
Mahatma Gandhi: A Practical Activist of Environmental Sustainability in Early 20th Century India

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Abstract

Mahātmā Gandhi is often known as a political activist, a social reformer, a religious scholar, a creative author, and a prominent thinker of the Subcontinent in 20th century. In the observation of many scholars Gandhi was an apostle of applied human ecology. He was considered as the pioneer of the emergence of the modern environmental movements in India. The concept of environmental degradation, conservation, protection, sustainability, and survival, on which modern environmentalists are embarking upon, were inherent in the ideology of Gandhi. He was a man far ahead of his time and all the modern ecologists. In this regard, this paper describes the ideology and ethical approaches of Gandhi for sustainability of natural resources. Through discussing Gandhi's practice of non-violence and supreme humanism, this article inspires human beings to minimize their destructive scheme in the name of development. The descriptive and analytical method is applied to identify the aims, approaches, ecological contributions, and conservational practices of Gandhi. The conclusion reveals the fact that Gandhi was indeed the role model in ecological paradigm and his practices of ahimsa and philosophy of self-realization proved the possibility of satisfactory coexistence of other living beings with humans. Thus, his philosophy of bio-spherical egalitarianism is relevant to eradicate the environmental crises of 21st century.

Keywords: Environmental sustainability, yamas, niyamas, non-violence, self-realization, bio-spherical egalitarianism, sustainable development, trustee, natural cure, Hinduism.

Introduction

Mahātmā Gandhi is a well-known political activist of 20th century India. In the observation of many scholars like Peter Dauvergne,¹ T.N. Khoshoo,² Bhikhu Parekh,³ John S Moolakkattu, Martin Haigh,⁴ Arne Naess,⁵ and many others, Gandhi is also a great environmentalist and eco-theologian of contemporary Hinduism. He was considered as the pioneer of the emergence of the modern environmental movements. His ideology was based on the practical conservation of our natural world. He was a strong advocate of environmental conservation, protection, sustainability, and preservation. His ashrams were a practical example of environmental sustainability and were against the destruction of natural resources for luxurious living. He was a man far ahead of his time and all the modern ecologists. The philosophy and simple lifestyle of Mahātmā Gandhi has left an over lasting impact not only in India but across the entire world.

As a visionary voice of 20th century, his practice of non-violence and supreme humanism is spreading at global level during twentieth and twenty-first century. He has been a great inspiration for many in the field of political, socio-economic, and environment. Therefore, I will discuss the ecological contributions of Mahātmā Gandhi in detail to define how he is considered as the pioneer of Hindu Environmentalism. Basically, this environmentalism was inherent in the lifestyle of Gandhi and his philosophical ideas are more relevant to save biodiversity of earth.

In this scenario of environmental degradation like water, air, and soil pollution, biodiversity loss, climate change, deforestation, and desertification,⁶ Gandhi's simple living style and his philosophy of need base not luxury base is relevant to control human greed. This concern was part of his daily routine which became his ethics. He believed that it is not enough to develop movements for the protection of biodiversity and save the earth from degradation; the principle of non-violence had to become fundamental to the ethos of human civilizations.

Literature Review

Mahātmā Gandhi as revolutionary figure of contemporary India also talked about the conservation of earthly resources. He has inspired many contemporary environmentalists on a global level through his critique of modern technology, economics and his ascetic or simple way of life. "*An Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth*"⁷ by Mahadev H. Desai is book of Gandhi's biography. It was written by Gandhi in Gujarati language. Later, it is translated in English by Desai. This book is an example of Gandhi's simple living and his harmonious approach to non-human world. It describes the eco-friendly co-existence of all living beings. Indeed he is depicted as an example of living environmental ethics. His other writings

such as “*Hind Swaraj*”⁸ “*The Essence of Hinduism*”⁹ “*Ashram Observance in action*”¹⁰ are an example in advocating the new ecofriendly coexistence of all living species including human beings.

