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**Gandhian Philosophy and Environmental Awareness:  
A Path to Sustainable Development**

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**Abstract**

*In the words of Mahatma Gandhi, "Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's need but not any man's greed." This profound statement encapsulates Gandhi's deep understanding of environmental stewardship and sustainable living. Gandhi, one of the most influential leaders and thinkers of the 20th century, offered a visionary perspective on the relationship between humanity and the natural world, advocating for a lifestyle rooted in simplicity, self-sufficiency, and respect for the environment.*

*This paper explores Gandhi's philosophical and practical views on environmental consciousness and sustainable development. Central to Gandhi's philosophy was the belief that all life forms are interconnected and that humans must coexist harmoniously with nature. He argued that the Earth's resources are finite and should be used judiciously, warning against the perils of unchecked industrialization, consumerism, and the relentless exploitation of natural resources. His critique of these practices remains highly relevant today, emphasizing the importance of ethical and responsible development that prioritizes the well-being of the planet.*

*Gandhi's reverence for nature was not merely theoretical but was reflected in his daily life. His commitment to living simply, minimizing waste, and advocating for self-reliance exemplified his vision of sustainable living. By practicing what he preached, Gandhi demonstrated that sustainable development is not just a concept but a way of life.*

*The paper further examines how Gandhi's ideas can inspire contemporary movements focused on environmental justice, social equity, and ecological balance. In a world grappling with climate change, resource depletion, and social inequalities, Gandhi's approach offers a timeless and holistic paradigm. His insights challenge us to integrate ethical considerations into our development strategies, fostering a future that is not only sustainable but also just and equitable.*

*Re-examining Gandhi's teachings provides valuable lessons for addressing today's ecological and developmental challenges. By embracing his principles of simplicity, self-sufficiency, and harmony with nature, we can work towards a more sustainable and ethical world, ensuring that the Earth's resources are preserved for future generations.*

**Key terms:** Sustainability, Environment, Gandhian View, Contemporary World, Industrialization etc.

**Introduction**

*Mahatma Gandhi*, revered as a profound philosopher, eminent educationist, and steadfast advocate for sustainable development, had an enduring love for nature. His lifestyle, marked by simplicity, was deeply intertwined with the natural world. *Gandhi* championed the principles of "simple living and high thinking," contrasting sharply with the consumerist ethos of his time. While he opposed the extravagant consumption

fostered by consumerism, he did not reject industrialization outright. Instead, he critiqued the excessive sophistication and resource depletion driven by consumer culture, which led to increased waste and pollution. (*Gandhi, 1997*)

In contemporary times, biodiversity faces severe threats from ozone depletion, the *greenhouse effect*, *climate change*, and the overexploitation of natural resources by modern society. *Gandhi's* philosophy was rooted in

opposition to the excessive use and exploitation of these resources. (Guha, 2006) He actively protested against human greed that led to environmental degradation, advocating for a lifestyle that aligned harmoniously with nature.

*Gandhi's* approach to life emphasized minimalism and efficiency in the use of natural resources. His commitment to a conservative lifestyle and his deep compassion for the environment reflected his belief in respecting and preserving the natural world. His teachings remain a timeless reminder of the importance of living in harmony with nature and using resources judiciously. (Jones, 2000)

This paper seeks to critically review and analyze *Mahatma Gandhi's* perspectives on the contemporary world, particularly in relation to environmental and sustainability issues. It also explores the enduring relevance and applicability of *Gandhi's vision* in addressing today's pressing environmental challenges. By examining *Gandhi's* critique of industrialization and modernity—often cited as key contributors to environmental degradation—this paper reclaims Gandhi as a unique environmentalist whose ideas offer valuable insights for contemporary sustainability efforts.

