

CHAPTER-VI

CONCLUSION

6.1 CONCLUSION

An analysis of the philosophy of Gandhi though not directly, points the ways which can be asserted firmly that these are the certain paths by which environmental issues can be resolved. But still a little reflection on the subtlety of his thought can certainly claim to be the comprehensive approach in order to get rid of the environmental problems which are thought to be tagged with various other problems. Gandhi's philosophy in a coordinate manner includes so many aspects, such that the conservation, preservation and even sustainability is being looked upon from a holistic attitude towards nature and natural resources, as Gandhi prefers a non-violent and humanitarian approach to all that exists in the cosmos where the inherent philosophy is being guided by the belief that 'an inherent unity underlies amongst everything'. Thus the piecemeal fashion of looking at things and to find a particular way out is only a partial realization which Gandhi's philosophy does not beckon. Gandhi's various concepts and teachings which are rooted in almost all religious culture, in a moderate manner try to point out the basic misconceptions, drudgery and ills of modern civilization and attempt to address the roots of it. Besides his philosophy does not aim to meet the subsiding claims which we find today in enormous forms of environmental views such as wilderness ethics, eco-centrism, biocentrism, eco-feminism, anthropocentrism or say even animal rights, rather his philosophy is a

conglomeration of a series of well furnished ideas which aims to diminish all narrow barriers and attempts to frame a non-violent social order where everything exist for the sake of everything. Thus we can very well claim that his philosophy ensures a more vibrant approach towards nature and natural resources, living as well as non-living and more particularly where every one can protect, conserve and even sustain his culture, indigenouness and identity being a member of the whole ecosystems.

In the words of Nobel Prize Laureate Albert Schweitzer,

“The revival of civilization has nothing to do with movements which bear the character of experience of the crowd; these are never anything but reactions of external happenings. But civilization can only revive when there shall come into being in a number of individuals a new tone of mind independent of the one prevalent in the crowd and in opposition to it, a tone of mind which will gradually influence over the collective one, and in the end determine its character. It is only an ethical movement which can rescue us from the slough of barbarian, and the ethical comes into existence only in individuals.”¹

Thus an analysis of the above views as aptly put forward by Albert Schweitzer seems that a revalidation of the chaos of civilization and building of present chaotic mess starts from degradation of environment, pollution and resource depletion to human moral deterioration needs an inner recourse. The recourse here may be none other than Gandhi’s ideas and teachings which is mostly guided by the three broad principles of co-existence, sustainability and replenish ability. Moreover, Gandhi’s attitude to human race is inherently motivated by the

integrated approach and a new tone of mind, so that co-existence, replenish ability and sustainability together provides a path to overcome environmental problems.

6.1.i Co-existence:

It is a fact that Gandhi's philosophy in a broad perspective encourages the basic principle of co-existence which seems to support simple living, non-possession, non-greediness etc. as it asserts that an underlying unity exists amongst everything. This underlying unity is the crust matter of the universe. But it is very unfortunate for human race that we fail to understand this basic principle. If we penetrate deep into his philosophy of simple living, need elevation and non-possession etc. we find that all of them point to one single principle that is simplicity as unity. Again in contrast to simplicity, if we look to today's diversified problems whatever it is ranging from environmental collapse to human enslavement we find that it is perplexed by complexities and chaos. Thus, simplicity seems to guarantee a vision of underlying unity where every living as well as non-living has immense chance of replenish ability.

6.1.ii Replenish ability:

Again, it can be pointed out that Gandhi's philosophy in a broader perspective nurtures the principle of replenish ability i.e. the principle of non-violence, satyāgraha, sarvodaya, trusteeship etc. Thus, in order to live a life of simplicity it has to be guided by the principle of replenish ability as mentioned above. Further, it is not possible to lead a simple life without a better understanding and practice of the principle like non-violence, satyāgraha, savodaya and trusteeship etc. Thus, the

practice of the above principles will again lead to another principle i.e. the principle of sustainability.

