



## GANDHIAN PHILOSOPHY RELEVANCE TO ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION: PRINCIPLES AND PERSPECTIVES FOR THE SUSTAINABILITY

**GADDEYYA GANDIPILLI\*<sup>1</sup> | RANGANATHAN R<sup>2</sup> | SUBHASHINI K<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> DOCTORAL RESEARCH FELLOW, DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, ANDHRA UNIVERSITY, VISAKHAPATNAM-530003, ANDHRA PRADESH, INDIA.

<sup>2</sup> PROFESSOR, DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, ANDHRA UNIVERSITY, VISAKHAPATNAM-530003, ANDHRA PRADESH, INDIA.

<sup>3</sup> DOCTORAL RESEARCH FELLOW, DEPARTMENT OF BOTANY, ANDHRA UNIVERSITY, VISAKHAPATNAM-530003.

### ABSTRACT:

In general, Environment Education (EE) denotes a study of environment and its dynamics, and its various forms, factors degrading environment and its impact on man's life. The main concept of EE is to prepare suitable strategies for saving our environment. Environmental education is a process to promote the awareness and understanding of the environment, its relationship with man and his activities. Environment education is education 'about' the environment, 'from' the environment and 'for' the environment. The main goal of Environmental Education is to create an awareness and understanding of the evolving social and physical environment as a whole, its natural, manmade, cultural, spiritual resources together with the rational use and conservation of these resources for the development. Environmental issues came to the fore in the 1970s. The first United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (1972) was held in Stockholm, Sweden. It brought environment to the centre stage of the global agenda and later led to the establishment of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). It has been acknowledged by environmentalists that Gandhian insights serve as a guide to understand the problem in a proper perspective. It is to be noted that Gandhi has not left any aspect of life untouched. He clearly expressed his views on basic issues relating to life. Though he has not dealt specifically with the issue of ecology and environment one can easily gauge his perspective on issues relating to environment from his basic approach to life. Gandhi led a holistic life which was in tune with principles of nature and environmental friendliness. Environmental problems are more challenging today to each developed and developing countries. Environmental degradation threatens not just the quality, but the very existence of life on earth. In the view of Environmental degradation and Climate change, the Gandhian ideas or philosophy, his idea on social transformation and basic education are a debate of global concern. In search of different approaches in tacking with environmental challenges, we are naturally attracted towards the Gandhian approach. Gandhi had emphasized the importance of natural resources and its conservation. Gandhi was deeply concerned with all problems confronted by humanity, and it was quite natural that he expressed his concern on matters relating to ecology and environment. Nowadays the environmental consciousness of humans came centre of the climate change due to many anthropological activities such as industrialization, urbanization, deforestation, pollution of various ecosystems etc. The Gandhian Philosophy can moulds the human minds with environmental consciousness through Ahimsa, Dharma, and Truth. Hence, in view of environmental protection, the authors emphasize the Gandhian Philosophy to conserve nature and natural resources.

### KEYWORDS:

**BASIC EDUCATION, DEEP ECOLOGY, ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION, ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION (EE), GANDHIAN APPROACH, MOHANDAS KARAMCHAND GANDHI, SARVODAYA, UNEP.**

### INTRODUCTION

The relationship between human beings and his environment has varied from time to time. It has also been varying from place to place at a given point of time. The Environment protection in India started long before from the time of Ancient India. In the early stages of human history in India, human beings considered the environment as very dominant and they worshipped different aspects of nature like trees, forest, animals, mountains, rivers etc. Indian concern for the environment is as old as our origin of civilisation. Ancestors did understand the meaning of environment as "the

environment is sum total of water, air and land,

inter-relationships among themselves and also with the human beings, other living organisms and property. The Arthashastra by Kautilya described environmental policy, written as early as between 321 and 300 BC, contained provisions meant to regulate a number of aspects related to the environment. In recent years, particularly since the early 1970's, the world has become increasingly sensitised to environmental issues. These issues cut across many disciplines and occur at different spatial scales. The unprecedented population growth and advanced technology have led to man's impact on environment

becoming appreciable, so that, there is mounting pressure on both environment and resources (Sarkar, 2014).

