

GANDHI'S THOUGHTS ON SUSTAINABLE LIVING CLOSE TO ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

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Abstract:

The world famous personality popularly known as Mahatma Gandhi was a great revolutionist and a strong supporter of sustainable development. The living style of Mahatma Gandhi was a role model of simple living personality which was adoptive to the minimum requirement. The Niyamas-yama is ethical commands related to the human behavior and are very much important for the environmental conservation and protection. Mahatma Gandhi was of the strong opinion that the villages should be developed and made self-reliance. Mahatma Gandhi realized the importance of reuse and recycling. He realized the potential of night soil to generate biogas and the energy ultimately. The present paper makes an effort to co-relate the modern concepts of environmental protection and proposes their closeness to Gandhi's thoughts.

Key words: Environmental Protection, Ethics, Gandhi's thoughts, Sanitation, sustainable Development.

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Introduction:

The world famous personality popularly known as Gandhi is a name of not only a political leader, but a great philosopher, a great revolutionist and a strong supporter of sustainable development. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi who born on 2nd October, 1869 at Porbandar in the princely State of Gujarat was not just a freedom fighter and a leader of masses but a great thinker of environmental protection. He has been named and universally known as Mahatma not only due to his mass leading activities but due to his great and generous pious personality. His personality was developed with his experiences and deep understanding of every situation experienced by him. His enthusiastic mind, kind and generous soul and spirituality made him Mahatma. Mahatma means a great soul. Every aspect of his life has been deeply studied by many researchers but very little has been focused on his love and care for nature.

Simple living and high thinking:

The most important ingredient of sustainable living in the natural environment is a simple living. The living style of Mahatma Gandhi was a role model of simple living personality which was adoptive to the natural condition with minimum requirement which is almost contrary to the modern human being who always prefers the sophisticated lifestyle. The consumerism has brought sophistication in the life of human being. This consumerism has been resulted from the industrial development caused with scientific development of materialistic use. The increasing consumerism increases the use of goods and resources which ultimately add the different types of wastes in the natural environment. These wastes cause the pollution of air, water and soil. Today we the entire humanity is facing these problems in the forms of air pollution, water pollution, soil pollution, solid waste, increasing levels of noise, scarcity of natural resources, global environmental problems like ozone depletion, green house effect, disturbances in climate, loss of biodiversity.

Mahatma Gandhi was against the excess use of natural resources and greed to harness the nature. He was against the exploitation of nature for the human greed. The lifestyle of Mahatma Gandhi was most suited to the ecological lifestyle. Minimum needs and efficient use of available resources was the main genesis of his simplicity. It was not due to no affordability or non

availability of the required resources but it was due to his conservative attitude and love and compassion for the nature.

Mahatma's life and Ecology:

Mahatma Gandhi was a practicing yoga which means a disciplined self-control on own body and origin of human greed is mind. It is ethical code of conduct and physical control in practice to be practiced by self. Gandhi practiced the ethical codes of conduct with orderly discipline which are referred as yama and niyam in the religious books. These disciplines were pertaining to the natural environment and the ethics of rational and justified use of natural resources.

A. Five components of yama:

The yama is ethical command related to the human behavior with the other living organisms and non living materialistic things like resources. These yamas adopted by Gandhi were ahimsa, satya, asteya, brahmacharya and aparigraha. These are very much important for the environmental conservation and protection. These five yamas control the human behavior with the nature.

1. **Ahimsa:** Ahimsa means non-violence. This non-violence towards the living creatures like all types of birds, trees, insects, animals and other organisms results in safe living of all flora and fauna in the environment. It is same in case of inanimate things and physical assets like earth, rivers, mountains and valleys. Mahatma Gandhi practiced ahimsa.
2. **Satya:** Satya means the truth. Truth is one of the essential ingredients of natural environment. The satya depicts the impact of every activity on to the surrounding which help in deep understanding. The satya is the way of controlling the use of material that has been obtained from illegitimate way. The satya keeps control and preferentially avoids the destruction. It only promotes the legitimate use maintains balance between the need and greed too. Satya results in the peace and harmony not only in the society but

also in the nature due real fact understanding. Ahimsa was an unintegral part of Mahatma Gandhi's life. His practices for satya are of immense nature.

3. **Asteya:** Asteya means destruction or harm or vandalism. Asteya justifies the need and willful destruction. It is the genesis of environmental protection. It obstructs or avoids the illegitimate use. It abuses the unjustified use. It supports only the justified willful destruction to satisfy the natural requirement or need. He always practices asteys in his most of the lifespan. He never used the things which he was badly needed.
4. **Brahmacharya:** Brahmacharya means celibacy. The brahmacharya results in the control of birth rate and ultimately the growing population. It keeps check on the population explosion which we are experiencing today. The increasing population is root cause of today's most of the environmental problems. The growing population puts heavy burden on the natural resources and increases the rate of use of these resources. It results in severe damage to the natural environment and creates many problems like the problems of pollution. To satisfy the increasing needs of growing population, the nature is heavily exploited and destruction is caused. It may be for food, shelter or for other uses for the sophistication of human life. It may be in the form of cutting of trees, destruction of forest or hunting of animals. More are the number of people; more is the destruction of nature and natural resources.
5. **Aparigraha:** Aparigraha means amassing the materials or wealth beyond necessity. Mahatma Gandhi's requirements were kept to the minimum by his own control. Off course, minimum requirements and minimum use results in the conservation of material and minimum loss. It insures justified use and avoids spillages. The practice of aparigraha leads to minimum pollution and promotes conservation practices.

