

Gandhi's way of Conservation and Protection of Nature: An Environmental Perspective

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Abstract

Apart from being a freedom fighter, Gandhi was also very aware of the protection of nature and environment. He had expressed those concerns towards the environment a hundred years ago which are completely relevant even in the present times. Gandhi's approach towards the environment was comprehensive. He appealed to the countrymen to be aware against blind imitation of techniques. He believed that by copying the standard of living of western countries, environmental crisis could flourish. He believed that if other countries of the world also accept the present form of modern technologies, then the resources of the earth will be destroyed. Gandhi's recipe for a simple life prohibits unlimited consumption and endless exploitation of natural resources. This is the biggest example of his environmental thinking.

Gandhi, the father of modern India, is best known in the West for his original method of struggle for the independence of his country, the doctrine of nonviolence. However, beyond the policy goals such as getting the independence of India, the Gandhian vision is much broader and deeper. Gandhi was not an environmentalist in the modern sense but he is often described as "Apostle of applied human ecology."

Keywords: Environmental Conservation, Protection of Nature, Modern Technologies and Sustainability.

Introduction

An important statement of Gandhi related to environment: Earth, air, land and water are not the properties received from our forefathers. They are the heritage of our children. They have to be handed over to future generations as we have got them.

Gandhi was influenced by Jainism, which looks at nature as a living entity and exhorts human beings to continually purify themselves by respecting diverse life forms. The Gandhian idea of Satya and ahimsa can be useful to reduce the greed of the individual and society. His concept of non-violence thus encompassed all living beings and embodied the eternal values of life in his thought and actions. He insisted on the eternal sacredness of life that included a tree, plant or a cow. Reportedly, the English historian Edward Thomson once remarked to Gandhi that wildlife was rapidly declining in

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India, to which Gandhi replied with sarcasm, "Wildlife is decreasing in the jungles, but increasing in the towns." According to him reckless and limitless pursuit of industrialization by all nations has posed serious problems for the very existence of not only man but also for all living creatures and all kinds of species on our planet.

MK Gandhi once said: "The earth provides enough to satisfy everyone's needs, but not everyone's greed." The effects of environmental degradation are now well felt globally, with consumerism being one of the factors responsible for this. Our insatiable desire to have more and more has accelerated the process of depletion of natural resources. The Gandhian call for reduction of wants is relevant in the rapidly depleting natural resources, bio-diversity and eco-system and its contemporary relevance. Gandhiji did not consider the consumerist culture good for India. This culture destroys human qualities, increases selfishness and self-centeredness in people, due to which people lack qualities like charity, sacrifice, kindness and harmony. This paper attempts to study and understand the Gandhian approach to mass production and consumerism.

Gandhi had said in the year 1909, that 'the endless race being run by the Western European countries for their prosperity and prosperity, will in future become an unspeakable threat to this earth, its environment and its natural resources saved by nature for millions of years.

Environmentalism, as a global movement, seeks to address the urgent challenges posed by environmental degradation and climate change. In this context, the ideology and principles advocated by Mahatma Gandhi, the iconic Indian leader, have gained renewed attention for their inherent environmental significance. This study examines Gandhi's environmental vision's conceptual foundations and considers how it applies to current environmental discourse. Gandhi's environmental activism can be linked to his larger Ahimsa (non-violence) and Sarvodaya (the welfare of all) philosophies. His spiritual approach to environmental preservation is rooted in the belief that humans are but one part of a larger ecosystem, and their actions should not disrupt the balance of nature.

Mahatma Gandhi had insights to serve as a guide to understand problem in a proper perspective. He led a holistic life which tuned with principles of nature and environmental friendliness. He practiced nonviolence and emphasized that our lifestyle also should be completely non-violent towards environment and development. According to Gandhi, the process of industrial civilization was a threat to environment whatever environmental problems we are facing today due to industrial growth and indiscriminate use of non-environment friendly materials (such as plastics) which cause a potential threat to human health. His philosophy provides a sustainable future with development paradigm which is in equilibrium with nature and ecosystem. Awareness development and focused development planning is the need of the hour. Gandhi's teachings have to be interpreted and re interpreted.

