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GANDHI AND THE ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

Mahatma Gandhi is known not only for peace and nation-building but he raised lively debate on environment. However, this paper highlights those notion of Gandhian philosophy which is similar to present debate on environment. His philosophy was based on human ethics for development on environment. The importance of Gandhian philosophy observed that human beings has been developed in a direction of high consumerism and generation of waste. This has been impacted in various ways. Firstly, the problem of depletion of resources have been increased tremendously. Second, the environment pollution threatening human life with extinction. Gandhi fully understood the man-nature relationship. Gandhi's ideas as an environmentalist lies in the critique of modern civilization in which he shows the limits of west and criticized the use of technology and problem of high standard of living.

KEYWORDS: *Environment, Growth, Degradation, Civilization.*

INTRODUCTION

Today, environmental hazards pose a greater danger to our survival than even the nuclear stock-pile. The Stockholm Conference in 1972 had proclaimed that "the protection of the environment is a major issue which affects the well-being of peoples and economic development throughout the wold". The growth of population and its growing urban ratio taking away good agricultural land, severe degradation of the Earth's soil, the destruction of tropical forests, dramatic rise in transport having extensive environmental impact, pressure of human numbers on agricultural land, non-availability of clean water and waste disposal system, growing under-nourishment and malnutrition in developing countries, loss of productive capacity of soil, worsening drought, increasing magnitude of floods, accumulation (about 5 tons of explosive per person) and testing of nuclear explosions damaging ozone layer etc.[1] have indeed posed the worst threat to the existence of all the living beings, technological fix, however, brilliant, no socio-economic reform however profound will be able to save us from this catastrophe if living natural resources are reduced below sustainable levels and the environmental elements are degraded to the point of dysfunction.[2]

Gandhi's Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule had raised a lively debate not only among the Westerners but also among the Indians. To some it was anti-science, anti-civilization and anti-machinery. While others dubbed it as sociological dystopian vision created as a reaction against dehumanization and alienation of man in modern technological culture. Professor Frederick Soddy suggested that the whole approach was some kind of a utopian vision, yet at the end of his survey. He felt that "anyone who wishes to change the world would do well to study it".[3] John Middleton Murrey came to the conclusion that "the Ultimate social goal of the spiritual leader in the modern world should be not to withdraw backwards to the pre-machine community, but to advance forward to the recreation of a society capable of using machine without incurring materiel and spiritual self-devastation….".[4] He acclaimed the book as one of the "spiritual classics of the

world", and the "the greatest that has been written in modern times". Claude Houghton welcomed its underlying message of love and doctrine of passive resistance. Gerald Heard discovered in Gandhi's ideas the beginning of a new order and described his Hind Swaraj as superior to Rosseau's Social Contract, Karl Marx's Das Capital. Hugh Hausset described Hind Swaraj "as one of the best modern handbooks of real revolution which must happen in us all, if we are to fulfil the creative purpose of life."[5] Irene Rathbone acclaimed the book as "enormously powerful" and by its "tremendous honesty" forced her to "search her own honesty". "It was not dated, not in any essential way".[6] J.D Brestford was impressed by personal practice as envisaged in the Hind Swaraj. G.D.H. Cole agreed with Gandhi that the "western Civilization is at enmity with human soul".[7] According to him, "Gandhi's case against the West looks infinitely stronger than it looked to us, westerners thirty years ago". It had a "deep power to disturb much deeper than it could have had when it was written".[8] C.D.Burns acclaimed "Its emphasis upon moral issues and opposition to the pursuit of private wealth and power."[9]

Gandhi's Hind Swaraj is a warning against mad race after so-called civilization equated with modernization, materialism and a wrong model of development. Both, Capitalism and Marxism adopt the western pattern of industrialisation to meet the ever-growing material standard of life leading to ruthless exploitation of natural resources. This leads to unrestrained urbanisation with all its attendant evils of crime, prostitution and street corner societies. The U.S.A consumes 30 to 50 percent of world annual production.[10] Although it has only 6 percent of world's total population. The U.S.S.R had to move into Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia and into many developing countries. It was in this context that Gandhi had exclaimed: "God forbid that India should ever take to industrialism after the manner of the west. The economic imperialism of a tiny island (U.K.) it today keeping the world in chains. If an entire nation of 300 (now 885) millions took to similar economic exploitation, it would strip the world bare like locusts".[11] This exploitation was due to the nature of present-day machine technology and model of development. Hence socialisation or nationalisation was no remedy. The publication of the club of Rome thesis on the Limits to Growth points out two major criticisms of this wrong model of development: a) depletion of non-renewable resources[12] and b) the environmental pollution threatening human life with extinction.

