

Gandhian Philosophy of Education and Its Relevance for Sustainability

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I. INTRODUCTION

People prefer convenience, efficiency and comfort due to economic progress. Man is striving for development in different walks of life such as social, agricultural, technological, medical and commercial which have caused concerns for sustainability as well. The development programmes are constantly depleting the resources vital for the sustainability of natural life support systems. Growth of human settlement into cities, the large population, technological inventions, more and more synthetic chemical and plastics, transport system, all products of development process have polluted the environment to such an extent that it is threatening health and even the existence of human beings and other living organisms. Progress in science and technology without concern for the environment is leading to pollution of environment and serious ecological imbalances which in the long run, may prove disastrous for mankind. Rapid industrialization has left us with polluted rivers, contaminated soil, depleted wildlife and exhausted natural resources. Air, water and oil pollution are side effects of our developmental activities. The pollutants emitted into the air by automobiles, electrical power plants, industrial processors, industry, transportation and modern agriculture cause severe air pollution which affect human health, agriculture crops, livestock and plant communities. Increasing domestic sewage and oxygen demanding wastes, infectious agents, chemical and heat from power and industrial plants are causing water pollution. Noise pollution primarily a feature of technological developments causes increase in blood pressure, mental tension, emotional and behavioral problems etc.

Deforestation a consequence of population growth and economic development has caused significant changes in the soil quality. It has destroyed the habitats of many animal and plant species thus pushing them to the point of extinction. Deforestation can lead to severe drought and desertification. It is causing threat to the biodiversity of earth. Excessive use of pesticides has disastrous side effects. These pesticides are highly persistent and enter the food chain, thus posing danger to the wild life and human beings. The green revolution pulls out more plant nutrients from the soil than it puts back.

Study have shown that the ozone layer is being damaged by increasing use of industrial chemicals that are extensively used in refrigeration, air conditioning, cleaning solvents, packaging material etc. Due to ozone depletion, the increased ultra violet solar radiations in turn have raised the temperature of the earth causing global warming. Due to ozone depletion, more ultra violet radiation is coming on the earth which causing skin cancer and diseases of the eyes.

Due to Green house effect, the melting of polar ice caps has hastened up. It is expected that sea level will rise and many coastal areas will be submerged in Asia and islands like Maldives may disappear totally. These changes would have enormous effect on human civilization. Disasters like the Tsunami in Indonesia and the recent flash floods in Uttarakhand where millions of people have been displaced, uprooted and lost their lives are the result of human induced ecological imbalance. Sadly, the impoverishment of the poor is accompanied by a simultaneous and systematic erosion of the basic means of their sustenance; the environment with its life supporting natural resources land, water and forests.

All these development have led to serious thoughts about saving the ecological degradation and ensuring safe future for the generations to come the very essence of sustainable development. This paper describes the concept of sustainable development and focuses on how the basic postulates of Gandhian philosophy and features of his scheme of basic education are relevant even today the sustainability.

II. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Sustainable development refers to a mode of human development in which a resource use aims to meet human needs while ensuring the sustainability of natural systems and the environment, so that these needs can be met not only in the present, but also for generation to come. The term sustainable development began to gain

wide acceptance in the late 1980's, after its appearance in 'Our Common Future'(1987) also known as the Bruntland Report. The fundamental principles of sustainable development entail that our actions must take into account effects on the environment, economy and society and that what we do today should not compromise the well being of future generation. Bruntland Commission's report postulates "Sustainable development is the kind of development which satisfies the current needs without endangering the future generation to satisfy their own". The essence of commission's statement is fair distribution of natural resources both among different generations and among the present generation of people from the first, the second and third world and finding a positive consensus between the environmental, economic and social dimensions of the environment. Thus sustainable development is not choice between environmental protection and social progress, but rather about striving for compatible with environmental protection. This definition of Bruntland Commission contains two essential concepts:

1. The concept of needs, especially the needs of the world's poor, which should be given overriding priority.
2. The idea of limitation arising from the effect of technologies and social structures on the ability of the environment to satisfy present and future needs.

The Rio de Janeiro declaration on Environment and development described sustainable development "as long term continuous development of the society aimed at satisfaction of humanity's need at present and in the future via rational usage and replenishment of natural resources, preserving the Earth for future generation.

