

Gandhian Economics Today

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The starting point is a faith in a certain vision of a **Good Society**. A society where the whole of humanity i.e. every person on this planet, not of any particular country or religion or race or caste or gender, but *every human being leads a healthy –happy- creative life in harmony with rest of humanity and nature.*

There are quite a few for whom "harmony with nature" is a non-issue. There are also many in the world and in India today who want a Good Life only for their own country, or own religion and its followers, or their own race or caste, or just own family and friends. They should stop reading this article right here!

For others let us see what this vision implies.

To be healthy everyone needs *adequate and healthy food, clean water, healthy shelter, clean air*. An economic system should therefore be producing and supplying these basic needs for all. Note the emphasis on *healthy and clean in these basic needs*. Any system which produces poisonous food, pollutes water and air should be phased out. Currently there is a lot of talk but hardly much phasing out. One should note that today often the economic system in one country "exports its pollution" to other countries and themselves appear to be "healthy and clean" (Hickel, 2020)¹. They should be considered as a "rogue economies"! Also note the word "*adequate*" to which we will return.

Living in harmony with rest of humanity implies that there is **economic equality**. Otherwise there will be too much of envy and discord and hardly any harmony. So any economic system of a particular country and the whole world should be judged on the basis of equality. Gini Coefficient (GC) of countries is a measure of income-wealth distribution. A GC of value zero means everyone is equal and the value of 100 means that all the wealth belongs to only one person. Lower the number, more the equality. The nine most equal countries with GC less than 26 are all in Europe and as expected include the Scandinavian countries of Norway, Finland, Sweden. The next 10 countries with GC between 27 -30 are also in Europe. GC above 30 means unacceptable levels of inequality.

The *World Inequality Report 2018*² shows that China and USA both have more inequality than India which itself is quite unequal. The other three BRIC countries ---Russia (41), Brazil (51) and South Africa (63) are also faring badly on the equality front. The countries which have the most economic equality are also some of the safest- peaceful societies and have the most satisfied citizens. *And yet not everything is fine with these countries and we shall come to that below when discussing the issue of harmony with nature.*

¹ Hickel, J. (2020). Quantifying national responsibility for climate breakdown: an equality-based attribution approach for carbon dioxide emissions in excess of the planetary boundary. *The Lancet Planetary Health*, 4(9)

² <https://wid.world/data/>

Happiness does not depend upon more and more material goods above an “adequate amount”; not more and more power, position, or fame but on some very important non-economic things such as:

1. **Deep Relationships:** of love and friendships as suggested by the 2010 longitudinal study by Waldinger and Schulz titled, ‘What’s love got to do with it?’³.
2. **Absence of fear:** Rabindranath Tagore’s dream and hope of a free society encapsulated in this 1910 verse of Gitanjali--

Where the mind is without fear, and the head is held high

Where knowledge is free

And the world has not been broken into fragments by narrow domestic walls

...Into that heaven of freedom, let my country awake.

It continues to capture the imagination of political struggles of our times today⁴.

This has implications of a society governed by a political system that does not violate universal human rights; a political system that gives “agency” to everyone in decision making i.e. “real democracy”; a political system that gives a large degree of positive freedoms to everyone. Essentially, a political system known as **Anarchism** where Power does not accumulate in any place or person as that inevitably leads to physical and mental violence by the powerful on the vast majority of powerless. This **concentration of power and violence** has been the default situation in large parts of the world throughout last 5000 years of human history in most agricultural civilizations. Modern liberal democracy starting 250 years back, which arose with Industrialism, changed this situation for the better in many parts of the world. Unfortunately today many of those countries all over the world are now moving back towards more authoritarianism, violation of human rights, diminishing of people’s agency, compared to the 2nd half of 20th century.⁵ But the crucial point to note is that the very nature of Industrialism was such that this “State centric electoral liberal democracy” could hardly be anarchistic. **However, this point needs a separate essay and is beyond the scope of this one.**

3. **A Socio- Cultural and value system:** that does not discriminate on the basis of religion, race, gender, ethnicity etc. Here again our 5000 years of human history is very uneven. Things have been better in particular periods in particular locations. In the last decade things seem to be getting worse in many parts of the world. (Pew Research Centre report, 2012⁶)

From the above discussions, it should be clear that Economic sphere, the Political sphere, and Socio-Cultural sphere are inextricably interlinked. The more they approach the ideals stated above, more the scope for **every human to be creative** in their own way and realize their full potential. We shall come to this again when discussing the question of what then is a Good Society.

