

# A Comparative Study of Human Sufferings under 'Breakdown of Civil Order in Biafra' and 'Lockdown in Welfare States in the Corona virus hit World' in the Light of Gandhism.

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## ABSTRACT

*Gandhism is the sum of Mahatma Gandhi's ideas about politics, economy, freedom, democracy, authority and justice. His ideas and beliefs about Ahimsa, Satyagraha, Swaraj, Sarovodaya, Self sufficient Village, Nation, State, War, Industrialization, and International Society have solutions to most of the troubles humanity is facing today. Gandhian philosophy works on two levels primarily it transforms individuals ultimately these individuals collectively bring a profound change in society. It would be great mistake to limit Gandhism as guiding principles of Indian freedom struggle; its morality, ethics and spirituality has the potential to make the world a better place. Particularly after the world wars and end of colonialism by the 1960s, we expected a peaceful world without cut-throat competition for land, wealth and interference of super powers in international affairs. But the cold war between the so called democratic and communist giants, neocolonial mechanisms of Eurocentric forces fanned several wars that casted unprecedented sufferings on human being. One of the best examples of such wars that could have been avoided with positive interference based on Gandhian ideals is the Nigerian civil war also known as Biafran war. It is assumed that there are similarities between the predicament of humanity in the holocaust of the Biafran war of 1967-1970 and today's Corona virus hit world. This study is based on close reading of the Biafran War novels like Adichie's Half of a Yellow Sun and Chukeuemeka Ike's Sunset at Dawn which are among the best fictional representations of the war tragedy and the media reports and experiences of Corona pandemic. With tools of close reading and explication this paper attempts to draw attention to the parallels between human suffering under breakdown and lockdown in the light of Gandhism.*

**Keywords:** Biafra War, Breakdown, Civil order, Corona Virus, Gandhism, Lockdown.

**Declaration :** The author declare that the present article is an original research work carried out independently. It has not been published anywhere in any format for any purpose.

### Introduction:

Since times immortal human societies have endeavoured for better life perspectives. In general, humanity has identified two major threats to its survival i.e. 'War' and 'Disease'. Man has progressed through the stages of savage wanderings to formation of groups, communities, societies, kingdoms, states, and nations by tackling these two threats. In quest of power these nation states developed means of communication, production, commerce, science and technology. The greed for more land and resources to cater to the needs of these progressive nation states has filled human history with records of barbarisms of all kinds i.e. deceit, murders, massacre, invasions and wars. Developed nations went on advancing armaments to protect the country, to stand to others as a force and to colonise and usurp the undeveloped nations.

World needs a political philosophy that guides all efforts of nation states for the welfare of mankind. Gandhism possesses this potential if his idealism is practiced to near perfection. Gandhi the promoter of Non violence has some different explanations for arms and armament. Gandhism is the sum of Mahatma Gandhi's ideas about politics, economy, freedom, democracy, authority and justice. His ideas and beliefs about Ahimsa, Satyagraha, Swaraj, Sarovodaya (welfare of all), Self sufficient Village, Nation, State, War, Industrialization, and International Society have solutions to most of the troubles humanity is facing today. Swaraj is most thought provoking concept of Gandhi literally it means 'Swaraj can mean generally self-governance or "home-rule" (swa- "self, rai- "rule") but the word usually refers to Mohandas Gandhi's concept for Indian independence from foreign domination.'

Since the Indian independence in 1947 several Asian and African colonies got the status of independent nation states. But before leaving the colonies the British diplomats have taken care of continuation of colonial exploits from the ex colonies. Nigeria got independent in 1960. It is one of the major African countries. The British amalgamated the two protectorates and named it as Nigeria. The social mould of the country comprised of more than 300 minor tribes and three major ethnic groups i.e. the illiterate, feudal Hausa of the north, the educated, democratic and ambitious Igbo are a majority in the south-east, and the wealthy, commercial Yoruba in the south-west. The British joined the two protectorates in such a way that the north will have a deciding majority in the parliament of the newly independent Nigeria and it happened so. In this way colonialism perpetuated. 'The question of whether the 1914 amalgamation was right or wrong should not be an issue for debate. Rather, it is better to muse that since the forces of history have coalesced the ethnic nationalities into one political entity, Nigeria should build on those pre-colonial antecedents of inter-group relations that make for true nation'.<sup>7</sup> But Nigeria failed to build on its pre-colonial inter group relations. After the first election the Hausa prime minister started leading the country. The Igbo expected the victory of their learned leaders who have contributed in the struggle for independence were hurt by the actual results.