6.1.iii Sustainability:

The concept of co-existence and replenish ability seems to ensure sustainability i.e. preservation, conservation etc. The various concepts of Gandhi such as charka or spinning wheel, small scale and cottage industries, decentralization of political as well as economic power, equal distribution of wealth and equal treatment etc. all point to one broader principle that is the principle of sustainability. It is a fact that we can't speak of sustainability unless and until our day to day life is guided by the two broader principles of co-existence and replenish ability which Gandhian philosophy seems to beckon. Gandhian philosophy can't be looked upon from sustainability apart from co-existence and replenish ability. Even Gandhi himself did not advocate of it. It can be pointed out here that as Timothy Doyle remarks with regard to sustainable development that,

“The sustainable development ideological package is currently being widely criticized for its detrimental effects on the economies and ecologies of the majority world in the interests of a global, largely minority-world elite. The environment, caste in this vein, is construed by some as a symbol of darkness, a form of ecological imperialism instituted by the minority world over the majority.”²

Thus it can be asserted that the sustainability that Gandhi advocated is firmly a step forward which is certainly different from piecemeal approach of sustainability as is conceived today.

Furthermore, the concept of non-violence, satyāgraha, sarvodaya and trusteeship etc. brings replenishment to the concept of simplicity i.e. non-possession and non-greediness etc. Gandhi did not speak of sustainability simply as an oral prescription. Gandhi's looking of sustainability is not a gradual approach as is thought today. Because, sustainability that we thought of or practice today is simply for sustaining resources that may either points to preservation, conservation and sustenance, which is certainly different from Gandhian perspective.

Besides, Gandhi did not perceive sustainability separate from the two principle mentioned i.e. co-existence and replenish ability. Because, something can't be sustained for a long time unless and until it is motivated by a sense of co-existence and replenish ability. Thus, the concept of sustainability will appear to be partial in its realization of the ideal of sustenance until and unless it is supported by the principle of co –existence and replenish ability.

Thus, the present environmental mess starting from pollution, environmental degradation to resource depletion can't be overcome unless sustainability is being practiced with the consideration of the other two broad ideals i.e. co-existence and replenish ability. It is possible to get rid of the environmental mess if we follow the Gandhian ideals in the spirit, as he advocated his diverse ideals though not advocated by him in the exact language of co-existence, replenish ability and sustainability. Hence, co-existence, for example, simplicity, non-greediness, non-possession etc. will be actually realized when we follow the replenish ability principle that is non-violence, satyāgraha, trusteeship, sarvodaya etc. to a maximum extent possible and this in turn will help us to live a sustainable life with the practical implementation of the concepts like charka or

spinning wheel, cottage and small scale industries, decentralization of political and economic power, equal distribution of wealth and equal treatment etc. will ensure self-rule and self-sufficiency, where machine and industry will not dehumanize man, where machine and industry will not pollute or degrade our environment. But rather a simplistic life style which in turn will help human race to lead a need based life being divorced from resource depletion, environmental degradation and pollution of any sort.

Again, there is another perspective to look into today's environmental problems and find solutions from Gandhian viewpoint. The uniqueness of Gandhi's thought to overcome environmental problems lies in his attitude of the inter mingling of means and ends. Though Gandhi believes that means justify ends, but if we reflect on the principle of co-existence, replenish ability and sustainability as enumerated above we find that if we adopt simplicity as an example of means it will certainly lead to ends such as non-violence, satyāgraha, trusteeship and sarvodaya etc. Further, if we adopt non-violence satyāgraha, trusteeship and sarvodaya etc. as means it will certainly lead to an end i.e. simplicity. Moreover, when charka or spinning wheel, cottage and small scale industries, decentralization of both economic and political power, equal distribution of wealth, equal treatment etc. are undertaken as means it will certainly lead to an simplistic way of life as ends, and it will in turn promote non-violence, satyāgraha, trusteeship and sarvodaya etc. This is the uniqueness that the means and ends togetherness can be realized in the same periphery of world order (i.e. rich and poor). And it is this fundamental approach which Gandhi believes that can bring a change in civilizational attitude. Thus, when this attitude is realized in

actual practice any problem whatsoever may it be social, economic, political and even environmental etc. can be overcome.