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born on 2 October 1869 at Porbandar, the capital of a small princely state in Gujarat. Gandhiji was a strict vegetarian. He was also a believer in fasting as a means of self-purification and religious tolerance. In his lifetime Gandhiji was regarded as a Mahatma (a Great Soul) by the people of India. He became the principal architect of India's Independence and nationalism and set his head and heart to stop the blatant exploitation of India's people and loot of natural resources. He advocated the use of the same for the good, the benefit and well-being of the teeming millions of India. After Gautam Buddha, he has been the Prophet of Non-violence (ahimsa), Truth (satya) and sticking to the truth (satyagraha) even under the greatest provocation. He was the unquestioned apostle of applied human ecology. He encouraged indigenous capability and local self-reliance (swadeshi); self-rule and local self-governance (swaraja) at the level of village; and welfare of the weakest (antayodaya) leading to welfare of all (sarvodaya). His chief "weapons" were non-violence (ahimsa) and sticking to the truth (satyagraha) which he used to rid India of the British rule and the plunder of the country's resources.

During the last five decades, after Gandhiji's assassination in 1948, there has been an ever-widening circle of environmental concerns and strategies, starting with conservation of the big cats and ending with ethics of resource use and everything in between. The earth is regarded as the Universal Mother (Dharti Mata or Greek Gaia) which harbours her "brood" of a very large family of living organisms (Vasudhaiva- kutumbakam). Humankind is only one out of millions of species described so far. Being a thinking species, it is no doubt different from others. Gandhiji believed that there is divinity in all life, and that there is thus a fundamental unity in diversity. His faith in non-violence and vegetarianism made him a votary of conservation of all diversity including all forms of life, societies, cultures, religions, traditions, etc. His argument for conservation of biodiversity was indeed simple: since a "human being has no power to create life, he has, therefore no right to destroy life". Further, Gandhiji felt that there cannot be any ecological movement designed to prevent violence against nature unless the principle of non-violence becomes central to the ethos of human culture (Khoshoo, 1997).

#### **GANDHIAN VIEW ON ENVIRONMENT:**

If we go through voluminous writings of Mahatma Gandhi there are rare references to his concern for protection and preservation of environment. Only a few writers recognized Gandhi as an early environmentalist. Mahatma Gandhi, Father of Indian Nation is the world's early environmentalist in vision and practice. The concern of Gandhi about the environment, urbanization and mechanization was evident in his speeches, writings and his messages to the workers. Gandhi concern about the environment and its effects is oldest and all the

international conferences such as the Stockholm Conference of 1972 or the Rio Earth Summit of 1992 were started after Gandhi thinking such as Dharma, Truth and Ahimsa (Non violence). In India, the major movements to protect environment such as the Chipko movement led by Chandi Prasad Bhatt and Sunder Lal Bahuguna and the Narmada Bachao Andolan by Baba Amte and Medha Patkar derived inspiration from Gandhi (Tiwari, 2019).

The Gandhian idea of non-violence, if adopted at various levels from international politics to local levels, can be useful to reduce carbon footprints caused due to wars and production of missiles. Gandhi had emphasized the importance of natural resources and its conservation. This has a direct bearing on the man-and-environment relationship. Gandhi was influenced by Jainism, which looks at nature as a living entity and exhorts human beings to continually purify themselves by respecting diverse life forms. The Gandhian idea of Satya and Ahimsa can be useful to reduce the greed of the individual and society. His concept of non-violence thus encompassed all living beings and embodied the eternal values of life in his thought and actions (Tiwari, 2019). Nowadays industrialization is a serious threat to Environmental pollution and degradation or loss of natural resources and biodiversity of life forms. According to Gandhi thinking, reckless and limitless pursuit of industrialization by all nations has posed serious problems for the very existence of not only man but also for all living creatures and all kinds of species on our planet.

#### **DEEP ECOLOGY AND GANDHIAN PHILOSOPHY:**

The present state of environment is a matter of concern for all socially committed individuals, international organizations and governments all over the globe. Global Warming, Climate Change, Pollution and access to clean water are some of the gravest challenges before the world today. The ever growing concern over environmental issues has been echoed in the various earth summits and the Copenhagen Summit. The deep ecology and the conservation of mother earth have become the catchwords for environmentalists all over the world. It is interesting to note that Arne Naess, who coined the term "deep ecology" has acknowledged his indebtedness to Gandhi in the formulation of this term (Weber, 1999). Many environmentalists acknowledge their debt to Gandhi in understanding the problem from a holistic perspective. In Gandhi's life time, ecological and environmental issues were not matters of serious discussion as now. But Gandhi was deeply concerned about the damages done by modern industrial civilization to the environment which he portrayed in his seminal work *Hind Swaraj* or Indian Home Rule written in 1909. Gandhi has not built up any theory of environmental philosophy or system which strictly falls within the scheme of present environmental science. Gandhi was deeply concerned with all problems confronted by humanity, and it was quite natural that he expressed his concern on matters relating to ecology and environment. One who scrutinises Gandhi's speeches and writings will be amazed by the deep eco-consciousness

rooted in his philosophy of life.

