

***Globalism, Sustainable Future and Gandhian Philosophy: Critique on Dominant Managerial Philosophy and Search for Egalitarian Alternative***

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**Abstract**

This paper attempts to examine globalism in terms of its de-humanizing and anti-civilizational dimensions. Capitalism during the twentieth century, with its innumerable managerial concepts and theories, promoted self-seeking and cost-benefit-oriented business organizations and enterprises. Consequently, the value structure of capitalism has led to degradation of nature, exploitation of human resources, erosion of moral universe, and disappearance of communitarian ties. Therefore, capitalism in the twentieth century has been the single most important cause for misery and violence. During the twenty-first century things do not appear to be different, instead they have become acute. The managerial philosophy, which, faithfully served capitalism in the twentieth century, is in the active service of post-capitalism in terms its propaganda for globalism. Needless to say that globalism, a new found theory of capitalism and managerial philosophy, is equally antithetical to nature and human civilization. Against this, the paper wishes to establish that what we are practicing today in the name of globalism, ably supported by well-oiled managerial philosophy, is naked social Darwinism. Further, the paper shows how capitalism creates greedy individuals by promoting consumerism and exploit nature resulting in alienation of man from nature. Finally, the paper intends to propose a normative alternative to global capitalism and its managerial philosophy by invoking the Gandhian critique of modern civilization. The Gandhian alternative, I put forward, is not a ready-made recipe over there. It requires careful, critical, and feasible reconstruction of Gandhi symbolically present in all those post-colonial life styles, agitations, and assertions in achieving sustainable human development.

**Keywords:** Globalism, consumerism, marginalisation, sustainable future, Gandhian philosophy

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## **Introduction**

This paper attempts to examine and critique 'globalism' in terms of its de-humanizing and anti-civilizational dimensions. The brazen march of capitalism all these years has taken the world to the edge where serious debates are on pertaining to the very sustainability of the future. The global scholarship is seriously engaged in finding the alternatives to the neoliberal development that is being pursued today. The world is experiencing crisis in almost all the areas of human life and its sustainability. Capitalism, with its well-oiled Managerial Philosophy, has sustained and legitimized itself at the cost of the larger issues of human life and sustainability. The history of management thought (Wren, D. 1994) tells us that its innumerable concepts and theories were directed towards the promotion of self-seeking and cost-benefit oriented business organizations and enterprises. The managerial philosophy enabled business organizations and enterprises to acquire social sanctity and unchecked freedom for pursuing their self-seeking objectives fearlessly, bereft of values and concerns. Consequently, the underlying value structure of capitalism and managerial philosophy made degradation of nature, exploitation of human resources, erosion of moral universe, and disappearance of communitarian ties and emotional inter-dependence appear normal.

Therefore, capitalism in the twentieth century has been perceived to be the single most important cause for misery and violence. During the twenty-first century things do not appear to be different, instead they have become acute. The managerial philosophy, which, faithfully served capitalism in the twentieth century, is in the active service of post-capitalism in terms its propaganda for globalism. Needless to say that globalism, a newfound theory of capitalism, is equally antithetical to nature and human civilization. The net result of all these is the creation of a mesmerizing and make-believe world to pursue unabashed self-interest. This in turn has led to unabated exploitation of natural and human resources and large scale de-humanization and marginalization of mankind.

In the light of this the paper takes up the following issues. In the first place, it briefly scans through the different dimensions of globalisation. While doing so it wishes to highlight how gobalisation has been historically an alibi of capitalism and has produced consumerism. In the process, the paper focuses on how this philosophy alienates human beings from their authentic selves and redefines them as atomized individuals caught up in the web of consumerism. This results in distancing the human beings from their natural communitarian ties. Along with this, an attempt is made to show how capitalism creates greedy individuals out to control, dominate, and exploit nature resulting in alienation of man from nature as well. Finally, the paper intends to propose a normative alternative to global capitalism and its managerial philosophy by invoking the Gandhian critique of modern civilization. The Gandhian alternative, we put forward, is not a ready-made recipe over there. It requires careful, critical, and feasible reconstruction of Gandhi symbolically present in all those post-colonial life styles, agitations, and assertions in achieving sustainable human development.

