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## 1. A health system to meet 21st century needs in India

Sunita belongs to Jharia, a backward district of Jharkhand but works as a migrant labourer in a construction firm in Delhi. She was eight months pregnant when lockdown due to COVID crisis came into effect. Faced with the ~~three~~ dilemma of death, either by the virus or hunger, she had no other choice but to travel back to her hometown. But to her dismay, with no public transport available she had to walk along <sup>with</sup> the thousands of migrant labourers facing similar situations.

She was not lucky enough to survive the tortuous

journey and breathed her last on a footpath.

Such incidents can be seen in everyday newspapers, from every nook and corner of the country. This poses a serious question about the status of health system in our country, which

In this essay, we will examine the current status of health system in India and the problems it faces.

We will then examine the new threats that 21st century poses.

Next we will deliberate upon the initiatives, already taken as well as those need to be taken to improve

India's healthcare system.

India has been historically known for its excellent healthcare. Sushrut Samhita and Charak Samhita are considered to be best works of those periods in the field of medicine and surgery.

Throughout the medieval period also, India was considered to be well versed with science of healthcare. The schools of Ayurveda, Yoga and naturopathy had huge acceptance all over the world. However, the situation changed for worse with the advent of British rule.

With the sole objective of profit for mighty British empire,

India was colonised by the East India Company (EIC). Social services like health, education took a back seat.

The situation was aggravated by frequent famines due to ~~the~~ poorly devised policies of British. Any progress if made was through the philanthropic activities of foreigners who brought with them the modern education to India.

~~With independence, came a humungous task of~~

During independence more than 80% of Indian population was below poverty line. With limited ~~ex~~ resources, a deindustrialised economy had a huge task at hand - the

social upliftment of a huge population, in the fields of health and education.

Although we have come a long way since then, Indian healthcare is known to be the best among the developing nations. Medical tourism has been on the rise.

The population below poverty line has decreased to ~22%. With more disposable income, greater population is able to afford modern healthcare facilities. But many problems still remain.

India's health expenditure as a percentage of GDP was meagre 1.28% in 2017-18. This is even

lower than some of our neighbours like Sri Lanka and Bhutan. The doctor to population ratio is 0.87:1000 as against 1:1000 recommended by World Health Organisation.

The children are said to be the future of <sup>a country.</sup> ~~India~~. In that case our future is suffering from triple burden of disease i.e. - malnutrition, overweight and hidden hunger. ~~Similar~~ The Global Hunger Index (GHI) by Welt Hunger Life estimates 39% of India's children to be malnourished.

National Family Health Survey estimates 50.8% of Indian women to be anaemic. Institutional deliveries

of pregnant women in rural areas is still behind stipulated target of 100%. Much of these problems can be attributed to infrastructure of healthcare.

The urban-rural divide is visible in healthcare too. Most of the healthcare professionals prefer to reside in tier-I and tier-II cities.

Primary Healthcare Centres are found with no medical professionals working there.

Moreover, most of the public expenditure is focussed on secondary and tertiary healthcare. The PHCs, which are the last mile connect with rural India lack in funds and



basic healthcare infrastructure.

Although India is known as the pharmacy of the world, still we import 80% of the active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs) from other countries. This poses a major health security concern.

The medical health education in India also faces several challenges. Medical Council of India (MCI) was believed to a corrupt and inefficient body. The courses in medical colleges are not updated regularly and most of the doctors passing out of these colleges lack practical experience in treatment.

The current challenges are expected to increase manifold in the 21st century. With factors like increasing pollution levels, change in lifestyles, environment change, etc., new health challenges are bound to emerge.

By 2030, 42% of India's population would be living in urban areas, leading to further congestion, unhabitable living conditions, unsafe drinking water and various other problems.

India's demography is also moving towards a significant milestone, with largest working age population by 2030. However, this will then result in increasing old age population and the increasing need of geriatric care.

Southern states like Kerala, Tamil Nadu

are already witnessing this shift.

The increasing population of youth is an important resource for India. But India's position as a conduit between the golden ~~triangle~~ <sup>crescent</sup> countries (Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan) and golden triangle ~~countries~~ (Laos, Thailand and Myanmar) poses a considerable risk of increasing drug abuse among this population.

Constant deforestation, climate change and increasing man-animal interactions pose a risk of more zoonotic diseases in future.

The pandemics of a scale even larger than COVID-19 can be expected in ~~future~~ 21st century.

The recent crisis due to COVID pandemic has reflected upon

the shortcomings of Indian healthcare. Eventhough many initiatives ~~the~~ to deal with modern challenges have been undertaken, still a lot needs to be done.

The health spending needs to be increased to 6% by 2030. The Ayushman ~~Health~~ Bharat initiative needs to be converted to Universal Health coverage so that all ~~it~~ have access to basic healthcare.

The replacing of MCI with National Medical Commission is a good initiative in medical education field. Further, the seats in medical colleges needs to be increased. Moreover the curriculum needs an overhaul with

new fields of medicine like nanopharmaceutics, medical ethics to be introduced.

The Mission Indradhanush needs to be further intensified to achieve universal immunisation. Special attention for maternal healthcare would be required. Schemes like Matritva Suraksha Yojana, Janani Suraksha Yojana need <sup>to be</sup> ~~more~~ promoted more.

