

EDUCATION: AN ETHICAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

The study is designed to make an analysis of the ethical issues in the present day situation, which encompasses man – made environmental problems. Mahatma Gandhi was the first thinker in recent times who tried to revive the moral character of man through education. He emphasized on moral society with non-violent, non-exploitative social order built upon the foundation of universal education. Education stands for all – round development of an individual. Here education with ethics is an essential need for quality of life. Gandhian education with ethics attempt to address the contemporary problems. He viewed that education with ethics is the only way to improve the life. He wanted man to be efficient and productive by knowing himself and environment. His contribution to education was immense and it was perceptible in social as well as in natural environment. This paper is divided into two sections: Section I deals with moral concern, where environmental crisis is indicated in briefly. The ethical answer to the environmental problems will then be discussed in short in the section II. The methodology of this paper consists of primary and secondary sources of different books, articles and journals. The paper concludes with reflective analysis of mind regarding environmental values which play an important role in shaping human character. Therefore, the direct aim of this paper is the formation of character by proper development of the moral feeling.

KEYWORDS: Education, Ethics, Environment, Quality of Life, Non Violence

INTRODUCTION

Education in its general sense is a form of learning in which knowledge, skills and habits of group of people are transformed from one generation to the next through teaching learning and research. Education is the key to human development. It is fundamental to all – round development of human potentials – material and spiritual. The Vedic Rishis held education, as means of salvation “Sa VidyaYaVimuktaye” was the maxim of Vedas and the Upanishads. The keynote of education is known thyself (tatwamasi) or self-realization, according to Indian Culture. The following noble sentiments expressed in our tradition which influenced education: -

“Let everyone be happy!

Let everyone be free from ailments

Let everyone has an auspicious outlook

Let no one be put to suffering”

It is always for collective happiness and for the removal of everyone’s distress.

In the literature of prakrit language, as A Mahaprajna (2001) observes, we get a beautiful indication: “Education

ought to achieve two objectives: -

To attain sadgati, i.e. to develop the values of life or values promoting good conduct.

To solve the problems of livelihood.”

In absences of these values, it is not possible to awaken the ‘good’ in human being, to construct a healthy society. So we need man and women of character who will bear upon human values to ensure larger concern of the society. But our education system seems to fail to meet the quality of life. We may consider environment, more precisely, natural as well as social environment is the root cause of the quality of life. In other words, the scope of the study will be confined only to the environmental ethical issues. For environment encompasses all the components which are generally identified as responsible for quality of life. Here Gandhian education with ethics is an essential need for quality of life of human beings as it is shown in the diagram: - I

