

Environment and Ethics – Emerging Life Styles

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The month of October takes all of us to the Gandhi Jayanthi and the life of the great soul, the impact he made on the Indian and world scene. Gandhiji's actions were very practical inspiring multitudes of people as in the case of Dandi March. His pronouncements on many issues were prophetic. His much quoted line is "Earth has everything for Man's need but not for his greed". Man's greed has now brought us to the spectre of Global Warming cautioning everyone to conserve the natural resources for our own welfare. Waste also contributes to Global Warming. The following illustrations are on the wastage of food.

As per data published in a popular book WASTE uncovering the global scandal of food waste by Tristram Stuart) – published by Penguin books :-

- It is reported that people belonging to the affluent classes all over the world, buy food products more than required. In UK upto 20 million tones of food waste is created each year. In US, around 50 percent of all food is wasted.
- Segregation of low grade food grain at the Farm levels, undersize fruits and vegetables and wilted leafy vegetable rejected by supermarkets and retailers cause 25 – 50% loss to the growers/farmers.

- In the course of their shelf life at retail counters, fruits and vegetables ripening beyond consumable standards, are thrown into dust bin as wet waste – which ultimately end up in landfills.
- Therefore, they waste as much as 40 to 50 per cent from plough to the plate.
- In the introduction to this book, author Tristram says "India alone wastes more than Rs. 580 bn (\$. 14 bn.) of agricultural produce every year largely because the infrastructure to bring harvests to market before they are spoiled, is lacking."

Now on the preferences of the food habits of the rich and their effect on Bio Diversity.

Areas of dense Amazon forests in South America were cleared to make way for Soya Bean cultivation for cattle feed for the production of high quality beef for the western countries. Deep Sea trawlers scrape the bottom of sea beds to catch the marine species of their choice leaving the rest dead and thrown back into the sea. Shark fin soup is a delicacy and sharks are caught, fins removed and the rest goes as waste! Whale meat is a specialty of Japanese, though whales are classified as endangered. But spooning of whales takes place clandestinely. French have a fancy for

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goose liver and the birds are caged and fed till they become fat and the liver extracted for the palates of the connoisseurs! Other portions of the slaughtered bird are discarded. In our own country our National animal Tigers are poached as their bones, paws, skin, teeth, etc are priced very much in China for making medicines and fetch very high prices. Horns of Rhinos are sought after as they are reported to be aphrodisiac and bereft of horns the magnificent beast comes to a deadly end. Such are the vagaries of human beings in pursuing their whims and fancies!

Panchayat Raj and Five Year Plans

Gandhiji said “You must realize that it is not the cities that make India but the villages and that you cannot reconstruct them unless you revive the villagers’ life with its handicrafts. The governance of the villages will be conducted by the Panchayat. They will have the authority and the jurisdiction required. The greater the power of the Panchayat, the better for the people”. But after six decades of independence, villages remain extremely poor and bereft of productive work they migrate to cities. Cities are overcrowded and they become unmanageable because of huge influx lacking in infrastructure and basic needs of water, sanitation, work and electricity. It is reported that slum dwellers in cities and towns have reached a population of 93 million.

When the country became independent and Pandit Nehru, an ardent follower of Gandhiji, took the reins of Government, he had other compulsions like resettling the refugees, food security, improving the irrigation and agricultural production, etc. Though now Nehru bashing is a common past time among the economists, he had a vision and took risk in implementing them. Thus the First Five Year Plan was on irrigation, agriculture and hydro power plants and the

second one on basic industries, such as Iron, Steel, Cement and production of Power plant equipment. But too much emphasis on Public Sector with loose labour laws and poor management resulted in low targets of production and consequent wastage of money. Professor Dipenkar Gupta wrote in the Times of India “Today’s planners unsure of their future, play both ends and the middle. This protects them against head-butts even if their plans get tangled in qualifiers and escape clauses”.

Liberalisation and After

The Licence-Permit Raj of the 1970s and 80s gave way to the economic liberalization as crafted by our present Prime Minister. Exposure of our engineers, scientists and professionals to the world outside and with the opening up of the information technology and service sectors, the country took a turn for the better and with more and more private entrepreneurs taking up manufacturing lines, the productivity and the wealth of the country increased. At the same time the implementation and delivery system of the Government to the poor and needy did not show much improvement as the whole system is mired in corruption and inefficiency. This is essentially an area of ethics and unless all the links in the delivery system are fool proof, this state of affairs cannot change. This area is very challenging and need dedicated and committed persons to intervene and stop the pilferage of food meant for the poor.

