

HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY TOWARDS SOCIETY AND ENVIRONMENT: THE GANDHIAN WAY

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Abstracts:

Our cleverness, inventiveness and activities have used and abused almost every element of these 5 elements. In today's age of science and technology we are catering to man's greed and not his need, drastically impacting the entire planet as a whole. In fact, we can rightly call the situation we are in right now as an unprecedented planetary emergency. The need of the hour is propounded in Gandhiji's four pillars, namely, Swaraj, Swadeshi, Sarvodaya and Satyagraha, similar to those advocated by the International Green Movement namely, Ecological Wisdom, Social Justice, Grassroots Democracy, and Nonviolence. Effective implementation of these pillars will create a foundation of sustainability, with equal distribution of power, money and economy, local excellence and self-reliance.

Keywords: Duty, Gandhiam, Human, Rights, India

Gandhiji believed in the unity and oneness of all life and its interconnectedness. All creations get nourished from the five elements of nature viz. earth, water, fire, air and space. But our cleverness, our inventiveness and our activities have used and abused each of these 5 elements. In today's age of science and technology we are catering to man's greed and not his need, drastically impacting the entire plane. The need of the hour is propounded in Gandhiji's four pillars, namely, Swaraj, Swadeshi, Sarvodaya and Satyagraha which are similar to those advocated by the International Green Movement namely, Ecological Wisdom, Social Justice, Grassroots Democracy, and Nonviolence. Effective implementation of these pillars will create a foundation of sustainability, with equal distribution of power, money and a global economy of local excellence and self-reliance.

Contentment is the best of riches. – Mahatma Gandhi

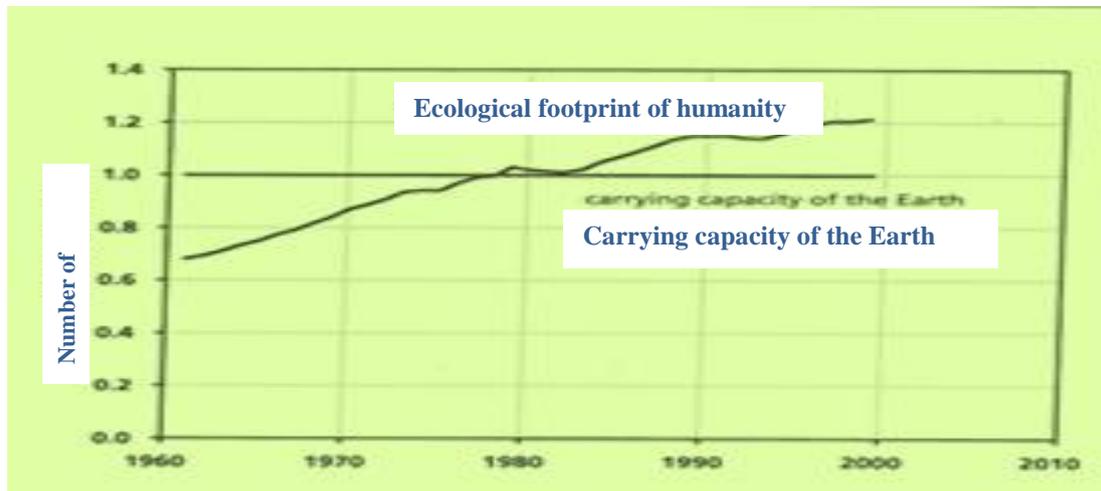
1. OBJECTIVES

"human society is ceaseless growth, an enfoldment in terms of spirituality". – M.K.Gandhi

Gandhi believed that life and knowledge cannot be divided into watertight compartments and if the individuals are healthy it will manifest in society and the environment. Stephen Emmott, the head of Computational Science at Microsoft Research said "our cleverness, our inventiveness and our activities have modified almost every part of our planet... In fact, the situation we are in right now is an emergency, an unprecedented planetary emergency."



2. ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINT OF HUMANITY



Gandhi said “The earth provides enough to satisfy for everyman’s need but not for greed”.

It may seem utopian to incorporate Gandhian Philosophy but it is the need of the hour to use our natural resources judiciously for the protection of all living beings.

