreamt of Ram Rajya, where there would be absolute good governance and transparency. He wrote in *Young India* (19 September 1929), 'By Ram Rajya I do not mean Hindu Raj. I mean Ram Raj, the kingdom of God. For me, Ram and Rahim are one and the same; I acknowledge no other God than the one God of truth and righteousness. Whether the Ram of my imagination ever lived on this earth, the ancient ideal of the Ramayana is undoubtedly one of true democracy in which the meanest citizen could be sure of swift justice without an elaborate and costly procedure.' In *Amrit Bazar Patrika*, on 2 August 1934, he said, 'Ramayana of my dreams ensures equal rights to both prince and pauper.' Again, in *Harijan* of 2 January 1937, he wrote, 'I have described Ram Rajya, that is, sovereignty of the people based on moral authority.'

I must impress upon everyone that good governance is one of the pillars of this government. There is proactive disclosure of all regular information and data by all ministries online. The roles and responsibilities of government officials and political executive are very clearly defined.

Every government office now has a digital attendance biometric attendance system. Every day we are striving to digitize the functions of the government and make them more transparent.

The government has identified 112 aspirational districts in the country and NITI Aayog monitors them daily on forty-nine indicators. Our effort is to bring these districts at par with the others, or even better, above the rest. We are following Gandhi-ji's words and trying to bring the people at the end of queue to the fore.

At NITI Aayog, we believe strongly in the spirit of competitive federalism. We believe in healthy competition between states and for that purpose, we have come up with several rankings to assess their performance in education, conservation and rescue of water, health and nourishment, and innovation. We name the states, and the reason for doing so is to enable their leaderships to understand how their respective states are doing compared to the others.

Good competitive governance will replace competitive populism, which is what, it has been said, we are stuck in.

Swaraj Gram

‘The independence of India should mean the independence of the whole of India [. . .] Independence must begin at the bottom. Thus, every village will be a republic [. . .] It follows therefore that every village has to be self-sustained and capable of managing its affairs. In this structure composed of innumerable villages, there will be ever-widening, ever-ascending circles. Life will be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom.’

To achieve this dream of Gandhi-ji, village panchayats and gram sabhas have been made the focal point of local development administration. To strengthen and empower gram swaraj, 100% of the finance commission funds of panchayats are given to village panchayats. The government is determined to make this happen at all costs; especially in the aspirational districts, the fund is crucial for the development of gram panchayats and urban local bodies. Under the Fourteenth Finance Commission grants worth Rs 2.88 lakh crore were distributed to the states for strengthening duly elected gram panchayats and municipal bodies for five years.

Satat Krishi

Mahatma Gandhi dreamt of a harmonious relationship between humans and nature. He believed in self-sustainable agriculture farming. Sadly, our agricultural sector is in a crisis today. We have a stock of 70

million tonnes of foodgrain, but the price is so high we cannot export it. Despite the fact that there are so many malnourished people in our country, we are forced to raise the cost and increase the minimum support price. At least 43 to 45 per cent of our working population is engaged in agriculture, and the sector contributes 14 to 16 per cent of the GDP. So, one can understand how much the productivity is. The Prime Minister wants the farmers' income to be doubled but with no increase in agricultural output. We have to improve our labour productivity and yield in all crops and focus on capacity building of farmers. Our costs must be globally competitive.

At NITI, I have focused a lot on zero budget natural farming, the brainchild of Subhash Palekar, from Vidarbha's Amravati district, who has been researching on this technique for the past twenty-three years. Zero budget natural farming (ZBNF) will meet our food security requirements and lead to a healthier and wealthier India. There is no space for chemical inputs in the traditional Indian farming system. It is important that we urge more and more farmers to move away from the usage of pesticides and chemical fertilizers and adopt zero budget natural farming, which is already being practised by 25 lakh farmers in the country. I have myself seen its effects, from Andhra Pradesh to Madhya Pradesh and from Uttar Pradesh to Himachal Pradesh. It is important that the rest of the country also follows suit.

Today there is a lot of emphasis on agroecology in the world. On the one hand French President Emmanuel Macron has declared that in the next four years he will ban the use of pesticides in his country, on the other, in India, we have a 'cancer train' that ferries dozens of passengers from Bhatinda to Bikaner. Organic farming is the answer to such grave repercussions of the usage of chemicals in agricultural practices. It doubles the organic content in the soil, reduces the carbon content and cuts down the usage of water to one-fifth, as the capacity of the soil to absorb atmospheric water vapour is enhanced and there is no need to water it separately. This has been studied and proven by the University of Agriculture in Hisar, Haryana.

The Ministry of Agriculture has been fully involved in this effort. And in the next budget, you will find that more work will be done on this. The Prime Minister himself mentioned it in Parliament and the government believes that it will significantly address rural distress. We also have to convince our agricultural scientists to join us in this endeavour and to help in its countrywide implementation.

Surakshit Bharat

The tenth and last goal is to make our country more secure. Recently I visited the Cochin Shipyard and went aboard Indigenous Aircraft Carrier 1, which will begin sea trials in the next two years.

India must become self-reliant in terms of its defence equipment. I am glad to inform we have added Tejas and Akash to our air fleet and BrahMos and other missiles to our arsenal. The government wants to cut down defence imports drastically. For the first time, we have a government policy around this.

However, internal security is more important, and for which, as Ashok Pradhan Saheb has said, we need harmonious coexistence of communities. We must strive to reach hitherto impenetrable and backward areas, whether they are tribal, naxal-affected or along the border. In the hills of Kumaon and Garhwal, as many as 200 villages have witnessed mass migration of their residents, who've left in search for better opportunities and lack of facilities. The ghost villages are a clarion call for us to work vigorously on achieving regional equity sans discrimination. For this, we must ensure and assure internal security to our citizens. In this regard, the most important thing is for us to make sure that our young people are effectively and productively engaged and employed in our country and that the economy takes care of them.

This government, you must have observed, is trying to enshrine Gandhi-ji's philosophy and principles in its economic policies. Following the Mahatma's thoughts and our Prime Minister's words, we are striving to create an economic system, where neither the pressure nor the absence of the government is felt, and support New India with the pillars of growth and employment, inclusiveness, cleanliness and transparency.

In all our efforts, we must include corporate India as well. Gone are the old days of the Adam Smith profit-maximisation capitalism. Now is the age of the triple-bottom-line framework, where companies have to focus on social and environmental concerns as well. I have worked with corporate India previously and believe that it will understand this, and when that will happen, we will have a true team India.