

Gandhian Thought and Environmental Consciousness towards Sustainable Development

Dr. Goutam Patra
Principal (WBSES)
gtmpatra21@gmail.com

Introduction:

Mahatma Gandhi, a great philosopher, a great educationist and a strong supporter of sustainable development was an ardent lover of nature. His simple living style was adoptive to nature. He gave emphasis on simple living and high thinking. He was against consumerization but not against industrialization. He never adopted sophisticated style -a result of consumerization. Consumerism increases the use of industrial products and resources which ultimately add different type of wastes in natural environment causing pollution. Today bio-diversity is in danger due to Ozone depletion, green house effect, climatic change and for the increasing use of natural resources by the modern man. Mahatma Gandhi was against the excess use and exploitation of natural resources. He protested human greed for the exploitation of nature. His simple life style was suited to nature. He gave emphasis on the minimum and efficient use of available natural resources. He was very famous for his conservative attitude and compassion for the nature.

The Way of Conservation and Protection of natural resources:

Mahatma Gandhi gave importance on self-control over body and mind. He practiced 'Yama' and 'Niyama' as self-discipline mentioned in religious scriptures. The 'Yama' is the ethical code of conduct related to living organisms and materialistic things in natural resources. He maintained five Yamas' for the conservation and protection of natural resources.

1. 'Ahimsa': It is nonviolence towards living creatures like birds, insects, plants, animals and other organisms in nature. Non-violence results in safe living of all living creatures and thus in maintaining biodiversity and ecological balance.

2. 'Satya': 'satya' means the Truth. It is the legitimate way of controlling the use of natural resources. 'Satya' helps to avoid destruction of nature and to maintain balance between the need and greed. It results in peace and harmony in nature.
3. 'Asteya': 'Asteya' is the willful destruction of illegitimate use of natural resources. It prevents deforestation. Gandhi practiced this as the genesis of environmental protection.
4. Brahmacharya: 'Brahmacharya' means celibacy. It results in the control of birth rate and inevitably checks the population explosion. Today the growing population increases the rate of maximum use of natural resources that creates various natural hazards. Living on the following path of 'Brahmacharya' can indirectly help to follow minimum use of natural resources for the sake of better living of future generation.
5. 'Aparigraha': 'Aparigraha' means amassing the wealth. It helps to cherish the ideals of minimum needs and minimum use of natural resources. It promotes protection and conservation of natural resources for the use of future generation.

Five Code of Conduct for better environment:

Mahatma Gandhi followed the extracts of our religious scriptures and practised five self-imposed code of conduct called 'Niyamas'. These include 'Kama', 'Lova', 'Moha', 'Ahankara' related to the cleanliness of mind, body and the surrounding environment.

- i. 'Kama': 'Kama' refers to sexual desire. Mahatma Gandhi advises to control of unwanted desire which helps to control population explosion and thus deterioration of environment.
- ii. 'Krodh': 'Krodh' means anger which is the root cause of war and destruction of nature. Warfare is the disastrous threat to the environment. It is seen that the use of nuclear weapons cause destruction in the balance of environment.
- iii. 'Lobha': 'Lobha' means greed. Greed develops consumerism and maximum use of natural resources which resulted in destruction of natural resources. Mahatma Gandhi inspired for controlling greed and thus prevented misuse of natural resources that encouraged the protection of natural resources.

- iv. 'Moha': It means undue attainment of resources. Mahatma Gandhi showed the path of non attachment to wealth. Attachment causes greed and thus it promotes over exploitation of natural wealth and degradation of nature.
- v. 'Ahankar': It means undue self-proud. This triggers the race towards destruction and annihilation of peace. Proud of mind enhances the use of variety of goods and services that promotes natural destruction.

ROOTS OF GANDHIAN ENVIRONMENTALISM:

Gandhi was influenced by Jainism and Buddhism particularly the Jain's 'Sarabpranabad' theory and non-violence. Jainism looks at nature as a living entity and explains human beings to continually purify themselves by respecting the diverse life forms on this earth. Gandhi wanted to strengthen the relation between man and earth. He considered religion for maintaining the balance of ecology. Gandhi was influenced by a number of Western thinkers- John Ruskin who showed the harmonious relationship of human beings with nature. Henry David Thoreau, whose essay on civil disobedience had influenced Gandhi, believed that nature could exist without humans but humans cannot. This prompted him to focus on the relation between human beings and the environment. Edward Carpenter, influenced by John Ruskin and Hindu mysticism, wanted to lead a life that was simple and close to nature whose critique of civilisation was a major influence on Gandhi's (1997) first book *Hind Swaraj*.

He said: "I need no inspiration other than Nature's." Gandhi did not come to develop his integrated vision from original insights into nature and its working. Instead he was exploring how social change could be brought about through least harm to other human beings as well as to nature. Gandhian environmental activists like Chandi Prasad Bhatt and Sunderlal Bahuguna of the Chipko movement or even Medha Patkar and Baba Amte of the Narmada movement began their activism over questions relating to the livelihood issues of the marginalized sections of society.

