

Mahatma Gandhi's Views on Machinery: Ideas, Manifestations and Practicality through the Prism of Ethical Reasoning

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Abstract : *Mahatma Gandhi's attitude towards machinery has passed through three different phases. In the early years of his political thinking, Gandhi was opposed to the concept of machinery and industrialization and justified his arguments based on ethical and economic rationale. However, in the later years, he modified his previous standpoint on machinery, as he realized the distinction between machinery and industrialization on the one hand and between different types of machinery, on the other. He persistently denounced industrialism, i.e. centralized mass production, but acknowledged the limited use of machinery within stringent restrictions for human welfare. During this time, he did not advocate the abolition of machinery, but spoke for its limited usage. In other words, Gandhi, during this phase, amended his earlier stance and upheld his opposition not to machinery but to the obsession for machinery. It is in this backdrop that this paper highlights Gandhi's views on machinery and the question of ethics, which is extremely topical and relevant in this digitized global order, invariably thrust upon us, as the world reels under the pandemic situation.*

Keywords: COVID-19, Gandhi, Hind Swaraj, Khadi, machinery, Satyagraha,

Mahatma Gandhi's Philosophical Thought:

Introduction: Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was one of the eminent mass leaders in the pages of world history and held a unique position in the Indian freedom movement in colonial India. Between 1916 and 1947, Gandhi had revealed his radiant adroitness and appeal as a leader of the masses and earned a niche as a nationalist leader par excellence. He was an iconoclast, who engineered a strategy of resistance to the British Empire in India by adopting novel methods such as non-violence, Satyagraha (acceptance/adherence to truth), fasting, hartals, non-cooperation and mass civil disobedience. Gandhi was a multifaceted genius, a philosopher and a humanist, deeply pained by the sufferings of the impoverished Indians. His social ideas thoroughly displayed a deep and abiding consciousness of the fundamental reformation of the Indian society. He fervently believed that the economic salvation of India was contingent on the economic revival of the numerous Indians inhabiting both the urban and rural areas. In line with such a conviction, he championed self-reliance and the cause of small-scale village and cottage industries, which could generate employment on a long-term basis to the common masses of India. At the political level, Gandhi felt that the state was a means of intimidation, since it was likely to deflate the cherished and essential ideals of individual freedom. As an individualist, Gandhi acknowledged that adherence to truth, non-violence and an ambience of freedom facilitated the development of the personality of individuals.

Gandhi was a charismatic leader with mass appeal, who introduced a new set of values and learning in the Indian milieu and beyond. Although his ideals had a magnetic influence on the masses, neither did he occupy nor aspire to attain a position of power and authority. He had a towering personality, who contributed to a great extent to the highest social and moral values of the people of India and abroad. He was essentially a psychologist, whose charismatic personality, perseverance and determination in the face of hardship, inspired the masses. The central canon of Gandhi's philosophy and approach was anchored on encouraging the propagation of harmony, sacrifice and service to mankind, which found concurrence with Satyagraha and non-violence. Satyagraha was the most significant ideology of Gandhi, infused with its inherent calmness and practicality, which could be accepted by anyone, irrespective of caste, religion and other affiliations.

Gandhi has been acknowledged as a political activist and a realist philosopher, rather than a theorist. Like Karl Marx, Mao Zedong and Ho Chi Minh, he devoted himself to analyzing a particular situation and modifying principles through practical experiences, rather than advocating a "theory" for an "ideal" society. His philosophical thought was a logical outcome of his political and moral principles, based on the ideals

