



Deendayal Upadhyaya's philosophy of antyodaya: A way to protect from economic and social injustice in Covid period

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Abstract

The whole world has been going through a Covid-19 pandemic since March 2020. India has not been left out of the pandemic. Many lives have been lost in India and throughout the world. The rupee is depreciating continuously. The Covid 19 caused inequalities across many income groups. It has disrupted the very important access to health services, essential medicines etc. it has also brought in front of the public the gaps in health information systems of many countries including India. (WTO, 2021). The pandemic has led to the big migration, many walked on foot due to countrywide lockdown. The loss of jobs, absence of socio-economic insecurity and access to daily ration were the main problems faced by marginalized sections of society with special emphasis on migrant labours.

India must rethink her development paradigm and make it more inclusive. The philosophy of Antyodaya talks about the upliftment of the last person in society. It deals with the marginalized sections of society with special emphasis on the upward development of the most disadvantaged groups in society. It also talks about reducing the gap between rich and poor. The philosophy of Sarvodaya talks about the upliftment of all. On the other hand, the Philosophy of Antyodaya does not compromise with the upliftment of the least advantaged of the society. Right to good health, right to access primary goods, Food, ration, and social security including the right to livelihood with dignity is the subject of the state. The liberal society also accepts the primary needs to be fulfilled or taken care of by the welfare state. This paper intends to argue that if the philosophy of Antyodaya is followed in India, it will be beneficial to eradicate the rising social and economic inequality. It also argues that it may be useful not only in India but in other countries which has the same rising economic inequality issues.

Keywords: antyodaya, justice, distributive Justice, procedural justice, primary goods, basic needs

Introduction

COVID-19 is a disease caused by a new coronavirus called SARS-CoV-2. WHO first learned of this new virus on 31 December 2019, following a report of a cluster of cases of 'viral pneumonia in Wuhan, People's Republic of China. (WHO, 2020: Q&A Column). The emergence of SARS-CoV-2 was first noticed when cases of unknown pneumonia were seen in Wuhan, China. Initially, some connections between the early cases and Wuhan Market cases were mainly reported in dealers and vendors. The authorities of the Country closed the market on 1 January 2020 for environmental sanitation and disinfection. In the beginning, the market was considered an epicenter of the pandemic. Investigations identified additional cases concerning Wuhan, which were not the same. (WHO, 2021: 9).

(Kadir, 2020) argues that diseases similar to pneumonia cases began to emerge in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China in December 2019. The studies say that cases that emerged were a new type of coronavirus. these were not earlier discovered. This form was called Coronavirus 2019, or we may call it COVID-19 since it appeared in 2019. Bats have been identified as the hosts of a series of important zoonotic viruses including coronaviruses with considerable genetic diversity.

WHO Guidelines suggest how human beings can protect themselves. It suggested staying safe by taking some simple precautions, such as physical distancing, wearing a face mask, especially when distancing is difficult to be maintained, keeping rooms well ventilated, avoiding crowds unnecessarily and close contact, regularly cleaning your hands, and coughing into a bent elbow or tissue. (WHO, 2020).

It is very much clear that Public gatherings, restrictions for not going into the crowds were introduced by WTO signatory countries which included India too. Nationwide lockdown measures were also introduced. These precautions saved many human lives on the one hand but brought many economic and social hardships to them on the other. India is not left alone. It has seen a lack of jobs. It has also been noticed that many scholars have dropped out of the education system due to a lack of financial and mentor support. (RTI filed in school of social science, JNU, 2020).

India needs the policy to address the issues that emerged during and after the pandemic. The issues may include job losses, financial burdens, Psychological disorders, etc. (Atalan, 2020) argues that Lockdown has been related to human psychology. It was determined that stress (8.0%) and depression (16.0–28.0%) were psychological reactions during the COVID-19 pandemic. He also raises some serious questions about the Countries and their measures. He says measures taken by countries against this epidemic brought an unprecedented economic disaster. The global pandemic has been dealt with in many studies on the socio-economic effects of the world economy. Almost 90% of the world had used social isolation. People were not allowed to go on the streets, workplaces were closed. Flights were concealed.

