



# Relevance of Gandhian Thoughts to Environmental Challenges in the Modern Era

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## ABSTRACT

The emergence of environmental challenges begins with applications of the different development models as both have *vis-à-vis* relationships. Sustainable development is a modern concept in which the complementary aspect of two opposites is considered as a key factor and provides a route to gradual development which favours to environment of the planet Earth and matches with the Gandhian thought of development. Gandhian thoughts are deep-rooted in the rich Indian tradition of world welfare. This paper finds the application of Gandhian thoughts to mobilize the generation for acceptance of development models suitable for planet Earth in terms of environmental concerns and the long existence of natural ecology.

**Keywords:** Gandhian thoughts; Environmental challenges; Sustainable development; Natural ecology.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Change is one prominent law of nature as the planet Earth is the home of all creatures present in it; but humans have always interfered in this change process and it is still on with a boastful declaration of being sapiens (Harari, 2016). The beginning of the Anthropocene Age in between the Industrial Revolution and the beginning some thousands of years previously in primitive stages of human development is still a matter of debate among scientists. Basic misconceptions in the thought process of scientists regarding development processes in the modern world due to the following two reasons:

(a) “The world has an unlimited supply of resources for human use and

(b) Nature is for human beings and can be used to any limit and anyway” (Gupta, 2015). This kind of orientation for development-headed mankind towards the proclamation announced by Albert Schweitzer in his words “Man has lost the capacity to foresee and to forestall. He will end by destroying the earth” but seers smell the threats like Mahatma Gandhi expressed himself this concern with his famous and popular statement that is “Earth provides enough to satisfy every man’s need but not every man’s greed”. The new orientation of scientists in the modern era towards the consideration of environmental concerns for its conservation due to the emergence of environmental challenges and related issues turns them into naturalists (a superior form of knowledge seekers) by reclamation. In recent years more concerns are paid to water monitoring (Pande, 2018; Patni, *et al.* 2020; 2021; 2022), water-related emerging

issues (Pande, 2022) and natural water pollution (Punetha, *et al.* 2021), eco-friendly sanitation techniques (Pande, 2017, Pande and Bhatt, 2017) and even study of outdoor natural gamma radiation (Patni *et al.* 2023) related environment-oriented works. The wisdom of Gandhian thoughts towards environmental challenges in the modern era as a solution is reflected in indifferent seminal works like environmental justice movements (Sahoo, 2016), the ecological vision of life, the role of enlightened anarchy (Friedman, 2008). Responding to global climate change (Gupta, 2011), this creates an urgent need to explore the relevance of Gandhian thoughts to environmental challenges in the Modern Era.

## 2. MAJOR GANDHIAN THOUGHTS AND THEIR RELEVANCE TO FIND SOLUTIONS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES IN MODERN ERA

Mahatma Gandhi observed and investigated all conceivable aspects of life, whether directly or indirectly, even though he did not forward any theories of his own. The understanding towards life by putting control in it can be considered as a major Gandhian thought as he described in seven social sins stated by himself in *Young India* (1925) are: “politics without principles, wealth without work, pleasure without conscience, knowledge without character, commerce without morality, science without humanity and worship without sacrifice” (Gandhi, 1925). In particular, “Science without humanity” highlights the relationship between scientific advancement and how nature was being more actively defied throughout Gandhi’s lifetime; therefore, it can be

