
Environment, Development and Modernization: An Gandhian Analysis

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Abstract

Many grandiose visions have been developed to depict how humans have shaped destiny in the new century that is fast approaching. These visions are based on scenario involving highly sophisticated breakthrough with vast potentials – colonies in space, robot operated plants, computers that match human intelligence and so on. Major question is whether such scientific and technological advancements are based on a position where man and machine co-operate with each other or has machine overpowered man? The unprecedented growth in world consumption and production is leading to environmental stress through impacts that are both global and local. Some kinds of environmental degradation are truly of global concern, such as global warming and depletion of the ozone layer. Others are international – acid rain, the state of ocean, in several countries. Others are more localized, - air pollution, water pollution, soil degradation, desertification and so on.

The emergence of environmental concerns during the past two decades has led several people to question whether growth of the cost imposed on the environment through depletion of non-renewable natural resources. Gandhi had an inherent distrust of modernization based on western concept of development parameters. He was critical of large scale industrialization, not only because it created havoc in the environment, but also because it led to extensive unemployment. Gandhi found the modern civilization, for all its achievements, fundamentally rooted in the pursuit of ever increasing wants with its harmful consequences. It contributed to inequality and non harmonious relations amongst members of a society. Gandhi was very particular about the adverse consequences of modernization on environment. The present article makes an modest attempt to discuss some of these issues.

Key words: Sustainable Environment, Environmental Degradation, modernization

The present century is confronting with two challenges: the massive increase in the rate of depletion of natural resources and pollution caused from human actions and the revolution in information technology, which has given to access the pictures and data about human and environmental disasters. The industrial revolution with rapid progress in the fields of science and technology has brought human beings for a direct conflict with nature by increasing the ambitions and aspirations of man. The toxic emissions from rash industrial and agricultural activities of an exploding human population are surpassing the carrying capacity of earth. The balance of earth is thus being upset by the extensive over-development, over-consumption, and over-population.

Now-a-days, man is becoming greedier with the process of reckless modernization. In the wake of modernization the finite resources of the earth were over-exploited by mankind which results in the destruction of ecosystem viz. air pollution, water pollution, soil erosion, deforestation, and loss of biodiversity, desertification, climate change, global warming, ozone layer destruction and several other negative changes in the ecosystem. It is evident that “the zeal for modernization has resulted in extensive and often disastrous environmental degradation. Neither the developed nor the developing countries have been able to escape the wages of greed. Not a

day passes without reports of fresh environmental disaster in some part of the world.”(Singh, 1999)

Modernization with industrial revolution and rapid progress in the fields of science and technology brought man a direct conflict with nature by increasing the ambitions and aspirations of man. Today toxic emissions from rash industrial and agricultural activities of an exploding human population are surpassing the carrying capacity of the earth. The balance of earth is thus being upset by the extensive over-development, over-consumption and over-population. Now-a-days man is becoming greedier with the process of reckless modernization. There is growing over consumption in the south and there is expanding of population in the north. Both north as well as south is posing threat to environment. “Rapid socio-economic development activities to meet the ever growing demands and satisfy the ‘Greed’ of consumerist society of north and to fulfill the ‘Needs’ of the growing millions of south, put tremendous pressure on the environment.”(Sinha, 1997) Thus “in this scenario of increasing demand for food and diminishing production or unavailability of food for human consumption the world may soon be inclining towards a condition of widespread hunger, famine or starvation, which may endanger global peace and cause irresponsible damage to the quality of life everywhere,” is great possibility.(Sinha, 1997)

The insatiable greed of man has taken him now to a situation from which he finds himself extremely difficult to extricate. Like a dragon the process of modernization extended its tentacles, now the entire humanity is under its grip. This is endangering not only life of mankind but also the entire life on environment. The desire for more and more material comforts is artificially generated in human mind, through a whole gamut of advertising business which produces an instant culture and anew value system. The underlying principle of today's modern society is mass production and mass-consumption. Industrialism and consumerism becomes the core ethics of modern society. The factors which have made significant contribution to raising the trend of modernization are rapidly increasing literacy level with the increasing exposure to electronic media. This resulted in the liberalization of economic policy which made easier for MNCs to enter and invest in developing countries.

