



## Redefining the Development Priorities in the post COVID scenario:

### *a la* Sri Sri Thakur Anukul Chandra's Ideology

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22<sup>nd</sup> May 2020

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## **Redefining the Development Priorities in the post COVID scenario: *a la* Sri Sri Thakur Anukul Chandra's Ideology**

Corona has proved to be a disruptor of unprecedented kind. It has brought to halt all economic activities of all countries in the world, of course to varying degree and in a staggered timeframe. Fundamentally, people and the economic system across the globe are going through prolonged period of shock. Human ingenuity and urge for survival is severely being subjected to test, as the world is trying seriously to be engaged in overcoming the pandemic, by finding ways and means of preventing and treating the virus. At a deeper level, this shock is out to change the social dealings and individual lifestyle. Taking everything together, this pandemic, which is yet to run its course, has posed a set of different challenges to human living. The way humanity deals with this crisis and makes future is going to be a turning point in history of civilization.

Notwithstanding the uncertainty the pandemic has unleashed, creative people have started reflecting on renewal and restoration of life, society and systems. With this background, this paper attempts to outline possible methods and mode of development in the post COVID 19 scenario. Objective is to lay some foundational framework for development planning of India.

It is generally believed that single minded pursuit of economic development, the way being carried out hitherto, (past 65 years in India and 75 years in world in general) did cause severe environmental damage, resulting in, among other things, ecological imbalance, global warming and pollution of air and water. The devastating impacts of these imbalances is miserably felt by everyone, to severe detriment of quality of life, more so in developing country like India.

Scientists, policy planners and statesmen of the world, including those from our country, felt for quite some time that a course correction must be adopted, sooner than later, as the debilitating impacts were getting graver day by day. Now, from last week of March 2020 in India, COVID has forced the economic activities to grinding halt and created a compulsion to rethink and reboot. That has presented a setting for making distinct departure from the past.

The development framework in post COVID scenario has to take in to account the following imperatives, as founding stones. A directional change and paradigm shift is expected to take place. Points to ponder are about the right approach and the mode of steering the change. There has to be a coherent framework, having synthesis with all aspects of developmental initiatives and in concordance with basic social and cultural moorings. Every aspects of individual and social life is set for re-examination and renewal.

One, nature and the environment has to get priority over any other human activity. Which means, no human activity, including developmental pursuits, will indiscriminately damage natural resources. Every such activity has to be conducted by following the principle of 'net zero emission' and 'positive contribution to natural elements like air and water'.

As a policy plank and as a statement of intent, the above premise is neither new nor untested. What is really expected in the post COVID era that this drive towards environmental protection has to come in the consciousness of every individual and then in the activities of collective entities. This will be the guiding beacon for policy makers and for state agencies, entrusted with the responsibility of implementation of environmental policies.

Unfortunately today, the rules related to environmental protection, which are good in number and some are draconian in nature, are either being paid lip service or being used as tools of protests. In the process of partisan considerations, from various quarters, the real issues and the objectives are getting over sighted. The COVID sufferings and breakdown, which has not spared anyone, is expected to bring clarity with regard to nature and environment.

Sri Sri Thakur Anukul Chandra through, in his all fulfilling ideology, has made environmental nurturing a part of everyday activities of his disciples. Every disciple of Sri Sri Thakur is committed to भूतभूज्य (offerings to nature), as part of daily and monthly offerings. Secondly, Sri Sri Thakur, through his own life examples has shown as to how much sensitive he was towards animals and plants. He could sense the language of animals and used to provide succor to those who needed it, as urgently as he would have done for any human beings. There are anecdotes which tell how an injured monkey was given first aid and dressing in the Satsang clinic at Deoghar. There are stories which narrate how cows and dogs used to be part of Sri Sri Thakur's surrounding devotees, as if they were having affection and

exchange with Sri Sri Thakur. Sri Sri Thakur never allowed to break even a twig and a branch of any tree in the vicinity. There is a narration in the book by Jayram Fakir that Sri Sri Thakur advised him to build a house in Himaitpur for birds. He even provided a visual sketch of that house, which will be suiting bird's habitation.

At a deeper level, it is to be understood that India needs both developments and environment. There are methods and tools available for environment friendly development activities. For evaluating a project, any view that is extreme and one sided may trigger larger damage than the issues under consideration. In situations of dilemma and conflict, expert view is to be given precedence over partisan views. We unfortunately are also witness to scenarios and events, where expert views are attempted to be managed and short circuited by resorting various deviant tricks. Hopefully, COVID alam bells are enough to deter us from those kinds of manipulative motions.