According to Fritz of Capra, the "nuclear power is neither safe, nor clean, nor, cheap. The 360 nuclear reactors now operating world-wide, and the hundreds more planned, have become a major threat to our well-being…. with their continuing proliferation, the likelihood of global extinction becomes greater everyday".[13] He fears a large-scale ecological disaster. Like Gandhi, Capra thinks that industrial technology is root cause. All this means that "whatever befalls the earth. Man did not weave the web of life; he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to himself".[14] Industrialisation everywhere has brought dirtier air. The story of airborne lead illustrates the connection between industrialisation and air pollution.[15] When fossil fuels are burnt, sulphur dioxide and oxides of nitrogen are released into the air. This acid rain is most dangerous for human life.[16] So ozone depletion would cause serious harm to human-beings, other mammals, plants, birds, insects and some sea-life.[17] Similarly the "greenhouse effect" meaning warming of earth's climate due to release of carbon dioxide is also dangerous ecological phenomenon. Water pollution problem is getting more serious. A study by the U.S Environmental Protection Agency in the mid-1970s found that water supplies of 80 American cities contained chemicals that may cause cancer.[18] The US global 2000 Report says that the demands for fresh water in the world will increase by 200-300 per cent from 1975 to the year 2000.[19] As consumption rises, so will the amount of wastes. Toxic waste is an environmental problem. Lone canal disaster is only the tip of the iceberg.[20] The U.S Government had created 1.6-billion-dollar fund to finance the cleaning up of the worst toxic waste sites. The Congressional Office of Technological Assessment has estimated that it will require about 50 years and 100 billon dollars to clean.[21] Deforestation is also a serious problem, because it can lead to significant changes in the climate which usually mean less rainfall.[22] The world health Organisation estimates that half a million people are poisoned yearly by exported pesticides and that most of those people live in the third world countries.[23] There are approximately 5-10 million species of living things but by the year one million species could be extinct.[24] Apart from these, we face the challenges of short-term and long-term hazards of nuclear stock-pile and possible threat of nuclear war. It has taken 42 billion years of life to reach its present its present state of development on this planet but "a full-scale nuclear holocaust could lead to the extinction of mankind".[25] Hence we must change both our technology and ideology. Albert Elinstein has said: "the unleashed power of the atom has changed everything save our modes of thinking and we thus drift toward unparalleled catastrophies.[26] Accidents like the one at Chernobyl raises the basic questions- whether governments that claim to function in the name of the people have the right to tamper with the right of man to survive or to preserve the environment on which life depends.[27]

Apart from these scientific imperatives for human survival a philosophical analysis of environmental challenges shows that there is a fragmentary paradigm underlying modern economic development and technology. Man is taken as a limited, material, mechanistic being functioning under the force of wants. The satisfaction of wants through the consumption of goods gives 'pleasure' which a rational man always seeks to maximise. Hence man is basically reduced to be a consumer having unlimited wants. Technical progress is thus favoured in order to maximise output because more is always better.[28] This craving for unlimited pleasures has accelerated blind industrialisation leading to rapid depletion of the non-renewable world resources and to the problems of pollution and ideology. And yet the hunger and thirst of man for more and more material and consumer goods are not quenched. Gandhi, therefore warned: "Earth provides enough to satisfy everyman's need but not every man's greed".[29]

