A note on the proposed agenda discussed at
the Nagpur Confrence organised by
many distinguished Gandhian leaders

Challenges Before The Realignment Process Of Democratic Movement

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The above heading demands the clarification of two points. One is as to what the concept of democratisation mean and the other is to sort out the meaning of realignment.

In our view, the democratic movement, in the present context, expresses the organisations and the activities of those who believe in the theory and practice of the existing form of democracy in India (or the world) and the idea of realignment indicates the realignment of positive democratic forces in contrast to negative ones.

2

To begin with, we first of all take up the question of the performance of this democracy and its practitioners in India. It will be more interesting to look at the comments made by the two top leaders—President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam and Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh—of India about the ongoing Indian democracy and its practitioners (i.e. politicians who control Indian parliament, state legislatures and political parties).

Speaking on the occasion of presenting awards on 20th of March 2005, President Abdul Kalam said that "dubious means" are adopted to cobble up numbers to form the government and called for introspection, remarks that assume significance in the backdrop of recent political developments. Observing that polling processes have been of late, "under severe strain" with fatal violence, he said, "let us be honest to ourselves."

The arithmetical compulsion of incremental numbers and the alleged tradability of certain legislative seats, won perhaps through means allegedly dubious and undemocratic, have many a time created doubts on our democratic system in the public eye.

The President said, "When politics degraded itself to political adventurism, the nation would be on calamitous road to inevitable disaster and ruination."

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, who was on 20th march 2005 presented the outstanding parliamentarian award for 2002 regretted that the standard of debate and general atmosphere in parliament was declining.

The PM underlined the need for introspection before people begin to lose faith in the institution. He said MPs should come better prepared to the house and be "more willing to listen to each other, even if we disagree, for that is the essences and hallmark of democracy." He added, "I think occasions such as this provide us an opportunity for introspection. There can be little doubt that the standard of debate and general atmosphere, within which we carry our business has been declining."

Many Indian intellectuals, take pride in the fact that India is the largest democracy of the world, that ours is a chequered history and a rich cultural heritage, that we have unity in diversity and that ours is the largest constitution, resting on democratic fibers but all this pride and prestige vanishes like a melting cloud and heads hang in shame the moment we look at the ugly and distorted face of our present day politics, which having lost its basic value and moral, is bound to ruin the country, its prestige and heritage, simply in the blind race of power under vested interests of power politics of the politicians who want to grab power by hook or by crook, fair or foul, by muscle or tussle, by bullet or ballot or by any unfair means, by taking the constitution for granted as their shield to justify all their corrupt practices by misinterpreting the constitution and its flexible nature.

Even the apex court cannot prevent the tainted, corrupt and criminal politicians from entering parliament or legislatures through the election process and leaves the umpireship in the hands of the parliament or the legislature itself for making a decision, to this effect. The election commission too seems like an undone and mute spectator.

No country can be expected free of corruption so long as its political kingdom remains dipped in it. Corruption descends from political apartments to bureaucratic floors and then travels down to administrative blocks to reach the executive setup and finally penetrates into the society to ruin the country. So, the time has come to awaken us from our deep slumber not to waste any more time till it becomes too late to mend the worsening democratic process.

Taking into account the above said facts, can we characterise the Indian democracy as a genuine democracy and its adherents as genuine democrats? Can the unity of the followers of such a corruption-based democracy be termed as a democratic movement?

Now let us look at the 50 year performance of the ongoing democracy and its practitioners in relation to economic inequality and environmental situation.

As regards economic inequality, it exists in a highly brutal form in India where only nine billionaires control $23 billion wealth and 61,000 multimillionaires control $267 billion, i.e., 50 percent of Indian's total GDP ($560 billion). Nearly 30 percent is under the black economy, 10 percent is possessed by upper middle classes, 8 percent is shared by medium and lower classes, while only 2 percent goes to 62 percent poor and deprived (40 percent with an income below $1 and 22 percent with an income below $2).

As to environmental situation, all the environmental components, i.e., air, water, land, forests, bio-diversity, etc., have become degraded and polluted to a great extent.