This paper is an effort to understand and analyze in depth the fundamental postulates of Mahatma Gandhi which are echoed worldwide and touch upon every aspect of life. A humble attempt has been made to reassess, reinvent and revive his philosophy and make it known to citizens, academics, activists and scientists to implement in our daily life and minimize problems facing the world.

3. METHODOLOGY

The paper is theory based. Secondary data has been taken from various articles and books. The problem is enormous. There are now over seven billion of us and more population means the need for more food and more land to produce this food. As a result many revolutions like Green Revolution, the scientific revolution, the industrial revolution and so on came at a huge cost to the environment, in terms of loss of habitat, pollution, and over fishing and decline of

species and start of the degradation of the earth’s ecosystem. The components of climate –the atmosphere (the air we breathe), the hydrosphere (the planet’s water), the cryosphere (the ice sheets and glaciers) the biosphere (the planet’s plants and animals) have started to change. As our demands grow the stress on the entire system and the loss of ecosystem services poses a very real threat to our survival.

For Gandhi life was precious – he believed in the immortality of the soul. He would like to give the analogy of the ocean. The ocean is composed of drops of water; each drop is an entity and yet it is part of the whole, 'the one and the many'. In this ocean of life, we are little drops. He said – My doctrine means that I must identify myself with life, with everything that lives; I must share the majesty of life in the presence of God. Gandhiji believed in Mahavir Jain's philosophy that inanimate and animate both are susceptible to pain.

In 1980, the Green Party, of Germany originally organized what came to be known as the Four Pillars of the Green Movement, for preservation of environment. This has since inspired other parties to similarly organize and agitate for change in over 40 countries throughout the world.

The Four Pillars of the International Green Movement include 1) Grassroots Democracy/Decentralized Political and Economic Power, 2) Social Responsibility,



3) Ecology Ethic, and 4) Nonviolence Ethic. Even though no one seems to yet have examined these Pillars in relation to the thought of Mohandas Gandhi, each of these Pillars can be seen as extraordinarily similar to the concepts he utilized while leading the successful independence campaign in India during 1919-1947. Perhaps a brief analysis of the Pillars in relation to

1) Swaraj, 2) Swadeshi, 3) Sarvodaya and 4) Ahimsa and Satyagraha may help both add to the consciousness of Greens globally even as it may assist Greens locally in India to link themselves with a global movement to save the planet from the New Colonialism associated with Globalization.

4. THE FIRST PILLAR: GRASSROOTS DEMOCRACY ----- SWARAJ

Grassroots Democracy, conceptualized by Gandhi as Swaraj. The logic of the concept is quite very basic: If we fearlessly rule ourselves, no external rule can rule over us. This idea is set into a much more sophisticated framework by Gandhi as we see beyond his short-term goal of national self-rule and realize that he sought at least two other levels including local self-rule and individual self-rule. Local self-rule was visualized as village (or neighborhood) self-rule and was made popular by expanding upon the traditional 'Panchayat' village council idea and making it more inclusive of participation by all members of the village regardless of religious, caste, ethic, economic or gender differences. As the ideal of democracy is approximated by increasing levels of participation, individual participants become more and more empowered and individual self-respect is enhanced. When undertaken in conjugation with other Gandhian principles (associated with the other Pillars), the more empowerment and self-respect is nurtured, the more an ultimate self-rule Gandhi called Ram Rajya (the Kingdom of God) may come into being.

Swaraj is one of the basic concepts of Gandhi's philosophy, according to

Gandhi, Swaraj is a state of being of individuals and nations, Swaraj is a Sanskrit word comprising of 'swa' and 'raj' that means self-rule. Swaraj literally means self-rule and its original connotation meant autonomy of the moral self, their strict control is exercised over the senses. In other words it means self-rule and self-restraint and not freedom from all restraints which 'independence' often means. Gandhiji defined this word in its fullness. Swaraj is non-subjugation to anyone. Non subjugation and ethical self-subjugation will make a better sense of Swaraj. Swaraj means to be able to manage one's own affair. In essence, Swaraj represent a genuine attempt to regain control, self-respect, self-responsibility and capacity for self-realization. Gandhi said that my Swaraj is to keep intact the genius of our civilization and Swaraj for all. Swaraj is the rule of all people, is the rule of justice.