He said: "The incessant search for material comforts and their multiplication is an evil. I make bold to say that the Europeans will have to remodel their outlook, if they are not to perish under the weight of the comforts to which they are becoming slaves." Further, with a prophetic vision, Gandhi warned: "A time is coming when those who are in mad rush today of multiplying their wants, will retrace their steps and say; what have we done?" (Quoted in Khoshoo and Moolakkattu 2009).]

Gandhi and the Ecological View of Life:

Though Gandhi was not a philosopher of ecology, and can only be called an environmentalist with considerable difficulty, he strikes a remarkable chord with all those who have cared for the environment, practiced vegetarianism, and cherished the principles of non-violence. The word 'ecology' is derived from 'economy' [from Greek oecology]. It is the economy of lifestyle that Thoreau spoke of in Walden -- and indeed of conduct, speech, and thought -- that Gandhi ruthlessly put into practice in his various ashrams. To follow the trajectory from 'economy' to 'ecology', The Oxford English Dictionary defines 'ecology' as the "science of the economy of

animals and plants", and this implies the imperative to look after animals, plants, and the environment to which they bear a relation. Ecology consequently means, in the first instance, that we are commanded to economize, or render less wasteful, our use of the earth's resources. To do so, we have to use our own resources, howsoever narrowly conceived, with wisdom and with the utmost respect for economy.

A recent study of Gandhi which describes him as "a practicing ecological yogi" argues that it is from his observance of certain environmental and ethical principles, which variously counsel us to practice austerity, introspect on the self, cultivate contentment, learn self-reliance, renounce possessions beyond our needs, and always keep in mind the interests of the weakest and the poor, that Gandhi forged his political movement; and it is from these same principles, argues Khoshoo, that Gandhi worked to develop his ideas of "sustainable development".

Self-reliance and sustainable development:

Self-reliance is one of the objectives of education. Mahatma Gandhi gave importance on village handicraft to develop self-reliance of the villagers. Dependence on indigenous product and swadeshi grow selfreliance. The use of 'Charkha'-the spinning wheel promotes rationality and sustainability of the use of natural resources. Use of 'Swadeshi' helps to protect both renewable and non renewable resources. The cottage industry and the use of swadeshi bring self-reliance and through this sustainability continue.

Environment protection and conservation:

He refers the earth 'the Dharitrimata' a place of living creature. It can be stated that this respect at least minimizes the use of ground water, cutting of trees, hunting of animals. Worshiping of plants reduces pollution of environment and promotes love, care and affection towards environment. He was a vegetarian and he believed that vegetarianism is the base of wild life and biodiversity. His principle of non-violence shows the way to prevent the violence against nature. To him the whole universe is a family. He propounded the concept of 'Vasudhaiva kutumbakam' against hunting of wild life, cutting of trees, exploitation of natural resources and spoilage of ecosystem.

Constitutional Provisions and Gandhian thought on environment:

The provisions of the Directive Principles of State Policy (Article-36-51) and the Fundamental duties are the reflection of Gandhian thought. Article 48-A 'The state shall Endeavour to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard the forests and wild life of the country' ensures protection of wild life. Article 51A-2 provides that 'It shall be the duty of every citizen of India to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers and wild life and to have compassion for the living creatures' The environmental thought of Mahatma Gandhi was

reflected in the Constitutional Provisions. It is observed that Protection of wild animals and protection of biodiversity are needed to achieve sustainable development.

Women education and protection of environment:

Women are more concerned with nature. The worship of plants and some animals by the women folk helps to preserve natural resources. Mahatma Gandhi encourages the women to protect the environment. Their role for protection of environment is constructive.

His experiments emphasize in simple living and high thinking. He emphasized on the growth of natural resources and rural development. Gandhian spirituality neglects material needs, greed and keeps human desires under control. His experiments on food, Brahmacharya, fasting, Naya are the results of spirituality. The forces of attraction and love advocated by him saved the animals and plants on the earth. He wanted to understand nature as the expression of God. He was fond of naturotherapy for the treatment of diseases by the application of fresh water, air, heat and light. He loved the mother earth keeping in touch with bare foot. He opined that nearer to nature helps to come nearer to good health. He believed that God expresses himself in the harmonies of nature. In his Autobiography, he says, "I was charmed with the natural scenery...and bowed my head in reverence to our ancestors for their sense of the beautiful nature, and for their foresight in investing beautiful manifestations of nature with religious significance."

The idea of environmental consciousness and the sustainability of all living beings on this planet can be derived from the philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi. If his philosophy and ideals of life are followed the crises prevailed regarding the degradation of environment can be put under control for the sake of better life of the future generation on this planet.

Reference:

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