Constructive Programme
A Manifesto for New India

A Department of International Studies, Political Science and History Publication
‘I will give you a talisman. Whenever you are in doubt, or when the self becomes too much with you, apply the following test. Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man whom you may have seen, and ask yourself, if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him. Will he gain anything by it? Will it restore him to control over his own life and destiny? In other words, will it lead to swaraj for the hungry and spiritually starving millions? Then you will find your doubts and your self melts away.’

—Mahatma Gandhi
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PREFACE

Mahatma Gandhi has been an inspiration to all generations of Indians. His determination, willpower, and spirit, have been admired by thousands within the nation and across the world, for decades! He was a man who truly cared about his country and strove for its progress. What better way then, to honour him on his 150th birth anniversary, if not in the form of a ‘Manifesto for New India’?

Gandhiji wrote the ‘Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place’ in 1941 with 15 domains and later updated it in 1945 adding three more to the original list. These were a set of recommendations that were to be fulfilled to prepare the Indians to undertake a nonviolent struggle for their independence. He had graciously said that the future generations could add to these recommendations or make changes depending upon the needs of their time. It appears that the time has come for us to create a ‘Constructive Programme’ for our own time.

To prepare this manifesto, the ‘Constructive Workers Conference’ was conducted with ten participants. This was aimed at proposing ideas and recommendations to India keeping in mind the current circumstances. The discussions during the conference spanned many of the topics discussed in the following pages and were thoroughly fruitful. Each participant gained new insights and engaged in healthy deliberations. The result of those discussions can be seen here.

The ‘Constructive Programme: A Manifesto for New India’ contains 14 domains, not arranged in any order of importance, which we believe require to be put on a higher pedestal and be given greater value for creating a ‘New India’, in which all the people are made part of its development, and prosperity is ensured for all. Recommendations have been made by taking into consideration the existing scenario, and are based on proposals presented during the conference.

We sincerely hope that this manifesto proves to be useful and insightful to all who chance upon it. We welcome any additions or suggestions to these, as well.
EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Education is necessary for any society to move on the path of development as it opens new horizons to its people. In this context, the state must focus on education by treating it as an essential service. Access to education must be equal to all sections of society irrespective of caste, creed, religion, gender, economic stature, and the like. The state may work out the decentralisation of responsibilities in terms of infrastructural development for education. This can be operationalised by allocating resources to local self-government.

While education is important, how one perceives education is also of equal importance. The state perception of education must include vocational training as well. Vocational training of their choice can be provided to students along with the regular curriculum. This shall ensure occupational security as well as enhance their skill sets. When students are secured with their basic necessities of life, they can move towards a higher order of social life and engage themselves in the development of the community as a whole.

Another matter of pivotal importance is to decide on what needs to be taught through education. For this purpose, all the stakeholders in the education system, i.e., educational institutions, state authorities, parents, and students, must be involved in designing the curriculum.

It is also important to realise that the education imparted must not only be a means to sustain one’s life but it should also ensure one’s integration into society, instil social responsibility, develop tolerance, peace, and broaden one’s horizon. Thus, morals and ethics should form an integral part of education for it not only develops one’s personality but also develops society.

The purpose of education is to liberate people from ignorance and ensure the welfare of society.
STUDENTS

The students of a nation possess immense potential to influence the fate of the nation. In order to channelise this potential, students should be socially aware and active. Students should come together and voluntarily support fellow students and work for the benefit of society as a whole. As mentioned, students possess the potential and creativity to bring changes in society. They should engage themselves in various community services in their surroundings and do their part for the upliftment of the underprivileged sections of society. By taking part in community services, they shall put into practice the knowledge gained through education during their days as students and develop a close connection with the society they live in.

The student community can play an active role in voicing out the problems of the society and provide solutions for the same. By this, students will be equipped to work for the larger needs of society rather than satisfying their personal needs. This will transform them into complete social beings working for the welfare of society.

Apart from the larger purpose mentioned, students can also be of help to their own peers both materially and psychologically. Being part of a larger student fraternity develops a sense of belongingness and commune, which shall bear a positive consequence on their mental health and well-being. Thus, a students can nurture themselves into socially responsible youth to this nation by engaging themselves in community services and helping their peers.
WOMEN

Women have customarily been considered sacred and revered, though reality suggests otherwise. India has been tagged as one of the worst countries for a woman to live in and it does not appear to be going away soon. The gap persists.

