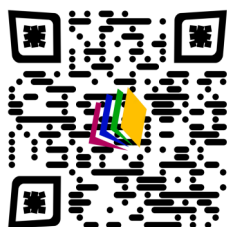




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#### \*Corresponding Author

Dr. Braja Kishore Sahoo  
Lecturer in Political Science,  
Chandbali College, Odisha.  
Email: sahuo.bks@gmail.com

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## Reinventing Gandhian Ideas on Sustainable Development in the Age of Environmental Crisis

**Dr. Braja Kishore Sahoo**

Lecturer in Political Science, Chandbali College, Odisha.

### ABSTRACT:

The environmental crisis is considered to be one of the major issues faced by the humanity. It threatens the very survival of the world community. The industrialization on a rapid scale followed by urbanization amid widespread and unwarranted resource use, energy inefficient life style soaked the assimilative capacities of the environment, thus the problem of environment has become more severe. As a consequence, the natural ecosystems of the planet earth are changing in an unprecedented scale. The problems like global warming, climate change, acid rain, ozone depletion, greenhouse effect, etc. are the direct outcomes of this process and pose a grave threat to the survival of life on earth. Thus, in this situation of self-destruction, it is necessary to find out an alternative path for the survival of life on earth. Against this brief background this paper is based on Gandhian ideals on environment which offers a grand nonviolent revolutionary strategy for the building of a new world order, which could help in protecting environment and obtain sustainable development. In this paper I draw on Gandhiji's insight on ecological ways of living, appropriate technology, people centered developments, and village oriented economy stand out as realizable visions of tomorrow. Gandhian model of sarvodaya is concerned with a continued and healthy environment in which continued all-sided development of man may be possible. Gandhiji's simple life style was born out of a belief and conviction that the resources of the earth are limited and human beings should limit their wants. Gandhiji's life was in complete harmony with nature, which showed the path of recovery from the present ecological crisis. I discussed how Gandhian philosophy of simple living in small communities and living in harmony with nature aims at building a harmonious relationship between man and nature.

**KEY WORDS:** Sustainable Development, Environment, Development, Gandhian Ideas

## Introduction

Environmental issues continue to dominate media headlines considered to be one of the major issues faced by the humanity. Environmental issues forcing peoples to reevaluate their day-to-day practices as citizens, as workers, as parents and as members of communities. So too concern about the environment is now starting to have greater resonance where global environment and entire biosphere started changing at a growing rate. The world's forests, both tropical and temperate, are in decline as a result every day some of the earth's species becoming extinct. Environmental degradation increases the poverty of those who are already poor in those parts of the world where livelihoods of peoples are dependent on ecosystem and natural resources. Desertification and land degradation become severe especially in developing countries which undermine the agricultural and subsistence practices also. Pollution of rivers and streams affects the irrigation of farms and also undermines the access to clean drinking water and kills other marine ecosystem and fish upon which local peoples rely for their food. The increasing concentrations of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases in the atmosphere have also adverse effects like Global warming, Climate change, rising of global temperature, melting of glaciers and many other destructive consequences. Nearly all these destructive trends of ecological changes have adverse effect on the environment.

The present state of the environment is primarily the outcome of the application of the sophisticated technology, scientific inventions and technological developments have given unlimited power to man to exploit the nature. The root cause of the present crisis of environment is human's misbehavior with the nature under the false ego that he is the master of nature. As a result of this unlimited exploitation

of nature by human beings the ecological changes started taking place which have an adverse effect on global environment. In a mad race for technical achievements mankind is overexploiting nature; as a result the essential services of the ecosystem come into the crossroads. The rise of natural hazards, the rise of temperature of the earth, climate change, global warming, acid rain, destruction of ozone layer, erosion of soil, desertification, spread of deadly diseases, radiation hazards were chiefly the result of the present environmental crisis. The sole cause of all these problems lies in the human greed and over-consumption. According to the World Watch Studies, Worldwide fund for Nature, the New Economic Foundation, and the World Conservation Monitoring Centre in their reports have identified over-consumption is accelerating and unabated. The consumption pressures from increasing material affluence have increased at a vast rate, which have destroyed the natural world with serious depletion of forest, freshwater, and marine systems on which life depends. The fumes and effluents from modern industries, the use of chemical fertilizers, pesticides and weed killers, the reckless exploitation of natural resources, the use of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons in wars, the destruction of forests etc. are playing havoc with ecosystem.

