

CHAPTER-IV

ENVIRONMENTAL ASPECTS OF GANDHIAN PHILOSOPHY

Mahatma Gandhi himself claims that he is not a system builder, and the fact appears to be true because his writings in a diverse manner provide enormous clues to meet up the challenges of the twenty first century in almost every respect and more particularly of the environmental problems. Gandhi's philosophy can never be practiced in a piecemeal approach because all his teachings are intertwined in such a fashion that they put greater emphasis on the greatest good of all contrary to the utilitarian concept of the greatest good of the greatest numbers.

It is very difficult to get a direct clue or even to derive any principle from Gandhi's philosophy which can solve environmental problems because Gandhi's philosophy conceivably does not have the terminology like pollution, environmental degradation, climate change and ozone layer depletion etc. But the whole philosophy of Gandhi is knotted in such a manner that the entire human race can save itself from the unwarranted crisis of environment.

The goal of the philosophy of Gandhi is to convert or to make a shift in paradigm for a harmonious and peaceful world. It is a fact that environmental concerns were minimal in Gandhi's time. It is also very difficult to place Gandhi as an early environmentalists or pioneer of environmental thought. But when one penetrates deep into his philosophy one can easily discern that Gandhi's thought has direct concern for environment. 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.¹

In this chapter the first and foremost attempt will be made in a brief manner to visualize one of the iconic problems of this century namely the environmental problems of the world. In this regard a glimpse of Gandhi's reservation for machines and science is worth mentioning.

Besides this, in the present chapter an attempt is made to show how the various 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 contains environmental aspects.

4.1 Environmental Problems an Overview:

Environmental problems appear to be mostly interconnected. Today the world is over populated, polluted, less secure, ecologically flimsy and exposed to disruption. Several problems have arisen on the surface of the earth including overgrowing population, resource depletion and environmental degradation. The dreadful condition of environment is so frightening that the existence of humanity is very much in danger now. Though miscellaneous preservation and protection measures for environmental defense have been introduced but still the situation is not under control. With the booming of industrialization the requirement of luxurious goods increased to a large extent. The severe contest amongst industrial powers have led to the over exploitation of natural resources such as minerals, forests, soil, flora and fauna. The destruction of forests, construction of nuclear

plants, big dams and roads have adverse effect on the ecological balance of the planet and at the same time it has resulted in soil erosion and drying up of rivers, lakes and other water resources. The major environmental problems threatening the earth are pollution of different types such as (air, water, soil, automobile & industrial and many more), over population, depletion of resources, global climate change, ozone layer depletion and dumping of municipal & nuclear wastes etc.

The industrial revolution and the advancement of human civilization following scientific inventions have no doubt made man the controller of his own destiny but this advancement, in disguise of civilization has brought with it terrifying and gruesome results. With the arrival of heavy industries in the west and subsequently the spread of heavy industries all over the world has necessitated the requirement of raw materials and the plundering of nature and natural resources to a large extent. This causes a devastating effect on the biosphere and its existence. The rise of capitalism along with the manifestation of machines in the whole world has worsened the situation. As capitalism puts much emphasis on capital formation which in turn makes man to think of himself (greediness) leaving aside the notion of self-denial and renunciation. By observing the present state of affairs of the world particularly the environmental problems, scientists have expressed their fear regarding the future of the earth.

4.2 Gandhi's views on machine and industry:

Environmental problems though largely surfaced during post Gandhian era but he foresaw it before it actually took place. The environmental problems as we are confronting today is mostly the result of machine and industry. Gandhi puts his objection to machine and industry because of farsightedness to a large extent. His

attitude towards machine and industry though at a first glance appears to be conservative, but it is actually holistic. Mahatma Gandhi expresses his objection against science and industry as he himself witnessed the precarious condition of labour, the profit motive of the capitalist class and mill owners, the military might and the dehumanization of man by machine and its lethal effect on the society. His objection to modern notion of science and industrial development appears more or less true as presently the whole world is witnessing the different types of environmental problems. Though, he has objection against industry but he was not totally against all industries, rather he was in favour of small scale and cottage industries for meeting the basic necessities of life. This is clear from his assertion in 'Hind Swaraj',

“How can I be when I know that even this body is a most delicate piece of machinery? The spinning wheel is a machine; a little toothpick is a machine. What I object is the craze for machinery, not machinery as such.”²

Gandhi believes that the growth of heavy industries is a menace to the basic moral ideals of the human society. Industrialism is based on the procurement of large quantity of raw materials and a huge market for the sale of finished products. For both activity resources and the markets of other neighbouring countries become necessary in order to make profit which will again posit to exploitation. Besides this, Gandhi's objection against industries is the fact that it poisons the very spirit of man. It makes life mechanical and artificial and seeks to reduce man to the status of a machine. It let loose a process of dehumanization. The result is that man loses the zest for life. He seeks an escape by indulging in purely sensuous pursuits

like drinking, gambling and the like. Consequently he loses his moral sense, and in fact, his soul itself.

