

October 2011

Gandhian Values for Sustainable Futures

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Gandhism and the Gandhian vision of sustainable development emerged as a critique of the Western-centric dominant model of development with its misplaced emphasis on the promotion of individual growth and self-advancement, the harnessing of Nature, the achievement of technological sophistication, the spurring of urbanization and the increased use of markets for the distribution of economic goods and services. Gandhism challenges the basic assumptions that the Western model of development makes about the use of Nature and natural resources, the meaning of progress, the ways in which society is governed and also about how public policy is made and implemented.

The Gandhian vision of Sustainable Development can be spelt out in a 'Ten-Point Charter':

1. Humankind would act in a manner that it is a part of Nature, rather than apart from Nature.
2. Materials available on the earth are not used with an element of greed.
3. Human beings practice non-violence not only towards fellow human beings but also towards other living organisms and inanimate materials, because overuse of such materials also amounts to violence.
4. Women are respected, and are made partners in, and are given their rightful place in all spheres of human endeavour.
5. Bottom-up shared view is preferred to the top-down authoritarian overview.
6. Conservationist and sustainable life-saving approach prevails over the unsustainable, consumerist, self-destructive approach.
7. Human beings care for and share with the poor and the destitute in society, as a moral obligation towards them.
8. The human race thinks about how much is enough for a simple, need-based, austere and comfortable lifestyle.
9. All development, as far as is possible, leads to local self-reliance, and equity with social justice.
10. Ethics and self-discipline in resource use is an overriding criterion of development.

It needs to be recognized that the Gandhian vision aims at fulfilling human material and non-material needs, advancing social equity, expanding organizational effectiveness and building human and technical capacity towards sustainability. The objectives of sustainability require the protection of the natural resource base upon which future development depends. To Gandhi, valuing Nature and non-human life forms in an intrinsic way, has also to become an integral part of development. The Gandhian model of development is aimed not just at protecting Nature but at creating an ecological society that lives in harmony with Nature. This calls for reconciling economic activity with social progress and environmental protection. In the Gandhian model, the promotion of human well-being does not have to depend upon the destruction of Nature.

The Gandhian model represents an important example of the new environmentalist approach. It seeks to reconcile the ecological, social and economic dimensions of development, now and into the future, and adopts a global perspective in this task. It aims at promoting a form of development that is contained within the ecological carrying capacity of the planet, which is socially just and economically inclusive. It focuses not upon individual advancement, but upon protecting the common future of humankind.

Gandhi challenges industrial societies not only to reduce the resource intensity of production (sustainable production), but also to undertake new patterns of consumption that reduce the levels of consumption and change what is consumed and by whom (sustainable consumption). This would create the conditions necessary for equitable development.

Gandhian Principles and Action Plans for Sustainable Futures

The need of the hour, at the present juncture, is to acknowledge the contemporary relevance of the following six Gandhian eternal Principles and to develop suitable Action Plans to realize them, as

emphasized by the *Global Greens*, an international network of Green parties and political movements at the Global Greens Conference in 2001:

1. Ecological Wisdom

We acknowledge that human beings are a part of the natural world and we respect the specific values of all forms of life, including non-human species.

This requires:

- That we learn to live within the ecological and resource limits of the planet;
- That we protect animal and plant life, and life itself that is sustained by the natural elements, namely earth, water, air and sun.
- Where knowledge is limited, that we take the path of caution, in order to secure the continued abundance of the resources of the planet for present and future generations.

2. Social Justice

We assert that the key to social justice is the equitable distribution of social and natural resources, both locally and globally, to meet basic human needs, and to ensure that all citizens have full opportunities for personal and social development.

This requires:

- A just organization of the world and a stable world economy which will close the widening gap between rich and poor, both within and between countries; balance the flow of resources from South to North; and lift the burden of debt on poor countries which retards their development;
- The eradication of poverty as an ethical, social, economic and ecological imperative;
- The elimination of illiteracy; and
- The carving out of a new vision of citizenship built on equal rights for all individuals, regardless of gender, race, age, religion, class, ethnic or national origin, sexual orientation, disability, wealth or health.

3. Participatory Democracy

We strive for a democracy in which all citizens have the right to express their views, and are able to directly participate in the environmental, economic, social and political decisions which affect their lives, so that power and responsibility are concentrated in local communities, and devolved only where essential to higher levels of governance.

This requires:

- Individual empowerment through access to all the relevant information required for any decision, and access to education to enable all to participate;
- Breaking down inequalities of wealth and power that inhibit participation;
- Building grassroots institutions that enable decisions to be made directly at the appropriate level by those affected, based on systems which encourage civic vitality, voluntary action and community responsibility;
- Strong support for giving young people a voice through educating, encouraging and assisting youth involvement in every aspect of political life, including their participation in all decision-making bodies;
- That all elected representatives are committed to the principles of transparency, truthfulness, and accountability in governance.

4. Non-Violence/Ahimsa

We declare our commitment to non-violence and strive for a Culture of Peace and Cooperation between states, inside societies and between individuals, as the basis of global security.

We believe that security should not rest mainly on military strength but on cooperation, equitable economic and social development, environmental safety and respect for human rights.

This requires:

- A comprehensive concept of global security which gives priority to social, economic, ecological, psychological and cultural aspects of conflict;
- A global security system capable of the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts;

- Removing the causes of war by understanding and respecting other cultures, eradicating racism, promoting freedom and democracy and ending global poverty;
- Pursuing general and complete disarmament including international agreements to ensure a complete and definite ban of nuclear, biological and chemical armaments, anti-personnel mines and depleted uranium weapons;
- Strengthening the United Nations as the global organization of conflict management, peace-keeping, and peace-building.

5. Sustainability

We recognize the limited scope for the material expansion of human society within the biosphere, and the need to maintain biodiversity through sustainable use of renewable resources and responsible use of non-renewable resources.

We believe that to achieve sustainability, and in order to provide for the needs of present and future generations within the finite resources of the planet, the continuing growth in global consumption, population and material inequity must be halted and reversed.

This requires:

- Ensuring that the rich limit their consumption to allow the poor their fair share of the earth's resources;
- Redefining the concept of wealth, to focus on quality of life, rather than capacity for consumption;
- Creating a world economy which aims to satisfy the needs of all, not the greed of a few;
- Eliminating the causes of population growth by ensuring economic security; providing access to basic education and health for all; and giving both women and men greater control over their fertility;
- Redefining the roles and responsibilities of multinational corporations in order to support the principles of sustainable development;
- Ensuring that market prices of goods and services fully incorporate the environmental costs of their production and consumption;
- Achieving greater resource and energy efficiency, and development and use of environmentally sustainable technologies;
- Encouraging local self-reliance (*Swadeshi*) to the greatest practical extent.

6. Respect for Diversity