It becomes imperative to introduce some changes then. Female infanticide must be punished appropriately. Penalties for domestic abuse should be strictly imposed. Punishment for sexual assault must be clearly defined and implemented promptly. Throughout the country, more cabs with women drivers that specifically cater to women can be introduced. The Government can team up with NGOs to stop child marriages and domestic abuse.

Women also face discrimination regarding access to technology in several areas. This can be countered by introducing laws that make provisions for women to gain access to technology or by keeping a stern eye on the working of local panchayats. They should also get education without discrimination. Discrimination in the workplace should be vocalised to eliminate it.

It is extremely crucial to educate the masses. Women are not belongings meant to live as per the wishes of society and be messed with. They are independent humans who have lives of their own. They need to be respected, just as every human deserves. It is crucial to make each person in the nation understand that it is not okay to dehumanise another person.

When the women of the country feel safe and happy, then success has been achieved.
SEX EDUCATION

Sex Education is sidelined heavily because of the embarrassing nature of a discussion about it. Being curious about one’s body is a natural human tendency. It, therefore, leads to several questions regarding the same. Giving children and teens a safe space to talk about it would prevent them from resorting to other means which will provide them with the information they want. An empathetic, scientific, non-judgemental approach towards this will make them feel comfortable to ask questions or talk about something that might be bothering them.

To achieve this, normalising the talk will be most effective. Sex Education must be made a part of the curriculum in schools and colleges, and must also be discussed at home. It will help youngsters understand one of the most fundamental aspects of human nature. Sex Education comprising topics on human anatomy, sex, sexuality, sexual health, and the importance of consent, is necessary to ensure the development of a healthy citizen with a broad mindset. The importance of consent, in particular, will ensure that these youngsters are sensitive to the personal space of others and will help them if someone tries to invade their personal space. Predators can be ousted when each child knows the difference between a good touch and a bad touch. Talking about these topics will also bust myths that have spread for years.

Sex Education must be introduced in all corners of the country irrespective of urban or rural areas. This will be a step in the direction of guaranteeing that all are responsible and respectful towards each other even when they are older—thus, building a safe nation for everyone.
HEALTH

‘Mens sana in corpore sano’ should be the first law of humanity. Health is the real wealth of a country. To ensure the well being of all the citizens, a nation needs a robust healthcare system. Indian health care has become increasingly privatised in the past few years. This pushes for a regulated healthcare system in the country.

The network and campaign of pharmacies that provide low-cost and high-quality medicines can be extended to all towns in India. This would ensure affordable medicines for all. Awareness can be created about traditional medicine in India. Traditional medicine helps not only in a cure but also in the prevention of diseases. The people can be educated about the three-tier healthcare system in the country, to avoid overburdening one tier of healthcare. With increasing access to technology, digital logging of prescriptions linked to Aadhar in primary, secondary, and tertiary healthcare, and telemedicine on the primary level can be adopted. Public Health can be shifted from the State List to the Concurrent List to ensure better coordination between Union and State Governments.
SPORTS

The inclusion of sports in the state list is an advantage as well as a disadvantage. The disadvantage is directly experienced by sportspersons, who do not get to practice with superior infrastructure because they can access only the infrastructure given by the Government, with the funds received from the Centre. However, the advantage also lies in the fact that a grassroot level change can be brought about only by the State Government. A solution to the poor infrastructure can be including sports in the industrial policy of the state, making it viable to avail benefits like loans with interest subsidies, etc. Transforming sports into an industry brings in a lot of money from private players. It not only leads to sports persons benefiting from better infrastructure but also related employment generation industries like equipment manufacturing, infrastructure-related industries, etc.
ECONOMY

Creating a sustainable economy is the need of the hour. To do this is to combine ethics and economics, giving primacy to the former. The relations of production must be altered in such a way that it will ensure dignity of labour and welfare for all. No individual must be deprived of the fruits of their labour.

The deepest concerns of the economy should be ending poverty, inequality, and violence, and ensuring equitable distribution and justice. Economies should change their priorities. The priority should no longer be increasing the growth rates, but seeing that the growth is inclusive and improves the social standards of people. Health and education should be the utmost priority. For a country like India, the government should focus on improving the capabilities of its working population and make the best use of it. All economies should focus on self-sufficiency where they can provide for all without any dependence on external sources.