of Swaraj (self-rule), Sarvodaya (universal kindness and welfare), Satyagraha, truth and non-violence, non-cooperation, civil disobedience, the use of the Charkha, khadi and popularizing the constructive program, to name a few. These ideals, in turn, fed his economic ideas and the economic system he visualized. Of these ideals, Sarvodaya posed the most overwhelming influence on him, following his reading of Ruskin's *Unto This Last*, which upheld that collective welfare is the source of individual welfare. Gandhi envisioned a society based on Sarvodaya, wherein social welfare would percolate to the grassroots. It was in this backdrop that his wider social ideals of Purna Swaraj (complete independence), truth and non-violence motivated him to envision an economic system consistent with his moral, social and political yearning (Grover and Mehta 2015: 334-335). His philosophy of Swadeshi and self-sufficiency was germane in that of Swaraj, while a chain of economic ideas, like non-exploitation, non-possession, trusteeship and bread-labor evolved from his perception of Sarvodaya. These ideas have constituted the pillars of Gandhi's comprehensive economic principles. His political ideas have exhibited two contrasting trends: on the one hand, his political ideas appeared to be a relative or a reconciled outline of both western and eastern traditions, while he has also been recognized as an original thinker or a unique pacesetter of political concepts, inherently based on Indian traditions, on the other. Gandhi advocated the concept of village self-sufficiency, which originated from his idea of non-exploitation. He was aware of the evils and exploitative character of the capitalist system of production and the advantages of personal interest associated with it. Therefore, he tried to evolve a production system to eliminate the exploitative character for the common masses of India by advocating the principle of Swadeshi. In other words, he emphasized the importance of indigenizing the methods of production, towards which, he objected to the use of machinery. In South Africa, Gandhi witnessed a brute form of capitalism, which laid the seeds of conviction in his mind that capitalism and industrialism were twin evils. To Gandhi, industrialism meant slave labor, the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few and the saving of labor instead of the generation of it, which was relevant for the teeming millions of suffering Indian masses. He believed industrialization was diabolical and an impediment to the growth of a non-violent society.

In this context, it can be argued that Gandhi developed a distinctive, non-western political philosophy, accommodating Indian value systems. On the notion of truth, Gandhi had a self-contradictory view: while on the one hand, he did not regard truth as eternal, he often conceded that truth was as old as the Himalayas, on the other. With this introductory backdrop, the article will analyze Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy on machinery and situate the study in the contemporary context of the unprecedented human dependence on machinery and digital technology. It will conclude with an

analysis of the question of reconciling ethics and the employment of machinery and technology under contemporary circumstances, in an attempt to view the issue through the Gandhian lens of machinery. The methodology of analysis is qualitative and the sources are primary including books authored by Gandhi and his selected speeches and secondary, like the interpretations of Gandhi's writings and archival records.

Gandhi's Views on Machinery: Formative Outlook and Concerns: Gandhi's philosophy and thought pertaining to machinery has been evolutionary in nature and spanned three different phases. The first phase of this evolutionary saga was contained in his famous book, *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule* (1909). This book presented a vehement critique of Western civilization, particularly its facets of colonial imperialism, industrial capitalism and rationalist materialism (Chakrabarty 2006: 24). In the fifth and sixth chapters, Gandhi has been uncompromisingly critical of machinery, technology and their attendant consequences on civilization so severely that he was not in a position to compromise with any of its form. He was convinced that, "It is machinery that has impoverished India", likening it to "a snake-hole which may contain from one to hundred snakes" and alluding to its representation of "a great sin." He defined machine "as an appliance that tends to displace the human or animal labour instead of supplementing it or merely increasing its efficiency." While explaining the predicament of the impact of machinery, Gandhi enumerated the plight of the workers in the mills of Bombay (now Mumbai), who had been transformed into "slaves" and his caveat was loud and clear, "If the machinery craze grows in our country, it will become an unhappy land" (ibid.:90-92). Gandhi was unable to recall even a single advantage of the use of machinery and believed that the basic cause of human misery and the "sin" of modern civilization was the advent of technology and industrialization. His negative views on machinery had roots in his student days in England (1888-1891) where he was influenced by radical and liberal groups and individuals. His extensive reading of the fervent critique of industrial life and campaigners of simplicity, namely Tolstoy, Ruskin, Thoreau and Edward Carpenter and profound thinking on this subject were supplemented with his first hand experiences of the indispensable position occupied by machinery in the progress of Western civilization. In his judgment, machine had four essential attributes: it could be duplicated or copied; there was no limit to its enlargement; it appeared to possess a force or creative capacity of its own that functioned as the inevitable law of the dislodgment of labor, which once the machine was created and permitted to function, went more or less out of human control (Tendulkar 1954: 179-180) and if allowed to operate in full swing, machinery would inevitably reduce or even shroud human mobility and competence. Furthermore,

