

Sustainable Development – Relevance of Gandhian Thoughts

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Abstract:

Sustainable Development is one of the most relevant thought of modern world of Globalization. According to Brundtland's report, Sustainable Development means “*To meet the needs of present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.*” One would wonder the relevance of Gandhian thought to that with the concept of Sustainability but when you closely study the views of Mahatma Gandhi on aspects like Humanity, conservation of natural resources and environment to name few, you will realize the visionary thoughts of legend Gandhi ji. Mahatma Gandhi's way of living itself is an apt example of sustainable development. Mahatma Gandhi once said, “Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's need but not any man's greed.” The manner in which mankind is aggressively progressing at the expense of environment is a cause of concern for many.

This paper makes an attempt to address some aspects related to sustainable development through the lens of Gandhian Philosophy.

Key Words: Sustainable Development, Ethics, Governance, SDGs.

Sustainable Development – Relevance of Gandhian Thoughts**Introduction:**

Sustainable development revolves around three pillars namely: Economic, Social and Environmental and many thoughts on which Mahatma Gandhi voiced his views, are related to these pillars. Sustainability is now being considered by Governments and societies globally as more of necessity rather than just as an aspiration to be achieved. International organizations like the United Nations (UN) have worked extensively in the area of Sustainable development by involving all the stakeholders with a view of developing Sustainable development Goals (SDGs). Economic development is definitely one of the key indicators of growth but such growth should not come at the cost of depletion of natural resources. Our lives are widely dependent on availability of the natural resources. If correct balanced is strike between usage of resources and availability of resources than lives of people and integrity of planet could be managed well. However when life is turned into excessive luxury and comfort this balance could break (Indu Gupta).

It is here where we can relate Mahatma Gandhi's thoughts simple life and maintaining high standards of ethics and Governance. Gandhi ji believed in Sarvodaya and thus the basis of his thinking was welfare for all. He stressed upon improving human life, fulfilling basic needs with a community centric approach by avoiding any direct harm to the environment.

Sustainability which moves around people, profit and planet priorities is now seen as a process of transformation which combines economic growth with social and environmental changes.

Gandhi ji was a true advocator of sustainability. His books 'Hind Swaraj', 'Story of My Experiments with Truth', 'Law and Lawyer' discuss at length various aspects of sustainable development for every stakeholder i.e. an individual, industry, nation and humanity as a whole. The Gandhian philosophy was very much in sync with the pillars of sustainability but without nomenclature.

“Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's need but not any man's greed”- M.K Gandhi, it is evident that the very core of sustainable development is based on the

fundamental aspects of keeping the needs of tomorrow/future in mind. Gandhi ji's view on various aspects of sustainable development:

Sr. No.	Aspect	Gandhian Philosophy
1	General attitude	Spiritual, selfless
2	Care for whom	Man & nature
3	Chief goal	Sustainable/ simple living
4	Modes of production	Sustainable, local, self-reliant production by masses
5	Power structure	Decentralised power of people

Some of the words explaining Gandhi ji's personality:

- Truth
- Ahimsa/ non-violence
- Love
- Simple living
- Humanity

All the above principles preached and practiced by him can be related to his thoughts about humanity. He always elucidated the importance of putting others first.

Now we will see some of the important phases of his personality through the lens of sustainable development

Satyagraha: According to Binoy Hazra (2018), in Gandhian context, 'Satyagraha' is a process of generating public opinion, such that it covers all the elements of society. Gandhi's Satyagraha consists of an ongoing task of communicating well: sharing, cooperating, building desire and determination to communicate, developing and refining skills, giving commitment constitutes praxis of first order. This is a unique way of connecting with people. One of the most important element of triple bottom line is 'People' (Planet & Profit being other two). This insisting for truth is an ongoing process and is necessarily non-violent in nature. According to Gregg (1938), Non-violent resistance is itself a language, and a very effective means of communicating feelings and ideas.

Satyagraha is based on principles of restraint, self-discipline, humility and one must have patience coupled with utmost faith in the process to attain desired objectives. Hatred and disrespect to others views have no place in this. Satyagraha teaches us the importance of Universal brotherhood, essence of co-existence and collective growth to achieve common goals. Love, peace and cooperation are the founding pillars of this philosophy.