### ECO-CONSCIOUSNESS EMBEDDED IN GANDHI'S PHILOSOPHY

Gandhi was the first man to introduce the concept of service to nature in order to enrich nature. Gandhi said "the earth provides enough to satisfy every man's need but not for every man's greed." The environmental wisdom of Gandhi is ingrained in this mantra. He lived a life which was in tune with environment. That is why he said "My life is my Message". His life was full of examples of his love for nature, environment and all that exists. Gandhi's philosophy of life provides a sustainable development paradigm which is symbiotic with nature and ecosystem. In Gandhian frame of reference economy, ecology and spirituality are interrelated. That is why Gandhian economy is often referred to as 'economy of environment' (Joseph, 2006).

### GANDHIAN ENVIRONMENTALISM

The important elements of Gandhian environmentalism are:

- *Human beings should act in a manner that it is a part of Nature rather than apart from Nature.*
- *Materials available on the earth are not used with an element of greed.*
- *Human being practices non-violence not only towards fellow humans but also towards other living organisms and inanimate materials because over-use of such materials also amounts to violence.*
- *Women are respected, and are made partners in and given their rightful place in all spheres of human endeavour.*
- *Bottom-up shared view is preferred over the top-down totalitarian overview.*
- *Conservationist and sustainable life-saving approach prevails over the unsustainable consumerist self-destructive approach.*
- *Human care for and share with the poor and the destitute in the society as a moral obligation towards them.*
- *The human race thinks about how much is enough for a simple need-based, austere and comfortable life style.*
- *All development as far as is possible leads to local self-reliance and equity with social justice; and*
- *Ethics and self-discipline in resource use is an over-riding criterion of development.*

### ENVIRONMENTAL PRIORITIES FOR 21ST CENTURY

The enemy of our environment is within each one of us because we want more and more at the expense of nature and consume more than our share of materials. Furthermore, ecological security is equally, if not more,

important than economic security. Today the human race is at the cross roads: The present eco-degradation and pollution are the result of greed of the rich, need of the poor to eke out an existence, and careless application of technology. Keeping in mind the type of environment that Gandhiji thought and practiced, one can make a fair list of environmental priorities for the next century. These are:

- *Population stabilization;*
- *Land-use planning in our land-hungry country;*
- *Water conservation;*
- *Sustainable agriculture, horticulture and animal husbandry;*
- *Conservation and sustainable utilization of natural forests and raising large-scale man-made*
- *plantations in order to save our natural forests;*
- *Conservation and sustainable utilization of biodiversity;*
- *Ecologically compatible housing particularly slum improvement;*
- *Control of pollution of air, water and soil;*
- *Non-polluting renewable energy systems;*
- *Minimization, reuse, recycling and utilization of wastes;*
- *Green technologies;*
- *Control of AIDS epidemic;*
- *Environmental education and training leading to environmental ethics;*
- *Periodic updating of environmental laws;*
- *Blending ecological and economic imperatives and*
- *Ethical and moral dimensions of resource use.*

### GANDHIAN MODEL OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH BASIC EDUCATION

Gandhiji was a votary of basic education of the village level (Basic education is one of the philosophy of Indian educational system). He was very particular regarding educating children about their surrounding environment and availability of resources, together with giving them a thorough grounding in self-help and self-reliance through productive crafts. According to him, education must be aimed at children being integrated with environment, and must have "strong pupil teacher relationship and appreciation for Indian culture". As a result of his first hand experience at the grass-roots level, there emerged a definite Gandhian Model of Rural Development which meant concentrating on villages (over 576000 in number) and villagers. It is here that 76 percent of India's population resides in abject poverty. He was for a proper legally-binding empowerment of the poor and women in our society. The model envisaged that development and governance should be bottom-up and not top-down; goals should be self-defined and not stranger-defined; production should be aimed at basic goods to fulfil basic

needs to use values, and not at non-basic and greed-oriented luxury goods; the process of production should be by masses and not through mass production; and the whole approach should be holistic and not sectoral. He felt that unless India focuses on the economic development of villages and the villagers, which are the weakest link in the socio-economic chain, the country cannot become strong in the real sense of the world. His chief aim was to strengthen political independence with economic independence of sustainable kind. The Kothari commission (1964-66) also suggested that basic education had to offer EE and relate it to the life needs and aspirations of the people and the nation. At the primary stage, the report recommended that the aims of teaching science in the primary schools should be to develop proper understanding of the main facts, concepts, principles and processes in physical and biological environment (Gopal and Anand, 2004).

