

WHAT IS DEVELOPMENT : RECALLING AN OLD DEBATE

I

Notwithstanding all other differences, there seems to have been a near-unanimity of perception amongst all the newly-independent countries of the third world as regards the long-term direction of developmental pursuits, viz., to industrialise and modernise basing heavily on modern Science and Technology. Choice of differing political systems and methods have only been based on the question of how best and how fast this can be achieved, and how much social justice and equality can be maintained while doing it. The feasibility and much less the desirability, of this project of 'catching-up with the West' has hardly ever been an issue of any serious debate in these countries; 'development' has been synonymous with 'modernisation' which, in practical terms has meant 'Westernisation'.

Given the historical fact that colonial rule had brought about an internal division of these countries into a few metropolitan centres of power, surrounded by vast rural hinterlands, such a development had been plagued by a dominance of town over village, industry over agriculture, centralisation over democracy, few over many. In those countries which gained independence without an accompanying socio-political transformation", the consequences of such a development have been disastrous—inequality, exploitation and injustice have been further accentuated to such a state that even this developmental effort has mostly ground to a halt. Even in those third world countries where the experiment was carried out in a more egalitarian context, tendencies fundamentally opposed to the aims and goals have continued to persist and even grow. It is this experience of the third world countries that is behind whatever questioning and debate that one comes across in the post-sixties period on the issue of 'alternative paths of development'.

It is thus interesting to note that the case of India has perhaps been quite different in this regard in that, the question as to what should development amount to, has been a central issue right from the beginning of our independence movement. At no point was it 'evident to all' that development consisted in industrialising and modernising and that modern Science and Technology was to form the cornerstone of development. In fact, right amidst the top leadership of our independence movement, views differed radically on this question; a path of development that was fundamentally opposed to the modern western paradigm was formulated and placed before the country by Mahatma Gandhi right from the early days of his involvement in the independence movement. As is well-known, most other influential members of the leadership (though all called themselves Gandhi's soldiers) do not seem to have ever taken his model seriously, much less subscribed to it; they shared the more widely known and internationally current notions of development. This viewpoint found its most articulate and forceful champion in Jawaharlal Nehru.

As the questions of alternative notions of development alternative Sciences and Technologies etc., are beginning to get increasingly debated and discussed, we thought it worthwhile to delve into this old debate that took place in our own country, no matter in whatsoever a limited manner. We are presenting this debate in the words of the protagonists of the two opposing viewpoints viz., Gandhi and Nehru in the form of extracts from their writings, speeches and correspondence. Of these two, the viewpoint of Nehru, the vision he had of future India, is rather well-known to the intelligentsia of our country and hence is not being presented here in any detail. As the same may not be true of the Gandhian viewpoint and vision, we have attempted to present it here in some detail, mostly in Gandhi's own words.

II

Gandhi's view of what sort of social order we should try to build in our country was derived from the understanding he had of our traditional social order (prior to the British conquest) as well as of the modern western civilization. He had spelt out this understanding in 'Hind Swaraj' written in 1909. In it he had in clear terms expressed the view that the modern western civilization and its various works including its technology were satanic in nature and were not conducive to man's happiness or dignity. He believed that there was very little that it had to offer to us in terms of concepts, institutions and values that we may incorporate in our future society. Regarding our traditional society, Gandhi wrote in 'Hind Swaraj',

'I believe that the civilization India has evolved is not to be beaten in the world. Nothing can equal the seeds sown by our ancestors. Rome went, Greece shared the same fate; the might of the Pharaohs was broken; Japan has become westernised; of China nothing can be said; but India is still, somehow or other, sound at the foundation. The people of Europe learn their lessons from the writings of the men of Greece or Rome, which exist no longer in their former glory. In trying to learn from them, the Europeans imagine that they will avoid the mistakes of Greece or Rome. Such is their pitiable condition. In the midst of all this, India remains immovable and that is her glory. It is a charge against India that her people are so uncivilized, ignorant and stolid, that it is not possible to induce them to adopt any change. It is a charge really against our merit. What we have tested and found true on the anvil of experience, we are not change. Many thrust their advice on India, and she remains steady. This is her beauty; it is the sheet-anchor of our hope.'

