



Environmental awareness – Gandhian thoughts of sustainable development

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Abstract: Mahathma's dream was 'Gram Swaraj'. Gandhism is a living thought for not only solving social, economic and political problems but also the ecological and environmental problems facing the present world. The developmental status of the world is unsatisfactory and it has given birth to the degradation of environment and depletion of scarce natural resources. In this paper, I have focused on the western cult of industrialization and urbanization. The growth has created multiple problems and miseries for the modern man. A detailed discussion is being taken place to predict Gandhian thoughts relating to how industrialization, modern civilization and rapid urbanization have created chaos, lop-sided development, rapid depletion of natural resources and endangered natural environment. Gandhi was critical of modern civilization, rapid industrialization and galloping urbanization. The pertinence of Gandhian ideas becomes relevant to the present environmental disaster throughout the entire world.

Key Words: Gandhism, Ecology, Environment, Mechanization, Economy, Industrialization, Urbanization

1.1 Introduction

Environment may be understood as all those forces which have their bearing on the functioning of human resource department. Environment provides resources and opportunities. It also puts limits and constraints on any organization and influences its survival and growth. Analysis of the environment is useful for the human beings in order to become proactive and not remain reactive to the environment. It strongly influences human life, occupation, location and development of industries directly and indirectly. It affects men's health and energy, religious ideas holidays and even festivals. Indeed environment exercises tremendous influence on the activities of human kind on land, seas and in the air.

Long before the modern environmentalists, starting cautioning us, Gandhi correctly realized that

checking rapid industrialization cannot be the panacea to all consequent ills. Increasing industrialization in today's world has not reduced social inequalities, but has rather resulted in further differentiations. Increasing use of technology has led to greater heterogeneity, greater inequalities and greater uneven behavior.

Gandhi regarded industrialization detrimental to growth of a non-violent and eco-friendly society, as in the classical anarchist model, there would be complete decentralization of political and economic system and self sufficient, barter type village economy would be the desired model.

1.2 Attributes of the machinery

According to the judgment of Gandhi, machinery should have three essential attributes. First it can be duplicated or copied; secondly there is no



limit to its growth or evolution; thirdly, it appears to possess a will or genius of its own that operates as the inevitable law of displacement of the labour. Once the machine is created and allowed to operate; it goes more and more out of human control.

- Ideally, Gandhi regards all machinery as thoroughly undesirable. Once he commented "*Today machinery merely helps a few to ride on the backs of millions. The impetus behind it all is into philanthropy to save labour but greed. It is against this constitution of things that I am fighting with all my might*".

His arguments against machinery can broadly be divided into two categories: ethical and economic.

1.3 Arguments of Gandhi about machinery

Labour is a value relative to non-violence and machinery tend to undetermine it. The arguments of Gandhi about machinery on ethical grounds are:

- Machines are repugnant to the good life.
- The invention of machinery has led to the growth of the factory system which has reduced the masses to the condition of slaves.
- Technological advancement has led to the growth of the monetary exchange system which is characterized by inequality and exploitation.
- Machinery has led to the growth of economic completion which undermines the process of cooperation.

He further argued about machinery on economic grounds as:

- The displacement of human labour is an essential characteristic of a machine and introduction of machines results in employment of a few and unemployment of many, it saves labour and provides leisure. Leisure results in wastage of time and is the potential cause of demoralization.
- Machines lead to the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few.
- The mass production through machines leads to a complicated system of distribution, characterized by fraud and speculation.
- Machinery inevitably leads to mass production and mass production necessarily leads to over production.
- The application of machinery in agriculture would destroy the fertility of the soil and eventually lead to loss of production.
- Machines lead to growth of congested, unhygienic cities, speed of travel etc. which results in the loss of health of the individual in a society.

Gandhi felt that the present industrialization and use of large scale machinery was not very healthy and resulted in serious economic dislocation. Dead machinery must not be petted against millions of living machines. Gandhi once commented on mechanization as:

"Mechanization is good when the hands are too few for the work intended to be accomplished. It is an evil when there are more hands than required for the work, as in India".



Large scale industrialization perpetuates war and leads to many other evils and all the naturalness comes to an end.

1.4 The Modern Industrial-military State: A Gandhian Solution

The capitalist, the imperialist, the socialist, the communist and the fascist states of the contemporary world are the main manifestations of the modern state system. Irrespective of their claims of ideological distinctiveness and symmetric specialization, all the typologies of the modern State are the products of industrialization and claim similar achievements which are the following:

- All of them claim of enormous rise in economic productivity, exchange and consumption.
- They boast of tremendous increase in their internal trade and commerce.
- They claim of high economic growth in terms of incomes and higher standards of living.
- They assert that they have achieved tremendous scientific and technological progress.
- They say that they have advanced culturally through increased education, publications, mass media and rapid communications.

The above achievements have been the products of following characteristics of modern state.