*Gandhi's* approach to modern civilization was nuanced and multifaceted. While he vehemently opposed many aspects of modernity that he believed led to moral and environmental decline, he was not entirely dismissive of its virtues. Gandhi recognized the importance of values like equality and freedom, which modern civilization often champions, and he acknowledged that certain advancements could contribute positively to society if used responsibly. (Joshi, 2001)

Contrary to the common perception that Gandhi was entirely against industrialization, his views were more balanced. He harbored a realistic and optimistic outlook on the potential benefits of industrial progress, provided it was guided by ethical considerations. *Gandhi's* primary concern was not with machinery or industrialization per se, but with their misuse and the excessive reliance on them, which he believed could lead to exploitation and environmental harm. He famously remarked, “*No one is opposed to machinery. Our opposition is to its misuse, or its excessive use.*” This statement reflects his belief that technological and industrial advancements should be evaluated based on their broader impact on human life, society, and the environment. (Khoshoo and Moolakkattu, 2009)

*Gandhi* urged people to assess the consequences of industrialization and modernity with a critical eye, considering how these forces affect various aspects of human existence, including environmental sustainability. He advocated for a development model that prioritizes the well-being of people and the planet over the relentless pursuit of material growth. (Kolge and Sreekumar, 2006)

The environment encompasses the entirety of the natural world surrounding us. It includes the sky above, the earth beneath our feet, and all living organisms with whom we share this planet. Essentially, the environment consists of both natural and man-made elements, as well as the conditions and effects shaped by physical, cultural, and social processes. (Gupta, 2015)

Today, the state of the environment is a pressing concern for socially conscious individuals, international organizations, and governments worldwide. Challenges such as *global warming, climate change, pollution,* and the scarcity of clean water have become critical issues that demand immediate attention. While there is growing awareness of the detrimental effects of *global warming,* and various initiatives have been undertaken to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, questions remain about the role of science and technology in addressing these problems.

Environmentalists argue that while science and technology can help manage renewable and non-renewable resources, they are not a panacea. They emphasize that the environment and development are intrinsically linked and caution against the exploitation of nature in the name of progress. The attempt to dominate or conquer nature often results in severe consequences, such as natural disasters—*floods, droughts, earthquakes, and landslides*—that science and technology cannot always control. These calamities are a stark reminder of the unsustainable development practices that disrupt the delicate balance of the natural world. (Mebratu, 2015)

This paper delves into how *Mahatma Gandhi's* philosophy of *non-violence (ahimsa), truth (satya),* and *self-reliance (swaraj)* can serve as a foundation for an ecological worldview that honors the harmony and interdependence of all life forms. *Gandhi's* principles offer a holistic approach to environmental stewardship, advocating for a way of life that is in tune with nature, rather than one that seeks to exploit it.

Moreover, the paper explores how *Gandhi's* ideas can inspire contemporary movements aimed at promoting environmental justice, social equity, and ecological balance. (Hicks, 2007) His vision challenges us to rethink the relationship between development and the environment, urging us to adopt practices that are sustainable, equitable, and respectful of the natural world.

Summary, the paper underscores the significance and relevance of *Gandhi's* vision in addressing the global environmental crisis. By revisiting his teachings, we can gain valuable insights into creating a more sustainable and just world, where development is aligned with the principles of ecological balance and respect for all life. *Gandhi's* philosophy offers a timeless guide for navigating the complex environmental challenges of our time, reminding us that true progress lies in living harmoniously with the Earth.

### Research Objective of Study

The objectives of the study are:

- Analyze Gandhian principles promoting environmental responsibility and sustainability.
- Explore the impact of Gandhian thought on modern ecological practices.
- Assess Gandhian philosophy's relevance to sustainable development strategies today.

### Research Methodology of the Study

This research adopts a multidisciplinary approach, integrating historical analysis and content analysis to thoroughly examine *Gandhi's* perspectives on environmental and sustainability issues. By employing

historical analysis, the study traces the evolution of *Gandhi's* thoughts and actions concerning the environment, contextualizing them within the broader socio-political landscape of his time. This method allows for a deeper understanding of how *Gandhi's* ideas on sustainability were shaped by the challenges and experiences of his era.

Content analysis, on the other hand, is used to systematically explore *Gandhi's writings, speeches, and other relevant texts*. This approach helps to identify key themes, principles, and patterns in *Gandhi's* environmental philosophy, providing insights into his critique of industrialization, his advocacy for simple living, and his emphasis on the interconnectedness of all life forms. By analyzing these sources, the research uncovers the underlying principles that guided *Gandhi's* views on sustainable development and highlights their relevance to contemporary environmental challenges.