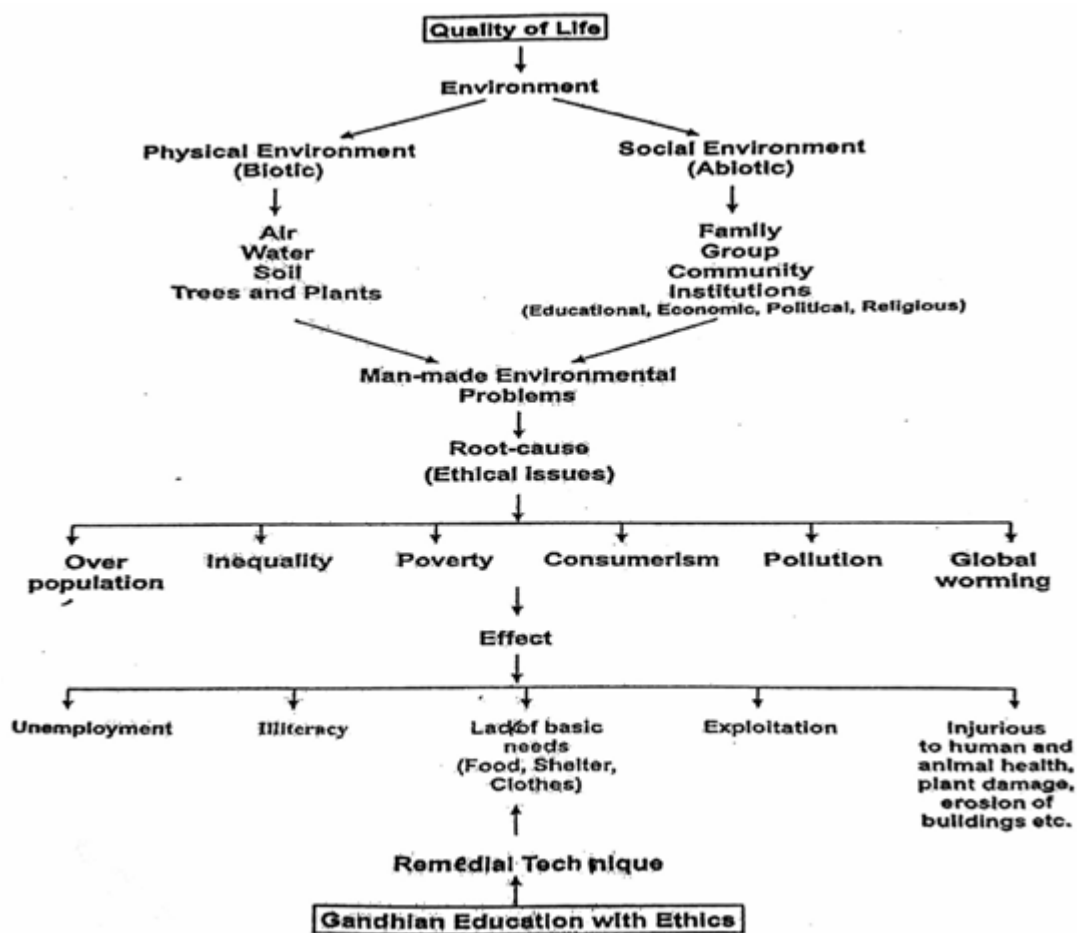


Figure 1

NECESSITY OF MORALITY

In society, where people live together, it becomes necessary to one and all to conform to certain rules and regulations. This will promote for mutual help and co – operation. These are the moral principles and there must be some foundations for the children to understand and go according to it. Therefore, the inculcation of moral qualities such as co –

operations, adjustment, etc becomes necessary.

Morality is the subject matter of ethics. Ethics is traditionally regarded as the science of rightness and wrongness, goodness and badness of human conduct. Ethics includes value system. Human values are those higher human qualities, which help human beings to transcend, the limitation of our biological existence. They make us rise above the normal pulls of selfishness, lust, and greed anger, sense of enjoyment, fear and frustration, which are common in a purely biological life. Values are guiding principles of life which are conducive to all round development of human beings. According R. K. Mukherjee (1964), “Values are integrated experiences that simultaneously touch all the dimensions of human adoption – organic, social and cultural. He strongly believes that values mould the human nature in our social environment”.

Ethics and values evolved in human society over millions of years. Ethics raises moral values, known as virtues, such as truthfulness, kindness, equality etc. In the Indian tradition, the Sanskrit word “Dharma” primarily, stands for moral values. Dharma is described as the set of values that sustains the creation without which the very existence of it would be threatened. The concept of Dharma is commended on different grounds. The first and the foremost meaning of dharma is that it sustains, nourishes and holds up the social order. Dharma holds the equilibrium among the deeds of man. Further, it is described on pragmatic grounds. According to man, “Dharma destroys him that violets it and protects him that adheres to it.”

The tremendous awareness of social issues during 1960s generate a group of new sub fields in philosophy in 1970, which are collectively called Applied Ethics. It is concerned with the application of the basic ethical teachings and moral ideals or values of peace, harmony, freedom, equality in the concrete and living problems in our social life. A new type of applied ethics called Environment Ethics has been emerged side by side of traditional ethics since 1950. According to it, it is wrong to damage the equilibrium of the environment or destroy ecological balance without having vital necessity only for the sake of our self interest and it is right conduct to preserve ecological balance in terms of taking care of future generation or avoiding self – interest lasting for a while. This is right when Peter Singer (1993) opined that we have been wronged by members of past generations whose thoughtless actions have deprived us of the possibility of seeing such animals as they do do The marsupial tiger. We must take care not to inflict equally irreparable losses on the generations to follow us. Hence the task of environmental ethics in the context of physical environment is to devise norms to regulate our conduct in respect of nature in all its facts at the individual and institutional level.

Social, political, economic and ecological values play an important role in shaping human character, which is an important aim of education. The environmental value consists of caring of our environment. In the late 20th century people began to realize that biological resources had limits and these limits were possibly being exceeded. This had, finally, led to air pollution, global warming, and ozone layer depletion, etc. Many people have started to realize that investment in the environment is the investment in a more secure future. This is an ethical issue and it leads us to try to avoid environment mistakes.

Environmental Crisis

The end of the 20th century has bought both blessings and curses for mankind. Obviously, the later entails degradation of human values and standard of living. The passion for peaceful co – existence is becoming stronger and sincere. The problems which press down on humanity may mostly political, economical and ecological, but their

background remains moral. The present society tries to handle these problems, but often fails due to lack of moral training even among the educated sections of the society.

