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GANDHI'S PREDICAMENT ON NATURE AND ENVIRONMENT

KEY WORDS:

V. Sivakesavardhan

Research Scholar, Department of Philosophy, S.V. University Tirupati -517 502, Andhra Pradesh.

Dr. B Sreenivasulu Naik

Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy, S.V. University Tirupati -517 502, Andhra Pradesh.

ABSTRACT

The Earth has enough resources for our need but not for our greed. Population explosion, mass poverty, over-utilisation of renewable resources, overuse of fertilizers leading to water pollution, rapid industrialisation, global warming, desert formation, deforestation, emission of harmful substances into air causing air pollution, industrial and synthetic wastes, nuclear hazards that are more man-made in nature are all causing irreparable damages to our planet. Gandhi's views on environment comprise moral, spiritual and non-violent dimensions. Man has adopted violent measures to take abundantly from nature. Gandhi fervently appealed to men to desist from exploiting others and inflicting violence on them. It pervades all the living beings including nature and natural resources. Gandhi was against disturbing the nature and ecological system that provides health and fertility to all. Gandhi is an ardent champion of a life pattern based on simplicity, slowness and smallness and successfully implemented it. Gandhi's reverence for nature and his advocacy for using the natural resources frugally stems from his concept of unity of man with all, including other living creatures. This is what made him an environmentalist with a difference.

INTRODUCTION

The Industrial Revolution has greatly changed the face of European civilisation including heavy industrialisation, pursuit of capitalist pattern of economy, exploitation of labour and injudicious use of natural resources. It has given tremendous material pleasure and prosperity to human society that was eventually pursued by other nations. At the same time, it has also imperceptibly done irreparable loss to mankind. Reckless as well as limitless pursuit of industrialisation by all nations is now posing serious problems for very existence of not only man but also for all living creatures and all kinds of species on our planet.

Population explosion, mass poverty, over-utilisation of renewable resources, overuse of fertilizers and pesticides leading to water pollution, rapid industrialisation, global warming, desert formation, deforestation, emission of harmful substances into air causing air pollution, industrial and synthetic wastes, nuclear hazards that are more man-made in nature are all causing irreparable damages to our planet. As the environmental consciousness spread worldwide, there were meetings including the Stockholm Conference, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and so on that recognised the need to use the natural resources judiciously so as to ensure a safe future for the coming generations. The 'Union of Concerned Scientists' stated that the human beings and the natural world are on a collision course. Human activities inflict harsh and often irreversible damage on the environment and on the critical resources. It calls for a great stewardship to halt further damage and mutilation of the planet and also called for reducing the over-consumption to abate the pressure on global environmental resources (Ramjee Singh, 1998). Gandhi precisely called for the same measures in a prophetic tone.

Gandhi's Views On Nature

The nature and power of the government, for it is in this sphere that Gandhians like Narayan feel most bitterly that India has deviated from the paths Gandhi indicated. Gandhi was not a systematic political philosopher, and his ideas changed considerably in the course of his life. But at the root of all his later thought were the beliefs set out in his booklet, *Hind Swaraj*. The precise nature of the indigenous government Gandhi favoured for India changed with the years. At first, he envisaged a benevolent autocracy; but by 1918 he believed that some form of elected government on parliamentary lines

was necessary as an interim stage of political development.

Gandhi's Views On Environment

Gandhi's views on environment comprise moral, spiritual and non-violent dimensions. To him, the hallmark of development of man consisted not in materialism or consumerism but in spiritual self-realisation, a character heavily loaded with morality and non-violence. The craving for materialistic wants was an alien to him for it hindered the path to one's realisation. His simple living and high thinking reiterated his love for all living beings, which is the very manifestation of God's creation. His concept of non-violence thus encompassed all the living beings and embodied the eternal values of life in his thought as well as actions.

Gandhi said, 'My ethics not only permits me to claim but requires me to own kinship with not merely the ape but the horse and the sheep, the lion and the leopard, the snake and the scorpion...' (Gandhi, 1954). He insisted immensely on the eternal sacredness of life that included a tree, plant or a cow. 'Indeed, all his love towards life constitutes his attempt for realizing the Vaishnava ideal 'Vasudevam Sarvamidam' (Benoy Gopal Ray, 1950).

Man-Nature Relationship

According to Gandhi, nature is a source and force of inspiration and not exploitation. To express it in Gandhian ideology and philosophy, man has adopted violent measures for taking abundantly from nature. Gandhi fervently appealed to men to desist from exploiting others and inflicting violence on them. It pervades all the living beings including nature and natural resources. Gandhi was against disturbing the nature and ecological system that provides health and fertility to all.

Gandhi firmly opposed the western view of man's conquest of nature. He sternly warned against man's overpowering over nature that might result in his alienation to nature's system. He also cautioned against using nature for unlimited mass production and consumption purposes. Gandhi's vision of upliftment of all Sarvodaya, implies a healthy development and environment than can be evolved by man to ensure his harmonious existence with nature and other living beings. What he preached and practiced corresponds to what we today call as eco-friendly measures and living in harmony with nature.