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Gandhi & Sustainable Future

Mahatma Gandhi, the iconic leader of India's independence movement, played a significant but often overlooked role in environmental protection. With a deep-rooted philosophy of non-violence and sustainability, Gandhi's contributions to the environmental cause are enduring and relevant even today. Gandhi's environmental consciousness was firmly grounded in his belief in 'ahimsa' or non-violence, which extended to all living beings, including nature. He recognized the interconnectedness of humans and the environment, emphasizing the need to respect and protect the natural world. This holistic perspective laid the foundation for his environmental activism. One of Gandhi's key initiatives was the promotion of sustainable agriculture and self-sufficiency. He advocated for traditional farming practices that respected the land's natural cycles, eschewing the use of harmful chemicals and synthetic fertilizers. Gandhi encouraged the adoption of indigenous crops, promoting biodiversity and resilience in agricultural systems.^[1]

Gandhi's 'swadeshi' movement also contributed to environmental protection. He aimed to reduce the ecological impact of large-scale industrialization and long-distance transportation. This approach aligned with his vision of self-reliance and ecological balance. He emphasized that a simple and minimalistic lifestyle was essential for preserving resources and minimizing environmental degradation. His advocacy for recycling and reusing resources resonates with modern-day efforts to tackle the global waste crisis. Gandhi's environmental principles continue to hold significance in the contemporary world. His call for sustainable development, ecological harmony, and respect for all life offers valuable guidance to address pressing environmental challenges such as climate change, pollution, and habitat destruction. Under the path of sustainable development, the earth's resources have to be protected and sustained not only for humankind, but also for other species and not only for this generation, but also for generations to follow. To manage and sustain the earth's resources, the approach must not be centred on any one species like. The human being, but should encompass the entire life support system.

Mahatma Gandhi was the first advocate of sustainable development in the world and he was against the massive industrialization for the existing world precisely because of its undue exploitation. What is the cause of present chaos? Answering a question, his reply was, "It is exploitation. I will not say of the weaker nations by the stronger, but of sister nations by sister nations. The fundamental objection to machinery rests on the fact that it is machinery that has enabled these nations to exploit others." If one tries to study analytically Gandhiji's actions and clarity on ecological issues, one will certainly appreciate his knowledge and vision of nature.^[2] His teachings and his life style stand as an example of his environmental consciousness. Very few people have tried to give full meaning and holistic understanding of environment. The considerations of such approach include wise rational, non-wasteful and sustainable use of natural resources, improved quality of life, satisfying basic needs of all, but restricting one's desire to fulfil one's greed. Till which time no concept of sustainable development had come, by that time, this person had given education to the whole world through his

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way of living and through criticism of modern civilization. That's why he is the first advocate of sustainable development in the world.

Gandhi & Hindswaraj

Gandhi had notified the world about the problems of large-scale industrialization, which we are confronting today. The Gandhian ideology is still more relevant when sustainable growth and development is to be achieved because he emphasized on production by the masses instead of mass production. Mahatma Gandhi emphasized the critical necessity of sustainability by interrogating modern civilization based on multiplication of wants and desires. Through his book "The Hind Swaraj" he outlined the threat to common future of humanity caused by relentless quest for more material goods and services. The concept of Sarvodaya propounded by Mahatma Gandhi is also similar to that of a sustainable development and forms a part of environmental ethics. He rejected the idea of the civilization driven by endless multiplication of wants and defined civilization in terms of performance of duties, adherence to morality and exercise of restraint. The key to the concept and practice of sustainable development is the approach which puts limitations on passion and greed and which aims at fulfilling the fundamental needs. In this sense his book Hind Swaraj became a manifesto of sustainable development.^[3]

Mahatma Gandhi never used the word environment protection but with his amazing foresight and insight he predicted that things were moving in the wrong direction. In 1909 his book "Hind Swaraj" he cautioned mankind against unrestricted industrialism and materialism. He was an ardent believer that "Humans should live in harmony with their surroundings." In India the major monuments to the environment such as the Chipko Movement led by Chandi Prasad Bhatt and Sunder Lal Bahuguna and Narmada Bachao Andolan by Baba Amte and Medha Patkar derived inspiration from Gandhi. His Speeches are evident for his concern about environment urbanization and mechanization are seen in his writings, messages and speeches to the workers. It is apt to note that he was the world's early environmentalist in vision and practice. His seminal work HIND SWARAJ written more than hundred years ago in 1909 warned of the dangers the world is facing today in the form of environmental destruction and the threat to the planet.