The habitation of human being, their number, density, distribution and occupation etc. are influenced by the environmental forces. This human impact on environment depends not only on its number and density but also on its level of culture, technology and relative rate of progress. The human actions on environment like- irrigation of canals, reclamation of saline soils, creation of urban and industrial areas on virgin lands, deforestation, depletion of natural resources, retreat of wild life, creation of polluted environment, mining landscape are not necessarily beneficial to man. What is beneficial or useful to present generation may not be beneficial to the future generation. Man's dependence on environment is an unquestionable fact. With the progress in science and technology, to cater the needs of ever increasing population, man is overexploiting natural resources which in turn have a greater effect on the environment. (Nagchaudhury, 1987) Forests, wetlands, coral reefs, rivers, seas, perform many important services for earth's environment like they provide food, air, water; to every living organism without these the life on earth is impossible. But with the widespread processes of modernization humans have interfered in the functioning of ecosystem. Due to widespread pollution which is the direct outcome of modernization process, all of the important services of the ecosystem are jeopardized due to over exploitation by humanity beyond repair. United Nations Environment Programme in its famous publication "Only One Earth" describes this situation and argues "if present trend continues, one third of the world's productive land will be driven to extinction, the sharpest setback to life on earth since our remotest ancestors first appeared on the planet. And the world climate will almost certainly change, with enormous, but in-calculate consequences. In each case, human activities will be to blame." (Singh, 1998)

The contemporary crisis of environment is getting worsened with the progress of time, and one day it will pose challenge to the survival of human civilization as well as planet earth. The entire problems of environment are rooted in scientific and technological development which leads to large scale and speedy industrialization. With wide spread processes of modernization and industrialization the natural resources are depleting at a hasty rate then the nature's capacity to regenerate these resources. "It is already too late to save our planet from harm. Too much has happened already: farms have turned into deserts, forests have been clear-cut to wasteland, lakes have been poisoned, and the air is filled with harmful gases. It is even too late to save ourselves from the effects of other harmful processes, for they have already been set in motion and will inevitably take their course. The global temperature will rise. The ozone layer will continue to fray. Pollution will sicken or kill more and more living creatures. All these things have already gone so far that they must now inevitably get worse before they can get better. The only choice left to us is to decide how much worse we are willing to let things get." (Asimov, 1991)

In this situation of resentment and self annihilation by humanity itself the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi were becoming increasingly relevant and meaningful. The life, ideas and teachings of Mahatma Gandhi appears as the only alternative to save the entire humanity from the present environmental crisis. Mahatma Gandhi was the only one who quite early visualized this problem of environmental crisis quite early. In his 'Hind Swaraj' he cautioned to entire humanity against such a situation. In his 'Hind Swaraj' he criticizes the dehumanizing character of modern industrial civilization, and described it as 'satanic'. According to Gandhiji the main plank of modern civilization is the unsatiable and incessant pursuit of material pleasure and prosperity.

Gandhiji visualized modernization from a very different angle. He anticipates the dangers inherent with the blind pursuit of modernization. He saw the danger inherent in values and in an over-zealous adoption of modernization tendency. He examines modernization from the point of view of the ideals of what he calls truth, non-violence, and moral well being of man, harmony, love embodying itself in a life devoted to the service of society. Gandhiji bitterly attacked the western civilization which is based on industrialism and dehumanized machine culture. He warned in different platforms that the western civilization will destroy itself. According to Gandhiji the present environmental crisis is the result of too much trace on western industrial culture. He argued once that "the world influenced by the western culture was going in the wrong direction and like the proverbial moth, it would burn itself eventually in the flame

around which it is dancing carelessly.”(Rajeevan, 2009)

Gandhiji criticized modern industrial civilization because it enabled one country to exploit another country. According to Gandhiji “modern civilization takes note neither of morality nor of religion. Its votaries calmly state that their business is not to teach religion. Some even consider it to be a superstitious growth. Others put on the cloak of religion and prate about morality. But after 20 years experience, I have come to the conclusion that immorality is often taught in the name of morality.”

For Gandhiji, development that discount duty oriented moral values is no development. He laid stress on moral approach to civilization and development. He predicted the downfall of western civilization because it gives much stress to machines not man. Though Gandhiji was not in favor of machines he did not totally reject machines, he was in favor of humanization of machines. He argues that machines should not rule humans. He was against the highly sophisticated technology and mode of production because they

lead to conflict among nations and ultimately leads to war. He was against the present style of industrialization because it is purely based on greed of humans. This greed of humans has led to the depletion of natural resources and invited the so called ‘environmental crisis’.

Conclusion:

Gandhiji's views of development are purely based on ‘live in harmony with nature’. Therefore he criticized modernization with uncontrolled industrialization, sophisticated technology, and mass production. He was always in favor of a simple life style and simplicity. His idea of civilization is based on simple living, equal distribution, decentralization, non-possession etc. He visualized a society which he named as ‘Sarvodaya’ or the ideal society. The aim of this society is ‘welfare of all’. His concept of sarvodaya is based on the ideal of ‘all round material and spiritual development of each and every individual’. His concept of sarvodaya aims at building a healthy environment where continued and all sided development of humans can be achieved.

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