

**THE CHALLENGE OF HARMONISING ECONOMICS,  
ECOLOGY AND ETHICS**

*A Gandhian Perspective of Greening The Economy*

**By H.M. Desarda**

‘Earth provides enough to satisfy every man’s needs but not for every man’s greed.’ - **M.K. Gandhi.**

At this juncture in our ‘development’ journey, the first and foremost question before humanity is: to preserve, protect and ensure the stability of our planetary system and wellbeing of all people.

The obsession with the growth, which is largely *undifferentiated* and *undirected*, has pushed the limits *beyond* the carrying capacity of the planet. The fossil fuels-based modes of transport and energy-intensive (read electricity through the non-renewable resources) production, consumption and overall *lifestyle* is not at all sustainable. The throughput intensive model of industrialization and urbanization has become a serious threat to the stability of the planetary system. Because of the phenomenal rise in the resource-use and emission of the CO<sub>2</sub> and other toxic gases, the temperature of the earth is rising at the rate which is most alarming. The overwhelming scientific evidence confirms that *climate change* is the undeniable fact. Its impact and implications on the sustainability of the growth process are terribly frightening.

As such, the need of the hour is to rethink, reorient and re-structure the global growth process to make it ecologically sustainable. Given vast disparities between consumption of the North and South, among the countries and across the social classes, there is an urgent need to make the global growth process geographically and socially equitable. Then alone it can be ecologically sustainable. Undoubtedly, equity and sustainability are *not* either/or issues and should be tackled simultaneously.

Let us not forget that there is an organic link between the ecological systems and economic systems and it should be carefully maintained. It has to be harmonized by adopting ethical and moral approaches to the growth and development. Quintessentially, it is a question of *lifestyle*, and related choices about the consumption. In our view, the life and work of M.K. Gandhi can show the world a pathway which is sustainable. In fact, we *view* Gandhi as a representative of the global green thought and role model of the environmental ethics and basic ecological values in *generic* term. Indeed, he stands as an epitome of ecological wisdom.

Indeed, the current global economic crisis should be utilized as an opportunity to come out of *the trap* of non-sustainable growth trajectory. As of now, the basic challenge before the world community is: to protect *the remaining natural capital*. The available evidence amply proves that the throughput intensive growth path has weakened the biophysical foundation of growth in a very substantial way. The decline, damage and degradation of the life-support-ecosystem are the grim reality.

Luckily, there are cheaper, quicker and safer *alternatives* to the resource-squandering growth model, blatantly imposed on all countries and communities in the name of faster growth and globalization. Take the example of basic needs of the people- water, food, energy, transport, health and education-there are local, low-cost, socially just and environment-friendly alternatives. Alas, 'The politics and economics of gigantism' does not allow the alternatives to work and succeed!

The vicious influence of the market forces can be easily seen in the domain of the automobile industry, which at present is very dominant economic force globally. It will never allow people to desist and /or dispense a personal motor vehicle and make its possession a social anathema, and non-preference good! The diabolic design of the global market forces, controlled by the transnational corporations has turned people into the consumer numbers. The craze of unbridled consumption is indeed the worst kind of social menace!

It would be a mistake to think that the insatiable consumer appetite of the seven billion humans and their growing numbers can be satisfied through the technological innovations and large scale production. The rapidly expanding ecological footprints have already jeopardized the stability of the planet. The huge cost and consequences of this are explained in details in the full paper-attached to this mail. The desirable and feasible action agenda of *the alternative pathway* is suggested for the consideration of the ecological economists' fraternity and the world community aspiring to make global green economy a living reality, through a conscious collective endeavour of caring and sharing. The main focus and concern of the paper is: holistic approach to development and plea for *normative* choice to harmonize economics, ecology and ethics.

Finally, as a grassroots academic activist, this paper writer humbly pleads for following the pathway shown through the ages by the Global Green Gandhians on the lifestyle issue; and resuscitating *reverence for nature*. That alone can bail-out the world from the colossal ecological-debt and catastrophic environmental crisis.

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## *A Gandhian Perspective of Greening The Economy*

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'Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's needs but not for every man's greed.' - **M.K. Gandhi**.

