

Gandhiji's 'Hind Swaraj' and Sustainable Development

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Abstract

Sustainable Development has become the catchword of the 21st century in every walks ranging from commerce, politics, policies and framing of law. Today, whatever is not sustainable or does not sustain the other aspects of the sphere like ecology, humanism, morals etc. is eschewed and not accepted. As the advancement in technology is going ahead and population of the world is going north, sustainable development has become a rage as well as the biggest challenge as whatever we have inherited and the prevailing goodness around has to be sustained for the posterity.

One of the greatest exponents of all round sustainable development, without naming the term, was Mahtama Gandhi. Gandhiji talked about all round sustainable development which is applicable in each and every aspect be it environment, personal physical, mental and spiritual health, politics, economics and law and justice. Perhaps, there is no greater exponent and intricate visionary of sustainable development for the human race than Gandhi.

His books 'Hind Swaraj', 'My Non-Violence', 'Story of My Experiments with Truth', 'Law and Lawyer' etc. discuss at length various aspects of sustainable development for an individual, industry, nation and humanity as a whole without the nomenclature.

In this research article, we will primarily touch sustainable development as discussed in 'Hind Swaraj' but will also touch some of the relevant points from his other books to find out what points expounded by Gandhiji are universally relevant for sustainable development and why.

Key Words

Sustainable Development, Gandhi, Hind Swaraj, India

'The world has enough for everyone's want but not for everyone's greed'

M K Gandhi

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable development is an approach of living and progress for infinite human life on a finite planet. "Sustainable development as an approach to environment implies meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generation to meet their needs." (Nayyar,192). The later part of twentieth century and henceforth, there has been a great hue and cry on sustainable development and the eyes of the world turned to a book called 'Hind Swaraj' written in 1909 by Mahatma Gandhi. The book was not popularly understood with all its essence that touched each and every aspect of civilized life. Why did 'Hind Swaraj' become so important in the modern context? What are the ideas, diagnosis and prescriptions in 'Hind Swaraj' for the modern world? What did 'Hind Swaraj' talk which was universally applicable and not only relevant to Indian context? What lessons can an individual, company, society, professionals, law makers and government take from 'Hind Swaraj'.

DISCUSSION

The Gandhian way of sustainable development and sustainable living can be traced from microcosm to macrocosm level i.e. from individual level to society at large. He elucidates the importance of individual who with his/her thought process, love of humanity, spirituality, healthy habits, desire less-ness and high thinking can make some difference in his/her life and thus in turn can inspire others around to develop. "Gandhiji was a highly evolved and spiritual human being. To him spirituality came first. Other things like politics, public life etc. were by-products of his spirituality. Also as a person progresses on the path of spirituality, his or her priorities in life change. The focus of life shifts more towards getting personal happiness through mental peace or by helping others and less on material needs, greed and desires. Gandhiji's experiments on simple and sustainable living followed his own spiritual progress. He also realized from an early age the importance of a great body and mind. In this he was following the tenets of ancient Yogic system which stresses on a healthy body and a powerful mind." (Raghuvanshi,12) The very important aspects of personality traits as we see in Gandhiji are those of truth and moral courage. These traits uphold the dignity of self and respect the dignity of the fellow human beings.

Certain principles as practiced and preached by Gandhiji are relevant for group dynamics and effective team work in any society or organization. He has always stressed the importance of cooperation when it comes to cooperating with good and fellow beings and workers. It is common sense that if the people or workers cooperate with them there will

be minimal scope of conflict among themselves and the organization or nation for that matter can sustain on its own, progress well without intervention of others. In 'Hind Swaraj' Gandhiji has explicitly stated giving example that the conflict and non-cooperation among the princes and castes in India led to the British rule and their power. "When our princes fought among themselves, they sought the assistance of Company Bahdur....Hindus and Mahomedans were all daggers drawn." (Gandhi, 35) Is it not a common thing today that neither of the conflicting parties benefit at all levels? If there is cooperation and mutual trust and harmony at each level the conflicts will be less and the environment is paved for sustainable development.

Gandhiji also talks about lawyers who can play a major part in reducing the conflicts and inequalities in the society and play the lead role of leading people as well as act as an arbitrator. According to him a lawyer should never encourage quarrel or court matters, as far as possible play an arbitrator and settle the matter out of the court. "Gandhiji advised his clients to settle with their opponents out of court." (Kher, ix) He also stressed tremendous importance to the adherence to truth and not defending the guilty at any cost. According to him the worst thing a lawyer could do is to defend the guilty by hook or crook in the court though knowing the latter's guilt. "Gandhiji has been known to retire from a case in open court, and in the middle of the hearing, having realized that his client had deceived him." (Kher, viii) "...it may even be the duty of a lawyer to defend a client whom he knows to be guilty. There I disagree. The duty of a lawyer is always to place before the judges and to help them to arrive at the truth, never to prove the guilty as innocent." (Kher, 210).