³ Waldinger, R. J., & Schulz, M. S. (2010). What’s love got to do with it? social functioning, perceived health, and daily happiness in married octogenarians. *Psychology and Aging, 25*(2), 422–431.

⁴ The latest high-profile public recital was at a climate change protest called Fire Drill Friday protest in Washington, where the Hollywood star Martin Sheen recited this poem of Rabindranath Tagore on Jan 10, 2020.

⁵ <https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2020/01/22/global-democracy-has-another-bad-year>

⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/sep/20/religious-intolerance-on-rise-worldwide>

Let us now come to the most important issue of present times ---**Living in harmony with Nature** . The United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report says that the rate at which our world economy is producing greenhouse gases, we have 12 years to go before we cross the tipping point (IPCC. *Global Warming of 1.5°C* , 2018). Currently there is a lot of talk (several countries and regions have set up targets for reaching net zero emissions as per the Paris Agreement, 2015) but they are empty promises supported by clever definitions, accounting and unattainable scenario planning ⁷. As more of the Planetary Boundaries are being breached, our world economic systems are becoming more unviable and the interlinked political and socio-cultural spheres are getting enormously strained at a very fast pace.

Do we have a sense of ENOUGH ? of LIMITS ?

The 2016 National Footprints Accounts report informs us that the world's average biocapacity is 1.63 global hectares (gha) per person . Which means to be in "harmony with nature" our personal **ecological footprint** should not exceed 1.63 gha /person. The current world average figure is much higher at 2.75 gha/person⁸. We are in fact consuming 1.7 times the earth's capacity!!! (Watts, 2018⁹).

But of course the world is hardly homogeneous with respect to its impact on nature. The gha/person figure for countries approximately mirrors the GDP/capita of countries . Till 2013 , out of 190 countries 15 had gha/person exceeding a massive 7.00 (remember a sustainable and equitable figure is 1.63) ; and 28 countries between 5.00 and 6.99 . These 42 countries are all so called First world and Middle Eastern oil rich countries. 40 countries are between 3.00 to 4.99 . And about another 40 countries between 2.00 – 2.99. *The economies of these 120 out of 190 countries whose gha/person exceeds 2.00 are not in harmony with Nature. They have to De-Grow.*

*If we consider the planet earth as a human body, then these 120 countries are like "cancerous tumors". Through unrestrained "growth" they are making the whole planet sick and uninhabitable for humans. China belongs to this club of 120. Its gha/person is 3.38 , its rank is 71, and it obviously has to de-grow. There are 15 countries whose gha/person fall within 1.60 – 1.99. These can be classified as *fair and sustainable economies*. There are about 60 countries whose gha/person is below 1.60 which need "economic growth". India belongs to this bottom category. Its gha/person is 1.16 and its economy needs to grow. But our national dream cannot be that of emulating China's rapid growth which itself has to de-grow. These figures of ecological footprint are taken from the Wikipedia entry: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_ecological_footprint*

⁷ This rings true even in the most seemingly progressive of governments. Example, the Swedish climate targets exclude emissions from international aviation and shipping, as well as consumption of goods manufactured abroad. Sweden's "climate neutrality" means that the emissions should be reduced by at least 85%. The rest is to be compensated, for example by using technological methods to remove CO2 from the atmosphere. Today these technologies do not exist on the scale needed(Thunberg, 2020; <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/video/2020/dec/10/greta-thunberg-dismisses-empty-words-in-new-climate-crisis-appeal-video>)

⁸⁸ Global Footprint Network, "National Footprint Accounts 2016 Are out! Carbon Makes up 60% of World's Ecological Footprint", <https://www.footprintnetwork.org/2016/03/08/national-footprint-accounts-2016-carbon-makes-60-worlds-ecological-footprint/>

⁹ (*Earth's Resources Consumed in Ever Greater Destructive Volumes | Environment | The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/jul/23/earths-resources-consumed-in-ever-greater-destructive-volumes>; <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/ecological-footprint-by-country>).