Together, these methods enable a comprehensive examination of *Gandhi's* contributions to environmental thought, offering a nuanced perspective on how his ideas can inform modern sustainability practices. This interdisciplinary approach ensures that the study not only captures the historical context of *Gandhi's* views but also explores their enduring significance in addressing today's ecological and sustainability issues.

### Findings of the Study

#### Gandhian View on Environment and Sustainability

*Mahatma Gandhi* emphasized the significance of self-control over both body and mind, drawing from the principles of '*Yama*' and '*Niyama*' found in religious scriptures as a means of self-discipline. The concept of '*Yama*' pertains to an ethical code of conduct that governs interactions with living beings and the material world, particularly in relation to natural resources. *Gandhi* adhered to five *Yamas* to promote the conservation and protection of these resources:



- **Ahimsa (Non-Violence):** *Ahimsa* is the principle of *non-violence* towards all *forms of life, including birds, insects, plants, animals, and other organisms*. This principle advocates for the safety and well-being of all living creatures, thereby contributing to the maintenance of biodiversity and ecological balance. By practicing non-violence, one helps ensure the harmonious coexistence of all species and the preservation of the natural environment.
- **Satya (Truthfulness):** *Satya*, or truthfulness, emphasizes the honest and ethical use of natural resources. It involves recognizing and respecting the limits of nature, thus avoiding the destruction caused by excessive or reckless exploitation. By adhering to the principle of truthfulness, individuals contribute to the balance between genuine needs and excessive

desires, fostering peace and harmony within the natural world.

- **Asteya (Non-Stealing):** *Asteya* refers to refraining from the illegitimate use or theft of natural resources. This principle opposes practices like deforestation and other forms of environmental degradation. *Gandhi* viewed *Asteya* as a foundational element of environmental protection, advocating for the responsible and ethical use of resources to prevent their depletion.
- **Brahmacharya (Celibacy):** *Brahmacharya*, or celibacy, pertains to controlling one's desires and impulses, which includes managing birth rates and addressing population growth. By following this principle, one indirectly supports the reduction of pressure on natural resources, mitigating the negative impacts of overpopulation. A lower population growth rate can lead to more sustainable use of resources, benefiting future generations.
- **Aparigraha (Non-Acquisition):** *Aparigraha* means refraining from the accumulation of excess wealth and material possessions. This principle advocates for minimalism and the prudent use of resources, emphasizing the importance of contentment with what one has. By embracing *Aparigraha*, individuals contribute to the protection and conservation of natural resources, ensuring that they remain available for future generations.

Through the practice of these *Yamas*, *Gandhi* aimed to cultivate a lifestyle of environmental stewardship and self-restraint, ultimately promoting a sustainable and balanced relationship with nature.

#### Five Code of Conduct for Better Environment

*Mahatma Gandhi*, guided by principles from religious scriptures, practiced five self-imposed codes of conduct known as '*Niyamas*'. These *Niyamas* address the purification of the mind, body, and environment. *Gandhi's* approach to these principles included:



- **Kama (Desire):** *Kama* refers to sexual desire. *Gandhi* emphasized the importance of controlling this desire to manage population growth. By curbing excessive or unwanted desires, he believed individuals could contribute to mitigating overpopulation, which in turn helps reduce environmental strain and degradation.
- **Krodh (Anger):** *Krodh* signifies anger, which *Gandhi* identified as a root cause of conflict and environmental destruction. Anger often leads to warfare and other forms of violence that severely impact the environment. *Gandhi* pointed out that the use of destructive weapons, such as nuclear arms, exemplifies how anger and aggression can disrupt ecological balance and lead to widespread devastation.
- **Lobha (Greed):** *Lobha* stands for greed, a driving force behind excessive consumption and the overuse



of natural resources. *Gandhi* advocated for overcoming greed to prevent the misuse and depletion of these resources. By promoting moderation and contentment, he aimed to encourage the responsible use of resources and support their conservation.