Gandhi believed that the main thrust of western technological developments was to indulge and pamper our passions, and according to him, 'the more we indulge our passions the more unbridled they become'. Hence Indian tradition and concepts had set a limit to man's indulgence because it 'saw that happiness was largely a mental condition'. Elaborating further on the technological aspect he observed :

'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, therefore, after due deliberation decided that we should only do what we could with our hands and feet. They saw that our real happiness and health consisted in a proper use of our hands and feet. They further reasoned that large 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, prostitution and vice flourishing in

them and that poor men would be robbed by rich men. They were therefore satisfied with small villages. They saw that Kings and their swords were inferior to the sword of ethics, and they, therefore held the sovereigns of the earth to be inferior to the rishis and the fakirs. A nation with a constitution like this is fitter to teach others than to learn from others. This nation had courts, lawyers and doctors, but they were all within bounds. Everybody knew that these professions were not particularly superior; moreover these vakils and vairs did not rob people; they were considered people's dependants, not their masters. Justice was tolerably fair. The ordinary rule was to avoid courts. There were no touts to lure people into them. This evil was noticeable only in and around capitals. The common people lived independently and followed their agricultural occupation. They enjoyed true Home Rule.'

'Hind Swaraj' constituted the basic framework for all of Gandhi's future life and activities. For him, the political movement for independence from the British rule was only one aspect of the overall movement for true Swaraj; and economic independence was the essential precondition for this. What path of development India was to pursue followed directly from this perceptions, that the objective of development was the restoration of Swaraj at the *individual* level. Thus we find Gandhi laying as much emphasis on the growth and popularisation of hand-spinning and hand-weaving as on the various political mass movements that he led against the British rule. To him, the faster khadi spreads amongst the people, the closer it takes us to freedom. As hand-spinning and hand-weaving gained momentum through the 1920s and early 30s, Gandhi began to focus his attention by mid-thirties on the regeneration of Indian crafts and rural industries. The creation of All-India Village Industries Association (AIVIA) in 1934 was the first step in this direction, whose purpose was 'to make an honest attempt to return to the villagers what has been cruelly and thoughtlessly snatched away from them by the city dwellers'. What Gandhi said at the inauguration of the AIVIA in 1934 shows how he looked at the problem of technology and development:

'But this reinstating the villager in what was once his natural position is no easy task. I had thought that I should be able to frame a constitution and set the association going within a short time. But the more I dive into it, the more I find myself out of my depth. In a sense, the work is much more difficult than khadi which does not in anyway offer a complicated problem. You have simply to exclude all foreign and machine-made cloth, and you have established khadi on a secure foundation. But here the field is so vast, there is such an infinite variety of industries to handle and organise, that it will tax all of our business talent expert knowledge and scientific training. It cannot be achieved without hard toil, incessant endeavour and application of all our business and scientific abilities to this supreme purpose. Thus I sent a questionnaire to several of our well-known doctors and chemists asking them to enlighten me on the chemical analysis and different food values of polished and unpolished rice, jaggery and sugar etc. Many friends, I am thankful to say, have immediately responded, but only to confess that there has been no research in some of the directions I had inquired about. Is it not a tragedy that no scientist should be able to give me the chemical analysis of such a simple article as gur? The reason is that we have not thought of the villager. Take the case of honey. I am told that in foreign countries such a careful analysis of honey is made that no samples which fail to satisfy a particular test is bottled for the market. In India, we have got vast resources for production of the finest honey but we have not much expert knowledge in the matter. An esteemed Doctor friend writes to say that in his hospital polished rice is taboo and that it is proved after experiments on rats and other animals that polished rice is harmful. But why have not all medical men published results of their investigation and joined in declaring the use of such rice as positively harmful?

