



DR. Punita Pathak

Gandhi and Environment- A Quest for an Alternative

Assistant Professor- Department of Political Science, Vasanta College for Women, Rajghat, KFI, BHU, Varanasi (U.P.) India

Received-21.02.2023, Revised-27.02.2023, Accepted-04.03.2023 E-mail: punita.pathak@gmail.com

Abstract: *"The Earth has enough resources for our need but not for our greed."*

This quote of Gandhi has a historical significance as this was stated in the era in which industrial development was in accelerating pace, but still, he insighted the ill effects of that development and evolving technology. If we go through the history of old civilisation then the development of humans was always based upon the utilisation of nature. However, over-exploitation of natural resources for the purpose of development led to serious environmental hazards. The very idea of human development and existence requires continuous exploration in the field of science which often crosses the boundaries of nature. The concept and realisation of environmental consciousness is a recent phenomenon that has gained momentum only in the last five decades.

Key Words: Historical significance, industrial development, accelerating pace, development, technology.

Apart from the being the flag bearer of Indian revolutionary movement, Gandhi has a definite sense of evolutionary thought which gave a new vision to harmonise nature with the needs of people. In true sense, Gandhi was not an environmentalist and neither he created any green philosophy or wrote any nature poems. His all ideas which were related to Satyagraha were based on truth and non-violence, simple life style, and harmony which also believed that sustainable development is possible without doing any harm to nature and our fellow beings which are evident throughout his writings. Mahatma Gandhi's critique of modernity reveals his concern about the emergence of a social order that exploits nature for short-term gains. He had written widely about the need for human beings to exercise restraint with respect to the use of natural resources. His "counter-thinking" is now increasingly becoming a mainstream thought with greater awareness of the environmental problems. Dr John S Moolakkattu stated about Gandhi's thinking and views on environment in his book, Mahatma Gandhi and the Environment. He mentioned that Gandhi's environmentalism fitted in with his overall vision for India and the world that sought to extract from nature what is absolutely necessary for human sustenance. His ideas on environment are intimately linked with his ideas relating to the polity, economy, health, and development and eventually he concluded that Gandhi's environmentalism is largely built on ecological practices of peasants and tribal communities. So if we ask that whether Gandhi was the progenitor of environmental ideas in the country? The answer may be in both 'yes' and 'no'. If we observe closely then he was an environmentalist as the implications of his social, political, and economic ideas on the environment. As we can see that many environmental movements in India have drawn inspiration from Mahatma Gandhi. On the other hand it is difficult to label him as an environmentalist if we do a mechanical content analysis of his statements based on the present understanding of environmental issues, since words like 'environment' and 'ecology' do not appear in his Collected Works. It was discerning that Gandhi saw everything in an interrelated way which was evident in his writings.

Gandhiji always emphasized on non-violence, with nature as well. According to him, it must be approached with a sense of respect. For him, non-violence meant not only non-injury to human life but towards all living things. He suggested that this was important because it was a pathway towards Truth. Our false perception that industrialization has ushered in the greatest happiness has always led towards environmental destruction. It has also led us towards unhappiness, depression, crime, obesity, suicide and so on. As a visionary leader of the Indian National movement and an architect of society, Gandhiji rejected the western model of civilization based on that Scientific-technological culture. However, he has also accepted many virtues of modernity like freedom, equality, justice etc. Gandhi said that civilization in the real sense of the term consists not in the multiplication, but the deliberate and voluntary reduction of wants. The concept of modern civilization is as unsatisfactory as an unending pursuit of material pleasure



based on greed. He suggested that the concept of modern civilization ultimately won't lead the world towards development. Gandhiji realized that modern civilization tends to multiply the wants (not needs) of common people. Gandhiji also valued bodily labour saying, "the rains come not through intellectual feats, but sheer bodily labour. It is a well-established observation that where forests remain denuded of trees, rains are attracted, and therefore the volume of water received increases with the increase of vegetation". The main reason behind Gandhiji's rejection of modern civilization was based on his deep conviction to uphold higher ethical principles, doubting whether it was sustainable in the long run.

The Gandhi's literature has elements of economics, politics, and sociology suffused with an interconnectedness informed by ethics. A very famous saying of Gandhi is: 'I believe in advaita (non-duality), I believe in the essential unity of man and, for that matter, of all that lives. J C Kumarappa, Gandhi's economist, who developed his ecological views in a clearer fashion, said: 'In the traditional archives of knowledge, religion, sociology, and economy have all been reserved their separate and exclusive spheres. He tried to explain the views of Gandhi as- Man has been divided into various watertight compartments.

The left hand is not to know what the right hand does. The nature does not recognize such divisions and while dealing she deals with life as a whole. In another contemplative view Gandhi considered the earth a living organism. His ideas were expressed 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. He believed that "the universe was structured and informed by the cosmic spirit, that all men, all life and indeed all creation were one. He said that 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. Regarding the law of species Gandhi believed that without the cooperation and sacrifice of both human and non-human beings evolution is not possible.

