

ABSTRACT

**ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS AND
GANDHIAN SOLUTIONS: A STUDY**

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A. Statement of the problem:

The entire world as appears today is facing the problem of pollution and degradation of environment. The degradation of environment as well as pollution is the outcome of increased industrialization, urbanization, transportation and to some extent modern agricultural activities. Population explosion is also putting pressure on the earth's natural resources which is indirectly posing a threat on earth's natural environment. Besides, greedy and extreme consumerism of the affluent society also paves the way to pollution and degradation of environment. It can be mentioned here that the growth of technology at the same time has made our environment unhealthy. Air pollution, noise pollution, traffic congestion, contamination due to chemicals, nuclear radiation and various other sources of pollution are putting intense pressure on earth's natural environment.¹

The tremendous technological achievements of the past century have brought many benefits to our life on one hand but on the other hand it has given birth to many environmental problems in the world. Amongst these, inventions like automobile engine which produces chemical pollution degrades the atmosphere and causes cancer and is responsible for global warming, which simultaneously results in green house effect. The use of chlorofluro carbons (CFCS) in refrigerators and air conditioners rise into the stratosphere and deplete the thin ozone layer that protects us from harmful ultraviolet radiation. The results are an increased skin cancer. Nuclear power could

provide inexpensive energy to the world but instead it poses a threat of global holocaust. Nuclear waste piles up with no solution in sight. As our activities of modern life requires lots of energy and accordingly we burn fossil fuels like coal which is more dangerous than nuclear energy, causing more cancer, polluting the air with sulfur dioxide and producing acid rain that causes destruction of trees, pollution of rivers, lakes and other water reservoirs. The construction of roads, dams and cutting of forests imprudently for development purpose is also posing threat to our environment. Moreover, the cutting and burning of tropical rainforests ultimately results in global climate change and also creating the problem of wild-life destruction, soil-erosion etc.

Environmental pollution and resource depletion are the two remarkable aspects of world environmental problems which again are tagged with modern agricultural practices, large scale industrialization, urbanization, population and poverty.² Particularly this century witnessed maximum explosion of population and is expected that it will further increase to an unlimited extent in coming years. It is generally believed that poverty rears population. Both rural as well as urban areas in the world live millions of people who are below poverty line and are denied of basic necessities like food, cloth and shelter which is directly posing threat to environment. Massive urbanization is also a threat to our environment as millions of people in search of employment and better quality of life rushes to the cities. It may be noted here that according to an estimate about half of the world population now live in cities. Moreover, flourishing of industries indiscriminately, hybridization, spraying of pesticides, use of fertilizers for more production is also a major source of pollution and environmental degradation as the discharges of numerous industries and agricultural wastes containing pesticides and toxic acids ultimately fell into the rivers,

lakes, oceans and other water sources which not only pollutes water and destroys aquatic animals but also is dangerous to other living organisms. The UN Conference on Human Environment of 1972 which was held from 5th to 10th June at Stockholm mentions environment and the various issues of pollution, destruction of ecological balance and depletion of resources as matters of overwhelming concern of the world as a whole.³

B. Justification of the problem:

We, the human being, are primarily the creators of environmental degradation and pollution as we want more and more at the cost of nature. Today in the present environmental perspective ecological security appears more relevant than economic security. It seems that we are constantly plundering nature in the name of need and wants but what is most noteworthy is greed. Presently, the whole of humanity as well as civilization is at crossroads; because the present state of ecological degradation and pollution is the result of greed on the part of the affluent society, and careless application of technology.⁴

Mahatma Gandhi's 'Hind Swaraj', a monumental book wherein he warns human race about the ills of modern civilization, the achievements of science and technology, urbanization and industrialization as nine days wonder. And this understanding of civilization as a whole as nine days wonder can be mentioned as Gandhi's farsightedness and thus visualizing the multifarious problems like environmental problems though not accurately coining the term like carbon emission, ozone layer depletion, global climate change and various forms of pollution. Moreover, Gandhi foresaw that massive industrialization will pamper mass production and this again will lead to consumerism. Today consumerism of the

affluent society is one of the most vital enemies of environmental degradation and pollution.