## The present environmental crisis and the way forward

From the dawn of human history, humans have changed the environments in which they live. We breathe the air, drink the water, and eat plant and animal life. Each of these is taken from the natural environment but in turn, we have polluted the environment. There are some very dramatic problems facing the planet when it comes to environmental issues. A change in the level of

public concern about environmental issues was also attributed to a greater reliance upon experts rather than environmental activists to define and shape conceptions of environmental problems. There is no one path or measure or tactic that provides the answer to how we ought to deal with environmental problems. The need of the hour is to adopt policies and programmes to reduce the destructive nature of environmental crisis. According Philip W. Quigg the time has come to have “the real concern for global environment.....if we do not, we face the prospect that an over burdened biosphere will no longer sustain us and that we will ourselves be on a struggle to survive.” Though there are many global organizations, treaties and conferences launched to resolve the crisis of environment but they were unable to yield any significant result. The biggest challenge posed before us to take steps for bettering the deteriorated condition of our environment is the greed of humans and the philosophy of consumerism. The tempo-centric tendencies of humans have led to over-consumption of natural resources and are likely to bequeath a barren earth to the unborn generations. Without realizing that the earth’s resources are limited and there is a limit to physical growth man is exploiting the resources of earth on an unprecedented scale. There is increasing in consumption pattern in each succeeding year and bringing the exhaustion of non renewable resources of the earth on an increasing rate.

As our civilization has entered in twenty first century it is the need of the hour to take actions to save the entire planet from environmental catastrophe otherwise it could pervade the life of not only human beings but also all forms of life. The Brandt Report titled ‘Common Crisis’, The Brundtland Report titled ‘Our Common Future’, the Club of Rome Report titled ‘Limits to Growth’ have given warnings about the present crisis. In this

context there is the need of a new world order based on a new philosophy to protect the environment and mother planet. Thus in this situation the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi is becoming increasingly meaningful and relevant. Mahatma Gandhi with his famous dictum ‘the world has enough for everyone’s needs, but not for everyone’s greed’ provides an alternative vision of development which is economically sound and ecologically sustainable in nature. Mahatma Gandhi was the first modern scientist who made a thorough study on the issues which pose a serious threat to the survival of human beings.

Before the growing of environmental consciousness among human beings in modern times from Stockholm Conference to Rio+20 conference, including the World Commission on Environment and Development and the United Nations Environmental Perspective and the declaration on the right to development in many UN General Assembly resolutions, Gandhi had recognized the imminent danger threatening the very existence of the earth in his ‘Hind Swaraj’ quite early. The Hind Swaraj of Gandhiji is a warning against growing consumerism, materialism and wrong model of development. Both capitalism and Marxism adopt the same western model of development and industrialization to meet the ever- growing material standard of life, which in turn leads to ruthless exploitation of natural resources. Gandhiji predicted the destructive nature of modern civilization with destructive consequences of unlimited industrialization and urbanization, much earlier.