It is evident today that science and technology are highly beneficial to humanity. But in spite of wonders of science and technology man lives in a worried world. Environmental degradation is a sad reality. In the name of scientific development nature had badly molded and mutilated and in turn it creates ecological crisis. Now when we –

- Watch TV;
- Use air conditioner,
- Use hair dryer,
- Ride in a car,
- Play in a video game,
- Use micro oven,
- Fly on an acre plan,

we help to send green house gases into air. To perform many of these functions we need electricity which comes from power plants. Most power plants burn coal and oil to produce green house gas. Too many of these gases would create a hot surface which may have disastrous consequences.

Industrial expansion has bought wastes by product, which creates pollution and subsequently environmental degradation. According to Odum (1971), “Pollution is an undesirable change in the physical, chemical or biological characteristics of our air, land and water that may or will harmfully affect human life or that of desirable and cultural asserts; or that may or will waste or deteriorate or our raw material sources”. Every environmental problem has short term and long term impact. During the course of rapid industrialization, we often neglect long term impacts mainly due to lack of proper education or in other words, inadequate knowledge. Air pollution causes severe damage to crops and livestock. Now population has grown beyond the earth. Thoughtless extensive launching of rocket and artificial satellites as well as space proves programmes have left enough debris in space. As a result thousand space debris is getting added thereby making our space programmes extremely risky and dangerous. All of us aware of the NASA’s American Space Vehicle “Columbia Shuttle” in which Ms. Kalpana Chawla and six other astronauts lost their lives in Febmery, 2003. This has happened because of Columbia is collision with space debris. So we may say that on the one hand, human activities pollute space and on the other, space pollutes the environment of the earth.

Again, activities of modern humanities are responsible for deterioration of social environment. The global system is not just a physical environment but it also includes man – made environment or social environment which is composed of societies, communities, institutions, etc. Giddies (2005) writes, society in the modern world have been divided into four categories:

The first world societies,

The seconds world societies,

The developing societies (The third world societies)

The newly industrializing countries.

Every society has its own needs, aspirations and goals of life based on the quality of life of its people. This quality of life of a community of people is realized through a number of organizations of social environment like family, group, institutions – religious, educations, and economics, political etc. These are the organs of a society which preserve social customs, traditions, beliefs, values, etc. They are agencies through which an individual gets himself adopted to his social environment. Today, it has been realized that any amount of food production cannot help in improving quality of life, unless population growth is controlled. Several measures have been invented by medical science to check population explosion. The science of engineering and the science of human behavior (psychology) have improved the impaired existence of human being. In short, science with its discoveries in different fields has done yeoman service in improving the material quality of human life. But the scientific inventions are causing rampant damage to social environment. The problems arising due to human activities in society may be listed as poverty, unemployment, inequality, consumerism, alienation, etc.

ETHICAL ANSWER

Human being is self conscious. We have the capacity to understand ourselves and also others. Since we are the self - conscious being, we have to be most responsible to our own existence as well as the existence of others. We thus carry a universal responsibility. In Indian tradition our responsibilities are known as “Dharma”. The ideal society stands on the four pillars of Dharma to protect each other. These are Satya (Truth), Daya (Compassion), Santi (Peace) and Ahimsa (Non Violence).

Ethical education programme will involve students in an exploration of different value dimensions of life, which will go into making a good man, a good life and a good society. The individuals and social development of mankind can proceed only when a favorable environment is created. Besides, physical environment, intellectual environment is also important. In such an environment, there should be unity of purpose, mutual selection of common goals and collaboration of the effort toward their environment. There must be an opportunity and encouragement for intellectual growth and life, attainments, with conflicting and competing demands on further foundation of Dharma. This is possible through the unity of mind, body and action. The primary purpose of Dharma is to provide effective instruction in non – violent thought. It is the responsibility of individuals in the society to see that new development in science and technology go into making a non violent human society.

Education and Ethics are essential needs for full development of human beings. Education must provide two types of knowledge and skill – ‘to live on’ and ‘to live for’. The first one is related to the caring of livelihood, the second is related to the quality of life, the highest goal that leads an individual to the attainment of self realization.

Quality of Life

“Quality of life”, a modern concept has been used to denote the availability of economic opportunities to the people. But this is only a partial connotation of the term. Available of economic opportunities by itself cannot improve the quality of life. Quality of life aims to promote of both quality and excellence. It appears to be the multi dimensional terms encompassing not only the economic opportunities available to the people, but also their ability to take advantage

living conditions which permit well being in life. The basic elements of human well – being refers to the level of living and quality of life. Basic needs approach was developed by the Norwegian Johan Galtung (1980). Basic needs approach focus on conditions, without which human beings are unable to survive, avoid misery, relate to other people and avoid alienation. Erik Allardt (1993) assets Having Loving and Being are catchwords for necessary conditions of human development and existence.