He asks, In terms of the extent of destruction in the economy during the pandemic and the speed of the expected recovery after the pandemic at what level and when the outbreak will be brought under control, how long the current social distance/isolation oriented measures will be loosened and when it will begin to normalize in the expansionary economic measures already taken (Atalan, 2020: 41-42).

(Uzus, 2020) argues that the psychological consequences of COVID-19 may be permanent in healthcare professions. Frontline employees, especially those dealing with emergency services, are at risk. Something has to be done to alleviate the effects of the epidemic on mental health. We need to protect and promote the psychological well-being of these Frontline employees.

Looking at the effects of Covid 19, It becomes important for us to look at the solutions to the issues that emerged due to the pandemic. The rising social and economic inequality is a matter of concern in the present scenario. Therefore we, now, will look for the possible solutions which can be retrieved from the philosophy of Antyodaya.

Conceptualizing Antyodaya Philosophy

Generally, it is believed in the west that man has to promote the happiness of mankind in the majority. It is also believed that happiness is only physical happiness and economic prosperity. While pursuing happiness, the laws of morality do not matter to them. their objective is very much clear. They just want to achieve the happiness of a minority. They believe that there is no wrong if happiness is secured by sacrificing the interest of others. This kind of search for economic and physical well-being is contrary to the divine law. John Ruskin also contended that Human Beings can only be happy if they obey laws of morality. (Ruskin, 1940).

One day when Mr. Gandhi was sitting in a vegetarian restaurant, he met with Mr. Polak. He was the Sub-editor of "The Critique", A British Journal. Mr. Polak gave a book by John Ruskin. The book was, "Unto This Last. Gandhi (1869-1948) was very much impressed by Ruskin's book. Gandhi paraphrased it and in years translated this paraphrased version into Gujarati and named it "Sarvodaya". The word 'Sarvodya' is taken from the language, Sanskrit. It is composed of 'Sarva' and Udaya. Sarva means all and 'Udaya' means rising. Therefore the etymological meaning becomes rising of all. It is very important to note here that this All comprises 'all living beings. Gandhi wrote three teachings of this book in his autobiography one, the good of an individual is repressed in the good of all. Second, the value of the work of a lawyer has an equal value of the work of a barber because both of them have the same right to earn from their work. Third, The life of the tiler and the life of the handicraftsman are both worth living. Gandhi understood both the above two principles and the third principle was introduced to him by Ruskin's Unto This Last. (Desai, 1993: 157).

The Philosophy of Sarvodaya was propounded by Gandhi and later Vinoba Bhave and Jayaprakash Narayan translated it into action. Although Gandhi was not one who originally coined this Sarvodaya philosophy. Before him, The roots of Sarvodaya can be found in religious books. The following are Vedas, The Ramayana, Upanishads, The Gita, The Quran, etc. Even many Indian and western saints and Philosophers preached this philosophy. But Gandhi was the one who extended the meaning and application of these ideas and principles.

Vinoba Bhave considers two-fold meanings of Sarvodaya. Firstly, Sarvodaya means ensuring everyone's happiness by removing their suffering and also removing poverty from society with the help of scientific knowledge. Secondly, Sarvodaya also means an ideal world that can be established with kindness, divinity, and equality. The philosophy of Sarvodaya does not believe in the principle of rising a few or many. It is not Utilitarian in nature. It talks about microorganisms of both, minority and majority. It is the voice of one and all. Similarly, it is the voice of high and low, intelligent and dull, poor and rich, strong and weak. This is contradictory to laissez-faire theory, propounded by Adam Smith. The theory of Laissez-faire talks about survival of the fittest on the one hand. The philosophy of Sarvodaya talks about the survival of all. (Harijan, 1949).