“*Self-Realization: An Ecological Approach to Being in the World*”¹¹ by Arne Naess is written on the basic philosophy of Gandhi’s self-realization. Naess borrowed Gandhi’s vision to develop his ecological approach. By following it Naess presented common and basic right of living for all living beings including human beings. Khoshoo’s “*Mahatma Gandhi and the Environment: Analysing Gandhian Environmental Thought*”¹² describes the environmental practices of Gandhi in contemporary discourse. The basic concepts of Gandhi about the protection of earth and its biodiversity have been described. These concepts are an example of advocating the new ecofriendly coexistence of all living species on earth. Parekh’s “*Gandhi: A Very Short Introduction*”¹³ outlines Gandhi’s major philosophical insights and his Cosmo centric view of nature. He discussed Gandhi’s philosophy of man in detail and his hostility to modern civilization. His ideology of non-violence is also discussed by Parekh as the only relevant ethical approach to save nature from exploitation in modern society.

“*Deep Ecology Education: Learning from Its Vaisnava*”¹⁴ by Martin Haigh defined elaborately how Naess developed the approach of deep ecology from Vaishnava roots. By inspiring Gandhi’s philosophy of self-realization and non-violence, Naess was able to cultivate the idea of deep ecology.

Based on these fundamental sources on environmental thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi, this new research beautifully describes, How Mahatma Gandhi is considered as environmentalist in contemporary discourse? How his philosophy of self-realization and practice of ahimsa is relevant to reduce environmental degradation? Thus, this paper analyses Gandhi’s ecological worldview and his ethical practices to sustain human relationship with other diversity of our living planet earth.

Research Methodology

The researcher has used descriptive and analytical methodology in this paper. The descriptive method is used to describe the ideology of Gandhi while the analytical method is used to highlight certain ethical approaches of Gandhi to sustain man-nature relationship. By thoroughly reading his biography and other written sources, author has analyzed how Gandhi’s environmental thoughts, practices and advocating were related with supreme humanism or what Naess called it ‘bio-spherical egalitarianism’ for peaceful co-existence of all species on earth.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi

Gandhi has written about his complete life events in his famous book, “*An Autobiography: The Story of my Experience with Truth.*”¹⁵ He was born at

Porbandar on 2nd October 1869. Later his father moved to Rajkot. Where he grown up in an extensive religious environment. His parents were belonging to Vaishnava tradition, but Jainism was strong there. Therefore, pervading religious beliefs and observance left everlasting impact on Gandhi's thought. He completed his primary and high school education at Rajkot with an average result. When he was thirteen-year-old, he was pressurized by his family to marry Kasturba. Later, his eldest brother sent him to England for legal studies. A vegetarian by tradition, he soon became the secretary of '*Vegetarian Society*' at England. In 1891, he was called to Bar and left for India two days later. His legal career was disappointing in India and in 1893, Gandhi went to South Africa and spent twenty-one years there. During that time, his ways of thought and life underwent major changes. He started to read the famous book of Tolstoy "*The Kingdom of God Is Within You*" the book of Henry Thoreau "*On the Duty of Civil Disobedience*" and Ruskin's "*Unto This Last*."¹⁶ Tolstoy's work, overwhelmed him and in which he claimed to have discovered the doctrine of love and by inspiring Ruskin, he decided to live a simple community life at Phoenix Farm in Natal. Then he founded Tolstoy Farm just outside Johannesburg.

Gandhi founded the '*Natal Indian Congress*' in 1894. In 1899, during the Boer War he helped the government by creating '*Ambulance Corps*' by combining Indians and local laborers. In 1903, he founded a newspaper called '*Indian Opinion*' to spread ideas and awareness among local Indians about their rights. While he was working hard for civil rights in South Africa, his efforts were published in Indian newspapers. In 1915, he decided to go back to India where he was already known as a hero.¹⁷

When Gandhi came back, Indian was ruled by British. He started his effort to forced British to leave India. He built an *ashram* in Ahmedabad. He started campaigns to get India free from British rule and named them '*Champaran and Kheda Satyagraha*.' This effort was for merciful farmers who were not able to pay high taxes to British rulers on time. Villagers and farmers were facing unbelievably bad conditions; they did not get enough food and could not afford other livelihoods. Therefore, Gandhi decided to fight against it. At the end, his campaign got a fair result. This time, Indians started to call him as 'Mahātmā' and his fame spread all over India.