Gandhian Views on Sustainable Development

Gandhi was not environmentalist in the modern sense. It is a fact that environmental concerns were minimal in Gandhian era, yet his views on nature are scattered throughout his writing. Gandhian thought give us a new vision to harmonize nature with the needs of people .His ideas relating to Satyagraha based on truth and non violence, simple life style and development reveal how sustainable development is possible without doing any harm to nature and fellow beings. Gandhian idea that nature has enough to satisfy everyone's need and not to satisfy anybody's greed became one line ethic to modern environmentalism. Gandhi considered the earth a living organism. His idea expressed in terms of two fundamental laws: cosmic law and the law of species. According to Cosmic law the entire universe is single entity. Nothing could malfunction outside the threshold limits built into the grand system that includes both living and non living aspects. He believed that the universe was structured and informed by the cosmic spirit that all men, all life and indeed all creation were one. He wrote "I believe in advaita, I believe in the essential unity of man and for that matter of all that lives. Therefore I believe that if one man gains spiritually, the world fails to that extent". In his words "man has no power to create life, therefore he has no right to destroy it" Man has been endowed with higher faculties so that he can be compassionate to lower beings. Regarding the law of species Gandhi believed that without the cooperation and sacrifice of both humans and non humans evolution is not possible. Being rational human beings we are the custodians of the rest of the creation and should respect their rights and cherish their diversity. It is for this reason that taking more than required resources is seen as theft".

Truth and non violence are the fundamentals of Gandhian Philosophy. Non violence means non injury but to Gandhi Non violence was much more than the absence of violence. He used it to mean non injury in thought, word and deed. To Gandhi truth is that "which determines the spirit in which one lives or religious and ethical criteria which governs the way in which he thinks and acts". He believed that truth can be achieved by only by means of non violence. It affords the highest protection to one's self respect and sense of honour. Satyagraha is an active form of non violence. It is based on the idea that the moral appeal to the heart or conscience is more effective than an appeal based on the threat of violence. Satyagraha itself originates from the belief that violence to person and property diverts the minds of the parties concerned from the real issues involved, non violent action invites the parties to a dialogue about the issues themselves.

The ecological scope of non violence is unlimited. Gandhiji's faith in non violence and vegetarianism made him a votary of conservation of all diversity including all forms of life, societies, cultures, religion and traditions. As Gandhi envisaged, non violence has the power to solve all our problems including ecological crisis. He believed that ahimsa provides freedom from hate, prejudices, fear, jealousy, narrow thinking, narrow nationalism and mind pollution. This is particularly relevant in present times when we need to rise above our parochial interests and act in unison to address cosmopolitan concerns. The message of ahimsa envisions a world without fear which could be applied to build trust and mutual understanding among nations which currently endanger arms race and nuclear war. The message of ahimsa is to love humanity and all creatures because they are Indian environmental movements like the Chipko Movement, Narmada Bachao Andolan etc. as the living example of Gandhian environmentalism.

Gandhi made a good criticism of modern industrial civilization, which had a huge impact on human kind as well as on the environment. It made a small part of the population wealth at the cost of exploiting the world's natural resources. Gandhi believed that modern industrial civilization propagates nothing other than the hunger for wealth and greedy pursuit of worldly pleasures. In Hind Swaraj, published in 1909, Gandhi criticized

the modern civilization as ‘Satanic’. He observed that machinery is the chief symbol of modern civilization; it represents a great sin. The distinguishing characteristic of modern civilization is an indefinite multiplicity of wants.

In Hind Swaraj, Gandhi argued that what we think as civilization today is an illusion and that any civilization that till treated outsiders could hardly avoid ill treating its own people. Gandhi’s critique of western civilization and science emanates from his dissatisfaction with the divorce of science and progress from morality. Gandhi believed that the greatest achievement of modern civilization have been weapons of mass destruction, the frightful disputes between capital and labour and cruelty inflicted on innocent, dumb, living animals in the name of science and technology. Modern civilization involved too much amount of violence against nature which was seen as nothing more than man’s property. This undermined man’s unity with his environment and fellowmen and destroyed stable and long established communities. Gandhi believed that villages would soon disappear due to the urbanization which is part of modern civilization and of which environmental degradation is a product. While the western environmentalists, spread the message of ‘going back to the nature, Gandhi spread the message of going back to the villages’. He believed that the blood of the village is the cement with which the edifice of the cities is built.