his initial views on machinery as antagonistic and detrimental to civilization were premised on ethical and economic considerations. Of his ethical arguments, to begin with, Gandhi emphasized the inculcation of ethical values, rather than rituals. He envisaged the development of a societal system which could synchronize with his religious vision of life. Gandhi stood for a simple, rural, agrarian social structure and was extremely critical of the modern, complex, automated civilization. He felt that modern, mechanized civilization, with intonation of higher standard of living, was antithetical to his professed religious principles. He advocated the need to restrain human desires within a thin and restricted sphere, while remaining content with the fulfillment of man's fundamental physical requirements. Gandhi believed that the spiritual progress of man should be independent of the obsession with machinery, as he advised the imperative of working several hours a day, taking cognizance of the adverse impact of the modern predilection of reduced working hours on the religious development of man. This view contradicted that of the socialists, as he argued, "I know that the socialist would introduce industrialization to the extent of reducing the working hours to one or two in a day, but I do not want it" (Tendulkar 1951: 202).

Secondly, Gandhi's critique of machinery was borne in his contention that it was offensive to normal life and was contrary to his dictum of "simple living and high thinking" as he argued that:

"I do not believe that industrialization is necessary in any case for any country. It is much less so far for India. Indeed, I believe that independent India can only discharge her duty towards a groaning world by adopting a simple but ennobled life by developing her thousands of cottages and living at peace with the world. High thinking is inconsistent with complicated material life based on high speed imposed on us by Mammon worship. All the graces of life are possible only when we learn the art of living nobly." (Tendulkar 1954: 188)

Thirdly, the development of machinery had led to the expansion of the factory system, which had relegated the workers to slaves. In this context, he wrote, "The workers in the mills in Bombay have become slaves. The condition of the women working in the mills is shocking.... If the machinery craze grows in our country, it will become an unhappy land" (ibid.:58). Fourthly, machinery tended to impose its individuality on those using it, thereby transforming them into machine-like characters and disparaging their inventive, creative and artistic talents. Probably, one of the best depictions of this sentiment can be found in Charlie Chaplin's movie 'The Modern Times'. Fifthly, technological progress spurred the development of monetary exchange system, which exacerbated economic disparity and exploitation of the impoverished masses. From this perspective, Gandhi preferred the barter system over the monetized model of economy, though he cautioned that the barter arrangement could succeed

only in a labor-intensive arrangement, rather than an automated economic system. In this context, Gandhi argued:

“Under my system, it is labour, which is the current coin, not metal. And any person who can use his labour has that coin, has wealth. He converts his labour into cloth; he converts his labour into grain. If he wants paraffin oil, which he cannot himself produce, he uses his surplus grain for getting the oil. It is exchange of labour on free, fair and equal terms-hence it is no robbery.”(Tendulkar 1952: 135)

Finally, machines fomented economic rivalry and power struggle, eventually demoralizing the process of cooperation on which the human society ought to be premised. In other words, Gandhi apprehended that the simplicity of human life would consequently wither away with the evolution of a mechanized society. Gandhi's critique of machinery from the economic standpoint may be summarized as follows: First, industrialization inevitably led to the displacement of human labor, which would ultimately tantamount to promoting unemployment. In other words, he regarded machinery as a mechanism that tended to displace human or animal labor in addition to retarding its competence. Secondly, machinery stimulated the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few and thus caused severe disparities in the distribution of income, as he contended, “I want the concentration of wealth not in the hands of a few, but in the hands of all. Today machinery merely helps a few to ride on the backs of millions”(Bandyopadhyaya 2000:143). By its logical extension, machinery led to the regional concentration of wealth in cities by exploiting the villages as well as common masses, thereby propagating an undesirable urban-rural divide. Thirdly, automated mass production resulted in a complex system of allocation, demonstrated by swindle and conjecture, which he believed would never emerge in the case of the non-mechanized and decentralized system of rural industries. Fourthly, Gandhi felt that machinery facilitated mass production, in turn leading to over-production and economic crisis. He firmly asserted that the Great Depression of the 1930s was due to the evil consequences of the growth of machinery. He further believed that the effects of over-production did not remain confined to domestic markets, but tended to propagate imperialism. While explaining this idea, he argued that industrialism depended on human capacity to exploit “on foreign markets being open to you, and on the absence of competitors. It is because these factors are getting less and less every day for England that its number of unemployed is mounting up daily” (ibid.:146). Fifthly, machinery was also not necessarily industrious in its capacity, as he acknowledged that the application of machinery in agriculture would impoverish soil fertility and consequently, jeopardize production. Finally, machinery spurred