In 1931, Gandhi was agreed to represent the '*Congress Party*' at the '*Round Table Conference*' in London. Later, he began series of fasting as a protest for Indians 'untouchables' whom he renamed '*Harijans*.' In 1934, he announced his resignation from '*Congress Party*' and his retirement from politics. But he again took control of '*Indian National Congress*' to demand India free from British.¹⁸ In 1947, when the '*Labor Party*' took the charge, they divided subcontinent into two: India and Pakistan. In January 1948,

Gandhi was killed by a Hindu extremist Nathuram Godse and next day his body was cremated on the bank of the Jumna River.¹⁹

Ideology of Gandhi for Sustainable development

The following citation describes the ideology of Gandhi as:

*“Your beliefs become your thoughts. Your thoughts become your words. Your words become your actions. Your actions become your habits. Your habits become your values. Your values become your destiny”.*²⁰

There are six pillars of Mahātmā’s ideology. He always believed, preached, and worked on these six principles. Martin Haigh defined these principles as Satya, Ahimsa, Satyagraha, Sarvodaya, Swaraj and Swadeshi. The first is truth or Satya as synonymous with concept of God and the goal of Vaishnava self-realization. The second is non-harming approach for environmental, social, and political problems known as ‘ahimsa.’ Vaishnava devotees were usually strict vegetarians, and they respect all other non-human creatures. Naess describes as:

*“Ahimsa included the search for non-destructive solutions to social problems and contained a deep respect for the rights of non-human creatures”.*²¹

The third is Satyagrah, literally grasping the truth. Gandhi himself explained it that “it is an absolutely non-violent weapon.”²² Naess describes in following words: “*Third was satyagraha, literally grasping the Truth, which involves using the ethical high ground, Truth-force, in the management of human affairs, especially when this involves non-violent resistance*”.²³

The fourth foundation is Swaraj. In Chitkara view, Swaraj relates with self-rule or self-governance.²⁴ It was introduced in the time of colonial period to empower people to rule themselves and establish self-capacities for self-realization. The fifth is Swadeshi means ‘self-sufficiency’ or “*some form of productive manual labor.*” The idea of ‘Swadeshi’ is not merely an economic or political doctrine rather it covers all aspects of the human life.²⁵ Gandhi pronounced the concept of ‘Swadeshi’ in the context of Indian’s struggle for freedom and he used it to achieve India’s swaraj.

The sixth foundation is ‘Sarvodaya’ means ‘*universal uplift*’ or the ‘*progress of all.*’ Haigh described that Gandhi’s Sarvodaya emphasizes sustainable local production and lauds simple living.²⁶

Gandhi was forward looking, and his visionary ideology can alleviate the greatest challenges of the future generation. His aim of development was inspired through the principle of ‘Sarvodaya,’ and his method was ‘Satyagraha’ based on ‘truth and non-violence.’ His philosophy is a living thought for solving the economic, social, political, and environmental crisis of modern era. While his idea of ‘Swaraj’ establishes a practical sustainable development that can be applied without compromising the quality of life

including both human and non-human. Thus, Gandhi can be said to be an advocator of peace and sustainability.

Gandhi's Ethical Approaches to Save Our Home Planet Earth

As for our living planet earth and its protection are concerned, Gandhi's revolutionary thoughts and his practice of yogic centered way of life, spiritual understanding of self-realization, moral value of non-violence, and sustainable development of society, represent a holistic approach to save our earthly resources for future generation.

Yogic centric Approach

Gandhi writes in 'Young India' that sages taught us to learn one thing:

"It is not possible to scan the universe, as it is to scan the self. Know the self and you know the universe. But even knowledge of the self within presupposes ceaseless striving, not only ceaseless but pure, and pure striving presupposes a pure heart, which in its turn depends on the practice of Yamas and Niyamas".²⁷

The 'Autobiography' of Gandhi shows that he was indeed a practicing ecological yogi. Although he himself did not say anything about his practice of yogas. In simple words, Yoga means discipline and control over body and mind through two types of practices. One is Hat yoga, and the other is Raj yoga. There are eight formal disciplines in the practice of Raja yoga, and the first two are 'Yamas and Niyamas.'²⁸ These two are pertained to human-earth relationship and ethics of resource use. These were practiced and preached by Mahātmā Gandhi.