I have just by one or two instances indicated my difficulty. What sort of organisation should I have? What kind of laboratory research shall we have to go in for? We shall need a number of scientists and chemists prepared to lay not only their expert knowledge at our disposal, but to sit down in our laboratories and to devote hours of time free of charge, to experiments in the directions I have indicated. We shall have not only to publish the results from time to time, but we shall have to inspect and certify various products. Also we shall have to find out whether the villager who produces an article of foodstuff rests content with exporting it and with using a cheap substitute imported from outside. We shall have to see that the villagers become first of all self contained and then cater for the needs of the city-dwellers....

Gandhi wrote extensively on the various aspects of village industry and life, elaborating on such varied issues as hand husking of paddy, grinding of wheat, making of gur (jaggery), polished rice versus unpolished rice, cleaning of village wells, tanks, etc. For him, the khadi work and the All India Village Industries Association and its program for the economic regeneration of rural India were as much important for gaining freedom as the Congress party's program of mass-movements against the British. He perceived freedom or Swaraj not solely at the national level, but more primarily at the individual level — without the latter, the former held no attraction for him. And Swaraj at the individual level comprised all the aspects of the individual's life—economic, political, social, cultural, moral, religious, spiritual, etc. For Gandhi, the objective of the independence movement was this higher form of Swaraj. Consequently, to him, the path of development that India should opt for was not a secondary question, to be debated *after* gaining of political independence from the British. Instead, the demand for political freedom from the British was only a step in the struggle for the Swaraj of his vision. It is thus that we find Gandhi working to evolve and clarify his concept of future society right from the very beginning of his involvement with the independence movement. His stand on the questions of path of development, science and technology, etc., followed from his conception of the social order that was to be aimed at. For him, the individual, the society and technology formed one whole in a similar manner as did religion, politics and constructive work. Making them separate or autonomous, was inconceivable and such a situation seemed to him to inevitably lead to the state in which modern western civilization found itself and which he rejected so outspokenly.

Gandhi was unequivocally opposed to the Industrialism of the west which he saw as the root cause of violence, slavery and misery in the modern period. Observing the state of Europe he concluded that 'its cities, its monster factories and huge armaments are so intimately interrelated that the one can not exist without the other.*' According to him, "a society based on non-violence can only consist of groups settled in villages in which voluntary co-operation is the condition of dignified and peaceful existence., The nearest approach to civilisation based upon non-violence is the erstwhile village republic of India. I admit that it was very crude. I know that there was in it no non-violence of my definition and conception. But the germ was there.' He perceived a fundamental antagonism between industrialism and the well-being of the village:

* Harijan, 13—1—1940

** Harijan, 29—8—1936

'The revival of the village is possible only when it is no more exploited. Industrialisation on a mass scale will necessarily lead to passive or active exploitation of the village..'** From what has been seen earlier on the efforts Gandhi was making towards the revival of village industries, it is apparant that he was far from being opposed to *all* forms of industrialisation. What he was opposed to was *industrialism* and not *industrialisation*. Elaborating his vision of industrialisation, he stated in 1940 : '... I do visualise electricity, ship-building, iron works, machine-making and the like existing side by side with village handicrafts. But the order of dependence will be reversed. Hitherto the industrialisation has been so planned as to destroy the villages and village crafts. In the state of the future, it will subserve the villages and their crafts.* From that it followed that '...nothing will be allowed to be produced by the cities, that can be equally well produced by the villages. The proper function of cities is to serve as clearing houses for village products** Gandhi was consistently and constantly opposed to India choosing industrialisation as its path of development.

Hi

Gandhi's perception of the problem, and even more so his vision, do not seem to have been shared even by his close followers who called themselves his 'sipahis' (soldiers). That this lack of commonality of views dates to very early days is borne out by the following extract from Nehru's Autobiography (London, 1936), which refers to the days, of the non-cooperation movement of 1921 :

'Few of us, I think, accepted Gandhiji's old ideas about machinery and modern civilization. We thought that even he looked upon them as Utopian and as largely inapplicable to modern conditions. Certainly most of us were not prepared to reject the achievements of modern civilization, although we may have felt that some variation to suit Indian conditions was possible. Personally, I have always felt attracted towards big machinery and fast travelling. Still, there can be no doubt that Gandhiji's ideology influenced many people and made them critical of the machine and all its consequences. So, while some looked to the future others looked back to the past. And, curiously, both felt that the joint action they were indulging in was worthwhile, and this made it easy to bear sacrifice and face self-denial.'