Gandhi has not built up any theory of environmental philosophy or system which strictly falls within the scheme of present environmental science. Gandhi was deeply concerned with all problems confronted by humanity and it was quite natural that he expressed his concern on matters relating to ecology and environment. One who scrutinises Gandhi's speeches and writings will be amazed by the deep eco consciousness rooted in his philosophy of life. Gandhian environmental ethics stems from his philosophy of life and his worldview. In the Gandhian world view, human life cannot be divided into watertight compartments such as economic, political, and religious and soon. Human life is an undivided whole. He believed that "One's everyday life was never capable of being separated from his spiritual being. Both acted and reacted upon one another."

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Gandhi & Hygiene

“Cleanliness is next to godliness” words of Mahatma Gandhi to human society. It is more important than independence also every person must take their responsibility personally to make the environment clean because it is directly connected to human health and hygiene. If the societies are healthy then it is able to stand with me for independence movements. Gandhiji was very much impressed by the cleanliness and hygiene of Western countries. In absence of basic sanitation, the whole community land and water can contaminate and infections spread everywhere and transmit the disease from one to another. Cleaner India was one of his dreams so we have to fulfil his dream and make India clean as much as possible. He also said that lavatory must as clean as a drawing room he saw this in Western countries. The philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi about cleanliness is reflected very clearly by this statement that he said “I will not let anyone work through my mind with their dirty steps” he pointed out the basic action about cleanliness is that nobody can spit and snuff the nose anywhere in the streets because in some cases this is very harmful and infectious he started Swachh Bharat movement that time Gandhiji’s mission for clean India have three key words “ hygiene Swaraj and abolish untouchability”. To make the mission continue Swachh Bharat Abhiyan was launched on 2nd October 2014 on 145th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi.^[4] In this Abhiyan every human should very much be aware about the cleanliness and make the surrounding clean so the environment become favourable for us. Spreading of diseases become less and make the India healthy. So, everyone must take the pledge to make the environment clean and be particular about health and hygiene.

Gandhi’s philosophy encompassed various aspects of human life, including health, hygiene and sanitation. From a psychological perspective, Gandhi’s emphasis on cleanliness, simplicity, and self-discipline can have profound effects on the individual’s mental wellbeing and the overall community’s psychological health. It can be understood through lens of his principles of self-discipline, self-restraint and self-reliance. Gandhi believed in the power of collective action and community participation. From a psychological standpoint community involvement fosters a sense of belonging, social cohesion and shared responsibility. In the context of health, hygiene and sanitation, community involvement encourages individuals to work together to promote hygiene practices, educate other and address sanitation challenges collectively. Adopting Gandhian principles can promote personal and community wellbeing. Following the principles of Gandhi individuals can cultivate a holistic approach to their wellbeing. The illustrious leader and proponent of nonviolent resistance, Mahatma Gandhi, stressed the close connection between personal hygiene, public health, and societal well-being. This study explores the fundamental components of the Gandhian approach to health, hygiene, and sanitation, drawing inspiration from his teachings. Gandhi emphasized the value of cleanliness and self-control as the cornerstones of a healthy lifestyle. He held that maintaining one’s health requires daily personal hygiene and cleanliness. Gandhi believed that cleanliness included our thoughts, deeds, and surroundings in addition to being physically pure. People can stop the spread of diseases and advance general well-being by forming healthy habits.

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Gandhi also promoted the importance of neighbourhood hygiene. In his ideal society, each person would be accountable for maintaining the cleanliness and sanitization of their surroundings. This entails providing suitable waste management and sanitation facilities in addition to maintaining a clean environment in our homes, neighbourhoods and public areas. Gandhi held the view that communal efforts to maintain cleanliness would result in a healthier society and a lower burden of diseases that could be avoided. His ideology of Sarvodaya, food security and inspiration behind present Antodaya Anna programme, NREGA about 100 days employment are all Inspired by Gandhian ideology. His quote “Man has no power to create life, therefore he has no right to destroy life”, Gandhi Construction Programme, Harijans and women are not yet treated as equal members of our society. His Vratans or Eleven vows are very significant and collaborated in the context of preserving the environment.

