Mapping Ecological Footprints of Migrants: A Gandhian Perspective.

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Abstract

Amid the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, migrants have suffered immensely not only across nations but also within the countries. Migration has been an inevitable phenomenon with the onset of globalization. With the commencement of globalization, humans are driven towards more and more consumerism. Thus, increasing levels of consumption have set further pressure on the limited resources in nature. On one hand, it is not ethically viable to cease migration, while on the other hand, while following their dreams or due to unavoidable circumstances, this international and inter-regional mobility results in a high level of consumption. The paper attempts to resolve the dilemma of the ethical responsibility of embracing immigration and the crises it imposes on ecological footprints. The study reveals that by adopting the attributes of the Gandhian philosophy of non-violence, tolerance, and adaptability the immigrants themselves can ensure the immigration process as a peaceful journey of life. The other aspects of Gandhian philosophy such as self-sufficiency, self-reliance, and minimum consumption become the guiding force in setting the goals in life. Thus, migrants themselves feel responsible for maintaining the ecological balance and the state must ensure equal opportunities and secure inclusivity, the two fundamental elements of sustainable development endorsed while advocating human migration and settlement.

Keywords: *Migration, globalization, COVID 19 pandemic, ecological footprint, Gandhian perspective.*

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Introduction

The unprecedented outbreak of COVID 19, has left the world in the biggest catastrophe to reflect upon. Migrants across countries and within countries have been threatened not only concerning life but also livelihood, leaving them in the most vulnerable situation. Approximately half of the global workforce is at risk of losing livelihood as reported by the International Labour Organization[3]. Consequently, it is imperative to comprehend the genesis of migration that has been a part and parcel of our civilization.

There prevails no consensus in a single definition of 'A Migrant '. Migrants may be defined as 'foreign-born'. Alternatively, they may be defined as 'foreign national' (Anderson and Blinder, 2011). UN defines the migration flows in and out of the country as 'A person who moves to a country other than that of his or her usual residence for at least a year…..' (United Nations Statistical Division). Despite the existing discourses to technically define the term Migration, it remains the custodian of certain fundamentals of the human race. The mere fact that migration refers to the mobility of humans across borders, immediately assimilates focus on a human, a citizen representing a particular history of culture, tradition, religion and lifestyle that is simply non-existent in the new country or recipient country. This diversity inculcates huge potential for conflicts and situations of war on one side, but on the other side when adapted strategically for growth and development, it plays an instrumental role in building people to people connectivity between nations by encouraging people's mobility who are essentially the custodian of one type of cultural identity. It primarily displays the extent of respect, tolerance and adaptability of each other's culture and religion.

Ever since the civilisation of humanity, man has been a wanderer, migrating from one place to another in search of better livelihood. Migration has been part and parcel of civilisation. However, over time, various international policies emerged as a crucial determinant governing this mass movement. Migration is a universal phenomenon and also a social phenomenon that influences human life and the environment around it (Virupaksha et al., 2014). The study revealed that most of the time, lack of preparedness, difficulties in adjusting to the new environment, the complexity of the local system, language difficulties, cultural disparities and adverse experiences would result in distress to migrants. Migrants experience trauma and adversity at each stage of the journey (Lusk et al., 2019). Subsequently, all these experiences would result in a negative impact on the mental well-being of migrants.

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[3] www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_743036/lang--en/index.htm

There are other instances of environmental crises being the core cause of the continued migration of people of Bangladesh to India (Alam, 2003). Rapid population growth, environmental change and unequal resource distribution have resulted in widespread landlessness, unemployment, declining wages and income, growing income disparities etc. which in turn became reasons for migration. Xu-dong (2012) highlighted the relationship between environment and adaption and between openness and closure. Several nations open their territories generously, strategically allowing large volumes of permanent and temporary residents in its mainland, rendering the chance to fulfil their dreams and ambitions. Given this fact, the paper creates indispensable connectivity between the policymakers and the immigrants by bringing forth the immigrants at the forefront. Khanian et al. (2019) analyzed the role of place attachment in increasing the tolerance of individuals.

This era of the new world is peculiarly marked by a significantly expanding diaspora, especially in times when the world is attempting to attain environmental sustainability. In this context, Canada has emerged as one of the largest centres, opening horizons for all individuals equally and in every sphere, fulfilling the dreams of a large proportion of people across the world. This country has thus made a peculiar statement in the realm of the Immigration process, reflecting an unusual combination of humanitarian tradition, international obligation and an epitome of a global processing network. Trovato and Halli (1983) suggest that the causal mechanisms involving ethnic, characteristic factors and propensity to move are varied and interconnected. The study concluded that both ethnic and social demographic characteristics are important sources of migration differentials.