In Swaraj he also insisted on rights. If everyone does his duty, there will immediately be the rule of order established among mankind. Rights accrue automatically to him who duly performs his duties. If all simply insist on rights and no duties, there will be utter confusion. Gandhiji in the philosophy of Gita " -Action is duty: fruit is the right."

In Purnaswaraj, there is an awakening among the masses, knowledge among them of their true interest and ability to serve that interest. This leads to harmony and freedom from aggression from within and without and progressive improvement in economic conditions.

Gandhiji wrote in Hind Swaraj, "True Swaraj means kingdom of soul, spiritual and modern freedom, swadeshi and economic freedom." Swaraj is based on inward freedom since freedom of action comes through acquired virtues.



5. THE SECOND PILLAR: SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY ---- - SWADESHI

The Second Pillar, Social Responsibility, is almost identical to the Gandhian concept of Swadeshi, which maybe roughly translated as Self Reliance. This concept can be best visualized by a series of concentric circles, at the centre of which is the circle of oneself obligated to live as one would expect others to live. This Swadharma (supreme duty) goes beyond being merely responsible for one's own actions, since to not help others in need (as you would want them to help you if you were in need) would be violating the golden rule: so do unto others as you would want them to do unto you. In other words, while each person should rely upon themselves as much as possible (and be responsible for their actions), Gandhiji understands that each person lives in a social context in which Swadharma may require voluntary sacrifice for the sake of others. In broader and inclusive circles of relationships, accordingly, each person should be willing to sacrifice for their family, their families for other families, villages for other villages, and nations for other nations – until all persons, ultimately, see themselves as citizens of the world who should both live simply so that others may simply live and voluntarily sacrifice for others when help is needed.

Swadeshi is a dynamic concept of Gandhian philosophy. It is a doctrine having both economic and political implications. Swadeshi provides an ethical direction to economic choices and under it sharing and self-provisioning becomes the basis of humane and egalitarian social honor. It engenders brotherhood and cooperation – swadeshi is the only doctrine consistent with the law of humanity and love. Swadeshi is that spirit in us which restricts us to the use and service of our immediate surroundings to the exclusion of the more remote. Gandhiji applied this principle in every walk of life, like language, Culture, government, economy and even religion. In the political sphere the spirit of swadeshi he observed in

the indigenous institutions like the village Panchayats (the local self-governments). Gandhiji also proposed a non-violent economy based on Swadeshi. He advocated Khadi (local fabric which is hand woven) for many benefits like, thousands knew how to weave it, it supplies the readiest occupation to those who have leisure, it is easily learnt, it does not require much capital, it can stop the drain of wealth, it is a potent instrument of securing co-operation among the people and even the smallest success means so much immediate gain to the people. Gandhi incorporated Swadeshi approach in diet. Recommendation was for local food which is easily available and conducive for health.

Language is the store of culture and tradition and knowledge. Gandhiji said that the first and foremost thing is to revive the rich provincial languages with which India is blessed. Gandhi made efforts to promote regional language for education but the knowledge of the English language is necessary for imbibing ideas of liberty and developing accuracy of thought.

“Purity of service is the very essence of swadeshi”, said Gandhi. Swadeshi helps in improving the range and quality of local goods and the costs go down, due to use of indigenous skills, resources, man power and technology and lesser need for marketing, transport and storage. He was convinced that through swadeshi we can encourage and revive home industries and handicrafts which can help the villages of India. He said that swaraj can come only through swadeshi.

Swadeshi does not mean boycotting all things foreign; it only means the use of local resources to the extent practicable for the protection of home industry. Swadeshi is a self-sufficient, decentralized and a need based economy with full employment through production by masses. It harmonizes individual and social concerns. Swadeshi provides an alternative and a solution in the present era of globalization. It is not opposed to a rational or need based trade among nations. The economy should be guided by ethics of unto the last through trade. A true votary of Swadeshi will not harbor ill will



towards a foreigner and not be actuated by antagonism towards anybody on earth. Swadeshi is not a cult of hatred. It is a doctrine of selfless service that has roots in the purest Ahimsa, i.e., love.