Village Vs Urban Life

Gandhi disapproved the concept of industrialised urban cities wherein material comforts and extensive use of machinery occupy a prominent place. He insisted on developing the village, teaching the villagers the importance of health, hygiene, sanitation and education to bring about positive change in their lives. His scheme of development included elimination of poverty through self-sufficiency in villages, promotion of village, small-scale industries, handicrafts and the use of local resources.

Gandhi favoured developing thousands of cottage and village industries as they would provide an outlet for the creative faculties and resourcefulness of the people. This would help in solving the unemployment problems while assuring jobs to the needy and addition to the nation's wealth. The village development would also arrest the mass migration of the villagers to cities in search of employment, thus avoiding any stress on urban resources. Much can be interpreted in today's context where the migration from village to the cities has placed enormous stress on the supply of water and electricity resources apart from the congestions due to lack of space and cropping up of urban slums, where the inhabitants live in inhuman conditions with no provisions for health and hygiene. The Gandhian model of development is based largely on the use of renewable resources that are abundant in villages, which has village as its centre, decentralised and agriculture centered.

Gandhi explained the reasons for his insistence on village-oriented development. 'If I preach against the enjoyment and ask men and women to go back to the simple life epitomised in the Charkha, I do so because I know, that without an intelligent return to simplicity, there is no escape from our descent to a state lower than brutes'.

Gandhi aimed at the regeneration of villages and society and ultimately of individual. He envisioned a strong India through self-support, self-reliance as against temptations and exploitation. It is possible only through integrating Charkha, Khadi and village industries that symbolise Gram Swaraj. This interrelated and mutually interdependent society as visualised by Gandhi may be termed as what one of his close associates Diwakar called as 'ecological humanism' combining the spiritual and ethical perspectives.

Importance of Nature Cure

Gandhi's reverence for nature and his advocacy for using the natural resources frugally stems from his concept of unity of man with all, including other living creatures. He implemented these ideals in real life with sincerity to evolve a sustainable society. He brought forth a close link between nature and the existence of man; he appealed for respecting the five elements of nature – Earth, Water, Ether, Sunlight and Air, without which the human existence would be jeopardised (Khoshoo, 1996)

The Rio Earth Summit (1992) had strongly stressed on the concepts of social justice and communitarian values to evolve the culture of respect for life in all forms. The eco-movements like Green Peace, Chipko Andolan and Narmada Bachao Andolan have all adopted the non-violent means for highlighting the gravity of the problem in their movements. Gandhi, once considered as orthodox or backward and idealistic with little practical approach and whose writings were termed seditious is now being hailed as one of the most vocal proponents and environmentalists of this century. His concept of 'respect for nature', simple living and voluntary reduction of wants has become all the more relevant for India and the world in the present times. The development patterns and the liberalised economy have had some negative imprints on its ecological system.

Nature is very important for health purpose. The science of natural therapeutics is based on a use of the same five

elements, in the treatment of disease, which constitute the human body. These are earth, water, ether, sunlight and air... they can be utilized for health purposes' (Key to Health, 1978). Nature cure treatment, he believed, 'brings us nearer to God. I will have no objection whatever if we could do even without it. The meaning of nature cure is to go nearer Nature's God (Sevagram, 1945). This again is closely related to the village life which Gandhi advocated persistently. My nature cure is designed solely for villagers and villages. Personal hygiene and healthy living are of primary importance (Harijan, 1946). 'It brings about a positive outlook in one's life and is bound to benefit all the villages and ultimately the whole of India' (Harijan, 1946). Living close to nature, he reiterated, is an ideal mode of life and assures absolute purity, both inner and outer, with no scope for illness. According to Gandhi, men comprise five natural elements, the most important among them being air. He disliked violating these elements that result in an unhealthy living. He noted in Harijan, 'anyone who fouls the air by spitting about carelessly, throwing refuse and rubbish or otherwise dirtying the ground sins against man and nature. Anyone who fouls the air that is to enter that temple desecrates it (Harijan, 1946).

CONCLUSION

The present environmental crisis that has gripped the world needs an immediate and effective damage control strategy if we are to ensure our peaceful healthy existence. The Gandhian approach gives us plenty of opportunities to overcome the crisis. A frugal living may not be feasible for the present generation but a consideration with rationality and sensibility towards translating these ideas into practice would help in saving the planet earth from the impending disasters. The eco-friendly technologies and measures adopted by public, the institutional support, for example judiciary, the efforts of nongovernmental organisations and civil society help in preserving the environment. Gandhi belonged to that school of thought where remedy was preferred to cure. He worked out a worthwhile alternative for man's peaceful, purposeful and happy existence. Gandhi is an ardent champion of a life pattern based on simplicity, slowness and smallness and successfully implemented it.

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