The Gandhian doctrine of self-sufficiency, minimum consumption, and self-governance are crucial aspects for introspecting one's desire to set one's wants. The implicit connectivity of inner -self and outer world experience is extremely necessary while setting one's goal for life. When an individual is guided by soul force, the ultimate Truth of nature and the purpose of life guides the migrant to resolve most of the conflicts prevailing in one's mind. A migrant thus leads a life that is aware of one's connection that exists with ecology.

The environment is composed of both natural resources and the social environment. There are fundamental linkages between individuals, community, nation, natural resources and social environment. The paper attempts to reinforce these inter-connections by deploying a comprehensive framework signifying the role of the migrant in connecting with the environment equitably and establishing sustainability in the overall ecological system. A perspective that views the process of migration from the prism of environmental sustainability has been proposed in the study.

However, the natural resources and social environment are not equitably distributed across nations. It is this inequitable distribution of natural and social environments that drives the structural motivation behind the process of migration. The paper attempts to view the process of migration from the perspective

of individual human beings, irrespective of the inherent reasons for migration. Guided by psychological, social security or economic security, an individual becomes an integral part of this framework. Based on the Gandhian principles of Truth and non-violence, a migrant acquires the characteristics of adaptability, resilience and cooperation, synthesizing sustainable connectivity not only between the socio-economic environment prevailing outside but also the inner world. J.C. Kumarappa's "Economy of Permanence" provides the significance of achieving overall environmental sustainability. When a migrant is aware and realizes the inherent interconnection between the inner and outside world, based on Gandhian thoughts, the migrant will consciously enact considering the ecological consequences of actions.

Globalization, Consumerism and Migration

With the surge of industrialization, globalization became an inevitable phenomenon. Humans have adopted migration for growth and betterment ever since civilization. When migration is observed from the point of view of geopolitics, it takes the shape of national security. Thus, the free mobility of people gets jeopardized and challenged. A migrant could be visualized as a political instrument or tool to strike a geopolitical balance or international relation. Political oppression, internal conflicts, civil wars etc. could be among several reasons that trigger the process of migration or are responsible for increased mobility of people across regions (Akokpari, 2000). Nizamuddin (1976) argued that low salary and poor prospects of advancement in jobs were two important push factors while improved salary and better promotion prospects were the two crucial pull factors for immigrants from India and Pakistan to Canada in the period 1946-1973.

In general, globalization has fostered free mobility in various parts of the world, giving a chance to the deprived sections of the population to reach out to better life and livelihood. As one of the imperatives of globalisation, people are free to move, looking for better opportunities for better living. To some extent, globalization brought homogeneity of products, lifestyle and even culture. To another extreme, it is responsible for increased levels of consumption. People can dream and also have been successful in accomplishing their dreams and ambitions.

The human race, unfortunately, indulged itself in more and more consumerism. More consumerism has subsequently resulted in mass production. More of everything has become the tradition of today's world. As a consequence, humans have lost the connection with their inner-self as they are focussing on the outer world and outer consumption. The spiritual connection is equally significant for migrants who plan to leave their country with the aspiration to discover a new life in the country of their choice. The spiritual connection or in other words, the connection of the inner and outer world, is critical not only for an individual migrant but also for establishing the ecological balance.

An individual undergoes a whole lot of changes in the inner and outside world. When it comes to the inner world, it mainly refers to the inner self or soul that gets directly or indirectly affected by the world outside. It is observed that the challenges of migration can jeopardize the mental health of migrants (Hosseini et al., 2017). Several policies to prevent depressions in-migrants are suggested such as improving employment opportunities, reducing discrimination, reducing the stress of the settlement process and interventions that strengthen resilience (Hosseini et al., 2017). Penman and Goel (2017) advocated a multidimensional conceptual model comprising of resilience, goals, settlement planning, healthy lifestyle and adaptation so that the migrants develop resilience.

Inner-self and outer world: A Gandhian perspective

Inner-self constitutes a crucial part of our experiences in this life. A migrant who perceives a journey gets enriching experiences not only in the outer world but also benefits internally, experiencing a better and evolved mindset. It is the responsibility of migrants to enhance and enrich the experience of their inner-self. Adaptability and resilience constitute an integral part of the inner self. Such an inner self enriched by adaptability and resilience not only engenders and leads an inner – self to a higher state of being but also a migrant can think and act rationally. The code of conduct of a migrant is extremely out of wisdom. A migrant is calm, composed and tolerant to every person and every situation in the world outside. In this sense, not only the inner self affects the outer world, but also the outer world influences the inner core equally. There exists a two-way relationship between them, and they both are interlinked with each other.