B. Five components of Niyamas:

Niyamas are practiced on priority by Mahatma Gandhi. These five niyamas are self imposed codes of conducts. There are to control the human behavior. These relate to the self discipline and self control. These also relate to the cleanliness of mind, body or health and the surrounding environment. Mahatma Gandhi promoted the niyama of santosh which mean the

happiness, tapa means austerity, swadharma which means introspective practices and ishwar pranidhan which means the prayer of God and meditation practices. All these are supportive to the protection of biosphere. These inculcate the self satisfaction and love and affection towards the flora and fauna. Mahatma Gandhi not only practiced these but always taught them to his followers.

We produce different kinds of waste and make the surrounding dirty. The niyamas control the human codes of conducts by self. There are major five niyamas in addition to the discussed niyamas.

1. **Kama:** Kama refers to the sexual desire. Mahatma kept control on his desire. If we follow the control on this niyams, the population growth can be reduced to some extent. Because unwanted or excess desire of sexuality is one of the major culprits of population explosion and increased population leads to the deterioration of environment. Control on sexual desire has several other social benefits along with the reduced exploitation of nature.
2. **Krodh:** Krodh means anger. Anger is one of the major root cause of war and destruction of nature. The treat of nuclear war is one of the disastrous threat to the environment as experienced by the entire world due to the destruction caused in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan which were attacked by nuclear bombs during the second world war. The control on the anger can reduce such threats to the nature and natural environment.
3. **Lobha:** Lobha means greed. The human being is always greedy. If the greed is controlled and only the need is satisfied with the minimum resource, the exploitation and overexploitation can be prevented. But the greed of development and sophistication in lifestyle has increased the consumerism. This has resulted in destruction of our natural resources like energy resources, forests, mineral resources, animal resources and many more. Mahatma Gandhi controlled his greed through out his life. His greedless living style has become a role model to the entire humanity and is a source of inspiration to the human mankind for the conservation and protection of nature. Mahatma Gandhi used to say that the mother earth has enough to satisfy the need of every human being but not sufficient to satisfy the human greed. The thought is a great landmark to the today's society which is running on the road of development and in the greed of sophistication.

Mahatma believed that the satisfaction is the state of mind beyond the need. The need is limited but the greed is unlimited. The earth can provide enough to fulfill the needs but not the greed of human being.

4. **Moha:** Moha means undue attachment. Moha gives rise to the greed. The moha keeps the mind and soul unsatisfactory. Mahatma Gandhi kept control on the moha. It is the state of living like a sadhu. The undue attachment forces to grab the available resources and promotes overexploitation of natural resources. The greed of development is giving rise to any environmental problems. It is the source and origin of several environmental problems. It is dangerous to the nature and natural balance. Many times human greed is needless and results in the degradation of nature. If we follow Mahatma Gandhi's path and keep control on the undue attachment to the wealth, we can achieve natural balance and keep the earth hospitable to all life forms and safer for the next generation. We can achieve the goal of sustainable development.
5. **Ahankar:** Ahankar means undue self proud. This triggers the race of greed and encourages for collection and raising the wealth. Ultimately, due to comparative dissatisfaction, it promotes destruction and destructs peace. Many of the heroes hunt the wild animals just as a fun and to manage the show of undue self proud. The use of vehicles, use of variety of goods and services are promoted by such self proud. It is needless to say that the undue self proud promotes the natural destruction.

Self-reliance and social welfare:

Mahatma Gandhi was of the strong opinion that the villages should be developed and made self reliance. His thoughts may not have directly pointed the today's problems faced by the urbanization, but definitely pointed the benefits of decentralized growth pattern in the developmental model. If his thoughts would be followed, we would not to face the ugly problems those are experienced by the city dwellers. Gandhi upheld and promoted the self-reliance as Swadeshi. This would be resulted in the development of indigenous capacities and would be based on the native local resources. Such reliance on local resources always promotes

the rational thinking of sustainability to match the demand and availability. It keeps the balance in the long run of time.

The self governance was always stressed by Gandhi. The self governance gives power to take suitable decisions at the local level to the villagers. This can promote the environmental conservation practices to protect the interest of the local people and supports the environmental protection. It helps to protect both renewable and non-renewable resources, forest lands, grasslands, water resources and many more. It also promotes the suitable land use pattern and land use practices. It results in the better and sound management practices due to throw knowledge and gross root situation with sound understanding of every situation. All these result in the safer and pure environment.

War conflicts and Environment:

Mahatma Gandhi was against the use of weapons. He supporter of non-violence and believed on the Satyagraha which means sticking to the truth or strong protestant with peace. Realization of truth resolves the conflicts. If the conflicts do not settle peacefully, the threat of war meanders on the heads of humanity. Warfare is always destructive and dangerous to the society. The non-violence and sticking to the truth can help to resolve conflicts and avoid the chances of war. He always used the weapon of non-violence and sticking to the truth for solving the problems. These are ecofriendly ways of tacking the problems without any harm to the human being and the nature.