Dada Dharmadhikari argues that "Sarvodaya is a term with a wider connotation since it conceives of assimilation of all and not only of many or most" (Dharmadhikari, 1960: 18). Sarvodaya provides checks against the imperfections of the human mind including the soul.

Gandhi believed that every development effort should address the last person first. This belief forms the foundations of Antyodaya in the Philosophy of Sarvodaya. Gandhi was of the view that we should make a morally and materially sound attack on poverty, inequality, and unemployment. This, he believed, can be done by consumption ethics and deliberate choice in technology. The choice of technology must address India's unique problems. (Jain, 1988: 311).

Vinoba Bhave understood Sarvodaya as the Philosophy of Antyodaya instead of Sarvodaya. He argued that the proper meaning of Sarvodaya would be the Upliftment of the last person of the society. He was also of the

opinion that since Gandhi preached this philosophy towards Sarvodaya, it must begin with the lowest person in the society. (Harijan, 1949).

Rawat (2004) argues that Vinoba Bhave was the one who bought the philosophy of Antyodaya on the ground. He started the Bhoodan (Donation of Land, 1951) Movement, Gramdan (Donation of Village, 1952) Movement, and Sampattidan (Donation of Assets) movement in India. Bhoodan Movement was the campaign to encourage the landholders to donate land to the landless. Behind this, there was the belief of Vinoba Bhave that the land belongs to Gopal (God). It does not belong to Individuals. On 18th April 1951, Vinoba received 100 acres of land from Mr. M. Ramachandra Reddy in Telangana, Andhra Pradesh. (Rawat, 2004: 26).

Similarly, Vinoba Bhave started the Gramdan Movement from Mangroth Village, Uttar Pradesh. In the later period, this movement spread in other parts of the Country. Manpur Village in Orissa State of India, became the first Gramdan Village in 1953. The philosophy behind this movement was to encourage every landholder in the village to donate his land to the village community. After the donation of land, the whole village should collectively produce. Then the produce should be used for the whole village community. So the philosophy behind this idea was collective farming. He also started the Sampattidan Movement. The philosophy behind this movement was the same. There should not be any private ownership. The main idea was to provide seeds, cattle, fertilizer to the poor farmers who had got some piece of land. He also encouraged poor farmers who did not have land to donate their labor into the fields of poor farmers. (Rawat, 2004: 26-27).

Some Scholars also believed that Deendayal Upadhyaya proposed the Concept of Antyodaya which means the rise of the last person. It is the concept emphasized by Deendayal Upadhyay. He was also one of the founding leaders of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh now known as the Bharatiya Janata Party. Upadhyaya believed that the calculation of economic plans and economic growth should not be done with those who have risen above the economic ladder but it should be done based on those who are at the bottom. (Express, 2017).

The present Government of India (2014-2024) also believes that Deendayal Upadhyaya propounded the concept of Antyodaya. Recently the Ministry of Power (2017) published an e-document cum advertisement which celebrated 2017 as the centenary year of Deendayal Upadhyaya. It says,

“Throughout his life, he advocated the cause of the have-nots and the downtrodden living in the lowest strata of the society. Invoking “Antyodaya”, he called for enlightening the life of the last person. Inspired by his vision, the Government of India gives him a tribute in the form of Deendayal Upadhyay Gram Jyoti Yojana”.

Contemporary debates on Antyodaya

Mishra (2018) argued that it is believed that the concept of Anyodaya is an integral part of Deendayal Upadhyaya's Integral Humanism philosophy. Antyodaya's concept is very much focused on the upliftment of the poor. It requires the state to make the policy in the interest of marginalized sections of society. The Modi regime has also made some schemes in the name of its ideologue, Deendayal Upadhyaya i.e Deendayal Gramin Kaushalya Yojna (2014), Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana (2015), etc.