4.3 Charka or Spinning wheel:

In Gandhi's framework of thought, charka or spinning wheel occupies a pivotal place. Charka or spinning wheel and small scale industries according to Gandhi will engage millions of people to earn their livelihood as well as to spend their leisure time when crop season is off. Mahatma Gandhi considered charka as a mark of prosperity and integrity of the toiling masses and not simply a tool of spinning cotton thread. He regarded charka or spinning wheel as the heart of village economy along with other small scale industries. Gandhi believes "The spinning wheel is a force in national regeneration. If we wish for real swarāj, we must achieve economic independence."³ For Gandhi the spinning wheel is the sign of political, economic, social and spiritual self-rule, if followed in real spirit by any nation. He asserts,

"If seven lakhs of villages of India were to be kept alive,
and if peace that is at the root of civilization is to be
achieved we have to make the spinning wheel the centre
of all handicrafts."⁴

As Gandhi believes that spinning wheel and khadi will make a reorientation of common people with one another, at the same time it will act as a life-giving force which in turn will make a self-reliant as well as nature friendly society to live in sustenance with nature. According to Gandhi, spinning wheel is the backbone of non-violent social order. The spinning wheel will generate maximum employment

and will bring economic self-sufficiency and more particularly it will help to live a simple life without bringing any harm to nature and natural environment.

At present, we observe that various kinds of clothes made artificially in large factories create side-effects both on human health as well as on our natural environment. For example the synthetic clothes produced in big cloth mills by using risky chemicals and hazardous process of dyeing which is dangerous for man and natural environment. But the spinning wheel if used in millions and trillions in numbers will perhaps not do much damage to our natural environment in contrast to big cloth mills. Because spinning wheel inherently asserts simplicity, non-violence, decentralization and an egalitarian approach of life which is non-exploitative of both man and nature. Here lies the importance of Gandhi's ideas of charka or spinning wheel and small scale industries with reference to nature and natural environment and can be considered as having an environmental aspect.

4.4 Village self-rule and self-sufficiency (swarāj):

“The word swarāj is a sacred word, a Vedic word, meaning self-rule and self-restraint, and not freedom from all restraint which ‘independence’ often means.”⁵

Swarāj is one of the most central idea in Gandhi's thought and philosophy. Gandhi's idea of swarāj appears to be multidimensional. His idea of swarāj absorbs almost all of his social, economic, political and even moral ideals. Once when he was asked about the real nature of swarāj he mentions that to me swarāj is not just like that,

“we want English rule without Englishman. You want the tiger's nature but not the tiger; that is to say, you would make India English. And when it becomes English, it will

be called not Hindustan but Englishstan. This is not the swarāj that I want.”⁶

Moreover, Mahatma Gandhi points out four main definitions of swarāj,

“as the rule over one’s self, in terms of symbol or image which he explains as the complete control by the people of the country’s imports and exports, of the army and its law courts, as the easy availability of food and clothing to everyone and in terms of conditions in which a young girl even at the dead of night will move about without any fear.”⁷

The village self-rule and self-sufficiency (swarāj) that Gandhi wanted was all-comprehensive and all encompassing. The notion that is premised in his concept of swarāj is the establishment of a village republic which is decentralized, self-sufficient, employment oriented, where there is guarantee of bread for all and social cooperation amongst individuals. It further guarantees equality, fraternity, justice and basic education for all. The notion of village self-rule that Gandhi envisaged was grounded on quality of life rather than modern urban-industrial notion of growth and development which has resulted in the degradation of nature and natural environment. By self-reliant villages Gandhi did not simply mean self-reliant villages of India to shed British rule from India and gain political ‘self-rule’ rather he believes that the real significance of the term was misinterpreted when uttered as mere national political goal. “He believed, therefore, that the swarajya which he envisaged for India was something which was relevant to other countries too.”⁸ Thus,