Following the independence in 1956, the north-west princely kingdoms of India were reorganized to become **Rajasthan** ^[5]. With the advent of five-year plans, the state has since seen significant development, and the 1960s saw a variety of development initiatives, including irrigation projects, road building, agricultural & residential growth, and population pressure, etc. As a result, the destruction of forests for constructing roads, villages, farms, allotments of land to the homeless, and other development projects became standard practice in Aravalli. Due to deforestation, viz. Banas, Luni, Sahibi, and Sakhi, several rivers originating in the Aravalli have now dried up. Several other practices like illegal mining, and rapid developmental activities like the construction of roads, and buildings, are continually degrading and declining the Aravalli ecosystem along with its unique flora and fauna respectively.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948), a true nationalist and the father of the nation; are not only his last identity; beside a political leader he made significant contributions in the field of development and welfare of health, hygiene, sanitation and cleanliness. The term sanitation includes many things like hygiene, cleanliness, health etc. The importance of sanitation, to prevent diseases not only essential but also played a crucial role. COVID-19 pandemic proved the importance of sanitation and cleanliness. All region of the world suffered from the pandemic. The main reasons are low priority to sanitation, illiteracy and ignorance. In other word COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically demonstrated how crucial and protection of natural habitats is for human health ^[6]. For these above circumstances Gandhi's idea of sanitation and cleanliness may became a solution and a lesson to us. Gandhiji told that sanitation programs will not being a particular section or society, it covers all parts of the society, Gandhiji not only told about sanitation as a program, but he also told the responsibilities of people towards cleanliness to protect the environment. COVID-19 is a wake-up call for our whole humanity, especially in India, to revisit Gandhi, his thought, views and practices. The relevance of Gandhi and his ideals are back in the spotlight in the wake-up of the pandemic.

Gandhi & Ahimsa

Gandhi ji propagated the principles of Non-Violence and Ahimsa. Ahimsa is derived from the Sanskrit

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verb root san, which means to kill. The form 'Himsa' means "desirous to kill"; the prefix a- is a negation. So a-himsa means literally "lacking any desire to kill". Literally translated, ahimsa means to be without harm; to be utterly harmless, not only to oneself and others, but to all living beings. But its implications are far wider; it is more than not doing violence, it is more than an attitude, it is a whole way of life. It is the opposite of ahimsa, "violence" which is to hurt the vitalities (pranas), through vibration due to the passions, which agitate mind, body, or speech. The concept of ahimsa extends to all living beings, and therefore, protection of environment, natural habitats and vegetarianism are its natural derivatives. Buddhism and Jainism impose total non-violence on their followers. In Hinduism, it means the principle of non-injury to living beings.

If we trace the history of Animal dissections in education, we have to go back to 1500s when Belgian doctor Andreas Vesalius used the practice as an instructional method for his medical students. Later in 1920's Dissections were introduced in education in America to study Anatomy, physiology, evolution and other aspects of life sciences. While frogs were the most common animal for students to dissect, students also encounter fatal pigs, cats, rabbits, guinea pigs, rats, minks, birds, turtles, snakes, crayfish, perch, starfish and earthworms, as well as grasshoppers and other insects. Sometimes students dissect parts of animals such as sheep lungs, cows' eyes, and bull testicles [7]. This study aimed to understand, from teachers' perspectives, whether and why they use dissection and what perspectives they hold toward alternatives. The specific aims of this study were (i) to explore the extent of animal or animal parts dissection (ii) to understand the attitudes and experiences of faculty toward dissection and animal-free alternatives, and (iii) to gain some insight into the circumstances hindering a wider uptake of alternatives to animal dissection in high school education.

Gandhi & Global Warming

Environment is a matter of concern for all socially committed individuals, international organizations and governments all over the globe. Global Warming, Climate Change, Pollution and access to clean water are some of the gravest challenges before the world today. People all over the world are aware of the ill effects of global warming and various steps have been taken to mitigate the emission of greenhouse gases. Environmental issues came to the fore in the 1970s. The first United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (1972) was held in Stockholm, Sweden. It brought environment to the centre stage of the global agenda and later led to the establishment of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). In 1983, the UN General Assembly set up the World Commission on Environment and Development, popularly known as the Brundtland Commission. Its aim was to link environmental issues to the findings of the 1980 Brandt report on North-South relations. The Brundtland report entitled *Our Common Future*, published in 1987, established the link between environment and the economy and coined a new term "sustainable development" as the way to ensure economic development that would not endanger the ability of future generations to enjoy the fruits of the earth.