## **Globalization and its impact**

Globalization, now reasonably well established, is a new and unprecedented phenomenon that has shaken the world as a whole. Supporters of globalization like Ohmae (1995), Wriston (1992) and Friedman (2005) hail it as a great leap forward in human advancement and a grand accomplishment in human civilization. All the same, the critics of globalization like Stiglitz (2002) and Deforney et al, (2000) hold divergent views about its nature and impact. Some of them argue that globalization is a dreadful development causing misery, displacement, and marginalization to the vast majority of people. They express the view that it has perpetuated 'eternal smile on one side of the visage of the world and frozen tears on the other side.' A few other critics notably Scholte (1993) and Castells (1996) tended to believe that the process of globalization is irreversible and that we have to live with it. Yet another group of critics, particularly the members of World Social Forum, think of possible human intervention in the process of globalization to create another world. Further, those critics who try to go into the historical antecedents of globalization hold at least two identifiably different views regarding its origin and historical development. One section among them argues that the history of globalization is the culminating phase of the history of late capitalism. Another section strongly contends this argument by emphasizing that globalization has no history, no past, and no antecedents. It is 'a bolt from the blue.' In any case, globalization today has occupied the center-stage in all kinds of intellectual debates.

As a result of these diverse views on it, globalization has aroused mixed reactions at the global level. It has been acclaimed as a cure to all kinds of problems that the world confronts today. A few hold that globalization is an entirely new phenomenon that cannot be explained away in terms of out fashioned theories of modernization. However, some others argue that it is merely an accelerated and aggressive form of modernization. As an aggressive form of modernization, globalization has led to the opening-up of the economies enabling the entry of a large number of new and more formidable economic actors. It has also significantly reduced the span of State activity, at times even resulting in the shrinking of national sovereignty and its control on the resources and the destiny of the nation. As a consequence of this, the modernization agenda of many countries in the post war began to slowly lose its welfare focus. This has aggravated the already existing dichotomies, contradictions, and structural inequalities. In this general setting of globalization, the researchers intend to take up and explore the issues with regard to development approach of societies that has resulted in the crisis of sustainability.

It is apt highlight here that, with new kinds of debates and perspectives on development (Sen, Amarthya. 1999.), new approaches of measuring development, and new indicators of human development (UNDP 1995) emerging, the flaws and paradoxes of the development agenda pursued by different societies came to the fore during the 1980s and 1990s. These fundamental flaws and failures are further highlighted in the era of globalisation. The development model that was adopted by different societies in the post-war period until early 1990s did not produce the expected results. It was not only unable to eliminate some of the crucial problems of many societies but also added a few more to them. Therefore writers like Bardhan (1984), Anupam Sen (1982) viewed that the process of industrialization due to the

uneven social structures existing in the world was lopsided and benefited only the dominant societies and groups in these societies. As a result, the gap between the rich and the poor, the urban and the rural, men and women, upper strata and the lower strata in the society began to increase. The supposed effective State intervention and planning did not materialize to the extent it was expected. In a sense, what really happened in the poor countries during those years was, as A. G. Frank (1975) puts it, 'development of underdevelopment.'

In any case, globalisation today has occupied the center-stage in all kinds of intellectual debates. In the context of the impact of globalisation Joseph Stiglitz (2002), in his seminal work on globalisation, observes that, "Globalisation today is not working for many of the world's poor. It is not working for much of the environment. It is not working for the stability of the global economy. Caring about the environment, making sure the poor have a say in decision that affect them, promoting democracy and fair trade are necessary if potential benefits of globalisation are to be achieved." Similarly, Jacques Deforny et al. (2000), while talking about the increased power of capital and the consequent displacement and marginalisation of the majority of the people world over make the following observation: "Today, globalisation is accompanied by the creation of economic blocs covering large areas. Global elimination of controls on capital was the basis for the financial globalisation that led to the creation of these blocs. Globalisation is sustained through deregulation and trade liberalization, and amplified by the new communication technologies. Business now focuses much more on export markets than on their home market and this extroversion is growing. The leading national and international concerns in this new social and economic landscape are the cries of employment and social cohesion, as exemplified by the growing rift between skilled and unskilled workers of the North and intense competition among nations of the South. As a result, large sectors of the population have been pushed into the informal economy, the last buffer against social upheaval."

### **Consumerism – Dehumanizing the Self**

Now it is widely acknowledged that, owing to some of the radical works on the ideology of consumerism, the very idea of consumer is a product of the on going process of capitalist development. Capitalism, it is observed, in the process of its historical evolution has reduced the individual into a consumption machine, and therefore, into a consumer. Hence some of these studies argue that the question of consumers, consumerism, and consumer protection can not be separated from the larger questions of capitalist domination and exploitation. Consequently, it has been pointed out that the process of capitalist development and the ideas and ideologies that it constantly produced and reproduced need to be kept in mind in any relevant discourse on consumerism.

