



## Mahatma Gandhi the Father of Environmental Movement in India – An Insight

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### Abstract:

Mahatma Gandhi 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 became one line ethic to modern environmentalism. We live in a world in which science, technology and development play important roles in changing human destiny. He believes remedy rather than cure of environmental protection. He believed that all creatures had the right to live as much as human beings and felt a living bond between humans and the rest of the animate world. He believed that humans should live in harmony with their surroundings. However, over-exploitation of natural resources for the purpose of development leads to serious environmental hazards. In this paper I would like to focus on the role of Mahatma Gandhi in protecting environment and Gandhiji's views on over exploitation of natural resources. Impact of modern civilization on environment is also one of the main concerns of this paper.

### Key words:

### Introduction

We know Mahatma Gandhi, "The Father of the Nation" as a great political leader and a freedom fighter. But he was great environmentalist too. 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 became one line ethic to modern environmentalism. We live in a world in which science, technology and development play important roles in changing human destiny. He believes remedy rather than cure of environmental protection. He believed that all creatures had the right to live as much as human beings and felt a living bond between humans and the rest of the animate world. He believed that humans should live in harmony with their surroundings. However, over-

exploitation of natural resources for the purpose of development leads to serious environmental hazards. In this paper I would like to focus on the role of Mahatma Gandhi in protecting environment and Gandhiji's views on over exploitation of natural resources. Impact of modern civilization on environment is also one of the main concerns of this paper.

One of the greatest problems that the world is facing today is that of environmental pollution, increasing with every passing year and causing irreparable damage to the earth. Today there are thousands of organizations throughout the world working for environment protection. But the problem of "environment degradation" and its concern is not something new to our society. There were people 100 yrs ago who too were very much concerned about the environment. Gandhiji criticized modernization and



industrialization for its lethal effects on the society. 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. His contribution towards the environment is so big that many environmentalists consider Gandhi the father of environmental movement in India; environmentalists around the world celebrate his contributions to environmental thought and action.

There are several movements in different parts of the world fighting against environmental injustice. Some of them are violent in nature, but in India environmental movements have been forged by Gandhian traditions of non-cooperation and non-violence. The Gandhian definition of non-violence is far more than mere passive resistance, rather "it is a way of life, which affects everything from a person eats through to how they relate to the world around them". Gandhian Satyagraha often functions as a conflict resolution technique. Gandhi wrote much about the colonial power. He believed that "the economic imperialism of a single tiny island kingdom is today keeping the world in chains.

Mahatma Gandhi never used the word 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. As early as in 1909 in his book 'Hind Swaraj' he cautioned mankind against unrestricted industrialism and materialism. 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 than the resources of the earth will not be enough. He argued even in 1909 that industrialization and machines have an adverse effect on the health of people. Although he was not opposed to machines as such; he definitely opposed the large scale use of machinery. He criticized people for polluting the rivers and other water bodies.

Gandhiji abandoned the luxurious life, which he could have easily afforded and identified himself with less polluting poor people. This is because perhaps one of the basic and profound tenants of Gandhian environmentalism, is that – "the earth provides enough to satisfy everyone's need; but not for anyone's greed." Here is a statement that makes Gandhi a prophet not of the past but also of the future. The statement related to the most basic and fundamental question as to what is enough for need based comfortable life style. If we take more than we need, we are actually taking from others. We are also taking from the future and destroying environment. Gandhiji opted for voluntary simplicity so as to end over-consumption i.e. consuming more than our need, because ultimately that would be at the expenses of earth's resources. According to Mr. Mustafa Jolba, former Executive Director (UNEP) – "*unless we begin to use natural resources rationally and fairly, the world would face an environmental catastrophe as complete and irreversible as any nuclear holocaust.*" Gandhiji felt, we can use, the bounties of nature; but not with an



element of greed. He was a vegetarian and had compassion for all forms of life. In fact, he advocated – *“man has no power to create life, therefore has no right to kill any life also.”* Gandhiji also believed that – Non-violence and compassion are not to be practiced only towards living beings, but also towards inanimate materials. Overuse of the latter, motivated by greed and the desire to undue profit at the expense of biosphere, is also a violence, since it deprives others of the use of such materials.”