Binoy mentions that, “The salt Satyagraha is illustrative of the various conceptual components underlying Gandhi’s integrated communication praxis. The rotating bigger wheel represents Gandhian communication praxis as a core activity, shaped by an ongoing cycle of actions and reflections. The reflections may lead to adjustments in actions, keeping the wheel in motion. The underlying structures holding the wheels of Gandhi’s communication praxis are pillars of humanity and morality.” Here moral and ethical values plays very important role. Our actions should speak louder than mere philosophical discourse. Unless and until these values are basis of our actions, Sustainable development will merely remain a distant thought far from reality.

Sustainable Rural development: There is no debate on the fact that for India's economy to be strong, it is essential that the rural economy should also grow. Gandhiji had this vision and always advocated that rural India should be empowered for real sustainable growth. As we envisage India to be one of the biggest economies of the world, this vision cannot be achieved if the 66% population who is residing in rural area is not touched upon.

The Gandhian plan of rural reconstruction was the meta-model of Indian development. It emphasized three dimensions: socio-economic development of localized need; village participation for self-development and self-reliance; and rural industrialization (Benoy Hazra). It emphasised that local needs have to be met by local participation and local resources. Gandhi Ji realised that if India has to grow, it has to be based on the fundamentals of inclusive growth. Evils of Poverty, illiteracy will have to be dealt with on priority. Standard of living had to be upgraded so as to protect the environment and achieve sustainable development. People wonder what the connection between poverty and environment? It is believed that poverty and environment degradation are connected in a way that majority of population in rural area is dependent on natural resources for livelihood. About 600 million population in rural area are directly dependent on climate sensitive sectors. That is why it is

quintessential for the government to frame policies, programs that target the development at grass root level. Past few decades have been challenging for both government and rural population. Growth cannot come at the cost of environment. Industrialization at one end has given employment but on the other hand has led to deforestation and degradation of environment.

As mentioned in research by Meenu Sharma & Shikha (JGC, 2016), The Gandhian model suggests the following steps to attaining a sustainable lifestyle. a) Sustainable agriculture: We should give up chemical fertilizers and pesticides and substitute them with bio-manures and bio-pesticides. b) Khadi and village industries are eco-friendly: They create employment and alleviate poverty. So we should promote khadi and products of village industries. c) Appropriate technologies: We should adopt technologies which are simple, and which our villagers are able to comprehend and operate themselves. The use of electricity should be avoided, or kept to the minimum. d) Renewable energy sources: Coal and petroleum are non-renewable energy sources and are getting exhausted very fast. Solar energy is limitless and inexhaustible. We can harness solar energy for heating and lighting. Water and wind energies can also be harnessed for producing electricity

Gandhian Thought & Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): India has been amongst pioneers in leading the world to set agenda for Sustainable development Goals. India signed the declaration with other countries for Sustainable Development through 17 SDGs at the UN's Sustainable Development Summit. In collaboration with UN in India pursued a rigorous research agenda to explore various aspects of India's negotiations, adoption and implementation of SDGs.

As per NitiAayog, The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are an ambitious commitment by world leaders which set out a universal and an unprecedented agenda which embraces economic, environmental and social aspects of the wellbeing of societies. The progress of the world to meet the SDGs, largely depends on India's progress. India played a prominent role in the formulation of SDGs and much of the country's National Development Agenda is mirrored in the SDGs. However, with 17 Goals, 169 targets and 306 national indicators, the SDGs might be difficult to grasp and understand. Defining and measuring success pose a challenge as well. Countries around the world have been considering how to

implement and measure success against the Goals. This dashboard presents SDG India Index 2018 analytics and shows how the progress on these goals will be measured in India. The indicators shall be refined, data collection and reporting processes shall be improved, and the potential for disaggregating data shall be explored over the coming years.



Reference: www.sdgindiaindex.socialcops.com

Experts say that India has, over the past years, directed its development pathway to meet its priorities of employment, economic growth, food, water and energy security, disaster resilience and poverty alleviation. India has also aimed to restore its natural capital and adopt transparent and robust governance along democratic lines. However, emerging challenges of climate change impacts, increasing inequities, and lagging human development indices are well recognised by both the citizens as well as the government. The post 2015 UN Sustainable Development Agenda framework provides an opportunity to renew and integrate efforts in order to meet, to a significant degree, national and global aspirations in a defined time frame.

In west, Gandhi ji is best known for Indian freedom struggle and his philosophy of non-violence. However, beyond the broad policy goals such as getting the independence of India and maintain the country's unity through dialogue between various communities, the Gandhian vision is much broader, relevant and deeper. Its different facets can be linked with modern ideas of sustainable development as they have emerged since the 70s.