Environmental hazards of the modern times have not only threatened our physical and biological existence but also it has caused intellectual and moral degradation. In a suffocating and highly contaminated atmosphere, much of our creativity, freedom and initiative is lost. There is always a living fear, insecurity, depression and frustration in view of the impeding and inevitable "Future Shock".[30] The indiscriminate technology within the framework of ecological balance of a holistic paradigm. The ecological imbalance has disturbed both the man-nature relation and man-man relation. It is through his productive activity that man enters into the relation with nature.[31] When Gandhi calls the modern

civilization as "Satanic", it means that it has no regenerative or creative trends. The atomistic, mechanical, deductive frame of thinking has to be given up. The modern western civilization has acted like a parasitic-on-nature. The environmental problem has proved that the dynamics of modern civilization has come to a dead end and hence Gandhi was in search of the possibility and necessity of a new civilization and a new science and therefore his life work was to develop a new dynamic of man-man and man-nature relation. This counter-culture will try to foster a new life-style. Efforts are already on. In the land of unheard-of-affluence, a veritable heaven for plenty, consumers are on the way to simplifying their lives spending less on material goods and services and opting for more frugal living. Growing from small beginnings in the fifties. America's frugality movement now embraces at least five million Americans. They pursue lives of voluntary simplicity, rejecting high-consumption life-styles for a more home-spun but richer quality of life.[32] What Gandhi had dreamt in the beginning of this century, it seems, is the only alternative for the survival of humankind. [33]

PHILOSOPHICAL IMPLICATIONS ON ENVIRONMENT CHALLENGES

1. *Culture of Violence:* The development in U.S.A has been possible to this extent by using 70 percent of global resources for its 6 percent of population. Hence it is impossible for 70 percent of the third world to develop with 10 percent resources at their disposal.[34] Even in the third world countries, this model of development has created terrific regional imbalances. The gulf between the rich and the poor countries and in one country between the rich and the poor people has widened. There is inequality and exploitation both. The Darwinian principle of the survival of the Fittest among animal species has come to be true here. Only those who are strong can survive and most of the resources of the world are concentrated into the hands of a few super-powers. Hence deprivation of resources has become acute among the poorer nations and they face hunger and poverty. This is why there is spurt in violence.[35] If we analysis the causes of modern wars and the so-called "theory of modernity". According to the standards of modern civilization, economic progress is synonymous with development. Hence to achieve such measure of progress and development, cruel exploitation of natural resources is regarded as the only way out. There is no secret about it. Unlimited consumption is possible through such unimpeded and unbridled exploitation of non-renewable resources of nature, through blind multiplication of machinery. Therefore, Gandhi attacks this notion of materialistic civilization which puts its faith in ever-growing material standard of life and a "craze for machinery". He was very clear that the western pattern of industrialization involved per capita investment of a magnitude which the Third World countries could hardly afford to generate unless it took to totalitarian methods. Even then the unemployment problem cannot be solved because of its magnitude and volume. Hence he pleaded for capital saving and labour-intensive decentralised technology like cottage and village industries. Gandhi objected to large-scale production because it creates "pockets of prosperity" within society while majority of people lived from hand to mouth. Community life breaks down and a sort of 'rugged individualism' comes up. This gives rise to perpetual tension and strife in society. Notwithstanding the creation of two distinct societies of rich and poor within nations. Modern machine technology leads to conflict among nations for cut-throat competition and market. Modern imperialism has become largely a market-oriented imperialism.
2. *Rape of Earth:* Modern technology has not only ruthlessly exploited non-renewable resources, it has affected the future of coming generations, who are bound to inherit exploitation, inequality and oppression. Man has not limited its atrocities on the 'material universe' but also on organic creatures, bird and beasts, trees and plants, air and natural chemicals resources. Even water and life of deep sea and high mountains have not escaped its onslaught. Needless to say, these natural phenomena had provided mankind with ample imagination, sensitivity, curiosity, creativity and joy since time immemorial. Now the "man of nature" has been converted "man of machine" and now there is no limit to his greed and sense of acquisition. He has been losing his love for his neighbours and friends and perhaps he has no sensitivity and respect left for this species of the coming generation. He ceases to be a forward-looking man. Therefore, this invasion of man upon mother-earth and it environmental will ultimately mean extinction of all life on earth. Hence, unless we learn to live as one community of entire mankind and in full sympathy with nature, we cannot survive.
   In order to survive, we have to learn to think as well as act globally. No community or nation can exist as an island independent of others. We have to identify our smaller group interests with the interest of the whole humanity. Not only this, we have to extend our fraternity to the lower species and the vegetable kingdom. This is the cult of non-violence discovered long ago by religious and spiritual seers and sages. In India, Jainism, Buddhism and Vaishnavism have rigorously woven a theory of non-violence and vegetarianism, which is more in conformity with eco-development. We must create an ecological balance for a fuller and healthier life.
3. *Demand for life Natural:* Industrialisation and the modern civilization have made our life artificial. The law of cause and effect is inexorable. People who live wrongly and break the laws of Nature have to suffer the consequences. Our entire culture from agriculture to human relationship has drifted away from nature. Artificial manures have eaten away the vitality of the earth and the frequent and excessive use of pesticide and insecticide has made many species extinct besides injecting pollutant poisons in the atmosphere and in our body. Our food and milk, multi-vitamins, the various drinks and drugs and the antibiotic medicines have effects on our body, mutations and brain. Even our recreation has become artificial. We have been accustomed to live in pigeon hole flats. Hence there