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At the global level environment is a matter of concern for all national and international organizations all over the world. Global Warming, Climate Change, Pollution and access to clean water are some of the gravest challenges before the world today. As countries advance demand for more luxuries growth which puts pressure on production units. Exhausting resources to fulfil people's greed leads to environmental problems. The man-made emission of greenhouse gases is the cause of global warming. The largest producers of these gases are the thermal power plants, transportation by road and air, heavy industries, all of which are indispensable in the present model of development. The depletion of the ozone layer is another pertinent environmental issue which has similar implications. These problems are not limited to a particular country or a particular continent. As a result of the globalization and the greed of market forces there is hardly any country left untouched by major environmental problems. A variety of environmental problems now affect our life. Gandhiji believed people are enslaved by their unlimited desires craving for more and more leading to over consumption thereby demanding for more production Gandhi's views on environment consist of moral, spiritual and non-violent dimensions. To him, the hallmark of development of man consisted not in materialism or consumerism but in spiritual self-realisation, a character heavily loaded with morality and non-violence. The craving for materialistic wants was alien to him for it hindered the path to one's realisation. Gandhi's idea of self-realization (Svachetna) is an issue of human values that govern the actions of human being, which should make a balanced interconnection between society, economy and environment If this will be misbalanced, man has to suffer by natural curses. Thus development becomes a moral imperative of deeper education. Gandhi can be said to be real provocateur of education of sustainable development.^[8]

Conclusion

This research paper delves into the visionary ideas of Mahatma Gandhi concerning environmental protection and sustainability. The study explores Gandhi's teachings, writings, and actions, which anticipated the significance of ecological balance and sustainable living long before the modern environmental movement gained momentum. Through an analysis of primary and secondary sources, this paper highlights the relevance of Gandhi's principles in the context of contemporary environmental challenges and advocates for their implementation to achieve a greener and more sustainable future. The environmental concern as we understand today was not there at the time of Gandhi, but his ideas on development, technology, self-sufficiency, village Swaraj etc. disclose his environmental concern. Different streams of environmental philosophy have paid their indebtedness to Gandhi. Gandhi was not an environmentalist in the modern sense. Although he did not create a green philosophy or write nature poems, he is often described as an "apostle of applied human ecology. Gandhi considered the earth a living organism. His views on nature are scattered throughout his writings. His ideas relating to Satyagraha based on truth and non-violence, simple life style, and development reveal how sustainable development is possible without doing any harm to nature and our fellow beings. His idea that "nature has enough to satisfy every one's needs, but not to satisfy anybody's greed" became one line ethic to modern environmentalism. The essence of the Gandhian

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approach to technological progress lies in treating Nature as a friend and supporter. It can be concluded that Gandhi's environmentalism fitted in with his overall vision for India and the world that sought to extract from nature what is absolutely necessary for human sustenance. Environmentalism, as a global movement, seeks to address the urgent challenges posed by environmental degradation and climate change. In this context, the ideology and principles advocated by Mahatma Gandhi, the iconic Indian leader, have gained renewed attention for their inherent environmental significance. Gandhi's environmental activism can be linked to his larger Ahimsa (non-Violence) and Sarvodaya (the welfare of all) philosophies. His spiritual approach to environmental preservation is rooted in the belief that humans are but one part of a larger ecosystem, and their actions should not disrupt the balance of nature.

In conclusion, Mahatma Gandhi's "Green Vision" embodied a profound understanding of humanity's place within the natural world and the imperative to nurture and protect the environment. This research paper underscores the enduring significance of Gandhi's environmentalism, drawing connections between his ideas and contemporary environmental challenges. By integrating Gandhian principles into current environmental discourse and policy, we can forge a path towards a more harmonious and sustainable future. Gandhiji, without ever using any of the modern jargons, was perhaps the greatest 'environmentalists' of our times. Gandhi prophesied that unless human beings lived in harmony with nature and stopped exploiting nature, it would lead them to the path of destruction. It was his environmental awareness that made him to decompose kitchen waste and use it as manure and to use the wastewater in the gardens. Gandhi has not built up any theory of environmental philosophy or system which strictly falls within the scheme of present environmental science. Gandhi was deeply concerned with all problems confronted by humanity, and it was quite natural that he expressed his concern on matters relating to ecology and environment. One who scrutinises Gandhi's speeches and writings will be amazed by the deep eco consciousness rooted in his philosophy of life. Gandhian environmental ethics stems from his philosophy of life and his worldview. In the Gandhian world view, human life cannot be divided into watertight compartments such as economic, political, and religious and soon. Human life is an undivided whole. He believed that "One's everyday life was never capable of being separated from his spiritual being. Both acted and reacted upon one another."

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