“It is on account of his overriding concern for the rights of all individuals and all communities that Gandhi refers to the Swarāj of his dream as Purna Swarāj. It is purna, or

complete, because it applies to all individuals irrespective of their race, religion or social status; it is as much the possession of the Muslim as the Hindus, the prince as the peasant.”⁹

Further Gandhi said, “you cannot build non-violence on a factory civilization, but it can be built on self-contained villages.”¹⁰ He thinks that non-violent living is best realized in the village life. Thus according to him,

“I hold that without Truth and Non-violence, there can be nothing but the destruction of humanity. We can realize Truth and Non-violence only in the simplicity of village life.... The essence of what I have said is that man should rest content with what are his real needs and become self-sufficient.”¹¹

This brief quotation has been analysed by R.C.Sharma in his book ‘Gandhian Environmentalism’ in the following manner, that it contains few primary elements of Gandhi’s ecological way of living. Firstly, the search for swarāj (self-rule) is to be found preferentially in the village life. Secondly, Swarāj (self-rule) as an economic, political and moral goal is articulated with reference to self-sufficiency. Finally, Swarāj (self-rule) is recognized as having both economic and spiritual meanings in Gandhi’s impression of the ‘simple life’ deep-seated in one’s basic needs.¹²

Thus the self-sufficient villages which Gandhi envisaged was happen to be eco-friendly villages, where the needs are met locally to maximum extent. After meeting the needs the rest produced is exported to the neighbouring villages or countries. Gandhi wanted that goods to be produced locally but it should not be sold out somewhere else for profit without meeting the needs of the locality. Gandhi’s peroration of the self-rule and self-sufficiency is that if everything can be

met locally than a harmonious and peaceful co-existence with nature and natural resources can be exhibited. Thus by self-rule and self-sufficiency Gandhi wanted that every individual or society or country must be self-sufficient according to his real needs. It is here self-rule and self-sufficiency play a vital role in the context of the individual. That the individual himself has his needs and at the same time he is aware that the unlimited wants of humans destroy nature and natural resources because of our greediness. We can thus make an assertion that self-rule and self-sufficiency can act as a means to mitigate environmental problems, and at the same time we can hold that self-rule and self-sufficiency contains an environmental aspect also.

4.5 Economic and political decentralization of power:

In order that the individual interest is to be safeguarded and kept on priority basis in the affairs of the state, the power and capital should not be concentrated or centralized in the hands of the state. Gandhi believes that exploitation of individual starts with the centralization or concentration of power and capital. Besides, centralization or concentration cannot be preserved or safeguarded, devoid of reinstate to force or violence. Centralization or concentration of power and capital in the hands of few always seems to have the tendency to misuse power for exploitation. It is because of these reasons along with his assurance that individual autonomy and enterprise alone can pave the way to progress, Gandhi suggests decentralization of power and capital as a compulsory economic and political measure.

Moreover, it appears that decentralization as a process of necessary economic and political measure has to be conceded to its utmost limit. Thus,

Gandhi suggests that a village democracy as the perfect form of decentralized social political system. Gandhi believes that the perfect form of village democracy can provide utmost chance to individual autonomy and growth in the panchayat system. Self-sufficient villages stand largely on agriculture and cottage industry. This process necessarily pre-supposes active participation or co-operation on the part of each person.

“In this structure composed of innumerable villages.....life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. But it will be a oceanic circle whose centre will be the individual always ready to perish for the village, the latter ready to perish for the circle of villages, till at last the whole becomes one life composed of individuals.....the outermost circumference will not wield power to crush the inner circle, but will give strength to all within and derive its own strength from it.”¹³

According to Gandhi, decentralized economy is the backbone of village republic. He believes that decentralized economy should be based on agriculture and village cottage industries. The system of economy that Gandhi advocated is mostly based on the development of Khadi and rural cottage industries to realize self-sustenance and self-sufficient villages. The 'Khadi economy' that Gandhi advocated put much emphasis on rural industrialization. Gandhi holds that small scale cottage and rural industries are most indispensable for the growth of villages and he put much stress on the concept of swadeshi, simplicity and manual-labour. The decentralized economic system that Gandhi advocates is primarily based on free-trade, free-business and free-competition. “Gandhi visioned that each village should be a complete independent village, but co-operating with neighbouring

villages, when required. He believed that such an economic system will be based on the concept of truth and non-violence.”¹⁴