'The Earth is one but the world is not. We all depend on one biosphere for sustaining our lives. Yet each community strives for survival and prosperity with little regard for its impact on others. Some consume the Earth's resources at a rate that would leave little for future generations. Others, many more in number, consume far too little and live with the prospect of hunger, squalor, disease, and early death.' **World Commission on Environment and Development**, 1987. *Our Common Future* p.27, (The Brundtland Report) **Oxford University Press**.

'Modern economics is the science of self-interest, of how to best accommodate individual behavior by means of markets and the commodification of human relations. Much of it still reflects the particular philosophic tradition of British culture inaugurated by Hume and his followers. In this economic world view, the traditional human faculty of reason gets short-changed and degraded to act as the servant of sensory desires. There is no room for logic of human values and rationally founded ethics. Human aspirations are watered down to skillful shopping behavior and channeled in to stale consumerism. One would think that there must be an alternative way to conceptualize the economy.' - **Lutz Mark**, *Economics for the Common Good*, P.ix-x, Routledge, 1999.

### **Overview**

At this juncture in our 'development' journey, question before us is: to preserve, protect and ensure the stability of our planetary system and wellbeing of all people. Regrettably, the cultures and civilizations developed through ages, which we proudly count and claim as a common

heritage of humankind are facing a severe threat to their continuity, coexistence and creativity. Let us begin with succinct recapitulation of the major problem that concern us as inhabitants of this planet; as a world citizen and, of course, as students of ecological economics.

Through the ages social thinkers, saints, scientists and statesmen grappled with the issues of inter-relationship of man and nature. Nature was always held in deep reverence. But after the industrial revolution overarching attitude is that of 'controlling nature'. There is a clear conflict and contradiction in the two worldviews: the worldview of modernism and the ecological worldview. Today, the task before the ecological economists is to analyse and articulate the issues and present a cogent perspective to the policy-makers and the people in order to make the development process structurally equitable and sustainable.

The neo-classical economic theories embedded in the assumptions like 'substitutability' and 'externality' has led to the commodification of nature. According to the worldview of modernism, all benefits are man-made, the product of technological and industrial progress. Hence what really matters is *capital* and *technology*. Nature is just another commodity and not of much consequence from the point of the growth. Above all, Market is supreme; it is capable and efficient to take care of all problems and concerns.

## **Introduction**

Adamsmith and few other classical economists have recognized the primacy of nature, environmental and social ethics and its significance in economic analysis. It is true that the systematic scientific theoretical work like Georgescu Rogen's pioneering and pathbreaking work *The Entropy Law*

*and The Economic Process* came much later in 1971, almost two centuries after the famous *Wealth of Nations*. The ideological supremacy of market, capital and technology was dealt a severe blow by Rachel Carson's seminal book *Silent Spring*, published in 1962. It has brought the environmental debate to the Centre stage.

The process of the economic growth heralded after the industrial revolution and particularly in the wake of great depression and the two World Wars has led to the search of resources worldwide. This has accelerated the process of colonization and accumulation of capital on the global scale. It was a new modus-operandi of capturing the resources across the continents. Hitherto unprecedented scale of increase in the throughput escalated the process of entropy.

Not surprisingly, the environmental problems began to crowd and compound. This was the backdrop of emergence of environmental movement globally. It attracted the attention of scientists, scholars and journalists. Edward Goldsmith founded *The Ecologist* in 1970, which became the World's most widely-read environmental magazine. Across the globe, many leading newspapers and magazines began to highlight the environmental issues and peoples' struggle to protect the environment.

In India, the social activists waging struggles against poverty, hunger, disease and related issues realised that 'the poor are refugees of the environment'. The chief cause of poverty, pollution and distress is the decline and degradation of life-support-ecosystems. The Chipko movement (Hug the trees) launched by the women living in Himalayan mountains was one such. In fact, it gave a big push to the study of environmental issues from the grassroots perspective. The Citizen's Report on State of India's environment prepared under the able leadership of Anil Agarwal, Sunita Narain and their team has provided a unique platform to the social

activists, pro-people journalists and academics. Another example is that of Chico Mendes' non-violent struggle, such as the *empate* in Amazonia to save the environment from the loggers and cattle ranchers. Yet another recent example is that of Vangarai Mathai's afforestation efforts in Kenya. During the past four decades, worldwide there have been several protests to oppose the irrigation, power and mining projects which are environmentally disasters and also lead to the displacement of people. The vast saga of worldwide struggles to save environment and protect human rights has created much needed awareness about the primacy of Nature. Indeed, it is a rich source material for students of ecological economics.