is great yearning for a life natural-a sun-shine, a rain or river bath, a walk in the forest. Thus there is growing awareness to save forest, protect beasts and so on. A life natural is an ecological balance between man, animals and vegetables.

4. *Role of Knowledge*: Modern technology has grown and developed in such an aggressive way that it has own enemy. It has increased inequality. The rich have become richer and the poor have become poorer. Environmental problems have posed the greatest dangers. But the worst tragedy has been with regard to human knowledge. Instead of becoming an instrument of domination, exploitation, modern state has become the prime anti-ideological force in the world. What development project like dams or nuclear reactors reveal is the necessity of new notions of civil rights. We need new concepts which grant rights to the future generation and also of natural objects, like trees, forests, rivers and seas. But contractual or legal systems cannot serve as the basis for ecology. Hence one needs a return to the sacred, where community recognises its moral responsibility for its environment. For example, in India river Ganges is worshipped, many types of trees are never cut, animals and birds are not killed etc.., as religious injunctions. Science and religion, therefore, were not antithetical. Einstein said: "Religious without science is blind, science without religion is lame".

   The new emerging concepts in science are giving the intellectual community of the world a unified vision of the universe.

CONCLUSION

Environmental challenges provide a turning point in the world –view and vision of reality. "There is a shift from the mechanistic to the holistic conception of reality"-says Fritz of Capra. Alvin Toffler thinks that "there will be a shift back from mass production to home-production". The mega-technology of today has led the world to be increasingly unified. Toynbee speaking in 1952 to philosophy club at Cambridge University on the topic 2002 A.D. said that the human spirit would rebel against this global unification or regimentation.

Much water has flown down the Ganges and Thames since Gandhi has initiated the debate on a counter-civilization in 1909. At that time, he was branded as anti-science and anti-progress. But Toynbee Says: "It is already becoming clear that a chapter which had a western beginning will have an Indian ending if it is not to end in the self-destruction of the human race". What Gandhi wanted to emphasise in his Hind Swaraj was that real culture is a culture of restraint and simplicity, of friendship with nature and of love and non-violence. Gandhi revalidated the essence of Indian civilisation. He had challenged the technological basis of modern civilisation and posited an alternative technology and development is based more on renewable resources like animal, water, oil and solar energies, etc. and less on non-renewable resources ones. It does not lead to environmental pollution. Man's capacity to destroy both nature and man and high thinking". But today, Pitrim Sorokin also called the modern had side-tracked Gandhian ideology of Simple Living Western civilisation as "Sensate". They come to the conclusion that mass would have no future and would be completely lost if he does not abandon his utterly ego-centric stance. To save himself man must become more altruistic, other-regarding, ecologically conscious and adopt early enough a new stance based on them. Schumancher has pleaded for "appropriate technology and small as Beautiful. Rifken, the author of *Entropy*, pleads for simpler life style in the name of Second Law of Thermodynamics.

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