Therefore, it seems that,

“Gandhian concept of village was not anchored on the modern (urban industrial) notion of growth but on a post modern perspective of quality of life, which today people realized only after having experienced the catastrophe wrought by modern urban, industrialism and environmental degradation. But Gandhi anticipated it quite in advance. Therefore, he ceaselessly insisted on a pattern of village life wherein the quality was the crux.”¹⁵

Thus it appears that through decentralization of social, political and economic system Gandhi tries to bring in forefront one of the important issue which till today has not been resolved that is exploitation which is rampant almost everywhere. It is because of much exploitation of nature and natural resources that earth today is facing many types of environmental degradation. Gandhi’s advocacy of decentralization contains environmental aspect in the sense that it encourages a system of society where production is need based and much importance is given on the basic need rather than on greed.

4.6 Satyāgraha:

Since Truth (satya) and non-violence (ahimsā) are intimately connected like the two sides of the same coin, so also ahimsā and satyāgraha are very closely interconnected. In Gandhi’s philosophy these three concepts i.e. truth, ahimsā and satyāgraha are very much interconnected and it is very difficult to treat one of them separately. If we try to describe any one of the three concepts it will necessarily

involve the other two. Satyāgraha is unswerving outcome of truth and non-violence. “In satyāgraha, there is always unflinching adherence to truth.”¹⁶

The exact meaning of satyāgraha is perseverance to truth, and the strength derivable from such perseverance, in order to alleviate malevolence. Thus, satyāgraha can be said to be the way to adherence to truth, and the behavior that based on truth is unfeasible devoid of love, and therefore, satyāgraha is the Truth-force or Love-force. “Gandhi thus concludes that satyāgraha is soul-force as opposed to armed weapon. Self-purification is another name for satyāgraha. satyāgraha is the way of non-violence.”¹⁷ It can also be stated as an attitude of mind. A person who acquires that state of mind

“will remain ever victorious , at all times and places under all conditions irrespective of whether it is a government or a people that he opposes, whether they be strangers , friends or relatives.”¹⁸

Satyagrha can also be termed as a brand of education in the exact sense of the term, and it can also be used as a significant tool for the education and awakening of the people. “In brief, the sign of satyāgraha consists in the quest for a principle of life.”¹⁹

Thus from the foregoing descriptions of the word satyāgraha, it is obvious that satyāgraha is the soul-force achievable by self-purification, and it can be said that satyāgraha is the moral and non-violent weapon which can be used in any circumstance to arrive at one’s desired goal. The word moral and non-violent entail loyalty to truth and love and the word self-purification denote the call for an appropriate education to make such an approach of mind. It is sometimes said that the union of non-violent resistance or satyāgraha can’t be practiced by all. But

Gandhi disagree here. He maintained, “My experience proves the contrary. Once its simple principles –adherence to truth and insistence upon it by self-suffering – are understood, anybody can practice it. It is as difficult or as easy as any other virtue.”²⁰

Satyāgraha is a technique to restore non-violence and political mistakes. Gandhi experimented it for the first time in South Africa and where he comes out successful. Later on it was also experimented in India in a greater scale through many phases in order to gain national independence. It is through non-violent revolution that India won her independence and it still stands incomparable in the history. Today even in the context of environmental movement Gandhi’s life and work has substantial influence in India and even many parts of the world. It can be mentioned here that the Chipko Andolon (Hug the tree movement) which began in April 1973 to save trees in the Indian Himalaya region against massive exploitation by industries is also prompted by the Gandhi’s concept of satyāgraha.

“In one of the first printed accounts of Chipko, a breathless journalist announced that Gandhi’s ghost had saved the Himalayan trees. Ever since Mahatma Gandhi has been, the usually acknowledged and occasionally unacknowledged patron saint of the Indian environmental movement. From Chipko to the ‘Save the Narmada Movement’ (Narmada Bachao Andolon) of the present time, environmental activists have relied heavily on Gandhian techniques of non-violent protest or Satyāgraha, and have drawn abundantly on Gandhi’s polemic against heavy industrialization. Again some of the movement’s better known figures, for example Chandi Prasad Bhatt and Sunderlal Bahuguna of Chipko or Baba Amte and

Medha Patkar of Narmada, have repeatedly underlined their own debt to Gandhi.”²¹

Thus, it can be concluded that though Mahatma Gandhi has initiated innumerable political and social reform movement in the context of freedom struggle for India. But amongst his various movements satyāgraha seems to have a direct bearing for environmental movement, because forest satyāgraha may be considered as having an environmental aspect.

