



## WORLD PEACE AND ENVIRONMENT: GANDHIAN PERSPECTIVE

**Dr. Pankoj Kanti Sarkar**

Assistant Professor

Department of Philosophy

Debra Thana S.K.S Mahavidyalaya

Paschim Medinipur, West Bengal

Mahatma Gandhi is well known for peace and nation building. His philosophy was based on human ethics for development of environment. Gandhi's concept of peace is also a broad one. For him peace emerged from a way of life and it's closely linked up with justice, development and environment.

We all know that we are in an environmentally endangered period, like Pesticides in the ground water, ozone holes and soaring extinction rates. When we think that we are distinct from the world, we also open up the possibility of its exploitation and destruction. Thus, we are the causes of destroying our environment. Humans must live in response to nature in encounter with their natural environment. Humans have a responsibility towards nature, is among the more recent philosophical discoveries, although not without precedent in the past.

Gandhi had insightful concern for nature and all living beings along with plants and animal kingdom. Gandhi's philosophy of *Sarvodaya* is based on the principle of well-being of all human as well as sentient beings. He led a life which was basically non-violent giving due respect to nature and its creations. Trusteeship is a socio-economic philosophy that was advocated by Mahatma Gandhi. It offers a means by which the rich people would be the trustees of trusts that looked after the welfare of the people in general. This concept was convicted by socialists as being in favor of the landlords, feudal princes and the capitalists. Gandhi's philosophy of life provides a sustainable development paradigm which is symbiotic with nature and ecosystem. In Gandhian edge of reference economy, ecology and spirituality are interrelated. That is why Gandhian economy is often referred to as 'economy of environment'.

The pattern of development has to be eco-development so far as Gandhi's philosophy is concerned. According Gandhi, such development is economic development based on ecological principles like environmental harmony, economic efficiency, resource (including energy) conservation, local self-reliance and equity with social justice. Natural resources have to be protected and sustained not only for humankind, but also for other species; and not only for this generation, but also for generations to follow. To manage and sustain the earth's resources, the approach must not be centred on any one species like the human being, but should encompass the entire life-support system. Thus, people will have to work with nature, and aims at not wasting resources unnecessarily, nor interfering with other species. Gandhi was concerned about



sustainability, both in his individual life and for all humankind. He wrote, "We cannot have ecological movement designed to prevent violence against Nature, unless the principle of non-violence becomes central to the ethos of human culture"<sup>i</sup>.

Gandhi himself believed that non-violence is definitely superior to violence; forgiveness is manlier than punishment. He imagined a peaceful society free from any sort of violence which is built on the principle of violence. Non-violence is defined in some modern discourses as a philosophy and strategy for social change that rejects the use of physical violence. As such, non-violence is an alternative to passive acceptance of oppression and armed struggle against it. Practitioners of non-violence may use diverse methods in their campaigns for social change, including critical forms of education and persuasion, aggressive civil disobedience and non-violent direct action and targeted manipulation of mass media. With the rise of systematic philosophy and religious concept, the concept of non-violence gradually came into existence. Non-violent movements, leaders and advocates have at times referred to, drawn from and utilized many diverse religious bases for non-violence within their respective struggle. However the concept of non-violence is not same in all its sources. For example, the Buddhist theory of non-violence is not categorical as its counterpart in Jainism. The present notion of non-violence is closely associated with the great Indian, political, social activist and thinker M K Gandhi. For his theory, Gandhi acknowledged his debt to Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Thoreau, Tolstoy and many other sources. Neither was he the first activist who practiced non-violence. In the 1830s a 'Non-Resistance Society' was founded by William Lloyd Garrison and his friends to fight slavery by non-violent means in Boston. But Gandhi was the inventor of a radically new form of non-violent struggle which is to be distinguished from 'passive resistance'. The notion of *Satya* or truth is central to Gandhian concept of non-violence and to signal the difference from other notion of non-violence, he forged the term *Satyagraha* which is the logical outcome of his own theory of non-violence. The clarification and explanation of all the above are of course come into the purview of my proposed thesis but our main concern is how to realize a non-violent society.

Non-violent action generally comprises three categories, The first, Acts of Protest and Persuasion, which include protest marches, vigils, public-meetings and tools such a banners, placards, candles, flowers and the like; secondly, Non-cooperation, the deliberate and strategic refusal to co-operate with an injustice; and thirdly, Non-violent Intervention, the deliberate and often physical intervention into a perceived unjust event, such as blockades, occupations, sit-ins, tree sittings, truck cavalcades to name a few.