Mahatma Gandhi did not articulately mention his views on environment and its ills separately and in a systemic manner. Still his view on this topic is sprinkled throughout his works and writings. The present study, however, is on some specific aspects of Gandhian philosophy. Many scholars worked on different aspects of Gandhian philosophy but no specific work has been done on this particular environmental aspect of Gandhian philosophy. The present Research Work is an attempt to explore the environmental aspects of Gandhian philosophy and to find out the possible solution in tune with Gandhian philosophy.

C. Objectives:

The present study aims to analyse the following objectives:-

- i) To identify and analyse environmental problems in the light of Gandhian philosophy.
- ii) To show that Gandhian philosophy of village self-rule and self-sufficiency as a tool to overcome the environmental problems.
- iii) To explore the elements of Gandhian philosophy and to show that these elements can be used as a tool for mitigating environmental problems.
- iv) To show that Gandhian philosophy of “simple living and high thinking” aims at minimization of wants or the philosophy of non-consumerism and can be used as a tool to solve environmental problems.

D. Methodology used:

The present study concerns with the theoretical as well as practical aspects of environmental problems. In the present study efforts are directed towards the analysis of different existing environmental problems that the whole world is confronting today and an attempt is also made to find out solutions in tune with Gandhian philosophy.. This study deals at length how the diversified human activity has resulted in the problem of environmental degradation and pollution today. The work is theoretical in nature and thus mostly based on observational method. Therefore, the methodology of the work is analytical and interpretative types and the data required for the study have been collected from both secondary and primary sources.

E. Organization of chapters:

The Research materials have been organized in the following manner:-

- i) Introduction
- ii) Environmental problems:
 - a) Local Problems
 - b) Regional Problems
 - c) Global Problems
- iii) Possible remedial steps suggested by Western thinkers and noted environmental activists
- iv) Environmental aspects of Gandhian philosophy
- v) Gandhian solution to the problems
- vi) Conclusion

F. Summary of chapters:

The first chapter i.e. the introductory chapter of the research study attempts to show that the environmental problems of today is the result of massive industrialization, urbanization, population explosion, modern agricultural practices and transportation etc. Besides, the chapter also remarks that the heinous development of science and technology has brought with it a series of advantages to our life but at the same time it has done irreparable loss to humanity. Today's environmental degradation and pollution of different types such as air pollution, water pollution, noise pollution, chemical pollution, desertification, ozone layer depletion, global warming and climate change etc. thus appears to be due to massive industrialization, urbanization, population explosion, modern agricultural practices and transportation etc. which seems to be breeds out of the development of science and technology and diversified human activities tagged with greed of humanity in general.

Thus, the chapter aims to show that the environmental degradation and pollution which we are confronting today is the result of neglecting one of the inherent philosophy of life i.e. simplicity on the part of the human beings which Gandhian philosophy mostly beckons. The chapter attempts to show that the multifarious problem particularly the environmental problem which is threatening human race that Gandhi foresaw much earlier and expresses his objection towards modern civilization which has given birth to many environmental problems though not in today's preferred coined terms like ozone layer depletion, global warming, climate change etc. Finally, the chapter proposes that Gandhian philosophy contains some elements by following which the environmental problems can be solved and thus the research study is framed to that direction.

The second chapter is mainly concerned with the different types of environmental problems that have made its appearance on the surface of the earth. The chapter shows that a number of problems which we termed as environmental problems is basically a series of problems that occur in nature either in the form of environmental degradation and pollution such as air pollution, water pollution, noise pollution, global warming and climate change, green house effect, ozone layer depletion, desert formation and desertification etc. are the result of the diversified activities of human being starting from industrialization, urbanization, modern agricultural practices, population explosion and transportation etc. Moreover, the chapter also claims that the present form of developmental activities, the use of technology, the greed oriented economics which mostly advocate the use of nature and natural resources imprudently also posing threat to our natural environmental.