4.7 Sarvodaya:

The term sarvodaya literally means ‘the betterment of all’. Generally sarvodaya is compared with utilitarianism. Utilitarianism is a hedonistic doctrine, it believes in the greatest good of the greatest number. On the other hand, sarvodaya is all-inclusive and more altruistic than utilitarianism. Sarvodaya is founded on ‘love’, it is based on the belief that a sarvodayi is always ready to self-sacrifice for the benefit of others. Its ultimate aim is the upliftment of all. This is feasible only if no person is ignored or disregarded, which in turn is achievable in the village panchayat system, where every person of the village can be paid attention through small village units.

Thus a sarvodaya society is all-comprehensive. In a sarvodaya social order,

“There will be freedom for all and utmost equality; there will be no class and castes, no exploitation nor injustice; and equal opportunity for each for fullest development. Man will be the centre of such a society, but self-interest will not be the basis of social organization. Life in such a society will be integrated and whole, so the work, art and play will form a unified pattern making possible the growth of an integrated human personality.”²²

It has been pointed out by Acharya Vinoba Bhave that a sarvodaya social order should consist of the following three basic characteristics and these are regarded by him as the essential conditions of a sarvodaya social order. The three fundamental principles or characteristics according to him must work simultaneously. The principles are:

- i. "No power should be dominant in society; there should only be a discipline of good thought;
- ii. All faculties of the individual to be dedicated to society which must provide the individual for growth and development; and
- iii. The moral, social and economic values of all the callings performed honestly should be the same."²³

Moreover, sarvodaya is founded on the faith that there is a necessary harmony following everything.

"I believe", says Gandhi, "in the absolute oneness of God and therefore, of humanity. What though we have many bodies? We have but one soul. The rays of the sun are many through refraction. But they have the same source. I cannot therefore, detach myself from the wickedest soul nor may I be denied identity with the most virtuous."²⁴

Thus it follows that there exists an essential unity amongst everything of this universe, the relationship of man with the animal territory and with the natural world is exaggerated by this faith. However, under the scheme of sarvodaya it can be asserted that any violence to animals as well as any insensible and conscious exploitation of nature cannot be allowed or endured. It can be referred here that one of the known figure of Chipko Movement for example Chandi Prasad Bhatt

uses the following words to protect the area of Uttarakhand from ecological exploitation.

“Our movement goes beyond the erosion of land, to the erosion of human values.....The centre of all of this is humankind. If we are not in a good relationship with the environment, the environment will be destroyed, and we will lose our ground. But if you halt the erosion of humankind, humankind will halt the erosion of the soil.”²⁵

This is the thought contained in the Chipko movement which is prompted and driven by Gandhi’s teaching of the concept of sarvodaya i.e (for the good of all or for the betterment of all). Thus the environmental movements which takes place in India and other parts of the world seems to be mostly guided by Gandhi’s various principles and ideas amongst them sarvodaya is one such principle. From this it can be finally assumed that Gandhi’s concept of Sarvodaya hold an environmental aspect also.

4.8 Trusteeship:

Gandhi’s concept of trusteeship is based on the attempt to abolish economic inequality. In order to abolish economic inequality, Gandhi has advocated several strategies and trusteeship is one of such strategies. Gandhi insisted that the poor should earn their livelihood by working on the village cottage and small scale industries, agriculture and other industries through manual labour without depending on charity. He believes that there should be full guarantee for employment of labour, and technology should not take the place of labour otherwise economic equality of the individual will be disrupted.

“ECONOMIC EQUALITY is the master key to non-violent independence. Working for economic equality means abolishing the central conflict between capital and labour. It means the leveling down of the few rich in whose hands is concentrated the bulk of the nation’s wealth on the one hand, and the leveling up of the semi-starved naked millions on the other.”²⁶

Thus, in order to put an end to economic inequality Gandhi introduced the concept of trusteeship of the rich. Gandhi’s concept of trusteeship is primarily a derivation from his three principal ideas such as non-violence, swaraj and equality which are very much closely connected. He believes that if any society really adheres to non-violence it will certainly accomplish equal distribution. As long as we are dedicated to non-violence, our goal of achieving equal distribution will be much easier. The actual economic implication of non-violence is an attempt to achieve an economy devoid of exploitation.

