

THE IDEA OF ATMANIRBHAR BHARAT : MAHATMA TO MODI

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Abstract

The ideal of atmanirbharta has been eternal goal of all nations including India. Our leaders have been working and suggesting as how to make and keep India as self –sufficient and self-reliant i.e atmanirbhar. The ideal acquired centre stage during freedom struggle when Mahatma Gandhi appealed for consumption of swadeshi and boycott of videshi products. It was a clarion call for local in the most aggressive manner. It was in colonial context to attain political independence and achieve atmanirbharta subsequently. Presently the atmanirbharta under Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan (ABA) has been reinvented and re-emphasised since 12th May, 2020 in context of Covid-19 by Our Prime minister Sh Narendra Damodar Das Modi. The stimulous packages too are being announced to realise the goal of self sufficiency. However its attainment appears a distant reality.

Key words : ABA, Stimulous package, Swadeshi, Covid-19

INTRODUCTION

The concept of *Atmanirbhar Bharat* (self –reliant) India is buzz word that again acquired mainstream and centre stage discourse today in this new millennium especially after Prime minister Modi announced it on 12th May ,2020 as main objective of his government especially after first wave of pandemic Covid-19 to recover shattered economy .A stimulus package of Rs 20 lakhs crores approximately 10% of the GDP was also allocated . The stimulus package further increased up to 22,810 crore and extended up to 31st March, 2022 as media reports on 29th June, 2021 . The areas like land , labour , infrastructure , demography and demand chain were identified as priority fields. He continued to harp on this agenda and appealed people on Independence day of 15th august 2020 also to contribute in making India a self reliant nation by using Indian products to boost local industries .It was made as a mission and a beginning of a movement atmanirbhar *abhiyaan* .It was linked with a series of already launched programmes like *Mudra*, *Make in India* and *Start up India* etc .A new vocabulary was coined to popularise new economic nationalism and promote deshi consumerism “local is vocal” This objective has been declared Dr.Ramesh Kumar is an Assoc Prof, Pol Sc & Principal (Actg), Shyamlal College (E), Delhi University as official target of our government earlier also on many occasions and expressed officially in India’s five year planning papers for development .But much before independence and nearly over a century before in 1909 ,Mahatma Gandhi pristinely propounded this theory and presented a broad roadmap as how India can achieve it after independence .The invention of the concept of self reliant India , its elaborate explanation and detailed outline of its methodologies for fulfilment are found there in his very compact and concise treatise entitled *Hind Swaraj* written 112 years back by Mahatma in 1909. According to Gandhi , the concept of atmanirbhar is antithetical to our dependence theory on other nations both for economic development and also for defence of our territory. Withal, it is equally a model of negation to asymmetrical , urban centric and crony capitalist model of development that India had or has hitherto .The increasing number of millionaires and billionaires even during Covid-

19 on the one and more alarmingly growing percentage of poor in India on the other are constantly widening the gap between rich, poor and poorest of the poor what Gandhi calls *Antimjan*. There is prominent perception about our development model that has till date been favourable for rural and urban rich which do not constitute more than 10% of our huge population. The rural India which provide habitation of 70% people does not get priority in development paradigm and therefore remained reasonably deprived of development even after 75 years of what we call political freedom. Our political scientist, economist and political sociologists divides poor rural Bharat and rich-shining and smart urban India. There are other academicians prefer to call undeveloped part of India as internal colonies which supply raw material and labour at cheaper rate. This faulty model divided the country that proved catalyst for myriad of socio-economic unrest, agitation and movements in many districts of rural India.

As a result, villages became dependant on cities, states on centre and central government became dependant on other nations and international organisations like IMF and World Bank etc. Precisely in stead of moving towards self-reliance (atmanirbharta), we inched decade after decade towards dependence (Nirbharta). This corona specially second wave proved our dependence on western countries for vaccination, ventilators and other life saving equipment. This what India could avoid if it could adopt holistic Gandhian model as suggested by him in his small book "Hind Swaraj". The paper would attempt to elaborate as to how Gandhian economic model could have been effective and analogous to allay asymmetrical development effect and made India as an atmanirbhar (self-reliant) nation and act as an assuaging factor to tensions besieging our periphery.

