

# Covid-19 and Social Security System in India

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## **Abstract**

*People need safety nets to live happy life. Hence modern governments have adopted social security system to provide basic needs to their people. Modern safety system depends more on the economy of the country. The Corona pandemic damaged the economy of almost all the countries in the world. So the people are in most vulnerable situation ever since in their life. People are looking forward to the assistance given by the govt. The economy of the countries has already broken down; the government is struggling to provide the basic needs of the people. Then how to handle the situation when a country faces deep problem of economic slowdown? What is the role our civil society plays? These are the questions will be addressed in this paper.*

## **Introduction:**

2020 is considered as a worst year. Corona Pandemic is leading to socio political crisis in the world. Every nations, from developed to under developed, are struggling a lot in all aspects of human life. Economy of the most developed nations dropped severely. Nations required many more years to get economical status as it had in pre-covid-19 world order.

At this movement every nations has facing immigrants' problem. Immigrants, refugees are the main victims of the pandemic. They are facing deep problems everywhere in the world. Most of them have lost their job and have to go back to the native countries. But it is difficult to return to their natives from the country where they have been working for last few years. And the condition of their dependants is too distressful. The native people also have suffered a lot in the critical situation.

In India, the migrants are the major problems during this pandemic. And there are a criticism against government is that it has failed to handle/ manage the problems of migrants. But central government and State government has assured that will

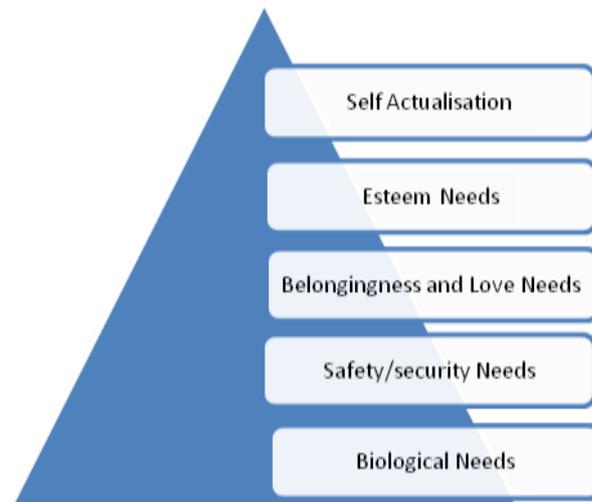
provide all the basic needs, people have to stay wherever they are. And many of them have Adhar card, Ration card and bank account in the cities where they are leading their life for past few years. And easy to get facilities of the government in the places where they are staying. But people neglected government assurance, and eager to go back to their villages. That means they wanted to be stay in their villages instead of accepting the safety net/social security system that government has adopted. Why did people eager to return to the native villages where most of them have no ration card, Adhhar card or bank account or property of their own? And they have taken high risk in returning from cities to villages. Why did people eager to return their native place? What is the social mechanism existed in our society?

### **What is Social Security System?**

UDHR Article-22- Social Security asserted, “Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to realisation, through national effort and international cooperation and in accordance with the organisation and resources of each state of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality”

In other words, “every person is faced with social problems and risks at some time in his life span due to risks associated with sickness, accident, unemployment, disability, maternity and old age. The Social Security Policies are intended to mitigate or provide cover the costs for these problems and risks faced by persons exposed to these situations”.

Human beings have different kinds of needs from the purely biological to the spiritual needs. Modern theories have classified individuals’ desires/needs in five strata.



Physiological/Biological and security needs are the basic needs such as food, water, shelter and protection etc. Belongingness and love and esteem needs are the psychological need which includes intimate relationships, friends, prestige and feeling of accomplishment. But the highest need is self actualisation that achieving one's full potential including creative activities.

State is capable of basic needs such as biological and safety desires of the people. It falls to the state to set up a social security system that treats human beings as mere receptacle of material goods.

Social security system can only be supported by the resources available to the state and that depends very crucially on the economic conjunctures. So sustained economic growth will provide sustained social security system. The safety net functions well as long as a minority depends on it. What happens when the majority needs to be supported by such safety net? When active population becomes minority the economic crisis deepens.

The corona pandemic created a situation as one such critical situation in every nation in the world. The social security system begins to breakdown. That means, it breakdowns when it precisely needed the most. In other words, the western model of social security system is affordable if and only if it is not really required. A social safety net that focuses on providing material goods to satisfy the 'basic' needs of a human organism is not a viable option in a long term (S. N. Balagangadhara).

The concept of social security has been very old one, though the term, the laws and the institutions build around to institutionalize the entire concept of social security

in India may be of recent origin. In view of the impact of the World War II on labour in India, the Government of India accepted the principles of health insurance and passed the Employees State Insurance Act in April 1948<sup>1</sup>.

The modern factory system of production is of recent origin in India. Until early twenties, there was no workers' organization at all-India level. So, the British Government continued with its traditional policy of exploitation and some measures were adopted only after 1920, when a little awakening started. Thus, the study of social security in India may be taken to have started from 1920.

