
UNIT 10 GANDHIAN LIFE STYLE AND LIVELIHOODS

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10.1 INTRODUCTION

Man has lived on this earth for over a million years. It is his home. In this home of his, there are millions of other species of life, ranging from the single cell amoeba to multi-million cell man with a mind of his own. And in this home each one has a place; each one has his own rights and responsibilities and each one follows the laws that keep the earth system alive and **functioning** optimally.

Prior to the advent of what we call modern civilisation, man lived a primitive life following the dictates of nature. His response to the natural environment was instinctive rather than imaginative. Nature was so vast and bountiful that there are enough for everyone to live 'happily', though very frugally and strenuously. Natural calamities were there, and there were interpersonal and inter-group feuds, but man's presence being sparse and his creations too rudimentary, that neither of them could inflict the devastation and miseries they do today.

Layers after layers of experimental knowledge, when translated into new technologies for the domestication of plants and animals, gave to a series of river valley civilisations in sub-tropical lands of Asia and Africa some 3,500 years ago. Man came out of the cave; his wanderings slowed down; and permanent human settlements emerged. They were essentially agricultural, but some of them produced enough surpluses to form urban centres like **Harappa** and Mohenjodaro in the Indus Valley. Except for Indian and Chinese civilisation, they all became victims of time, leaving behind a rich agricultural heritage that remained the backbone of life support all over the world until the end of 17th century.

A strange combination of social forces brought about another epochal change in human civilisation sometime in the 17th century. Manufacturing that incubated in the home of

agriculture for over 2000 years or more came out in the open in an otherwise not very hospitable island of Western Europe. The animal power that made agriculture a success was replaced by mechanical power. And thus was born the Industrial Revolution. Within a span of just three centuries, one tenth of what Agriculture Revolution took to mature, it made the west rich and developed and converted the agriculture-based civilisation of Asia, Africa and Latin America into fiefs to supply the European industry the raw materials, labour and market. By the first half of the last century, practically the whole world was under the command of West, western people, western ideas and western goods reigned supreme.

The developing countries, after post-war liberation, tried to catch up with the industrialised countries. A few of them made remarkable progress but most of them are struggling hard to make both ends meet. Natural resources crunch has made the task of development slow and costly. Environmental pollution generated by old style industrialisation is no longer acceptable to the people. And added to all these is the advent of Information Revolution, rendering the economic, social and technological institutions and the whole process of production and consumption of the past obsolete. It demands totally a new paradigm of thinking, a new model of development, a new approach to nature, a new way of doing things and a new style of life and living.

The mode of production, refined during the Industrial Era, has the potentials of rendering this earth uninhabitable. The biosphere that sustains life on planet earth is being imbalanced; the air and water are being polluted, the land is becoming lifeless and innumerable plants and animals that keep the ecosystem in healthy state, are disappearing. There is growing fear of climate change, ozone layer depletion, overpopulation, incurable diseases, hunger and malnutrition and violence against nature and human beings. Our civilisation has really become a disease, to use Mahatma Gandhi's terminology. The continuance of the earth as a livable planet can no longer be taken for granted.

Aims and Objectives

After studying this Unit, you should be able to understand

- The consequences of modern life style; and
- The relevance of Gandhian life style and livelihoods.

10.2 WESTERN WAY OF LIFE

Western civilisation is like a blind man who has been put on the wrong road. No matter which direction we look in world affairs, a many-sided impasse economic, ideological, and military- exists. But at the root it is the impasse of a materialism that has been spreading for a long time as the result of the gradual abandonment of many vital spiritual values. One effect of this spiritual decline has been a marked fall in the quality of life in the West, especially during the last half- century.

For nearly two centuries, the West has been functioning from impulses it has never seriously challenged or even questioned. Those impulses have been gathering momentum ever since the dawn of the Industrial Revolution, although they had an earlier origin. A new factor, phenomenal Prosperity, captured the imaginations of politicians and businessmen and swept the nation into a way of life, an economy and system of values, which have never been subjected to careful analysis, let alone condemned, by any institution or

school of thought. Though there have been individual condemnations, it is only in these latter days that a few people have begun to realise that prosperity may be a dangerous acquisition, a means of lowering the quality of life, fostering class divisions, and causing international tensions.

The latest means of overcoming this dilemma is the discovery of an "expanding" economy. Whenever production outpaces consumption and exports, various financial techniques are to be employed to increase the consumption of goods and services. This means that as industrial production rises as the result of new industrial techniques, consumption will keep pace with production by means of new financial techniques.