Adaptability and resilience are essential tools to interact with the world outside more productively and effectively. These aspects uplift the inner-self, making a migrant more sensitive and accommodating in any situation. At the same time, the experiences and changes happening in the outer world tend to affect the inner self of a migrant. Several ups and downs occurring in the outside world during the journey of a migrant are bound to influence the integrity of the inner peace of self. It is the existence of twin aspects of migrant the adaptability and resilience that are crucial in maintaining compose in the migrant. Adaptability makes an individual migrant more resilient, and therefore the inner core imbibes strong willpower that makes the migrant resilient to all hardships, failures and unforeseen circumstances.

The Gandhian ideology prescribed a way of living based on the ideology of Truth and Non-violence. These are the two tools that were instrumental in bringing one of the most significant revolutions of the century 'The freedom struggle of India'. Gandhi introduced the notion of Ahimsa (Non-violence) and Satyagraha (peaceful civil disobedience) to the world. The fundamentals of Truth and Non-violence were powerful enough to bequeath independence to India. These are the two foundations that not only

revolutionize the system but also offer the ideology for life. This constitutes the entire purpose of exploring a new place, culture, people and finally, a new life. Gandhian ideology advocates a thought process of adopting the fundamentals of Truth and non-violence that profoundly inculcate the aspects of adaptability and resilience necessary inputs for a successful journey of a migrant.

The essence of 'Truth 'and 'Non-violence' originates from 'Ahimsa' meaning 'The greatest love' or 'The charity'. A migrant with an enriched inner-self well-endowed with the characters of adaptability and resilience is successful in placing himself most efficiently in the world outside. Such a migrant is capable of deriving the maximum benefit from the skills and education that he equips himself with. He strategically applies the aspects of his character like tolerance, compassion and adaptability in a much more productive and fruitful way. It is so much fruitful and productive that it not only brings peace and equilibrium in the community around but serves as an essential ingredient in constituting a sustainable community, nation and world. The ultimate connection of an individual with nature or ecology is reinforced and established based on Gandhian thoughts by J.C.Kumarappa.

Migration and Ecological Limits: A Gandhian Perspective

The urge for seeking Truth by adopting, non-violence and resilience propagated by Gandhi is not limited to attaining spiritual upliftment but also to discovering harmony with nature. Based on Gandhian philosophy, the concept of 'Economy of permanence' was advocated by J.C.Kumarappa. Human intellect falls short of comprehending this notion of absolute permanence. (Kumarappa,1958) contends that everything ceases somewhere. Nature, however, is considered permanent in comparison to human life that is transient. Since man consumes nature for his survival and existence, Kumarappa proposes the concept of an economy of permanence.

Such an understanding of life which is transient manifests a deep realization of the true meaning of life. Moreover, the significance in the context of nature gets revealed that nature is permanent and while living a transient life, one needs to harmonize life's connection with nature. Nature comprises both transient and permanent elements. Certain things that get exhausted and possess a certain quantity of stock or reservoir such as iron, copper, gold etc. are found in fixed quantity and referred to as stock. Such stocks are transient as they get reduced and are exhaustible. The other component of elements of nature is' flows'. Such flows are constantly growing such as overflowing rivers or timber of forest etc. These flows are permanent relative to the stock that are transient. This concept of permanence teaches a great lesson for a life that is based on sustainable consumption by mankind.

The notion of an economy of permanence advocates the process of consumption for an economy that has the potential to remain sustainable. An economy that relies more on the permanent elements of nature as

compared to the stocks will ultimately be more sustainable. Apart from the philosophy prescribed for the consumption pathway for an economy, the fundamentals of J.C. Kumarappa also propagate lessons for an individual to base his life philosophy. An individual should attempt to become a flow since the very nature of flow is 'permanent'. Flow in this context reflects the sustainable goal or nature of the individual to perceive a sustainable life and purpose. An individual who adapts the nature of flow like a river and floats with time progressing towards achieving each step laid down for betterment is the one who lives successfully. He should never become a stock as he tends to confine himself to a place.

The very nature of a stock stops an individual stops his ever-evolving growth and development of both inner self and outer achievements. Adapting this aspect of flow, an individual gradually progresses towards higher and higher levels both in terms of inner enlightenment and in setting sustainable goals. Such a thought process and such a pathway based on flow nature are sustainable. A migrant himself reflects this nature of being a permanent flow. This preaches a lesson of being a lifelong seeker of knowledge and experience who becomes a flow in his endeavour to accomplish his dreams. Such an individual migrant who follows the guidelines of Gandhian thoughts and J.C. Kumarappa's notion of economy of permanence becomes a propagator of an environmentally sustainable community or society.

Such a community that constitutes a nation becomes a remarkable example of an economy of permanence that is based on minimum production and consumption and also depends on natural resources for sustainable growth and development. Lesser exploitation of natural resources results in lower emissions and waste generation. By adopting the Gandhian ideology, individuals can minimize their ecological footprints. Such a community also yields a sustainable social and political environment that is peaceful and just. This model of society or community becomes an epitome of egalitarian, non-violent and non-exploitative world order.

