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SECTION A

Q4. Strengthening healthcare system in India: is privatization the only answer?

India is a welfare economy and sound healthcare system is one of the most important arms of a welfare state.

However, healthcare system in India is facing myriad issues and privatization has often been touted as a possible solution.

However, is privatization the only answer?

This question needs a multi-pronged analysis to arrive at an answer.

Let us begin with some numbers.

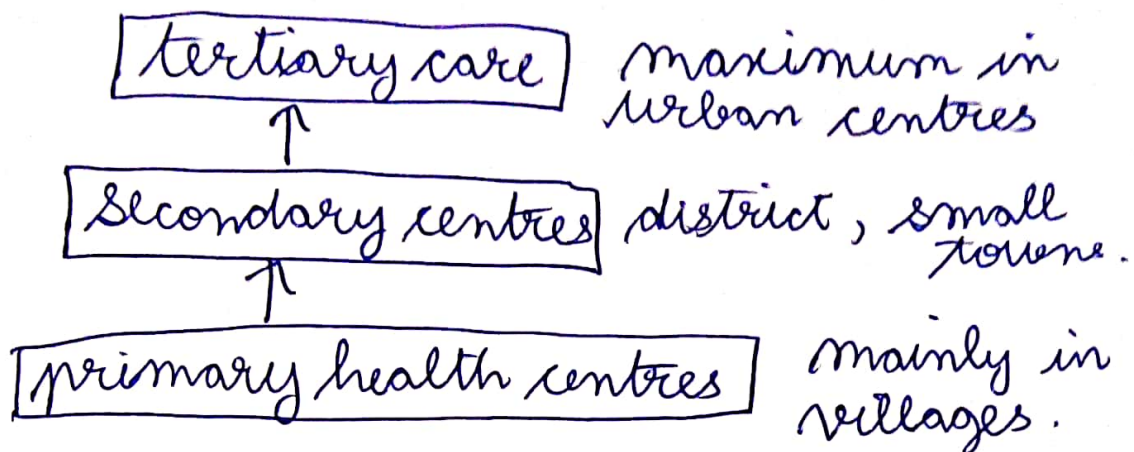
- India spends less than 2% of the GDP on healthcare, while developed countries spend almost 6% (2.5% by 2025)
- India has only 130 doctors per 1 lakh population (including AYUSH) while the global average is 250, and has been mandated by WHO.
- 70% of India's healthcare expenses are out-of-pocket.
- 4 crore people fall below poverty line every year, due to health expenses.
- Health insurance penetration is less than 10%.
- Estimated about 20% medicines sold in India are counterfeit.

These numbers tell a story. And it is a far bigger issue than mere privatization.

What is needed is an overhaul of the entire healthcare infrastructure in the country.

National Health Policy 2017
may be a beginning in the right direction.

The current medical system consists of :



The tertiary centres are where maximum privatization is seen, along with some secondary centres.

Primary health care centres are the first point of access for any medical issue for most of the poor. It provides immunization, maternal care, medicines and injections for common ailments.

Ayushman Bharat Scheme aims to convert these into Health and Wellness centres to treat upto 12 basic conditions, including screening for NCDs.

Efforts may be made to encourage private sector to invest in such infrastructure and service upgrade.

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NITI Aayog had proposed PPP in the secondary and tertiary centres. Only the conditions of coronary, pulmonary and cancer diseases were recommended to be handled by the private partner.

The land would be provided by the government and referrals from all levels will also be sent to them.

However, the issues raised were - possible profiteering by the private partners, may provide lower quality care for patients coming through such referrals, may subject patients to unnecessary tests and treatments which may not be covered under any insurance thus escalating bills.

These issues are valid and hence need to be addressed before the policy is green flagged.

However, the private sectors assistance may be sought in manpower training - a critical area which is lacking.

The shortage of manpower cannot be addressed by privatization alone. Infact rise of private hospitals is reducing the number of doctors in rural areas - many of whom even pay huge bond amounts to avoid serving in rural areas.

A public health cadre had been recommended, to address the issue. These would be trained medical practitioners in handling epidemics and common conditions. However MCI did not approve the proposal. It may be an idea that can be considered. But this should not lead to rural healthcare being given less priority and hence non-deployment of MBBS doctors.

Research and development is an area where private hospitals and pharma companies can help.

Innovate in India Mission is focussing on creating APIs in India and private sector help will faster the process. This can help keep costs of medicines low.

Currently, through price control, essential drugs are being made available at low prices. Along with this generic drugs and AYUSH are also being encouraged.

A proper implementation of all these, along with strict quality control by FDI will ensure proper medicines availability — an important component of healthcare.