6. THE THIRD PILLAR: ECOLOGY, ETHICS AND WISDOM

The third pillar is present in the Gandhian concept of Sarvodaya but is not so obviously identified with it. Gandhi was inspired by John Ruskin to create this concept as Sarvodaya, literally means the welfare of all – the ‘All’ included all life on this planet. That Gandhi rarely comments on ecology explicitly is actually a result of his integrating an ecology ethic so pervasively throughout his thinking that it almost never is thought of as a separate focus of analysis. That this ethic is manifested in his desire to not harm animals (even being reluctant to kill poisonous snakes where he lived in South Africa), in his vegan diet (where only goat milk was accepted), and his desire to live simply (by weaving his own clothing and refusing all imported cloth) is clear. Reflecting upon his concept of karma, moreover, one can quickly deduce that just as apple seeds cannot grow into mango trees and dictatorships cannot reap democracy, so also we cannot disrespect our natural environment without producing dire consequences.

Sarvodaya is essentially a spiritual activity, which has two meanings, mainly negative and positive. As a negative concept, Sarvodaya is not limited to one person or to one group of persons. It is not something which one man or set of men can gain or enjoy to the exclusion of others. As a positive concept, Sarvodaya implies the participation of all kinds of people irrespective of class, caste, creed and religion. It also stands for the total blossoming of all the faculties- physical, mental and spiritual of the human being. It is an activity in which all may partake if it is to

amount to a full realization of the human faculties of the human soul.

According to Acharya Vinoba Bhave, the term Sarvodaya commands a two-fold meaning. Firstly, Sarvodaya means making everyone happy by removing suffering and poverty with the help of scientific knowledge. Secondly establishing a world state full with divinity, kindness and equality is called Sarvodaya.

7. THE FOURTH PILLAR: NON-VIOLENCE ETHIC

The fourth pillar is more dramatically manifested in a Gandhian concept of Ahimsa than is commonly realized. Translated crudely as non-violence, ahimsa is better translated as non-injury or harmlessness- though it is best understood as a quality of mind that manifests in our actions.

Gandhi seeks not only to practice tactical non-violence in response to violence, or even to love our enemies: his ideal is to not even have an enemy concept! According to his Satyagraha approach to social change, we are obligated to hold firm to the truth as we see it at any point in time displaying a nonviolent willingness sacrifice (and die, if necessary) for that truth, even as we must be willing to learn new information and knowledge from all sources like race, religion literature even from nature (Including our components).

Non-violence is not a new concept; it is as old as the hills and Indian civilization. Gandhi used non-violence very beautifully in practical, day to day life and demonstrated its power and utility in socio-economic transformation as well as political liberation of mankind.

Gandhi's brilliance as a leader and thinker lay in his transformation of the individualistic message of non-violence into a success technique for direct mass action. Gandhi transformed it into a social and political technique. He, thus, attempted to apply the theory of ahimsa enunciated by the ancient Indian teachers and prophets on a social and political plain.



Ahimsa is not selflessness and positive universal love and constructive suffering. Gandhi also pleaded for brotherly ethics and believed that ahimsa has almost an obligation and compelling power to bring peace and unity to the world. Silence and compassion are the respective applications of the wisdom of many in life. Western anthropologists have given indication and signs of progressive ahimsa and diminishing himsa.

Gandhiji regarded all life as sacred and precious. Hence, he had deep faith in the sanctity of the right to life. He would not kill even a snake. He said 'God alone can take life, because he gives it.' The believer in ahimsa would regard even the lives of the opponents as worthy of reverence. The practice of ahimsa requires inner compulsions, faith in compassion, indomitable courage and deep self-introspection. *'My life is my message' Gandhi*