### **GHANDHIAN PHILOSOPHY AND SUSTAINABILITY**

He was opposed to following Western industrialism blindly because of the associated environmental, social and economic problems. The principal reason was that such industrialism is based on an assumption that resources are unlimited which is actually not the case. The biosphere does not have unlimited capacity to bear the eco-degradation resulting from unsustainable development. While our planet's resources do not grow, population and wants grow exponentially. This means that there cannot be unlimited and infinite growth and development with limited and finite resources. He advocated that we should not become slaves to unlimited desires for material growth. If we do not follow an austere path, there would follow an ecological backlash which may engulf the human race, with nowhere else to go. Therefore, the delicate and holistic balance that exists in Nature has to be respected and maintained. There is a tremendous connectivity and interdependence among various components, like natural living and nonliving resources, with considerable social, economic, historical, cultural, philosophical, ethical and moral dimensions. All these aspects are now under purview of environment. Thus a healthy economy cannot flourish in an unhealthy environment. The enemy of our environment is within each one of us because we want more and more at the expense of nature and consume more than our share of materials. Furthermore, ecological security is equally, if not more, important than economic security. Today the human race is at the cross roads: The present eco-degradation and pollution are the result of greed of the rich, need of the poor to eke out an existence, and careless application of technology.

Environmental sustainability is the most burning issue with which every one of us is related very closely. Environmental Sustainability means to sustain ability, both the ability of the environment to regenerate and the ability of people to retain control over their living conditions. In the terms of the 1987 Brundtland Report, sustainability is "Meeting the needs of the present generation without

compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs." Sustainable development may be described as a process for improving the range of opportunities that will enable individual human beings and communities to achieve their aspirations and full potential over a sustained period of time, while maintaining the resilience of economic, social and environmental systems (Munasinghe, 1994). Gandhiji's entire life and work is an environmental legacy for all humanity. This was not because he wrote a big treatise on environment, or led a movement to stall a dam or some industry, or clean a river, or whatever. This was because he was a practitioner of sustainable development in the real sense of the word. His strength came to him on account of his spirituality and practice of non-violence and truth. Taken in a wider sense, these are the very critical elements for the success of sustainable development. In brief, his whole life was his message and a lesson on environment and development for Indians and the world at large to follow. Gandhiji's environmentalism amounts to being pro-nature, pro-poor, pro-women and pro-job generation. He combined social, economic, environmental, equity and ethical imperatives for obtaining political independence and economic salvation through rural development for the teeming millions of India. To achieve this, he considered the path of love, cooperation and peace more sustainable than hate, conflict and war. Furthermore, in 1920 in *Young India*, he wrote thus: "We want to organize our national power not by adopting the best methods of production only, but by the best method of both the production and distribution."

The Gandhian Model is basically aimed at building self-reliance and self-respect in a villager, and poverty alleviation of India. This Model is primarily based on enhanced biomass production, processing, and utilization. The larger section of our society to be served by this model depends on renewable resources (both man-made and natural) and the Model is fuelled largely by solar energy (photosynthesis). The indicator to be used for estimating growth of such a Model has to be the increase in the Gross National Resource Product at the village level, which should be sustainable and should cause the least or manageable amount of ecological damage to the production base. The basic principles (local self-reliance and equity with social justice) of the Gandhian Model of Development must become applicable to all situations - from Ecosystem to Industrial Societies.

In Mahatma Gandhi's opinion, in any scheme of development, man should be at the centre. A long term view of development has to be taken, for we owe our debt to prosperity as well. Man has to make a judicious use of natural resources. The ecological balance should not be disturbed. The objective should not be to build the islands of prosperity in the ocean of poverty; but to raise the level of standard of life and to combat poverty. Gandhi's ideas are also reflected in the total value shift in production, consumption, habits and political systems. It places more emphasis on moral responsibility of the individual at the personal, social, national and universal level. Gandhi

pleaded for decentralization of power in society. He visualized 'Swaraj' at the individual level, 'Gram Samaj' at Local level and 'Sarvodaya' at global level. Gandhi believed in Sarvodaya and therefore the welfare of all was the basis of his thinking; hence his community centred approach towards sustainability emphasized on 'betterment of human life' and 'ensuring fulfilment of basic needs of all human needs'. Welfare of the human beings being the ultimate goal by avoiding all sorts of exploitations, Gandhi felt that human dignity needs to be established.