Gandhian philosophy is not only inspired by the life experience based on daily practice of moral principles but also ideas from Indian civilization – Jainism, Buddhism and Hinduism – as well as Western civilization – Thoreau, Ruskin and Tolstoy.

It is primarily based on five main principles:**Swaraj**: Self-rule - The search for self-governance, democracy // **Swadeshi**: Self-sufficiency - Seeking economic independence / national and local self-sufficiency. // **Sarvodaya**: Unto this last - Prosperity for all, the pursuit of economic and social equity. // **Satyagraha**:The Truth Force - “Truth Force”, integrity. // Ahimsa / Non- violence - Safety for living beings, concern for others.

Gandhian Philosophy to Sustainability:Recall that three traditional pillars of sustainable development namely: Economic, Social and Environmental can be joined by the pillars of the Governance, Culture and finally and the North-South dimension.The five points of the doctrine of Non-violence can be linked to the 6 pillars of sustainable development. They affect indeed various fields of human life in society:

The social aspect with the focus on Dalit or “untouchables” (without questioning the caste system, unlike Dr.Ambedkar, Dalit defender and dalit himself), but also the women, by including them into the political and economic action in favor of independence.

The concept of Sarvodaya refers to the concern for the poor and to the matter of parity in gender relations. For upliftment of society, the poor and downtrodden have to be empowered.

The economic field, not just with a research for the economic independence of the society and the country, but also the economic empowerment of local communities in search for food self-sufficiency, energy, etc. It can be said that the concept of Swadeshi can be related to the issue of food sovereignty as well as to the circular economy.

The environmental field through research for ways of protecting environment and resource conservation.The concept of Ahimsa can be related to the research for maximum safety and thus towards the living than the preservation of the environment and natural resources.

The governance or political field through the promotion of a localised self-government, research participation of all including minorities (religious, social and sexual) in decision-making and governance. The concept of Swaraj refers to the integration of stakeholders and social responsibility for the company in one hand, but also participatory democracy in the other hand.

The cultural/ethics field through the promotion of individual responsibility toward everyone, a true moral action internalized and lived daily in every act of life.

The concept of Satyagraha can be compared to the philosophy of Care and trust in its wider dimension, which is to say, in the matter of caring for each other not only for his/her physical needs, but also for psychological and emotional health. It is putting 'us' in front of 'me'.

The field of North-South relationship through the claim of an independent political and a justice in international economic relationships.

Materialism Vs humanism: Olivier Flumian says that "Materialism and individualism are rejected by Gandhi. It emphasizes the responsibility for each Life, Creation, according to him, because of the phenomena of divine origin, the interdependence between all human beings and beyond among all living beings. Therefore there is a reciprocal relationship between humans and the living world and between this last one and the world in general. Human beings are responsible for one another because of the interdependence between them all. This responsibility applies between contemporaries but also for the human beings to come."

Gandhian vision is a radical critique of the Western development model. Gandiji's idea was based on progress at grass-root level but the western model primarily focuses on infinite growth of material goods and growth of individual liberty which would lead to ever-increasing needs and new routines.

