
RELEVANCE OF MAHATMA GANDHI THOUGHTS ON ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

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Abstract

The article is based mainly upon the concerns raised by Gandhi about the environment and later published in journals like Harijan, Harijan Sevak, Young India, the book 'Hind Swaraj, etc. Gandhi was always against the violent consumption of natural resources and loved the sustainable use of the things nature gives us as a gift. Gandhi's perspective to meet the Ethical problems of the environment. As such, includes his way of solving the environmental crisis. His views concerning the environment offer a practical way to improve the quality of life. What he preached was not only for the Indian masses but for the entire humankind. His message is relevant not for a particular time but for the future of mankind for all time. Especially his theories of non-violence, peaceful co-existence, and universal welfare of mankind. The method of data analysis is descriptive and evaluative, in which the textual analysis would be focused on the social and environmental utility.

Introduction

All the international conferences such as the Stockholm Conference of 1972 or the Rio Earth Summit of 1992 were held much later than the concerns raised by Gandhi about the environment and its effects. Even in India the key movements to protect the environment like the Chipko movement led by Chandi Prasad Bhatt and Sunder Lal Bahuguna and the Narmada Bachao Andolan by Baba Amte and Medha Patkar derived inspiration from Gandhi. His concern about the environment, urbanization, and mechanization was evident in his speeches, writings, and his messages to the workers. It can easily be said that he was the World's early environmentalist in vision and practice.

Environmentalism in India is now looked beyond specific goals to raise questions about organization of Indian society and the direction of its development. By

1992 when the Earth Summit (United Nations Conference on Environment and Development) at Rio de Janeiro in Brazil was held, global environmental 53 concerns- climate change, biological 'diversity, and the idea of sustainable development became the central theme of the debate. The concept of sustainability is closely interconnected with the control, use, and management of resources. The environmental debate, at the national and international levels, had to confront issues that are essentially a problem of the political economy.

We live in a world in which science, technology, and development play important roles in changing human destiny. However, over-exploitation of natural resources for development leads to serious environmental hazards. The idea of development is itself controversial in the present situation as in the name of development, we are unethically plundering natural resources. Indeed, a science that does not respect nature's needs and a development which does not respect people's needs threatens human survival. The environmental thoughts of Gandhi give us a new vision to harmonize nature with the needs of people. Today more than ever before the people of the world are well aware of their environment.

Objectives

- His views on human-nature relationship.
- His idea of simplicity and reduction of wants.
- To develop a strategy to apply the Gandhian environment practices in present-day society.

Gandhi's Thoughts

Gandhi considered the earth a living organism. He expressed his ideas in terms of two fundamental laws: Cosmic law and the Law of Species. Cosmic Law views the entire universe as a single entity. Nothing could malfunction outside the threshold limits built into the grand system that includes both living and non-living phenomena. (R P Mishra,2009) He believed that "the universe was structured and informed by the cosmic spirit, that all men, all life and indeed all creation were one." (Bhikhu Parekh,1989) He wrote: "I believe in the Advaita (non-duality), I believe in the essential unity of man and for that matter, of all that lives. Therefore, I believe that if one man gains spiritually, the world gains with him, and if one man fails, the whole world fails to that extent." (Young

India, 1924) Regarding the law of species, Gandhi believed that without the cooperation of both human and non-human evolution is not possible. Being rational human beings, we are the custodians of the rest of creation and should respect their rights and cherish diversity. It is for this reason that taking more than the required resources is seen as theft. Gandhi developed these principles from his readings and understandings of various religious traditions from Hinduism, Jainism, Christianity, and Islam. His social, economic, and political ideas were framed on the understanding of the interdependence of the whole universe.

Conflict resolution is an emerging branch of social science that deals with the techniques to resolve conflicts between nations or between individuals. It can also be applied to address environmental issues. Whenever there is a mismatch between different interests, conflicts arise. Gandhian non-violence or Satyagraha is accepted by many as an effective technique of conflict resolution. Gandhi never used the word 'conflict resolution'; instead he use terms like mediation and 'negotiation'. He never considered conflicts as problems, rather, they were opportunities for moral growth and transformation.

The contribution of Gandhi to conflict resolution was his working hypothesis that the non-violent resolution of group conflict was a practical goal. His philosophy of truth and nonviolence contribute to the theory of conflict resolution. Gandhi believed that truth is one and different individuals perceive it differently. Nobody can claim that their perception is correct. If we are not sure about the supreme truth there is no need for violence or conflict. To realize truth one should have to realize God. Self-realization is the way to realize God. Self-realization will lead us to refrain from violence against other beings. As far as the Indian environmental movements are concerned, the conflict is often between different interest groups or between the state and people and is often led by peasant groups or tribal people. It is often in the form of a struggle for the protection of livelihood control over resources or some form of self-determination.