Under Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan, private sector doctors are being encouraged to dedicate 1 day per month for checkup of pregnant women from PHCs. Ultrasound facility is being provided and high risk pregnancies are being monitored. This is another example of a successful private partnership.

Ayushman Bharat, once rolled out, will also allow the beneficiaries to access private hospitals. Once the scheme rolls

out all over, one can evaluate the feasibility and success or performance of this private partnership.

Thus, there have been instances of successful private public partnerships. However, complete privatization cannot be recommended due to several reasons like:-

- Overcharging. Fortis was recently fined for overcharging.
- Unnecessary tests are being recommended. Such tests may not be covered by insurance, further adding to cost burden.
- Unethical medical practices like performing caesarian even when not required, hospitalization even for minor illnesses, using trial drugs without patient approval.
- Clinical Establishment Act has not been implemented by all states, thus making it difficult to track malpractices.
- MCI has been accused of negligence, corruption.

Instead, what is needed is a partnership with the private sector wherever required, along with a reform in the entire healthcare system.

It can be done as follows:

Focus should not only be on curative care, but also on preventive care and palliative care.

Cleanliness, vector control, timely vaccinations, behaviour change are some measures needed. Example: Japanese Encephalitis in UP can be controlled by vector control.

Medical education should be reformed. The syllabus is being revised now after almost 2 decades. More frequent revisions is needed.

ANMs, ASHAs can be provided formal certifications and diplomas to enable them to handle some more medical conditions. However, a pay hike is necessary to motivate these women who have frequently protested over low pay.

Cadre for rural healthcare.

may be considered. Lower fees or more marks in entrance test for admission to PG may be given to those doctors who serve in rural areas.

NCDs are a rising concern and the focus should be on correct diet and exercise and encouraging a healthy lifestyle. Meditation, Yoga ~~can~~ can be promoted for stress relief. Early screening is the key here - as recommended by NITI Aayog.

Mental Health Bill 2017 draws attention to rising need for mental healthcare. Adequate counsellors, psychiatrists need to be trained. Stigma attached with mental health needs to be removed.

Increased insurance coverage is needed to reduce burden on savings. Ayushman Bharat will solve the issue partially. But even those not under this scheme should be encouraged to purchase some health insurance. Out-patient treatments are not covered by insurance and a solution to this is needed as

hospitalization may be done unnecessarily to avail insurance money.

Maternal, child, adolescent healthcare is to be focussed on by effective implementation of RMNCHA+ framework. Correct diet, medicines and care to be provided to reduce IMR, MMR, NNMR.

Thus, healthcare system is not something to be looked at in isolation.

It requires an allround approach from mere healthcare to health and wellness.

Cleanliness, diet, exercise, medicines, education, manpower are several of its components. Privatization is but a small solution to a far complex issue.

A welfare state is committed to health and wellbeing of its citizens. And it cannot rescue itself from such an important responsibility and hence privatisation is not the only answer.

SECTION B

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[3] The world needs Gandhiji's ideas more than ever today.

A local henchman, worried about a problem, plus tensed about his relationships, falls asleep in a library.

An afternoon nap like any other day. However this day was different. He dreamt a dream. And found all solutions to his issues in the dream. After being guided by a historical figure.

And ~~what~~ what a simple solution it was — 'Gandhigiri' !

This premise from the popular film 'Lage Raho Munnabhai' may be a work of fiction. But it is not an exaggeration to say that 'Gandhigiri' is the solution to many of the issues the world is facing.

And hence, the world needs Gandhi's ideas more than ever today.

Rise of terrorism is the biggest scourge of the world today. From

ISIS in the Middle East, Boko Haram in Africa and Taliban in Afghanistan, and several other radical extremist outfits - violence and extremism are on a rise.

War in Syria has rendered millions homeless, Yemen is being ravaged by war and famine. Afghanistan has known no peace from almost 40 years. Ethnic clashes are destabilizing Africa, while our own India has been a victim of Pak-sponsored terrorism.

Gandhi and his teachings of non-violence and compassion immediately come to mind. He advocated shunning violence. Violence, he believed, only affected the body of the aggressor. However, non-violence and the quest for truth and the courage shown in the face of violence can inflict gravest wounds on the conscience of the wrong doer.

This is not a retreatist or passive approach. Rather, it is a

Recognition of the fact that violence only begets violence, and that an eye for an eye can make the whole world blind.

Everlasting peace can never be achieved through violence, he believed and only the most courageous can fight violence with non violence and love.

Rising protectionism is another problem the world is facing. Trade system has been dismantled in the garb of 'protecting domestic interests'. Xenophobia is another manifestation of protectionism, with increasing hostility towards migrants and refugees.

'Brexit', US-China trade wars, Building a wall on Mexico border, refusal of many EU countries to accept refugees, stringent visa regimes, travel bans are several of its demonstrations.

