

Gandhian Insight for Environmental Sustainability

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Abstract

Gandhiji has not said anything specific on it as environmental degradation had not become a problem then. But we have it in his writings. Gandhiji was very much influenced by Indian tradition and stressed on Truth and non-violence. In the words of Gandhiji “man has no power to create life, therefore, he has no right to destroy life.” Man has been endowed with higher faculties so that he can be compassionate to lower beings. Man's progress and the road to development has led to the deterioration of nature. In his quest for fulfilling his needs, he has exploited nature to its maximum. This is development that is ecologically not sustainable. Present study is based on secondary sources of data such as autobiographies, magazines and other research works. This paper describes the impact of anthropogenic activities on natural resources and responsible for environmental degradation. This research analyse Gandhian insight to lessen environmental destruction and adopt a more sustainable alternative for maintaining eco-balance through the method of satyagraha or non-violent direct action. Further, examine the relevance of Gandhiji's Insight in today's world.

Keyword: environmental degradation, non-violence, sustainable, anthropogenic activities, eco-balance.

Introduction

The ecological crisis we currently face today has been analysed from various angles and scientific information available on the state. Humanity has come out of its foolish self-complacency and over-exploitation of nature has caused a very serious degradation and damage of our ecosystem. Through a number of research, academics have demonstrated the clear link between consumption and environmental degradation.¹

Many people are now concerned that unless we take immediate corrective action, life on Earth may disappear from the face of the planet due to the current climate change. There have been numerous international summits and important conventions have been signed. But to our great dismay, the majority of these covenants have been flagrantly broken, rather than rigorously honoured and implemented. Awareness of the problem involved has become almost universal, but the determination to make changes is sorely missing.

Rationale of the study

The rationale for exploring Gandhian Insight for environmental sustainability in a research paper stems from the pressing need to address environmental degradation and climate change through innovative and ethical approaches. Gandhian philosophy offers a unique perspective grounded in principles of non-violence, simplicity, and respect for all life forms, which are highly relevant to contemporary environmental challenges. By delving into Gandhian insights, researchers can uncover alternative paradigms for sustainable living and resource management that prioritize the well-being of both humans and the natural world. Additionally, Gandhi's emphasis on self-reliance and community empowerment provides valuable lessons for building resilient and equitable environmental solutions at local, national, and global levels. Therefore, investigating Gandhian principles in the context of environmental sustainability offers a promising avenue for generating new ideas, strategies, and policies that promote harmonious coexistence between humanity and the planet.

Objectives:

To analyze Gandhian view on:

- Natural resources are not for human consumption only but for all of God's creature; they are not only for this generation but for generations to come.
- Change in the orientation of our life course from materialism to spirituality, from having mode to being mode. This is crucial for maintaining eco-balance.
- Discard satisfaction of material wants and attainments of physical comfort as the root cause of all social maladies including environmental degradation we witness.

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- Persuade and pressurise decision makers to adopt and implement appropriate policies and to change anti-people and eco-destructive projects, Gandhi gave us the method of Satyagraha or non-violent direct action.

Gandhian Ideology and lifestyle

Gandhian ideology is the set of religious and social ideas adopted and developed by Mahatma Gandhi, first during his period in South Africa from 1893 to 1914, and later in India. Gandhian philosophy is not only simultaneously political, moral and religious, it is also traditional and modern, simple and complex. It embodies numerous Western influences to which Gandhiji was exposed, but is rooted in ancient Indian culture harnessing universal moral & religious principles.²

Of course, the most notable aspect of this alluring modern lifestyle is its focus on consumerism. It is important to distinguish between legitimate/consumption and lavish/extravagant consumption, as well as between consumption driven by need and consumption driven by greed. In the contemporary way of living, consumption has been elevated to the status of an ideology. Not just for the typical Westener but for the majority of middle classes around the world, shopping is the most significant and exciting cultural activity. Malls have become the cultural symbols and of our. The amount of consumption has become the standard for measuring the value of a person and his or her life.³

Impact on Environment

This craze for material consumption has led to several psycho-social and environmental problems besides the economic ones. It is necessary to examine the relation between production and consumption and the impact it makes on the natural environment. Demand-supply logic of conventional economics would imply that production would increase only if there is demand. But in this century, this has, strangely, been reversed. Today, it is the invention that leads to necessity. Marshall, the master craftsman of the theory of consumption says, “Although it is man's wants in the earliest stages of his development that give rise to his activities, yet afterwards, each new step is to be regarded as the development of activities giving rise to new wants rather than of new wants giving rise to new activities.”