The Igbo leadership, for the time being concealed their bitterness and maintained a happy appearance and participated in the government. They were unhappy with the British for hurriedly introducing democracy to the feudal minded and illiterate people without much exposure and enlightenment. The Yoruba had spent great wealth, party funds and personal in the elections. Still, they were surprised by the results of the manipulated elections as some Hausa candidates got more votes than the total number of voters. They knew that it will not be possible for them to oppose the British supported prime minister; it will incur enmity with forces larger than their grasp. Many suspected from the inception of the government that it will not run smooth for long. In addition to all this unease, the corruption that started with the elections went on mounting. Contracts were mostly signed with British companies; the ministers seldom signed them without fixing their percentage. All the expectations of the common man were shaken. This new Nigerian government neither exhibited qualities of European nation states nor did it fulfill Gandhi's expectations from state machinery. 'I look upon an increase in the power of the state with the greatest fear because although while apparently doing good by minimizing exploitation, it does the greatest harm to mankind by destroying individuality which lies at the root of all progress.'<sup>8</sup> Such an immature political orientation of a country makes it susceptible to outside forces.

For Gandhi the nation state is not simply one concept but combination of two. Nation comprises of all its citizens: individuals with potentiality and creativity. While the State is a super imposed machinery "Gandhi, therefore, wants to make sure that social potentiality of nation-hood should not be eclipsed by an overwhelming concern of the state to ensure conformity of the people to its political and military prescriptions. Gandhi never wants the state to stifle the creativity of the people as a so-called controller of the destiny of a nation."<sup>9</sup> In Nigeria many sought the new federal government as a super imposed system put by the British governor hastily in unworthy hands. The only party claiming to be a national party NCNC, the Igbo intellectuals were reduced choice less by the communal masterstroke of the divide and rule policy of heir ex masters. The great expectations of the intellectuals about free Nigeria were threshed under coercive power.

The peace of the first republic was disturbed by the power struggle among the Yoruba. The leader of their party gave charge of the region to his lifelong friend as he was moving to the central politics to contest the elections of the republic as a prime ministerial candidate. Leaving his place as the leader of opposition in the centre, he came back to hold the regional body. The clash between the two leaders resulted in mass killings by both sides. The friend seized the leadership of the party. The changed leadership changed the equation in the second election of the republic; he joined hands with the Hausa. This was unexpected for the Igbo; the most eligible party have to sit in the opposition for the second time. It was not only the result of communal and corrupt politics of the Nigerians but the success of the British policy.

The colonial power politics of the British masters, their political allies and failure of the Nigerian people to stand united to tackle the issue of self determination, good governance were the major reasons behind this war. Six states from the south east seceded from the Nigerian federation and declared themselves as independent nation named Biafra. The Nigerian federation backed by British, America and most of the African Union secluded the seceded Biafra. Soon Biafra was blockaded but the new born Biafra did not pay heed to such actions.

Her military officials, intellectuals and elites took charge of the country, farmers mostly women started producing food, scientists engaged in advancing weapons, and most of the adults and young lads took arms in conformity to the Biafran cause. Britain, France, Russia, etc directly or indirectly supported Nigerian federation and a full

fledged war begun. The war lasted almost three years claiming approximately two million lives on the battlefields and due to breakdown of civil order and supply of essential commodities and services and consequent starvation and disease in the refugee camps.

The Biafran War is one of the most publicised wars. Several novels, poems, diaries, memoirs reflect on the war. The novel like Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) is among one of the best fictional representations of the war tragedy. The 37 chapters of *Half of a Yellow Sun* are divided into four parts. The novel is divided in four parts in juxtaposition of the two periods The early sixties and the later sixties. In the early sixties the protagonists Odenigbo the professor in Nasuka, Ugwu the adolescent attendant of Odenigbo, the twin sisters Olanna and Kainene, and Richard the researcher on Igbo art lead a happy life in newly independent country. Odenigbo engaged with Olanna and hiroutine studies, work, eating and drinking, and drawing room discussions on the various political issues. Ugwu, the uneducated village lad aspires to be like his master who as a true teacher gives him opportunity to learn. Ugwu with a bit of learning had great hopes for future. Everything was going well until the war erupted in the late sixties. In the beginning Biafra fought like good warriors but as time passed situation went beyond their powers.

