

“Achievement of Sustainable Development through Environmental Protection- A Gandhian Perspective”

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Abstract

The concept of ‘Development’ is a complex and multidimensional in its nature. In fact, it is a broad concept that refers to the process of growth, progress or advancement in various areas, such as social, economic, cultural, and environmental. Development can also refer to the process of improving the quality of life of the individuals and communities, enhancing their capabilities and opportunities and reducing poverty and inequality. A Sustainable Development means a national use of our dwindling natural resources to improve the quality of life. The natural resources should be protected and conserved for the benefit of both present and future generations. The concept of environment means that it is the sum of all social, biological and physical or chemical factors which compose the surroundings of man. .Environmental protection is the practice of protecting the natural environment by individuals, groups and various governments of the world. Gandhiji showed the path of sustainable development which means environmental harmony, economic efficiency, resource conservation, local self-reliance and peace. This study is highly inevitable for the present world because environmental degradation today is the result of growing population, deforestation, global warming, climate changes, fresh water crisis and so on. The study examines how Gandhian model of sustainable development relates to the environmental protection. This study is based on the secondary data which has been collected from the research articles, journals, periodicals and reference books.

Key Words:- Sustainable Development, Environmental Protection, Gandhian Perspective, climate changes

Introduction,

The earth is about 4,500 million years old but man appeared only about 1 million years ago. Ever since his appearance, man has been changing his natural habitat without bothering about its consequence. The result was seemingly an all-round development of which scientific and technological development formed a substantial part. All such developments, however, present some peculiar problems hindering the smooth pace of development. Development is a continuing process and it takes place with the change of time and space. But, sadly, the present model of development in the whole world has demonstrated a deterioration in the environmental conditions.

Regarding development, its impact and consequences, Ashis Nandy, asserted that “ like war, development hegemony in the minds of men. Once, it establishes itself, like war again, it becomes nearly impossible to exercise it. It becomes a form of nationality and eliminates other ideas of social change. The economic and industrial ‘development’ in the contemporary world has become a serious threat to environment and ecology. It has caused huge climate changes hotter summers, falling water tables, continuing deforestation and rising food prices. Environmental degradation today is the result of growing population, deforestation, global warming, climate change, fresh water crisis, noise pollution and so on. Hence many thinkers who are greatly concerned with the use or misuse of nature and environment for economic growth and industrial development.

Among them Gandhiji stood first for his great principles such as environmental harmony, economic efficiency, resource conservation, local self-reliance, gender equality, equity with social justice, cultural relevance, peace and disarmament. He was not against industry but against that which curbs the growth and development of the villages.

Objectives of the Study,

- To study the real notion of the Gandhian model of sustainable development,
- To examine the suitability of the Gandhian model of development to the present situation of the world.

Gandhian model of Sustainable development,

Sustainable Development is the organizing principle for meeting human development goals while simultaneously sustaining the ability of natural systems to provide the natural resources and ecosystem services upon which the economy and society depend. Gandhi’s writings on sustainability are rich and extremely perceptive. The concepts like ‘Deep Ecology’ and ‘Biodiversity Conservation’ have become catchwords for environmentalists and green warriors all over the world. In Hind Swaraj

1909, Gandhiji asserted that “Sustainable development is an ideology, drawn at the global level, showing human beings are interrelated with the ecosphere. It is a movement as it suggests a way of life. It involves the active participation of all the members of society. Self-help, Self-reliance, decentralization of industries and labour-intensive technology, these are the qualitative goals of satisfying meaningful life.” In 1928, Gandhiji wrote “ God forbid that India should even take to industrialization after the manner of the west. If the entire nation of 300 million took to similar economic exploitation, it would strip the world bare like locusts.” This statement appears contemporary for a world struggling to survive against the unprecedented global warming and climate change.

When we dwell upon Gandhiji’s notions of sustainable development, It is important to take stock of his stance vis-à-vis industrialisation and industrial society. It would be untrue to suggest that Gandhiji was against machines and technology as such, He was not against industry but against that curbs the growth and development of the villages.

Sustainable Development through Environmental protection,

Gandhiji considered as the first world environmentalist. All the international conferences such as the Stockholm Conference of 1972 or the Rio Earth Summit of 1992 were convened much later than the concerns raised by Gandhiji about the environment and its effects. Even in India the major movements to protect environment such as the Chipko movement and the Narmada Bachao Andolan derived inspiration from Gandhiji. He had cautioned the world much before any modern-day environmentalist about the problems of large-scale industrialization, which we are confronting today. Gandhiji warned of the dangers the world is facing today in the form of environmental destruction and the threat to the planet much before hundred years.

Gandhiji emphasized on production by masses instead of mass production. This will result in the development of an economic system that can minimize environmental degradation and achieve sustainable development. Quality and purity of life is highly essential, regarding urbanization Gandhiji expressed his views as follows “ It is a process of double drain from the villages. Urbanization in India is a slow but sure death for her villages and villagers. It can never support 90 per cent of India’s population, which is living in her 7,00,000 villages”.

Gandhiji was acutely aware of environmental pollution and of its consequences to human health. He was especially concerned about the appalling working conditions in industry, with workers forced to inhale contaminated, toxic air. He expressed in 1906 in Indian Opinion that “ Nowadays, there is an increasing appreciation among enlightened men of the need for open air”. Gandhiji always emphasized the need of conservation of resources. He said “ I need no inspiration other than Nature’s. She has never failed me as yet. She mystifies me, bewilders me, sends me to ecstasies.” Gandhiji had

emphasized the importance of natural resources and its conservation. This has a direct bearing on the man-and-environment relationship.