*For countries like India any talk of economic policies and economic growth which does not prioritize the issue of LIMITS , that does not explicitly state that we will **grow only till our gha/person reaches 1.6 and no further** , is not only nonsense , it is downright dangerous! As for the 120 countries whose gha/person is more than 2 , they have to come up with economic policies and strategies to de-grow !!*

The Sustainable development Goals(SDGs) are of not much use¹⁰. Talk of Green Growth is a red herring! Replacing petrol and diesel vehicles with electric ones or investing in mega solar and wind power plants is not at all an ecologically and politically benign solution as it is often touted¹¹.

Country wise Ecological footprint calculation is misleading!

The other equally important point that we have to consider is that the above ecological footprint figures are average for countries. As already mentioned , many countries in the world have unethical and violent degree of inequality, and India is among them. Within countries like india which have very low average gha/person , there are a certain percentage whose “consumption” and gha/person is way above the fair and safe limit and some whose gha/person is huge.

One has to remember that almost half the world’s population with dangerously unsustainable gha/person are actually citizens of the Third World ! And so talking in terms of countries is misleading today.

Therefore for India , any economic policies and ideas which can come up with ways and means of reducing inequality, of raising the economic condition of those whose material consumption is too low to allow a Good Life and *bringing down those who are cancerous in their overconsumption* would be exciting. This is important as today we cannot think of communist revolutions to do this job, with all its accompanying violence and the swallowing up of human freedom and dignity.

End of State centric , Growth obsessed , Economics of Industrialism

We should remember that India’s total population (1400 M (million)) is almost equal to the combined populations of Europe (740 M) , South America (430 M) and North America (370 M) . And with its tremendous diversity of geography, history and culture, the days of thinking of a unified economic policy and one standard model for India are over. The government in Delhi should not be in a position to accumulate money or power to decide the economy of the 30 states, 10,000 urban areas and 600,000 villages. **The days of such Statism are over.**

Many economists , analysts, politicians, govt officials, educated middle class are **stuck** in the 20th century obsession with “economic growth” . They want countries like India to emulate the First World or China or South Korea (whose gha/person is a whopping 6.00). Some of their favorite terms are “rapid industrialization”, “unleashing the animal spirits”; “increasing consumption and creating demand” . They are upset with “endemic corruption”, “vulgarity of crony capitalism”, “stagnation”. They want “good governance” to remove those blemishes. BUT what is the purpose? “Rapid economic growth” so that in principle all Indians (and presumably the whole world) can join the festival of endless consumption. And

¹⁰ <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/africaatlse/2015/09/23/five-reasons-to-think-twice-about-the-uns-sustainable-development-goals/>

¹¹ <https://india.mongabay.com/2020/09/mega-renewable-energy-park-in-kutch-could-have-potentially-adverse-environmental-impact/>, <https://scroll.in/article/970582/large-scale-solar-projects-in-india-could-create-more-problems-than-they-solve>

as per this framing what we need is another round of “policy reforms for Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization”.

But beware of yesterday's success. It is true that this economics has been quite successful in many parts of the world in the 20th century but it is the economics of INDUSTRIALISM--- an ideology of unlimited material growth by endless and more efficient exploitation of Nature through cutting edge or large-scale Science and Technology spearheaded by Nation States and large Corporates. ***The Industrialism party, whether capitalist or socialist, is now over.*** A paradigm shift is under way.

With apologies (or not!) to those who get irritated or angry when they see the name of Gandhi , in Hind Swaraj written in 1909 , Chapter VI , titled “Civilization”, Gandhi writes “*this civilization (Industrialism) is such that one has only to be patient and it will be self-destroyed*”. 111 years is not too long in human history!