assumed that “Science without humanity” indicates the pragmatic approach in Mahatma Gandhi’s philosophy as the modern science is majorly inclined towards the sustainable approaches for developments; in simple words, sustainability may be considered as the ongoing capacity for the earth to maintain the life. One of the statements of Mahatma Gandhi confirms his naturalistic approach to substantiate his worldview on sustainable development and that is - “The incessant search for material comfort and their multiplication is such an evil and I am bold to say that the Europeans themselves will have to remodel their outlook, if they are not to perish under the weight of the comforts to which they are becoming slaves”. The modern concept of sustainability and sustainable development resembles with incorporation of some prime thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi *viz*, Non-violence, Sarvodaya and Satyagrah. In his own words, he declared, “there is no such thing as ‘Gandhism’ and I do not want to leave any sect after me. I do not claim to have originated any new principle or doctrine. I have simply tried in my own ways to apply the eternal truths to our daily life and problems...the opinions I have formed and the conclusions I have arrived at are not final. I may change them tomorrow. I have nothing to teach the world. Truth and non-violence are as old as the hills”. This modest declaration originated from the healthy and wisdom-filled tradition of the Indian Philosophy of Tyaga and Truth and stated at different times in different expressions to take the world out from seer materialism. In a recent study related to the message to youths through Mahatma Gandhi’s life, some views of Mahatma Gandhi related to materialism are depicted as according to Mahatma Gandhi material wants to dehumanize the individual. He often said that one has to renounce his cravings and desire contentment from within. It is said to be ‘samthistha’ that can only help one to dissociate from materialism (Ganguly, 2019). Another Gandhian thought related to education, especially basic education (Buniyadi Shiksha) is imbued with the cardinal creed of non-violence and the idea of cooperative living could be the tool to develop the generation adopting the non-violence method of conflict resolution. In modern concepts of education, the inclusion of education of sustainability in the education system to sensitize the knowledge seekers towards nature has many-fold similarities with Gandhian thought of education – ‘Nai Taleem’ to have a connection with nature in terms of a caring attitude towards nature.

### 3. MAHATMA GANDHI ON ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

This very realization in practice has been reported by Satya Narayana Sahu in his address very interestingly.

One of the founders of The Green Party - Ms. Petra Kelly, admirably summed up the impact of

Mahatma Gandhi in forming the party when she wrote the following:

“In a particular area of our work, we have been greatly inspired by Mahatma Gandhi. That is in our belief that a lifestyle and method of production which relies on the endless supply of raw materials and which uses those raw materials lavishly, also provide motive force for the violent appropriation of raw materials from other countries. In contrast, responsible use of raw materials as part of an ecologically oriented lifestyle and economy reduces the risk that policies of violence will pursue”. Once this specific kind of realization turns into generalization by any means like inspiration, motivation, adaptation or education extracted from Gandhian thoughts most of the mess of this world thaws rapidly to develop this planet Earth into a better place without looking with greedy eyes to other planets to fulfil the desire of the residents of the planet Earth. In the present scenario, the utility of education on sustainability can be the tool to culture the generations for better development as it is somewhere related to the frame of mind with the gist: “The contribution of certain influential eco-centric accounts to the idea of sustainability, is critically evaluated and a sense of sustainability is developed which is neither anthropocentric nor eco-centric” (Bonnett, 2002). To achieve this kind of balanced development in a historical analytical work favored to Gandhian development model for its suitability in 21<sup>st</sup> century (Namita, 2014). A study again advocates that Mahatma Gandhi’s ideas on the environment are intimately linked with all his ideas relating to the polity, economy, health and development (Moolakkattu, 2010). Many environmental movements in India after the Independence protested against the exploitation of natural resources or the commissioning of big dams like Chipko movement and Narmada Bachao movement; they were based on Satyagrah, one of Mahatma Gandhi’s tools. One more important aspect of Gandhian thoughts is Sarvodaya; one study exhibits its connection with environment as - the Sarvodaya notion is a component of environmental ethics and is comparable to the idea of sustainable development. According to Gandhi’s vision of Sarvodaya, man may create a wholesome environment and development to ensure his peaceful co-existence with nature and all living things (Tiwari, 2019). Thus, most of the Gandhian thoughts are suitably working to find the solutions of environmental challenges in the modern era and find acceptance of its relevance.

### 4. CONCLUSION

Gandhian thoughts are deep-rooted in the rich Indian tradition of world welfare.

The environmental movements worldwide can be linked with better concerns for human sustenance and development; most of them are inspired by Gandhi or Gandhian thought. The modern lifestyle is inclined in a

direction of high consumerism and the generation of waste but this can be better understood through Mahatma Gandhi's emphasis on the importance of natural resources and the need for its conservation as a way forward to find positive solutions. The application of Gandhian thoughts to the modern generation for acceptance of development models suitable for planet Earth in terms of environmental concerns and the long existence of natural ecology is of paramount importance. Since 1970, when environmental concerns were raised, the understanding towards the symbiosis of life with nature in terms of stewardship has emerged as a solution in the form of sustainable development which is very near to the naturalistic approach of Gandhian thoughts in the modern era.

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## CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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