- **Moha (Attachment):** *Moha* represents undue attachment to material wealth. *Gandhi* championed non-attachment as a way to counteract greed and prevent the overexploitation of natural resources. Excessive attachment often leads to the pursuit of more resources, which contributes to environmental degradation. *Gandhi*'s teachings encouraged a detached perspective to foster a more sustainable relationship with nature.
- **Ahankar (Ego):** *Ahankar* means undue pride or *ego*. *Gandhi* recognized that excessive self-importance often drives people to pursue more goods and services, which can lead to environmental harm. An inflated sense of ego can fuel consumerism and exploitation, exacerbating environmental degradation. *Gandhi*'s principle of humility sought to temper this ego-driven behavior and promote a more balanced and respectful approach to resource use.

Through the application of these *Niyamas*, *Gandhi* aimed to cultivate a disciplined lifestyle that aligns with environmental stewardship and personal integrity, ultimately fostering a more harmonious and sustainable relationship with the natural world.

#### Roots of Gandhian Environmentalism

*Mahatma Gandhi's* philosophy was deeply influenced by both Jainism and Buddhism, particularly Jainism's concept of *Sarabpranabad*, which emphasizes the sanctity of all life forms and advocates for non-violence. Jainism views nature as a living entity and teaches that individuals should strive to purify themselves by respecting and protecting the diverse forms of life on Earth. *Gandhi* was profoundly inspired by these teachings and sought to enhance the relationship between humanity and the environment. He believed that religion should play a role in maintaining ecological balance. (*Goudie, 2006*)

In addition to *Eastern philosophies*, *Gandhi* was also influenced by Western thinkers who shared his concern for the environment. John Ruskin, whose works highlighted the harmonious relationship between humans and nature, had a significant impact on *Gandhi*. Similarly, Henry David Thoreau, whose essay on civil disobedience inspired *Gandhi*, argued that while nature could thrive without humans, humans could not survive without nature. This view secured *Gandhi's* focus on the interconnection amid human beings and the environment.

Edward Carpenter, influenced by both John Ruskin and Hindu mysticism, advocated for a simple and nature-centric lifestyle. His critique of modern civilization deeply influenced *Gandhi's* first book, *Hind Swaraj*. *Gandhi* himself echoed this sentiment, stating, "I need no inspiration other than Nature's." (*Singh, 2021*) His vision was not rooted in a scientific understanding of nature but rather in a desire to promote social change with minimal harm to both people and the environment.

*Gandhi's* environmental philosophy also inspired activists such as Chandi Prasad Bhatt and Sunderlal

Bahuguna of the Chipko movement, and Medha Patkar and Baba Amte of the Narmada movement. (*Kumar, 2019*) These activists focused on the livelihood issues of marginalized communities, reflecting *Gandhi's* concern for social justice and environmental sustainability.

*Gandhi* was critical of materialism and warned against the perils of excessive consumption. He remarked, "The incessant search for material comforts and their multiplication is an evil. I make bold to say that the Europeans will have to remodel their outlook, if they are not to perish under the weight of the comforts to which they are becoming slaves." He prophetically cautioned that future generations might look back and question the consequences of their relentless pursuit of material wealth, asking, "What have we done?" This vision reflects *Gandhi's* enduring commitment to balancing human needs with environmental stewardship. (*Bawa, 2012*)

#### Gandhi and the Ecological View of Life

Although *Gandhi* is not traditionally recognized as an ecological philosopher and it may be challenging to classify him as a modern environmentalist, his principles and practices resonate deeply with those who advocate for environmental care, vegetarianism, and non-violence. The term 'ecology' originates from the Greek word 'oikos,' meaning 'household' or 'economy,' which reflects the interconnectedness of living systems and their environments. Thoreau's concept of economy, as explored in his work *Walden*, encompasses not just material wealth but also how we conduct ourselves, our speech, and our thoughts. *Gandhi* embodied this holistic approach in his various ashrams, emphasizing a lifestyle aligned with simplicity and respect for the environment. (*Gandhi, 2013*)