- Massive Industrialization.
- High Technologicalization.
- Vast colonization: both explicit and implicit, domestic and foreign.
- Expensive Governmentalization.

- Large bureaucratization.
- Widespread ecological miss management.
- Heavy militarization which leads to violence for intra and inter-state conflicts.

The ultimate goal of Gandhism is the Panchayat Raj, the economically self-sufficient, politically self-governing and culturally non-violent village republic. Gandhism is, therefore, antithetical to the modern industrial Military State.

1.5 Environmental unequilibrium – Gandhian philosophy and proxies

Besides all, the above elements have generated four fundamental consequences that are totally unacceptable to Gandhian philosophy and proxies:

- They have anti-democratic forces that have undermined meaningful and full-fledged democracy and have facilitated the rise of autocratic, authorization and totalitarian systems.
- They have culminated in anti-humanism that have down played humanitarian impulses and values and have led to dehumanization of science-technology of the economy and of the polity.
- They have given rise to anti-peace forces that are antithetical to world peace as they inspire military conflicts and wars.
- They have generated restlessness and violence in thoughts, words and deeds. This violence permeates human relations at all levels---inter-personal, inter-groups, inter-regional and inter-state. For example, to my



belief, the combined Andhra Pradesh State had divided into two separate states; viz., Andhra Pradesh and Telangana due to the above reasons.

As the proponent of democratic non-violent humanism, Gandhism cannot support or concede these factors that are anti-democratic, anti-humanistic, anti-peace and generative of environmental unequilibrium and violence.

1.6 Modern State – A Gandhian Solution

The critical and contentious question is: Can we reach and sustain the so-called '*achievements*' of modern State without its negative aspects? Theories of modernization and development, whether capitalist or socialist or Marxist, seem to contend that the destructive and the undesirable aspects of the industrial-military State can be avoided, reduced or overcome by proper planning and thoughtful direction by adopting democratic methodologies, peaceful process and 'appropriate technologies', and by aiming at 'limits of growth'.

To eliminate or avoid all the evils of mass industrialization, Gandhi proposes small-sized, self-sufficient industries, cottage or village industries (Gram Udyog) that produce just enough products for consumption in the village or in a few nearby villages as well. He stood for small scale cottage industries which preserved harmony and naturalness. It was only through a small-scale industrialization that a person developed affinity for the work he was doing. Large-scale industries should be taken over by the State with the idea of promoting collective welfare. In 'Hind Swaraj', he said, "*Machinery is like a snake hole which may contain from one to hundred snakes*".

The Gandhian system of economic activity is to provide work for body to satisfy the economic needs of the society. In his opinion, Large-scale industrialization inevitably leads to centralization of production and distribution. Gandhi visualized a radically different form of development in which the destruction of village crafts and industries by machine-made goods from the cities will not be permitted. In this type of economic development, villages or groups of them will attempt to meet all their own needs and export only surplus to the cities. In his words "*I do visualize electricity, ship-building, iron works, machine-making and the like existing side by side with village handicrafts. Hitherto industrialization has been so planned as to destroy the village and village crafts*". In his letter to Nehru written in 1945, Gandhi said, "*My ideal village will contain intelligent people. They will not live in dirt and darkness as animals. Men and women will be free and able to hold their own against anyone in the world. There will be neither plague, nor cholera, nor small-pox; no one will be idle one will not wallow in luxury*".

1.7 Ecological Balance – The Gandhian thought

Technology or industrialization in Gandhian terminology used for the purpose of unlimited economic growth leads to the vast depletion of the non-renewable world resources, pollution and problems of ecology. There are limits to which the natural process can replenish them. Nature cannot cope with unlimited industrialization and technological advancement. In Gandhian holistic approach, industrialization and technical progress must be carried out within limits so that the natural process



are not disturbed. Small-scale operations are always less likely to be harmful to the natural environment than large-scale ones, simply because their individual force is small in relation to the recuperative forces of nature village industry will need a technology that is appropriate to small-scale production and the local economic conditions. Gandhi advocated decentralized communities.

The village industry would be based on local and indigenous resources. Gandhi always believes in *“Simple living and High thinking”*. Gandhi was quite aware of the dreadful consequences of urbanization. He remarked on this is as *“There is really nothing to admire the big cities with their oppressive hunger and congestion, and the same noises and the same faces day in and day out. If we were not victims of the mighty forces of inertia, one would sicken over the repetition of the same ugly phenomenon”*.

Thus, Gandhi was in favour of village life. This Gandhian thought, not only suited best to India's needs but was also more eco-friendly. Small enterprises and devices are less energy-intensive, less wasteful and less damaging to the environment.

1.8 Conclusion

Although Gandhi's contesting discourse has been ignored by India after independence, the country moved to a new direction of economic development, many questions and suggestions raised remain relevant to the problems we face today. Now it is increasingly apparent that industrial civilization, urbanization and excessive consumption driven by modern civilization have created enormous often intractable problems, which force many postindustrial

intellectuals to search for a new solution again.

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