Unfortunately, this discovery overlooks certain economic and spiritual consequences which are fatal to its purpose. The chief economic consequence concerns the supply of raw materials. If we are to accept the view that civilisation can only be kept going by perpetually increasing the consumption of goods and services and running the world's machinery at full speed, where are the raw materials to come from to keep going what can only be described as a "devouring" economy? But what will be the situation when the rising demands of the awakening East and the rest of the world for the earth's resources come into conflict with those of the West? The impoverished East has stronger entitlement to increased supplies, but will it get them?

It is easy to say that new sources of food and raw materials will be discovered. Such optimism is not supported by the rates of consumption and discovery during the last forty years. The rate of consumption of food and raw materials in the U.S.A. is now so high that it is drawing upon outside resources at an alarming rate. Not long ago the U.S.A. was practically self-supposing, but to day it is dependent upon world supplies for its raw materials, while its consumption is equal to that of the rest of the world put together.

It would be a folly to look for answers since the "way of life" in question is not the good life for man and must therefore be rejected. We thus come to the moral consequences of this devouring economy. That economy is now accepted by most Western, and possibly a few Eastern, nations, Capitalist, Communist and Socialist alike. It is the latest in the edifice of the most colossal expression of materialism the world has yet known, It is intrinsically evil in that it stimulates by artificial means, including pressurised advertising the cultivation of habits of extravagance without any reference to the good life, the social good, or the needs and welfare of mankind as a whole. It therefore stands condemned.

10.3 THE PARADOXES IN THE PRESENT-DAY LIFE STYLE

The balance sheet of the 20th Century, which humanity has pushed behind, reflected the following developments:

1. Decolonisation, death of imperialism, rise and fall of communism, rise of USA as the leader of unipolar world.
2. Development of Science and Technology and emergence of a technological mentality and crass **materialism**.
3. Death of religion and spirituality
4. Spread of violence and development of non-violence alternatives

It was Socrates who defined Wisdom as "Knowing what you do not know". The emerging present-day realities perhaps defy even a wise man like Socrates. In the twenty-first century with the confused visions of a world without war and boundaries, statesmen, scientists, social activists, religious leaders and others reiterate from different world forums their commitment to the ushering in of a just and peaceful world order; the one thought that troubles the minds of sensitive souls who have no stake in any of these high-profile declamations, is how wise are we in believing that the web of the soulless consumerist and materialistic culture- with all the temptations it offers- is a dependable and durable shield.

The general scenario is one of utter helplessness and to add to this is the acquisitive tendency of those who are tempted to acquire all that the market offers. A kind of insatiable greed seems to have taken control of mankind and no effort is being made anywhere to limit one's wants. And this has become a global phenomenon and no country seems to be free from this. Thus the average man finds himself to be truly at cross roads of utter despair and helplessness. He is swept away by the mighty waves of materialism and consumerism. Economic well-being appears to be the sole purpose of life and the manner in which value systems are being trampled upon, raises the big question: Where are we heading to?

The self-styled custodians of the emerging trends are impervious to the following paradoxes:

- While absolute poverty has decreased globally, relative poverty has increased.
- More people have become literate. But access to information and technology has become concentrated and centralised.
- More countries have become democratised but there is greater concentration of power.
- Communication explosion, growing alienation and lack of communication at individual level has become rampant.

Certainly, our **fundamentals** have gone wrong. Life is one, a unity which rapidly disintegrates when one of its major functions ceases, as happened when creative and social values were taken out of the labour of increasing percentages of the people. Once spiritual values and principles cease to control the vital functions of life, religion quickly loses its significance and meaning; and religion will not regain its lost power until it earnestly seeks to restore to human labour the spiritual values which alone can make it wholesome and holy.

The nature of a man's work has more to do with determining his spiritual health and well being than any other single factor, and if it fragments him religion cannot make him whole except as a stimulus to social revolt. Man must work in order to eat, but if his labour does not develop the whole man, his imagination and creative genius, and satisfy his inward being, his life will be out of joint. The right to wholeness is basic, and it should be one of the major aims of religion to make it possible for all men to achieve it. It was the failure of religion to do precisely this and also to demand economic justice for the workers during the Industrial Revolution that was responsible for the great exodus from the Churches of Britain during the first three decades of the 19th century.

