



# *How much should a person consume? Guha*

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# Self-correction is an ideal

Redistribution has to accompany collective and individual will

**Reality:** *Today, India is in many ways an ecological disaster zone, marked by high rates of ecological deforestation, species loss, land degradation, and air and water pollution [Guha 2006: 232]*

*Any reduction of our consumption requires:*

- **we need political action [based on scientific and social science data] that has to be guided by technical change, by the exercise of individual restraint and by a wider resolve to redistribute wealth and resources with the less-advantaged countries of the South**
- **Are we doing or merely propagating it to others?**

# Which citizen needs to reduce?

**“Looted” vs “yield” : In 1938, C. Sauer had spoken about the expanding frontier of technology overcoming limits of nature and warned about difference between the two and that nature could not be exploited indefinitely.**



**2022: Can technological innovation be sufficient or we need strong behavioural shifts to meet emission targets?**

Global emissions Report 2022 emphasizes need for “individual” citizens of the world to reduce their ecological footprint

When we compare?

**2.4 tCO<sub>2</sub>e/capita Indian citizen VS 14 tCO<sub>2</sub>e/capita US citizen**

\* Picture is evident and self-explanatory! Within each are great inequalities between Indian citizens themselves and averages cloud the picture

All kinds of comparisons about nature's stock by an American citizen - (number of cars, consumption of wood, minerals and other materials can be compared)

\* Much before we calculated these quantitative comparisons sociologists were already writing about these and tracing this idea to Gandhiji - Eminent sociologist and environmental historical Ram Guha's 2006 article argues this

>>>>>>my own field research in North-east India

# Consumptive individual & nation: Galbraith

- **Worshipping GOD GROWTH as cardinal principle of USA - 1950s:** Plentiful and society of affluent consuming such that consumption of material goods itself became a measure of individual and collective achievement
- What are the consequences of this trajectory, globally? Is this at cost of other nations and other citizens of the world?
- BIG ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINT: Galbraith published "**The Affluent Society**" in 1958 speaking about American high production and high consumption patterns
- His later essay published in 1958 entitled "**How much should a county consume?**" spoke about disjunction between public squalor and poverty and private affluence [inequity and appetite for consuming more resources than ever] - American citizen has an insatiable desire and hunger for consuming and drawing resources from other countries
- **Pristine nature:** Promote wilderness and conserve nature while shifting resource extraction from other nations [R. Carson and few other romantics argued about value of ecological restoration and cutting environmental degradation and biodiversity loss]
- USA is deeply democratic yet indistinctively imperialist and consuming more than one-third of world natural resources while its population accounts for 330 Million out of 8 Billion persons
- **Ehrlich and Hardin in 1970s: Human Population growth as single most imp factor contributing to ecological crises - developing countries like India were constantly blamed**

# German Greens acknowledge ecological vulnerability and need for sustainability

Recognition and admission: Exploitation of developing countries and ecological extraction of resources from Third World countries at cheap prices has permitted the wealth and growth economies of the North

How do we reduce poverty in the developing world without cutting voracious appetite to consume in the industrialized North?

***Eco-socialist Bahro: "we are eating up what other nations and future generations need to live on" [1984, From Red to Green: Interviews with New Left Review]***

- Debates have proliferated in 1990s, and public have been sensitized on need for reconstructing their industrial society to shift to ecologically and socially equitable distributive processes of production and consumption
- Green Party acknowledged: Present consumptive patterns of industrialized societies and nations was destructive and leading to ecological deterioration and undermining health of the planet. This could not be sustained and had to be curtailed as natural resources were being exhausted and could not be replenished and renewed.
- Netherlands – Dutch also attempted to understand and aim for reducing consumption



# Can India ape the West?

Greed and Growth - Civilizational perspective: the distinguishing feature of modern industrial society is insatiable desire to consume and indefinite multiplicity of wants [while traditional society were characterized by collective and individual restraint on wants]

Gandhiji spoke in Dec 1928: "God forbid if India should ever take to industrialization after the manner of the West. The economic imperialism of a singly tiny island kingdom {England} is today keeping the world in chains. If an entire nation of 300 Million took to similar economic exploitation, it would strip the world bare like locusts."

Whom do we exploit? Where do we extract resources from and how do we tackle growth with redistribution to reduce inequalities?

# Greed needs to countered

Mahatma Gandhi considered the earth a living organism.

The distinguishing characteristic of modern civilization is an indefinite multiplicity of wants, whereas ancient civilizations were marked by an imperative restriction upon, and a strict regulating of these wants. Gandhi believed that the ancient civilizations were religious in nature which would surely limit worldly ambitions.

Gandhiji advocated a code of voluntary individual and collective simplicity and sustainable lifestyle [resource recycling, minimization of greed and consumptive desire]

**"nature has enough to satisfy every one's needs, but not to satisfy anybody's greed"** has over time became the code and ethic of modern environmentalism.