Gandhi's Thoughts On Environment Protection

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." (T N Khoshoo, 1995) It is a fact that environmental concerns were minimal in Gandhi's time, but eminent environmental writers like Ramachandra Guha consider him an early Environmentalist. (Ramachandra Guha, 1998). His views on nature are scattered throughout his writings. His ideas relating to Satyagraha based on truth and non-violence, simple lifestyle, 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 everyone's needs, but not to satisfy anybody's greed" became one line of ethics to modern environmentalism.

In the context of water scarcity and water famines in the world it is important to recall Mahatma Gandhi's ideas on water. During our struggle for independence he referred to the water famine occurring in the Kathiawar region of Gujarat ruled by many princes. To address the issue of acute shortage of water he advised all the princely States to form a confederation and take long term measures for planting trees in vast tracts of land. He opined that afforestation on a large scale constituted the most effective step to face the water crisis. The twenty-first century world need to follow his words with utmost seriousness. The British rulers who treated forests as a source of revenue hardly understood their relevance from the point of view of ecology and sustainable development. Gandhiji also stressed on rain water harvesting. While speaking in a prayer meeting in Delhi in 1947 he advocated for for harvesting rain water and using it for irrigational purposes to avoid famines and food shortages. The M.S. Swaminathan Commission for Farmers in its report submitted in 2006 recommended to harvest rain water for addressing the problem of irrigation affecting our farmers. Green Party in Germany owes its origin to Gandhi's ideas Establishment of Green Party in Germany owes to the vision of Mahatma Gandhi.

Environmental injustice and marginalization are considered instances of structural violence. As Gandhi believed violence and counter-violence will never help to resolve conflicts, he considered Satyagraha as the "only force of universal application be that of Ahinsa or love" to fight these kinds of problems. (CWMG) It is entirely different from mere passive resistance, where there is no scope for

mutual love. In passive resistance, Gandhi believed "there is a scope for hatred" but "Satyagraha may be offered to one's nearest and dearest." (CWMG) Environmental movements in India used Satyagraha as the moral equivalent of war. Forest Satyagraha was first used effectively in the Chipko movement to protest against deforestation. Gandhian techniques like padayatras were conducted to save nature. Conflict resolution techniques based on non-violence and self-sacrifice were used by environmental activists like Chandi Prasad Bhatt, Baba Amte, Sunderlal Bahuguna, Medha Patker, and others.

The Chipko Andolana (to save the forest) community is another example from India, in which common people hugged the trees, held the trees by their hands and stuck to them to prevent their cutting by the contractors. They challenged that these trees can be cut over their bodies. They were subjected to torture but ultimately this movement succeeded in the leadership of Sunderlal Bahuguna. The Chipko Movement is not just a movement for saving trees and planting new trees. It stands for a basic change in land use for a permanent economy. Gandhi has in fact given new strength to the concept of "sustainable development". Sustainable means use of the nature without exhausting the natural resources completely. People who have been living for centuries in undisturbed harmony with nature should not be disturbed in the name of progress or development. The forests are also the home of varied mountain cultures, mountain ecology that ensures sufficient rains and productive hill agriculture.

Gandhi fully understood the primordially 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 which makes him an environmentalist par excellence. He is not an environmentalist who will analyse the causes and consequences of the depletion of the ozone layer. He is not competent to recommend measures against environmental pollution and safeguards against all kinds of environmental hazards. He belongs to the school which believes in remedy rather than cure. In Plato's ideal state, there was no place for doctors, for, he advocated the practice of a lifestyle in which nobody would fall ill. Gandhi also subscribed

to this line of thinking. He is the profounder of a kind of life, culture, and society that will never lead to environmental problems.

Mahatma Gandhi never used the words environment protection however what he said and did makes him an environmentalist. Although during his time environmental problems were not recognized as such however with his amazing foresight and insight he predicted that things are moving in the wrong direction. In his book Hind Swaraj he cautioned mankind against unrestricted industrialism and materialism.

His concept of non-violence thus encompassed all living beings and embodied the eternal values of life in his thought and actions. 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 Ahinsa can be useful to reduce the greed of the individual and society. He insisted on the eternal sacredness of life that included a tree, plant, or cow. Reportedly, the English historian Edward Thomson once remarked to Gandhi that wildlife was rapidly declining in 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 all living creatures and all kinds of species on our planet.