Environmental protection and conservation:

The Gandhian principles always fevered the environmental protection in many ways. The ethics of resource use, abuse of unwanted materials and socio-economic and ethical principles were converted into a mass movement by Mahatma Gandhi. He regarded the earth as Universal Mother rather than just a place for living creatures. He used to refer the earth as Dharati Mata which means the Mother earth. If this thought is inculcated in the minds of the people, most of the problems can be resolved or at least minimized. We harness the groundwater, cut the trees, hunt the animals mercilessly and do many more activities without considering their attachment

with our like. As these are also part and parcel of mother earth, they are closely attached with the existence and wellbeing of human being. When we realize the earth as the mother, definitely we will avoid over exploitation. We will try to protect it and its products in the forms of living creatures and inanimate things. We will worship the natural things by elevating to the position of God. The polluting attitude will get reduced. The degradation of natural automatically stops. This thought is very deep and far reaching the hearts of human being. It creates love and care with affection towards the nature.

Mahatma Gandhi was a strict vegetarian. He always supported the vegetarianism. The vegetarianism is the main base of conservation of wildlife and biodiversity. The concept of vegetarianism is same all over the world irrespective of any caste, society, region, nation of the religious and traditions. It is a scientific concept and has protective stand for the nature and organisms. Mahatma Gandhi's faith on vegetarianism was intentional and with the kind consideration with the recognition of existence of other organisms as separate and independent life forms. His argument for the vegetarianism and ultimately for the conservation of biodiversity was very simple. He used to say, "The human being has no power to create life, he has, therefore no right to destroy life". Mahatma Gandhi was of the opinion that there can not be any ecological movement designed to prevent the violence against nature unless the principle of non-violence becomes a centre to the ethos of human culture.

Mahatma Gandhi's feeling for earth was with the attachment of soul, mind and heart. He used to think the reality that the earth harbors her blood for human being. He considered the earth as unique mother who harbors the all living creatures. His concept of Vasudhaiva Kutumbkam (The entire universe as one family) was on the thought that the all life forms on the earth are part and parcel of a family and we all are members of this family of living organisms. No need to say that this thought leaves no room for destruction of nature, hunting of wildlife, felling of trees, over exploitation of natural resources, spoilage of ecosystems and so on. This entire approach is protective and nature conservative.

Environmental laws and Gandhian thoughts:

Mahatma Gandhi believed on the divinity in all life forms. The fundamental duty of every citizen has been incorporated in to the Indian constitution which is cumulative reflection of thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi. Though India is first country to impose a constitutional obligation on the State and citizens' as directive principle of state policy and fundamental duty to protect and improve the environment, the thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi have been reflected in both these constitutional articles. Article 48-A of the Indian constitution provides, "The State shall endeavor to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard the forests and wildlife of the country". Article 51-A (g) provides, "It shall be the duty of every citizen of India, to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers and wildlife and to have compassion for the living creatures." If the thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi are followed, there is no need to enact deterrent legal provisions for wild life protection, protection of biodiversity, and other aspects of environmental protection.

Women empowerment, environment and Gandhi:

The world is now focusing its attention on the women empowerment and gender equality. Even yet this thought is being not practiced, only discussion has begun. Mahatma Gandhi considered the equality in men and women during his days. The women are more concerned with the traditional conservation practices. They are never hunters of wildlife. They are not involved in the killing practices like the men. Mahatma Gandhi was of the opinion that women can care and share more than the men. The role of women in the protection of environment is more constructive than men. Mahatma Gandhi eulogized the women for "Worshipped women as an embodiment of the spirit of service and sacrifice". He involved women in the in the independence movement as well as in the process of national reconstruction though the handloom program.

Heath, sanitation and Gandhi:

Mahatma Gandhi was not concern about only the non-violent freedom movement but also he was a revolutionary social reformer. He was against social divides in the name of not only caste,

creed and spirit but also on work. The conditions of sanitation practices were very poor. The bad practices of scavengers for scavenging the night soil were practiced. Mahatma Gandhi was keen in both the sanitation and liberation of scavengers. He considered these people as the people of God. He fought for the removal of this inhuman practice and drudgery. He led movement against the orthodox people for their rights. Mahatma Gandhi realized the importance of reuse and recycling of night soil as a resource. He promoted the reuse of night soil as a rich source of manure for agriculture. He used to refer it as the golden manure because of its nutrient rich status and growth promoting contents for the agricultural crops. He realized the potential of night soil to generate biogas and the energy ultimately. He promoted the diversion and reuse of night soil for the anaerobic digestion to produce biogas as fuel for domestic cooking. The night soils by its nature a potential pollutant is having high health hazard otherwise. Night soil in open can provide the breeding ground for the vectors of disease causing organisms and spread of infectious diseases resulting in to the spread of epidemics. The management of night soil was treated on priority by Mahatma Gandhi.

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