Gandhiji was influenced by Jainism, which looks at nature as a living entity and exhorts human beings to continually purify them-selves by respecting diverse life forms. His concept of Non-Violence encompassed all loving beings and embodied the eternal values of life in his thought and actions. The English historian Edward Thomson once remarked to Gandhiji that wildlife was rapidly declining in India, to which Gandhiji replied with sarcasm, “Wildlife is decreasing in the jungles, but increasing in the towns”.

Gandhian concepts of Truth, Non-violence, Sarvodaya, health, internationalism are the guided principles to achieve sustainable development through environmental protection. Today most of the nations though they are speaking about the world peace but practically they are in favour of the nuclear and biological weapons. But Gandhiji always emphasized the use of Non-Violence. This Truth and Non-Violence are the most important gifts given by Mahatma Gandhiji to the world.

Protection of environment through moral education,

Ecology is becoming a more and more important subject today, because it scientifically studies the relation of nature and living organisms with each other as well as with their surroundings. Compared with the past it is becoming a subject much referred to due to the destruction of the natural resource base through deforestation, destroying fauna and flora, disturbing the natural environment for various development activities, Air pollution has an adverse effect on the ozone layer.

Gandhiji advocated the ‘Sarvodaya model of Moral education for environmental protection’. This model is based on traditional Asian cultural values and differs from isolated, unilineal, material-oriented development models. It is unique, since it is developed through people- centred activities and for people- centred activities. Thus, this model is directly associated with both an individual morality and a social morality within the central value system of society. The Sarvodaya moral education programme has five different steps. 1) Pre-School group, in this group, children have opportunities to recognise and perceive the relationship among them and between them and the environment and culture. 2) Children’s group, Members of these groups are schooling children receiving formal education. They initiate and engage in tree planting, maintaining small home gardens, soil conservations, prevention of water pollution, repair of small irrigation systems and group savings. 3) Youth Group, this group is relatively mature, knowledgeable and responsible. It may be more active in environmental protection. Some of their activities may include collecting planting materials, tree planting, participatory environmental protection than previously mentioned groups. 4) Mothers’ Group, At the village level this is dynamic and the most powerful of all Sarvodaya groups. They are trained in child care, tree planting, moral and spiritual development, family

nutrition, home economics, home crafts, sustainable farming practices, post-harvest technology of food commodities and natural resource management. The last group is 5) Farmers' Group, the elders of the village are in these group. They organise all Sarvodaya activities in the village and are active members of the Shraavana society. They enhance cooperation, unity, freedom and are interested in the prosperity and socio-cultural identity of the village. In this way Gandhiji strongly believed that we can protect the environment through moral education,

Relevance of Gandhian model of development to the present world order,

The UN Millennium Development Goals indicates eight development goals. If we achieve these goals, Gandhiji's perspective of development is highly significant. His concerns embraced the whole of human race and not just India. The moral issues he raised are still relevant and the questions he posed for social, economic and political justice still remain of crucial importance. Gandhiji presents the humane face of development. The basic objectives of the Gandhian scheme of holistic development are 1) human development for capability expansion, 2) development in a balanced way through manual and intellectual labour 3) development with social justice, rights and freedom, 4) attainment of self-sufficiency and self-reliance through rural development, 5) reduction in poverty through the generation of additional income and employment,

Gandhiji rightly observed that "nature provides just enough, not more for our daily needs, hence he advocates judicious use of natural resources. Gandhiji draws our attention to the need to protect the environment and to guard against the abuse of natural resources. Our mindless destruction of natural wealth is alarming. Gandhiji shows us that making opportunities available for all members in the society for their full development and having full civic engagement of the citizens.

Gandhiji said "there is enough for every one's need but not enough for every one's greed. This is the central dilemma today. With finite resources we cannot sustain our present lifestyles and also have social equality." Here lies the importance of moral-ethical use of the earth's resources. Gandhiji said that economics is untrue which does not take care of moral values. Today there is a significant poverty in Asian and sub-Saharan and Latin American regions. To overcome this chronic poverty, we must adopt the Gandhian bottom-up approach of development.

What we really need is a creative synthesis of Gandhiji's and Nehru's model of development. Which means the vast population base comprising eco-logical victims must be given greater access to resources. Yet we cannot ignore Nehru's top-down model either.

During his visit to India in 1959, Martin Luther King was asked a question at a press conference, "Where is Gandhi today? We see him nowhere." His reply was "Gandhi is inevitable. If humanity

wants to progress, Gandhi is a must. We may ignore Gandhi at our own risk.” This insight is of crucial importance to all of us in our times.

Conclusion,

Gandhiji was one of the most powerful visionaries who strongly advocated the need of environmental protection for the future of the world. The nations and the people should ensure the proper utilisation and conservation of the resources. This would imply rational use of resources and their preservation from reckless exploitation and destruction. Gandhiji always advocated effective control and management of resources in such a way that they will be useful to man for longer time. Vivek Pinto rightly pointed out that “ If it would be possible to reconstruct a harmonious, poverty-free, non-violent and self-reliant society” on the basis of ethical principles of Mahatma Gandhiji. The best part of Gandhiji’s ideas was that its up to each and every individual to simplify his or her life to share his or her resources and to care his and her surroundings.

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