It is evident that a large number of studies on consumerism work on two major assumptions. First, they start with the assumption that capitalism is given and natural. In this process they fail to recognize that capitalism, as a distinctive historical process, produces a corresponding set of cultural values, including consumption values. Therefore, the consumer that we talk about is not a universal and ahistorical feature but a specific creation of contemporary capitalism. Another major assumption

underlying the contemporary mainstream research on consumer related issues is that the market knows best as to how to allocate and use scarce resources in an efficient manner. And, therefore, the consumer and his interest would generally be safeguarded by the efficient and impersonal logic of the market. This understanding conveniently undermines the element of domination and power that loom large in the market scenario. Bazelon best expresses the character of market domination thus, "...So the terms of sale simply reflect the power, or lack of it, that each party brings to the market place. So a market is also a financial slaughter house, where the strong chop up the weak."

Given these two major assumptions of the mainstream research engagements on consumer related issues, we need to address some of the larger and fundamental issues of domination, discrimination, alienation, racism, sexism, marginalisation, etc., which capitalism as a historical phenomenon has been creating for its sustenance and survival. By doing so, capitalism is able to capture the huge psychological subjugation of human ingenuity and characterization of his identity in resonance with the logic of market. By doing so market reduces human beings into passive consumption machines and divorce them from their creative genius (Hunt and Sherman, 1978).

Further, the market for its growth attempts continuously to fragment the demand as evidenced by the shift that is taking place from mass marketing to customization and to customerization. It is interesting to note here the observation of Raymond Williams (1960) on the distinction between 'consumer' and 'user'. He says, "the popularity of 'consumer,' as a way of describing the ordinary member of modern capitalist society in a main part of his economic capacity, is very significant. The description is spreading very rapidly, and is now habitually used by people to whom it ought, logically, to be repugnant. It is not only that, at a simple level, 'consumption' is a very strange description of our ordinary use of goods and services. This metaphor drawn from stomach or the furnace is only partially relevant even to our use of things. Yet we say 'Consumer,' rather than 'user,' because in the form of society we now have, and in the forms of thinking which it almost imperceptibly fosters, it is as consumers that the majority of people are seen." As a result of this, human beings, basically seen as consumers by the market, are slotted in to different categories and types such as 'Strugglers-Actualizers,' 'Believers-Makers,' 'Strivers-Achievers,' 'Leaders-Followers,' 'Conservatives-Radical,' 'Flamboyant-Passive,' 'Fulfillers-Experiencers,' etc. Consumers are fragmented into categories, sub-categories, sub-sub-categories, and finally leading to a situation where each consumer constitutes a market in itself (Schiffman and Kanuk. 1998).

### **Gandhi and Sustainable Development – An egalitarian alternative ahead**

The above analysis of capitalism, globalism and consumerism brings to the fore the disastrous and dehumanizing aspects of capitalism. This compels all of us to look beyond capitalism and search for a feasible alternative. Ever since the emergence and consolidation of capitalism we have seen innumerable kinds of resistance against its Darwinian essence. Many such resistances have either come from within such societies that have been the home grounds of capitalist development or from such other societies that have historically the victims of colonial capitalist expansion. It is

now high time to re-examine the nature and forms of all such resistances against the capitalist havoc. The alternative that the present paper offers is essentially a combination and the quintessence of the historic battle that humanity at large has always fought against the forces of destruction. Specifically, this paper wishes to reformulate the alternative in the form of resistance that M. K. Gandhi has articulated in his critique of modern civilization more than 100 years back.

Gandhi's monumental work *Hind Swaraj* or Indian Home Rule (Gandhi 1909) is considered as one of the most important and formidable intellectual reflections in the twentieth century on problematic of modernity. It is a book written in a span of about two weeks during his voyage from England to South Africa. Gandhi himself considered that *Hind Swaraj* represents in a nutshell everything that he stood for. Therefore, when it was republished after 18 years, Gandhi insisted on its faithful verbatim reproduction. *Hind Swaraj* is a small monograph written in the form of a dialogue between the editor and the reader. Gandhi's reading of Plato's Republic is believed to be the single most important factor in determining the format of the book. Interestingly, Gandhi tried to capture all those different shades of arguments directly or indirectly involved in the comprehensive construction of Self Rule. This note on *Hind Swaraj* is important for the central argument of this book forms the foundation of the alternative proposed here in this paper. It is also pertinent here to mention that *Hind Swaraj* is a text that has been widely read and differently perceived by a significant section of the global scholarship. What this paper attempts is to re-read *Hind Swaraj*, re-construct its central argument, and re-visit the entire spectrum of Gandhi's ideas on the basis of which a consistent normative struggle against the onslaughts of capitalism could be pursued by humanity as a whole for its survival and sustenance.

Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* is a powerful expression of anti-colonial nationalism. It critically discusses in depth the challenges before the Self and more so conceiving self-rule. To Gandhi there cannot be Swaraj or self-rule without the self. Gandhian self is not an already constituted self. But, it is something that gets constituted in the process of self-control and self-realization. Therefore, for Gandhi Swaraj becomes a continuous process of self-exploration. Modern civilization, he considered, is a huge hindrance in the process of self-realization and swaraj. It is important to emphasize here that the Gandhian conception of the self is at once both a universal self and a particular self. He does not see any dichotomy between the two. Hence, modern civilization to Gandhi is unacceptable both in terms its specific manifestation of the British colonial rule as well as in terms of its generic representation of western civilization values. Consequently, he pleads, in *Hind Swaraj*, for a more comprehensive understanding of swaraj on the basis of a larger human and universalistic set of norms perceived in the specific contexts of time and space. In the course of conversation, in *Hind Swaraj*, with the imagined reader he poses the question, "What do we want? Whether we want the British to go leaving behind their values, institutions, and practices?" If yes, Gandhi would say that is not swaraj. To Gandhi, the continuance of British habits without their physical presence would imply a state of non-swaraj. What is significant in Gandhi's discourse on swaraj is his conviction that the colonial domination in India is just a specific manifestation of the universal domination of a larger western civilization. He conceived that India's struggle for freedom or nationhood or swaraj is, therefore, a larger battle of humanity

against the domination of modern civilization. Hence, the resolution is not British leaving India but the entire world getting emancipated from the clutches of this dominant, destructive and all pervasive civilization. He very clearly suggests in *Hind Swaraj* that not only the Indian people should be liberated from the British rule but also the British to be rescued from the clutches of this civilization.

Gandhi's major objection to modern civilization is that it is machine-centered and not man-centered civilization. It is important to state here that he was not opposed to machines as he aptly recognized the intrinsic link between human life and machines. For him the weaving wheel, the plough, and a spectacle are inextricable machines of human use. Gandhi's objection, therefore, is not against machines's per se but against a specific kind of domination that machine imposes up on man and specific kinds of control that men exert through them. He calls it the craze for machines and the human enslavement to machines.

It is important to recognize that Gandhi's critique of modern civilization carries an incipient critique of industrial capitalism. Its contemporary reading could also suggest a reflective and refreshing critique of global capitalism. In our quest for an alternative normative agenda for a sustainable future of humanity, the Gandhian critique would be of immense help. It facilitates us to understand the central dynamic of global capitalism and its impending dangers. It endows us with the moral strength to withstand the engulfing nature of capitalism and resist its onslaught. Further, it enables us to rediscover such sources on the basis of which a persistent battle against the onward march of capitalism could be launched.

Another crucial aspect of the Gandhian critique of modern civilization is his realization that it dichotomizes man and nature and makes nature subservient to man. Gandhi perceives that the modern civilization considers the relation between man and nature as basically a relationship of power. It teaches man to dominate, control, and exploit nature to meet his ever-increasing greed. It makes him greedy and self-indulgent and prompts him to use nature recklessly. Environmental agitations world over have therefore directly or indirectly have a Gandhian streak in them. The pursuit of an alternative agenda to improve humanity should therefore take serious cognizance of Gandhian critic of modern civilization vis-à-vis relationship of man with machine and nature. The Gandhian alternative is not a discrete high-fly dream but an achievable, realistic, and pragmatic blueprint strongly rooted in communitarian and humane civilizational universe.

### **Conclusion**

The crucial elements of the Gandhian blueprint like self-sufficient village, locally anchored development, culturally embedded communitarian welfare, trusteeship, political and economic decentralization, non-violence, and civil disobedience are already present in the innumerable sites of human endeavor. What needs to be done is to bring them together in a cohesive frame and place it before globalism-stricken humanity to improve itself.

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