

Environmental aspects of Gandhi's thought: A study

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Abstract

In the modern sense, Gandhi was not an environmentalist because he didn't come up with a green ideology. Nevertheless, Gandhi's green ideas bring a new perspective on how to balance the demands of humans with the natural world. His thoughts on Satyagraha based on truth and nonviolence, simple living, and development demonstrate how sustainable development is possible without harming nature or our fellow beings. His notion that "nature has enough to satisfy everyone's needs, but not to satisfy anybody's greed" became a fundamental principle of modern environmentalism. Gandhi believed that modern industrial civilization had a significant impact on both humanity and the environment. In his book Hind Swaraj, released in 1909, he called modern civilization "satanic." He argued that modern society constituted a terrible amount of violence against nature. Gandhi feared that villages will soon vanish as a result of modern civilization's rapid urbanization, of which environmental degradation is a heinous byproduct. While western environmentalists propagated the notion of "going back to nature" Gandhi propagated the message of "going back to the villages"

Keywords: Environment, Satyagraha, Modern Civilization, Sustainable Development.

Introduction

Today, the entire world is suffering from horrible environmental pollution and degradation. Many of us today are aware of the underlying causes of environmental pollution and degradation, which are founded in industrialisation, urbanisation, transportation, and modern living, as well as, to a lesser extent, modern agricultural activities. The population explosion has put a huge strain on the Earth's natural resources, putting the supply of natural resources under threat. Furthermore, the affluent society's greedy and extravagant pleasures have opened the path for environmental contamination and destruction. While technological growth has immensely aided our civilization's advancement, it has also harmed our environment. At the moment, it appears that environmental security is more important than economic security. In the name of

need and wants, we are continuously plundering nature. In fact, it is the result of our inordinate greed. Because of greed, we have been exploiting nature on a daily basis. The affluent society's unbridled greed and reckless use of technology are at the core of environmental degradation and pollution. As a result, humanity and civilization as a whole are currently at a crossroads.

People's awareness of the environment has grown in the previous half-century or so. Environmental conferences such as the 1972 'Stockholm Conference' and the 1992 'Rio Earth Summit' have occurred on a global scale. However, Gandhi voiced his concern for the environment in his different publications, speeches, and messages to the people about a century ago. But, first and foremost, we must remember that he was not an environmentalist in the modern sense. This is due to the fact that he did not develop any fundamental theories in the environment or systems that are strictly subject to present environmental science. Although Gandhi never used words like 'environment', or 'ecology', the environment was an important part of his life, thoughts, and activity. Nothing appears complete without the environment, from his Gram-Swaraj to Nonviolence, from Charka to Self-Reliance. That is why, in his essay "The Eco-Gandhi and Ecological Movements," Pravin Sheth identifies Gandhi as the "World's Early Environmentalist in Vision and Practice."^[1] He has served as an inspiration to persons such as Sundarlal Bahuguna, the leader of India's first successful environmentalist Chipko movement, and Medha Patekar, the leader of the Narmada Bachao campaign in the 1980s.

Objectives

The purpose of this study is to examine the following objectives:

- To identify and analyse environmental issues using Gandhian thought as a framework.
- To understand Gandhi's view on industrialization or the modern civilization & the impact of modern civilization on the environment.
- To demonstrate how Gandhi's concept of village self-rule and self-sufficiency may be used to manage environmental issues.
- To demonstrate that Gandhi's ideology of "simple living and high thinking" focuses on minimizing needs or non-consumerism and can be used to tackle environmental issues.
- To understand the relevance of Gandhi's ecological perspectives in Modern times.

Methodology

The present study deals with the theoretical as well as empirical aspects of environmental challenges. In the present study, efforts are aimed toward the examination of numerous existing

environmental problems that the whole world is facing today, and an attempt is also made to find out remedies in accordance with the Gandhian perspective. The study is theoretical in nature and thus mostly reliant on the observational method. Therefore, the methodology of the work is analytical and interpretative types and the data required for the study have been acquired from both secondary and primary sources.

Gandhi's environmental consciousness teaches us a new approach to balancing people's demands with nature's. Satyagraha, based on his truth and nonviolence, his simple lifestyle, and his development concepts, assists us in becoming more integrated with the environment and moving toward the objective of sustainable development. To comprehend Gandhi's concept of the environment, one must first realize his concept of Nonviolent Satyagraha, his Simple Way of Life, his concept of Gram-Swaraj, his vision of Modern Civilization, and so on.

To fully comprehend Gandhi's views on the environment, one must first comprehend the context in which he developed his thoughts. Massive industrialization, the growth of the capitalist economy, labour exploitation, and the reckless use of natural resources all resulted from the Industrial Revolution, which fundamentally altered European society. As a result, other nations have pursued similar objectives of material wealth and happiness, inadvertently causing permanent harm to humanity. S.K.Jha, in his essay "Mahatma Gandhi- An Environmentalist with a Difference," commented on this, "Reckless and limitless pursuit of industrialization by all nations are now posing serious problems for the very existence of not only man but for all living creatures and all kinds of species on our planet"^[2].