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Turning to the problem of the performance of democracy and its practitioners in South Asia, the region has witnessed an extensive erosion of its natural resources base over the last five decades as a result of rapid deforestation, the forest cover of the region has declined to 17.5 percent of land area. Some of the worst natural disasters, like floods and drought, are directly linked to the pressures on its eco-system, global warming caused by the greenhouse effect is found to have serious implications for all coastal regions, with the Maldives and Bangladesh being the most vulnerable.

As regards the degeneration of human resources in South Asia over 400 million South Asians go to bed hungry every night. Another 300 million live just above the poverty line. More than half the South Asian people are illiterate, one-third homeless, 40 percent under-employed, one-third devoid of safe drinking water and other health facilities and three-fourth do not have access to latrines. 53 percent of children below 5 years are under weight. About 100 million in the 5-14 age group work as labourers. The condition of women is highly distressing. South Asia tops in gender-based violence world over.

The average annual income of the people at $309 is even far below $555 of Africa's sub-Saharan region, the most deprived of the world two decades ago. Countrywise also, national incomes are among the lowest in the world, ranging from Bhutan's $180 to $360 for India.

The problem of poverty is further aggravated by various other social deprivations. South Asia requires primary schooling for 126 million children, healthcare for 690 million and safe drinking water for 770 million people, adequate nutrition for 87 million children and provision for family planning services to 287 million married couples.

All this demands a huge amount of finance. But the ruling elite pursues its own priorities. The internal and external conflicts, generated by wrong official policies, devour much of the regions financial resources.

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Coming to the issue of the international performance of the existing democracy and its practitioners, it is evident from the authenticated reports made by UN and other scientific and other social experts' reports.

The 2002-UN Environment Program (UNEP) report warns that the expansion of cities, destruction of forests, erosion of fields and rising demand for water are likely to threaten human and ecological health in many countries.

It says the growth of agriculture is damaging landscapes, depleting aquifers, raising the level of salt in the soil and reducing habitat for wildlife.

Already, five billion acres of soil, more than the areas of the US and Canada combined, is degraded by human activity with a sixth of that strongly or extremely degraded. More than 80 percent of the damage has come through water and wind erosion.

It adds, most regions of the world will still see their biological diversity and coastal eco-systems badly damaged by 2032.

According to the 2003-UN Human Development Report, the disparity trend between the rich and the poor and the high and low continues growing unabated, without any sign of reduction in size or halting at some point. The 2002-UN Human Development Report expresses: the world's richest 1 percent receives as much in terms of income as the poorest 75 percent. The 2001-UN Human Development Report writes: of the 4.6 billion people in the developing countries, more than 850 million are illiterate, nearly a billion lack access to improved water resources, 2.4 billion lack access to basic sanitation. Nearly, 32 million boys and girls are out of school. And 11 million under age 5 die each year from preventable causes—equivalent to more than 30,000 a day. Around 1.2 billion people live on less than $1 a day (1993 PPP US $) and 2.8 billion on less than $2 a day. Such deprivations are not limited to developing countries. In OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries, more than 130 million are income poor, 34 million are unemployed and adult functional illiteracy rates average 15 percent. The report further states that the richest 10 percent of the US population (around 2.5 million people) had a combined income greater than that of the poorest 43 percent of the world people (around 2 billion people). The 1999-Human Development Report says: by the late 1990's the fifth of the world's people living in the highest income countries had 86 percent of the world GDP the bottom fifth just 1 percent and 74 percent of world telephone lines, today's basic means of communication, the bottom fifth just 1 percent and 82 percent of the world export markets the bottom fifth just 1 percent.

The 1996-Human Development Report tells: just three of the world's richest people have the combined GDP of the 48 least developed countries. The world's 225 richest people have a combined wealth of over $1 trillion which is also the total income of 47 percent of the poor who number 2.5 billion.

Further, the following facts based on expert reports also substantiate the above conclusion.

The 2000-statement issued by the internationally prominent scientists has emphasised that if the human community did not stop the production of the Greenhouse Gases (GHGs) in a short span of time, the global warming would make the earth uninhabitable for bio-life by the end of the 21st century.

The 2002-UN Johannesburg world summit on sustainable development was held to consider the fatal problem of environmental degradation and human resources degeneration.