Since 1962, during the past five decades almost every ten years some landmark events in the realm of environment have drawn the attention of the United Nations, national governments, thinkers, scientists and journalists. Agreeably, the issue of climate change and its genesis- the growth pattern and policies- is the major intellectual pursuit and political engagement of our times.

In 1972 it was publication of *Limits To Growth* which served as warning to the world obsessed with growth mania. In 1982 it was setting up of the United Nation's Commission for Environment and Development, the report of which *Our Common Future* has paved the way to the historic Earth Summit in Rio in the year 1992. It gave the clarion call: '*development without destruction*'. Ten years later, Rio + 10 meet at Johannesburg conceived the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) which has pinpointed Specific targets and measures to reduce poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy and pledged to protect the environment.

Now, in 2012 coinciding with Rio +20 UNCSD Earth Summit, ISEE has thoughtfully decided to grapple with the challenges of greening the economy. The landmark Journey of the past five decades is certainly an

occasion for the serious reflections. Indeed, it is an opportunity which we should seize to get our thoughts and actions together.

### **An Outline of the paper**

After a brief statement on the theme, the paper is divided in seven sections indicated by the Roman numerals. Introductory observations and section I describe the state of our planet today. The obsession with the growth, which is largely *undifferentiated* and *undirected*, is fast pushing the world to the brink of disaster. The depletion, decline and degradation of the resources and the accumulation of the toxic gases in atmosphere, triggering the human induced climate change are the major challenge before the world community today.

Section II pinpoints the root-cause of the crisis humanity is facing globally. Like many scholars, we feel M.K. Gandhi has precisely perceived it as the resource-squandering pathway of the industrialization. The global green movement draws inspiration from it and can take it further by way of an action agenda.

Logically, this takes us to the most critical issue of the consumption, discussed briefly in section III. Section IV focuses on the question of *lifestyle*. There the prefix 'stupid' may sound rather harsh. So be it! Obviously, it does not promote health and happiness of human population (which has crossed the seven billion) and is out rightly injurious to other life forms and long-term stability of the Planet. Later, in section V we argue that there is a need for paradigm shift in concepts and categories used in mainstream economics, with its deductive logic of technological-fix. In fact, the answer is societal and not technological; albeit some technologies on anvil like cheapening of the photo-voltaic techniques of equipment and new methods of tapping solar and other renewable energies, along with the



decentralized means and modes of the communication can make alternative pathways a universal reality.

Indeed, it is basically an ecological and ethical issue. For that we have to make conscious *normative* choices. In section VI the issues and perspective of the alternative pathways are discussed with a view to clear the conceptual cobwebs and the hurdles posed by what we paraphrase as ‘the economics and politics of gigantism’. The major issue that confronts the world community in its journey of ushering in Green Economy is to preserve and to protect *the remaining natural capital*.

In the last section VII, we have attempted to suggest an alternative action agenda, which can enable us to make peaceful transition to sustainable society through sustainable economy. Interestingly JC Kumarappa, a follower of Gandhi who was economist trained at the Columbia University, has called it *Economy of Permanence*, in a book of that title. The foundation of which is total non-violence in production and consumption. This paper writer, an academic activist or activist academia is pursuing ecological economics pathway from a Gandhian grassroots perspective and practice. As such, it is a humble effort to perceive and promote holistic approach which can enable us to integrate economics, ecology and ethics. The paper seeks to present it in the context of transition toward the global green economy. The main thrust is on *praxis* – from analysis to action. Therefore, at the end, we ventured ‘a message’ from the global green Gandhians – in lieu of conclusion. Pardon, me-a cul.pa!

## I

### **The Problematique**

The many vital signs and signals like global warming, land degradation, deforestation, loss of biodiversity etc. suggest a grave threat to the very

existence of the planet and its capability to sustain complex forms of life. Notwithstanding the tremendous resilience of the planet Earth and its capacity to sustain life, the situation is really most alarming. First and foremost, climate change is the dominant reality confronting all the seven billion humans and the vast animate entities inhabiting this wonderful planet, the mother earth.