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines 'ecology' as the "*science of the economy of animals and plants*," highlighting the necessity to care for the relationships between living organisms and their environments. Ecology, therefore, implies a call to minimize wasteful practices and to manage our use of Earth's resources wisely. This involves a respectful and economical approach to our natural resources, ensuring that we use them thoughtfully and sustainably. (*Gandhi, 2008*)

A recent analysis of *Gandhi's philosophy*, which describes him as a "*practicing ecological yogi*," suggests that his environmental and ethical principles align closely with modern ideas of sustainability. *Gandhi's principles*—such as practicing austerity, engaging in *self-reflection*, *cultivating contentment*, *fostering self-reliance*, *renouncing unnecessary possessions*, and *prioritizing* the needs of the most vulnerable—were integral to his political and social movement. According to Khoshoo, these same principles underpin *Gandhi's* vision of "sustainable development." By integrating these values into his activism, *Gandhi* effectively laid the groundwork for contemporary discussions on sustainable living and environmental stewardship. (*Singh, 2010*)

#### Self-Reliance and Sustainable Development

Self-reliance is a fundamental goal of education, and *Mahatma Gandhi* emphasized its importance through the promotion of village handicrafts. He believed that fostering self-reliance among villagers was crucial for their economic and social development. *Gandhi*

championed the use of indigenous products and the principle of '*Swadeshi*' (supporting local goods) to enhance self-sufficiency and reduce dependence on external sources.

Central to Gandhi's vision was the use of the '*Charkha*' or spinning wheel. The Charkha symbolized more than just a tool for spinning cotton; it represented a commitment to rational and sustainable use of natural resources. By encouraging villagers to spin their own cloth, Gandhi promoted the conservation of resources and supported the local economy.

The Swadeshi movement, which advocated for the use of locally produced goods, was integral to Gandhi's approach. It aimed to protect both renewable resources (such as cotton and other agricultural products) and non-renewable resources (such as minerals used in industry). (Singh, 2016) By encouraging the production and consumption of Swadeshi goods, Gandhi sought to preserve the environment and promote sustainability.

Additionally, the revival of cottage industries and the emphasis on *Swadeshi goods contributed to economic self-reliance*. These local industries not only provided employment but also helped ensure that resources were used efficiently and responsibly. Through this approach, Gandhi aimed to build a sustainable framework where communities could thrive independently, ensuring the continued availability and preservation of natural resources for future generations. (Pathak, 2015)

#### Environment Protection and Conservation

*Mahatma Gandhi* referred to the Earth as '*Dharitrimata*,' meaning the Earth Mother, viewing it as a living entity that sustains all forms of life. This profound respect for the Earth guided his environmental ethos, encouraging practices that minimize harm to the environment. By promoting this reverence, Gandhi advocated for reducing the exploitation of natural resources, such as groundwater, trees, and wildlife.

He believed that respecting and worshiping plants could help diminish environmental pollution while fostering a deeper connection of love, care, and affection towards the natural world. *Gandhi's* commitment to vegetarianism stemmed from his belief that a plant-based diet supports wildlife and biodiversity, reducing harm to animals and preserving ecological balance.

*Gandhi's* principle of *non-violence (Ahimsa)* extended beyond human interactions to encompass the natural world. He saw non-violence as a means to prevent the exploitation and destruction of nature, advocating for a harmonious coexistence with the environment. For Gandhi, the universe was a single, interconnected family, a concept he encapsulated in the phrase '*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*,' meaning "*the world is one family*."

This worldview opposed activities such as hunting, deforestation, and the reckless exploitation of natural resources. Gandhi's philosophy underscored the importance of safeguarding the ecosystem and promoting sustainable practices. Through his teachings, he encouraged a holistic approach to environmental stewardship, integrating respect for nature into the fabric of daily life and societal values.

#### Constitutional Provisions and Gandhian Thought on Environment

The provisions outlined in the *Directive Principles of State Policy (Articles 36-51)* and the Fundamental Duties of the Indian Constitution embody Gandhian principles and reflect his environmental philosophy. Specifically, Article 48-A states that "The State shall endeavour to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard the forests and wildlife of the country." This article underscores the state's responsibility to preserve wildlife and maintain ecological balance, echoing Gandhi's commitment to environmental protection.