“Trusteeship implies self-reliance, self-discipline and a certain autonomy for the producing unit. It is both end and means. Trusteeship is not only an intermediary or transitional institution for something more fundamental and enduring; it is also a path, the only non-violent path through which economic transformation should take place.”²⁷

To fight inequality Gandhi proposed some principles of trusteeship. But it was M.I. Dantawala and a group consisting of some members who after a thorough going discussion with Gandhi has pointed out his views or policy to fight inequality. The draft so prepared by the group finally got approval of Gandhi but with some minor changes. The principles are:

- “i. Trusteeship provides a means of transforming the present capitalist order of society into an egalitarian one. It gives no quarter to capitalism but gives the present owning class a chance of reforming itself. It is based on the faith that human nature is never beyond redemption.
- ii. It does not recognize any rights of private ownership of property except in so far as it may be permitted by society for its own welfare.
- iii. It does not exclude legislative regulation of the ownership and use of wealth.
- iv. Thus under state regulated trusteeship an individual will not be free to hold or use wealth for selfish satisfaction or in disregard of the interests of the society.
- v. Just it is proposed to fix a descent minimum living wage, even so a limit should be fixed for maximum income that would be allowed to any person in society. The difference between such incomes should be reasonable and equitable and variable from time to time so much so that the tendency would be towards obliteration of the difference.
- vi. Under the Gandhian economic order, the character of production will be social necessity and not by personal whim or greed.”²⁸

The fundamental thought containing the teaching of trusteeship is very simple. The individual who are wealthy are left in control of their wealth, but they will use only what is reasonable to meet their present needs and after fulfilling their needs they should use their remaining wealth for the society and act as trustees. Gandhi was very much aware of class conflict, and he wanted to eradicate

class conflict rather than class divisions. Therefore, trusteeship aims at eradicate class difference and attempts to establish class collaboration and a pleasant relations amongst conflicting classes.

“Gandhi’s idea of trusteeship is an innovative way of reconciling the psychological need for incentive or reward for skills and entrepreneurship on the one hand and the social need to take care of the deprived on the other. The enterprising and the better-skilled people need an incentive or reward for their work, which the society values higher, in the form of higher income and wealth. It gives them some sense of achievement and pride, but this does not mean that they need to keep all of their earnings to themselves. Gandhi felt that they should consider themselves as trustees for the income and wealth which is a surplus after meeting their basic needs, minimum comforts to maintain their skills, and reinvestment requirements, and spend it on the less fortunate in society who need these resources to end their deprivation. They can spend their surplus wealth directly for such purposes or give it to charitable trusts who can utilize this surplus wealth to meet the needs of the poor.”²⁹

Thus, though trusteeship seems to be a lofty ideal at the first appearance, but in long run it will play a positive role in bringing equality in society to a large extent. It is not production but distribution which seems to be an evil rampant in all society, because the rich are consuming much and are busy in accumulating wealth. And as a result the rich are growing rich and poor become poorer day by day. Gandhi through his ideal of trusteeship tried to put an end to exploitation based on greed, rather than need. Finally trusteeship appears to play an important role in environmental aspect if everybody consume according to his need. Therefore, Gandhi advocates a need based thought where exploitation of nature

and natural resources is least. As Ramchandra Guha in an article entitled ‘Mahatma Gandhi and the Environmental Movement’ maintained that “one of his best known aphorisms, that the ‘world has enough for everybody’s need but not enough for everybody’s greed, is, in effect, an exquisitely phrased one line environmental ethic.”³⁰ Thus the environmental aspect of Gandhi’s concept of Trusteeship is tremendous if implemented in its original spirit.

4.9 Non-violence:

A description of Gandhi’s concept of Truth inevitably makes us to reflect on his theory of non-violence. Gandhi declares,

“I have nothing to teach the world. Truth and Non-violence are as old as the hills. All I have done is to try experiments in both on as vast a scales as I could. In doing so I have sometimes erred and learnt by my errors. Life and its problems have thus become to me so many experiments in the practice of truth and non-violence. . . . In fact it was in the course of my pursuit of truth that I discovered non-violence.”³¹

According to him,

“Ahimsā and truth are so intertwined that it is practically impossible to disentangle and separate them. They are like the two sides of the same coin, or rather a smooth unstamped metallic disc. Who can say, which is the obverse, and which the reverse? Ahimsā is the means; Truth is the end. Means to be means must always be within our reach, and so Ahimsā is our supreme duty. If we take care of the means, we are bound to reach the end sooner or later.”³²

Gandhi's understanding of non-violence is certainly similar to the traditional and customary sense. Though his understanding of the term ahimsā is similar to its usual meaning, but it certainly have some distinctive features of its own. Non-violence as coined by Gandhi has both positive as well as a negative aspect. For him the positive aspect of its implication of non-violence is more essential since the positive aspect grasps the negative aspect and embodies its fundamental nature.