Indeed, it is difficult for any thinking person to refuse to *reflect* and *act*. Lamentably, the general populace, barring the small minority, have not realised the seriousness of the crisis that threatens the entire humankind. The leading environmental thinker and former editor of the well-known journal *The Ecologist*, Edward Goldsmith says in his highly perceptive and path breaking book, *The Way*: “Modern humanity is rapidly destroying the natural world on which it depends for its survival. Everywhere on our planet, the picture is the same. Forests are being cut down, wetlands drained, coral reefs grubbed up, agricultural lands eroded, salinized, desertified, or simply paved over. Pollution is now generalized; our groundwater, streams, rivers, estuaries, seas and oceans, the air we breathe, the food we eat, are all affected. Just about every living creature on earth now contains in its body traces of agricultural and industrial chemicals – many of which are known or suspected carcinogens or mutagens.”

Further, in unequivocal words he warns, “By destroying the natural world in this way, we are making our planet progressively less habitable. If current trends persist, in no more than a few decades it will cease to be capable of supporting complex forms of life. This may sound farfetched; unfortunately, it is only too realistic.” Undoubtedly, it is the most forthright prognosis of the problem the world is facing, by one of the leading thinkers of our times. That is precisely the purpose of quoting him at length.

As of now, it is amply clear that this picture is both global and local. If we fail to come to grip with this problematique, consequences are going to be much more fatal, violent and irreversible. Hence, there is no time to loose. We have to *act* as underscored by the Brundtland Commission, a quarter century ago. The commission in its landmark report *Our Common Future* had asked the leaders and Governments all over the world to initiate measures to control and combat the adverse effects of the greenhouse gases (GHG) urgently; emphasizing with the bold expression: *Here and Now!*

Since the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992, the consequences of the *undifferentiated* and *undirected* growth are succinctly documented in number of studies, by the independent scholars, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the 'United Nations' Intergovernmental panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Notwithstanding the diabolic defence of the ruling elite, the overwhelming evidence in respect of the worrisome *climate change* is the most serious threat to our wellbeing, nay our very existence!

In short, the ecological toll of the Dominant Development Path pursued globally and which governments across the continents are blindly *aping* has literally pushed the humanity to the brink of disaster. Globally, we have already over-stepped the carrying capacity of the planet by more than 50 percent. This means on yearly basis we are 'using' (read wasting) resources of one and the half planet- or the resources that take one and half year to renew and replenish! Also, we have to take into account capacity of the atmosphere and biosphere to *absorb* the waste, carbon dioxide and other toxic gases. This means the *sink* function is equally crucial. In fact, we have to conceive and count resources in terms of both 'the source and sink' i.e. the total *throughput*.

As we very well know that there is a marked difference and disparity in the ecological footprints between the North and South, and among the continents, countries and the social classes.

## II

### **The Root-Cause**

What is the genesis of the crisis – economic, ecological and ethical – we are passing through? Primarily, it is the crisis of *'the industrial society'*. For the sake of conceptual clarity it may be paraphrased as “The Crisis of Modern Western Industrialism”. The perceptive critique of which was presented to the world by M.K. Gandhi in his epochal work “Hind-Swaraj” as early as 1909. The prophetic vision of Gandhi stands fully vindicated after a century of its publication. Surely, it can serve as a guide to usher in global green economy.

In our opinion, the flaw in the industrial society and its world view is: It sees the universe as a mechanical system and the human body as a machine and life as a competitive struggle, and calls the waste of scarce resources ‘progress.’! And it will sacrifice anything – the planets health, our children’s future – in its quest for unlimited economic growth. We are losing our sense of place and community to a materialistic culture. Militarism and environmental destruction threaten the continued existence of most life, including human life itself.

By and large, the green thinkers and activists the world over agree with this critique of the industrial society. The growing tribe of ecological economist is pursuing it with a competent professional rigor. Of course, the moot question is: to make it socially and politically relevant. In other words, the task before us is to mobilize and muster necessary *political will* to make the change a vibrant reality.

## **The Overconsumption**

The overwhelming worldwide experience amply proves that the resource-squandering and excessive *throughput* oriented global pattern is neither equitable nor is it sustainable. The new process and modus-operandi of 'globalization and marketization' has worsened the situation by giving impetus to the unbridled consumerism. All in all, solution to the crisis is pinned on so called advanced and frontier technologies on anvil. Well, this is the myopia and growth mania which is the ideology of the ruling elite – alas, the universities and scholarly professions are, with notable exceptions, strong protagonists of the consumerist growth model. Perversely, the dominance of 'the growth first' mindset is the ruling ideology.