Being rational human beings, we are the custodians of the rest of creation and should respect their rights and cherish the diversity. It is for this reason that taking more than the required resources is seen as theft. Gandhi evolved these principles from his vast readings and understandings of religious traditions of Hinduism, Jainism, Christianity and Islam. His social, economic and political ideas were framed on the understanding of interdependence of the whole universe. It is paramount to understand that Mahatma Gandhi never used the word environment protection however what he said and did makes him an environmentalist. Although during his time the environmental problems were not recognized as such however with his amazing foresight and insight, he predicted that things are moving in the wrong direction and the trend of development on the verge of environment is going to take a disaster in future.

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 about that. He raised the point that if India, with its vast population, tried to imitate the west than the resources of the earth will not be enough. He argued during the nascent phase of industrialization that machines have an adverse effect on the health of people. On the contrary he was not opposing the machines as such but he definitely opposed the large-scale use of machinery.

He was very much against the ill effects of all types contamination therefore he criticized people for polluting the rivers and other water bodies and mills and factories for polluting the air with smoke and noise. He always advocated that in place of industrialism and consumerism it is better to live a simple life based on physical labour. He always insisted that if people will learn to live simply then other may also live simply. So, he said that earth provides enough to satisfy every man's need but not every man's greed. The notion is that the rich must not only restrict their wants but must also treat their wealth as 'trust' for poor and use it for the welfare of poor.

This can be done only if people can distinguish between their real needs and artificial wants and control the later. He recommended that the real need meant to possess only what is absolutely necessary for the moment for the live sake so that this would not only help the unprivileged of today but would help protect the environment for the next generation. He endorsed that the earth, the air, the land and the water were not an inheritance from our forefathers



but a loan from our children. So, it is our diligent duty that we have to handover to the next generation at least as it was handed over to us. 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 donated all their property and left nothing beyond the clothes that they wore and a change or two. He used scrapes of papers to write brief notes and reversed envelopes for reuse to send letters. To him poverty was the most severe polluter and hence poverty must be eradicated and that can be done only when every body is taking their own share and not grabbing others share by limiting their needs and sharing their resources. However his concerns were not limited to human beings alone as he had a very strong sense of the unity of all life. 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.

Gandhi's vision and values was meant to be a serious exploration into the contemporary meaning of Hind Swaraj and the kind of possibility it indicates for agricultural practices in rural India. Therefore Hind Swaraj herein refers to Gandhi's text and also to India's last 50 years as an independent country. In this he advocated for the empowerment of the individual. Its up to each and every individual to simplify his or her life; to share his or her resources and to care for his and her surroundings. In the post-Gandhian era, environmental problems surfaced at a breakneck speed with large-scale and indiscriminate industrialisation leading to environmental hazards and degradations. We cannot develop India by ignoring environmental issues. He promoted eco-friendly products such as khadi to create markets and jobs for the village economy and watershed management and organic farming. So, to achieve his philosophy regarding the environment, we'll have to define and find out 'new' education by amalgamating scientific materialism into scientific idealism. "I need no inspiration other than Nature's. She has never failed me as yet. She mystifies me, bewilders me, sends me to ecstasies."

REFERENCES

1. Barua A. Towards a Philosophy of Sustainability: The Gandhian Way. *Sociology and Anthropology*. 2015; 3(2):136-143. [Google Scholar]
2. Deb P. Gandhian approach to environmental challenges. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Advanced Research Trends*. 2015; 2(2):185-194. [Google Scholar]
3. Guha R. *Berkeley: Permanent Black: The University of California Press*; 2006. How Much Should A Person Consume? [Google Scholar]
4. Jha S. Mahatma Gandhi - An environmentalist with a Difference. [Internet] Available from: <http://www.mk Gandhi.org/environment/environment.htm> . accessed on October 20, 2018.
5. Moolakkattu JS. Gandhi as a Human Ecologist. *J Hum Ecol*. 2010; 29(3):151-158. [Google Scholar]
6. Sasikala AS. Environmental Thoughts of Gandhi for a Green Future. *Gandhi Marg*. 2012;34 (1):53-68. [Google Scholar]
7. Sheth P. Ahmedabad: Gujarat Vidyapeeth; 1994. Theory and Praxis of Environmentalism: Green plus Gandhi. [Google Scholar]
8. T N Khoshoo, Mahatma Gandhi: An Apostle of Applied Human Ecology (New Delhi: TERI, 1995), p.9.
9. M K Gandhi, Hind Swaraj, G A Natesan and Co, Madras, 1947, p 99.
10. Haridas T Mazumdar, Mahatma Gandhi- Peaceful Revolutionary, Gharles Scribner's Sons, London, 1952, p 13.
11. Ramachandra Gunha, "Mahatma Gandhi and Environmental Movement in India" in Arne Kalland and Gerard Persoon (ed), *Environmental Movements in Asia* (London: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies & Routledge, 1998), p.67.
12. Young India, October 15, 1925.