The second pillar which comes as development priorities is promotion of agriculture and agro industries. This premise again does not come with any surprise, as it is well known and well publicized. What would assume importance in coming time is that agriculture must be done on scientific basis and agro industries have to proliferate in every village. Both the above points are being progressed today by plethora of government initiatives and being financed by various schemes. What is lacking today is local leadership and expertise to really take benefit of the schemes. Wherever local leadership and expertise have supported these two movements, we have seen wonders.

Sri Sri Thakur Anukul Chandra argued for scientific agriculture and local expertise. He visualized a role called 'village professor' who guide local people with expertise pertaining to all local initiatives and crafts, leading to people's welfare. The concept of 'village professor' embodies traditional relationships with innovation based modern knowledge. This will take away evils of current play of politics and bureaucracy.

Sri Sri Thakur also wanted every household to have cottage industries where ladies of the households will engage themselves in productive activities. Sri Sri Thakur also wanted laboratories to study local conditions and come out with most appropriate cultivation methods, seeds, soil, manure and various other applications. Small industries, efficient technologies, appropriate supply chain and marketing network will spur productivity and will enhance profitability. This model when replicated across the regions

and country will make foreign 'wall mart' model of retailing superfluous in India. The crux is involvement of local people, local finance and local expertise.

Third pillar of new paradigm of development is mobilization of local finance. Sri Sri Thakur formulated a scheme and there are millions of practitioners of that today in the country, which is called 'swastyayani vrat'. This is a unique practice that makes every practitioner a productive agent in the society. This also has a small saving scheme, which is a kind of voluntary saving done every day and the fund is cumulatively available for productive investment in the family. There is also provision that the individual fund can be pooled together and productive assets can be developed on joint ownership basis. Essentially, it is a saving and investment scheme; which can be applied to any businesses, including banking business. This scheme makes resources available for investment from the local community.

Fourth pillar of new development paradigm is to build hereditary expertise in the affairs of occupation, including artisanship, craftsmanship and trade. It is based on premise that genetic expertise provides irreplaceable human resources. Those hereditary traits begets skills refined through generations and provide head start to the upcoming workforce in the family.

The culture of hereditary occupation, as being practiced in *varnashram* based social system, is not to be considered as pool of stagnation and confinement. There are many cases, where this skill and occupation system, has adopted technology and marketing tools and have proved to be world class in quality and scale.

Sri Sri Thakur Anukul Chandra wanted to rinse and renovate the traditional *varnashram* system. In a country like India, with large population and diverse requirement, the hereditary occupation system goes well with all new channels of value creation and services. For a child in the family, the heredity occupation provides a school for learning and first occupation opportunity. Nothing prevents a skilled child to migrate and adopt any other better occupation with higher fulfilment.

Any social and economic system provide graded opportunities to fulfil diverse talents (supply) and to meet diverse requirement (demand) of goods and services. Hereditary occupation like farming and food processing, craftsmanship of various types, including apparels, gem and jewelries, animal husbandry, cottage industries,

carpentry, stone crafting, hospitality services and so on, has immense avenues for furthering artistic and creative talents to absorb and let them prosper. However, those ventures constitute only a segment of huge other opportunities coming in sunrise sectors. Sri Sri Thakur always wanted to see innovation, creativity and need fulfilment in sensitive and nuanced way. All these lead to technological advancement and better services.

Fifth point; it is to be understood that wellbeing of people is the objective and economic development is the means to achieve that. With that in view, overarching priority is to be accorded to public health, sanitation, primary education, and infrastructure for connectivity and mobility. Here again, emphasis of mass wellbeing is a known development priority, but it has been subjected to debate on alternate development philosophies, like capitalism vs. socialism, consumer choice vs. prescriptive diet, egalitarianism vs. hierarchical order, and so on. The question here is of priority and timeliness of taking care of basic needs of mass, within limited resources and conflicting demands, coming from various interest groups. This debate cannot be resolved on merit and rationality alone. The issue is to be settled on grounds of human values, sympathy and feelings for others. The policy planners, government and civil society have to come together on this issue. Now it is time, post COVID, all have understood the need to have affordable public health and sanitation facilities.

Above all, economic development calls for peace and order in the society. Collective spirit and cooperation with State agencies in implementing development schemes are prerequisites. Social and national issues must be kept above self-interest. These ecosystem and orderliness comes easily if there is an Ideal who is universally adored. Sri Sri Thakur Anukul Chandra presents himself as that Ideal who can be placed on the pedestal for commanding universal affinity and adherence. The ideological framework of Sri Sri Thakur is above all parochial considerations like religion, region, sects, community, poor and rich, literate and illiterate and so on. His ideology fulfills all people and takes the society on progressive pull. This sets the philosophical and cultural aspects of economic development.

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