The pre-1920 period can be called as the period of unconcern on the part of government, the employer and the workers. Large scale factories began to develop in India from 1850.<sup>2</sup>

When the modernity entered into India the same western model of social security has adopted gradually. It is to be a right oriented, states responsibility to do it. But if the states' economic condition is become worse, then the chances of getting security opportunities will be less. Large number of people depending on state is not a viable condition for large populated country like India. There must be an alternative ways to be invented. Role of civil society needs to be revisited.

The 'Civil Society' and its basic units like family, friends and villages can help to set up a viable safety net. Is it possible? My answer is yes. It is possible.

### **Gandhi: Idea of Social Welfare**

As mentioned before, the modern social security system started to introduce in India during British administration. Before that the people of India has faced many risks and uncertain conditions. And there was no such government policies and administration to handle the situation. Then there must be alternative mechanisms that handle the situation better by providing safety net to the people. In Gandhi's perspective, it is none other than 'our society'.

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<sup>1</sup> Wilbur J. Cohen "Social Security in India" *Bulletin*, May 1953. URL:

<https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/ssb/v16n5/v16n5p11.pdf> last dated 09-06-2020

<sup>2</sup> [https://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/49070/12/12\\_chapter%207.pdf](https://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/49070/12/12_chapter%207.pdf) last dated 09-06-2020.

Gandhi never equated happiness with economic prosperity and physical pleasure alone. His concept of welfare of society was totally opposed to the western notion of welfare which is individualistic and utilitarian.

Gandhi's deep-rooted conviction that individual happiness lies in the happiness of society and vice-versa; and this is constantly seen in almost all his pronouncements regarding social welfare. He considered man superior to the system he propounded, and so he was against the system which brought about moral degradation of Indian society. Gandhi never drew a sharp distinction between economics and ethics. For him, economic policies which were harmful to the moral well-being of an individual, community, society, country or a nation were immoral and therefore, sinful. For him, happiness means the happiness of the society as a whole and was indicated primarily, by its moral standard and secondarily, by its physical and economic well-being.(Chitra Desai)

He believed firmly that the individual and the society were contributory to each other's happiness. His concept of social welfare was mainly focused the relationship between individual and society: each contribution necessary to the other's moral, spiritual, economic and social progress, prosperity and happiness. Unlike to the modern western concept, this is the way his concept of social welfare is structured. Modern institutional concept of citizen-right is concentrated on the different needs, of an individual or a group like physical, mental or economic.

The Gandhian concept takes a total perspective and focuses on the development of the moral and spiritual aspects with truth and non-violence as its base; with all the other aspects, such as physical, mental and economic. To enhance the individual's social sense, thereby creating a society of healthy individuals. One important aspect of Gandhi's social thought was his tendency not only to bridge the gap between individual and social ethics but also to regard social reality as a counterpart of man's inner reality.

In the western concept of social welfare there lies a sense of giver and receiver even in today's institutional and citizen-right concept. This may be due to the fact that the present concept has developed from the initial residual concept of charity...In the Gandhian concept, there is no giving or receiving...it is a total perspective, not divided into areas, i.e. the total individual or society has to reform and thus build up the *society as a moral concept of*

*happiness* which covers all other aspects. The individual contributes to the society and the society helps the individual<sup>3</sup>.

Overall, the modern notion of welfare developed in the West based on individualism and industrialisation. The welfare services consist of help in the form of money, material or services. But the Gandhian concept has been developed in India, where social welfare was woven in the fabric of its society since time immemorial. Help to the needy was enjoined by 'dharma' for the joint families, communities and kings. Gandhi went a step further and for him, rights and duties go together. Both parties had to co-relate, co-operate to improve the conditions, not merely wait for society to help them. His concept of welfare is not dependent merely on money or materials alone whereas modern social welfare is mainly focuses on money and material goods.

### **India: Traditional Social security net**

In India, at this stage, somehow this pandemic is under control. We will be relieved if it ends at this stage. And we hope so. Most of the scholars agree that Indian Prime Minister and the existing Government has taken risk by announcing early lockdown. Some others criticise the decision by considering migrants problem. But the overall response from international arena, appreciates the government decision and its implementation related to this pandemic situation. That means, we are in a superior position to fight against the Corona. But the social situation is in danger. Because, when modernisation, industrialisation enters into India, people started to migrate to cities to work in industries, MNC's, hotels and different kinds of production and marketing.

During lockdown, industries, companies, hotels and all the productive and marketing services are stopped. This closed down of the city effect the rural economy. Social crisis in European countries predominantly increased. Slowed down of economic activities in urban areas has an effect on rural access as well. Today the

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<sup>3</sup>Chitra Desai, "Gandhi's Concept of Social Welfare" [http://www.gandhi-manibhavan.org/activities/essay\\_socialwelfare.htm](http://www.gandhi-manibhavan.org/activities/essay_socialwelfare.htm) last dated:10-06-2020.

large portion of our agriculture activities is commercial. The process of production has taken place in rural areas are depending on the demands of the cities. When cities are closed down, the rural agriculture faces deeper problem. The dependants of this kind of agriculture and the people (migrates) return to their village are in a crucial condition which is unimaginable. Ex: Fruits, vegetables, flowers and poultry producers are in critical condition which our media reporting every day. The poverty is the major issue. This is the typical condition that we have in India and elsewhere.