Gandhiji was a thinker and a visionary who foresees the dangers inherent in over mad rush after industrialization and modernization quite early. He was the early critic of the dehumanizing character of modern industrial civilization. Civilization for

Gandhiji is worthwhile unless it provides opportunities for the fullest development of human beings. According to Gandhiji machinery has its own place, but it must not be allowed to displace human labor. His primary objection to machinery and industrialization was that it tended to concentrate the production of wealth in a few hands. Gandhiji was concerned with the misuse and abuse of machinery because of the use of machinery tends more and more to concentrate wealth in the hands of a few in total disregard of millions of men and women whose bread is taken by it out of their mouths. This conflict among man and machine hurt and bothered Gandhiji much, for which he was always against the craze for machinery. Gandhiji understood very well the improper use of machines, will one day made man slave and become master. Gandhiji countered machine because he saw the improper use of machine has a dehumanizing influence that needed to be countered if man has to retain his individual dignity and freedom. According to Gandhiji, the propelling force of modern civilization is the hunger for wealth and greedy pursuit of worldly pleasures. Modern civilization according to Gandhiji, places the pursuit of self-interest at the centre of man's existence. Gandhiji is of the opinion that with the advancement of science and technology, industrialization has succeeded chiefly for producing goods and services on a larger scale and at a faster rate. This leads to over-exploitation of natural resources on a vast scale. Gandhiji claimed that colonization, domination, and unhealthy competition ending in violent clashes and world wars have been the natural consequences of industrialization. Only a small section of the world's population enjoys most of the benefits and a much larger section continues to suffer the pangs of poverty, starvation, malnutrition and lack of education. Thus Gandhiji firmly believed that a non

-violent society cannot be built on the foundation of industrialization.

Gandhiji believed that the major factor, which is responsible for the emergence of modern industrial civilization, is the tendency of greed for more and more material wealth with a craze for higher standard of living and luxurious life. Many of the scientific inventions are carried out by man were with the motive of achieving supremacy in the race for power and gaining exclusive control over natural resources without knowing that the results of these efforts are leading towards environmental catastrophe which pose a serious challenge not only to the survival of humans but also of planet earth. In this situation of repugnance there is an urgent need for a balanced ecological system without which entire earth will face the challenge of endurance. Gandhiji's insights of eco-spirituality, sustainable development, simple living and eco-villages are the only alternative before humanity in this horrifying situation. Gandhiji's view on simple living and living in harmony with nature, which is ecologically viable and friendly with the environment is the only alternative before humanity available.

### **The Gandhian Model**

Gandhiji is one of the thinkers who touched so many issues which are not major issues at that time as it is today's. The ecological issue or environmental crisis is one among the issues which is touched by Gandhiji at a time when it was not a major issue at that time as it has now. The concept of environmental conservation, sustainability etc. is inherent in the ideology of Mahatma Gandhi. He warned to entire world about the large scale industrialization would create large scale problems in early 1920's which the entire world is facing now. He pointed out the pitfalls of industrialism and the damages incurred to nature, man, and society.

Though Gandhiji has not left behind a treatise on 'environmental ethics' or its protection, nor did he even go on fast or launch a satyagraha in protest against deforestation or the construction of large dams and nuclear reactors but he did much more than this. He led a life which was in absolute harmony with his environment, with himself as with others. There were utterly no contradictions in his thoughts and in his way of life; environmental ethics, its needs and its practice were part of his holistic approach towards life. Gandhiji's attitude towards environment and ecology was an integral part of his life's philosophy. The environmental philosophy is inherent in his holistic approach towards life. He lived the life of a human who affirmed the integrity and value of life, human as well as non-human. He lived a life that was completely in harmony with the environment. He believed in the Vedic ideology – "vasudhaiva kutumbakam" which believes that, the whole world is one family. He led a life which was completely dedication to the observance of eleven vows, namely- satya, ahimsa, bramhacharya, asteya, aparigraha, aswad, abhaya, aprushyata nivaran, sharer shram, swadeshi and sarvadharm sambhava. A lifestyle based upon such high quality virtues was bound to generate waves of change and transformation through its demonstrated example and pave the way for a society of peace and harmony. The simple lifestyle of Gandhiji, his simple living habits also had a great ecological bearing. Gandhiji's philosophy of 'non-violence' and 'prohibition' is of great ecological significance. Gandhiji's concept of non-violence aims at absence of injury to both living as well as non-living entities of nature such as air, water, soil, etc. Gandhiji's concept of prohibition aims at conservation of essential natural resources of earth from misuse by mankind.