The opening up of the economy has given ample opportunities to many middle class citizens to improve their finances and their life styles. N.C.A.E.R’s recent report on “How India earns, spends and saves” show a decline in the percentages in the population of the very poor and the rise in numbers of very well off. A country which over many years looked

down on ostentatious consumption now looks the other way. Everyone wants better lifestyles, valuable possessions and flaunt their wealth. Many of them became richer by unfair means as can be seen by the scams and offences committed by high ranking officials and politicians in pursuit of money. Lok Ayukta in Bangalore has unearthed many cases of middle grade officials having palatial buildings and amassing of riches. From the assets disclosed for candidates standing for election one can only see Crorepathis. No wonder the public serving politicians of yesteryears gave way to self-seeking variety of the present generation.

The loss of moral values has contributed to the changing lifestyles of very rich, rich and even common citizens. Newspapers carry advertisements of fancy goods and the number of luxury magazines have increased considerably. In cities, bars and restaurants are full and a small place like Koramangala in Bangalore, boasts of more than 100 eating establishments – all of them crowded even though the dishes are priced premium. Exotic vegetables and fruits though costlier than the native ones are preferred and the consumption of high priced goods and services has become the order of the day.

Automobiles and their impact on citizen's life

Prior to the liberalisation only three brands of automobiles were available in the market and second hand vehicles were in demand as the waiting list for new ones like Fiat ran into number of years. The quality of production was much to be desired. Now all these have changed and we have everything in the country from the cheap Nano to the high end Mercedes, depending on the depth of the pocket of the individual. Now with the flooding of the market with ever new and posh vehicles, the number of individually owned

vehicles has reached an all time high and still climbing up. In a recent issue of the Weekly 'India Today' the consequences due to jamming of roads are brought out.

“Rs. 10 crores is what traffic costs Delhi daily in wasted fuel. Seventy per cent of parking in Mumbai is in prohibited areas. 814 vehicles per sq.km is the traffic density in Kolkota. 4 lakh vehicles weave in and out of Chennai daily. 18 km is the average vehicle speed in Bangalore's central business areas.” Road accidents in our cities are more than any other country. Even in smaller cities like Jaipur, Lucknow, Coimbatore, etc., vehicle population is increasing exponentially. It is reported that car sales is increasing annually by 23%. The roads cannot keep pace with the additional number of cars being added year after year.

The cheapest car in India is about 12 times the annual per capita income of a citizen, while in USA, it is about three times the average income. The fancy for urban India for automobiles is never ending. With the cities paralyzed in traffic jams and more being added every day, office goers spend more time in their vehicles and by the time they return home they have neither the energy nor the inclination to take any useful pastime. This invariably speaks on the quality of life, increased stress, resulting in bad health. In spite of the availability of money increasing considerably, the quality of life has deteriorated.

There is something radically wrong in our planning and execution of work. For instance, from the 1990s, Bangalore developed without any planning and control and we are in the sad state of correcting the wrong done earlier. Even now it is not too late to plan the development in new extensions so that the distances for movement of people to schools, colleges, hospitals, etc are kept to the minimum. In the present chaos no ambulance

carrying emergency and casualty assignments can reach the hospitals in time, situated as they are at distances. A new suggestion has sprouted in the minds of planners to wean away people from metropolises and crowded cities. Creation of auxiliary cities with good connectivity could be an answer where residential complex, office of work places are not far off so that office goers can either walk or go by cycles. Schools, hospitals, entertainment places are also situated not far off so that transportation of people are kept to the minimum. This would give ample opportunities for persons to work within a daily time frame and return to their homes for pursuing their personal interests. But when and how these utopian cities emerge in our country is anybody's guess. We hope, earlier the better.

Happiness

This begs the question "What is happiness?" Is it the possession of wealth, power over people or the availability of sufficient funds to carry out one's fancies or travel to places and enjoy. Dilip Bobb in "India Today" quotes the vision of Martin Seligman, the father of Positive Psychology.

According to him, there are three dimensions to happiness which one can cultivate:

One is to learn to appreciate the basic pleasures such as companionship, the natural element and physical needs to live comfortably.

To find one's own unique strength and employ them creatively to enrich one's life. Mobilise the strength for higher purpose.

A key element in leading a happy life is making contribution to larger community as it benefits both the giver and the receiver.

In our present scenario, this may not happen for another fifty years, if not more, until there is a radical change in our approach to life and wellbeing. This needs a total reorientation in thinking that money and possession of wealth, are not everything in the world to look for. This calls for great reforms to usher in a change or the next generation see the futility and shortfalls of the present generation and take positive steps to bring the change which augurs well for the individual, society and public at large. It is high time that we put a stop to consumerism and mad rush to possessions leading us ultimately to an impoverished world. _____●



“There must be a reason why some people can afford to live well. They must have worked for it. I only feel angry when I see waste. When I see people throwing away things we could use.”

- *Mother Teresa*