Overconsumption of the North and their rich allies in the South is the major cause of the degradation of the environment. Also, it is true that the poor masses out of sheer survival necessity are forced to exploit the land and biomass resources in non-sustainable manner owing to the decline of the commons and their usurpation by the rich and powerful for profiteering. The common property resources (CPRs) on which the poor primarily depend for their basic wherewithal-water, food, fodder, fuel, etc. -are finding it increasingly difficult to subsist. Willy-nilly, they are required to over-exploit their meager resources.

Since 1950 global consumption has increased eight to ten fold. The use of the fossil-fuels is increasing at the phenomenal rate. Notably, the use of many other non-renewable resources is also increasing at the mind-boggling rate. Even the use of renewable resources like water and biomass is not at all sustainable. Clearly, this requires an immediate curb on the

conspicuous consumption. The unbridled consumption is not at all sustainable. The mindset of technological-fix is totally misplaced. Perhaps, it is the deliberate design to gloss over the inconvenient harsh facts!

#### IV

### **The Stupid Lifestyle**

Geographically and socially the global consumption of the resources is highly skewed. To take one glaring example, the United States with 5 percentage of the world's population consumes 25 percent of the world's oil. Nearly, 86 percent of world's goods and services are consumed and used by the upper 15 percent of the global population. Whereas the poorest 20 percent consume barely 1.5 percent! This shows the stark inequity in use of the precious resources. Shamefully, the consumption day by day is becoming more and more skewed!

There is tremendous waste and triviality in the global growth pattern, the consumption behavior and social mores. Priorities are highly distorted. The Human Development Report says: "the Americans spend more on advertising and Europeans on ice-cream in a single year. This is more than the amount needed to provide basic education and sanitation to the third of the global population who need it". Will the protagonists of 'globalization' seriously ponder over the consequences of these anomalies and stark realities?

Those who talk about the technological feat of 'the global village' will ever realize the necessity of caring and sharing? Certainly, the answer is not technological but societal. It squarely hinges on our perceptions, values, and vision of a good society. The crux of the problem is: The Lifestyle. The resource-squandering *lifestyle* adopted in the name of modernity, industrialization and urbanization is the major cause of the environmental

crisis, violence and discord. The elite everywhere are caught in a trap in which they find their intellectual inclinations and actual lifestyle is at variance. This dualism is not a marginal deviation but the deep divide and distortion. The difficulty to get out of *the trap* is the basic issue.

## V

### **The Ethical Answer**

The entropy created by the pursuit of the *undifferentiated* and *undirected* growth is getting worse and worse each day. As such, the hollowness of the basic assumptions of the mainstream economics such as ‘externality’ and ‘substitutability’ stands fully exposed! The tools in the kit of the economics and its major policy and planning instruments and the institution of ‘market’ are not adequate to arrest the *entropy* and ensure preservation and protection of the precious resources which are the primary source of the sustenance of life and flourishing of the culture and civilization.

M.K.Gandhi, reverentially called Mahatma (a great soul), had intuitively and intellectually grasped the cost and consequences of the greed-based economic pursuits, limits of technology and dangers of consumerism. He defined “voluntary reduction of wants” as a true civilization. Notably, even J.M.Keynes, the renowned economist said: “the ultimate purpose of economics is to increase the possibilities of civilization for our grandchildren.” Intriguingly he is the very economist whose policy prescriptions are advocated to cure the ills of the developed economies of the USA and Europe! The thinking and sane people worldwide are recognizing the profundity of Gandhi’s perception about machine, technology, path of austerity, self-reliance and dignity as well as value of the human labour. In his characteristic simple and poignant manner he explained the meaning of the present day popular phrase ‘the global and

local'. He says: "for the purpose of economy, the village is my world and for the purpose of culture, the world is my village." Thoughtfully, this can be a guiding principle of sustainable development about the need and greed.

Gandhi's famous dictum (cited in the beginning) is rightly considered as the edifice of the philosophy of sustainable and equitable development. Nowadays, it is universally accepted as the cardinal principle of the environmental ethics.