Furthermore, *Article 51A(g)* asserts that "*It shall be the duty of every citizen of India to protect and improve the natural environment, including forests, lakes, rivers, and wildlife, and to have compassion for living creatures.*" This provision enshrines the responsibility of individuals to contribute to environmental conservation and demonstrates compassion for all forms of life, aligning with Gandhi's principles of non-violence and respect for nature.

These constitutional provisions highlight the influence of Gandhi's environmental thought on India's legal framework. They emphasize the importance of protecting wildlife and maintaining biodiversity as essential components of sustainable development. By incorporating *Gandhi's* environmental ideals into the Constitution, India recognizes the crucial role that safeguarding natural resources and fostering ecological balance play in achieving long-term sustainability.

#### Conclusion

- *Mahatma Gandhi's* profound insights into environmental and sustainability issues, articulated long before the contemporary environmental movement took shape, continue to resonate powerfully in today's context. His advocacy for simplicity, *self-reliance*, and *non-violence* as fundamental principles provides a compelling framework for addressing current environmental challenges while fostering a more just and equitable society.
- **Conclusion for Objective 1**
- *Gandhian* principles, rooted in *simplicity, non-violence, and self-sufficiency*, offer a strong foundation for promoting environmental responsibility. By advocating for minimal resource use, local production, and non-exploitative practices, Gandhi's vision aligns closely with modern sustainability ideals. His concept of *Sarvodaya* (the welfare of all) extends to the environment, emphasizing that human progress should not come at the cost of ecological degradation. This philosophy remains a valuable framework for addressing contemporary environmental challenges.
- **Conclusion for Objective 2**
- The influence of *Gandhian* thought on modern ecological practices can be seen in movements advocating for *renewable energy*, waste reduction, and ethical consumption. *Gandhi's* call for limiting materialism and fostering a balanced relationship with nature has inspired eco-friendly initiatives across the globe. From grassroots activism to policy frameworks, his ideas resonate in efforts aimed at reducing carbon footprints and promoting green

technologies, demonstrating the enduring relevance of his environmental consciousness in today's ecological movements.

- **Conclusion for Objective 3**
- **Gandhian philosophy** remains highly relevant to today's sustainable development strategies. His emphasis on harmony between human needs and nature serves as a guide for **creating development** models that prioritize environmental conservation alongside economic growth. By integrating **Gandhian** ethics into modern sustainability frameworks, society can aim for development that is equitable, non-exploitative, and long-term. The global move towards sustainable living echoes his principles, highlighting that true progress is only possible when the environment is protected for **future generations**.

### Significance of Research in Current Scenerio

In today's rapidly industrializing and consumer-driven world, this research offers valuable insights into how **Gandhian principles** can address the pressing environmental crises. It promotes an ethos of balance between development and ecological well-being, encouraging societies to adopt sustainable living practices that benefit both current and future generations. The study also provides ethical frameworks for individuals and communities to rethink their relationship with nature, making a strong case for sustainable development that prioritizes equity and environmental stewardship.

This study holds significant academic value as it enriches disciplines like **environmental studies**, philosophy, **political science**, and **sustainable development**. **Gandhian thought** serves as a unique blend of moral philosophy and practical action, offering students and scholars a comprehensive model for sustainable living. It encourages critical thinking, interdisciplinary research, and value-based education, contributing to academic discourse on sustainability. Additionally, integrating **Gandhian environmentalism** into educational curricula can inspire a new generation of environmentally conscious leaders who prioritize long-term ecological balance over short-term gains.

### Future Scope of the Study

The exploration of **Gandhian** thought and environmental consciousness presents vast potential for further study, particularly in the context of emerging global challenges like climate change, biodiversity loss, and unsustainable resource consumption. Future research can investigate the practical application of **Gandhian principles** in modern policymaking, sustainable agriculture, and renewable energy sectors. This study can also contribute to interdisciplinary approaches, connecting **Gandhian** ethics with technology, economics, and environmental sciences to craft holistic sustainability models. Additionally, the rising importance of eco-friendly lifestyles and circular economies makes this topic increasingly relevant to shaping future development policies.

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