Modern economy is propelled by a frenzy of greed and indulges in an orgy of envy. It makes man more materialistic at the risk of majority and the environment. Gandhi asserted that true economics stands for social justice; it promotes the goods of all equally, including the weakest and is indispensable for decent life. Gandhian economic concepts like swadeshi, trusteeship, bread labour etc received attention and acceptance from the whole world. The swadeshi spirit encourages us to consume commodities made from our own villages, thus promoting small scale industries which help ordinary farmers and weavers to live happily. Limitations of wants are another important aspect in Gandhian economics. Gandhi urged the people to minimize consumption and thus reduce the burden on nature by avoiding hazardous wastes. Gandhi realized that the modern civilization and the market economics have a tendency to multiply the wants and needs of common people. Bread labour is another economic concept of economy. He valued bodily labour saying the rains come not through intellectual feats but through sheer bodily labour. It is well established scientific fact that where forests are attracted and the volume of water received increases with the increase of vegetation. The Gandhian concept of bread labour encourages the use of human hands and body instead of machines to produce essential items like vegetable, cloths etc. Gandhian ideal vision of the world known as Sarvodaya safeguards the rights of future generations through the welfare of all.

Gandhian Philosophy of Education and Sustainable Development

Gandhi through his basic scheme of education wanted to bring social transformation in the country. His basic scheme of education is designed to make individual self-reliant and self sufficient through child-centered, activity-centered, craft-centered and community-centered curricular activities. Regarding social order, Gandhi advocated that ultimate aim of education is not only a balanced and harmonious society but a just social order, in which there is no un-natural divide line between the haves and have-nots and everybody is assured of a living wage and right to freedom. Gandhi was of the opinion that all subjects should be co-related to the craft of the locality. Accordingly, co-relation will integrate and coordinate the subjects with the socio economic, cultural, environmental and life like conditions. Gandhi wanted to develop community life through education which consisted of manual labour, tree planting, agriculture, simple life and crafts. The running and recurrent principle of the community life was to live according to the rhythm of the nature and in harmony with what nature offers. It was because of his experience of dealing with environmental and development issues that Gandhi, when asked if he would like to have the same standard of living for India’s teeming millions as was prevalent in England, remarked, “it took Britain half the resources of the planet to achieve this prosperity. How many planets will India require?”.

Through basic craft, Gandhi wanted to develop self reliant communities, capable of managing their own affairs. His emphasis on village craft was related to stopping migration to urban areas. Basic crafts would lead to the development of cottage industries. It would lead to the consumption of swadeshi goods and solve the problem of unemployment. Gandhiji’s basic scheme of education focuses o training in citizenship which aims at developing ideas of mutual understanding and habits of cooperative and mutually helpful living among the students through its various practical and constructive programmes. It intended to strengthen in them the desire for self improvement and social service in a cooperative community. This feature of basic scheme is relevant to sustainable social order which focuses on peaceful co-existence. Gandhiji’s scheme of Basic education stood for free society with a sense of self discipline and social discipline because he was of opinion that responsibility cannot be imposed from outside but it has to emerge from within. It springs from the inner world of the learners and makes them fearless, responsible, cooperative and sympathetic. Social discipline advocated by Gandhiji unites and integrates the scattered units of life. It strengthens and accelerates the interaction of the learners with the people and society as a whole. It is based on the idea of world community and world society and integrates

the nation's world and the humanity as a whole. His idea of integration of humanities is in concurrence with socio-political sustainability which is against global trade in armaments endangering not only world peace but the survival of mankind and earth itself.

III. CONCLUSION

Man's progress and the road to development has led to the deterioration of nature. In his quest for fulfilling his needs, he has exploited nature of its maximum. This is development that is ecologically not sustainable. Gandhi picked up fundamental environmental issues like over consumption, violence to man and nature and so on several decades before the rise of environmental movements. In India, environmental movements have been forged by Gandhian traditions of non-cooperation and non-violence. Gandhian definition for non-violence is far more than mere passive resistance. Rather, "it is a way of life, which affects everything from what a person needs through to how they relate to the other world around them." Gandhian Satyagraha often functions as conflict resolution technique. He criticized modernization and industrialization for its lethal effects on the society. He believed that "the economic imperialism of a single tiny island Kingdom is today keeping the world in chains. If as entire nation of 300 million took to similar economic exploitation, it would strip the world bare like locusts". He observed that the Indian situation demanded a new vision on economics which is centered on agriculture and village industries. He conceptualized a new economic order based on ecological balance. Gandhi's thoughts are relevant to sustainable economic development, ecological balances and above all building the platform for conflict free, peaceful world society.

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