Demands are created artificially through advertising and other means. Production is now driven only by greed and the desire to make a profit, rather than by needs or demand. Excessive-production of non-essentials like consumer durables and luxury artifacts makes a very heavy demand on the environment.⁴ There is a rat-race for non-renewable resources, leads to unhealthy, ruthless competition, their over-exploitation and consequent destruction of the environment. This would lead to gradual but significant militarisation and most likely to a war. It causes unanticipated, permanent environmental damage. The war in Iraq is typically illustrative. In actuality, the chronic crisis situation in the Arabian Gulf region and the Iraq war were caused by the unrelenting and ever-increasing need for oil, which was required by the pathological vehicle dependence of the American and European populations. The irreparable natural damage caused by oil mining has been revealed by petroleum-geology experts and their warnings should be seriously taken into account in this context.⁵

Happiness and Consumerism

All major world religions and ideologies agree that happiness is what humans seek in life. So, how do people become happy? The response has mostly been in the negative. Instead, this causes to a deeper and more profound restlessness. When the gap between expectation and fulfilment is bridged too quickly, it gives rise to unexpected issues.⁶

If we search deeper within ourselves, it could be understood that our fundamental desire is for both happiness for oneself and the community's well-being. An “essential pre-condition” for individual happiness is the community's well-being. When Gandhi made this specific point, he wrote that “the good of the individual is contained in the good of all.” And happiness, in its true sense, means being in accord with human nature.⁷ This can be achieved only by overcoming the pulls and pressures of one's lower self, i.e., one's selfishness, narcissism, greed, ego. It also means experiencing oneness with our fellow beings, and all of the creation. This connection must be achieved affectively, but not rationally. Realizing one's potential is a necessary part of

happiness. It is to discover one's actual self in the act of being and becoming, not having and consuming. Therefore, for creative living, a change from having mode to being mode becomes necessary. In light of this, it is important to consider and understood the relevance of Gandhian insights into ecology and lifestyle.⁸

Gandhi's perspective on lifestyle

For Gandhi, a lifestyle consisted solely of putting one's beliefs into action—in other words, living out one's values on a daily basis. It is important to understand that Gandhi's views on ecology and way of living are based in his philosophy of life, or more clearly, his world-view. He came to the firm idea that all life is one via observation and study. This inherent perception of oneness of life make up the cornerstone of his world-view. According to his theory, all of creation—both living and non-living—is so intricately intertwined that one cannot injure another without harming oneself. So, for Gandhi, protection and preservation of creation, becomes the bounden duty of every human being because the human being for him, was a conscious, moral agent and hence owed it to the rest of creation. We, humans, must therefore, treat every creation with reverence. Gandhi's ecological perspective, contained in this aphoristic statement that "the Earth provides enough to satisfy everyman's needs, but not for anybody's greed" is derived from this metaphysical/ethical position. Treating nature with reverence, protecting and preserving creation, limitations of wants and consumption, and simplicity are, hence, inevitable pre-conditions for sustainable living.⁹ Gandhi's notion of body, mind, and spirit is a second key tenet that is pertinent in this context. So, for him any approach that treats human being as a one-dimensional entity, accepting either the body or the intellect or the spirit as the sole defining constituent was ill-misguided and hence should be rejected. Human interactions are shaped by our thoughts, words, and deeds, just as human persons are composed of a body, mind, and spirit. As a result, all three play a significant role in lifestyle.

Triple Harmony

Gandhi's vision of a healthy lifestyle considers the Triple Harmony of the three dimensions, namely the intra-personal, the inter-personal, and the environmental/cosmic. Additionally, there is also a dimension of transcendence which links human beings to the Ultimate which is the source and existence of life on Earth. At the intra-personal level, there must be proper correlation between body-mind and spirit leading to their peaceful development. A disproportionate growth of any one, neglecting the others, would hamper the organic evolution of human personality. For example, if intellectual development is given predominance, overlooking both physical and spiritual developments, the result would be an intellectual giant, who would be a moral dwarf and a physical weakling. Likewise, there must be perfect harmony in all aspects of thought, word, and deed. Any disjunction may cause a person to experience severe emotional instability, which in turn, may lead to social conflicts. In order to lead a healthy lifestyle, achieving this intrapersonal harmony is essential.¹⁰

Gandhi believed that people have unique qualities, such as the capacity for moral judgement and the potential to be godly. That was why he characterised human beings as moral agents and placed a specific emphasis on interpersonal relationships because of this. He wanted us to understand that 'the good of the individual is contained in the good of all.' (the first principle of sarvodaya) and that there is no conflict between individual and social/collective interests. People must have the ability to accept others as part and parcel of their own selves. Such a viewpoint would lead to inter-personal harmony and create social synergy which is the next crucial component of a healthy lifestyle.

Endowed with intellectual acumen to comprehend the laws of nature and discern the intimate and intricate inter-relation between everything that exists, human beings must consider themselves as nature's stewards and try to protect and preserve it, and thus achieve harmony with the natural environment/cosmos. This is the third dimension of the triple harmony envisaged in Gandhian lifestyle.