How does one measure a “Good Society” today?

We have already mentioned that Economic sphere , the Political sphere and Socio-Cultural sphere are quite interlinked. So before we return to what Gandhian Economics might mean today, let us look at what is our overall idea of a Good Society encompassing all aspects of life .

Notice we are trying to get away from the word “development” because of its association with Industrialism and Growth. The simplistic wealth ranking, GDP/capita was replaced by Human Development Index (HDI) 30 years back in 1990. It is interesting that scholarly articles are still written trying to justify this substitution of only wealth by a combination of wealth + health + education.

If you look at the HDI tables for the year 2019 , you will see that there are four broad classes of countries with respect to HDI ---very high (62 countries) , high (54 countries) , medium (37 countries including India) , low (36 countries). It is interesting that if one ranks countries according to only GDP per capita , these classes would still contain the same countries , although the relative ranks of GDP and HDI within a class will change.

Let us look at a measure which started coming out from 2013 from Harvard (Michael Porter) and MIT (Scott Stern) and taking cues from Amartya Sen, Douglas North and Joseph Stiglitz. It is called Social Progress Index (SPI) and it measures three dimensions called basic human needs, foundations of well-being, and opportunity. Each of these three dimensions have four components. Each of these 12 components have 3-4 outcome indicators totaling 54 ! And after doing this grand exercise who are the top countries? It is the same ones which top GDP and HDI rankings!!

But what about their ecological footprint? Out of the 54 outcome indicators which are measured and added to make up the total Social Progress Index, only one is “ecosystem sustainability” ! It is just *one* out of the 54 things which are “added” up and are not of any consequence in times of today’s ecological crisis!

Most “mainstream” development writers and media do not seem to give traction to the *Happy Planet Index (HPI)* which started coming out in 2006 from the New Economics Foundation in London. It does a very simple thing. It measures three outcomes --- health, happiness, equality, puts them in the numerator and divides them by the ecological footprint. It is the measurement of the production of human well-being per unit of imposition upon nature. And voila!!! Very few of the top countries in GDP, HDI, SPI find place in the top 25 of HPI and not a single one in the top 10 !!! *Because It is an index which “penalizes” for excessive wealth as it leads to excessive stress on environment.*

HPI measurements have appeared in 2006, 2009, 2012, and 2016. Costa Rica has topped the list every time. What this means is that the citizens of a country can be healthy, happy, creative, equal, and at peace with each other. But if they are happily destroying the planet and making people of other countries

unhappy, one should not call them developed and hold them aloft as models for others to copy. Scandinavian countries fall into this category. “The Nordic countries have some of the highest levels of resource use and CO2 emissions in the world, in consumption-based terms, drastically overshooting safe planetary boundaries. “ (Hickel , 2020¹²) The young climate activists and especially the most popular champion of all, Greta Thunberg, has grasped this when she points out¹³, “***The emperors are naked. Every single one of them***” and notes “the gap between what science says is needed” to limit the increase of global temperature rise ... and politics that run the Nordic countries is gigantic”.

The Nine Point Development Index

Today one should not get stuck with a composite index like HDI, SPI or even HPI. It is better to do an exercise that we popularize through our University courses : We call it the ‘*Nine-point Development index*’.

It consists of these nine elements: 1) *Adequate* Wealth (note Adequate --- the more you exceed that limit, the lower your score) 2) Health 3) Education 4) Economic Equality 5) Gender Equality 6) Liberty Rights Democracy 7) Fraternity across all divisions 8) Happiness 9) Sustainability. Any society or country has to strive to score good grades(Aspire for Grade A!) in ALL Nine elements. There is not much point in totaling the scores and coming up with combined index.

Another variation could be to indulge in the exercise proposed by the India based Alternatives network, Vikalp Sangam, called “Alternative Transformation Format”¹⁴ where there are five interlocking spheres namely Ecological, Social , Political, Economic, Cultural . Each sphere has some elements which need to be evaluated. The idea is to achieve *top grade in all the elements and spheres*. This kind of exercise is important because often one can do good in some and lag behind in others. Or one may even slide back towards lower grades in some if we are not careful.