Modern industrial civilization has had a huge impact on human kind as well as on the environment. It made a small part of the population wealthy at the cost of exploiting the world's natural resources. Gandhi believed that it propagates nothing other than the hunger for wealth and the greedy pursuit of worldly pleasures. *Hind Swaraj*, published in 1909, criticized the modern civilization as " 'satanic' ". He observed that 'machinery is the chief symbol of modern civilization; it represents a great sin. It is machinery that has impoverished India.'

If interested refer to [https://www.mk Gandhi.org/articles/green\\_future.htm#:~:text=His%20idea%20that%20%22nature%20has,and%20the%20Law%20of%20Species.](https://www.mk Gandhi.org/articles/green_future.htm#:~:text=His%20idea%20that%20%22nature%20has,and%20the%20Law%20of%20Species.)

# Romantic vision and contrast

- Gandhi: Set up contrast between idyllic self-sufficient village republics and modern industrial cities
- Guha talks about - India and several India's [ecological diversity and socio-economic inequality]: How India has become like United Kingdom and America?
- Environmentalism of poor and ecological conflicts expressed within India (forests, water, land) highlight the contradictions and inequalities between societies and nation and within India itself - massive asymmetries in power, access and consumption of resources
- India's growth and development story has been based on human exploitation and resource extraction from within the territory of the nation itself, and particularly from rural sections and tribal-dominated geographies that have been alienated from their resources [middle India, North-east India, Andaman and Nicobar Islands].
- Distinguishes between 3 categories:
  1. **Omnivores** [industrialists, rich farmers, state officials, middle class living in cities, and others consuming resources and extracting]
  2. **Ecosystem people** [peasants, urban poor, animal herders and pastoralists, tribals, majority of rural population dependent on primary sector for their livelihood and majority of India's population]
  3. **Ecological refugees** who have been displaced by various development projects and migrated to urban areas and live in slums and work in the informal sector



# India's development process – Guha identifies 5 aspects

1. concentration of decision-making power with Omnivores
2. use of state machinery to divert resources and give subsidies to Omnivores
3. Indifference towards ecological degradation by Omnivores while ecosystem people pay the cost and suffer
4. Development projects (wood, water, minerals) around dams and hydropower, deforestation, and mining have dispossessed ecosystem people
5. Development has permanently displaced large number of eco-system people from their homes, farms and forests and transformed them into ecological refugees and created “victims of development” and created ecological faultlines

# Contrast & Choices

- Universalization of American style of consumption has been promoted by Globalization [discusses the index of motor car as reflecting lifestyle aspiration]
- Fruits of development within India and China are unevenly distributed although absolute poverty has declined – environmental degradation has been immense

Guha differentiates and discussed

- **Economists romantic fallacy** which supposed there were no limits to growth and resources would be redistributed by the market principle

Solution given by Biology professor – reduce size of human beings genetically alter them!

- **Fallacy of romantic environmentalist** – Gandhi's ideal village [Guha, 2006: page 239-40] read...
- Some spring from emphasizing the agrarian lifestyle while others from a deep ecological perspective

Reality: But the peasant does not want to remain a peasant, or be denied fruits of development!

Ecosystem people do not wish to be stagnating and remain as ecosystem people, but aspire to be omnivores and be denied prosperity and material objects [Gandhiji's lion-cloth vs Ambedkar Blue suit]

Choices of consumption should be available to all

Overlap between ecological entitlements and economic status and this needs to be sorted

The rich not only do they consume more of the resources but also more protected from environmental degradation while the poorer get deprived more and get more exposed and suffer from consequences of ecological destruction

# Guha's charter – New Green Development Strategy

1. Foster a genuinely participatory democracy
2. Process of natural resource use should be free, transparent and accountable
3. Removal of subsidies to ensure proper ecological valuation and political decentralization of control over resources
4. Encouraging shift to private market enterprise to curb corruption and factoring environmental externalities in production costs
5. Outline sustainable policies [combining science and social science] for specific resource sectors {transport, energy, health, water, and so on}
6. Work towards a more equitable society by investing in social development (land reform, education, health) and enhancing power of ecological refugees and ecosystem people

# Nature-consuming to nature-saving model

- Will the rich retreat from their patterns of consumption and reduce their appetite?
- Discussions and policy suggestions are circulating within Europe but USA is far behind
- Several German towns and cities are putting sustainable policies and proposals into practice
- Bitter arguments are going to occur over distribution of ecological resources and as they get scarcer

Not merely an Intellectual Debate – emissions report of 2020:

- ❖ What element of reducing consumption can be voluntary or can be demanded?
- ❖ What amount of ecological degradation is avoidable?

# Note

Compulsory reading already circulated on Moodle

- Chapter by R. Guha “How much should a person consume?” and inter-connect it with the Exec Summary of the Global Emissions Report 2022

Tutorial discussion: Youtube video produced by the Indian Academy of Sciences

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-tyLEACvSr8>, Guha’s lecture on Gandhi, Science and Future of Humanity