However these differences did surface quite sharply at various times. For instance Nehru wrote a long letter to Gandhi on 11th January, 1928 setting forth his views and we here reproduce excerpts from this letter.

'. . . you know how intensely I have admired you and believed in you as a leader who can lead this country to victory and freedom I have done so inspite of the fact that I hardly agreed with anything that some of your previous publications—Hind Swaraj etc. — contained. I felt and feel that you were and are infinitely greater than your little books I have asked you many times what you expected to do in the future and your answers have been far from satisfying. All you have said has been that within an year or eighteen months you expected the khadi movement to spread rapidly and in a geometric ratio and then some direct action in the political field might be indulged in. Several years and eighteen months have passed since then and the miracle has not happened. It was difficult to believe that it would happen but faith in your amazing capacity to bring off the improbable kept us in an expectant mood. But such faiths for an irreligious person like me is a poor reed to rely

* Harijan, 27—1—1940

** Harijan, 28—1—1939

on and I am beginning to think if we are to wait for freedom till khadi becomes universal in India we shall have to wait till the Greek Kalends. Khadi will grow slowly and if war comes it will grow very fast, but I do not see how freedom is coming in its train You tell us that if the country will not even take to khadi how can we expect it to do anything more difficult or daring. I do not think the reasoning is correct. If the country does not go ahead politically by one method, surely it is upto our leaders to think of other additional methods.

Reading many of your articles in Young India—your autobiography etc. — I have often felt how very different my ideals were from yours. And I have felt that you were very hasty in your judgements, or rather having arrived at certain conclusions you were over-eager to justify them by any scrap of evidence that you might get You misjudge greatly I think the civilization of the West and attach too great an importance to its many failings. You have stated somewhere that India has nothing to learn from the West and that she has reached a pinnacle of wisdom in the past. I entirely disagree with this viewpoint and I neither think the so-called Ram Raj was very good in the past, nor do I want it back. I think the Western or rather industrial civilization is bound to conquer India, may be with many changes and adaptations, but nonetheless in the main based on industrialism. You have criticised strongly the many obvious defects of industrialism and hardly paid any attention to its merits. Everybody knows these defects and all the Utopias and social theories are meant to remove them. It is the opinion of most thinkers in the West that defects are not due to industrialism as such but to the capitalist system which is based on the exploitation of others.'

That Gandhi recognised the existence of such a fundamental difference between them, and that he wanted it to be known to the people and a debate held on it, becomes evident in his reply to Nehru dated 17th January 1928. Some excerpts from Gandhi's reply :

. Though I was beginning to detect some differences in viewpoint between you and me, I had no notion what-so-ever of the terrible extent of these differences. I see quite clearly that you must carry on open warfare against me and my views. For, if I am wrong, I am evidently doing irreparable harm to the country and it is your duty after having known it to rise in revolt against me. Or, if you have any doubts as to the correctness of your conclusions, I shall gladly discuss them with you personally. The differences between you and me appear to me to be so vast and radical that there seems to be no meeting ground between us. Write to me a letter for publication sharing your differences. I will print it in Young India and write a brief reply. And if you do not want to take the trouble of writing another letter, I am prepared to publish the letter that is before me. I consider [it] a frank and honest document'

From Nehru's reply of 23rd January 1928, we see that he was rather disinclined to publicising his differences with Gandhi and having a public debate on them. It was his hope that the differences between them could be resolved through personal discussions. However, this does not seem to have happened.* Much later in 1945, we see these differences surfacing sharply once again. The meeting of the Congress Working Committee in September 1945 seems to have had a discussion on the shape of Indian polity after independence, and there, very different view points seem to have been put forward by Nehru and Gandhi. In his letter to Nehru dated 5th Oct. 1945, Gandhi refers to these differences, and once again, at some length, restates his position on the path of development that he wishes India to follow. Excerpts from this important letter:

* In one of the few public statements of their differences, Gandhi wrote in 1940: 'Pandit Nehru wants industrialization, because he thinks that if it is socialised, it would be free from the evils of capitalism. My own view is that the evils are inherent in industrialism, and no amount of socialisation can eradicate them' [Harijan, 29-9-1940].