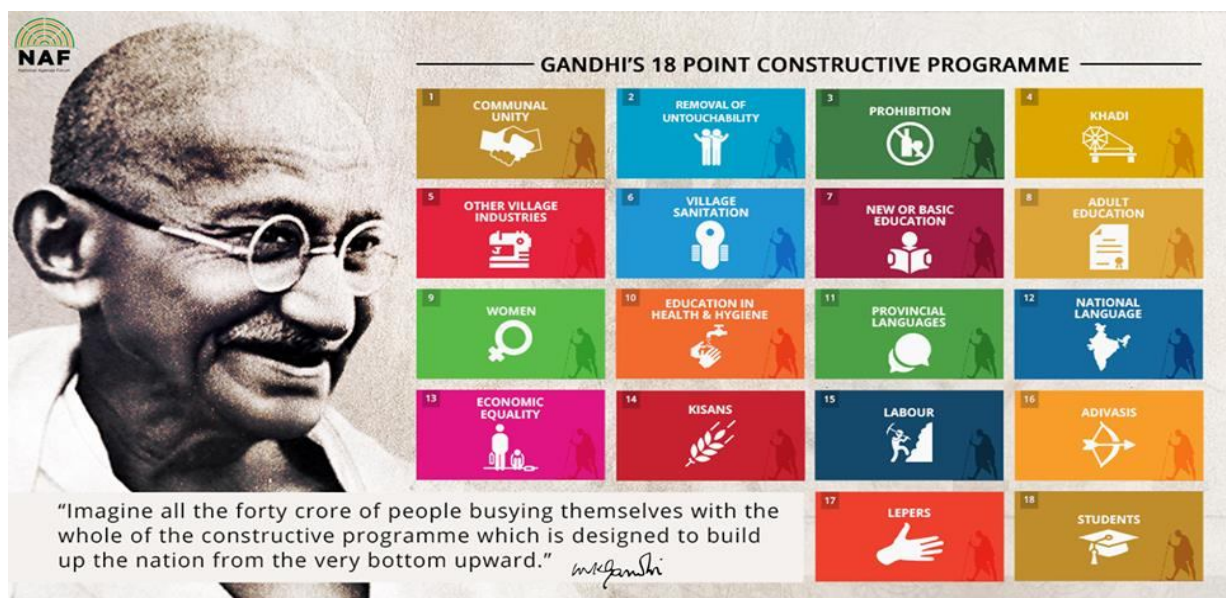
A spiritual foundation: Gandhian thought is universal today. It resounds with contemporary concerns around the major issues of democracy, equality, international solidarity, economic and social justice, inter-cultural and interfaith dialogue, preservation of the environment.

Olivier says that, Gandhian Thought has a spiritual foundation of ecumenical origin in which the believers of all faiths, even atheists and agnostic people, can relate. Apart from this spiritual aspect which everyone is free to join or not, it can legitimately inspire everyone involved in the construction of an economically viable world, socially equitable and ecologically sustainable.

Mahatma Gandhi's Principles, SDGs & India:

Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of our Nation, is recognized the world over for his teachings on peace, non-violence and more importantly self-sustainability. His teachings are therefore even more relevant today, at a time when the world is grappling with an imminent socioeconomic and environmental crisis in the form of poverty, employment, global warming and climate change. (Harshith Gokulendra)

It is interesting that these thoughts have their roots in what was envisioned by Mahatma Gandhi through his 18 Point Constructive Programme – a part of Satyagraha.



18-Point Constructive Programme written by Mahatma Gandhi in 1945

Gandhi once said, "Recall the face of the poorest and weakest man you have seen, and ask yourself if this step you contemplate is going to be any use to him." It is this thinking, which was reflected in the Millennium Development Goals for the world and is now even more central in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). United Nations has always honoured

Mahatma Gandhi for his commitment towards peace, humanity and non-violence. It is no doubt that his principles have a constructive effect on the UN in bringing up a paradigm shift in development thinking for the world.

Mahatma Gandhi, throughout his life advocated the principle of sustainable development and called for harmony between society, development and environment. Gandhiji had highlighted how water, air and grains are the three basic amenities required by every human being on a daily basis. These resources were to be, therefore, given utmost care and be conserved.

Mahatma Gandhi worked for every section of the society and believed in the concept of inclusive growth, which is for all and not just for a chosen few. Gandhi's way of living enlightens us about the connection between his futuristic thought process towards sustainable development way back in 1940s and SDGs drafted in 2015.

If the SDGs are likely to drive India's futuristic planning and development processes, do we have an ideology, philosophy or principles to make India the front-runner in achieving SDGs by 2030? No one had better grasped the nature of the long and winding road to the sustainable future we want than Mahatma Gandhi himself. SDGs were generated through four years of participation of millions of people around the world and not by a select set of experts huddled in a board room. It emphasizes Gandhi's importance for citizen's participation in defining India's priorities.

Conclusion: It is rightly said that the thought of Sustainable Development is the catalyst for the various factors needed for the existence of the present and future generations. Gandhi ji's model of humanity & non-violent development justifies the key elements of sustainable development. The biggest false notion human beings have is of the ownership of Planet Earth and the self-proclaimed right to exploit it for sustenance. It is thus important for us to protect the environment and preserve the carrying capacity of Mother Earth. It's high time that we should leave the materialistic lifestyle and evaluate our desires, wants thus aligning our needs towards sustainable way of life. Gandhi ji always kept room for harmonious growth of all with his basic principle of "live and let others live". We see him as the greatest believer in the concept of sustainable development and his ways touches each and every human being and reminds us for individual development of mind, body and soul, development of non-violence

among the societies and nations, cooperation to the good and non-cooperation to the evil, wealth generation and utilization for the goodness of humanity.

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