In the late sixties, with consequent setbacks in the war, Biafrans have to evacuate their cities and find refuge in villages. After fall of Nasuka, Odenigbo moves to his native village. To be safe from bombings Odenigbo, Olana, and baby have to hide in the bunker that was dug for the purpose. Frightened by a near escape from bombing Olana had a dreamed happening something unpleasant with baby. This is the effect of war trauma. But the baby coughs and Olana felt relief that it was under her control; she has to take baby to hospital. But it was not that much easy in such circumstances. 'At the check point, where a huge tree trunk lay across the road, she told the civil defenders that her child was very sick and they said sorry and did not check the car and her handbag. The dim hospital corridor smelt of urine and penicillin. Women were sitting with their babies on their laps, standing with their babies on their hips, and chatter mixed with crying.'<sup>10</sup> In these inhuman condition even the intellectuals and elites like this couple has to live. The condition of the poor and refugees was disgusting. They hoped that the world would sympathise with them, but it not happened so. The Biafrans were hurt by the way the world secluded them and backed Nigerian federation. The resonating voice on Radio Biafra filled the room.

*'These African states have fallen prey to the British-American imperialist conspiracy to use the committee's recommendations as a pretext for a massive arms support for their puppet and tottering neo-colonialist regime in Nigeria'*<sup>11</sup>.

Olanna and Kainene did not pay heed to their rich parent's advice to move abroad for safety; they take own course in the tense situation of the war. Living with Richard Kainene worked for the deprived people. In the final stage of war she spent her money to provide relief material to the refugees. One day she left home early with a consignment and never returned back. 'A day passed, then a second day. Everything remained the same, the dryness in the air, the dusty winds, the refugees tilling dried soil, but Kainene was not back.'<sup>12</sup>

Biafra survived the atrocities of war for three long years on the basis of such spirit of nationalism displayed by millions of youths like Kainene.

Adichie has narrated what she read from her predecessors and heard about the war from her grandparents and relatives. Through Ugwu's incomplete book entitled *The World Was Silent When We Died* Adichie criticizes the Western world and puts forward the Biafran stand as to why they stuck to their position amidst the disaster. Ugwu's book reads 'He writes about the world that remained silent while Biafrans died. He argues that Britain inspired this silence. The arms and advice that Britain gave Nigeria shaped other countries. In the United States, Biafra was 'Under Britain's sphere of interest'. In Canada, the prime minister quipped, 'where is Biafra?' The Soviet Union sent technicians and planes to Nigeria...Communist China denounced the Anglo-American-Soviet imperialism but did little else to support Biafra. The French sold Biafra some arms but did not give the recognition that Biafra most needed. And many Black African countries feared that an independent Biafra would trigger other secessions and so supported Nigeria.'<sup>13</sup>

This silence of the world at the suffering at the troubles of others is surprising. This insensitivity has become a habit; insistence of Gandhism is necessary to avoid such things in future.

#### Corona:

Spare all the arguments about the causes of the wars like the Biafran war i.e. from the third world point of view it resulted from political intervention of Eurocentric powers, to the European they are nothing more than war between

tribes. But, one thing is clear that humanity suffered dire effects of these wars, and the world was silent when they died. We can't disown these sufferings as they did not happen on our land. We have to break this silence.

This breakdown of civil order in war situations can be compared to the lockdowns worldwide on the face of Corona pandemic. All the progressive and backward nations in the world have become the grounds where Corona that engendered war, materialism, imperialism, capitalism, and globalization. I base this comparison on the assumption that Corona pandemic has become so fatal due to globalization. It is not a derogatory phrasing; I am very much assured that Lockdowns are for preventing the spread of Corona. Though they are not total collapse of civil systems like that of Biafra, the effect is same for most of the world's population. This is an attempt to stress the fact that both the situations have the same origin and Gandhism is the perfect remedy for both.