India is a unique in its religious, linguistic and cultural diversity. It is really difficult to produce unity and harmony in such a country by non- violent means where the inherent tendency of groups is to dominate over the other (there may be some exceptions). Moreover, complete non-violence cannot be realized until and unless a harmony in the world as a whole is produced. It's a



difficult task is to see whether and how such a non-violent society can be established. However, it is fundamentally irrational to use violence to achieve a peaceful society. A non-violent society cannot be brought into existence by violent means.

We all know that the thought of Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau's are on unity, fellow-feeling, friendship and above all, non-violence are the ways to form a good society. Non-violence is the demand of a society to be formed. From the Vedic period to the period of Jaina and Buddha, non-violence was the guiding principle that was practiced and closely related to the everyday life of the people of India. The Indian religious traditions have given utmost importance to the principle 'do not harm' and '*Shanti*'. Buddhism and Jainism have been the greatest challenge in this regard. Both these religious tenets uphold the principle of non-violence. Hinduism also in its later period, tried to accommodate this principle. The whole Christian message is of love, peace and compassion. In modern times, Gandhi's principle of non-violence is the soul force that has influenced so many societies and countries. His concept of non-violence is our inspiration and weapon to fight against violence.

A recent study of Gandhi, which describes him as "a practicing ecological yogi," makes the point that Gandhi bound himself to the observance of a certain set of rules of conduct. Some of these rules prescribe what a human being should do. T.N.Khoshoo suggests that it is from these environmental and ethical principles, which variously counsel us to practice austerity, introspect on the self, cultivate contentment, learn self-reliance, renounce possessions beyond our needs, and always keep in mind the interests of the weakest and the poor, that Gandhi derived his political movement, and it is in these same principles, argues Khoshoo, that Gandhi worked to develop his ideas of 'sustainable development'.<sup>ii</sup> Even Gandhi deplored the idea of waste, and fasting was a sure means of ascertaining the true needs of the body and preserving its ecological equanimity. One instance, among numerous, indicates the eco-sensitivity of Gandhi. One occasion, a cobra would come into Gandhi's room. There were clear instructions that it was not to be killed even if it bit Gandhi, though Gandhi did not prevent others from killing snakes. Gandhi says, "I do not want to live at the cost of the life even of a snake."<sup>iii</sup> As a proponent of deep ecologist, Gandhi treats animals, insects, and plants as persons. His theory of non-violence actually helps him to realise the harmonious relationship with nature.

We all know that the Chipko movement of Chandi Prasad and Vandana Shiva provides the best insight into the structural dimension of Gandhian ecology: its steadfast adherence to a nonviolent and self-reliant ecological philosophy. In fact, the Chipko movement stresses harmonious and sustainable relations between humans and nature. Human must respect nature as an extension of themselves and, therefore, interact with the natural 'communities' with respect and compassion. Chandi Prasad reveals the inner logic of Gandhian non-violent ecology when he says: "Our movement goes beyond the erosion of land, to the erosion of human values.... The centre of all of this is humankind. If we are not in a good relationship with the environment, the environment



will be destroyed, and we will lose our ground. But if we halt the erosion of humankind, humankind will halt the erosion of the soil.”<sup>iv</sup> Whatever else a Gandhian ecology may be, it will begin with individual and collective self-rule ( *swaraj*) promised upon truth (*satya*) , non-violence (*ahimsa*), and self-sacrificial actions (*tapas*). It will, therefore, insist upon respect and compassion for all creatures and for nature itself. Moreover, Gandhian ecology will interweave religious, economic, and political dimensions of life on both the personal and corporate levels. As the Chipko movement reveals, a Gandhian ecology is both an economic and a political mode of living that is expressed in practical environmental actions that are grounded in ultimate values and truth-seeking. This is said to be the inner logic of Gandhian ecology that addresses the practical environment.

Gandhi was a visionary environmentalist who realised environmental crisis from his unfathomable heart. We can conceive Gandhi as an ecological day-tripper. He says, “I need no inspiration other than nature. She has never failed me yet. She mystifies me, bewilders me, send me into ecstasies.” Man’s capacity to destroy both nature and the man had side-traced *Gandhian ideology of simple living and high thinking*. Even today Sorokin like Gandhi, named the modern Western civilisation as *Sensate Civilisation* where masses would have no future and would be completely lost if they do not abandon the utterly ego-centric and homo-centric stance. Man can save himself only if he persists with his altruistic attitude, engages him with other regarding activities, ecologically conscious. He has to realise that ‘small is beautiful rather than big’. “I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the winds of all countries to blow about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any.”<sup>v</sup>