‘Having’ refers to those material conditions which are necessary for survival and for avoidance of misery. It covers the needs for nutrition, air, water, for protection against climate, disease and environment, etc.

‘Loving’ stand for those needs to relate to other people and to form social identities.

‘Being’ stands for the needs for integration into society and to live in harmony with nature.

Now it is assumed that quality of life includes: -

- Availability of nutritious food.
- Shelter.
- Clothing.
- Universal elementary education.
- Employment for all able bodied being
- Employment
- Healthy living environment
- Basic health services to all
- Equal opportunities for individual and social development.

We may consider environment, more precisely, natural and social environment as the root cause of quality of life. For environment encompasses all the components mentioned above generally identified as responsible for quality of life.

Education with ethics is the only way to avail and improve the quality of life. Education has the responsibility not only to provide training in three R’s (Reading, Writing and Arithmetic) but also to develop the qualities of hand, heart and head. Here Gandhiji rightly said that, the goal of education should be moral education or character building. Character formation for Gandhiji, implies cultivation of moral values such as courage, purity of personal life, self – restraint and service of mankind.

Gandhiji’s love of traditional values and nature are criticized and even ridiculed on various counts not least because the philosophy is against modernity and technology. But of late, people have become conscious of desecration of nature in the wake of natural calamities, change in the weather pattern, excessive pollution that can cause various ailments, change in the harvesting pattern, destruction of flora and fauna and so on. The traditional respect for nature helped conversation, while modern concept of science conquering nature has turned its destruction. The modern slogans of “Save Nature and Save Yourself” are belated warning that were followed in the past. The two key principles of rational ecology namely “Maximum Diversity” and “Minimum Interference” can be followed if the Gandhian principle of non violence is

accepted. In India, we have always followed the simple formula of least interference. For example, according to Indian tradition, cows were not milked for a while after a calf is born so that the later gets enough nourishment. Flowers and leaves were not plucked at night when these were supposed to 'sleep'. The sacred groves or various customs or a deity of the forest or hills helps conservation in a regular way. Modern science and technology debunked these traditions as superstitions without any suitable environmental alternative that can help conversation.

The task of environmental ethics is to devise norms to regulate our conduct in respect of nature. Here S. R. Bhatt (2002) claims that there is a need to formulate a character of environmental conduct and create awareness in human being through proper education. The eco syllabus should take into account global ethics both preventive and curative. The best ideals of global ethics can be found in our Santipathas, Svastivacanas and Subhasitas that are available in our classical thought. The syllabi on eco – philosophy and code of conduct in eco – ethics should incorporate them. It should aim at regulating our conduct in the sphere of earth, water, air, fire and space. The classical tradition on eco – philosophy is very rich. Nature has given status of mother. Nature is regarded as worshipable worship of nature is the keynote of Indian way of life even today. So if Indian masses offer worship to land, rivers, trees, birds, animals, etc. it is not an exhibition of primitive animation. It is expression of our love, regard and reverence to nature that sustains us and provide nourishment.

CONCLUSIONS

Gandhiji's dictum, "there is enough in the world for our needs but not enough for our greed" is rightly considered as the edifice for the philosophy of sustainable and equitable development. It is universally accepted as the cardinal principle of the environmental ethics, which is rightly said to be the foundation of the quality of life. Our Shastras often refer to ecological responsibility as a sacred duty; both animate and inanimate natures are objects of protection. Gandhiji tried to reconcile the divine and the mundane by restoring to the notion of ahimsa (non – violence), not merely as a code of conduct of individuals and social institutions for perpetuation of life and tolerance. This form of life or ahimsa can be extended, to both the animate and inanimate world. Any custom or law of civil society requires to follow principles of maximum diversity of culture, religion, language, race etc. among its members and minimum interference with their choice or performance so long as it does not hart another person's similar choice or personal freedom. Thus the concept of non - violence is a prerequisite for rational ecology. For it discourages extreme ecological engineering and encourages maximum eco diversity by minimum interference. This is very important because nature does not require human beings but we need nature for the fulfillment of our physical and mental well being. B.D. Dogra (2010) supports this view, by saying that the development model, which predominantly guides the present day world is so fundamentally wrong that we need to change it in basic, fundamental ways if we want to effectively tackle the most serious problems like climate change. In a word, the present day modal is driven by greed rather than need, and we need to replace it by a model that respects the basic needs of all human beings and all life forms. The most basic requirement is that human life has to be, based on a consensus to accept the values of equality, simplicity, justice and peace.

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