It can be picturesquely said that today's environmental problems is mostly because of the attitude of the human race hankering after ends, which in any way we want to realize and when we realize that there is a mistake we try to cover it up by sustainability principle, but perhaps Gandhi realizes the truth that sustainability can't be cultured alone which we see in today's environmental movements as well as environmental activism. Though there are so many environmental movements as well as govt. legislation both at national and international level still the situation is at brink and there is yet no hope that we can come out of the situation instead of many national and international conferences, seminars as well as many organizations working both at national and international level. Thus, the way Gandhi tried to show things are certainly different from today's conservative, preservative and sustainability approach. Gandhi believes that until there is a humanitarian approach, the civilization can't come out of the 'snake-hole'. The 'snake-hole' as coined by Gandhi and can be described as based on false faith that development is possible to an unlimited extent in a finite world. But, on the contrary, Gandhi realizes that this is the false notion of civilization and he in turn proposes for an unlimited development of moral recourse which will certainly make human being a more complete man, which will help man to rise above greediness and mould himself (man) accordingly, and live along with the basic needs of life. Today's environmental pollution, degradation of environment, resource depletion, cultural vagueness and loss of indigenous culture is more or less gifts of the greed oriented or consumeristic attitude of the human race.

Thus, it can be asserted that a rational reflection is very much in need which perhaps is the urge of the time that the humanity should take a turn around to come out of the brink situation that various types of pollution, environmental degradation and resource depletion has bring the civilization at the corridor of destruction. This corridor of destruction can perhaps be stopped or can even be resolved by an insight into our conventional morals which also Gandhi in his philosophy repeatedly asserts. These conventional morals may be brought into two heads, i.e. micro and macro level morals. The micro level morals may be termed as simplicity, non-possession, and non-greediness etc. which the individual have to observe, that even Gandhi has spoken of though not in the exact word of micro level morals, which is also the conventional morals. The macro level morals may be termed as non-violence, satyāgraha, trusteeship and sarvodaya etc. that might be followed by society and nation along with the individual which are also the conventional morals.

Karl-Otto Apel in his article, ‘A Planetary Macro-Ethics for Humankind’ appeals for a macro ethics as a stage qualitatively beyond the micro and meso ethics, ethics at the level of small groups and ethics at the national level respectively. Apel points out in his discussion the new macro level ethical issues like environmental hazards, developing countries/third world, the nature within human beings etc. He tried to frame the trend of the planetary macro ethics as follows:

“What we need today is indeed a universally valid ethics for the whole of humankind; but this does not mean that we need an ethics that would prescribe a uniform style of the good life for all individuals or for all different socio-

cultural forms of life. To the contrary; we can accept and even oblige ourselves to protect the pluralism of individual forms of life as long as it is guaranteed (warranted) that a universal valid ethics of equal rights and of equal co-responsibility for the solving of the common problems of humankind is respected in each single form of life”³

Finally, it can be concluded from the above and as pointed out by Karl-Otto Apel that macro ethical norm at national level along with micro moral norm at individual level can certainly enable human race to come out of the mess of environmental problems, which is also an inner voice of Gandhian philosophy. Besides, as has been pointed out in the foregoing paragraphs that the ideals of co-existence, replenish ability and sustainability which points to a simple life style that can surely ensures human race to solve environmental problems which Gandhian philosophy mostly beckons though not in the exact terms. Moreover, Gandhian ideals of simple and need based life, non-possession and non-greediness which are also conventional morals i.e. micro morals can find its fullest expression when conjoined with the ideals of non-violence, satyāgraha, trusteeship and sarvodaya etc. which are considered as macro ethics along with the implementation of charka or spinning wheel, small scale and cottage industries, equal distribution of wealth, decentralization of both political and economic power, equal treatment etc. when realizes in actual practice will certainly enable human race to overcome or solve many of its problems or issues of social, economic, political, cultural and more particularly environmental problems. Hence, to conclude with Barbara ward’s words, he observes:

“From the beginning of time people have heard the still small voice of obligation and brotherhood. When they

have listened society has worked. When they have refused to listen, society has broken.”⁴

References:

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3. Apel, Karl-Otto. (1991). *A Planetary Macro-Ethics for Humankind*. In: Eliot. Deutsch, ed. *Culture and Modernity*. Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press. pp 269-270.
4. Kumar, S.B. (2010). *Environmental Problems and Gandhian Solutions The Only Ray of Hope to The Present Ailing World*. New Delhi: Deep and Deep Publications Pvt. Ltd. p 92.