Though globalization is not altogether a negative phenomenon as imperialism and war, it has its own disadvantages that come to the front emphatically in the current Corona pandemic. Gandhis views on economy and industrialization have bearing upon the troubles of globalization that we are facing today. Gandhi was against industrialization, particularly more rigorously in case of Indian economy. He opposed industrialization as it is based on exploitation, it centralizes wealth, promotes unemployment and creates the division of 'haves' and 'have nots'. Instead of Industrialization he suggested to create self-sufficient villages. He preferred the spiritual principle of 'simple living and high thinking' over 'western materialism' that engenders greed for excessive consumption and cut-throat competition for mass production. 'To Gandhi, all wars in future would be the result of economic exploitation. The only antidote to economic exploitation and violence is to pursue with all efforts the policy of decentralization through the organization of largely self-sufficient village communities.'<sup>10</sup> Industrialization causes imbalance of development, a ditch between urban and rural, owner and labour etc. The high population zones it creates give way to war like situation in disasters like Corona.

Today, the world is at War against the deadly Corona virus Covid 19 which has spread in more than 180 countries of the world. This virus is marching its death toll in the entire first, second and third world countries. It has affected the share markets across the globe and brought even the world power like USA on to knees. Is Covid 19 is the indicator of failure of globalised world order? Or an attempted biological war? Only time will answer these questions and guide the world forward. As it is a current issue some news reports recording its physical, social, economical, political, repercussions are taken into consideration.

**First Covid-19 case happened in November, China government records show – report  
(The Guardian) March 13, 2020**

The first case of someone suffering from Covid-19 can be traced back to 17 November, according to media reports on unpublished Chinese government data.

The report, in the South China Morning Post, said Chinese authorities had identified at least 266 people who contracted the virus last year and who came under medical surveillance, and the earliest case was 17 November – weeks before authorities announced the emergence of the new virus. The Chinese government was widely criticised over attempts to cover up the outbreak in the early weeks, including crackdowns on doctors who tried to warn colleagues about a new Sars-like virus which was emerging in the city of Wuhan in Hubei province. The data obtained by the Post, which the Guardian has not been able to verify, said a 55-year-old from Hubei province could have been the first person to contract Covid-19. For about one month after that date there were one to five new cases reported each day, the report said, and by 20 December there were 60 confirmed cases. The virus, which is now a pandemic, has infected at least 128,343 people across the world and killed 4,702. Of those who have contracted the virus since it began, 68,324 people have recovered.<sup>14</sup>

**Observation:** What this news at the earliest stage when it was not my problem implied?

- I. As in the case of Biafra, we disown the trouble. China is being criticized.
- II. No serious attempt on the part of organizations like W.H.O. to find solutions is initiated. The world was silent.
- III. Beginning of the blame game between America and China the two hotspots of the world.

**Coronavirus lockdowns: 24 hours of confusion around the world**

(CNN) March 17, 2020

Tens of millions of people around the world have suddenly found themselves under various forms of lockdown as governments scrambled to impose new Corona virus related restrictions over the past 24 hours.

But with different governments taking different approaches, many people have been left confused. If schools are shut in one country, is it really safe to send children into class in another? Why are restaurants shut but shops still open? Why are some countries advising against non-essential travel while others are banning it? The extent of the measures partly depends on the severity of the epidemic in each country. The British government, for example, justified its initial reluctance to impose restrictions by saying the country was behind the rest of the Europe in terms of the spread of the virus. The stark differences are most noticeable in Europe, where some countries, including Spain and Italy have imposed shutting down all but essential services, ordering people to stay inside and threatening those who ignore the restrictions with fines.<sup>15</sup>

**Observation:**

- I. Lockdowns worldwide, restrictions imposed except essential services
- II. Ambivalence.