The 'Yamas' are ethical commandments or principles that regulate the behavior of humans toward other human beings, non-human creatures, and non-living materials. The five Yamas, according to Yogashastra are, the first is non-violence that approaches toward sentient and non-sentient beings. The other is Truth, the source of everything. He pervades all there is on the earth, nothing belongs to humans as their property, and they can only use them as a trustee. Since God is the master of everything which human beings possess. The third is non-stealing, avoiding destruction or damage. The fourth is celibacy, to live in spiritual manner and avoid sexual relations to control growing population otherwise demand on resources will increase. The last is non-possession means not desiring or amassing materials and wealth beyond requirement. The use of resources is based on Gandhi's philosophy of 'need' base not for 'luxury' base.

The 'Niyamas' are self-based codes of conduct. The first is related to the cleanliness of one's body, mind, and the surroundings. Basically, the human body needs cleanliness through taking bath in water, mind also needs some sort of cleanliness from lust, anger, or greed. Therefore, human beings

generate considerable waste and garbage as such pollutes the environment, so they must have to care about their surroundings. The other 'nyamas' contentment, forbearance, study of scriptures and the last is resignation to the will of God. These all 'yamas and nyamas' provide individuals a harmonious or balanced ethical code to deal with earth and its components, of which humans are an integral part. Gandhi practiced all these codes of conduct in his entire life without claiming to be a yogi. T.N. Khoshoo writes that "*the yamas are ethical principles or commandments relating to human behavior in relation to other humans and living creatures, and non-living materials*".²⁹

There was a shift of transforming the practice of 'Yamas' and 'Niyamas' from Brahmins to Shudras. Gandhi refuted the concept of 'adhikara' means that if a person is Brahmana, then only, he has the right to read and expound Shastras to others. But Gandhi refuted this concept by calling that Yamas and Niyamas are the religious rules that can be studied and practiced by anyone.³⁰

Self-Realization

Mahatma Gandhi says:

*"Hinduism believes in the oneness not of merely all human life but in the oneness of all that lives. Its worship of the cow is, in my opinion, its unique contribution to the evolution of humanitarianism. It is a practical application of the belief in the oneness and, therefore, sacredness, of all life".*³¹

In the view of Martin Haigh, the philosophy of oneness of existence is the basic theme of Vedantic philosophy. Mahatma Gandhi as the religious scholar of contemporary Hinduism has developed his approach of self-realization on the basis of advaita Vedanta. While using the term self-realization, Gandhi means to spread the vast or deep understanding of 'Self' or the universal soul that is called "Atman" in Hinduism. He did not mean to speak about the "Jiva" or "self" in egocentric interest. He was speaking about the "universal Self" to be realized that includes everything in himself. Everything like human beings, animals, plants, or all that exists relates to this wider "Self" and will return to it. By introducing the idea of self-realization, Gandhi reduces the dominance of narrow self of human beings over non-human world.³² Gandhi describes his philosophy of Self-realization as:

*"I believe in advaita (non-duality), I believe in the essential unity of man and, for that matter, of all that lives. Therefore, I believe that if one man gains spirituality, the whole world gains with him and, if one man fails, the whole world fails to that extent".*³³

Arne Naess, a Norwegian philosopher of deep ecology writes that Mahatma Gandhi was a practical model of self-realization. He was a very strong advocate of self-realization of a non-human world than human beings. He includes every species in the wider “self” and favors their right of living. Gandhi’s ashrams like phoenix, Satyagraha, and Tolstoy were practical examples of his ideology of self-realization. Where he proves the possibility of peaceful co-existence of human beings and other living beings. After realizing their status under supreme self, Gandhi adopted ahimsa or non-violent approach toward them for their basic right of living and flourishing. His farms were living example of these two approaches like self-realization and non-violence or what Naess called their internal relation as bio-spherical egalitarianism.³⁴

In this regard, the ashram living people were very humble toward other creatures. They were working for the common good. They understand the importance of joint living, eating together, working for the welfare of society, and religiously connected and performing fast or other religious observance together. They reduced the dominance of narrow self and developed the ability of cooperation and favored the fulfilment of common needs. Instead of independent needs, they recognized the mutual welfare what Naess named their attitudes as “ego-trip” of basic norms of developed society. Naess says about developing the social self in following words:

*“To identify self-realization with ego-trip manifests a vast underestimation of the human self”.*³⁵

In Naess view, human beings have already developed their social self under the umbrella of self-realization, that’s why they favor others. Now it is the time to introduce them with the greater self that includes animals, plants, soil, and other living and non-living objects of the world. They will feel the pleasure and joy in such a type of self-realization. He says:

*“You are much greater, deeper, generous, and capable of more dignity and joy than you think! A wealth of non-competitive joys is open to you”.*³⁶

Thus, Naess encouraged humanity to think about themselves in deeper understanding through ego-trips. Naess also used the terminology of altruism as an opposite to egoism which means that to love others as a duty. He says: *“we ought to love others as strongly as we love ourselves.”*³⁷ Instead of duty human beings should widen themselves and understand others as a part of supreme self then they will love others unconditionally. Naess suggested human beings to think in deep manner to avoid future environmental catastrophes. Thus, unit all other creatures under the umbrella of ecosystem.³⁸

Therefore, based on Gandhi’s approach of self-realization and Naess philosophy of deep ecology, it is suggested that modern secular man should

understand natural resources as the sacred creation of God and will return to Him so have value in themselves. Thus, treated with respect.

Non-Violence

In the view of Khoshoo and Moolakkattu, Gandhi believed that only an environmental movement designed to prevent violence against natural resources was not adequate. There must be a renewal of the basic principle of non-violence and its practical dimension had to become fundamental to the ethics of human civilization.³⁹

Naess developed his concept of deep ecology based on Gandhi's philosophy of common right of living for all creatures. He also related it to his philosophy of bio-centric egalitarianism which holds that equality of all life forms. Haigh describes that the non-violence philosophy of Gandhi is the main factor of the development of Naess's concept of deep ecology. Gandhi's concept of ahimsa is reflected in the theory of deep ecology that human beings should live on earth without harming the other living beings of earth. They should live with harmonious attitude and do as little harm as possible.⁴⁰

On the surface, non-violence and deep ecology are easily related. Deep ecology defines equality of all life forms, and their basic right of living and flourishing while 'ahimsa' provides a non-violent approach to all living beings. Ahimsa implies that everything in our universe should be protected. As Bhikkhu Parekh states that: "*ahimsa means non-violence or absence of a desire to harm a living being.*"⁴¹

Gandhi explained his philosophy of 'ahimsa' in certain places and instructed humanity to adopt a non-violent approach in their materialistic existence. He believed that 'Gita' teaches us the lesson of ahimsa and prevents us from adopting himsa. He also describes in 'Harijan' that 'ahimsa' is from the central glory of Hinduism and it is the way of life not only duty of sannyasis.⁴² There are famous quotations of Gandhi which are signifying his philosophy of 'ahimsa.' These are followings:

"My religion is based on truth and nonviolence. Truth is my God.

Nonviolence is the means of realizing Him."⁴³

"Ahimsa means avoiding injury to anything on earth, in thought, word and deed. Non-violence is the supreme law."⁴⁴

"Non-violence is first article of my faith."⁴⁵

"When the practice of ahimsa becomes universal, God will reign on earth as He does in Heaven."⁴⁶

Furthermore, he used to believe that truth and ahimsa are so intertwined that it is practically impossible to separate them. He drew a link between truth and non-violence. This non-violence was interlinked with the doctrine of Truth. The essence of Hinduism is contained in its assertion of one God as

Truth and acceptance of non-violence as the law of humanity. It shows that ahimsa is the means, to reach truth or ahimsa is the way and truth is the goal. We can say that ahimsa is the law or duty that is governed by truth. These notions of explanation define that the earth and human life was ruled by certain laws of truth that constitute one of the greatest moral values.

In the light of previous quotations, Gandhi regarded the concept of 'Satya' as a value. Human beings and other living beings are governed by rules and laws. The dignity of human beings is in the acceptance of these laws and living a life in rhythm with the law. This will be called a moral life or a life that was spent contributing to the betterment of humanity. This necessitated the use of knowledge, devotion, self-discipline, harmony, and empathy. Thus, Gandhi's approach of non-violence "*had to become central to the ethos of human culture.*"⁴⁷

Sustainable Development

In the early 20th century, Gandhi underlined the critical necessity of sustainable development. He interrogated the modern civilization that established upon increase of wants and desire. He outlined the threat to future generations in his book '*The Hind Swaraj*' that was caused by persistent quest for more material goods. He condemned this modern urban industrial civilization that it contained the seeds of destruction, and he favored the sustainable development of society. He described it in the term of performing duties and inclination toward morality and exercise of restraint. The aim is to fulfil the fundamental needs of humanity and put some limitations on greed and passion.⁴⁸ Gandhi's concept of sustainable development is based on his six principle of ideology.

