

Non-Violence and Environment: Gandhi's Ecological Idea for a Sustainable Future

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Abstract

The care for environment of Mahatma Gandhi can be seen in his philosophy of non-violence. His philosophy focuses on an ethical behaviour towards the environment. This article will highlight environmental concern of Gandhi that will focus on his philosophy of non-violence, simple living, and self-sufficiency as core ideas governing human actions towards the environment. Gandhi stated that real happiness comes when human being instead of destroying the nature for selfish motives, lives peacefully with the environment by adopting a simple life. Gandhi's philosophy is based on the principle of Ahimsa or non-violence which should be applied to all the creatures of the world. He mentioned that harm to the environment would result in harm to human being. This relation highlights the ethical duty of human being to protect the environment for future generations. Gandhi's philosophy of Sarvodaya which is betterment of all reflects betterment of all the creatures of the world. Therefore, it can be useful in addressing environmental crisis by focusing on the welfare of every being. This article will also highlight Gandhi's implementation of his environmental ideas which is reflected in his idea of self-reliance, critique of industrialization, cottage industries and eco-friendly agricultural habits. His adoption of khadi products is not only an economic friendly idea but is also helpful in preserving the environment. By relating Gandhi's philosophy in the context of ecological crisis, this paper will deal with the practical application of his philosophy to address environmental issues. His philosophy is reflected in various environmental movements that deals with ethical practices that result in a healthy human-nature relationship.

Keywords: Gandhi, environment, non-violence, sarvodaya, swadeshi

Introduction:

Gandhi's idea of non-violence, simplicity, self-reliance, sarvodaya and unification of human being with the nature form the backbone of his concern for the environment. His ideas are useful for the welfare of not only for the entire human society but also for the benefit of the entire environment. Environment refers to our surroundings. It includes living and non-living, natural and man-made components. Environmental issue is the

burning issue in current times. Global warming, ozone layer depletion, climate change are some of the results of environmental damage. This has a drastic effect on human health as well as the entire environment. Environmental issues occur due to pollution, over population, technology and exploitation of resources. Although there was less environmental concern in Gandhi's time but he was concerned with environmental issues that the world is facing now. His famous argument "The earth has enough for human need but not for human greed" points to the fact that he was very much concerned about the environment. The basic foundation of his philosophy is non-violence which is applicable not only to human being but to the entire environment. Gandhi was not an environmentalist as he did not lead any environmental movement, nor did he write any book related to it. But he was concerned about the environment which can be perceived in his philosophy. Gandhi considered industries as the main source of pollution that hampers the environment (Tiwari, 2019). Industries, although have a great impact on human life in terms of technology, services that make human life easier but it is also considered as the main source of pollution that creates environmental degradation. It releases harmful pollutants into the air that are dangerous to human health (Manisalidis et al., 2020). It can be seen that excessive exploitation of resources in the name of development leads to serious environmental degradation. Therefore, Gandhi was not in support of industrialization. Although, industrialisation hampers human labour but environmental degradation also results from it and thus, Gandhi's unwillingness to accept industrialisation can also be helpful in addressing environmental degradation.

Critique of Industrialisation:

Industrialisation refers to the process of moving into industrial based economy from agriculturally based economy. With the increase of industries, it requires raw materials on a large scale that leads to massive deforestation. Although industrialisation contributes to the development such as economic growth, urbanisation, encourages technological advancements and improves standard of living but it has a negative impact on environment. Human being is exploiting the resources unethically for the sake of development which can be clearly seen in deforestation, pollution, water disputes in current times (S, 2012). If a development does not respect nature, then it also threatens human survival. Human being can be regarded as nature's child because like parents, nature fulfils human needs. But at the same time human being stands outside the nature and destroys it for fulfilling his greed. The deterioration of nature also affects human being. The degradation of the environment is the result of human activities (Ekiugbo & Isanbor, 2012). The dangers of industrialization, machinery, modern civilization, urbanization was already visualised by Mahatma Gandhi much before these issues actually took place. He dealt with these issues mostly in Hind Swaraj (Tiwari, 2019). Throughout his life, he was a critique of industrialization and modern civilization after visualizing the danger inherent in the industrial revolution in the west. He was against industrialization as he visualised that it would lead to massive harm to the environment which the world is facing now. Gandhi was influenced by Ruskin's view against Victorian Industrialization through his book "Unto This Last" where he was influenced by the importance of manual labour. Industrialization

