

26. ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS AND GANDHIAN APPROACH

- We all depend on one biosphere for sustaining our lives. It is our fundamental duty to make this planet earth a decent habitable place. Gandhiji also had an ethical approach towards “**Environmental Protection**” at a time when there were no signs of degradation of earth's environment as we experience today.
- Ethics is a branch of philosophy which deals with **morals and values**.
- Ethics leads us to adopt the right conduct. Good conduct makes life worth living. Ethical relationship between human beings and natural environment is called **environmental ethics**.
- In Nature, there is a balance between its different components. Biogeochemical cycles are an example of this balance, maintained through constant and continuous assimilation and recycling. Ethical behavior of humans towards nature would help to sustain this balance.
- Unfortunately humans have overexploited natural resources and polluted the ecosystems. Developmental activities because of a fast growing human population such as deforestation for agriculture and construction of buildings, dams on rivers for getting electricity, mining of ores and draining of wetlands are few of these activities.



Excessive cutting of forests for human needs

- The consequences of these activities are loss of wild animals, polluted natural water bodies and land, global warming and climate change. The environment is spoilt of us and lost for future human generations.



Polluted Rivers

- As urbanization is increasing, so also the need for water, this in turn leads to drawing of ground water. Over exploitation of sub-soil water has led to rapid decline in the level of water table, and if this continues for long, soon many areas would become a desert.
- Industrial wastes, both solid and liquid are usually dumped indiscriminately into the surrounding land and water bodies.
- Environmental ethics is the guiding force that should make every human care for their surroundings.
- **Approaches to Environmental Ethics**
 - 1). **Anthropocentric-** Humans are the dominant species on earth so they can manipulate earth's resources for their benefit.
 - 2). **Biocentric-** On the other hand Ethics demands that humans take the responsibility of caring for nature and let all other living beings on earths live in peace .
 - 3). **Ecocentric-** The entire environment has to be taken care of and humans take this responsibility
- **Respect for all life on Earth**
Earth is the only planet in our solar system which has life. All living beings are also interdependent. "**So live and let live**" and keep the earth resources full for humans and all other life for many generation.
- **Traditions of Harmonious Living with Nature**
- A Sanskrit saying or verse “**Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah Sarve Santu Niramayah**” refers to "**May all be sinless and may all experience happiness.**" Actually all religious scriptures viz. Vedas, Ramayana, Mahabharata etc. talk of harmonious living with nature.

- Indian festivals, traditional art and crafts also can be looked into from the viewpoint of environmental ethics.
- Worship of plants and animals has long been known in India.
- In many of our states of India, **New Year** begins and is celebrated with the harvesting of the rabi crops in the month of April. Baisakhi in Punjab, Nabo Barsho in Bengal, Vishu Kini in Kerala, Tamil and Telugu new year of Tamilnadu and Andhra Pradesh are few examples.
- Colours from Tesu (flame of the forest) flowers, pomegranate peel, turmeric are used as sources of different colours, earthen lamps, vegetable oil and cotton wicks are used for decorating homes during special occasions.
- Special food items are prepared at some festivities to highlight the importance of different plants and plant products that laddoo made from Amaranthus (Ramdana or Chaulai) are eaten.
- In various parts of the country, people worship various animals and plants.
- A large number of Hindu Gods have a “Vahana” i.e. vehicle that they ride. The goddess of wealth Lakshi rides an owl, Durga is astride a tiger and Saraswati sits on a swan expresses collaboration between human and gods.
- Plants like tulsi, banyan and banana, coconut fruit are worshipped; turmeric is used in rituals considered auspicious associated with Hindu, Islamic and Buddhist cultures.
- In India, the Bishnois of Rajasthan have sacrificed their lives to protect sacred ‘khejdi’ trees.
- It is recorded that some sacred groves have water bodies within their boundaries. Hunting, logging etc. is prohibited and these areas are preserved for generations.
- They represent native vegetation in natural or near natural state. In the Himalayas Sherpas considered certain mountains as sacred and do not climb into them (for conquering peaks during expeditions)
- Clumps of trees (ranging from bamboo in eastern Himalayas to forest in Himachal Pradesh) or a portion of the forest is considered as the place where gods or spirits of ancestors reside. Thus they

are left undisturbed and the area is considered ‘sacred groove’. The sanctity of the area ensures that the flora and fauna flourish and biodiversity is maintained.