The 2002-study made by the UN worldwide fund had warned that if the human community (especially the rich nations and the rich persons) does not change its extravagant and wasteful lifestyle, our earth will become unsustainable for human life by 2050.

The 2003 Rome conference of the world-noted scientists has cautioned that if the worsening process of environmental degradation is not reversed within a short time, the earth will become totally unsuitable for bio-living in the near future.

A January 2004-article published in the scientific magazine, Nature, says that "climatic change over the next 50 years is expected to drive a quarter of land animals and plants into extinction." The other scientific experts, who have not committed themselves to any time table, do admit that the environmental situation is highly alarming.

A well known economic historian, A Madison, has stated that the gap between the richest and the poorest countries in 1820 was about 3 to 1. It became 11 to 1 in 1913, 35 to 1 in 1950, 44 to 1 in 1973 and 72 to 1 in 1992. In 1997 it was roughly 74 to 1—a heart rendering figure. Earth shaking is the disparity that today exists between a richest and a poorest person in the world. While Bill Gates, the richest American of our world, owns a total wealth of $47 billion and Azim Premji of India possesses assets worth $6 billion, a starving person, with an empty pocket and deprived of every source, to get even a loaf of a bread, has no option but to go begging, subsist for sometime and then quit for the next world. The medical experts pronounce such deaths as a result of defective stomach bowls or some other physical ailment.

A handful of developed countries, with hardly 15 percent of the world population, today control over 80 percent of the world's material and financial resources, leaving less than 20 percent for 85 percent of the world people, living in over 130 developing countries.

The January 2004-report of the World Watch Washington has remarked that the extravagant and unsustainable lifestyles of the world's rich and the upper middle classes (constituting one-fourth of the world) is pushing the human community towards a dangerous crisis.

The March 2004-Report of the Natural Environment Research Council Centre for Ecology and Hydrology in Dorchester, UK says, "a sixth massive extinction event in the history of life is upon us yet again." Such mass extinction of living species of flora and fauna has periodically occurred during the course of five gigantic pre-historic extinctions. The Dorchester centre says that previous five extinctions were due to the inter-play of natural causes, while the sixth one seems to be due to human activity.

The March 2004-UN report says that the 'smokeless industry' of Information Technology is a major global pollutant. According to it, 24 kg computer along with a 27 centimeter cathode ray tube monitor requires at least 230 kg of fossil fuel, 22 kg of chemicals and 1,500 kg of water—a total of 1.8 tones.

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Despite the above-stated negative performance in terms of Human Community and Natural Environment at the Indian, South Asian and the World levels, the adherents of present democracy define it as a rule by the people, for the people and of the people. But this definition does not represent the exact reality about the existing democracy. In our existing democratic structure, the people have the only right to elect their representatives through an electoral process. Beyond that, the people have no right. Our representatives have the right to rule over us for five years. In this sense, we can characterise this democracy only as a people's representative democracy and not a people's democracy. But the ruling politicians have named it as peoples rule which is contrary to facts. Both brands of democracy, i.e., the existing corporate capitalist democracy (operating through multi-party method) and communist democracy (functioning through only a single communist party in the state-led or party-led form) name it a peoples rule. To call the peoples representatives rule as peoples rule is a distortion of the fact. In our current people's representative rule, people have the only right to elect their representatives. They have no other right except the right to vote. The elected representatives have the exclusive right to do whatever they like. In fact, in the present above two types of national democracy, people have no say to intervene in any other matter.

Further, the corporate capitalist electoral law in India permits a Lok Sabha candidate to spend Rs 25 lakhs in his constituency on electoral expenses (while the electoral expenses law varies from country to country and allows much bigger sums to be spent on elections expenses). Evidently, 90 percent people in India do not afford to spend such a huge amount of money on election expenses. Hence, the common people have to forgo the opportunity of becoming a candidate in the election (however capable

they may be). Only the party-nominated candidates (who generally belong to wealth-owning classes) enter the contest. In fact, the electoral contest remains confined to the wealth-owning classes and their favourites. It is interesting to mention here that in the Lok Sabha elections, according to EC-sponsored CSDS study on the 1999 polls, when the ceiling was Rs 14 lakhs, average expense per candidate worked out to Rs 70 lakhs, which now works out to be worth Rs 1.20 crore.