He did not want India to follow the west in this regard and warned that if India, with its vast population, tried to imitate the West then the resources of the earth will not be enough. He argued even in 1909 that industrialization and machines affected the health of people. Although he was not opposed to machines as such, he opposed the large-scale use of machinery. He criticized people for polluting the rivers and other water bodies. He criticized mills and factories for polluting the air with smoke and noise.

What he advocated in place of industrialism and consumerism was a simple life based on physical labor. He implored people to "live simply so that others may simply live". The rich must not only restrict their wants but must also treat their wealth as a 'trust' for the poor and use it for the welfare of the poor. This can be

done only if people can distinguish between their real needs and artificial wants and control the latter.

He also believed that one must "be the change that one wants to see in the world" and hence he practiced what he preached. His life was his message. So he and his wife gave away all their property. They had nothing beyond the clothes that they wore and a change or two. He used scraps of paper to write brief notes and reversed envelopes for reuse to send letters. Even when he used to bathe in the water of the free-flowing Sabarmati river he consciously used only the minimum water needed for taking a bath.

Spiritual Basis of Environmentalism : As Gandhi said, 'My ethics not only permit me to claim but requires me to own kinship with not merely the ape but the horse and the sheep, the lion and the leopard, the snake and the scorpion...'
(M.K.Gandhi, 1952). 'Indeed his love towards all life constitutes his attempt to realize the Vaishnava ideal 'Vasudevam Sarvamidam' (Everything is HE) (Benoy Gopal Ray, 1950) Gandhi was greatly influenced by Adolph Just's book 'Return to Nature' that further strengthened his conviction that if a man desires to live a wholesome life, he will have to share his life with not only humans but all living beings - birds, animals, plants and the whole ecosystem. Man must return to nature what he takes from her. He abhorred violence, in any form, towards animals or other living beings. Gandhi thus expressed his sense of the unity of all life. He wrote in Harijan in 1937, "I do believe that all God's creatures have the right to live as much as we have."

Thomas Weber brings an interesting perspective on how Arne Naess, who was thoroughly influenced by Gandhian philosophy, interprets the link between self-realization and non-violence. Weber's interpretation is as follows: 1.All living beings are one. 2. Violence against oneself or others makes complete self-realisation impossible. 3. Violence against a living being is Violence against oneself and 4. Self-realisation presupposes a search for truth. (T. Weber, 1999).

The ancient Indian religious philosophy, thought and action and practices point out to a harmonious relation between man and other living beings. Gandhi was an ardent believer of this philosophy of Vedanta, a combination of spiritual faith and scientific thought.

All those aspects remained central to Mahatma Gandhi's life and work. There is slow but sure realization that by following Gandhiji's ideals we can survive the century. The Time Magazine in its 9th April 2007 issue came out with 51 Global Warming Survival Guides. The 51st Guide earnestly suggests to share more, consume less and simplify life. In other words the Time Magazine, one of the mouth pieces of the western world, is turning to Mahatma Gandhi to save the world from the danger of extinction caused by global warming. It is a measure of Mahatma Gandhi's enduring and deeper significance in the context of attempts to protect the planet earth. It is therefore indispensable to rediscover his writings and comprehend them to further the cause of sustainable developme

Conclusion

It also requires great self-discipline and training and development of soul-force." Gandhiji believed that for achieving Sarvodaya the best and most effective means is spiritual through the technique of Satyagraha or clinging to the Truth and Nonviolence at the cost of untold suffering for oneself and even death. Gandhian Satyagraha often functions as a conflict resolution technique. Gandhiji said "self-giving, self-control and self-suffering are prime requisites" for realizing Sarvodaya.

The real importance of Gandhi as an environmentalist lies not in his vision and his right understanding of the man-nature relationship. He made honest efforts to translate his percepts into actual life. The current study has surveyed the perception of knowledgeable persons and the common man in society. It is observed that Gandhian practices are quite feasible in modern society. Applying Gandhian notions in day-to-day activities can make the lifestyle of the society more comfortable and happy. It would be able to keep environmental degradation in check and help in achieving sustainability. Thus, the study concludes that there is a great concern about the environment in Gandhian Philosophy and Practices. Gandhi's views on the environment consist of moral, spiritual, and non-violent dimensions. His simplicity and high thinking showed his love for all living beings. His concept of non-violence thus included all living beings and represent the value of life in his thought and actions.

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