has a huge effect on human and environment. It has made a portion of people rich by destroying the natural resources of the earth. Gandhi stated that it has made people run after wealth and worldly pleasures. He regarded machines to be a representation of sin. Industrialization has given rise to multiplicity of wants. The resources are limited but the human wants are unlimited that creates violence of human towards the environment. It also gives rise to inequality, oppositions and scarcity for the rest of the population. Gandhi believed that before Industrialization, the human wants were limited that has little effect on nature. Gandhi was not totally against industries but he was against industrialization that makes man superior to nature. He considers industrialization as a tool of mass destruction, the torture to innocent living creatures. He believes that industrialization reduces morality of human being. The raw materials are exploited from the smaller countries and the stronger countries try to compete with one another to reach the position of industrially powerful. This leads to more and more exploitation of resources. It also creates a huge gap between capital and labour class. It also gives rise to issue of unemployment of labour. Gandhi believed that the excessive industrialization leads to destruction of human spirit that transforms the status of man into machine. It degrades the morality of human being. The harmful effects that industrialization creates in the environment are air pollution, water pollution and soil pollution that destroys life and reduce life expectancy (Blokhin, Boyle, & Logan, 2021). To address these issues, sustainable practices such as reforestation, self-sufficiency, cottage industries, organic farming can be taken into consideration which is already found in Gandhi's philosophy. Gandhi believed that industrialization gives importance to material wealth and consumerism that has a negative impact on society. He argued that running after material objects results in endless greed where individuals fall prey to endless wants and unnecessary consumption. This leads to excessive destruction of resources. Thus, consumerism is an important element of industrialisation that contributes to the environmental degradation.

Consumerism:

Consumerism is a state of increasing the consumption of goods and services by the people. It is economically beneficial but has an adverse effect on nature because the resources are limited but human wants are unlimited. It leads to exploitation of the nature. The attitude of human being towards the environment is exploiting in nature. Construction of dams for beneficial to human being creates greenhouse effects as it releases large amounts of carbon from the killing of trees around dams. It leads to global climate change. It also creates loss of habitat of different species and resettlement of human being (Sara & Ovi, 2016). It can be seen that in the process of consumerism, the worth of human being depends on how much they possess instead of who they are. This leads to an end of the ethical values such as modesty, sympathy and satisfaction. Instead of having satisfaction, human being desires for more that creates a feeling of separation of human being from others. Thus, it can be seen that it not only creates social inequality but also creates a feeling among human being that man is the superior being than all other creatures of the world and therefore, it forgets to bother the well-being of other creatures. In this regard, Gandhi, although admires rationalism but considered it as a "hidden

monster” when it considers itself to be Supreme Being (Gandhi, 1926). The consideration of human being as omnipotence is a way to possess the material world. It would give illegitimate power to man to exploit the nature. Gandhi did not accept the sacrifice of animals even in the name of religion. Thus, by considering human being as a Supreme Being themselves, it would not regret to use violence over other beings which can be seen as a challenge to environmental justice. Thus, this challenge can be addressed with the help of non-violence which can be seen in Gandhi’s philosophy of non-violence.