In the communist democracy, only the ruling communist party has the privilege to put up the candidates. Thus, while in the corporate capitalist democracy, wealth-owners or their representatives succeed to get control over the political power in every election, in the communist democracy, communist party holds the monopoly of power.

Taking into account the above facts, the nature of corporate capitalist and communist democracies expresses a two-sided character. Firstly, it does not represent the people's direct rule and secondly, it is controlled by wealth-owners in the case of corporate capitalist democracy and monopolised by the communist party (i.e., its leading group) as regards the communist democracy.

As to the parameters of the two forms (corporate capitalist and communist) of democracy, both these types start from the social premise that makes them human centric. In fact, wealth-owners in corporate capitalist democracy and communist party, i.e., its few leaders, in communist democracy act as the motive forces of these two respective capitalist models and everything is geared to serve their interests in their respective social formations.

The second parameter of these two respective capitalist forms is to regard force as the ultimate tool to resolve any problem. As a result, the war remains their top option to resolve any intricate problem. Necessarily, the defence becomes their main priority in running their respective social models and resolve their problems.

The third parameter of these two forms is to attain state power at all costs, by hook or by crook for maximising their wealth and rule over the people and to hold on the state power for good.

The fourth parameter of these two forms is their respective value systems. Corporate capitalist value system sanctifies the commercialisation of all types of activities—sports, film shows, beauty contests, etc., while verbally clamouring to abolish gender inequality and give women rights equal to men-folk, it shrewdly encourages the traditional patriarchal domination in social and family life, treating women as second class citizens.

Communist value system is basically regulated through the communist party and its state. People are generally conditioned through government-controlled press and media that the ruling communist party and its leaders are the real votaries of social truth that deserves to be upheld at all occasions.

The fifth parameter of these two respective capitalist forms is to measure development in terms of money. Although both (corporate capitalist and communist theories) differ in their definition of capital (the corporate capitalist naming it as wealth and the communist calling it as workers surplus value), yet, both denominate it in terms of money and measure development, progress and prosperity at the rate of the increase or growth of money. That is why, they call accumulated money as capital for investment. They use every type of device to multiply their capital, the top most thing, according to them, in society. Their understanding of capital motivates them to proliferate it by all means (hook or crook), without any regard to natural or human resources.

Coming to the practice of these two respective capitalist forms, that have ruthlessly sought to maximise there capital by all means, degrading environmental resources, on the one hand, and degenerating the human resources, on the other—thus, damaging them beyond repair. That is the picture presented by UNEP, UNDP and other scientific and social expert reports.

Summing up the whole process of ongoing democracy (i.e., its corporate capitalist and communist varieties), it can be said, that while its positive side includes certain technological and scientific innovations, the negative side consists of the highest crime ever committed in the biological history (over shadowing its achievements)—a crime that is now posing a life and death threat to both natural and human resources. The entire 200 year history of the ongoing democracy bears witness to this fact.

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We firmly hold that people's rule or rule by the people, for the people and of the people can only be established under Nature-Human Centric model of democracy.

Nature-Human Centric model of democracy holds that human and environmental resources are two principal forces in the development of human society.

It believes that man is a bio-social being, characterised by individual biological existence, on the one hand, and social interests, on the other.

Nature-Human Centric model of democracy considers social development as a process, comprising three equally important dimensions of human nature, such as existential (i.e., security of life and sex urges), psychological (i.e., yearning for freedom of thought and action) and social (i.e., strong impulse for equality and justice in all material and psychological processes). Here, people have to decide how to ensure life-long social security to every person; how an individual be granted total freedom of

thought and action, how much difference there be between equitable incomes and how to ensure the continuity of human community.

It thinks that the theory of might being right (symbolised in the form of war) has today become unproductive. Holding peace as its basic principle, it stands for the resolution of all conflicts, including Jammu-Kashmir, Palestine, through talks and negotiations.

It maintains that both ends and means have an equal importance. It holds a planetary and inter-planetary vision. The fundamental principle of this vision is to put the people and the environment at the centre of our entire activity.