Gandhian Praxis in the light of Environment

Gandhi considered modern civilisation which priorities the satisfaction of material wants and attainments of physical comfort as the ultimate goal of life, is to blame for all social ills including environmental degradation we witness today. Therefore, it is essential to get rid of this and replace it with a sustainable alternative in order to maintain ecological harmony and ensuring human survival. This is

essentially a structural issue to be addressed at the level of political decision making, particularly with regard to development. Gandhi provided us the method of Satyagraha, or non-violent direct action, to convince and pressurise decision makers to adopt and implement acceptable policies and to reverse anti-people and eco-destructive programmes.¹¹

Gandhi was aware, however, that this issue also had a personal component that was tied to personal responsibility. According to Gandhi, each individual human's connections with the natural world is extremely important. When we are born into this world, we inherit a great and wonderful legacy. We have abundant of resources at our disposal besides what our ancestors have saved for us. It appears strange that we are given access to something for which we have not contributed anything. What ought to be our duty towards them? To drive home the relevance of individual responsibility, he drew upon the ancient concept of yajna and gave it his own original interpretation. Yajna or selfless service and sacrifice, also means one's duty which comes with birth. We are debtors all our lives, argued Gandhi. He wrote, "As a bond slave receives food, clothing and so on from the master he serves, so should we gratefully accept such gifts as may be assigned to us by the Lord of the Universe." A whole gamut of consequences comes out of this conviction, for Gandhi. Since we haven't created any of the natural resources, it is our responsibility to utilise them judiciously and to replenish what we take as much as we can.¹²

Humans have the capacity to understand the rules of nature, thus it is their responsibility to live and act in accordance with these Laws, ensuring that all activities adhere to the dharma that preserves life. Additionally, Yajna promotes the virtue of renunciation of self-interest and the way of selfless service. Natural resources aren't just for humans to consume; they're for all of God's creatures; they are not only for this generation but for generations to come.¹³ Thus Gandhi rejects anthropocentrism and adopts bio-centrism in its place. He urges us to go from materialism to spirituality, from having mode to being mode, as the direction of our lives. This is crucial for maintaining eco-balance.

DPSP – Gandhian Principles

Gandhian Principles

Article 40 Organise village panchayats and endow them with necessary powers.

Article 43 Promote cottage industries on an individual or co-operation basis in rural areas.

Article 48 Prohibit the slaughter of cows, calves and other milch and draught cattle and to improve their breeds.



Further the constitutional (forty second Amendment) Act, 1976 incorporated two significant articles viz.

Article 48-A (The State shall endeavour to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard the forests and wild life of the country) and

Article 51-A (g) (places a duty on the citizens of India to protect and improve the natural environment and have compassion for all living creatures)

thereby making the Indian Constitution the first in the world conferring constitutional status to the environment protection

Relevance in Today's Context

From a Gandhian perspective, the present environmental mess, ranging from deforestation, soil and biodiversity loss, to pollution and climate change, is not a disease but only a symptom. A good doctor treats the disease and not the symptom. His simple living, a rural- centred civilisation based on village autonomy and self-reliance, handicrafts and craft- centred education, emphasis on manual labour and absence of exploitative relationships are connected with the elements of today's ecological vision.

The Gandhians believe that the principles of truth and nonviolence, which form the foundation of the

entire philosophy, are relevant to all humankind. Mahatma Gandhi's ideas are more relevant than ever at a time when people are looking for ways to combat unbridled greed, pervasive violence, and consumptive style of living. There is no wonder that Gandhi is a major inspiration for many environmental movements worldwide, particularly for those who link their movement with larger concerns for human sustenance and development. When Medha Patkar protests against dam, she is following the Gandhian way.¹⁴

Dalai Lama said, "We have a big war going on today between world peace and world war, between the force of mind and force of materialism, between democracy and totalitarianism." It is precisely to fight these big wars that the Gandhian philosophy needed in contemporary times.

In my life, I have always looked to Mahatma Gandhi as an inspiration, because he embodies the kind of transformational change that can be made when ordinary people come together to do extraordinary things." - Barack Obama.

Concluding Observation

Gandhi's life and writings demonstrate that he sought to promote a paradigm shift by offering a comprehensive and environmentally responsible alternative to the unsustainable lifestyle that the contemporary industrial civilisation had established. He made an effort to replace consumerism with conservation, mass production with production by the masses, private ownership with community ownership, quantity obsession with quality concern, dominating power with enabling power, centralisation with decentralisation, reductionism with holism, and crass materialism with authentic spirituality. His philosophy and way of life are characterised by these aspects of deep ecology, which is why many refer to him as the founder of modern environmentalism. And the relentless effort he made to attain the triple harmony- of body, mind and spirit, and of thought, word and deed – earned for him the title of Mahatma which means a person in whom thought, words and action are amalgamated into a whole.

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