The acceptance of the inevitability of human fragmentation in the interest of "progress" was also responsible for a change of emphasis in the working-class struggle for justice

and freedom. The economic pressures of the struggle for markets and the consequent necessity for increased **speciali-sation** blocked the road to responsible, creative labour for the average worker, in consequence of which propaganda was concentrated on shorter hours and higher wages.

The spirit of man wilted under the materialism of quantitative production for the capture of markets, as politics became a sordid personal and class struggle for cash and power. The "good life" was reduced to maximum consumption of goods and services.

The Welfare State is the logical outcome of that policy, and an indispensable condition of a materialistic civilisation, notwithstanding the unpleasant fact that it has increased personal dependence upon the State and reduced personal responsibility precisely when it needed to be increased.

The longer the present trends continue, the more **fragmented** will people become, and the more dependent will they be upon end less diversions in order to preserve their mental balance. The root problem of our time is how to pass from a quantitative civilisation which fragments the human person to a qualitative civilisation which makes whole persons.

10.4 THE GANDHIAN ALTERNATIVE

Gandhi formulated his **order** in the context of his design of an ideal social order: a non-violent, non exploitative, humanistic and egalitarian society. His approach is through the avenue of truth and non-violence. Its goal is not pure material benefit but the advancement of humanity on its road to progress by strengthening the character and the individual development of personality of every single person engaged in such activity. No one's gain should be anybody's loss- financial, physical, moral or spiritual. If there is to be a choice, the preference should fall on the eternal constituents of man rather than on the material. It is the first brick upon which the edifice of his entire philosophy stands. He denounced the concept of economic man because the mind of the industrial robot suffers an almost complete black out when it comes to **freedom** and responsibilities of a human person and it will not easily be quickened into a realisation of what has happened to it.

The problem is how to conduct life style in a manner that is compatible with non-violence. The problem gains real urgency, from the strenuous attempt all over the world to develop the underdeveloped countries. This development is generally conceived along Western lines. Yet it is easy to see that the Western way of life cannot be permanent and will be incompatible with peace if it spreads to all mankind. It is based on non-renewable resources and rejects any idea of voluntary self-limitation.

The western way of life, even in a much more modest form than its American model, requires the annual use of several tons of 'fossil' fuel per person. But the world's resources of fossil fuels, obtainable at a reasonable cost, are strictly limited. It follows that a civilisation based on fossil fuels can be only an episode in the history of man- and when measured against the life of nations a very short episode. By using coal and oil, we live on capital instead of income. This is quite legitimate under certain conditions. Many a young man has his education financed out of capital **funds**, but if he is wise he does two things: (a) he voluntarily limits his annual drafts on capital so that it will last **atleast** until he no longer needs it, and (b) he never loses sight of the fact that he must quickly learn to subsist an income, without further substantial drafts on capital. His principal task is to find a way of life that is self-supporting. And that precisely is also the major task of modern man.

A way of life that even more rapidly depletes the power of earth to sustain it and piles up ever more insoluble problems for each succeeding generation can only be called violent. It is not a way of life that one would like to see exported to countries not yet committed to it. Man's urgent task is to follow a non-violent way in his life. It is a concept that needs to be widened out, to combat not merely the violence of man against man, but also the violence of man in his dealings with living nature around him and with the limited and finite resources of the earth. Let us take the agricultural research the world over which still goes into method, of violence-insecticides, herbicides, fungicides, artificial fertilizers, etc. in that modern agriculture has become a gigantic battle with nature instead of a careful devoted striving to gear in with its unbelievably gentle and efficient methods. If man should emerge as victor from this battle with nature, he would undoubtedly find himself on the losing side. Similarly, a civilisation ruled almost exclusively by town dwellers is always in danger of forgetting this basic truth, until the emergence of famine reminds it of its utter dependence on the health of country side. This pattern exists not only in agriculture but also in industry and every walk of life. We need to give our attention to the development and perfection of non-violent methods, so that the answers will be found to the three-fold crisis of this modern world, the crisis of resources exhaustion, the ecological crisis, and the crisis of man's alienation and disorientation. All this requires work with a new orientation.