Santosh Gupta argued that the philosophy of Antyodaya is the lasting legacy of Deendayal Upadhyaya. It talks about the upliftment of the last person in society. It has been the guiding principle of those who are working for the upliftment of the last person including Indian social responsibility network. (Gupta, 2021: 18).

Baghel (2021) argued that the ancient texts i.e Vedas, Ishvasyo-Upanishad, Mahabharat's Geeta, etc Inherently talked about the philosophy of Antyodaya. Antyodaya Is a philosophy in which a society to be found would be classless, Casteless, and free of exploitation. (Baghel, 2021: 15).

Deendayal Upadhyaya spread light on this philosophy by explaining, why there is social and economic inequality In India still existed? It was due to the lack of a complete understanding of Indian thought. Antyodaya, he further said, is a philosophy in which everyone's good has been advocated. (Baghel, 2021: 14).

There are also some disagreements about the propagation of Antyodaya's philosophy associated with Upadhyaya.

Some of the scholars deny this argument which says that philosophy of Antyodaya was propounded by Deendayal Upadhyaya. Sharma (2018) argued that the philosophy of Antyodaya was not propounded by Deendayal Upadhyaya but it was derived from Ruskin by Gandhi when he translated Unto this last in Gujrati, Sarvodaya. He goes further and says that Gandhi was so much fascinated by the book, Unto this last and therefore he extended the idea of development of all through the development of the weakest. He says Gandhi introduced this idea of development through the welfare of the weakest in his book, Hind Swaraj.

Antyodaya and Social justice

The idea of Antyodaya is very much close with the concept of Social Justice. As we have mentioned above, the philosophy of Antyodaya talks about the upliftment of the last person. It talks about the preference given to marginalized sections of the society while policies are being made by the state. So it is the sole responsibility of the state to make policies keeping the interest of marginalized people into consideration.(Baghel, 2021). Social justice is also the concept of providing justice into the society by providing equal opportunity, distributing rights and liabilities on the basis of fairness, providing justice to the needy keeping in mind what is due. Social justice is also in Aristotle's words treating equals equally and unequals unequally. The Fundamental rights Incorporated in Indian Constitution are very much relevant from the social justice point of view. The Right to Equality before law, right to equal opportunity, right against discrimination on the basis of caste class colour sex place of birth. The right to equal opportunity also includes the equal opportunity to earn livelihood, primary needs, etc.

Ambedkar also believed that the state should play the role of State Socialism. It should take into its hands the agricultural, health, land, education, insurance sector etc. He conceived an ideal society in which everyone should have access to resources of basic needs. His ideal society would be based on three principles i.e Liberty, equality and fraternity. He also talked about the fundamental rights of citizens living in a society. He advocated the right to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness. To Ambedkar Social Justice is the synonym of the collective form of Equality, Liberty and Fraternity.(Ambedkar, 2014). Ambedkar believed that the State can provide Equality before law, freedom of expression and thought but the third element of justice remains untouched by the state. It is the people of society who have to volunteer to establish fraternity in the society. State can not force its subjects to behave in a particular manner.(Ambedkar, 2014). Since the philosophy of Antyodaya also talks about the upliftment of the marginalized sections of society, we may say that Ambedkar's ideas of upliftment of Poor, Dalits, women, minorities, etc are also similar to it. The intention of both Ambedkar and Antyodaya is to upliftment of the last person.

The Directive principles of the state policy are very important which has been Incorporated by our constitution makers. Article 38 of Indian Constitution says that the state should try to promote the welfare of the people and also protect the rights of justice such as social, economic and political rights. Article 39 is very much close to the notion of Antyodaya. This article 39 says that the state should make its policies which makes adequate means of livelihood possible for the people. This principle of welfare contains the demand of the weakest sections of the society. State should keep the weakest or the last person into consideration while making its policies.