Gandhiji's insight on ecological ways of living, appropriate technology, people centered developments, and village oriented economy stand out as realizable visions of tomorrow. Gandhiji's life was in complete harmony with nature, which showed the path of recovery from the present ecological crisis. Gandhiji visualized a society which he called as 'sarvodaya' the ideal society which he wanted to establish. Gandhiji's ideal society the 'sarvodaya' aims at welfare of all. It was based on the ideal of "all round material as well as spiritual development of each and every individual". His sarvodaya is concerned with a continued and healthy environment in which continued all-sided development of man may be possible. Gandhiji's simple life style was born out of a belief and conviction that the resources of the earth are limited and human beings should limit their wants. Gandhiji believed on the principle of Bhagvad Gita's teaching of non-possession. His life style was his identification with all living beings on earth. He believed in the control of human wants, by which a balance must be maintained between man and nature. His ideal society i.e., sarvodaya is based on voluntary reduction of wants, ending toward system and building up a new world order, unity of mankind and judicious sharing of the resources, breed labour, simplicity, recycling, living in tune with nature etc. are the basic features of such a life-style. Adoption of this at a mass scale will bring in welfare of all. Gandhiji's dream of sarvodaya society is based on the idea of "the rising of all" welfare of each and every living being on earth. His visionary sarvodaya society includes a process which begins with the least and last in the society and moves on into the dawn of a Moksha on earth or Ramrajya, the kingdom (rule) of god. It is the supreme goal of Gandhian philosophy. Gandhiji's vision of economic development is based on the principles which are ecologically

sustainable. Gandhiji's entire philosophy is based on the principle of 'living in harmony with nature'. His economy focuses on recycling and re-use of finite resources of nature. Gandhiji was the first philosopher who advocated about sustainable development in the world. The Gandhian idea on sustainable development implies the establishment of equity between rich and poor and between generations for the protection of environment and natural resources.

### Conclusion

In this century when the entire planet is undergoing a major crisis which threatens the very survival of humanity, when other methods have failed to provide an alternative for the survival of humanity, Gandhism and Gandhian model of development offers a distinct possibility to retrieve humanity from this undergoing crisis. The Gandhian model provides an alternative direction and motivation in forming new values and attitudes that would build a harmonious relationship between humanity and environment. The Gandhian model offers a grand nonviolent revolutionary strategy for the building of a new world order, which could help in protecting environment and obtain sustainable development. Gandhiji unlike other environmentalists gave top priority to the social environment. He realized and predicted quite early that the nature is becoming the victim of human greed. Gandhiji was always against such things which produced inhumanity, degradation and having social and economic illness. His philosophy of simple living in small communities and living in harmony with nature aims at building a harmonious relationship between man and nature. Simplicity and simple living is the essence of Gandhian thought. By suggesting decentralization, appropriate technology, upliftment of the suffering humanity, use of waste, Gandhiji was guiding humanity to look ahead beyond the

frame of modernity to protect the planet earth. Gandhiji's oft repeated quotation that the world has everything for fulfillment of the needs of everybody and not the greed of anybody made him a remarkable leader of the environmentally stressed planet. His warning against the voluptuous physical and intellectual consumption and his advocacy for restraint was not only timely for his own period but also for our own time marked by multiplication of wants, incessant materialistic pursuit and conspicuous consumption. In Gandhiji's entire philosophy the concept of non-violence occupies a key position. He led his entire life in conformity with certain basic norms and principles among which non-violence occupies an important principle. His concept of non-violence which is regarded as science of peace and art of living in harmony with nature is the only alternative before entire humanity from the present environmental crisis.

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