Gandhi did not undermine the importance of economic aspect of life; rather he gave it, its due importance. All men have material needs. It is neither wrong nor unworthy to devote thought and care to the satisfaction of those needs to the economic aspect of life. In view of the universality of the economic aspect, it is not surprising that a systematic body of thought should have grown up, commonly called Economics. But what is surprising is that the science of Economics is based on one particular outlook on life, the outlook of the materialist. Every concept of Economics is rooted in this outlook. Even where Economics admits that man does not live by bread alone, it counts as cost any activity that fails to cater to material needs. Economics distinguishes between productive and unproductive activities, and only those are called productive which cater to material wants. Not that Economics had failed to concern itself with welfare. But even welfare is a term completely rooted in materialism.

The concept of 'economic man' is robbing the modern economics of its moral character. Where Mammon is God, no one worships the true God. God lives only in the homes of the poor. Gandhi equated God with 'Daridranarayan' meaning God of the poor or God appearing in the hearts of the poor. He emphasized the divinity of man which is epitomised in the great maxim that 'a jive is always a shiva', a man is by and large divine. And in this respect it is difficult to distinguish between a man and a man. It is on this deep feeling of spirituality and divinity of man that Gandhi based his order.

10.5 THE LIMITATIONS OF HUMAN WANTS

Human wants are unlimited. The means to satisfy them are limited too. Human beings strive to get the maximum satisfaction from what so ever they have. There is a paradoxical twist in the Gandhian method of solving this problem of unlimited wants and limited resources. It almost amounts to putting the energy in reverse gears. Instead of satisfying the maximum wants with limited resources, Gandhi advocated wantlessness. He was of the opinion that wants are the sources of pain. Instead of adding to the sum total of human happiness, wants subtracts from it a good deal. In fact, he thinks that maximisation

of satisfaction is rather completely inconsistent with the maximisation of human wants. A want is a painful experience. This is evident from the fact that we wish to satisfy it and want to rid of it as soon as possible. We would not have bothered to remove or satisfy it had it not been **painful**. So the removal of a want means removal of pain and procurement of pleasure. And this pleasure is the same thing as satisfaction or utility. If one wants to get maximum pleasure one should see to it that all pain is removed and no fresh pain is experienced in future. At least this is the ideal for anyone who wants to achieve maximum pleasure from his limited resources.

Gandhi approached the problem of wantlessness from another angle also. "We should not receive any single thing that we do not need", he wrote in "From Yervada Mandir". We are not always aware of our real needs, and most of us improperly multiply our wants, and thus unconsciously make thieves of ourselves. If we devote some thought to the subject, we shall find that we can get rid of quite a number of our wants. One who follows the observance of Non-stealing will bring about a progressive reduction of his own wants. Much of the distressing poverty in this world has arisen out of breaches of the principle of non-stealing. He further clarified that the profound truth upon which this observance is based is that God never creates more than what is strictly needed for the moment. Therefore whoever appropriates more than the minimum, that is really necessary for him, is guilty of **theft**. The propensity to accumulate commodities cramps the soul and degenerates into the morbid desire to make a fetish of external goods of life. The luxury of the ascendant classes, therefore, makes them morally deprived. The monopolisation of the things needed by all by a few men at the top, is unjust. Moreover accumulation is condemnable because it is not possible to be practised by all. Accumulation by a few amounts to the dispossession of the many. Thus the alternative lies in renunciation. To him, renunciation is life. Accumulation spells death. But he clarified: "This does not mean that, if one has wealth, it should be thrown away and his wife and children should be turned out of doors. It simply means that one must give up attachment to these things and dedicate one's all to God and make use of His gifts to serve Him only". He advised the wealthy men to earn their crores (honestly) but asked them to dedicate themselves to the service of all. The best and most effective mantra is "**Enjoy thy wealth by renouncing it**". Expanded it means: Earn your crores by all means. But understand that your wealth is not yours; it belongs to the people. Take what you require for your legitimate needs, and use the remainder for society".

Thus it is clear that Gandhi offered his doctrine of non-possession as an indictment of one of the most **powerful** drives in modern economic society; the drive for multiplication of wants, fuelled by an insatiable propensity for **superfluous** or conspicuous consumption. One may justify such consumption as an essential prerequisite for economic growth. This argument is based purely on economic grounds. To Gandhi it was an economic issue as well as a moral issue. To him, Ethics and Economics are inseparable. "I must confess that I do not draw a sharp or any distinction between Ethics and Economics. The Economics that hurt the moral well-being of an individual or a nation are immoral and, therefore, sinful." But he realised that the perfect ideal of wantlessness is unattainable because it demands total renunciation. His pragmatic mind would accept something short of perfect realisation of the ideal; namely a movement towards it through the process of gradual **reduction of wants and minimisation of consumption**.

