

M.K. GANDHI'S CONCERN WITH ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract: The article is based mainly upon the lectures delivered by Gandhi at various occasions and later published in journals like Harijan, Young India, Harijan Sevak, etc. 'The story of my Experiments with Truth,' that is, the autobiography of Gandhi and others works of Gandhi are available in print and the whole of his works have been published under the title 'Complete Works of M.K. Gandhi'. His works are widely distributed and available even in local libraries. The method of data analysis is descriptive and evaluative, in which the textual analysis would be focused on the social and environmental utility. Gandhi was always against a violent consumption of the natural resources and loving to the sustainable use of the things the nature gives us as a gift. For example: Gandhi will say eat the fruit and not the tree, and even in eating the fruit his sense is to avoid its misuse that may lead to the waste of it. The gist of the research highlights the logic of non-violence and Gandhi's perspective to meet out Ethical problems of environment. It as such, includes his way of solving the environmental crisis.

Gandhi was an unparalleled man of the last millennium who was having a human and global perspective useful for the welfare of the world community, who thought of both, the human existence, human continuity and survival of humanity in sense and essence. He, who, without ever using any of the modern jargons, was perhaps the greatest 'environmentalists' of our times. Gandhi knew that unless man lived in harmony with nature and unless he stopped exploiting nature he would certainly tread the path of destruction. His views concerning the environment offer a practical way to improve the quality of life. What he preached was not only for the Indian masses but for the entire human kind. His message is relevant not for a particular time but for the future of mankind for all time. Especially his theories of non-violence, peaceful co-existence and universal welfare of the mankind (Sarvodaya) (Gandhi, 1983: 425)¹ have influenced and attracted the globe. Gandhi was of the view that consumeristic life-style and globalization verily impacted hugely on the environment with major consequences like global warming, famine, soil erosion and as a whole exploitation of nature. Gandhi believed that in the global age there is still a hope to transform the consumeristic life-style into good living with full cooperation, coordination and harmony with the nature. It could be altered for the betterment of the whole planet. Gandhi believes that there is a good soul even in devils and we should work for getting the goodness that comes out from even the devil. At some point of time, the perspective of goodness in consumeristic attitude needs to be cultivated. As stated by Gandhi- hate the sin not the sinner. (Fisher. 2010: 83) In the same way we need to find out how consumerism creates a platform where all individual have the basic need of life to sustain himself.

Consumerism as a social and economic order and ideology encourages the acquisition of goods and services in ever-increasing amounts.¹ Nowadays, the perspective of man towards

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nature is more exploiting in nature. If somebody looking at Himalaya or any mountain cladded with snow would think that the snow is to be exploited for business purpose. In the same way, someone looking at any waterfall could think that it is a waste of hydro-electric power and by implanting a plant it would yield billions. In this way, people, are trying to exploit the nature to the optimum so as they can derive maximum wealth from it, and in this way enabling them to have wealth to enjoy. People are rarely of the view to enjoy nature as it is, that is, the natural habitat of the flora and fauna of a particular country. Gandhi believes that exploitation of the natural habitat is *himsa*. For him not to hurt any living thing is no doubt a part of Ahimsa. (Gandhi, M.K. 1962: 26) Furthermore, Gandhi was of the view to protect animals found in the nature. In fact, he laid more emphasis on cow protection. Cow protection is one of the most wonderful phenomena in human evolution. It takes the human being beyond his species. For Gandhi the cow means the entire subhuman world. Man, through the cow, is enjoined to realize his identity with all that lives, why the cow was selected for apotheosis is obvious. The cow was the best companion of man in India. She is the giver of plenty. She does not give milk only but also makes agricultural activities workable. She is taken to be the mother of billions of people throughout the globe. Protection of the cow means protection of the whole creation of God. The appeal of the lower orders of creation is all the more forcible because it is speechless. A Hindu who protects the cow should protect every animal. Non- killing of animals generally may be regarded as a duty for one who believes in ahimsa. And every Hindu and for that matter, every man of religion, does so. The duty of non-killing animals generally and therefore of protecting them must be accepted as an indisputable fact. It is possible by only exciting the fellow-feeling of those who does not protect animals. (Gandhi M.K. 1920: 5) Then, it is so much to the credit of Hinduism that it has taken up cow protection as an obligation. And he is a poor specimen of Hinduism who stops merely at cow protection, when he can extend his arms to other animals. The cow protection merely stands as a symbol and the protection of the cow is the least he is expected to undertake. Cow protection is not an act only but an idea that cultivates one to respect others and non-violence.

Unlike almost all the major traditions of Western thought, which neatly separate human beings and animals and assign the former a supremely privileged position on earth, Gandhi followed Indian traditions in taking a Cosmo centric view of man. (Ibid) The cosmos was a well-coordinated whole whose various parts were all linked in a system of *yajna* (a sacrifice at the universal alter, and find joy in contributing to the maintenance and enrichment of both the human world and the cosmos)it is sacrifice with and without ritual, or interdependence and mutual service. It consisted of different orders of being ranging from the material to the human, each governed by its own laws and standing in a complex relationship with the rest. Human beings are an integral part of the cosmos, and are tied to it by the deepest bonds. In Gandhi's favorite metaphor, the cosmos was not a pyramid of which the material world was the base and human beings the apex, but a series of ever-widening circles encompassing human kind, the sentient world, the material world, and the all-including cosmos. (Gandhi, 1920: 5)

¹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Consumerism>.