Critique on Western Civilization

Gandhi strongly rejected the western civilization and its concept of educational and industrial development. He believed that Western civilization spent all its energy on industrialization and destruction of the other races. Therefore, it is not a symbol of 'progress' for him, so he helped India to find an alternative way of progress which suits them and fulfil its needs. Chitkara writes that Gandhi's 'village development' evolved with two basic components i.e., self-sufficient village and decentralization of political and economic powers. He formed a main place to development of 'Khadi' and cottage industries in India. He described that Gandhi's village industrial approach was followed in India till the "New Small Enterprise policy of 1991."⁴⁹

Rural Development

Gandhi was fond of rural development and his approach for it was holistic and people centered. It was rooted in his vision of truth, non-violence and the communal good. The influence behind his idea of rural development was

by Ruskin, Tolstoy, and the teachings of Gita. He emphasized more spiritual and moral value than economic needs. For economic needs he emphasized agricultural production and allied activities including village and cottage industries. The basic principle of 'Swaraj' village was trusteeship, swadeshi, equality, bread labor, employment, and Nai Talim.

According to his '*Autobiography*' such type of villages should not be found in cities. His Phoenix Farm, Tolstoy Farm and Satyagraha Ashram are the best examples of his rural developments. His motto for the people of ashram was to live a moral and spiritual life while following simple living style, high thinking, and reduction of materialistic wants. He believed on the dignity of labor and the use of local products to achieve actual meaning of swadeshi.⁵⁰ The Ashram of Gandhi was living example of such bio-spherical egalitarianism, people belonging to different caste and creed were living there and enjoying working together. While other living beings including animals and insects were getting absolute freedom of living. The people living in Ashram habitually look at their shoes for insects before wearing their shoes. Even in darkness during the night they were very conscious of other fellow beings and easily avoided trampling on them. Therefore, the people living in that Ashram were working for the common good. They were living, eating, working, praying, and fasting together. They were not in favored of independent needs, isolatable goods, and services rather they developed the ability to cooperate and work with people. They focused on mutual welfare of a society.⁵¹

Hence, Gandhi's concept of sustainable development is based on bio-mass production, processing, and consumption. Thus, it shows that our current situation needs bio-industrial development, instead of pure industrial development.

Nai Talim

In 19th century, the colonial education system was established in India by British government. Gandhi strongly criticized it. In his view, their education system was a negation of uppermost values called truth and non-violence. His basic education planned to develop self-sufficiency. He tried to train children for productive work. This program of sustainable development was an alternative view of industrialization. Although he was opposite to western type of industrialization. But Sarvodaya aimed to help communities live sustainably within their local territory and work for the welfare of society. Through Sarvodaya, Gandhi planned for craft center education with mother tongue as the medium. 'Nai Talim' ultimately aims at the development of both mind and body. It also wants to develop the capacity of earning one's livelihood. This educational system provides knowledge of the production processes involved in craft, such as spinning, bookbinding, weaving, basket-

making, metalwork, leatherwork, and pottery. The students working on these products were belong to 'untouchables'. This study also included fundamental universal ethics. This educational system tried to make self-sufficiency as well as possible.⁵²

According to Y.K. Singh, Gandhi's educational philosophy was based upon ancient Indian idealism. His attention was mainly directed towards the spiritual growth of individuals. Gandhi believed that education should provide the individual basic knowledge of self-realization.⁵³

Natural Cure

The 'Autobiography' of Gandhi shows that he was influenced by Adolph Just 's book 'Return to Nature.' This book strengthened the conviction of Gandhi that if a man wants to live a healthy wholesome life, he must share his life with not only human beings but with all other living beings including, animals, birds, plants, and the whole ecosystem. Man must return to natural cure for the treatment of his diseases.⁵⁴ Gandhi brought forth a close link between man and nature; he appealed human beings for respecting the five elements of nature (earth, ether, air, water, and sunlight), which are very necessary for the healthy existence of human life.⁵⁵

The scientific experiments show that these five elements are used in the treatment of diseases of the human body and for their health purposes. According to him, village life and simple living are the best ways to cure the human body through bringing it near to nature. He believed that "*personal hygiene and healthy living are of primary importance.*" His 'Autobiography' is full of such incidents of natural cure and his dislike for medicines. Instead of taking medicines, Gandhi favored dietetic changes and suggested natural remedies to cure any disease. "*I knew that the cure lay not in taking medicines internally, but dietetic changes assisted by external remedies.*"⁵⁶ Furthermore, he narrated many experiments in which Gandhi cured diseases through "*earth and water treatment*" and by following the natural diet plans, he was entirely succeeded in them.