The doctrine of non-possession, if it implied only voluntary reduction of wants, could be construed as a totally negative doctrine. But Gandhi expounded it as a positive doctrine. According to him, the doctrine of non-possession would teach that everyone should limit his own wants and spend the rest for the welfare of others. He considered this as a desirable non-violent method of reducing inequality of income distribution and misdistribution of wealth. In his own words, "Now let us consider how equal distribution can be brought about through non-violence. The first step towards it, is for him who has made this ideal part of his being to bring about the necessary changes in his personal life. He would reduce his wants to a minimum bearing in mind the poverty of India." He was aware of other means of dealing with these problems of inequality of income distribution and misdistribution of wealth but he discounted this because of his fear that other methods may include the coercive power of the state. Thus Gandhi put utmost reliance on the individual and his moral awakening to bring these radical changes in the distribution of income and wealth in the society through wantlessness.

10.6 SMALL AND SIMPLE IS BEAUTIFUL

"I have taken fuel merely as an example to illustrate a very simple thesis", writes Professor Schumacher, "That economic growth, which viewed from the point of view of economics, physics, chemistry and technology, has no discernible, limit, must necessarily run into the decisive bottlenecks when viewed from the point of view of the environmental sciences. An attitude to life which seeks fulfillment in the single minded pursuit of wealth in short, a materialism does not fit into this world, because it contains within itself no limiting principle, while the environment in which it is placed is strictly limited. Already, the environment is trying to tell us that certain stresses are becoming excessive. As one problem is being solved ten new problems arise as a result of the first solution. As Professor Barry Commoner emphasizes, the new problems are not the consequences of incidental failure but of technological success".

Schumacher not only points out the defects and drawbacks of the system, but also suggests positive remedies, "If the road is leading us into a crisis of survival, we may consider whether new guidelines may be called for, which would point in opposite directions".

Towards smallness rather than gigantism;

Towards simplification rather than growing complexity;

Towards capital saving rather than labour saving and

Towards non-violence, in a rather generalized sense.

Man is small and man is or ought to be beautiful. When Gandhi said: "Not mass production but production by the masses", he talked the language of Small is Beautiful or when he demanded that "Production and consumption must become reunited". Re-uniting production and consumption is possible only if production units are small and therefore easy to manage and adaptable to local conditions.

10.6.1 Simplicity

Gandhi said: "High thinking is inconsistent with complicated material life", and this applies not merely to consumption but just as forcefully to the modes of production. Complexity, like goods transport, has to be seen, not as a sign of achievement, but as a mark of

failure or at best as a necessary evil. Complexity entails the need for extreme specialisation, so that men become "fragmentary men", too specialised to be able to attain wisdom. Like the trend towards gigantism, it destroys work satisfaction, and it also means exclusion: only highly specialised people gain admittance to the productive process; the rest become technological gap-fillers having to hawk themselves around. Any highly trained person can make complicated things even more complicated, but it takes perhaps a touch of genius to regain the essential simplicity of things. All real human needs are essentially simple; only the frivolities and extravaganzas. The findings of Professor Schumacher and other technologists and ecologists have reinforced the basic validity of Gandhi's approach.

10.7 SUMMARY

Mulling over these points time and again, one becomes progressively convinced that the present ecological crisis is a direct consequence of man's inability to rise to the level of understanding and responsibility demanded by his new power of understanding and responsibility demanded by his new power role in the world. The problem is within man, not outside him, and so is any solution. And this is precisely what Gandhi emphasized. To quote him, "The world will live in peace only when the individuals composing it make up their mind to do so". Human beings will have to realise that a way of life that rapidly depletes the power of earth instead of sustaining it piles up more insoluble problems for each succeeding generation can only be called violent. Man's urgent task is to follow a non-violent way of life in economics. It is a concept that needs to be widened out to combat not merely the violence of man against man, but also the violence of man in his dealing with living nature around him and with the limited and finite resources of the earth. A new approach would be required to redirect the human society involving a supreme effort of understanding, imagination and political and moral resolve. There is no other avenue but man has to explore himself his goals and values as much as he seeks the world to change. There needs to be unending commitment to ensure that man will survive without falling into a state of worthless existence. More and more people all over the world should look for the ways to redirect economic and ecological system "as if people mattered".

10.8 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. What are the problems and consequences generated by modern life style?
2. Examine the relevance of Gandhian life style and livelihoods in the present context.

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