The spirit of these “elements” is Gandhian or anti-Industrialism or what they call “Radical Ecological Democracy”. This anti- Industrialism spirit can be picturized through some well-known quotations:

GANDHI : THERE IS SUFFICIENCY IN THE WORLD FOR MAN’S NEEDS BUT NOT FOR MAN’S GREED.

LAO TZU : HE WHO KNOWS HE HAS ENOUGH, IS RICH.

SAMUEL ALEXANDER : ENOUGH FOR EVERYONE, FOREVER.

These ideas of Enough and Limits could and should guide the subject of Economics in the future.

¹² <https://www.aljazeera.com/amp/opinions/2019/12/6/the-dark-side-of-the-nordic-model>

¹³ Thunberg-shames-norwegian-leaders, www.newsinenglish.no, 29 October 2019

¹⁴ <http://vikalpsangam.org/about/the-search-for-alternatives-key-aspects-and-principles/>

Gandhian Vision Today and its Economics

We started with a simple one-line statement of the vision of a Good Society -- *every human being leads a healthy –happy- creative life in harmony with rest of humanity and nature.* This Gandhian way dilutes the toxic religion called Nationalism which has arisen in last 150 years and make the powerful benevolent and not so benevolent Nation States redundant to a large extent. According to Gandhian principles this goal is possible only when we strive to create **“just equitable , self- sufficient, self- governing, eco-sustainable , non- exploiting, rural and urban communities.”**

Gandhian Work – Livelihoods today

Huge number of people are worried today on how to get a decent employment or work or livelihood or a source of income. If they have one, they are apprehensive about how long that will last. This uncertainty, fear and frustration is rapidly increasing. Governments are under pressure on how to provide jobs to large number of their citizens. On top of this, for various reasons, people’s aspirations for a better job, more income, more material goods are rising sharply.

There could be at least four reasons why I or anyone would want a “good” livelihood:

1. To provide for a decent life for my family.
2. The whole society is going to benefit from my work output. And so it is also my social responsibility.
3. It will provide me with physical, intellectual, spiritual food.
4. It will enable me to climb the huge ladder of wealth-position- power – fame.

This last motivation for work has probably existed for at least 5000 years as agricultural societies became more and more stratified. But for most people this scope was quite limited. The advent and progress of Industrialism has stretched this ladder enormously and opened up the race to climb this ladder to more and more people. The subject of Economics is concerned with providing opportunities for this “upward mobility”, for “better” life outcomes for everyone. But we hope that readers can understand from the previous discussions on ecological footprint, limits to growth, happiness for everyone, the need for equity and justice, that this socio-economic “ladder” has to be squished. And remember that the goal of a good society is that *every human being leads a healthy –happy- creative life in harmony with rest of humanity and nature.*

Let us imagine the contours of a Gandhian Utopia by imagining the journey of a village community in India

The ownership of all property and productive assets is transferred from individual families to the whole community. All decisions are taken in a village meeting attended by everyone in the village including young adults through consensual democracy. Whatever “jobs” the community as a whole decides is necessary is assigned equal value , irrespective of its actual productivity (in today’s terms). All income earned by working on their community’s productive assets , as well as that earned by anyone working outside the village , now goes into a common village fund. From this every family gets an equitable allowance. All the basic needs of every member are met from this community funds. So the farmer, teacher, sweeper, cook, driver, painter, singer, engineer, poet, potter, software expert, philosopher, carpenter, architect, doctor, nurse, manager, plumber, lawyer and so on-- everyone’s work has equal value and dignity. *This is classic ideal socialism –from each according to their capacity, and to each according to their needs.* This has got rid of most job-livelihoods related insecurities. It has ended the individual “battle for survival “as well as the “rat race for upward mobility”. This socialism is not imposed

from above, nor is it State driven, but is arrived at by the community through intense face to face debates and discussions.

The community together also decides upon a frugal, prosperous lifestyle for themselves.