Since everything in the universe, bear the mark of divinity, it needs to be approached in a spirit of cosmic piety and *maîtri* (friendliness). Gandhi thought that the idea that God has given the universe to human beings as a property to be used as they pleased was both incoherent and sacrilegious, the former because God is neither a person nor separate from the universe, the latter because the divine could not be an subject of property. The universe is a common inheritance of all living beings, where are equally entitled to its resources and should live in a spirit of mutual accommodation. Sometimes Gandhi like Christianity (Bhikhu, 1997: 38) says that- being rational, human beings are the custodians of the rest of creation and should respect its rights and cherish its diversity. Since their very existence so required, and since nature constantly reproduces and replenishes itself, they might help themselves with such natural resources as they needed to live in moderate comfort. One has no right to take more, for that amounts to 'theft', Enjoying is not bad but infatuation with enjoyment is condemned by Gandhi, which verily conveys the idea like the verse of Isopanisad, *tena tyaktena bhunjita* (Ibid) nor to undermine the regenerative capacity of nature by polluting and poisoning it, by rendering land barren and infertile, or by exhausting its resources.

Since Gandhi considers all life sacred, he vacillated on the question of whether human life was superior to the non-human. By and large he thought that it is, because of the human capacities for rationality and morality. However the superiority is not 'absolute', because non-human beings too are of the same in nature and respectable of the cosmos. Human beings kill animals only when extremely necessary and that with a sense of regret. Poisonous snakes and animals which destroy crops were not to be killed but caught and released in safe places or driven away. Animals were not to be killed for food except when the climate or local circumstances so required, and never for pleasure or even for only experiment sake. This was not however the end of Gandhi's problem. The body needs food which also have life. During the process several insects are killed unwillingly and therefore that is not violence. Since violence was built into the human condition and thus unavoidable, he thought the only moral course of action was to minimize it by reducing one's want and to compensate for it by both taking care of nature and leading a moral life.

This idea of Gandhi against the commercial exploitation of nature inspired the *Chipko Movement*. Nath, 2012:10) Chipko is a Hindi word which means "to hug hard" or "to cling", a strong step towards perceiving the environment as existence. The Chipko Andolana (to save the forest) community is another example from India, in which common people hugged the trees, held the trees by their hands and stuck to them to prevent their cutting by the contractors. They challenged that these trees can be cut over their bodies. They were subjected to torture but ultimately this movement succeeded in the leadership of Sunderlal Bahuguna. The Chipko Movement is not just a movement for saving trees and planting new trees. It stands for a basic change in land use for a permanent economy. Gandhi has in fact given new strength to the concept of "sustainable development". Sustainable means use of the nature without exhausting the natural resources completely. People who have been living for centuries in undisturbed harmony with nature should not be disturbed in the name of progress or development. The forests are also the home of varied mountain cultures, mountain ecology that ensures sufficient rains and productive hill agriculture. The trees protect the soil and purify the air. Resistance movements through non-violent means appealed to the masses and this holds true to this day

when one finds that the Chipko movement of the hill people draws its main strength from organized action through non-violent defense of the rights of the people over their own surroundings. (Radhakrishnan, 1978: 567). The Chipko movement in its broader context is concerned with the conservation of the ecological balance in nature. For example, a rain forest represents an extremely delicate balance of nature and once disturbed, the harm becomes irreparable. Gandhi supported the Chipko movement so that people are committed to the preservation of nature, combating pollution, preserving wildlife and to do everything to see that the precious Earth on which we live is not plundered for profit and destroyed by human folly. Moreover, he was not of the view that there need to be a conflict between ‘development’ and ‘ecological concern’ implying that “development” relates to material and objective bases of life while “ecology” is concerned with non-material and spiritual factors, such as scenic beauty. There was no dichotomy between development and ecology according to Gandhi but rather he laid emphasis on having ecologically sound development. Today this has become the motto for each and everybody to have ecological stability, which in turn provides the best guarantee for ensuring a stable material basis for life for all.

Gandhian view of respect to the nature is well observed in the maintenance of the beauty of the Mauritian island. Mauritius is known throughout the globe as a paradise island. Its paradisiacal lies not in artificial beauty created through electronic and technological devices but because of its natural enrichment and the eco-friendly conduct and respect by the Mauritian people to the nature. This natural beauty attracts the people of the globe and that enhances the economy of the Republic through tourism. Our national identity can be more forceful if we continue to have venerable attitude towards nature. The existential difference of me and my environment or other in Vedic-tradition is just ignorance, a sense of duality for which the sense of non-difference or “all is spirit” is the light, the remedy. This device has caused great influence on different ideologies of the world and has inspired them for healthy practices regarding the “other”. A perfect harmony between scientific and technological development and spiritual ecology is feasible only if we perceive everything in nature has existence value like parts of human’s own body and hence humans can be called so only when their conduct shows equal respect to lives in nature as well. For each “I” the other is you or he/it and vice versa. Substantially the subject and the object are the same for each other and, therefore, our conduct must be based on nature as sacred (Oza, D. K. 1991: 25) I believe that this view is the culminating point of the Gandhian perspective of the environmental ethics. (Nath, 2016:66)

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