Gandhian Model of Atmnirbhar Bharat and Hind Swaraj: The book "Hind Swaraj" was written by Mahatma Gandhi on a Kindolan castle ship in ten days while he was returning from London to Durban in South Africa. It was a collection of notes on many issues in his Gujrati language that was latter compiled and translated in different languages. This is a small book of less than 100 pages divided into total small 20 chapters. The book begins with discontents and differences that Gandhi experienced in meeting with Indian youths at London quite disillusioned with non violence and poised to adopt violent methods against Britishers to liberate India. Gandhi, as an editor, understood his limitation since he failed to convince these youths votaries of violence like V.D Savarkar, Tarakant Das, V.Chattopadhyaya, and Krihna Varma etc depicted in book as readers. Gandhi shortly but succinctly touched many issues in this book that do not need to be discussed here in this context. Mahatma candidly and explicitly blamed fellow Indians for slavery at the hands of foreigners since we made easy for them to plunder and rule over us. Our fellow Indians felt proud to follow western life style like to wear their dress, speak their language, studied in their institutions, use and consume their products. This unwanted temptations promoted British products. It enriched British industrialist and industries at Manchester and Birmingham on the one and neglect of indigenous goods plus fabrics ruined our industries, increased unemployment and turned industrial cities of Dhaka & Murshidabad into dead and deserts. This led to economic dependency of India. To bring back lost position and road of recovery the promotion of Swadeshi is to be undertaken and it can be expedited only with boycott of videshi. This was expected to be first popular call for a step towards atmanirbhar bharat abhiyaan

in 1916-17. Later it was extended to non-cooperation among other things for adoption and promotion of our indigenous institution. This was the loudest voice for local what present regime rephrasing as vocal for local. It would not be exaggeration if we name this Gandhian modest effort as aggressive localism.

This is how ideological and experimental background of atmanirbhar bharat was prepared by Mahatma long back in last century. He made atmanirbhar appeal through swadeshi production and consumption through self help and hand labour with minimum tool. The *charkha* (spinning wheel) and *khadi* are the fittest example of self production, self consumption and a right step towards self reliance writ large. Gandhi linked this self reliance for all where every men and women in cities and villages from all castes, class and communities should be made capable enough to be self reliant and self dependant. This capacity building should end with enabling of all including poorest of the poor living in remotest corners of the country. Leaving anybody, any individual under any pretext at the mercy of other would not be in tandem with atmanirbhar bharat.

Gandhian idea of atmanirbharta was adoption of Indian tradition, culture, education and great civilization which we have quite old. The fashionable madness of few Indians after new civilizing mission carried out by new regime strengthened colonialism. The kind of skill based vocational education catalyst for self employment in our indigenous language was visualised by Gandhi what forms the cornerstone of our new education policy, 2020 today. Popularisation of ancient vedic legacies was strongly advocated by Mahatma. Gandhian agenda of Swaraj for all living within the territory of India was innovative, egalitarian and all inclusive for which he tried hard during his life time and advised post independent generation of rulers also to carry forward and realise. There was cautionary strong warning to empower neglected, deprived, disadvantaged section (antimjan) at the earliest on priority basis in his last wish (talisman) and failing which India would be trapped in myriad of problems. We might be victim of slavery and dependence again. This prediction proved true to an extent.

Atmanirbharta –Nirbharta in post –independent India : Indian ruling class in interim Government and after claimed to be Gandhian in name, but largely followed ungandhian policies. Gandhian ideals were sidelined in the Constitution of India itself framed by the constituent assembly dominated by so called hard disciples of Gandhi. Parliamentary form of government was adopted which was repeatedly and openly criticised by him. Its adoption was complete negation of Gandhi. The atmanirbharta was made synonymous to import substitution only in planning commissions papers and that also as long objective. In stead of promoting Cottage and village industries, heavy machine based large public-private industries were set up. Largest land sector reforms were deliberately made fail to keep rural landlord happy, Rural India got neglected and resulted in agrarian unrest, caste clubbing and poor grouping under naxal activities enveloping over 200 districts of India in red corridor. Pro-rich and urban-centric policies created asymmetrical development and divided country into India & Bharat. The onset of globalisation under triad of privatisation-liberalisation and globalisation created conducive environment for dependency and dependent on Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) for development. Every socio-economic sectors of nation was opened for foreign companies

.Governments after governments irrespective of parties single or coalitions did not dare to discontinue it under one pretext or another. Globalization under westernisation or better Americanisation of food, fashion ,music ,art and culture created flat world . Most important sectors like media and education including agricultural sectors were also opened to foreign stake holders. The half hearted approach for agricultural modernisation and commercialisation by Indian and foreign companies under GATT was adopted in 1990s and continues till today . Recently passed three agricultural laws ailing farmers against which movement is continuing for almost eight months. .Our centre and state governments made laws to lure foreign investors. These policies led to make *parnirbhar bharat* which is antithetical to what Modi ji proposes *atmnirbhar bharat*. This double speak turned into big betrayal to Gandhian ideal of his *atmnirbhar bharat* and *swaraj* by his so called disciples dominating ruling class during most of the times in post –independent India where presently more than 50 crore people are poor and waves of Covid-19 added many more crores into it.

