



International Journal of Humanities & Social Science Studies (IJHSSS)

A Peer-Reviewed Bi-monthly Bi-lingual Research Journal

ISSN: 2349-6959 (Online), ISSN: 2349-6711 (Print)

ISJN: A4372-3142 (Online) ISJN: A4372-3143 (Print)

Volume-IX, Issue-II, March 2023, Page No.53-58

Published by Scholar Publications, Karimganj, Assam, India, 788711

Website: <http://www.ijhsss.com>

DOI: 10.29032/ijhsss.v9.i2.2023.53-58

Contemporary relevance of Gandhi's ecological thought

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Abstract:

Gandhi was not only a freedom fighter; he also had many other facets to his personality. He was interested in many different parts of human and social life. Even though he wasn't a modern environmentalist, he was very aware of environmental and other problems. The environment was an important part of his life, thoughts, and activities. From his gram-swaraj to his nonviolence to his Charka to his self-reliance, nothing seems to be complete without the environment. His ideas about Satyagraha, simple living, and development show how we can grow in a way that doesn't hurt nature or other people.

This research aims to use Gandhian ideas as a framework to identify and analyse environmental issues. An attempt to comprehend how Gandhi's values of "simple living and high thinking" apply to addressing environmental issues, as well as the significance of Gandhi's ecological ideas in present times. In this context, it is essential to recognize that Mahatma's thoughts and conceptions arose from a lifetime of experimentation with truth, making Gandhian ideas even more relevant today.

Keywords: Gandhi, Satyagraha, Environment, Self-Reliance, Truth, Relevance

Introduction: Gandhi was not only a freedom fighter; he also had many other facets to his personality. He was interested in many different parts of human and social life, such as philosophy, economics, politics, education, science and technology, psychology, values and morality, trade and business, and world peace, harmony, and the sustainability of the environment. The ideas of Gandhi served as a source of motivation for society. All of the Mahatma's ideas and thoughts were arrived at by him through lifelong experimentation with truth, which makes Gandhian thoughts more essential in this era. During Gandhi's lifetime, the intensity of environmental pollution and natural resource depletion was not as severe as it is today. His objective was to achieve not just political independence from British rule, but also liberation from poverty and the anthropogenic influence of environmental contamination.

People's awareness of the environment has grown in the past half-century or so. There have been environmental conferences all over the world, like the "Stockholm Conference" in 1972 and the "Rio Earth Summit" in 1992. However, Gandhi voiced his concern for the environment in his different publications, speeches, and messages to the people about a

century ago. But, first and foremost, we must remember that he was not an environmentalist in the modern sense. This is because he didn't come up with any fundamental theories or systems about the environment that are strictly based on what we know now.

Although Gandhi never used words like "environment" or "ecology," the environment was an important part of his life, thoughts, and activities. From his gram-swaraj to his nonviolence to his Charka to his self-reliance, nothing seems to be complete without the environment. This is why Pravin Sheth calls Gandhi the "World's Early Environmentalist in Vision and Practice" in his essay "The Eco-Gandhi and Ecological Movements." Sundarlal Bahuguna, the leader of India's first successful environmentalist movement, the Chipko movement, and Medha Patkar, the leader of the Narmada Bachao campaign in the 1980s, were both inspired by him.

Objectives: The purpose of this study is to examine the following objectives:

1. To identify and analyse environmental issues using Gandhian thought as a framework.
2. To demonstrate that Gandhi's ideology of "simple living and high thinking" focuses on minimising needs or non-consumerism and can be used to tackle environmental issues.
3. To understand the relevance of Gandhi's ecological perspectives in modern times.

Methodology: The study is theoretical in nature and thus mostly reliant on the observational method. So, the work is based on analysis and interpretation, and the information needed for the study came from both secondary and primary sources.

Gandhi's green ideas offer a new way to think about how to balance human needs with the environment. His ideas about Satyagraha, simple living, and development show how we can grow in a way that doesn't hurt nature or other people. "Nature has enough to satisfy everyone's needs but not to satisfy anybody's greed," he said, and this became a key premise of modern environmentalism.