Gandhi believed that the rich people could be persuaded to part with their wealth to help the poor. Putting it in Gandhiji’s words “Supposing I have come by a fair amount of wealth either by way of legacy, or by means of trade and industry I must know that all that wealth does not belong to me; what belongs to me is the right to an honourable livelihood, no better than that enjoyed by millions of others. The rest of my wealth belongs to the community and must be used for the welfare of the community.”<sup>vi</sup> The resource is provided for humanity as a whole in space and for all times and not for this generation but also for future generation. It is totally incompatible with this notion that any one generation adopts such a lifestyle that it causes the loss or reduction in the quality or quantity of the resources that nature provides. Indeed this would almost amount to sacrilege and also theft from future generations of their rightful inheritance.

Therefore, World peace in true sense can only be sustained within the parameter of eco-philosophy where diversity, holism, interdependencies and relations among all species are sought for. Eco-philosophy deals with metaphysical ecology where questions like what is human nature, what is the relation of humans to the rest of nature and what is reality are examined. Eco-



philosophy thus gives rise to an ethical analysis where a better understanding of the world relies on ecology can be realized. Eco-philosophy through ecological realization has pleaded for an all-encompassing world-view by universalizing ecological concepts. It holds that humans are inseparable from the rest of the nature, i.e. humans are fundamentally a part of their surroundings. The inseparability between humans and the rest of the natural species actually hinges on two norms, i.e., self-realization and biocentric equality. Self-realization is a process through which people come to understand themselves as existing in a through interconnectedness with the rest of nature. Biocentric equality, on the other hand, is the recognition that all biotic species as well as abiotic environment are equally parts of an interrelated whole and therefore has equal intrinsic worth. World peace as such hinges on the self-examination, self-evaluation of individuals through which individuals can realize that deeper, more central and lasting or sustainable interests are more worthy than trivial, superficial and temporary interests. Self-realization is a process of self-examination, self-evaluation where humans can conceive themselves as part of a greater whole. It is a process where an individual can realize that there underlies no ontological gap between humans and non-humans., between self and other. Such process of realization actually adheres to Gandhi's notion of enlightened being where 'he who sees the same, the over soul or self in everything and hence is not alienated from anything'. So realization of one self with other through transition is a relational whole where every citizen of the biotic as well as a biotic are inter-related with each other and this inter-relation is made possible with mutual trust, cooperation, care and love.

The concept of 'ahimsa' as used by Gandhi brings the message of love and care. Gandhi emphasized the interconnectedness of all life forms which are organically unified. The individual good and flourishing is to be realized in the good of the whole whose balance and stability deserve the sacrifice of the individual. More succinctly, it can be said that self-realization is a thought process where one can conceive that his own flourishing actually hinges on the flourishing of others. Thus, by pleading an organic and holistic conception of reality, Gandhi conceives a deeper support to morality and religious concern for the environment which will definitely bring and sustain world peace.

**Notes:**

- i. Khoshoo T. N. *Mahatma Gandhi: an apostle of applied human ecology*, Tata Energy Research Institute, New Delhi, 1995, p.17.
- ii. Ibid. p.8.
- iii. Gandhi, M.K. *Truth Is God*, Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1959, p.102.
- iv. Shepard, M. *Gandhi Today: A Report on Mahatma Gandhi's Successors*, Seven Locks Press, 1987, p. 80.



- v. Mukhopadhyay, D. *Folk Arts and Social Communication*, Publications Division Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, 2017.
- vi. Gandhi, M. *India of My Dreams*, Rajpal & Sons, Delhi, 2009. P. 69.

**References:**

1. Naess, A. *Gandhi and Group Conflict: An Exploration of Satyagraha Theoretical Background*. Universitetsforlaget, 1974.
2. Khoshoo, T. N. *Mahatma Gandhi: An Apostle of Applied Human Ecology*, Tata Energy Research Institute, 1995.
3. Gandhi, M.K. *Truth Is God*, Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1955.
4. Gullapalli, S & Mishra, R.P. edit. *World Peace and Global Order: Gandhian Perspectives*, Pentagon Press, 2013.
5. Mathur, J. S. *Contemporary Society: Gandhian Appraisal 01 Edition*, Gyan Publishing House, 2010.
6. Sharma, A. K. *Gandhian Perspectives on Population and Development*, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi, 1996.
7. Sharma R.C. *Gandhian Environmentalism*, Global Vision Publishing House .2003.