The literal sense of non-violence is non-killing. Its importance is frequently made extensive by exemplifying that non-killing is simply an instance of non-violence. Nonviolence is sometimes also considered as non-injury. Thus in any situation non-violence is also considered as the reverse of violence. Gandhi admits it and attaches a lot to its content. He also believes that violence means giving pain and killing life of anything out of resentment, or from an egotistic motive, or out of the intent of causing injury to something. To keep aloof from doing any such act is ahimsā or non-violence. Moreover, Gandhi asserts that killing or causing any damages to life is considered as an act of violence simply under certain circumstances. The circumstances are such as resentment, pleasure, disgust, self-interested consideration, dreadful intent and like supplementary concern. Therefore, non-killing can be termed as the negative meaning of Ahimsā, but here it can assumed that a non-violent action is not accompanied with disgust, resentment, malevolence and the like.

It seems that for Gandhi the positive side of non-violence is much comprehensive than the negative side. Non-violence does not simply mean abstaining from bringing any harm or injury to living beings, but non-violence

inculcates a positive approach for both non-living and living beings that a person should nurture.

“In fact, in its positive aspect Ahimsā is nothing but Love. Love is a kind of feeling of oneness. In an act of love one identifies himself with the object of his love, and this cannot be possible unless there is an effort to free mind from every such disposition that prevents the spontaneous out flow of Love. Therefore, Ahimsā demands a sincere effort to free mind from feelings like anger, malice, hatred, revenge, jealousy etc., because these creates obstacles in the way of Love. Love, according to Gandhi, energy that cleanses one’s inner life and uplifts him, and as such, love comprehends such noble feelings as benevolence, compassion, forgiveness, tolerance, generosity, kindness, sympathy etc.”³³

Again, Gandhi’s concept of non-violence does not teach us inaction or non-action. Non-violence is also considered as the gospel to act in any situation. It does not teach us inactivity or passivity. Non-violence is an active dynamic process.

“It is an active fight against all wickedness, or putting one’s soul against the will of the tyrant to win over him by love. Non-violence in its positive sense implies sacrificing one’s own life for the sake of truth. Thus, the philosophy of non-violence is aimed at reconstructing, remoulding and reshaping human nature.”³⁴

Thus it can be affirmed that non-violence can even act as means to bring equal treatment (man as well as other living creatures) in the society. To do that one must follow the ideal of non-violence and should bring necessary changes in his personal life. The changes should start in him with the voluntary reduction of wants to a minimum, keeping in mind the poverty of others. He should earn his

livelihood by honest means. The desire for conjecture would be abandoned. His habit and attitude should be in consonance with new mode of life. He should live a life of self-restraint in all spheres. This self-restraint attitude makes an individual to become non-violent and treat other living and non-living at per equal with him. Gandhi says,

“I hold that non-violence is not merely a personal virtue to be cultivated like other virtues. Surely society is largely regulated to the expression of non-violence in its mutual dealings. What I ask for an extension of it on a larger, national and international scale.”³⁵

Thus, his theory of non-violence on the backdrop of his thought play an important role in transforming the individual and it can also be practiced universally so that the human race can comes out of the ecologically flimsy state of the world. Here one can surely assert that non-violence as a concept possesses an environmental aspect also.

It is true that Mahatma Gandhi did not frame any methodical environmental ethics or philosophy. Still his concept of non-violence has inspired many non-violent freedom movements and civil rights movements. Besides, one thing certainly goes to the credit of Mahatma Gandhi in recent times that he contributed considerable influence on the modern environmental thought and movement in many parts of the world.