As a matter of fact it has been asserted that it is because of the diversified environmental problems the human, animal including the whole ecosystem are now facing various types of threats of extinction and diseases. Besides this, the chapter also holds that the environmental problems which the human race is confronting today have been envisioned by Gandhi far before industrialization has really make its appearance in the whole world. Gandhi through his farsightedness and practical experience in England was able to realize that this industrial civilization is going to be curse for humanity. He was very much dissatisfied with the menace of machine, the soullessness of modern civilization and therefore he declares that, “This civilization is such that one has only to be patient and it will be self-destroyed.”⁵ Further, it has been seen that Gandhi has condemned industries and machine because it exploits human being as well as nature and its resources. Large-scale industrialization is the base of centralization of both economic and political power. Being frustrated with the evils of

machine Gandhi remarks that, "I cannot recall a single good point in connection with machinery. Books can be written to demonstrate its evils."⁶

Thus the chapter attempts to explore that it was Gandhi who realizes the evils of modern civilization far before its appearance on the surface of the earth. He realizes the basic principle of nature that it is a conglomeration of a series of laws which if violated will react adversely. That is why he led a simple life and which even reflected in his thought and deed. Moreover, it has also been seen that Gandhi was very much aware of the cleanliness which we found in his writings. He also gives lectures and demonstrations about the purity of air, water and food etc.

In the third chapter an attempt is made to explore and find out whether environmentalism, environmental thought or romanticism of nature or nature lovers have any basic difference in the discourse of environment. But it has been seen that all of the above form tries to locate their views to preservation, conservation and protection of nature and its resources. Again it has been seen that an environmentalist or environmental thinkers is one who tries to bring changes either by some policy formation in public sphere, or by bringing a change in the attitude/behavior of the individual.

Besides this, the chapter mainly elaborates the different thoughts and activities advanced by a few noted environmental thinkers as well as environmental activists. In a short span of discourse it is not possible to represent the views of each and every environmental thinkers and environmental activists and for that matter the views of following noted environmental thinkers and environmental activists has been considered: Aldo Leopold, Rachel Carson, Arne Naess, Vandana Shiva, E.F.Schumacher, Laster R. Brown, Chico Mendes, Wangari Maathai and Gaylord

Nelson. It has been observed in the chapter that almost all environmental thinkers as well as environmental activists treated the environmental problems either by symptoms or by piecemeal fragmentation through certain activities, laws and regulations. Besides this a little reflection even of the above mentioned environmental thinkers can be traced by their love, duty, respect towards nature and natural resources which they variously termed as conservation, preservation, deep ecology, eco-feminism, wilderness and sustainability etc. But almost all thinkers and activists as discussed above have looked upon the problem of environment in a piecemeal fashion, and it is here Gandhi differs.

The fourth chapter attempts to explore the environmental aspects of Gandhian philosophy. The environmental problems which have multifarious affect on the whole of ecosystems are very difficult to portray. It was Gandhi whose writings in the 'Hind Swaraj' against science, industry, machine and in totality even about civilization appears to be an envision of the today's environmental problems though he did not uses the exact phrases regarding different types of pollution and environmental degradation. Today we speak of global warming, green house effect, climate change and ozone layer depletion etc. and its lethal effect on the whole of ecosystem but Gandhi in his monumental book 'Hind Swaraj' warned humanity about the destructive approaches of modern civilization. His warning to humanity about the destructive approaches of modern civilization as a whole and teachings appears to have such a magnitude which humanity has perplexed as inconsistent to modern civilization. As eminent Gandhian scholar Amlan Dutta has pointed out, Gandhi's teaching cannot be uncritically and mechanically applied everywhere. One has to make the effort to interpret and reinterpret him in the context of time and space.⁷ Thus an inward search or reinterpretation of the ideas of Mahatma Gandhi such as charka or

spinning wheel, village self-rule and self-sufficiency (swarāj), economic and political decentralization of power, satyāgraha, sarvodaya, trusteeship, non-violence and above all the idea of simple living and high thinking as depicted by him seems to reflect that all of his ideas contains an environmental aspects.

The **fifth chapter** thus attempts to explore the inherent legacy of Gandhi's ideas which may be considered as the ultimate way to get rid of the numerous problems that the human race is confronting today and more particularly the environmental problems. Gandhi's concepts such as charka or spinning wheel and khadi, cottage and small scale industries, economic and political decentralization of power and wealth, swarāj etc. as system reformation are to most extent supplementary or even complementary to other various concepts such as satyāgraha, non-violence, sarvodaya and trusteeship as individual/social reformation which appears to have foundational bearing in the context of environmental crisis resolve. As S.B.Kumar observes that,

“The solution ultimately lies in what Gandhi had suggested in changing life-styles and wasteful expenditure, small scale industries, and a technology that assists and helps the individual and not overpowers him, and that teaches us to live in harmony with nature.”⁸