Let us not forget that the 20<sup>th</sup> Century has been the most violent century in the human history. The violence not only in the war but also in the production, consumption and for controlling and commanding the resources (like the \$ 3.5 trillion Iraq war waged for the oil by the USA, a la Joseph Stiglitz), is the major problem besieging humankind today. Therefore, the major challenge is to come out of the growth trajectory which abates violence and promote excessive exploitation of natural resources, thereby endangering its sustainability.

## VI

### **The Alternative Pathway**

Keeping in view the crisis and challenges we are facing, the major task today is: to preserve and protect *the remaining natural capital*. Unfortunately, all the protagonist of growth and development economists are of the view that constraint to the growth is 'capital and technology' and not *the natural resources*. Moreover, they have unwarranted belief in the power of technology to surmount the limits of natural resources. Undeniably, the technology is a useful tool which can eschew drudgery and afford leisure for creativity. But 'the technological fix' as an answer to all human problems is totally misplaced idea, so also the mindset of limitless speed and volume of production. The Growth-God has become omnivorous



demon destroying the ethos, mores and morals necessary to sustain the human society; nay leading to the extinction and holocaust too tragic to put in words!

The moral of the story is: Sans strong ecological and ethical vision you can never build a sustainable and equitable economy and a universal non-violent world order. For this the relevance of the life and teaching of Mahatma Gandhi is very significant. Unless and until we bid goodbye to the resource-squandering growth mania, we will not be able to ensure a truly sustainable system of production. The stupid and highly resource-squandering lifestyle of the *modern west*, which nations all over the globe are *aping* in the name of the growth and globalization, is the major cause of the environmental disaster and crisis. Sadly, the entire world today is reeling under its burden and incurring a huge ecological-debt! Unequivocally speaking, the mass production and mass consumption is fast pushing the world to mass destruction!!

The meaningful alternative to this is local, natural and human resource-based production which not only fulfills needs of survival but facilitate quality of life that enables flowering of crafts, culture, fine arts and literature. The key to this is in the three D's: Demystification, Democratization and Decentralization. This alone can be a firm foundation of a truly wholesome Green Economy. Surely, this will work only in a social milieu that ensures sufficient production to meet the needs of meaningful creature existence and human comforts - guaranteeing health and happiness of one and all. Put in nutshell: It is not the pathway of present-day 'mass production' by atomized big industries but *production by the masses*. Needless to emphasize, this would be carried out not only with the least damage to the ecosystem, but also to ensure pride and pleasure of creativity. A tremendous addition of real value beyond money price!

Diabolically, the chief obstacle in restructuring the economy, as stated earlier, is the predominance of 'The Economics and Politics of Gigantism'; the fulcrum of which is the kick-back to the nexus of the ruling coterie! Therefore, we have to go *beyond* the growth and globalization model to ensure the integration of economics, ecology and ethics. Hence there is need for the paradigm shift. Happily, Gandhi's view of the *life* and the vision of *development* can ensure a progress which is equitable and sustainable. Therefore, the foremost challenge before us today is: *To redefine development* in terms of Gandhi's perspective and philosophy (which is quintessence of the values and vision of all the wise men and women from Buddha, Confucius and Socrates to Tolstoy, Ruskin, Thoreau and Rachel Carson) that alone can ensure peace and prosperity for all.

Gandhi's critique of the industrialism and industrial society was much deeper than the usual oriental outlook. What he rejected outright was not everything *modern, western, industrial*, (the three words have to be taken together) but the manifestation of what he experienced in England and Europe during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. In substance, Gandhi's critique was that of resource –destructive urbanization and industrialization. As the matter of the fact, he drew his inspiration from Ruskin, Tolstoy and Thoreau. Indeed, it was highly nuanced philosophical and civilizational dialogue and response to the negative consequences of the growth, based on (baser) greed and excessive creature comforts.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century the profession of ecological-ethical-economics, a new holistic paradigm can draw inspiration from all these Western and Eastern *conscience- keepers* of humanity to usher in sustainable global green economy. The thought process of greening the economy which began in a big and bold way with the Earth Summit in 1992 (not to forget its precursors the Human Environment Conference at Stockholm in 1972, and

the follow-up process under the aegis of the United Nations) needs to be pursued to the logical ends. Hopefully, 12<sup>th</sup> ISEE conference 'Ecological Economics and Rio + 20' should lead us to the sustainable world order.