congested cities, high speed of travel etc. which were responsible for deterioration of health. All these supposedly evil characteristics of machinery guided Gandhi to draw a decisive conclusion that machinery "represents a great sin" as he failed to "recall a single good point in connection with machinery" (Chakrabarty 2006: 92). Therefore, in the early years that characterized the evolution of his philosophical thought, Gandhi vehemently objected the use of machinery, denounced it as an absolute evil justifying his critique on valid ethical and economic rationale. Expressing his reservation to the use of machinery, as he experienced it first hand as a student in London, in the backdrop of its industrial vista, he explained:

"It was not that we did not know how to invent machinery, but our forefathers knew that, if we set our hearts after such things, we would become slaves and lose our moral fibre.... They further reasoned that larger cities were a snare and a useless encumbrance and that people would not be happy in them, that there would be gangs of thieves and robbers, prostitutions and vice flourishing in them and the poor men would be robbed by rich men. They were therefore, satisfied with small villages." (Gandhi 1947: 61-63)

Metamorphosis of Gandhi's Concept of Machinery:

Reading its Critique

This section delves into the second phase (1920-1925) in the evolution of Gandhi's philosophy, which witnessed significant departure, when contrasted with his initial years that has been discussed in the preceding section. This was a period characterized by his appreciation of the dichotomy between machinery and industrialization on the one hand and the distinction between machinery of different kinds on the other. His repudiation of industrialism or centralized mass production notwithstanding, Gandhi became more amenable to the use of machinery with stringent restrictions, as a means of facilitating human welfare. During this phase, he emphasized limiting the use of machinery, as against its outright eradication. Finally, in the third stage of this evolutionary saga (1926-1946) Gandhi underwent a radical transformation on his concept of machinery, with his acceptance of the establishment of factories on specific premises, like the use of machinery was acceptable if it did not cause unemployment; it must be owned or at least controlled by the state; machinery must run in the spirit of public service and welfare; workers must be given reasonable wages and should not be deprived. Besides, he provided a list of machinery to be used in the fields of electricity, shipbuilding, iron works, railways, machine making and specific machines like sewing machine, printing presses, surgical instruments and steamers, which had public efficacy, provided they were not antithetical to village crafts, or they did not

enhance economic inequality and dislodge manual labor. Validating his argument, Gandhi wrote:

“Electricity, shipbuilding, iron works, machine making and the like existing side by side with village handicrafts.... Hitherto industrialization has been so planned as to destroy the villages and village crafts. In the state of the future, it will sub serve the villages and their crafts. I can have no consideration for machinery which is meant either to enrich the few at the expense of many or without cause to displace the useful labour of many.” (Ministry of Information & Broadcasting 1963: 580-581)

Finally, he also stressed that the use of machinery is lawful which serves the interests of all. However, he issued a caveat against allowing it to displace human labor and render them unemployed. However, such an analysis of his views of machinery suffers from the lack of a strong rational basis. His arguments from the economic perspective were justified from the standpoint of unhygienic factory environment and lack of proper town planning, while his contention that machinery led to the loss of soil fertility had no valid or scientific basis. Gandhi's critics have argued for the need to replenish soil fertility with fertilizers, irrespective of the method of cultivation, physical or mechanized. They asserted that machinery did not impoverish the natural and indestructible properties of soil. Besides, Gandhi's explanation of the concentration of wealth has been challenged on the logic that social relations in general, the system of ownership and government policy, in particular, are responsible for the same. The issue of the skewed distribution of wealth could be addressed by trade union activism, public ownership in one form or another, preventive as well as redistributive fiscal and monetary policies, regional economic decentralization and the delegation of economic power through organizations of workers' self-management, which Gandhi had approved of as well (Bandyopadhyaya 2000: 150-152). Moreover, from the economic perspective, Gandhi's argument that big machines had relegated the smaller ones to the back burner of industrial development was also repudiated, as critics justified that big machines were cost-effective, thereby facilitating workers' earning higher wages against less physical labor. The constructive contribution of small machines could not be overlooked in an industrially developing country like India.