Gandhi strongly believed in simple living and high thinking, so that others can live simply. There an example of our luxuries and ignorance towards environment. What does a car cost? Volkswagen, Ford, Toyota and others keep telling us that we can buy a car for around 8000 pounds. That's not what a car costs. Let's look at what a car costs. The iron ore forming the basis of the car's steel body has to be mined, and then transported on a very large scale and very polluting ship to somewhere like Indonesia or Brazil, to be made into steel. The steel is then transported to a very large and polluting ship to a car factory in, say, Germany. The tyres have to be manufactured. The rubber then has to be produced in Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia. The rubber then has to be shipped to a country that manufactures tyres. The plastic for the car dashboard starts out as oil in the ground. That oil has to be extracted and exported- on a very large and very polluting ship- to be made into plastic, which then gets transported to the car factory to then be molded into a dashboard. The leather from the seats came from an animal. The animals needed to produce the leather - cows - require a lot of water and a lot of

food. They will have been reared somewhere such as Brazil. Their skins will have been shipped somewhere such as India for processing. (Kanpur is the centre for India's booming leather industry producing leather for car seats and handbags for the UK, Europe and the US. The leather processing factories pollute both the atmosphere and the river Ganges with Hydrochloric acid, chromium and a cocktail of other poisonous chemicals). The resulting processed leather will be then shipped to factories to be made into seat covers. The lead in the battery has to be mined in China, for example, then shipped and made into batteries, which need to be transported on a very large and very polluting ship to car factories in Germany, the US or elsewhere.

All this before a single car is even assembled. Let alone before a car is then transported for you to buy. And that's before you've put a single liter of petrol in your car and started contributing further to the climate problem.

But you don't have to pay the real cost- the cost of environmental degradation, pollution from mining, industrial processes and transportation, the resultant loss of ecosystems and climate change, and what economists like to call 'externalities'; at least not yet. But this cost of the consequences of producing a car will have to be paid for by someone in the future; maybe you, more likely your children.

8. CONCLUSION

Resources intensive industries like the car manufacturing industry, or chocolate makers (to produce one bar of chocolate approximately 2700 liters of water are used) destroy and disrupt vital ecological processes and pose a threat to human survival. To prevent the erosion of ecological processes we have to adhere to the following principles:

Protection and preservation of essential ecological processes means conservation of components of ecosystem. There are two components of every ecosystem the living



(biotic) components like plants and animals; and the non-living (abiotic) components like water, air nutrients and solar energy. The dominant ideology of development, which guides development activities almost exclusively, has been classically concerned only with the use of natural resources for commodity production and capital accumulation. To make good of the short coming it is necessary to comprehend the place of natural resources in all the developmental activities.

The second principle of basic needs of the people must be fulfilled. The gulf between rich and poor must be minimized. Most of the ecological movements in Afro-Asian countries are not the luxury of the rich but for the sustenance of the common man.

The third principle -that the demands of the market for industrial-commercial commodity must be the last priority. The hidden negative externalities of the development process governed by the principle of the market create new forms of poverty and put immense pressure on ecological processes.

Cleanest air, cleanest water, simplest food and cleanest thinking which really means communion with God are the four laws, the first three flowing from the fourth.

– Mahatma Gandhi

To conclude, Gandhi's ethical norms were not based on divine revelation, but on the Laws of Nature that the human mind could decipher through experience, reason, and insight. These Laws determine existence, survival and growth or progress. Adherence to them ensures harmony with the environment. There can be no harmony where there is injustice either to one self or to others. Thus, morality lies in adherence to the higher law that one finds manifested in nature. This is the law of truth, Love, altruism, renunciation of covetousness and greed, the spirit of Yajna or sacrifice and the single-minded and consecrated pursuit of the truth or God that transcends the ego and the corollaries of the sense of separateness.

These, therefore, constitute the essentials of Gandhi's perception of the ethical foundations of society. Gandhiji philosophy is based on "Scientific Idealism not Scientific Materialism". The earth is a home for all that is animate and inanimate. We must use natural resources very judiciously because for all living beings non-living components are essential. With no sunlight, water, air and minerals, life cannot exist. In our lives we can do small things

- Respects and reverence for all living and non-living things
- Lead a simple life
- Always carry a cotton bag to avoid plastic bags.
- Occasionally use public transport
- Do not seal the mouth of the earth – avoid Concretization of the Earth.
- Always think twice before buying anything that it is for need or greed

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