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**YEARS OF  
CELEBRATING  
THE MAHATMA**

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## Environmental Issues and Mahatma Gandhi

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### Abstract:

Modern industrial civilization has had a huge impact on human kind as well as on the environment. Gandhi believed that it propagates nothing other than the hunger for wealth and the greedy pursuit of world. The environmental concern as we understand today was not there at the time of Gandhi but his ideas on development, technology, self sufficiency, village swaraj etc. disclose his environmental concern. Whatever environmental issues are raised today were understood and picked-up by Gandhi several decades before.

**Key Words: Environment, science, Gandhi, human, industry**

**Environment** - the surroundings or conditions in which a person, animal, or plant lives or operates.

We live in a world in which science technology and development play important roles in changing human destiny. However, over exploitation of natural resources for the purpose of development leads to serious environmental hazards, in the present situation in the name of development, we are unethically plundering natural resources. It is true that a science does not respect nature's needs and a development which does not respect people's needs threatens human survival.

The green thoughts of Gandhi give us a new vision to harmonize nature with the needs of people. Gandhi was not an environmentalist in the modern sense, and also did not create a green philosophy, or write nature's poems, he is described as an "apostle of applied human ecology". It is a fact that environmental concerns were minimal in Gandhi's time; but many environmental writers consider him an early environmentalist. His views on nature are scattered throughout his writings. 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 our fellow beings. His ideas that "nature has enough to satisfy everyone's needs, but not to satisfy anybody's greed".<sup>2</sup>

This statement clearly shows that when human beings became greedy day by day for their comfort and luxurious life they started exploiting the natural resources, and the finding results are seen as increasing in natural disasters, climate change, increasing in global warming, the depletion of the ozone layer etc. "Without major societal changes over the next decade, the planet will face a global environmental catastrophe that will cause or worsen war, poverty, water shortages and Massive species die-offs and huge numbers of animal species will disappear from the earth."<sup>3</sup>

There's no doubt humans have been the main part of the problem and that's why there is a need to create a solution. So Gandhi's ideas on environmental issues are always relevant and became one line ethic to modern environmentalism. Gandhi considered the earth a living organism and his ideas were expressed in terms of two fundamental laws. Cosmic law and the law of species, where cosmic law views the entire universe as a single entity and the law of species Gandhi believed that without the co-operation and sacrifice of both human and non-human beings evolution is not possible.

His social, economic and political ideas were framed on the understanding of interdependence of the whole universe. As Gandhi envisaged, non violence has the power to solve many problems, including ecological crisis. Many thinkers considered the Indian Environmental movements like Chipko Movement, Narmada Bachao Andolan etc. as the living example of Gandhian Environmentalism. As they believed Gandhi as a "man with deep ecological view of life, a view much too deep even for deep ecology". The key agenda of the chipko movement was that carrying forward the vision of Gandhi's mobilization for a new society, where neither man nor nature is exploited and destroyed, which was the civilizational response to a threat to human survival"<sup>5</sup>

In the context of modern India he appeared as a ruralist. "He stood of safe

guarding the integrity and foundations of the villages. His heart bled to see the disintegration and utter ruin of Indian countryside. Gandhi saw that India lived in the villages. Hence his slogan "Back to the Villages" was not an abstraction or a reactionary trend. Even the Marxists have recognized that a balance has to be established between the rural and the urban centres"<sup>6</sup>

Modern Industrial civilization has had a great impact on human kind as well as on the environment, as "Gandhi believed that it propagates nothing other than the hunger for wealth and the greedy pursuit of worldly pleasures"<sup>7</sup>. *Hind Swaraj*, Published in 1909, criticizes the modern civilization as 'Satanic'. It observed that machinery is the chief symbol of modern civilization and it represents a great sin. While the western environmentalists spread the message of "going back to the nature", Gandhi spread the message of "going back to the villages". He believed that the blood of the village is the cement with which the edifice of the cities is built"<sup>8</sup>.

Europe became the guiding aspect of that civilization "by 1980s it was realized that such an approach would degrade the environment beyond repair and cause unimaginable consequences to the very existence of the planet. An institutionalized approach in the form of The World Commission on Environment and Development under the Chairmanship of Harlem Brundtland was set up to find remedies to the problem. It produced a report in 1987 entitled "Our Common Future" which stressed on the ability of mankind to make development sustainable".<sup>9</sup> "The Living Planet" a report of the World Wildlife Foundation released in 2006 clearly stated that "in 1980s it was realized that the Humanity's footprint first grew larger than global biocapacity"<sup>10</sup> disturbing the subtle balance of the planet earth. The Human Development Report 2007-08 on the theme Fighting Climate Change: Human Solidarity in a Divided World also critically looked at the modern development.

Other countries are also greatly inspired by Gandhi and that is felt by them. Vision of Gandhi provides the remedy to create a new civilization the foundation of which is

based on discipline, restraint and morality. It is heartening to note that the recent literature being brought out in the western world is eloquently following the vision of Mahatma Gandhi. A book "Surviving the Century: Facing Climate Chaos" edited by Professor Herbert Girardet and brought out by the World Future Council stresses on measures suggested by Mahatma Gandhi in the beginning of the twentieth century."<sup>11</sup> The book argues for an approach which would speak for the earth community. It suggests that such an approach can be devised if we become non-violent, respect nature, follow the path of sustainable development and ensure justice to the poor. All those aspects remained central to Mahatma Gandhi's life and work.

"The Time Magazine in its 9th April 2007 issue came out with 51 Global Warming Survival Guides. The 51st Guide earnestly suggests to share more, consume less and to simplify life"<sup>12</sup>. In other words the Time Magazine, one of the mouth pieces of the western world, is turning to Mahatma Gandhi to save the world from the danger of extinction caused by global warming.

#### Suggestions

**People should follow things to save environment such as :-**

Host a recycling drive, Reduce use of disposable plastics, Host own event to clean and beautify your community, Plant own vegetable garden, Support local farmer's market, Conserve energy, Print as little as necessary, Save electricity, Save water, Avoid taking cars when possible, Get charged up with renewables, Use energy wisely, Help put a price on pollution, Consume less, Waste less, Divest from fossil fuels etc.

#### Conclusion:-

In the post- Gandhian-era, environmental problems surfaced at a breakneck speed with large scale and indiscriminate industrialization leading to environmental hazards and degradations. Gandhi's counter thinking is now increasingly becoming a mainstream thought with greater awareness of the environmental prob