Summarily then, Gandhi's initial aversion to the use of machinery and its acknowledgment as a symbol of modern civilization, fueling moral and ethical degradation of human beings experienced a transformation in the later years. Evidently, with his increasing experience of the advantages of the spinning wheel, he erected a thin line of demarcation between machinery designed for human good and those exacerbating human exploitation. He thus submitted that centralized power machinery was more readily capable of being utilized for purposes of exploitation than

decentralized machinery. Since the principal consideration of Gandhi's philosophy revolved around individual welfare, he subjected everything to this highest experiment. His preference for Khadi and village industries was a rational upshot of his views against machinery. He was very passionate about Khadi and village industries as he felt that the Khadi and spinning wheel had the potential for providing employment to millions adding to their slender resources by way of supplementary occupation, which mills could not provide. He believed that the huge population of peasants dependent on land in Indian villages had practically no work for more than four months in the year. This forced idleness, according to him, was responsible for the impoverishment and poverty of these villagers. The effective way of providing employment to these insolvent millions was through the use of the spinning wheel in every household. Thus, Khadi would result in the economic independence of the peasantry and it was, according to Gandhi, the only means of saving the peasantry from extinction and making the impoverished Indian masses self-reliant and self-supporting (Young India 1929: 85). However, Gandhi was not against machines but against the machinery age and the craze for machinery, as he argued, "I am not against machinery as such, but I am totally opposed to it when it masters us." To overcome his personal dilemma regarding his viewpoint on machinery, Gandhi further added: "Ideally, I would rule out all machinery, even as I would reject this very body, which is not helpful to salvation, and seek the absolute liberation of the soul. From that point of view I would reject all machinery, but machines will remain because, like the body they are inevitable" (Gandhi 1951: 29).

Gandhi's perspective of machinery, industrialism and his deep attachment with the spinning wheel has suffered wide criticism. Even his most trusted disciple, Jawaharlal Nehru, did not subscribe to Gandhi's stand on machinery, and during his stewardship of this great country, he took all possible steps to industrialize India. While describing the Khadi movement, hand-spinning and hand-weaving, Nehru asserted that it was "an intensification of individualism in production, and is thus a throw-back to the pre-industrial age. As a solution of any vital present-day problem it cannot be taken seriously, and it produces a mentality which may become an obstacle to growth in the right direction" (Nehru 1936: 523). Subhas Chandra Bose had also expressed his resentment to the Gandhian approach to machinery and industrialism, though he had praised the Khadi program and admitted:

"If we view the programme of the Congress during the last few years we shall find that only our Khadi programme has been able to offer to our masses something which means bread and butter to them. Khadi, I am glad to say, has brought food to thousands and thousands of hungry mouths all over India... There are lakhs and lakhs of poor Indians

living on the verge of starvation to which Khadi can offer a means of subsistence.”(Ministry of Information and Broadcasting 1962: 31)

Additionally, Indian political thinkers of the ilk of M. N. Roy, Rabindranath Tagore and Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar were quite critical of Gandhi's views on machinery. Gandhi and Ambedkar were piercingly divided on the issue. While the former denounced machinery as a “snake-hole which may contain from one to a hundred snakes” and identified it as a significant factor responsible for poverty and diseases in India, the latter acknowledged the potential of machinery to free the masses of their mundane toil and grind, thereby opening up a period of leisure and helping them pursue a “life of culture” and intellectual enrichment. Ambedkar thus explained, “What divides the brute from man is culture. Culture is not possible for the brute, but it is essential for every person to lead a life of culture which means the cultivation of the mind as distinguished from the satisfaction of mere physical wants.” (Rodrigues 2006: 157) Ambedkar deplored the Gandhian philosophy as Sanatanism or militant orthodox Hinduism arguing that it would take us back to the “primitive” stage and “animal life” and hailed the use of machinery, since it would play the role of an emancipator among the masses. Appending that modern civilization and machinery were inseparable, he questioned:

“How then can a life of culture be made possible? It is not possible unless there is sufficient leisure....What can lessen such toil? Only when machine takes the place of man.... The man who condemns machinery and modern civilization simply does not understand their purpose and the ultimate aim which human society must strive to achieve.”(ibid.:159)