Indeed, it is high time to restructure and reorient global economic processes in order to make it equitable and sustainable, not in mere words and expressions in scholarly professional discourse but in actual action agenda. Therefore, any decision and direction in respect of the *growth* should be strictly in accordance with criteria and consideration that it is: *pro-nature, pro-women and pro-poor*. For this simple step is to begin with you.

As Gandhi candidly said, 'Be the change you want to bring.' In this regard, we can begin by extending, the well-known dictum 'think globally, act locally' to include *respond personally*. This may sound somewhat doctrinaire and rather simplistic, but we can revoke our individual and collective hope, and of course, the faith to make The Green Economy a global reality. In short, this is the meaning and message of Gandhi and the Gandhian perspective of greening the economy.

At this stage, permit me to mention clearly that the word (and name) *Gandhi* is *generic* for the green and global, let us say: the global green. He was truly a world citizen-combining the best in the traditions of the East and West, the North and South. Physically, he lived in the three continents - Asia, Europe and Africa and, more importantly, embodied the values of sustainable social order across the countries, continents and cultures. Hence he could be a meaningful symbol of A Global Green Economy.

## VII

### **Towards An Action Agenda**

As we prepare to combat climate change, preserve biodiversity and use resources equitably and sustainably, we should accept and adopt a few ecological and ethical tenets in contents and composition of consumption and lifestyles.

Immediately we can begin with a few basic steps like the local and organic vegetarian food; renewable energy and public transport; and overall *low entropy lifestyles*. This means, consciously bidding goodbye to the chemicalised and genetically modified foods, the personal automobiles and drastic reduction in the use of fossil fuels. The prevailing pattern of housing is predominantly based on energy intensive construction materials like steel, cement, glass and plastic. By concise choice, it should be *replaced* by materials which are least energy intensive (read electricity) in construction, operation and maintenance. The community-based rainwater harvesting and renewable energy harnessing; commuting to work, market, civic and social errands by walk, bicycle and other eco-friendly modes is *the key* to make safe transition to sustainable economy. It is a penultimate step towards sustainable society, which is truly humane, enlightened and totally non-violent.

The above mentioned steps can decisively change the prevalent perverted systems of the health, education and socialization. This may sound a near impossible tall order. Admittedly, it is hard to practice in prevailing political and socio-economic milieu. But considering the cost and consequences of fossil fuels, environmental friendly alternatives are absolutely essential prerequisites for the security of the planet and people. Frankly, it is sheer survival necessity today.

Perhaps, it may sound as a blind opposition to the growth. On the contrary, it is an opposition to the blind growth. It is due to the fact that we are encircled by the mighty forces of senseless consumption and creature

comforts. Take the example of the personal automobile or motor car, which is the icon of modernity and generally preferred mode of mobility, convenience and comfort. Do we realise (!) its *real cost* and *consequences*? It would be no exaggeration to say: cost of a car is the Earth! Do we still want it?

As of now, the world economy is in the grip of multi-national/trans-national corporations. (MNCs/TNCs) For them the people are: *The crazy consumers!* Pandering to baser instincts, they promote unbridle consumption. A choice paralysis is created, 'shop till you drop mania'! The diabolic design of these giant supra-state-corporations is the real threat to a sane, peaceful and non-violent human society. The multi-national corporations and people simply cannot *coexist*. This is the real contradiction which we have to resolve by making conscious ethical choices.

The MNC/TNC, whether in the domain of the mass consumption or the Military- Industrial-Complexes vying for 'the control of resources' are a real threat to the security of planet and people. Resolving this basic contradiction is the major challenge for the transition to a global green economy. Let us hope and pray, the 12<sup>th</sup> ISEE conference and Rio +20 UNCS Earth Summit will pave, the way to make 'development without destruction' (the motto of the Earth Summit in 1992) a global reality.

In this regard, as argued in detail earlier, we should be very clear about the fact that sustainable economy can be built on the edifice of sustainable society. That means a society free from hunger, disease, discord, ethnic and economic rivalries. The societies afflicted by these problems can face the crisis and collapse even before the economy has crossed the limits of environmental and resource sustainability. There are several factors, proximate and perpetual like chaos, disorder, riots, revolts, growth of

criminality, civil war and aggression, which can distract the state and society from pursuing the path of sustainability. Undoubtedly, it is a big *drag* on the natural and human resources of the globe.

