

Environment & Gandhian Philosophy in 21st Century

Abstract

Gandhiji's entire life and deed, indeed, is an environmental bequest for the whole mankind. This is not because, he wrote big volumes of books or environment led a people's movement to oppose the construction of large scale dam project or spent his life time for cleaning Ganga or whatsoever; rather because he was a true practitioner of environmentally sustainable development in the real sense, by his personal life style, he has adopted in his day to day life.

Keywords: Environment, Philosophy, Goodwill, Pollution, Life, Human, Industrialization, Globalization.

Introduction

Gandhiji is believed to have greater relevance in present world of modern science and technology which has produced geographical neighbourhood but distance between man and man has increased. He insisted not only purity of ends but also on purity of 'means'. His principles of 'Satyagraha' and non-violence are the means of achieving a just goal. Many scholars questioned the relevance of the philosophy of non-violence in the age of weapons of mass destruction. In this regard I would like to quote what Gandhiji says in his last interview. He told the interviewer that "Non-Violence is the greater force at the disposal of mankind. It is mightier than the mightiest weapons of destruction devised by ingenuity of man"¹ The complete destruction of opponent is the watchword of nowadays international politics which seems to be much inspired by the Nazism doctrine of superiority of the race. But what we seen in the last few years that such attempts always create a backlash. The events in Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Iraq, Sudan and so on clearly depict relevance of Gandhian principle and teaching that "A peaceful society can't be created on the foundation of violence"² Against this he conceived the idea and method of non-violence & non-cooperation. Reduced to its simplest form it is this 'I would not hate you but I would not obey you when you are wrong. Do what your likes, I will match my capacity to suffer against your capacity to inflict suffering my soul force against your physical or brute force. I will wear you down by goodwill. The present world has become highly individualistic. There is no longer concern with terms. Cooperation has been replaced by competition and consumerism. Much intelligence and energy are going in this effort. Yet it seems more important than ever that an ever greater effort be made to achieve positive and mutually helpful human relationship. This can be accomplished only through man himself working with other men based on Gandhian principles.

Self sufficiency of villages, promotion of small and cottage industries, control on the import of consumption goods, improved agriculture etc. are some of the way to reach our goal. Importance should be given to the qualitative improvement of human resources, education and health, are to be given top priority. Better sanitation, better living condition and better life, can be achieved only through Gandhian ways today. Gandhiji wanted science to be coupled with spirituality. As Acharya Vinoba Bhave spiritual successor of Mahatma Gandhi, used to observe, the point on which the most modern science and ancient wisdom known as spirituality meet, you will find Gandhi on that point.

Pollution is one of the biggest problems that we have to face. Air is polluted, water is polluted, and land is polluted. All these because mind of man is polluted. Gandhiji knew that with all the advancement of science and technology, attention needs to be given to the mind of man also, which is domain of spirituality. A search of eco-friendly and pollution free

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technology takes one to charkha and village industries – Gramodyoga. Charkha is the symbol of eco-friendly and pollution free technology. It also gives employment to millions and millions of people with negligible investment. Khadi cloth is a cloth of compassion, as feeds the hungry, gives them an opportunity to lead a life of dignity and also establishes the dignity of labours. It is the most convenient form of clothing especially in the tropical country like India. If various Government after independence, have given preference to khadi and village industries, we would have been spared from many miseries that we face today. A little was done in this sector, much needed to be done.

Gandhi felt “Industrialization is going to be a curse for mankind, it can provide jobs for its millions of citizens and in addition, it would be creating pollution problems, whereas, developing thousands of cottage and village industries would provide an outlet for the creating faculties and resourcefulness of the people”³ It would also usefully employ many persons, who are in need of employment, which in fact would add to the national wealth too. The big industries can never overtake the unemployed millions. Their aim is primarily to make money for the few owners. If we compare between the Gandhian model of bottom up rural development and Nehruvian model of top down industrial development; we can visualise that Gandhian model leads to an economy of permanence and is based largely on renewable resources, where the damage to the environment is minimal and manageable, while the latter is based on non-renewable resources and cause environmental pollution. Moreover in reality what we find today even after 60 years of independence is that rich have become richer and poor have become poorer.

The very concept of ‘development’ needs a review. What does a development society mean – More and more consumption, more and more destruction of happiness, more pollution and more disparities less happiness? In this age of globalization, the world is becoming one unit and hence the need for sharing at every level, a concern for food, clothing, shelter, employment, education, healthcare etc. for every inhabitants of the globe. The present world order is based on the exploitation, disparities; injustice cannot and should not be allowed to last long. Hence a change in the life style is needed. A life of simplicity, austerity, sharing which leads to happiness and inner peace, as envisaged by Gandhiji may help us in overcoming present predicaments. Gandhiji gave the concept of voluntary limitation, besides complexity and interdependence. As all the resources on this planet earth are limited, man can’t survive if goes on exploiting them, the way he is doing today. Gandhiji used to say, “The Mother Earth has enough for everyone’s need but not for their greed.”⁴ One is also reminded of the wise advice by J. B. Krishnamurthi “The more I have, the less I am.” Gandhi opted for voluntary simplicity so as to end ever consumption i. e. consuming more than our need, because ultimately that would be at the expense of the earth resources. Gandhiji felt, we can use the bounties of nature, but not with an element of

greed. He had a compassion for all forms of life. He advocated “Man has no power to create life, therefore, has no right to kill any life also.” For him Non-violence and compassion are not to be practised only towards living beings; but also towards inanimate materials.

Gandhiji addressed himself to the problem of sanitation, told, sanitation should occupy the foremost place’ He also said, ‘Ahmadabad cannot evade the responsibility for sanitation by pleading poverty. Anyone who fouls the air by spitting about carelessly throwing refuse and rubbish or otherwise dirtying the grounds; sins against man and nature. Man’s body that fouls the air that is to enter that desecrate it, his taking the name of Lord Rama is in vain.”⁵

Aim of the Study

Gandhiji environmentalism was based on various ethical principles such as non-violence⁶, practicing and preserving truth, stunning the use of material obtained by illegitimate means, celibacy- as a means of population control, neither coveting or amassing materials and wealth beyond one need, sanitation of body, mind and surroundings, contentment with available resources, austerity, introspection and meditation and ever fasting for self-purification and any dereliction of duty towards nature including human beings. He did not preach anything that he did not practice himself⁷.

Conclusion

The best way to come out of the present malice is to adopt Gandhian principles and policies towards life. Through practicing the self-reliance and self-governance, which helps in achieving environmentally sustainable development, enables us toward a Greener Globe for our future generations.

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