Trusteeship

The term 'trusteeship' is based on the idea that whatever belongs to a person is the right to an honorable livelihood, the rest of his property belongs to the welfare of the community. The concept of trusteeship has dynamic nature, and it also has strong moral imperatives toward restructuring the relationship of earth and man in current situation.

In his 'Autobiography' Gandhi described that he founded the concept of 'trustee' from Gita. By trusteeship, he means that one holds everything as a trust and has control over a great possession. They must believe that God is the source of everything and pervades all there in the earth. Therefore, nothing belongs to human beings as their property, and they can only use

them as trustees. Since God is the master of everything which human beings possess.⁵⁷ He explains the concept of trustee in following words:

“If all the princes would call themselves servants of God, they would be correctly describing themselves, but they cannot be servants of God unless they are servants of the people. And if zamindars and moneyed men and all who have possessions would treat themselves as trustees and perform the act of renunciation that I have described, this world would indeed be a blessed world to live in.”⁵⁸

In above citation, Gandhi described the meaning of the term ‘trustee’ as the servant of God. If we elaborate this concept of ‘trustee’ it can be implied on all human beings that they all are servant of God in this materialistic world. They all can utilize the resources of earth in sustainable way.

Furthermore, Gandhi rejected the idea of private possession and replaced it with communal trusteeship under the spiritual orientation of sarvodaya. Because Gandhi believed that personal ownership establishes attachment to the material world and enhance personal greed for more wants which hinder self-realization. Hence, sarvodaya aimed to help communities live sustainably within their local territory and work for the welfare of a society.

Analyzing Gandhi’s Practical and theoretical Dimension for Solution of Current Environmental Crises

In an era of environmental disequilibrium, where secular ethics prevail on a global level. Renaissance philosophy of ‘humanism’ already has encouraged modern secular man to get dominance over natural world and use it for his materialist needs and desires of luxuries living. Apart from secular or scientific worldview, Industrial revolution of United States and its spread to other countries through colonization, our life sustaining resources are depleted.

In the above cited context, the six pillars of Gandhi’s ideology describe a balanced approach to environmental consumption. He was forward looking, and his visionary ideology can alleviate the greatest challenges of the future generation. His aim of development was inspired through the principle of ‘Sarvodaya,’ and his method was ‘Satyagraha’ based on ‘truth and non-violence.’ His philosophy is a living thought for solving the economic, social, political, and environmental crisis of modern era. While his idea of ‘Swaraj’ establishes a practical sustainable development that can be applied without compromising the quality of life including both human and non-human. Thus, Gandhi can be said to be an advocator of peace and sustainability.

His philosophy of oneness of existence abolishes the dualistic worldview, that is formed by Rene Descartes through his publication “*Meditations on First Philosophy*” in seventeenth century. He proclaimed a dualistic

worldview by splitting the mind from body and refuted the traditional order. His words depict his dualistic philosophy "*cogito ergo sum*" (I think, therefore I am). It provided a secular principle and replaced the traditional religion. In previous times, religion was the most important part of the overall pattern of life in societies. His thoughts challenged the traditional worldview through proclaiming that the man is the "*master and possessor of nature.*"⁵⁹ Therefore, Gandhi approach of self-realization challenged his philosophy and views every creature from deep understanding of "Self" from which everything is connected. Instead of dualistic worldview, he presents oneness of existence to bring the worth and value of all living and non-living creatures.

On the other hand, his non-harming approach for environmental, social, and political problems known as 'ahimsa' is also relevant to eradicate current environmental crises. His non-violent approach suggests human beings promote merciful attitude to biodiversity of our living planet and give them their basic right of living. It provides a non-destructive solution to environmental crises. Thus, his ashrams were a practical example of his philosophy.

For the sake of sustainable development, Gandhi strongly rejected the western civilization. Its colonial education system and industrial development. He believed that Western civilization spent all its energy on industrialization and destruction of the other races. Therefore, it is not a symbol of 'progress' for him, so he helped India to find an alternative way of progress which suits them and fulfil its needs.