The government, at whose behest all the nation’s economic resources are bequeathed, should avoid unnecessary spending which could be used for investing for the welfare of the poor and for making the environment stable. The government needs to spend its resources in important areas such as protecting the natural environment, creating a sustainable economy, conserving biodiversity, and promoting the welfare of all citizens.

It must be remembered that this world that we are living in today is not a gift from our past, but it is a responsibility we have towards our future generations. The resources on this planet must be utilised in such a way that they ensure decent life and fulfilment of basic needs for all the people without compromising the capacity to do the same for future generations on this planet.
AGRICULTURE

Directly and indirectly, a huge percentage of the Indian population depends on agriculture and its allied activities for their livelihoods. This sector is an abode of underemployment and for the unemployed people who continuously struggle to make ends meet. Effective use of this section of people can make growth sustainable. By creating employment opportunities through increasing the price of the agricultural output and improving the agricultural supply chains, the welfare of large sections of people can be ensured. Governments should avoid bringing up policies against the interests of the farmers. Policies that pay lip service should also be avoided.

To make agriculture remunerative and vibrant, a lot of educated and literate people have to enter the field. Most of the youth are not ready to become farmers, and one of the main reasons is that agriculture is always looked down, and income from it is not sufficient. To overcome this challenge, starting from primary education, steps should be taken to bring in various programmes related to agriculture and make students aware of the significance of agriculture. In order to improve agriculture, funds have to be allocated for setting up labs and conducting research to develop newer technologies that can improve agricultural outcomes. Organic farming should be encouraged.

To stop farmers’ suicide which is increasing every year, there must be a unified grievance call number all over India which can help farmers overcome their trouble. This can involve counselling sessions and arranging help for farmers in severe crises.
FARM AND TRADE UNIONS

All the farmers and workers who tirelessly labour for taking the country forward, need to be organised as a single unit to make their voices heard to the governments, and for their own empowerment. Farm and Trade Unions should be recognised as the legitimate voices of farmers and workers. Governments should consult them before making decisions regarding issues concerning them. If the government fails to get support from these unions for its proposed reforms, then the government should not take them forward. If workers go for strikes, then their grievances should be addressed to end the strikes, instead of using force to suppress them.

Unions should be supported to set up their own community settlements with all the necessary amenities like schools for children, centres for developing their skills and for providing vocational training, hospitals. Credit facilities should be eased for members of the unions. Unions can elect their leaders democratically. Leaders should resign if they lose the support of its members.
PROTECTION OF NATIVE HANDICRAFTS

Every Indian should consider it a matter of pride to be born in a country with such a diverse culture. Indian Handicrafts provide a unique identity to India. These unique handicrafts should be promoted by the Government. The Government can advertise and publicise the handicrafts on all platforms. The artisans should be protected from exploitation by corporates, as the reach of the handicrafts has increased multifold. To increase awareness about the handicrafts, workshops and interactive experiences can be organised in living-history museums. The handicrafts can be patented to prevent duplication and selling of unauthentic crafts. Increased organised investment in infrastructure is needed to market the products. Coordination between the private players and the Government can be bettered. Incentives and subsidies given to the artisans will increase the production in the sector. The artisans can be educated about the required global standards and communication channels.

The Handicrafts Industry lacks participation from the younger generations since there is less profitability. Schemes can be adopted to make the industry more attractive to younger generations. Handicrafts can be prioritised in vocational training institutes. To ensure development in the region, the training institutes can be established closer to the region where the particular handicraft is produced. Private institutions could collaborate with the Government to establish such institutes where students would be trained by the traditional and native artisans. Exclusive summer workshops with valid certificates can also be organised in these institutes at a reasonable fee. These workshops can be open to visitors from other countries, who are interested to explore Indian Heritage. When Indian Handicrafts are protected, the vision of a New India would be decorated in vibrant native handicrafts, representative of true national taste.
RURAL TOURISM

It is well-known that the rural section of India forms its majority and backbone. Thus, it becomes significant for the state to focus on the development of rural areas. This thought was realised by Mahatma Gandhi through his opinions and actions where he expressed that when a nation earns independence through its struggles, it carries the obligation to rebuild, recreate, and rejuvenate its socio-economic conditions to prevent its solidarity from being hampered again by any. Based on this, he attempted to venture on the journey of transforming the village economy as he believed this is the very place where India holds its roots.