To fully understand Gandhi's thoughts on the environment, you must first understand how he came to have those thoughts. Massive industrialization, the growth of the capitalist economy, labour exploitation, and the reckless use of natural resources all resulted from the Industrial Revolution, which fundamentally altered European society. So, other countries have tried to achieve the same goals of material wealth and happiness, which has hurt humanity in the long run.

Reducing greed at both the individual and social levels can benefit from the Gandhian principles of Satya and ahimsa. So, his idea of nonviolence included all forms of life, and he showed how the rules of life itself could not be broken. All life, whether it be human, tree, plant, or cow, was sacred in his eyes. It is said that when the English historian Edward Thomson told Gandhi that India's wildlife was disappearing quickly, Gandhi said in a sarcastic tone, "Wildlife is decreasing in the jungles but increasing in the towns." He claims

that the world's irresponsible and boundless drive toward industrialization has threatened the very survival of every living creature and every species on Earth.

The moral, spiritual, and nonviolent aspects of Gandhi's ecology are the three most important. Therefore, he considered spiritual self-realization more crucial to humanity's development than materialism or consumerism. So, his idea of nonviolence includes all living things and reflects the unbreakable rules of existence. He thought that people had to make up for any resources they had taken from nature. Because of this, he strongly opposed any acts of cruelty toward the environment or other forms of life. A quote from his 1937 article in *Harijan* reads, "I do believe that all God's creatures have the right to live as much as we have."

Gandhi's lessons on environmental consciousness were not just theoretical; he exemplified them in his daily activities. Because of this, he always made sure that the areas around his ashram, or home, were neat and clean. This is why S. K. Jha pointed out that Gandhi's lessons about caring for the environment weren't just ideas; he showed them in his daily life. Because of this, he always made sure that the areas around his ashram, or home, were neat and clean. This is why S. K. Jha's observation that "Gandhi fully understood the primordiality of man-nature relationship and his theory and philosophy of life, society, and politics are in consonance with it. It is this understanding of, and reverence for, the salience and senility of nature for human existence that makes him an environmentalist par excellence."

Gandhi thought that India existed in villages. And he believes that destroying the village's culture and civilization through technology, equipment, and industrialization is a sin. That is why he has often warned the younger generation not to be tempted by the glitter of modern civilization. He believed that people should strive for a rural lifestyle. Furthermore, the link between his village-dependent economy and his environmental ideology is profound. This rural economy is evolving in harmony with the natural environment. This is because the operations of the Kumbhakar, Malakar, Sutradhar, Tantubaya, and other communities, starting with the farming of the rural society, only meet the needs of the rural society. The materials and resources used in their work are sourced from the environment. With this in mind, Gandhi designed a viable alternative economy for rural India. He pictured a village community with people from all walks of life who could take care of their own needs and protect the environment.

Gandhi thought that the lives of common people would only change if they were taught the right things about health, cleanliness, sanitation, and education. So, he started many projects to help the common people of the village, such as making the village self-sufficient, promoting small-scale industries and handicrafts, and using local resources to help the common people of the village get out of poverty. In this regard, Ramjee Singh stated that the "Gandhian model of technology and development is based more on renewable resources like animal, water, oil, and solar energies, etc., and less on non-renewable ones." It does not pollute the environment or disrupt the ecological equilibrium. As a result, the Gandhian

model emphasizes "waste reduction" rather than building a "waste-centric" society. He saw contemporary civilization or industrialization, as a curse for the human race, causing environmental damage rather than providing employment for millions of people.

As a follower of Sarvodaya, Gandhi placed a premium on the well-being of all people; as a result, the "betterment of human life" and "ensuring fulfilment of the basic needs of all human needs" was central to his community-centred approach to sustainability. Gandhi thought that all forms of exploitation must be stopped if we want to improve the lives of people and give them a good life.

Gandhi was a popular economist and environmentalist who didn't use a rigid framework. We obtain his well-reasoned, environmentally sustainable development model despite the fact that he did not provide a systematic model of environmental conservation and development.