'I take first the sharp difference of opinion that has arisen between us. If such a difference really exists people should also know about it, for the work of Swaraj will suffer if they are kept in the dark. I have said that I fully stand by the kind of governance which I have described in Hind Swaraj. It is not just a way of speaking. My experience has confirmed the truth of what I wrote in 1909. If I were the only one left who believed in it, I would not be sorry. For I can only testify to the truth as I see it. I have not Hind Swaraj in front of me. It is better that I redraw the picture today in my own language. Then it would not matter to me whether or not the picture tallies with that of 1909, nor should it to you. I do not have to establish what I had said before. What is worth knowing is only what I have to say today. I believe that if India and through India the world, is to achieve real freedom, then sooner or later we shall have to go and live in the villages—in huts, not in palaces. Millions of people can never live in cities and palaces in comfort and peace. Nor can they do so by killing one another, that is, by resorting to violence and untruth. I have not the slightest doubt that, but for the pair, truth and non-violence, mankind will be doomed. We can have the vision of that truth and non-violence only in the simplicity of the villages. That simplicity resides in the spinning-wheel and what is implied by the spinning-wheel. It does not frighten me at all that the world seems to be going in the opposite direction. For that matter, when the moth approaches its doom it whirls round faster and faster till it is burnt up. It is possible that India will not be able to escape this moth-like circling. It is my duty to try, till my last breath, to save India and through it the world from such a fate. The sum and substance of what I want to say is that the individual person should have control over the things that are necessary for the substance of life. If he cannot have such control the individual cannot survive. Ultimately, the world is made up only of individuals. If there were no drops there would be no ocean. This is only a rough and ready statement. There is nothing new in this.

'But even in Hind Swaraj I have not said all this. While I appreciate modern thought, I find that an ancient thing, considered in the light of this thought looks so sweet. You will not be able to understand me if you think that I am talking about the villages of today. My ideal villages still exist only in my imagination. After all every human being lives in the world of his own imagination. In this village of my dreams the villager will not be dull, he will be all awareness. He will not live like an animal in filth and darkness. Men and women will live in freedom, prepared to face the whole world. There will be no plague, no cholera and no small pox. Nobody will be allowed to be idle or to wallow in luxury. Everyone will have to do body labour. Granting all this, I can still envisage a number of things that will have to be organized on a large scale. Perhaps there will even be railways and also post and telegraph offices. I do not know what things there will not be. Nor am I bothered about it. If I can make sure of the essential thing, other things will follow in due course. But if I give up the essential thing, I give up everything.'

From Nehru's reply of 9th October 1945, we see that his position also has not changed from what he stated in 1928, but has only become clearer, sharper and firmer. We reproduce his reply almost in its entirety :

'Briefly put my view is that the question before us is not one of truth versus untruth or nonviolence versus violence. One assumes as one must that true co-operation and peaceful methods must be aimed at and a society which encourages these must be our objective. The whole question is how to achieve this society and what its content should be. I do not understand why a village should necessarily embody truth and non-violence. A village, normally speaking, is backward intellectually and culturally and no progress can be made from a backward environment. Narrow-minded people are much more likely to be untruthful and violent.

Then again we have to put down certain objectives like a sufficiency of food, clothing, housing, education, sanitation, etc. which should be the minimum requirement for the country and for everyone. It is with these objectives in view that we must find out specifically how to attain them speedily. Again it seems to me inevitable that modern means of transport as well as many other modern developments must continue and be developed. There is no way out of it except to have them. If that is so inevitably a measure of heavy industry

exists. How far will that fit in with a purely village society? Personally I hope that heavy or light industries should all be decentralised as far as possible and this is feasible now because of the development of electric power. If two types of economy exist in the country either there should be conflict between the two or one will overwhelm the other.