A society or a legal system wherein there is no one to help the guilty or criminals even with their money power or so to say non-cooperation toward the criminals and guilty people will gradually become an ideal and sustainable society and legal machinery. The courts will not have to deal with the gimmicks and falsification of facts and instead concentrate on the other matters. This will also lead to the deterrence where criminals are discouraged to carry out their acts knowing there is no one to defend them. Gandhiji has set a self-example by breaking those laws which were not in accordance to morality and human dignity or in other words not sustainable laws. "I saw too that not only did the reforms not mark a change of heart, but they were only a method of further draining India of her wealth and of prolonging her servitude....little do they realize that the government established by law in British India is carried on for this exploitation of the masses...The law itself in this country has been used to serve the foreign exploiter....affection cannot be manufactured or regulated by law." (Safire, 345)

Gandhiji was perhaps the most vociferous leader the human race has seen on the matter of non-violence and the freedom movement of India was the only example in history of the world of a country getting independence without taking up arms. Non-violence is a gospel in today's world where the previous century has witnessed two world wars and number of other wars between nations be it India-China, India-Pakistan, America-Vietnam, America-Iraq etc. If the gospel is followed at the political scenario of the world accompanied for less greed and hunger for power, the world would become 'Utopia' as envisioned by great people like Jesus, Buddha, Mohamed, Ram and so on. Just like differences and conflicts at micro-level the differences and conflicts at international levels can be sought out with understanding, cooperation to good, non-cooperation to evil and arbitration. The 20th and the 21st century saw the rise of commerce and industry and the development is getting manifold. The concept of sustainable development actually was conceived by UN owing to industrialization only as the natural environment on the earth that sustains life was endangered. There were problems of pollution, exhaustion of natural resources, physical hazards to human life and conflict among the countries and between classes. Here too, Gandhiji's ideals are relevant and they are accepted by people of all walks ranging from political leaders, industry leaders, social activists and common worker. It was also believed that Gandhiji was against machines and industry and the belief does not hold water. As he puts, "What I object to is the craze for machinery, not machinery as such.

I want machines to work for man not man work for machine." (Gandhi, 8) This is the major challenge that people face today, we have been enslaved by machines and our life seems to be useless without the machines and gadgets around us be it mobile phones, computers, automobiles, air conditioner etc. and the enslavement is so high that our bodies and mind cannot function without them. This again, is not in accordance to the harmonizing with nature as our mental, spiritual and physical toughness and tolerance is reduced which leads to innumerable ailments that the medical science sees today. Gandhiji believed in commerce and trade. It is a known fact that during his visit to England for the Round Table Conference he took with him three industrialists and businessmen. But the essence of commerce, for him, is that the wealth generation should not be at the cost of individual, the generated wealth should be used for the betterment of the humanity and not for personal indulgence. "I want to save time and labour not for a fraction of mankind but for all. I want the concentration of wealth not in the hands of a few to ride on the back of millions but in the hands of all." (Gandhi, 8) That is how the idea of trusteeship was born and many industrialists gave their wealth for the betterment of society. This idea was inspired by Gandhiji more than 100 years ago and business tycoons gave wealth for uplifting of mass and society. This concept took the name of 'Corporate Social Responsibility-CSR when the need for sustainability arose but the idea was envisioned by the great man even when there was no need seen.

CONCLUSION

Thus, we see Gandhiji as the greatest exponent of sustainable development and his sustainable development touches each and every aspect of modern life from microcosm to macrocosm beginning with individual development of mind, body and spirit, development of political philosophy by adhering to non-violence among societies and nations, cooperation to the good and non-cooperation to the evil, wealth generation through commerce and utilizing the wealth for goodness of humanity and not indulgence, not being enslaved by machines, bringing about sustainable legal reforms to uphold the dignity of man. Sustainable development everywhere?

In today's world when an individual as well as the society in general are concerned for sustainable development, Gandhian principles, thoughts and prescription of lifestyle become more and more relevant. Mahatma Gandhi was an outright crusader and exponent of sustainable development without using the nomenclature in his times. His ideas are relevant for an individual i.e. how an individual can develop self morally, intellectually, spiritually and maintain a healthy body. More so, the principles laid down by him and practiced by him in the realms of politics, social and professional work, economics, law are worth pondering and practicing with their relevance today. Gandhiji was a forerunner of sustainable development for the world which would lead to progress, harmony with nature and care for the posterity. His two fundamental principles of 'Truth' and 'Non-Violence' themselves spell the greatest gospels for human race on sustainable development in every walks of life be it law, politics, commerce etc. He has elucidated them in many of his writing in 'The Young India', 'Hind Swaraj', 'My Non-violence', 'Law and Lawyers' etc. Of course 'Hind Swaraj' discusses more with allusions the method, relevance and result of sustainable development.

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