The consequence of this are: (1) the total productive work when divided consensually among the members ends up being, on a yearly basis, much less “work” compared to what most people did or do in an agricultural or industrial civilization. This gives more time to everyone for leisure and entertainment; (2) This promotes “Swadeshi or Localism”. Most of the basic needs and some more extra things for a prosperous living are obtained from within the village, a small percentage from a cluster of 10-20 neighboring villages, and very little needs to come from far; (3) This frugal living makes them go towards ecologically sound production practices and regeneration of local environment; (4) It makes them think deeply on what new outside “products and services” to reject, which to accept under very restricted conditions, and which to accept fully.

There are villages and towns all over the world who have embarked on this journey. Some of the advanced ones are Menda Lekha village of Gadchiroli district in Maharashtra, the 1000 village movement of the Zapatistas in Chiapas of Mexico, the 2000 Amish communities of USA, the 60 odd traditional kibbutz of Israel, Eco-village movements all over the World. There are other examples in India who have started on this journey which are being documented and put up in the Vikalp Sangam website. <http://vikalpsangam.org/>

The new economics of balanced equity-justice-sustainability : some tasks ahead for Gandhian Economists today in India

1. The above hypothetical model of a Gandhian rural community will work favorably in areas which have good amount of natural wealth and the population density is within limits. The other requirement could be that these have to be small homogenous villages like fully adivasi (Indigenous) or adivasi majority villages. There are about 100,000 such villages out of ~600,000 census villages of India. A Gandhian Economist's first task should therefore be to find out what are the enablers and impediments to spread the above stated model to these 100,000 adivasi villages where there are possibilities.
2. Classify other villages of India where the “economic arrangements” will have to be different. And figure out what these arrangements could be for each such class (based on geography, history, culture, demography, current socio-economic conditions and divisions).
3. Identify areas which are very poorly endowed with natural wealth or where the population density has exceeded the bio-capacity of that area by a large margin. Come up with special plans for those areas and people.
4. Come up with area specific forms of “Local Currencies” and different kinds of “Solidarity Economies” suitable for different places and classes of villages.
5. Come up with the Economic role of governance structures of a single village, a 2nd level cluster of 10-15 villages, a 3rd level cluster of clusters etc. applying the “Principle of Subsidiarity”. Derive an appropriate fund raising and sharing mechanism for these “ever widening oceanic circles”¹⁵.

¹⁵ Gandhi illustrated his vision of an alternative political structure in the framework of ‘ever-widening, never-ascending circles’. In this framework ‘Life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. But it will be an oceanic circle whose centre will be the individual always ready to perish for the village, the latter ready to perish for the circle of villages, till at last the whole becomes one life composed of individuals, never aggressive in their arrogance but ever humble, sharing the majesty of the oceanic circle of which they are integral units’. In this scheme, therefore, ‘the outermost circumference will not wield power to crush the inner circle but will give

6. Plan for the rapid contraction of large corporations (private and state), huge governments at state and national levels, and the long-distance Market. These have been the main carriers of Industrialism ; they have done a marvelous job ; and now they have outlived their utility.
7. Suggest concrete steps to de-carbonize the economy on an emergency basis i.e. the drastic reduction of the use of fossil fuels in direct and indirect manner. And come up with decentralized local renewable energy plans.
8. Make plans to rapidly phase out chemical and fossil fuel-based agriculture and shift towards ecological bio-production.
9. Plan for the contraction of mega cities; for the reverse migration to rural areas in many places ; and for vitalizing small towns.
10. Plan for the large-scale reduction of “luxury and status goods” for consumers who currently have unethical and unsustainable ecological footprint or gha/person. For example one of the main items would be the reduction of the automobile and aviation industry, all its related infrastructure, and all the associated backward and forward linked industries. Similarly for the construction industry.
11. Plan for Appropriate Technology for all production processes , primary and secondary. Come up with area specific “ecologically sound” work/livelihood/employment ideas and plans. This implies the application of 4 Rs principles(Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Regenerate)
12. The reduction of massive “School and higher Education industry/business” which was one of the main vehicles to take Industrialism forward and for the individual’s upward mobility or the building of capacities to join the rat race.
13. Educate about this practical new economics of balanced equity-justice-sustainability to young and adults alike.