Thus, 21st century poses a myriad of challenges. A concerted, balanced and future oriented health policy is need of the hour so that millions like Sunita can be ensured with basic healthcare and prepare them for the challenges of 21st century.

2. An army of principles can penetrate  
where an army of soldiers cannot

Astoka is the most renowned king of ancient India, who belonged to the Mauryan dynasty. With huge empire and well armed army consisting of elephants, horses and artillery, he could have easily conquered the world. He even did try to do so till the Kalinga war.

But his greatness lie not in his might armies, but the policy of 'Dhamma' that he used to conquer his enemies. As it is said - 'To win one hundred victories in one hundred battles

is not the acme of skill, to subdue  
the enemy even without fighting is  
the acme of skill!

Based on these principles of  
'Dhamma', Ashoka was able to rule  
over such a vast empire which ~~was~~  
could never have been possible with  
a great army, thus showing the  
power of principles over army  
strength.

In this essay we would  
analyse what principles are?, How  
principles have helped achieve  
remarkable milestones in the past?,  
their importance and relevance; and  
how to inculcate them?

Principles refer to a certain set of values and ideas that guides us through all walks of life to help us progress in every field. They are such standards of conduct that helps an individual achieve his full potential and utilise it for the welfare and progress of whole society.

Ever since the modern civilisation has taken shape, principles have been the bedrock of every major change ever happened. The fall of Bastille and French revolution were more attributed to the ideas of liberty, equality and fraternity.



These ideas bound the French population together and acted as the foundation stone for a new civil society.

Similarly, when slavery was rampant in America, it was a principled man - Abraham Lincoln who championed the cause of slaves and led to its abolition, which resulted in the 13th Amendment in the American constitution.

The triumph of principles over an army can have no better example than Mahatma Gandhi. He fought the mighty British empire with his weapon of satyagraha which was only based on the principles of truth and courage. An empire ~~is~~ which ~~is~~ never saw the dusk of it.

the day was defeated by an old man  
with his principles.

The importance of principles can also be seen in the field of international relations also. After independence, when whole world was divided into two poles and an arms race was ensuing, Jawahar Lal Nehru followed the principle of non-alignment. This allowed India stay independent as well as improve its international standing.

Contemporary world also has abundant examples. With a principled choice of soft power over hard power, India frequently wins over its neighbours through humanitarian methods. Operation Vanilla and the medical assistance during COVID-19 are such

examples. Alongwith the international arena, principles have their utility in the field of economics also.

The devastated economies after world war -II could be rebuilt only by following the policy of international peace, world trade and rule based interdependence, led by world institutions like United Nations and GATT (now WTO).

Similarly, the economic problems that India faced after 1980s were remedied by the principles of liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation.

Religion is the ~~most~~ institution that has profound effect in all spheres of life, be it spiritual, social or ~~social~~ political. Many religious personalities have emphasised upon principles of

peace, harmony and co-existence. Indian subcontinent has been fortunate enough to be the birthplace of religions like Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism and Hindu philosophy. These religions, along with the Bhakti movement brought the whole subcontinent together, a feat not achieved by most armies.

Such principles have played a great role in shaping our society. Back in 1820s, the practise of Sati was prevalent in many communities. The fight against this social evil was led, not by the armed British, but by Raja Ram Mohan Roy, a man of principles.

Similar evil in our society was the caste system. Personalities like Jyotibha Phule, B.R. Ambedkar,

Mahatma Gandhi led a fight against this social evil.

The importance of principles can be well understood from the example of Malala Yousafzai, who ~~was~~ survived a Taliban attack on the way to school. In her speech at UN she said, "It is not the American bullets, tanks or missiles that the Taliban are afraid of. It is a girl with a book, that they fear the most."

Principles have always shaped the futures of a nation. At the time of independence, India faced many problems like poverty, inequalities in society, backward classes, religious insecurities, etc. Such a diverse country needed something extra-ordinary to

keep itself together, and progress towards sustainable development. This was provided in the form of 'Constitution of India', based on principles of Justice, liberty, equality, fraternity, freedom.

However it is well known that even with the best of the constitutions, a country can't be governed wisely if those implementing it are unwise. Conversely, a wise, ethical and principled person can govern a country best with even a worst constitution.

This brings to us the important question of how such principles can be inculcated among members of a society. The most accepted norm is through education as education is considered to be the best investment one can make.

But educating a person  
in mind and not in morals would mean  
educating menace to the society. Thus  
it is the ethical education that  
should be focussed upon.

Ethical education is imparted  
to an individual right from his childhood.  
In other words it can be said that  
ethical education of a person spans  
from womb to the tomb.

Such an education helps  
an individual to be self-aware  
as well as to be educated about his  
environment and society. Based on the  
morals he inculcates, he approaches  
all walks of life, be it his family,  
work life, environment, etc.

The problems of 21st century like climate change, rising protectionism, civil wars in various parts of the world (Syria, Yemen), terrorism, exodus of Rohingya population and others cannot be resolved by force. The principles of being humane, world peace, brotherhood, equality need to be inculcated into all the citizens of mother earth.

~~Such~~ a The potential of such principles should never be underestimated. We should never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.