This gives *impetus* to the military-industrial-complexes and unproductive expenditure in the name of national security. Well, it is an *alibi* for the security of the ruling elite, comprising political representatives, technocracy and bureaucracy who have close nexus with the business and industrial tycoons. There is unholy alliance of the money, muscle and political power. No wonder, this is the *raison d'être* of *the mafia rule*, which is the chief obstacle in the way of greening the economy.

This takes us to the domain of political ecology and people's struggle to save Nature. The challenge and opportunity for the tribe of ecological economists is to thoroughly analyse and articulate the issues and boldly identify with the people's grass root struggle, as indeed many of us are already doing so. As one perceptive thinker said 'theory becomes force only when it grips the masses'. The '2012 ISEE Conference' can be a historic landmark in our journey towards a global green economy.

### **In lieu of Conclusion:**

#### ***A Message from the Global Green Gandhians***

The foregoing analysis of the ecological-ethical perspective of the economic growth and the realities of the prevailing global political economy bring us face to face with the question of the State and Market (with capital S and M). During the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, the major political economy debate was focused on the desirable path of growth, justice and development. The ideological and political discourse was centered on the issue, which is the

humane, egalitarian and efficient pathway: the *Free Market Capitalism* or the *State Controlled Socialism/Communism*? In retrospect and prospect, it seems both are highly imperfect and inadequate systems; at least as they exist today or existed earlier. Indeed, both suffer from some *insuperable* structural problems. Succinctly they could be summarised as the issues of 'equity versus efficiency' or vice versa. As of now, there seems to be a broad agreement, may be a general consensus, on the tenets of equity and sustainability. The economic rationality has to be redefined in the light of the ecological imperatives and ethical vision of the sustainable society.

In the light of the historical experience of the growth trajectory and development experience under varied 'modes of production' and socio-political systems of varying hues, we cannot solely rely on any prevalent political system (Capitalism or Socialism) and its instruments and institutions (Market or State). The goal of accomplishing happy, healthy and humane society require us to move *beyond* capitalism and socialism, *beyond* state and market, and *beyond* growth and globalization as we understand and experience it today. Not getting bogged to the nomenclature, we could call it 'Global Green Society' which is basically a communitarian cooperative organization that will ensure the harmony of nature, economy and society.

As such, the question of power and political economy that perpetuates it can never be ignored by social analyst, including ecological economist. The ecological answers *pose* formidable political questions, which must be faced boldly in the societal arena. This takes us to basic task of building social and ecological democracy. Here, we decisively enter the realm of ethics and morality. The earth-ethic and ecological values speak volumes about the level of enlightenment of any state and society. Indeed, the

respectful reverence for *Nature* is the crying secular and / or spiritual need to realize the goal of greening the economy.

At the end of the day, despite the incontrovertible facts, the mainstream economists arrogantly 'refuse to engage' with these critical issues by taking shelter under 'technological advancement', as an answer to the resource exhaustion. In their perception, there is always *on hand* technological-quick-fix! For this they invoke the thesis of innovation and creative destruction, forcefully profounded by Joseph Schumpeter. But the grim facts about climate change have clear warning: 'More of the same is not the answer'! On the contrary 'business-as-usual' approach is totally futile.

Keeping in view the facts and arguments presented in the paper, the first and foremost task before all thinking people is to consciously *disengage* from the mad race of consumption, comforts and speed. All in all, as Gandhi wisely said: 'Speed is irrelevant if the direction is wrong'. A sensible way to reorganize the global economy, society and polity is to make a conscious choice: Live simply so that others can simply live!

The meaningful pathway to this is the total commitment to the philosophy and practice of *non-violence* in everyday life, in matters of- food, clothing, shelter, health and education; art, culture and entertainment. Above all, respect for all forms of life. Therefore the lifestyle is the key issue. The choice is clear: Need and not the greed. Let us consciously make it. We have the abundant information and knowledge to do so. Ultimately what we critically require is: *wisdom* and *courage*. We can definitely draw it by faithfully following the global Gandhian greens!

Hence this paper pleads to the world communities and the powers-that-be to harmonize economics, ecology and ethics. That alone can enable us to realize the goal of greening the economy.



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