These tasks are not an exhaustive list. The main idea is that Gandhian economists today will not bother about “growth”, about making or analyzing national economic policies, becoming an advisor to *Niti Ayog*¹⁶ or any part which requires central governance. They will put their effort on figuring out a transition from Industrialism to a Gandhian India and world. And they will work with rural and urban communities, with the ethos of building up bottom up clusters of such communities to help design and train people to build “just equitable , self- sufficient, self- governing, eco-sustainable , non- exploiting, rural and urban communities.”

Warning

Time is running out. The following are increasing and quite likely to occur with higher severity and frequency : Extreme weather events, nuclear catastrophes, chemical disasters, biological accidents (rogue genes, antibiotic resistance, diseases from animal factory farming, human pandemics, crop pandemics) , collapsing dams , human induced earthquakes , hatred-intolerance – violence , fascism. Apart from the above ---Algorithms might take away most human agency and decision-making power ; and Artificial Intelligence and robots might make most human jobs and lives redundant. One could optimistically say that a much-reduced population of homo sapiens will evolve into another species. And yet It is mind boggling and horrifying and bizarre to imagine such a disappearance of most of us humans.

Samuel Alexander of Simplicity Institute, Melbourne in his utopian novel “Entropia” written in 2013 describes today’s situation as “ *It is like watching a balloon being blown up, breath by breath, and*

strength to all within and derive its own strength from it'. Gandhi, M.K.(1947),India of My Dreams, R.K. Prabhu, ed. Bombay

¹⁶ The policy think tank of the Government of India formed in 2015

assuming that since no breath so far has burst the balloon , adding more air should not produce any great changes.” Then he says that the balloon will burst violently with terrifying consequences. Survivors will say “We were warned, we did know, and now our inaction looks not just foolish, but shameful.” It is akin to Gandhi’s warning when he wrote in 1945, “ I must not fear if the world today is going the wrong way. It may be that India too will go that way and like the proverbial moth burn itself eventually in the flame round which it dances more and more furiously. But it is my burden to protect India and through India the entire world from such a doom.” (Gandhi’s Letter to Nehru, Oct 5, 1945¹⁷)

Conclusion

We have tried to give a brief outline of what a Gandhian economist’s “burden” is today. They have to dream as per Bernard Shaw “ You see things , and ask why ? But I dream things that never were , and I say why not ?” And imagine as Arundhati Roy says : “Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next. We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it.”¹⁸

And proclaim the call for a new world like the Zapatistas proclaim, ‘we want “a world where many worlds exist”¹⁹; to which we may add “ as long as their ecological footprint is below 1.8 gha/person!”

Some useful additional readings :

1. Acosta, Alberto ; Demaria Federico, Escobar Arturo, Kothari Ashish , Salleh Ariel , “Introduction: Finding Pluriversal Paths” , Pluriverse: A Post –Development Dictionary, 2019 . <https://www.ehu.es/documents/6902252/12061123/Ashish+Kothari+et+al-Pluriverse+A+Post-Development+Dictionary-2019.pdf/c9f05ea0-d2e7-8874-d91c-09d11a4578a2>
2. Alexander, Samuel , “Entropia: Life Beyond Industrial Civilization” , 2013
3. Kothari, Ashish and Joy, K.J. , “Looking back into the future: India , South Asia, and the world in 2100” , Alternative Futures: India Unshackled, Ed Ashish Kothari and K.J. Joy , 2017

¹⁷ <https://www.mkgandhi.org/Selected%20Letters/Selected%20Letters1/letter13.htm>

¹⁸ Arundhati Roy, 2020, ‘The pandemic is a portal’, <https://www.ft.com/content/10d8f5e8-74eb-11ea-95fe-fcd274e920ca>

¹⁹ <https://livrepository.liverpool.ac.uk/3031522/1/Gahman%20-%20An%20Anti-Capitalist%20Moral%20Economy%20of%20the%20Rebel%20Peasant.pdf>