Finally, these ideals as discussed and as enunciated by Gandhi may be considered as the pillars of both individual as well as social reformation which ushers towards a more vibrant ecological world order. These pillars though appear to be utopian in Platonic sense, but if practiced with a view to bring reformation at both ends i.e. individual and social levels, it will certainly guide human race to solve environmental issues and problems to a great extent. It is simply because these pillars as Gandhi framed put much emphasis on an egalitarian line keeping in view the

interest of living as well as non-living, man as well as animal and above all nature. These pillars throw light on almost all aspects of individual and society which can be considered as necessary ingredients for environmental issue resolve. The various aspects which the pillars highlights can be summarized in accordance with the thoughts of Gandhi, so that the environmental issues can be best resolved and managed keeping in mind the needs of posterior generation.

Thus in the environmental perspective the teachings of Gandhi can be paraphrased in the following few lines which inherently provokes ecological sustainability. Firstly, Gandhi advocated science and technology in its lucid form in order that it may fit best to small scale and cottage industries instead of large scale industrialization which put much emphasis on mass production. But Gandhi emphasizes production by the masses so that the basic needs of everyone can be fulfilled easily. Secondly, the philosophy of Gandhi warns us repeatedly to put control on our greed, so, that the basic needs of everyone can be met and the resources available in the world can be used for betterment of all keeping in mind the limits of resources and nature. Thirdly, Gandhi put much stress on decentralization of wealth and power in both economic and political spheres in order that the resources to be utilized locally not for profit but to meet the basic needs. Gandhi disfavours centralization and concentration of wealth and power as it results in exploitation of both man and nature. Finally, the thought that percolates in his philosophy is mostly backed by equal distribution of wealth. He prefers equal treatment for the weakest section of the society and even for animals and plants. Hence, this approach of Gandhi fits best for environmental management as well as environmental issue resolve of the 21st century.

Towards the conclusion of the study...

The study's conclusion thus as follows:

- i) The solution of environmental problems lies in our way of approaching it. Thus, the first and foremost approach is that our lifestyle should be guided by the principle of simplicity, i.e. non-possession and non-greediness which is termed here as the principle of co-existence. This principle of co-existence should again conjoin with the principle of replenish ability i.e. non-violence, satyāgraha, trusteeship and sarvodaya etc. Thus the practice of simplicity will ensure a society based on non-violence, satyāgraha, trusteeship and sarvodaya etc. Again, the practice of non-violence, satyāgraha, trusteeship and sarvodaya etc. will ensure a life of simplicity. So, a reformation of both individual and society is possible. When the principle of co-existence and replenish ability are actually realized along with the principle of sustainability i.e. spinning wheel or charka, cottage and small scale industries, economic and political decentralization power, equal distribution of wealth and power and equal treatment etc. are actually realized in practice by individual, society and nation we can ensure a world free from environmental degradation and pollution.
- ii) The solution of environmental problems lies also in our practice of moral and ethical norms. The ideals as has been enunciated by Gandhi such as the concept of non-possession, non-greediness, non-violence, satyāgraha, trusteeship and sarvodaya etc. in the micro as well as in the macro level i.e. at the individual and the social level which are also considered as our conventional morals. It is true that a universal ethics is impossible, but as

Karl-Otto Apel in an article points out that we should frame a planetary macro ethics in the following lines:

“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”⁹

Hence, it can be concluded that from the above and as pointed out by Karl-Otto Apel that macro ethics at individual/social/national level along with micro moral norms 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. No, law can bring a transformation of values, just as no law can bring change in our degraded environment. A real change in our degraded environment is possible only by bringing a transformation of the values of life.

iii) Though Gandhi believes that means justify the ends. But it seems that his ideals and teachings contains the intermingling of means and ends. Means to be means should always be within one’s reach. Thus if we take simplicity as a reachable criteria as our means it will certainly lead to non-violence, satyāgraha, trusteeship and sarvodaya etc as ends. Again if we consider non-violence, satyāgraha, trusteeship and sarvodaya etc. as a reachable criteria as our means it will certainly lead to simplicity as an end. Thus, a world devoid of environmental degradation and pollution can be ensured with the means as

shown along with the concepts such as charka or spinning wheel, cottage and small scale industries, economic and political decentralization power, equal distribution of wealth and power and equal treatment etc.

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