**Desperate to go home, Indian migrant workers face tough choice amid world's largest lockdown**

(CNN) March 28, 2020

New Delhi (CNN) Thousands of migrant workers are attempting to leave India's major cities after a government lockdown designed to prevent a local epidemic of novel corona virus left them without jobs or pay. The potential mass migration may undermine attempts by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government to prevent the localized spread of the corona virus, with some workers even attempting to make the journey on foot, due to widespread closures of public transport. According to government statistics, every year more than nine million migrant workers move from India's rural areas to large population centers to find work at construction sites or factories, sending money back to their home towns and villages. But with those industries closed by the government lockdown, many have been left with little choice but to attempt the return journey home. Migrant worker Bablu Ehrewal, 24, used to work at a mall construction site earning \$7 a day (500 rupees). Construction stopped this week when the lockdown came into effect. Now he is stuck in a slum with 70 other migrant construction workers in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh and hasn't been paid in 20 days.<sup>16</sup>

**Observation:**

- I. Developing country like India faces the trouble of mass migration from population clusters to villages in spite of article 144 that prevents doing so and assurance by government to provide essential services.

**Corona war erupts as Germany, Canada accuse US of hijacking supplies**

(TNN) April 4, 2020

WASHINGTON: Germany and Canada are among countries that are accusing the United States of virtually hijacking much-coveted medical material that are in short supply in the global war on the corona virus, aggravating Washington's already testy ties with some of its major allies. In what appeared to be an unprecedented international heist, the Trump White House reportedly authorized a "diversion" to US from Bangkok airport of a flight carrying 200,000 N95 face masks bound for Germany, causing Berlin to go apoplectic and accuse Washington of "modern piracy." The masks were manufactured in China by the US company 3M which been contracted by Berlin for the consignment meant for its police. 3M has been under fire from Trump, purportedly for its extra-territorial loyalties in time of crisis, although like with many US companies, manufacturing in China for the international market is part of its global supply chain norm. But the Trump administration, which famously proclaimed a "America First" policy, is now pulling out all stops to secure medical supplies after it has been brutally exposed for its lax initial response to the pandemic, the country's lack of manufacturing capability (which Trump blames on his predecessors) and the shallowness of its national strategic reserves of such material. Coming on the heels of earlier reports that the Trump White House had tried to buy a German pharmaceutical company Cure Vac, which is said to be on the verge of a breakthrough in developing a corona virus vaccine, the incident has soured an already tetchy relationship between the two countries "We view this as an act of modern piracy. Even in times of global crisis there should be no wild west methods. I am urging the [German] federal government to demand the USA, respect international rules," Andreas Geisel, the interior minister for Berlin state. Told the local media.

Other countries, including Canada and Brazil have also complained that the US is outbidding them, and in some cases usurping contractually obligated supplies for itself, and warned it does not augur well for ties.<sup>17</sup>

- I. America in desperation breaks conditions of trade. Borrows amenities from China. Earlier it was blamed of biological war.
- II. Germany, Canada, Brazil accuse America of usurpation.

Several other reports worldwide note the irresponsible behavior of civilians not abiding by the law, inflation of essential goods, abuse of social media, non co-operation of some private practitioners, inhuman conditions in relief camps show the loopholes in the societies.. One thing surely comes out through these reports of Corona hit world that nature is the supreme power. Even those boasting to be the gods on earth do not have sufficient amount of life support systems like ventilators, not even ordinary equipments like personal protective aprons, masks etc. It would have been better to produce these basic amenities in abundance than making the world a factory of arms and squandering wealth on arms. What all this turns out is the matter of future. A more sensible response is required from the world.

#### Conclusion:

To conclude, I note the similarities I found between Biafra and Corona i.e. both stem from the unending cycle of desire for power and greed for excessive consumption and production. Biafra killings find their equal in Corona deaths; both are painful. Relief camps in Corona are the microcosm of refugee camps in Biafra. Biafra and Corona alike showcase examples of both selfishness and sacrifice. In those who are ready for sacrifice rests the hope of survival of humanity After considering the case of Biafra and these reports in the light of Gandhism it becomes clear that we have learned nothing from our mistakes. The tendency of disowning the pains of others, selfishness displayed on face of a natural calamity like this viral pandemic, would lead us to doom. Such a behaviour at the peak point of human development raises questions over entire humanity. Leave Biafra behind as a matter of past and a political stratagem, but Corona is current and different don't politicize it. It is not a situation to find opportunity for political supremacy but to join hands to combat the disaster. Gandhism has the potential to lift us to a higher level of international society.

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