The law of growth presupposes that any growth will be subject to the innumerable constant factors, which govern the human life. Modern planners seem to have forgotten the simple truth that while something ought to growing, other ought to be diminishing; Schumacher has rightly pointed out – *“unlimited material consumption in a finite world is impossibility.”*

Gandhiji felt “industrialization is going to be a curse for mankind. It cannot provide jobs for its millions of citizen and in addition it would be creating pollution problems, whereas, developing thousands of cottage and village industries would provide an outlet for the creative facilities and resourcefulness of the people. It would also usefully employ many persons, who are in need of employment, which in return in fact would add to the national wealth too. The big industries can never overtake the unemployed millions. Their aim is primarily to make money for the few owners. Dead machinery must not be pitched against the millions of living machines.

Self-sufficiency of villages, promotion of small and cottage industries, control on the import of consumption goods, improved agriculture etc, are some of

the ways to reach our goal. Importance should be given to the qualitative improvement of human resources; education and health are to be given top priority. Better sanitation, better living condition and better life, can be achieved only through the Gandhian ways today. A sustainable society has to aim at working in partnership with nature and conserve resources and energy, reduce wastes and avoid degradation of renewable. It should produce goods that are easy to recycle, reuse and repair after use. The method of growing food and raising livestock have to be based on the use of soil and water conservation, bio-fertilizers, biological control of pests. *The society should largely be a solar/wind/bio-mass based society together with a whole range of environment friendly technologies mainly based on renewable resources.* Hence, resources should be utilized prudently and the basic need of people is to be met without any serious detriment to the environment. In this context Gandhiji’s thought, shall always remain relevant for the smooth global development.

In modern terminology, Gandhiji’s strategy is modified in terms of pattern of growth, which preliminary uses renewable resources and a minimum utilization of non-renewable resources. Though concern for the environment was not the focus of such prescriptions, yet such strategy helped to minimize the degradation of environment. The environment-friendly nature of Gandhian economic is further revealed when one notes the emphasis on the ‘last man’ In such policy, poverty has been described as the most severe polluter. The Gandhian prescription of ‘simple living’ also attempts to put a check on unlimited consumption and



unending exploitation of natural resources

He observed that the Indian situation demanded a new vision on economics which is centered on agriculture and village industries. He conceptualized a new economic order based on ecological balance. The village romanticism of Gandhi has been considered as central to his environmental philosophy. However, going back to the thoughts of Gandhi is essential to build up a green future, where there is no place for human greed.

He believed that "the universe was structured and informed by the cosmic spirit, that all men, all life and indeed all creation were one. Many thinkers considered the Indian Environmental Movements like Chipko movement, Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) etc. as the living example of Gandhian Environmentalism and they consider Gandhi as a "man with deep ecological view of life, a view much too deep even for deep ecology. "The key agenda of the Chipko movement was that carrying forward the "vision of Gandhi's mobilization for a new society, where neither man nor nature is exploited and destroyed, which was the civilization response to a threat to human survival. All these together made Gandhi an exponent of Indian environmentalism.

#### **Conclusion**

Gandhi is not an environmentalist who wills analyses the causes and consequences of depletion in the ozone layer. He is not competent to recommend measures against environmental pollutions and safeguards against all kinds of environmental hazards. He belongs to the school which believes in remedy rather than cure. Throughout his life he kept on telling people and giving demonstration on

health, hygiene and sanitation. Hardly any political leader of his stature in the world had ever devoted so much of time and energy on these problems with so much sincerity and dedication. Environmentalist of today gives scholarly lectures and writes research papers and books on the subject. There are also activist environmentalists no doubt. But we can easily discern in them the motives to be prominent and cash it for political purposes. Gandhi tried to carry the message to the mass through the life he himself led. This is what made him an environmentalist with a difference.

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