Notwithstanding his eulogy of machinery, Ambedkar was also aware of the challenges associated with human being's over-reliance on machinery, though he did not concur with Gandhi's view that the solution lay in rejecting it completely, thereby exhorting the need to address “wrong social organization” (Kumar 2015). Gandhi preferred nationalized or state-controlled organizations to private ownership over large industries, but he was not convinced that socialization would remove all the evils of industrialization. His immediate concern was the challenge of acute unemployment and underemployment in India, which he apprehended, would be further fueled by the indiscriminate use and obsession with labor-saving machinery. Expressing his concern, Gandhi asked, “How can a country with crores of living machines afford to have a machine which will displace the labour of crores of living machine? It would spell their unemployment and ruin” (Ministry of Information and Broadcasting 1967: vii). It is true that Gandhi's opposition to machinery was crucial at that particular juncture in the history of India, as he professed it was imperative for establishing a non-violent society, contrary to a technologically-advanced society replete with

human greed and desire. He thus advocated, "What is good for one nation situated in one condition is not necessarily good enough for another one. One man's food is often another man's poison. Physical geography of a country has a predominant share in determining its culture"(ibid.:43). In this evolutionary saga of Gandhian thought, he exhibited a transformation from total rejection to limited acceptance of machinery, akin to the conditions and circumstances of the teeming millions in India. This flexibility and pragmatic adaptation encompasses the distinctiveness in Gandhian philosophy.

The Ethical Connotation of the Concept of Machinery:

Interrogating its Contemporary Relevance

The relevance of Gandhian philosophy in contemporary times may be discussed in the context of the situation unleashed by the pandemic, in particular, its impact on digital learning. The indispensability of machinery and technology in our daily lives has been exposed under the present circumstances, as the world is adapting to a "new normal", with the use of digital, virtual technology-fostered online methods of teaching and learning, as against the traditional classroom teaching. Although under extraordinary circumstances, digital learning can act as a supplementary method, it may not be accessible or acceptable as a viable alternative to classroom teaching. In particular, in a developing country like India, with more than 22% of the population enduring below poverty level existence on less than Rs. 32 daily, digital learning undesirably widens the digital divide. According to a Reserve Bank of India estimate in 2019, of the total population living in the rural areas in India, 25.7% live below poverty line, whereas in the urban areas, the situation is marginally better with 13.7% of the population living below poverty line. In sum, however, around 22% of the Indian population pursues below poverty line existence (Sharma 2019). Citing the unprecedented situation unleashed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the University Grants Commission (UGC) has approved in principle a proposal to allow all Indian Universities to complete up to 40% of their existing courses online as a means to supplement the face-to-face classroom mode (Mohanty 2020). However, the question that was raised in this perspective pertained to the viability and adequacy of this mode of teaching in the country's diverse socio-economic milieu. According to the sample survey on "Household Social Consumption on Education in India" conducted between July 2017 and June 2018, it was revealed that 10.7% households in India had computers, which included laptops, desktops and tablets but not mobile phones. The survey also noted a deep urban-rural divide in owning computers and accessing the Internet. Only 4.4% households in rural India had computers, while 14.9% had Internet. The service got disrupted frequently due to power cuts and weak network. In urban areas, 23.4 % households

had computers and 42% Internet facilities. Thus, online education can never emerge as an alternative to classroom teaching, as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) acknowledged it is not the way forward due to disparities in access to computers and the Internet across households. (National Statistical Office 2019: B-7) The pandemic has served as a powerful reminder to reassess the challenges to overcome the vulnerability of education, particularly the virtual teaching-learning process, further underscored by a survey conducted by the professors of one of the premier Universities of India, Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) with 70% of the faculty respondents acknowledging the ineffectiveness of online teaching to successfully replicate the offline in-person classroom mode. It reported that approximately 40% absenteeism was caused by the inability of students to access the internet either due to poor connectivity or lack of gadgets, representing the diverse socio-economic backgrounds they hailed from. (Sarfaraz 2020)