Unfolding Consumerism with Gandhian Trusteeship model

The key driving force behind the Gandhian economic thought is the minimal possible respect for human and socio-ethical values. The Gandhian philosophy of Trusteeship is primarily based on the fact that the bounties of the world are primarily for the entire human race as a whole and not for any particular individual. When an individual processes more than what is rationally needed, he has the ethical responsibility to distribute (Harijan, 23 February 1947). The elementary aspects of the Gandhian notion of self-sufficiency and self-reliance envisage that the individuals are satisfied with minimum consumption. Such a society or community is devoid of any concentration of power, competition, warfare and unrest. Such nations are peaceful and non-violent with equitable distribution of wealth.

The model of trusteeship advocates the responsibility of nature not only at the individual level but also at the state level. Both the individuals and the state must act as custodian of nature and be thoughtful of the future generation. The fact that means are limited and desires are unlimited, provides a substantial rationale for distinguishing between wants and desires. One must never forget …..

"Earth has enough resources to meet people's needs, but will never have enough to satisfy people's greed".

An individual who is spiritually evolved can clearly distinguish the underlying difference between wants and desire. Such individuals reject greed naturally and are aware of their responsibility towards nature. The aspects of minimum consumption come naturally to them. As a consequence, a migrant who is guided by Gandhian principles is more responsible while setting up the goals and fundamentals in life.

Individuals belonging to communities that get together to make nations affect the natural environment of the country during the process of production and consumption. The method of production and consumption destroys the natural integrity of resources in the form of land, minerals etc. However, individuals who are socially and economically secure and have empathetic behaviour among each other are more contended. Such individuals not only progress in their outer world endeavours but also in their spiritual pursuits of the inner self. With such extraordinary characters, individuals truly realize their journey towards real purpose in life and become more contended. This entails a lesser desire for production and consumption and thus exerting lower pressure on natural resources. This inculcates the habit of minimum consumption and conservation, which reduces emissions and wasteful accumulation in the environment ultimately.

Mahatma Gandhi had once said, "One must care about the world one will not see". Indeed, humanity has progressed when it has collectively risen to its obligation to the world and responsibility to the future. This notion of sustainability is very much embedded in the Gandhian school of thought and Kumarappa's notion of economy of permanence. When an individual basis is life on the fundamentals of Truth and non-violence by deploying satyagraha inculcates the nature of contentment, compatibility and tolerance. Such an individual or a migrant is competent enough to take moral actions and make rational choices. This reduces competition among the community for consuming more and more, realizing the significance of peace within themselves and with others. In such an environment, the wants and desires of people are limited, and the phenomenon of conservation of resources is inculcated. People are at peace not only within themselves and among others but also with nature. They refrain from exploiting natural resources and ecosystems. This is the only pathway how humans can restrain from overconsumption and accumulating excessively the ecological footprints.

When individuals are simply in a peaceful state within themselves, they are more resilient and adaptable to people around them. Principles of Truth guide them, and non-violence would finally conceive the notion of satisfaction and contentment. Such individuals can visualize the needs of the future generation and ultimately the environmental sustainability. A community represented by this epic model is not only the most environmentally sustainable but also serves as a remarkable model for a peaceful world order strategically. The world that incorporates individuals and migrants who advocate love, Truth and non-violence would define their journey towards progress as most peaceful, devoid of any unrest or war.

Conclusion

The unprecedented outbreak of COVID 19, has left the world in the biggest catastrophe to reflect upon. It becomes extremely useful to comprehend the genesis of migration that has been part and parcel of civilisation and later globalization. However, over time, various international policies emerged as a crucial determinant governing this mass movement. Migration is a universal phenomenon and also a change in social paradigm which influences human life and the environment. This era of the new world is peculiarly marked by a significantly expanding diaspora, especially in times when the world is attempting to attain environmental sustainability.

An immigrant with an ability to adapt and be able to respond to challenges encountered during the process of migration in a most resilient manner. Such attributes are advocated by Gandhian thoughts. Self-reliance, self-sufficiency and non-violence, the underlying Gandhian philosophy provide a guiding source for a migrant to realize the true purpose of life and set their ultimate goals. Kumarappa's notion of economy of permanence based on nature's permanency of maintaining the continuity of life demands non-interference to maintain its permanency. The economy of permanence is embedded in the Gandhian principles of non-violence and cooperation. In this era, when the world is facing the health pandemic crises, the dilemma of the ethical responsibility of embracing immigration and the crises it imposes on ecological footprints. By adopting the Gandhian ideology, individuals can minimize their ecological footprints. Such a community also yields a sustainable social and political environment that is peaceful and just. An immigrant is a traveller proceeding on the journey of evolving his self to be able to connect the outside world and at the same time become instrumental in bridging the gap between the stakeholders in a much productive manner to lead an entirely sustainable and peaceful social order.

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