Corresponding to this vision, it stands for a new global order in which the UN general assembly becomes the top decision-making body. The general assembly elects a council to carry its decisions (abrogating the old rule of appointing a security council, with a few members having permanent council seats and enjoying veto powers) and restructures in future the present national units on the basis of two considerations: common identity and more or less equal population.

It maintains that capital comprises a two-sided phenomenon, i.e., the environmental resources, on the one hand, and human resources, on the other. It rejects the theory of the money being the denominational unit of capital. It considers money only as a medium of exchange.

Its development model stands for a five fold fundamental principle, i.e., environmental sustainability, equity (with 1:5 difference in incomes and social security as a fundamental right to all), productivity, peoples-led democracy and all sided transparency.

This model differs with both the corporate capitalist-led and the state-based development models on the issues of their purpose, management and style.

While the corporate capitalist model stands for developing the capital and capital owners and the state model advances the interests of the ruling politicians and bureaucrats plus the labour aristocracy, the Nature-Human Centric one serves the interests of people and environment, in general, and the poor and deprived sections, in particular.

In management, while the corporate capitalist sector upholds the monopoly corporate capitalist management and control and the state sector supports the monopoly bureaucratic management and control, the Nature-Human Centric development model stands for democratic management and control of public limited companies by elected joint committees, each comprising two-third elected members from ordinary shareholders and one-third elected workers representatives in place of permanent corporate capitalists.

In style, contrary to the authoritarian and secretive corporate capitalist and state style, the Nature-Human Centric development model stands for democratic, transparent and accountable style.

Nature-Human Centric politics stands for a democratic order that is based on fully democratic principles, functioning and structure. Such a model necessitates the introducing of the principle of the maximum possible empowerment of the people in decision-making.

Nature-Human Centric economics demands a rational and realistic economics whose concepts, laws and rules are required to be framed in the light of former's two top priorities (i.e., human-kind and environment) and five principles (i.e., environmental sustainability, equity, productivity, democracy and transparency).

Nature-Human Centric value system calls for a way of life (or lifestyle) that is embedded in basic human and environmental values and promotes rational humanist and environmentalist thinking, behavior and organisation among the people.

The Nature-Human Centric model of democracy will ensure that all types of constitutions (from local to international levels) be prepared by respective elected constituent assemblies and then finally referred to the people for their final approval and sanction.

Here the following ideas may also be kept in view:

The executive constituting the legislative members not to hold the leading position.

All parts of state structure, i.e., legislative, executive, judiciary, administration to have an equal position.

The Nature-Human Centric model of democracy holds that all representative bodies in all processes (social, economic, cultural, political etc.) be elected through elections in which every member of society will have the right to contest. No association, body, party or group be given any special position in the electoral processes at all levels.

All types of elections be conducted through the state funding to each contesting candidate.

Voters be given the right to recall their representatives.

Candidates not to deposit any security and instead to produce five percent signatures of their supporters from among the electors in any electoral constituency.

The way forward, in our views, lies in doing five things:

(a) To raise peoples awareness for restructuring the ongoing money (or capital) -based and corruption and crime-oriented politicians led ongoing democracy into a Nature-Human Centric democracy.

(b) To make people conscious about distinguishing right from wrong in the present conditions. The prevailing corporate capitalist system has generated a public mindset that considers money, power and might as the principal aims of human society and every human being. The environmental and human interests demand that these three negative and harmful motivational factors be replaced by the environmental and human resources as principal objectives.

(c) To start the mass mobilisation campaign among all sections of the people, in general, and deprived and neglected sections, in particular, because the latter's lot demands an immediate change.

(d) To prepare the development agenda concerning each of the deprived groups, namely, the rural and the urban poor, houseless, unemployed, widows, women, working children, girl child, invalids, scavengers, agricultural labour, bonded labour, unorganised labour, tribals, prisoners, undertrials, old people having no attendant, factory workers, lumpen elements, such as beggars, etc., office employees, students, youth and minorities, etc.

(e) To build fraternal relations with all those involved in social movements and those who have grassroot connections in India and other countries in the world. 06-04-2005