Therefore, in a Corona Virus Disease (COVID)-dominated world order, the most daunting challenge in India emerges in the spheres of reduction of poverty and inequality. The situation can be addressed by embarking upon more inclusive policies, with stress on social security and equitable redistribution of wealth. Towards this end, smart machines and other digital devices would emerge as inadequate as the sole academic tools for learning and even risk manifestation as an economic “poison” for the impoverished lot. Probably, Gandhi’s acceptance of the machine-driven revolution would be contingent upon machinery not creating and increasing the digital divide. To sum up, Gandhi’s visualization of the western civilization as self-gratifying and self-centered, was hinged on its pursuit of immediate material benefit. He also attributed it as individualistic in the sense of encouraging egocentric and sovereign individuals. Through personal experience, Gandhi realized that the industrial and technological revolution had transformed man into individual-oriented beings, thus mechanizing life, reducing him to helpless and passive victim and thereby establishing a new form of slavery. From the psychological standpoint, Gandhi had ushered in a transformed milieu in Indian nationalist movement, by inculcating the psychology of non-violence among the masses. Bereft of the psychological plank of non-violence, Gandhi believed, he would be unable to assemble the masses in political demonstrations and peaceful marches. Thus, the ethical premise of his argument was hinged on the fact that machinery was invented for the purpose of fulfilling the needs of the society as a whole, as opposed to satisfying individual greed. Gandhi subscribed to the use of machinery to cater to the basic needs of the masses, failing which, he advocated the rejection of machinery as a curse to the society. He assumed that machines must help to fulfill the ultimate objective of obtaining freedom and said:

"Ideally, I would rule out all machinery, even as I would reject this body, which is not helped to salvation, and seek the liberation of the soul. From that point of view I would reject all machinery, but machines will remain because, like the body, they are inevitable. The body itself, as I told you, is the purest piece of mechanism; but if it is a hindrance to the highlight fights of the soul, it has to be rejected." (Gandhi 1962: 9)

Gandhi's life is an exemplar of simple living as he spoke for small-scale, decentralized technology, which was consistent and conducive to fostering a nonviolent social order. For him, the supreme consideration of a society is man and machines should not be allowed to tend to atrophy the limbs of man (ibid.:8). He wanted to unfold human uniqueness, development and upheld human dignity and self-respect, as he was convinced that:

"If individual ceases to count, what is left of a society? Individual freedom alone can make man voluntarily surrender himself completely to the service of society. If it is wrested from him, he becomes mechanized and society is ruined. No society can possibly be built on a denial of individual freedom. It is contrary to the very nature of man." (Harijan 1942)

Gandhi had an open mind and firm conviction, which were amended over time to adapt to the circumstances. His philosophy is universally valid, including in the progressive industrialized west. Human civilization has progressed through science and technology with its beneficial and adverse implications. Today, our lives are intertwined to the wires of digital technology and the virtual society has taken centre-stage under the pandemic circumstances. Our lives are almost unimaginable without sophisticated machines, which have increased our levels of comfort and knowledge. However, on the other side of the spectrum, machinery has eroded human virtues of patience and tolerance, in addition to posing severe challenges to physical and mental health. Modern technology has a debilitating effect on interpersonal relations and disastrous consequences for the environment and ecology, thus justifying the apprehension and concerns of Gandhi pertaining to the unrestricted and unethical use of machines, with his moral commitment to serving the poorest of the poor. Therefore, Gandhi was aware of the menace of technological unemployment, but he emphasized the need for labor-intensive methods of production in a country with surplus labor. On the whole, his ideas on machinery are still relevant in the contemporary context, since in a country like India, which has experienced more than seven decades of planned economy, the use of machinery and power-driven economic development has been unsuccessful in retarding the level of unemployment. Notwithstanding the limitations of the Gandhian concept of machinery, it would be extreme naiveté not to acknowledge the triumphant march of science and technology and therefore, it is imperative to re-

examine his views from a contemporary perspective. From a logical, ethical and honest standpoint, Gandhi's philosophy is justified, particularly with reference to small unit machines in a populous country like India, where unemployment remains the major challenge to development. Thus, it may be argued that Gandhi personified a religious way of life and believed that a rural, natural, agrarian economy was suited to it. A staunch critic of materialism and a high standard of living, Gandhi based his rationale and philosophical thought on the dictum of "simple living and high thinking."

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List of Abbreviations:

COVID - Corona Virus Disease

JNU - Jawaharlal Nehru University

UGC- University Grants Commission

UNESCO - United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

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