No doubts some discontents against mad race erupted and resulted in post –globalisation self identities consciousness. Most of the countries became conscious of protecting their own national legacies and it percolated among different communities also within nations. A new era of protectionism dawned. Promotion of nationally produced products for consumption by the citizens became new trend .This new packaging of economic and cultural nationalism is the latest feature of post-globalization. it is in this light among other thing that our nationalism is rekindled with new agenda of *atmanirbharta*.

AtmanirbharBharat Abhiyaan in new Millennium and Modi : The present agenda of *atmanirbhar Bharat* is by product of Covid- 19 and announced after ebbing of its first wave and during height of second wave on 12th May .2020. This corona came like catastrophe around the globe in general and India in particular .Lakhs of Indian lost their lives in two waves of this deadly disease due to lack of proper medical infrastructure and sufficient personnel like doctors and nurses etc .Besides there was neither facilities for vaccination nor visible satisfactory preparation for it. The lockdowns were adopted as only precautionary measure .This was extended from one phase to another and continued consistently in four consecutive phases. Such long lockdowns suspended all economic activities in manufacturing and service sectors. It ruined economy .People in lakhs lost their jobs since factories ,shops etc remained totally closed for long .Precisely people dependent on wages and salaries faced miseries of many kinds in cities and they were forced to back to their native villages. This resulted in mass migration from cities to villages with or without corona. Such mass migration was historical in post independent India after partition. The migrants marched in hundreds and hundreds of KMs on foot in large numbers. It was corona times and people had to quarantine for minimum two weeks .All saving spent before reaching home .There was no income left nor was any source of income available .The MNREGA could not provide employment to all . The second wave closed the hope of further opening and proved more disastrous .Lack of vaccines , hospital beds, oxygen cylinders and ventilators exposed our dependence. Besides ,our economy got adversely affected. Our GDP began to dip and reached to negative side .Price rise started soaring. Unemployment rate increased beyond expectation .The central government planned to give stimulus package to revive economy by reopening manufacturing and other related activities .India's Ffinance minister, Dr.Nirmala Sitharaman

announced in 20 lakhs crores to reactivate post covid economy of India .Again eight booster dose of 6.29 crore was allocated in this month too on 28th June,2021.

It is in this context that the Prime Minister Narendra Damodar Das Modi made a grand announcement of *atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan* on 12 th May ,2020.Keeping miserable condition of post covid economy in mind ,he planned to club all developmental plans and programmes to meet set objectives undertaken in this abhiyaan. These programmes include Make in India, Start Up India, Mudra ,MSMEs, MNREGA etc. This missionary call to make India a self reliant nation was situational and intentional to combat and contain his loosing popularity as well as to give momentum to constantly declining economic growth .To promote Indian manufacturing sector ,an appeal to use locally produced goods was made .The slogan *local is vocal* is almost replica of Gandhian call for consumption of swadeshi in 20th century. But Modi ji did not suggest to boycott videshi may be under tactical policy of not to annoy any foreign powers in the present era of interdependent world .It is merely one year old project and therefore it would be too early to make any conclusive comment .

No doubt that it new project .But no serious step seems to have been taken to get desired progress .Besides ,there is not declared dead line .The import list is being increased. Chinese and Korean goods are flooding our markets and getting popular response from consumers. The most unfortunate part is that Indian products are not able to compete in terms of price as well as in terms of quality. This government should work out a clear and practically attainable target in a set time frame .Without this ,the abhiyaan of atmanirbhar bharat would end up like earlier rhetorical slogan like *garibi hataao*

Conclusions: The idea of atmanirbhar bharat is not new rather coined in the last century by the Mahatma Gandhi during freedom struggle. The idea appeared in the form of aggressive economic nationalism to boycott british and all videshi goods and adopt swadehi in stead. Besides goods ,there was a clarion call to abandon British educational institutions and move to new and indigenous one . . Gandhi believed that it would weaken economic interest of colonial powers as a catalyst to loose their interest in ruling and plundering India for economic gains. Further this taste for consumption of local products by masses would boost local economy ,employment and income of our own people . This Gandhian idea of Atmanirbhar Bharat was a pristine proposal in colonial context . The present proposal of Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan by Prime Minister Modi is by and large on same line in pandemic covid-19 context .The narrative is same in two different time space as well as in context. Whatever may be the context and time frame ,the idea and objective is certainly good .The only thing needed is honest intention and proper follow up .It is hardly one year old concept .The coming time alone would prove its proper perspective ,sincerity, viability and prospects .But earlier experiences do not appear substantial . The abhiyaan appears more like rhetorical..

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