Gandhi’s Philosophy of Non-violence and Environmental Justice:

Gandhi was of the view that harming the environment is *himsā*. Not to harm any living being is *ahimsa*. Non-violence or *ahimsa* is the basic foundation of Gandhi’s philosophy. His philosophy is applicable not only to a particular area but can be applied to every aspect. Non-violence generally means debarred from harming others at any situation. It is a method of solving an issue peacefully without any forceful attempt. It refers to non-killing or non-injury. Jainism has a great influence on Gandhi’s non-violence. Like Jainism, Gandhi also considers everything as a living entity. He advised people to respect every life form. But Gandhi’s idea of non-violence is much more general definition of it. Non-violence, according to Gandhi is absence of violence in thought, word and actions. He regarded it as a way of life. The term non-violence means “love” (Lal, 1978). He accepts love for humanity. He believed in Advaita or non-dual reality (Reddy & Chinnaiah, 2023). It shows that human and environment is one. Therefore, non-violence should be applicable to the entire environment. Gandhi’s non-violence can be helpful to control environmental issues as after adopting this idea, the carbon footprints is believed to be reduced which is produced in wars and missile production (Tiwari, 2019). Gandhi gives importance to preservation of natural resources by human being. Thus, man has to be non-violent towards the nature. His principle of non-violence is very necessary in current time to have a balanced nature as consumerism is increasing at higher rate and produces tremendous amount of waste to the environment. Excessive consumerism results in extinction of resources and also pollutes air, water and soil (Nayeck, 2018). Arne Ness considers preservation of environment as non-violent in nature. He propounded his idea of Deep ecology from non-violence (Weber, 1999). Gandhi believes that non-violence is the highest duty that helps to attain the highest law which is truth. When Gandhi was in search of truth he found non-violence. Non-violence is the means and truth is the end. He regarded these two principles as the two sides of the same coin. He considered Truth as God. Truth is the ultimate goal of human being that can be attained through non-violence (Lal, 1978). It is a principle which cannot be practiced by coward. The strong and brave can practice this principle. He considered it as a tool to control human greed. Thus, it can be helpful in controlling the unnecessary destruction of the nature by controlling the excessive human wants. It can also be useful to improve human-nature relation. Gandhi said that violence can be perceived in economic, industrial and political system and thus, he desired to bring a change through trusteeship. It is a philosophy where the rich people keep with themselves what is necessary for them and donate their remaining to the poor (Lal, 1978). He mentioned that owning property is

also a kind of violence and he believed that everyone has the right on everything. By adopting this method, the desire for excessive owning can be reduced which can be helpful in mitigating exploitation of resources. Another principle of Gandhi is Satyagraha. It is the technique or tool of non-violence which is holding fast to truth. It is a principle that maintains extreme love for truth. It is a technique that tries to bring positive changes by sticking to the path of truth. It is the truth force, soul force or love force (Lal, 1978). It is a non-violent method which is adopted against any injustice and *himsā*. It develops a feeling of love and oneness among all. It also involves participation by the masses. Therefore, in order to preserve the environment, people should come forward and join hands to have a sustainable nature. It can be perceived that it influences many environmental movements such as Chipko movement, Narmada Bachao Andolon, etc. The main aim of Chipko movement is to take forward Gandhi's idea of forming new society where there is no exploitation of man as well as nature, and to raise voice against the barrier to human survival. The Cauvery River issue, deforestation, Ganga water issue, Narmada Bachao Movement, etc. are some of the environmental issues that requires resolution to solve these issues. Most of it adopted Gandhi's philosophy to solve these issues (Reddy & Chinnaiah, 2023). Gandhi's non-violence is environmentally friendly and more effective than violence. Gandhian successful solution to other issues might also have influenced these environmental movements. Gandhi considered satyagraha as a weapon of non-violence to solve any issue. Environmental issues also come under the issues that can be reduced through Gandhi's technique. He suggested coming to negotiation to come to a solution to any issue. He experimented to use non-violence to resolve issues and succeed in it. The main elements of non-violence are peace and harmony. These elements of non-violence are the tool of Sarvodaya. It is a principle which deals with the betterment of all. This principle can be applicable when it involves truth, non-violence and co-operation. It includes love for all and well-being of all. It also involves self-sacrifice. It highlights the unity and oneness of all (Lal, 1978). Sarvodaya means well-being of all that includes not only human being but the entire environment. The pre-Socratic philosophers considered nature as the primary stuff of the universe. Thales considered water as the primary substance of the world. On the other hand, Anaximenes considered air to be the source of all creatures. The western philosopher Spinoza considered nature as God. Thus, it can be perceived that nature is considered as the Supreme creature of the universe. Therefore, it is the responsibility of human being to protect the nature and respect it instead of exploiting it. But it should be noted that prevention of complete exploitation of resources by human being is hard to follow. In certain circumstances extractions of resource for the survival of human being is absolutely necessary (Shiva, 2014). Again, increase of poverty can also be seen as one of the effects of strict cut down on destruction of resources. The economic development of a nation also depends on use of resources. Thus, certain form of violence to resources by human being is bound to take place in order to live. Gandhi also accepted that it is difficult to control *himsā* completely under certain conditions such as killing an animal for self-protection, destroying plants for food, destroying mosquitoes that create germs, etc. and the like causes. Gandhi's meaning of violence is harming others out of anger, selfishness, and jealousy. Absence of