“It may be mentioned particularly that the movements led by Sundarlal Bahuguna and Chandi Prasad Bhatt in the Himalayas and the ASTRA programme led by A.K.N.Reedy in India, and the movement led by Chico Mendes in Brazil. The environmental movement in

America, though directly prompted by Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), is also considerably influenced by Gandhian ideas."³⁶

4.10 Simple living and high thinking:

The cultural heritage of India since time immemorial is the creation of pleasant ambience by man with nature and natural phenomenon without causing any harm and damage to it. As Mahatma Gandhi pointed out that, "Our civilization, our culture, our swaraj depend not upon multiplying our wants---self-indulgence, but upon restricting our wants---self-denial."³⁷ The tradition of Indian culture reflects how our forefathers have spent their life in consonance with nature being grounded on the original teachings of the land. Gandhi was also influenced by the original teachings of almost all major religions of the world, and he practiced old philosophies adhering to certain fundamental principles and values. These teachings seem to percolate his thought and activities in almost every respect. As dissatisfied with the present state of machines and its outcome, Gandhi's whole philosophy is of an all encompassing stature where much stress is given on the all round development of man's personality such as moral as well as spiritual along with basic necessities to lead a simple life. Therefore, the ideal of plain living and high thinking in which Gandhi believes seems to be a path to pursue for the greater interests of mankind to survive on the surface of the earth.

Gandhi's attack on modern civilization and machinery mostly plead for simplicity of life, because in his formative days in England, South Africa as well as in his own country he observes the precarious condition of human being as a whole. He found that modern western civilization put much emphasis on production and capital formation. Mahatma Gandhi was not against any economic

framework; rather he wanted to frame an economic system of permanence for the betterment of all without neglecting the moral aspects. He believes that economics and ethics must go together. Today human being is engage with growth and development excluding the other aspect. But

“Gandhi conceded that the need for economic betterment even at the personal level, particularly for those left behind or deprived, but he stressed that it should be forgotten that the basic purpose of human life is self-development—morally and spiritually. This required according to him, an outlook which eschew a single minded pursuit of economic betterment in isolation, to the exclusion of other aspects of development of human personality. It also required recognition that individual development can take place only in a harmonious relationship with others in a spirit of mutual concern and regard.”³⁸

Gandhi’s own life is an example of simplicity. He himself lives a life of self-restraint and self-control. That is why he insisted that, “Everyone must have a balanced diet, a decent house to live in, facilities for the education of one’s children and adequate medical relief.”³⁹ This assertion of him seems that how much he was concerned with simplicity of life. He believes that a person must not be slave to his needs because this put hindrance to development of personality. As once Gandhi said, “The secret of life lies in renunciation. Renunciation is life. Indulgence spells death.”⁴⁰

The simplicity of life that is projected in Gandhi’s framework of thought is all-inclusive. If one penetrates deep into his thought one might come out with the premise that the life which an individual should lead must be a life of contentment

which he tried to formulate for the human race as a whole. Again he thinks that a man should lead a life of dignity and try for all round development without neglecting even the sentient creatures. Thus in order to live a dignified and harmonious life one must put a restraint to his unlimited wants. As Gandhi says,

“A certain degree of physical harmony and comfort is necessary, but above a certain level, it becomes a hindrance instead of help. Therefore, the ideal of creating an unlimited number of wants and satisfying them seems to be delusion and snare.... Man falls from the pursuit of the ideal of plain living and high thinking the moment he wants to multiply his daily wants. Man’s happiness really lies in contentment.... When anything assumes the strength of a creed, it becomes self-sustained and derives the needed support from within.”⁴¹

Thus the philosophy of high thinking which Gandhi advocates seems to rely on his philosophy of simple life. Gandhi believes that a harmonious and peaceful society can only be established in the simplicity of life. It can be said that all the problems of the world mostly starts with unlimited wants. Gandhi realizes this truth and he in his own way try to put a remedy to it. But it is we, failed to realize the depth of his thought. That is why, in the whole world now a day we observe a state of crisis.

“This is reflected in the ecological crisis, the ramifications of which are becoming clearer. Natural resources are being depleted at a faster rate. An economy based on the foundation of endless wants would therefore, not last long. It is in this context, that Gandhian doctrine of want limitation (which should be better understood as want regulation or moderation) becomes extremely significant for the survival of mankind.”⁴²

Finally, the philosophy of simple living and high thinking directly has nothing to do with the ecological crisis. But in the ultimate way out it does everything. It is this unlimited wants which has makes it seat in every mind. But somehow we have to come out from the chain of material and luxurious attachment. Here lies the importance of simple life which could work as a tool for mitigating environmental problems.

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