### **GANDHIAN PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

Education is central to development. It empowers people and strengthens nations. It is a powerful "equalizer", opening doors to all to lift themselves out of poverty. It is critical to the world's attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Education enriches people's understanding of themselves and the world. It improves the quality of their lives and leads to broad social benefits to individuals and society. Education raises people's productivity and creativity and promotes entrepreneurship and technological advances. In addition it plays a very crucial role in securing economic and social progress and improving income distribution (Qutub Khan, 2014). Gandhi through his basic scheme of education wanted to bring social transformation in the country. His basic scheme of education is designed to make individual self-reliant and self sufficient through child-centered, activity-centered, craft-centered and community-centered curricular activities. Regarding social order, Gandhi advocated that ultimate aim of education is not only a balanced and harmonious society but a just social order, in which there is no un-natural divide line between the haves and have-nots and everybody is assured of a living wage and right to freedom. Gandhi was of the opinion that all subjects should be co-related to the craft of the locality. Accordingly, co-relation will integrate and coordinate the subjects with the socio economic, cultural, and environmental and life like conditions. Gandhi wanted to develop community life through education which consisted of manual labour, tree planting, agriculture, simple life and crafts. The running and recurrent principle of the community life was to live according to the rhythm of the nature and in harmony with what nature offers (Dayananda, 2017).

### **CONCLUSION**

Gandhi was not environmentalist in the modern sense. It is a fact that environmental concerns were minimal in Gandhian era, yet his views on nature are scattered throughout his writing. Gandhian thought give us a new vision to harmonize nature with the needs of people .His ideas relating to Satyagraha based on truth and non violence, simple life style and development reveal how sustainable development is possible without doing any harm to nature and fellow beings. Gandhian idea that nature has enough to satisfy everyone's need and not to satisfy anybody's greed became one line ethic to modern

environmentalism. Gandhi considered the earth a living organism. His idea expressed in terms of two fundamental laws: cosmic law and the law of species. According to Cosmic law the entire universe is single entity. Nothing could malfunction outside the threshold limits built into the grand system that includes both living and non living aspects. He believed that the universe was structured and informed by the cosmic spirit that all men, all life and indeed all creation were one. He wrote "I believe in advaita, I believe in the essential unity of man and for that matter of all that lives. Therefore I believe that if one man gains spiritually, the world fails to that extent". In his words "man has no power to create life, therefore he has no right to destroy it" Man has been endowed with higher faculties so that he can be compassionate to lower beings. Regarding the law of species Gandhi believed that without the cooperation and sacrifice of both human and non human evolution is not possible. Being rational human beings we are the custodians of the rest of the creation and should respect their rights and cherish their diversity.

### **REFERENCES**

1. Dayananda KC (2017). "Gandhian Philosophy of Education and Its Relevance for Sustainability." IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science, 22(10): 41-44.
2. Gopal GV and Anand VV (2004). Environmental education in school curriculum an overall perspective. Regional Institute of Education, Mysore-6
3. Joseph K (2006). The Principles of Gandhian Economy: Integrating Spirituality and Ecology. Gandhi Marg, 28 (30): 309-320.
4. Khoshoo TN (1997). Gandhian Environmentalism: An Unfinished Task. IASSI (16): 1.
5. Munasinghe M (1994). Sustainomics: A Transdisciplinary Framework for Sustainable Development. Keynote Paper, Proceedings of the 50th Anniversary Sessions of the Sri Lanka Association for the Advance of Science (SLAAS), Colombo, 56-65.
6. Qutub Khan (2014). Role of education in promoting peace, sustainable development and global citizenship. In: Education for peace and sustainable development: concepts, clarity, and cohesion. A set of papers commissioned by MGIEP. pp.16.
7. Sarkar DN (2014). Environmental Policy in India.

ARSS Vol.3 No.2 pp.17-20

8. Sonowal CJ (2009). Environmental Education in Schools: The Indian Scenario. *J Hum Ecol*, 28(1): 15-36.

9. Tiwari RR (2019). Gandhi as an Environmentalist. *Indian J Med Res*, 149: S141-S143.

10. Weber T (1999): Gandhi, Deep Ecology, Peace Research and Buddhist Economics. *Journal of Peace Research*, 36(3): 349-361.