Rural tourism is one of the novel ways to achieve this transformation. As its basic consequence, rural tourism shall generate employment and curb migration in rural areas. By this, the rural economy shall generate a higher revenue leading to the eradication of poverty. Rural tourism shall also provide scope for diversification of the rural economy from traditional occupations without harming the innate nature of a rural community. Infrastructural development would be a byproduct of the promotion of rural tourism.

Rural tourism will also ensure the preservation of heritage specific to certain places. For this purpose, rural tourism can be divided into categories like ecotourism, cultural tourism, and horti/agro tourism. This shall also ensure sustainable development.

The State must provide resources to promote rural tourism by allocating funds to local self-governments along with autonomy in promoting it. Such efforts on the part of State Machinery will lead to rural self-sufficiency which was emphasised by Gandhi time and again.
ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY

Modern Technology, which was in its infancy in India just around 2-3 decades ago, has progressed at a quick pace. The coronavirus pandemic has underlined its vitality as everything from buying groceries to working to education happened online. The necessity of the internet has been felt by each person in the country, and this has brought to light the lack of access to it. Funds need to be invested in establishing digital infrastructure to reduce the digital divide in India.

While many privileged people can make time for a variety of tasks because of their access to technology, there are lakhs who remain unfamiliar with it. Access to the internet and new technology is much lesser in rural areas than in urban areas despite the rural population being higher. Gender discrimination creeps in here as well; this should be prevented with the use of the law or by keeping a sterner eye on activities in these places. More efforts should be taken to guarantee that rural dwellers can get their work done with technology just like the urban dwellers.

With regards to the digitalisation of education, a timebound approach can be adopted to digitally-equip schools in rural areas. Even initiatives coming from the smallest units can be encouraged so that the younger generation can study and accomplish their dreams without hindrances.
JOURNALISM

Freedom of the Press is a precious privilege that no country can forego. Journalism is a great power in this country. However, an uncontrolled pen can only lead to destruction. The essence of a democracy is freedom of speech. This freedom of speech and expression comes with a due sense of responsibility. One notices misrepresentation, misinformation, and misleading news on a daily basis, in both Print and Electronic Media. With growing access to the internet, the number of independent news websites is also on the rise. With increasing media outlets, there is a need for monitoring what is reaching the members of the society. Inaccuracy and misrepresentation may mislead the people in society who put their trust in these outlets. The aim of journalism should be service to humankind. Hence, to ensure the protection of people, there can be an autonomous regulatory or enforcement body to which Print and Electronic Media are equally accountable. This body can have powers to question, investigate, penalise, punish, and adjudicate media outlets. This body can have qualified employees to monitor the outlets and a jury composed of people from different walks of life, to decide in case of violation of the code established by the body. Primarily, no media house should have any affiliation to political parties or business organisations to prevent bias in reporting. A code of conduct that applies to all journalists can be formulated by the body. The body must prioritise clearly defining important terms. The body must also create awareness among the people and educate them about the principles of Journalism. Creating awareness would lead to maximum participation and stir healthy public opinion. There can be a cap on the number of news channels and newspapers given permission to broadcast and print to avoid unfriendly competition. Journalism has a great responsibility to the people and hence should practice honesty and be of service to the people.
ELECTORAL REFORMS

Elections are at the heart of any democracy. Hence, it becomes important to ensure that the election of representatives is done by bestowing absolute power to the people.

In the case of state legislative assemblies, though the Chief Minister (CM) is elected as a Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA), it becomes important for citizens to assess if the person is capable to lead the state owing to the significant responsibilities and authority placed on the office. This could be realised by a two-tier election system where citizens elect MLAs for their respective constituencies and a CM for their state from amongst the candidates contesting for the respective office. This shall ensure a feasible, the low-cost election of an able Chief Minister.

The Election Commission holds the same significance as the candidates and electorate in the elections to various offices. A body entrusted with the conduct of a democracy’s biggest festival, i.e., the elections, must be conducted with great care and integrity. Since elections involve huge expenditure in their preparation, the rules of the Election Commission must be established in a way to ensure that eligible candidates contest elections. For this, the Election Commission may set certain standards to file nominations for candidature. Also, another pivotal change would be to allow a candidate to contest from one constituency alone in order to reduce expenditure on re-election if the candidate wins from more than one constituency and pave way for others to contest elections.
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