Antyodaya and Economic Justice

The Economic justice is considered as the integral part of Social justice in the present times. We have economic inequality in our country. In 2019, the 1 percent population earned 21 percent of the country's total income. It was only 11 percent in the year of 1990. The 10 percent of India's rich Indians owned around 80.7% of the total wealth in 2019. (Chaudhary, Ghosh, 2021). This increasing inequality requires an intervention by the state and society to address this issue. Since India became a liberal democracy in 1991, Both State and Society may, possibly, play a influencing role in reducing this rising economic inequality. The State has already made some social policies i.e Public Distribution System 1945, Food Security Act 2013, Right to Education Act 2009, etc. In Spite of that, the literacy rate of India was 74.04% in 2011. The male literacy rate was 82.14% in the same year. But on the other hand the literacy rate of females is just 65.46% in 2011. Economic Justice deals with economic aspects of Justice in society. It talks about Freedom to Contract, liberty to do any business of one's choice, equal opportunities to earn livelihood, rights to do business in any part of a country. It also talks about fair circumstances for all. Every Country has some cultural values including India. India has seen a big movement of Sarvodaya, Antyodaya during 1950s and 60s. Many good souls have donated their lands, villages, and money for the welfare of the whole Community. Gandhi, Vinoba Bhave, Deendayal Upadhyaya and others have played a significant role in spreading this philosophy of Antyodaya in other parts of the Country.

Antyodaya Philosophy may play a big role in dealing with rising inequality. It may help in changing the mindset of the society into the belief that the land, village, resources, and money are for everyone. We should use it for the welfare of all. It is up to the state and society both how they want to deal with the existing inequality in terms of economic, social and political.

Covid-19 Pandemic and Antyodaya

As Countries imposed restrictions on movement for the protection of the society and to halt the spread of Covid 19 virus, it has infected millions and have brought the economic activities to almost zero. The economic damage is very much evident. The world is experiencing an economic shock. Although it was not that before Covid everything was fine. Many developing countries were already going through the lower economic growth. The pandemic has made these crises even harder for them. The crisis that emerged due to the pandemic requires an urgent action to stabilize health, protect marginalized sections of society. It requires fastest recovery. Strengthening public health systems, implementing reforms and addressing the challenges occurred due to informality are critical. These recures the sustainable growth. (WB, 2020).

It is estimated that South Asian Countries will be facing the worst impacts of the pandemic. Countries like India (-8.0 GDP growth in 2020), Pakistan (0.5 GDP Growth in 2020), Sri Lanka (-3.6 GDP growth in 2020), and Afghanistan (-1.9 GDP growth in 2020) are experiencing negative GDP growth. The worst affected is Maldives whose GDP is to decline around 8.5 leading to 13 % in the year of 2020. This is due to the restrictions in tourism. (WB, 2020).

It is also believed that the impacts of the pandemic will be harsher on the poor population in south Asian countries like India, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan etc. the poor population has the higher chances of losing their jobs. India has also seen the big migration of the labour class from the cities due the closed private sector industries and market. We have seen people going home via different means i.e private vehicles, trains, buses after the closure of factories, private sector jobs etc. This is how the pandemic has forced this large section back to poverty or rural poverty. Many poor people are facing food security issues also due to many reasons.(WB, 2020: 7-8).

Since many south Asian countries have been going through the dire consequences of pandemic, it becomes necessary to look at the issues like food insecurity, lack of health infrastructure and poor economic conditions of the marginalized sections of the society. We need to address these issues on an urgent basis. Antyodaya

philosophy provides a way forward for these problems. It says that society may take the responsibility into its hands and can bring out poor in needs. we have seen the land redistribution in many countries, including India. If the state and society comes together, we can win these dire situation. Countries like Afghanistan, sri lank, Maldives, Bhutan and so on may apply the philosophy of Antyodaya teachings while dealing with these economic, social and political problem occurred due to pandemic. India has seen and applied the teachings of Gandhi, Vinoba bhawe, Deendayal Uapdhyaya in dealing its instant issues just after the Independence. The time has come to deal with these pandemic caused issues in which the teachings of Antyodaya become very relevant today.

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