Gandhi saw the whole world as one single family. He

showed the same compassion for Blacks in South Africa, Dalits in India and even the Britishers. He never discriminated amongst anyone and treated every human being as a creation of God, no matter his or her race, caste, religion or gender.

A poor, a person in distress only cares for assistance and compassion. Caste, colour, religion nothing matter to him. This value was rightly recognized by Gandhi and can help fight the rising hostility towards refugees and migrants.

Gandhi was a firm believer of the Hindu philosophical concept of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam which means the whole world is my family - a teaching relevant for today's rising protectionism. It recognizes that borders are nothing but mere human creations.

Rising inequality is another major global issue. It has been seen that the wealthy are only getting wealthier. In India, the top 1%, own as much as 43% of the assets. At the global level, this is even worse, with the top 1%, owning 74% of the global wealth.

Gandhi was not against capitalism. However he was against capitalist greed. He favoured the 'trusteeship' model as a way to prevent wealth accumulation. He believed that the wealthy should consider themselves as 'trustees' of the wealth accumulated and re-distribution of the wealth was the right way forward.

This was because, any wealth is created through resources that come from the community itself. And what comes from the community must be returned to the community many times over. Even the concept of CSR, being espoused globally has its origins in such Gandhian values.

Sustainable development is the focus of UN and other international organisations. Rising temperature, changing rainfall patterns, frequent extreme climatic events, rising sea-levels and fear of submergence of coastal areas, melting of glaciers are just some examples of how the industrial-era has damaged environment.

The loss of biodiversity is even more staggering, with over 70% species having become extinct or nearing extinction. This points to the highly irresponsible consumption and development model being followed in the 21st century. Deforestation, release of harmful industrial effluents, aggressive mining, fishing, race to exploit the natural resources is slowly depleting them all.

Gandhi had taught that 'The world has enough for everyone's need, but not for everyone's greed'. The greed for more. The rise of consumerism and conspicuous consumption is at the heart of the

irresponsible development and over-exploitation of resources. It also demonstrates a short-sightedness wherein the needs of the next generations are not being considered. Producing only for need and not for greed is at the heart of sustainable development.

Unplanned, Uncontrolled Urbanization is taking hold, with most developed countries already urbanized and even developing countries like India are seeing fast pace of urbanization. This rapid growth is bringing many problems in its wake.

Urban slums, increased crime rates, unhygienic, inhuman living and working conditions, issues of women safety, high inequality giving rise to relative deprivation, with a potential to cause civic unrest - a growing city has it all. In addition, there is an extreme burden on its scarce resources. From islands of prosperity, they have been reduced to magnets of anti-social phenomena.

Gandhi was a champion of the cause of self-sustained village community. He saw villages as an engine for national development. Long before the era of planned economy, he spoke of 'smart villages'. He envisioned a local pattern of self-governance which was materialized only in 1992. A village-centered and village-led growth, had it been pursued from the beginning, would have drastically reduced the distressed migration to urban centres.

Agrarian distress in India is often attributed to the unfinished agenda of land reforms. The Gandhian model of communal pattern of land ownership and cultivation, is the need of the hour. 'Bhoodan' which was based on Gandhian ideas had made some progress on this front.

His 'swadeshi' campaign is a solution to the rising trade deficit. Even before WTO and Washington Consensus, Gandhi had sensed the

need for import substitution and strengthening local industries. Khadi and Village Corporation, founded on his ideals, provides training in rural entrepreneurship even today. MSMEs as an engine for manufacturing sector expansion was also envisioned by Gandhi.

The biggest and most important lesson to be learnt from Gandhi's life is universal brotherhood. He truly lived by the principle of 'Vaishnava Jan to' seeing everyone as a child of God.

Rising communal tensions, caste conflicts, ethnic strife, linguistic divides - all these could have been prevented had the world taken a lesson from the life of Gandhi. A frail old man, who singlehandedly succeeded in normalizing the reign of terror and bloodbath in Noakhali, by appealing to the spirit of universal love and fraternity - Of the common bond of humanity that binds us all.

However, there still remains hope. Gandhi may be long gone, but his ideals have been kept alive by many.

From Martin Luther King Jr. to Nelson Mandela, from Abdul Sattar Edhi to Baba Amte, the world has seen such men and women dedicated to selfless service of humanity.

And this is the everlasting legacy that Gandhi has left behind. Even 150 years after his birth, he continues inspiring and guiding others. Serving as a model of how a life should be lived, to make it a life ~~be~~ lived for others.

Churchill dismissed him as a naked fakir, Nobel committee ignored him several times, radical elements criticized him and finally killed him. But Gandhi lives on! And his ideas refuse to die, and continue showing the world, the path of Gandhigiri.