Spiritual basis of environmentalism

There are three essential parts of Gandhi's environmentalism - moral, spiritual and non-violent. Therefore, instead of materialism or consumerism, he viewed spiritual self-realisation to be the most significant part of human progress. Materialistic needs were entirely strange to him. Because he considered that these material wants interfere with human self-realisation. So he led a simple life and was guided by deep, high-minded thoughts and was bound by his love for all animals created by God. Thus his idea of non-violence covers all living beings and embodies the eternal values of life in his thoughts and acts. Influenced by Adolph Just's book "Return to Nature", Gandhi became more convinced that if a person wanted to live a healthy life, he would have to share it with humans and other animals as well as plants and the whole environment. He thought that whatever man had taken from nature, he must give it back to nature. For this reason,

he hated all types of violence against nature and other creatures. He wrote in Harijan in 1937, "I do believe that all God's creatures have the right to live as much as we have."^[3]

Gandhi's critique of modern civilization

Most of the environmental issues we confront today were prophesied by Gandhi. As a result, we can identify him as the primary critique of modernization and industrialization's inhuman nature. Savita Singh writes in her book 'Global Concern with Environmental Crises and Gandhi's Vision' that it is in the context of new value orientation and the quest for human survival threatened by the environmental and ecological crisis that the re-discovering of Gandhi's warning of 'industrialise and perish' has to be seen.^[4] Gandhi stated in his famous book 'Hind Swaraj,' published in 1909, that unbridled industrialization and materialism will be detrimental to the country. He has long warned of the hazards of river and water contamination, which is now a common problem. He also warned us a long time ago about the hazards of misuse of pesticides and chemical fertilisers, which deplete the fertility of the land with the aim of increasing yields. As a result, he envisioned an ecological or fundamental demand model focusing on demand restrictions rather than modern civilization.

Man-Natura relationship

Traditionalists have always viewed nature as a divine manifestation, and needless to say, their views were opposed to the exploitation of nature. Because all the religions of the world are generally eco-friendly.^[5] In ancient scriptures and literature, nature, including plants, animals and other beings, is cherished tremendously. Prehistoric man lived in intimate touch with nature and as a result of constant evolution, nature became man's eternal buddy. Gandhi called for conservation of the environment and frugal use of the environment following this Indian tradition of paying tribute to Mother Earth. He often contended that people do not have the power to create life; So he has no right to destroy his life. He argued that as humans are more rational and clever than other animals, humans should be more empathetic to other creatures.

The teachings of environmental consciousness that Gandhi taught to us were not limited to the form of theory, he also lived it in his own working life. So he made it a priority to maintain his Ashrams or the surroundings of his residence clean and tidy. In this regard, S. K. Jha properly stated that 'Gandhi fully understood the primordality 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'^[6]

Village self-rule and self-sufficiency

Gandhi believed that India existed in villages. And he considers it a sin to destroy the village's culture and civilization through technology, equipment, and industrialization. That is why he has often urged the younger generation not to be enticed by the glitter of modern civilization. Because he believed that modern civilization's flaws were well understood, but that none of them could be rectified. As a result, he believed that people should strive toward a rural lifestyle. Furthermore, the link between his village-dependent economy and his environmental thought is profound. This rural economy is evolving in tandem with the environment. This is because the operations of the community of Kumbhakar, Malakar, Sutradhar, Tantubaya, and others, beginning with the rural society's farming bus, only address the needs of the rural society. Their work's materials and resources are derived from the environment. Gandhi devised a sustainable alternative economy for rural India with this in mind. He envisioned a village society comprised of individuals from all walks of life, self-sufficient in meeting their needs while preserving the environment.

Gandhi believed that change in the life of the common man was bound to come only if proper values of health, cleanliness, sanitation and education were instilled in him. So he adopted many plans for the development of the common people of the village - such as village self-sufficiency, widespread use of small scale industries, handicrafts and utilizing local resources to alleviate the poverty of the common people of the village. In this context Ramjee Singh commented that 'Gandhian model of technology and development is based more on renewable resources like animal, water, oil and solar energies etc. and less on non-renewable ones.'^[7] It does not lead to environmental pollution or disturbs the ecological balance. Thus the Gandhian model places more emphasis on 'waste-reduction' rather than on building a 'waste-centric' culture. He thought that modern civilization or industrialization was a curse for the human race - which would create environmental pollution instead of providing employment to millions of people.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the protection of the environment is one of the most difficult concerns facing mankind at the moment. Everywhere, people are yelling "Consumption for today and conservation for tomorrow". When live natural resources are depleted to sustainable levels and

environmental variables become ineffective, no technological intervention or socio-economic change will be able to save mankind from looming calamity. So from the Gandhian point of view, we must radically transform our way of life and learn to live in peace with nature. Gandhi's environmentalism was a natural extension of his entire view of India and the globe - which sought to extract from the natural world what, is absolutely necessary for human survival. His environmental approach is not simply a reaffirmation of ancient ideas, but also a rejection of capitalist industrialism, consumerism, and patriarchy, and the building of a new system with eco-friendlier principles.

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