such causes in hurting others is not considered as violence by Gandhi (Lal, 1978). Therefore, by considering Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence it can be stated that use of resources is necessary for human survival but unnecessary destruction of resources for selfish purpose should be reduced to deal with environmental degradation.

Conclusion:

Gandhi's environmental concern came into being much before the environmental movements took place. His teachings "The earth has enough for human need but not for human greed" points to the fact that he was very much concerned about environmental crisis. He hinted towards issues such as consumerism, violence, industrialization, modern civilization, and so on. In India, environmental movements can be seen to have inspired by Gandhi's teachings of non-violence, satyagraha, Sarvodaya. The non-violent attitude towards environment by human being not only improves human-nature relation but also helps in controlling environmental problems. His philosophy of satyagraha served as a weapon to resolve conflict which can be useful in controlling man-nature conflict. Although, he did not lead any environmental movements but his teachings can be seen to have applied to reduce various environmental problems. He visualised that industrialization would not only hamper employment of labour but it would also lead to massive environmental destruction such as pollution, ozone layer depletion, climate change, etc. He was not in support of modern civilization that runs to satisfy human greed which leads to massive exploitation of resources. His predictions to future environmental crisis can be perceived in the current times. Thus, his solution to environmental degradation that can be found in his philosophy can be seen to be work as prevention of the issue rather than cure which is more effective in the long run. Gandhi's idea can be realised with a determination and moral principle. The basic necessity in adopting it is a change in thinking of human and the step towards a sustainable future. The path towards a green future can be found in Gandhi's idea of non-violence. But at the same time, Gandhi's philosophy cannot be used in every aspect without critically examined. His ideas can be utilised based on the time and the situations. The complete industrialisation cannot be overlooked as it is necessary for economic development, productivity, technological upliftment and standard of living. Again, a large section of capitalist considered Gandhi's idea of Sarvodaya as "utopian" land of dreams which is difficult to achieve in reality. With the fundamental rights of people, Sarvodaya is hard to apply in current times. But with these critical standpoints, it is to be taken into consideration that Gandhi accepted a middle path to attain the goal. Gandhi himself stated that certain form of violence by human being is considerable but excessive destruction of resources is untenable. By analysing his concept of industrialisation, it can be stated that industrialisation can be acceptable to that extent where village handicrafts based on human labour can go hand in hand with machines and have less impact on environment. Although, critics have mentioned Sarvodaya as a utopian concept but adopting this concept voluntarily ensure harmonious existence of man and nature. Thus, it can be said that reinterpreting Gandhi's idea with moderate considerations can be useful towards building a green future.

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