He favored rural development and his approach to it was holistic and people centered. It was rooted in his vision of truth, non-violence and the communal good. The influence behind his idea of rural development was by Ruskin, Tolstoy, and the teachings of Gita. He emphasized more spiritual and moral value than economic needs. For economic needs he emphasized agricultural production and allied activities including village and cottage industries. The basic principle of 'Swaraj' village was trusteeship, swadeshi, equality, bread labor, employment, and Nai Talim.

For the solution of current crises, Gandhi also suggested natural cure. He writes that if a man wants to live a healthy wholesome life, he must share his life with not only human beings but with all other living beings including, animals, birds, plants, and the whole ecosystem. Man must return to natural cure for the treatment of his diseases. Gandhi brought forth a close link between man and nature; he appealed human beings for respecting the five elements of nature (earth, ether, air, water, and sunlight), which are very necessary for the healthy existence of human life.

Instead of Western humanism philosophy, Gandhi's term 'trusteeship' is based on the idea that whatever belongs to a person is the right to an honorable livelihood, the rest of his property belongs to the welfare of the community. The concept of trusteeship has dynamic nature, and it also has strong moral imperatives toward restructuring the relationship of man and nature in current situation. Human should understand themselves as the trustee of God in this phenomenal world so they should adopt a wise and just approach to utilize natural resources. Thus, Gandhi's philosophy and practical vision of environmental protection contained a deep respect for the rights of non-human creatures.

Conclusion

In the light of previous discussion, it is understood that Mahātmā Gandhi is world-renowned scholar of Hinduism in general and is considered by many thinkers as pioneer of contemporary environmental movements of Hindu faith.

- The major contributions of Mahātmā Gandhi are not directly related to religious ecology or modern environmentalism. Because he belongs to the late 19th and early 20th century, his environmental contributions are shown by his vision and foresight. There was no wide-ranging debate on man-nature relationship and its catastrophe during the lifetime of Gandhi. But he is considered as pioneer of environmental movements and conservation in the observation of many thinkers. Because he did much more by living the life of a person who affirmed the value and integrity of life, including human and non-human. He lived a life with harmonious attitude toward all animate and inanimate.
- In ecological paradigm, Gandhi has talked about the nature of ecological crisis. He considers the current environmental crisis as the result of modern industrial development which was originally introduced by the colonial masters in India. He rejected western industrial development as not a symbol of progress in his view. Instead, he formed a main place for the development of 'Khadi' and cottage industries in India. He described a village industrial approach instead of blind industrial development which caused destruction of other species.
- Gandhi interrogated the modern civilization that established upon increase of wants and desire. He outlined the threat to future generations in his book '*The Hind Swaraj*' that was caused by persistent quest for more material goods. He favored the sustainable development of society. His aim was to fulfil the fundamental needs of humanity and put some limitations on greed and passion.

- He felt the need for a radical shift from modern secular worldview to traditional worldview of nature to avoid catastrophe. Gandhi's philosophy of oneness of existence also rejected dualistic secular worldview of nature. He advised humanity to understand their place and the status of all other living beings in the vast umbrella of oneness.
- Although the founder of deep ecology is Arne Naess, Gandhi's concept of self-realization is the base of his approach. In the term of self-realization, Gandhi spoke about the supreme or universal 'Self' the 'Atman' that is to be realized. He tries to reach self-realization through reduction of the dominance of the narrow 'self' or through 'selfless action.' Every living being is connected through the wider 'Self' intimately, and from this follows the capacity of identification. Arne Naess in his work on deep ecology, borrowed heavily from Gandhi's vision of the right to life of all living things. This understanding would lead humanity to address the environmental concerns of today at its root and talk about the equality of all life forms. Hence, their basic right of living and flourishing. Moreover, based on deep ecological principle inherent in Gandhi's philosophy it can be analyzed that he admires the cosmo-centric value ethics to sustain man-nature relationship.
- As for our living planet earth and its protection are concerned, Gandhi's revolutionary thoughts and his practice of yogic centered way of life, spiritual understanding of self-realization, moral value of non-violence, and sustainable development of society, represent a holistic approach to save our earthly resources for future generation. Indeed, he was an apostle of applied human ecology.

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