Water pollution and scarcity are two of the most pressing issues of the present day. The government needs to deal with big problems like a falling water table, falling water levels, and cutting down trees. Seventy years ago, Gandhi was aware of all of these issues. Drought struck Gujarat's Kathiawar region during the independence struggle. Gandhi pushed for a lot of trees to be planted because he knew that was the best way to deal with the lack of water. At a prayer meeting in Delhi in 1947, he suggested water harvesting for irrigation as a way to stop famines and food shortages. The M. S. Swaminathan committee, in 2006, really proposed the same thing. The conclusion is that Gandhi was decades ahead of his time.

Gandhi's importance to the environmental sustainability movement is demonstrated by Germany's initiative to create the Green Party and promote policies compatible with nature conservation. Mrs. Patra Kelly, one of the party's original members, beautifully encapsulated the Mahatma's significance. According to her, "in a particular area of our work, we have been greatly inspired by our Mahatma Gandhi, i.e., in our belief that lifestyle and method of production, which relies on endless supply of raw material and which use those raw material lavishly also provide motive force for violent appropriation of raw materials from other parties. In contrast, responsible consumption of raw material as a part of ecologically oriented life style and economy reduces the risk that policies of violence will pursue'. This argues in favour of adopting environmentally friendly measures.

All of the Mahatma's ideas and thoughts were arrived at by him through lifelong experimentation with truth, which makes Gandhian thoughts more essential in this era. India needs to show respect for Gandhian ideas and stay on the right path if it wants to reach its goal of becoming a superpower.

Gandhianism is based on the idea that "simple living and high thinking" are the keys to deep personal and social change. In these hard times, when the world is facing a lot of problems, it is important to try to apply Gandhian ideas to all parts of life and government.

Many animal, bird, and plant species face imminent extinction due to global warming, climate change, and deforestation. The accumulation of urban trash and poisonous

substances has created environments that are lethal to human life. The new Covid 19 pandemic has presented unrelenting problems to healthcare systems, environmental initiatives, mental health, and economics around the world due to its inherent uncertainty. Now, more than ever, a model of growth and development that doesn't destroy the planet is desperately needed.

Gandhi cared a lot about cleanliness, which he called "swachhata," and he was a strong supporter of the movement to clean up. The Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, which is India's biggest effort to clean up, was just put into action. This made Bapu's dream of a clean India come true. According to Gandhi, personal cleanliness and the pursuit of independence were inextricably linked. "All the religions in the world prohibit the pollution of streams, their banks, public roads, and all thoroughfares. This pollution is a sin born of ignorance or laziness."

After 75 years of independence, economic growth, technical innovation, and widespread urbanization have all contributed to a significant improvement in people's attention to cleanliness. Gandhi's idea of cleanliness inspired the Swachh Bharat Mission, which aims to create a "Clean India" through community participation in garbage collection, sorting, and management, clean water and air, e-waste management, and sanitation coverage for everyone.

However, there is more to this need for purity than mere hygiene. That's why, if we want a clean India with clean roads and toilets, we need a corruption-free society with a high degree of accountability and openness.

Conclusion: Gandhi was an outspoken supporter of environmental sustainability and reduced consumption. "There is enough on earth for human needs, but not enough for human greed," Gandhi said. These comments by Mahatma Gandhi show how important it is to live in a more environmentally friendly way today. Because people are worried about things like climate change, running out of resources, and global warming, Gandhi's ideas should be part of all international agreements and plans for sustainable development. Following Mahatma Gandhi's guidelines can lead to a more sustainable society. This demand for cleanliness, however, is not limited to how someone appears on the outside. It's also vital to consider how clean someone's insides are. As a result, a corruption-free, more transparent, and accountable society, as well as clean roads and toilets, are required for a clean India. As famous Indian scholar P.N. Haskar stated, "There is need to reiterate Gandhian values and instead of merely garlanding the portraits of Gandhi, Indians must translate his ideals into real life." According to a Gandhian viewpoint, which can be severe at times but is open to interpretation, the present environmental crisis is not a disease, but rather a symptom. A good doctor will treat the disease rather than the symptom. The condition is identified when the perspective shifts. So, wherever we are and whenever we can, let us resolve and dedicate ourselves to completing his unfinished ambitions. Let Gandhi's memory guide us to the right way of a sustainable and green world.

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