The question of independence and protection from foreign aggression, both political and economic, has also to be considered in this context. I do not think it is possible for India to be really independent unless she is a technically advanced country. I am not thinking for the moment in terms of just armies but rather of scientific growth. In the present context of the world we cannot even advance culturally without a strong background of scientific research in every department. There is today in the world a tremendous acquisitive tendency both in individuals and groups and nations, which leads to conflicts and wars. Our entire society is based on this more or less. That basis must go and be transformed into one of cooperation, not of isolation which is impossible. If this is admitted and is found feasible then attempts should be made to realise it not in terms of an economy which is cut off from the rest of the world but rather one which cooperates. From the economic or political point of view an isolated India may well be a kind of vacuum which increases the acquisitive tendencies of others and thus creates conflicts. There is no question of palaces for millions of people. But there seems to be no reason why millions should not have comfortable up-to-date homes where they can lead a cultured existence. Many of the present overgrown cities have developed evils which are deplorable. Probably we have to discourage this overgrowth and at the same time encourage the village to approximate more to the culture of the town.

It is many years ago since I read Hind Swaraj and I have only a vague picture in my mind. But even when I read it 20 or more years ago it seemed to me completely unreal. In your writings and speeches since then I have found much that seemed to me an advance on that old position and an appreciation of modern trends. I was therefore surprised when you told us that the old picture still remains intact in your mind. As you know, the Congress has never considered that picture much less adopted it. You yourself have never asked it to adopt it except for certain relatively minor aspects of it. How far it is desirable for the Congress to consider these fundamental questions, involving varying philosophies of life, it is for you to judge. I would imagine that a body like the Congress should not lose itself in arguments over such matters which can only produce great confusion in people's minds resulting in inability to act in the present. This may also result in creating barriers between the Congress and others in the country. Ultimately of course this and other questions will have to be decided by representatives of free India. I have a feeling that most of these questions are thought of and discussed in terms of long ago, ignoring the vast changes that have taken place all over the world during the last generation or more. It is 38 years since Hind Swaraj was written. The world has completely changed since then, possibly in a wrong direction. In any event any consideration of these questions must keep present facts, forces and the human material we have today in view, otherwise it will be divorced from reality. You are right in saying that the world, or a large part of it, appears to be bent on committing suicide. That may be an inevitable development of an evil seed in civilization that has grown. I think it is so. How to get rid of this evil, and yet how to keep the good in the present as in the past is Our problem. Obviously there is good too in the present.'

The debate does not seem to have been pursued any further. The hectic pace of the events that ensued seem to have called off this exchange at this inconclusive phase.

IV

The rest of the story is of course well-known, viz, that it was Nehru's vision that was adopted to be translated into reality, and the Gandhian model was given the go-by.

That the Gandhian model has never been given a try and that it has not been rejected because it was found wanting, is common knowledge. What is perhaps more significant is to note that even the *existence* of two fundamentally different models of development was never brought out into the public and made into an issue of nation-wide debate. All the din and noise of paying endless homages to the Mahatma made it appear that whatever was being done was after all what he had wanted ; while in reality, the very soul of Gandhi's vision was being given a most unceremonious and obscure burial ! But may be it is all too simplistic and naive to ascribe this to the villainy and treachery of the leaders of the post-independence India ? May be there was something clearly unrealistic and unworkable about the Gandhian model, and it would have led to total disaster if it was attempted to put it into practice. But now that after more than three-and-a-half decades of trying out the Nehru model, what we are left with *is* a near total disaster', should not the other model be considered afresh ? Should not the nation-wide debate (due half-a-century ago !) be started right in earnest at least now ? May be this *is* the time for such a debate, and the experience of the last half-century the world over could today make such a debate far more fruitful. And who knows, 'the ancient thing, considered in the light of this (modern) thought', might, after all, 'look so sweet' ?

—Madras Group