

## **The Relevance of Gandhian Environmentalism**

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### **Abstract**

*The environment is one of the most important concerns in the present scenario in our country. The present paper deals with the relevance of Gandhian thoughts on the Environment. Gandhian approach towards the environment was influenced by Vedic perception of Vasudaiv kutumbkam and Ahimsa Parmodharam. Gandhi Ji was opposed to the capital-intensive western industrialism, based on the false assumption of unlimited supply of resources and rampant consumerism. The relevance of the Gandhian environmentalism becomes more prominent in present-day circumstances i.e. imminent threat of neo-colonialism, against which Gandhi fought throughout his life.*

### **Keywords**

*Environment, Constitution, Development, Rivers, Capitalism*

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Though the Article 48 A of the constitution of India under its IVth Part, related to the Directive Principles of State Policy, requires the State to take steps to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard the forests and wildlife of the country and subsequently the Supreme Court of India, relying on Art. 48A, gave directions to Governments to take appropriate steps for the prevention and control of pollution of water. But the situation has worsened since the dawn of independence, at least from the point of view of protection and conservation of the environment and ecosystem.

One of the main reasons for this situation is that India adopted the model of economic development, which involves the Western Industrialism, big dams for irrigation and power generation, and the amalgamation of chemical fertilizer, pesticides, insecticides, and the hybrid varieties of the seeds for agricultural products. It is regrettable for the people of India that the model of economic development practiced to date was adopted by J.L. Nehru, the able disciple of Mahatma Gandhi, who was in himself an apostle of balance of the ecosystem and noted environmentalist in theory and practice.

The Nehruvian model of development has been oblivious of the destruction of natural resources, water, and air pollution, deforestation, ozone hole, soil loss, desertification, water scarcity, toxic water, unsustainable energy use, extinction of the species, and the threat to the human life itself. The omission of poisonous gases due to the large-scale industrialization has created the Green House Effect. According to an estimate of IITian Scientists, due to this effect by 2030 AD the mean temperature of India in summers will be higher by 7°C and in winters 3.4°C. This may cause havoc in climate of the Indian sub-continent and present a threat to the flora and fauna and overall ecosystem.

Most of the rivers, which were at a time lifeline of Indian people, have been changed into the drainage for the flowing of Industrial water and effluent and untreated urban sewage water. According to WHO, nearly 50 million people of India become sick each year due to polluted drinking water, and out of this 2 million die. Chlorine which is used to purify drinking water, after reacting with organic compounds, in polluted water creates six compounds including chloroform which cause cancer. According to a report of Greenpeace, more than 1 lakh tonnes of hazardous and potentially hazardous wastes have entered India in the last two years due to the opening of the Indian economy. The large-scale use of polythene bags has choked the urban drainage system in India.

The main cause of this deplorable scene is that we have deviated from the Gandhian model of development and social life. Gandhij's life and work is an

environmental legacy for all humanity, because he was a practitioner of sustainable development in the real sense of the word. His underlying philosophy was a need but not greed and some comfort but no luxury. He envisaged the environmental crises that were in the offing in the coming future.

Gandhian approach towards the environment was influenced by Vedic perception of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* and *Ahimsa Parmodharam*. According to him, the enemy of our environment is within each person who has greed for more and more at the expense of nature, but is still unsatisfied. But according to Gandhiji, “*Men’s happiness lies in contentment. He who is discontented, however much he possesses becomes a slave to his desires.*” As per Gandhian views, if a human being practices, *Niyamas* and *Sanyams* in his daily routine, he will restrain himself from indulging in any anti-biospheric activity.

Gandhi Ji was opposed to the capital-intensive western industrialism, based on the false assumption of unlimited supply of resources and rampant consumerism. This model of economic development is unsustainable and a source of environmental, social, and economic ills. He advocated that we should not become slaves to unlimited desires for material growth.

Gandhi Ji was equally concerned about sanitation and the liberation of scavengers. He did a lot to remove their drudgery and called them ‘Harijans’. He was of the view that everyone should clean his her own refuse and nearby surroundings. Furthermore, he also recognized that night soil was a very good resource and could be profitably used as energy and manure.

The outcome of the ongoing analysis is that the real conflict is not between environment and development, but the environment and reckless exploitation of the natural resources in the name of efficiency. The need of the hour is that common people should be made aware of the possible threat to their very existence, if they continue recklessly exploitation of natural resources and practice the western mode of life. The society will be ready for giving preference to their health and environment over comfort availed, if the inspiration is of a high order.

This inspiration can be inculcated through the educational institutions. By establishing co-ordination with schools and colleges, the students may be awakened for the conservation and preservation of pollution-free environment and biosphere. The curriculums of the college and school system should be framed with a course on environmental study, compulsory for all students. Besides this, the education system should be based on Gandhian Basic Education which was aimed at educating children about their surroundings and environment and the resource availability in the village.

Such education would also give a good training in location-specific productive crafts so as to make villagers and villages self-reliant through self-help and produce marketable goods.

For this, through educational institutions, students should be integrated with the environment and there should be strong students teacher interaction and appreciation for Gandhian philosophy and way of life which cherished economic development based on ecological principles of environmental harmony, economic efficiency, resource conservation, and equality with social justice.

The relevance of the Gandhian environmentalisým becomes more prominent in present-day circumstances i.e. imminent threat of neo-colonialism, against which Gandhi fought throughout his life. The recent concept of Global village is really a concept of the world market, where the artificial demand is created in the developing countries and provides opportunities for the dumping of the products manufactured in the Western countries which ultimately will destroy the economic, social, and environment fabric of the developing countries.