To overcome from this situation, productive measures are needed on the part of the government/ State. Social security system is very crucial in protecting people from this crisis. If state provide basic income security/basic needs /desires, thereby enhancing people's capacity to manage and overcome shocks.

The sustainable economic growth helps sustainable social security. And safety net functions well as long as minority depends on it. But in this situation majority needs to be supported by such a safety net. So it depends economic condition of the country. That means social security breakdowns when it precisely needed the most. The state/Govt safety net is not viable for long term.

Then the civil society and its basic units like family, friends etc can hope to setup a viable social security system. Is it possible?

We have seen the story of migrants. They were eager to return to their native places by tempos, bikes, tractors, bicycles and by walk for thousands of kilometres.

Prime Minister, all the Chief Ministers, and all the concerned ministers assured them to be stay the place wherever they were. Government will be taken care of basic needs: Food; Shelter; Cloths etc. And even many of them are have some labor and health insurances and many of them have ration and Adhhar Cards and bank account in the cities. But they were not stay in the cities; returned overnight to the native places. Why???

Here Gandhian notion of social welfare is still possible and practical. And people are not depends merely on money and materials. People are expecting a social relationship instead of government schemes. Or Indian society provides a different comfort zone to their members. Indian social security system is completely different and ideal too. It focuses more on human happiness than the biological needs.

Biological needs not enough to a person to be happy. Our society teaches us to be happy in many ways. Western social security system focuses on: satisfying the requirements needed to live. Then the following challenge that one has to solve/explain: *who 'needs' happiness when there is no food to eat?*

The answer to this question is two-fold. One: this question makes sense if and only if you accept the idea that human beings have some basic needs, a picture that western culture has made a part of our common sense. Second: because the society-at-large builds this safety net, people have to be taken care of within the units that belong to the civil society, namely, family, friends, charitable organizations, temples and such like. It is not the responsibility of the State but that of the society (S. N. Balagangadhara).

Our society focuses mainly on the happiness of its members, but it is able to provide biological needs too. In India, traditional Agricultural family is like a banyan tree. They were the guardian for the non-agricultural communities. *Athiti Devobhava*, *Hasidode Bhikshannagaluntu*, *Concept of Vaaranna* etc were the major notions and practices were existed in the in society. There are different kinds of people are leading their life by collecting groceries in a village(Hegde, 2018).

In a broader level, temples, *Matas*, *Ashramas* have been providing food for larger population. Ex: Dharmastala, Siddhaganga Mata etc. This system is not completely collapsed. Therefore, people are still happy in the villages, having no money and no support from the government. Now we need to focus on such a safety net. For a longer run, it would work in a different way. The precondition is to rebuild this system is to concentrate more on our traditional agricultural system.

### **Rejuvenating Social virtues:**

As we all know that this is a strange situation every nation comes across. The economic slowdown is common problem of many countries. Modernisation allowed society to be changed drastically. Therefore, Covid-19 teaches us to revisit our own social virtues instead of only criticising. So we need to rethink on two issues: one, Agricultural aspects; two, Village Industries.

- ***Revisiting Traditional Agriculture system:*** Our agricultural setup is completely urban-centric. Urban-centric is profit oriented instead of social moral and ethics. Traditional agriculture is not merely profit based, it is social value oriented.
- ***Revival of village industries:*** The major aspect of this pandemic situation is that of urban labour as well as that of the landless farmers, constituting rural labour. But Gandhi has tried to address the problem long ago. He was appalled at the living conditions of the factory workers in the city and of the landless farm-labourers in the village. He believed that the spinning wheel was the answer to many of India's problems. By the spinning wheel, he no doubt meant Khadi, but he also meant the revival of village industries. He was strongly believed in the opinion that India was a country of villages. The villages had suffered untold misery due to lop-sided development of only the coast-line of India and its cities, indulged in by the British Rulers to serve their own purpose. To resolve such problems is possible with decentralization, development of Khadi and village industries with efforts to make the villages self-sufficient.
- ***The resurgence of villages:*** The dominant intelligentsia, both India and western, criticizes and tried to reform/change each and every aspects of the society. The critical notion of eastern societies is purely barrowed from the western religious perspective. It has been troubling Indians to understand themselves in a better way. It gives the framework to understand our society completely different from what it is. This is the right time to revisit our social structure and its mechanism.

### **Conclusion:**

The self-sufficient villages are the real solutions to the problem occurred due to the strange situation. It will gradually eradicate the condition to migrate to the over-crowded cities for work and employment to earn their daily bread. Then people will be happy where unusual developments happen in their country or elsewhere. And

economical slowdown does not matter for them in some sense if they develop our traditional social safety net with necessary changes. Then India is able to provide new happiness model to the world. Or people will think beyond their biological desires. That will lead to the ideal situation where everyone can learn to get human happiness.

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