- **Inculcating Environmental Ethics**
- Habits are formed in childhood and habits die hard. So right from childhood, whether from parents or from teachers or from peers, children should understand that environment issues are important and that harmonious living with nature is to become a "die hard habit".
 - **In the school curriculum activities** such as:
 - growing plants and taking care of them.
 - visits to national parks and sanctuaries.
 - creating stories/ poems/ plays on nature conservation.
 - Tree plantations for ‘greening schools’ and its neighbourhood.
 - Weeding lawns.
 - Making attractive posters and messages related to environment should become competitive events every year for various classes.
 - Nature study should inculcate in the children love for living beings and urge for maintaining the surroundings.
 - Inculcate love and empathy for animals be they pets or on road or on trees.
 - Participate in writing and enacting in skits related to environment and environmental issues.
 - Spreading awareness in the neighbourhood and school about the need for harmonious living with Nature
- **Conservation Movement and Public Participation**
 - If we have Environmental ethics efforts for environmental conservation will come naturally.
 - Government alone cannot take up the burden of creating awareness and ensuring a clean environment.
 - There is a need for public participation at every step. If the common man is aware of what is going on at the local and national level, thus surely decision making by the authorities can be influenced.

- Recently the Supreme Court has banned construction and boring of new tubewells in the Aravalli region of Faridabad (Haryana) in adjoining Delhi. Hopefully, these measures may prevent rapidly depletion of vegetation and ground water in the area.
- Present Government's "Swachhata Abhiyan" is another example of steps towards environmental cleanliness.
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• **Contribution of the concerned**

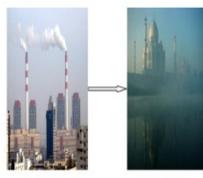
- The Silent Valley project in the Western Ghats was abandoned due to protests environmental activists and by public representation. It helped to save the rain forests of that area which is one of the hot spot of biodiversity in the world.
- The Bishnois of Rajasthan had once upon a time laid down their lives to protect the local Khejdi trees (*Prosopis spicigera*)
- A noted environmental activist and lawyer M.C. Mehta filed public interest litigation (PIL) against the Union, Government of India. His interest was to protect India's Taj Mahal from the effluents of the Mathura refinery.
- This landmark case created awareness about the right of every citizen to clear air, water and land. It also opened the doors for many other PILs and the judgment given by the court.



Lawyer activist M.C.Mehta



The Taj Mahal



Delhi/NCR



Polluting Industries

- Some such cases are those that caused the shifting of polluting industries from Delhi and NCR (National Capital Region); the compulsory use of CNG (Compressed Natural Gas) for buses in Delhi and NCR the use of the campaign, 'Green Fuel Clean Fuel' led to the

use of unleaded petrol for cars in Delhi (first time in India).

- Also these show that awareness or activism by individuals public organizations, NGOs etc. can definitely lead to a cleaner environment.
- The agitation against dams is a controversial issue, and the Narmada Bachao Andolan has been very actively pursuing the case of the Narmada Dam oustees (people displaced due to construction of the dam). Similar instance have arisen over the Tehri Dam.



Medha Pathakar



Narmada Dam

• **What can anyone do!**

- Awareness of spreading awareness about environment is every human's table Awareness in public domain also leads to positive and fruitful cooperation between the government and people of the area.
- Joint forest management practices have participation of the official machinery and local inhabitants in forest conservation, afforestation, wild life management and also other natural resources.

• **Corporate Environment Ethics**

- Corporates would comprise companies both manufacturing companies with their industries and service sector that markets goods, They have a responsibility.
- A clean environment is now taken as one of the basic social responsibilities of the corporate world.
- Recent environmental movements have moved the business community towards environmental ethics. Industrial houses have now become interested in efficient, green and clean technology. The use of solar cars and technology with low carbon foot prints.
- Above all EIA (Environment Impact Assessment) has enforced the environmentally ethical operations of all new business projects.



Public Places in Gurgaon (Haryana) and New Delhi maintained by Corporate Houses

- **Gandhian Thoughts and Their Relevance to Current Concerns for Environment Conservation or Gandhian Legacy**
- Mahatma Gandhi has been acknowledged as the 'patron saint' of the Indian environmental movement.
- Environmental activists have relied heavily on Gandhian thought of non-violent protest or satyagrah and have drawn heavily on Gandhain philosophy against heavy industry which may displace or crush the poor and downtrodden.
- The chipko movement (Chandi Prasad Bhatt and Sunder Lal Bahuguna), Baba Amte and Medha Patkar (Narmada Bachao Andolan) all derived inspiration from Gandhi. Other groups like Sulabh International that work for uplifting of Harijans and sweepers, who once lifted night soil were also inspired by Gandhian thought.



Sunder Lal Bahuguna
Chipko Andolan

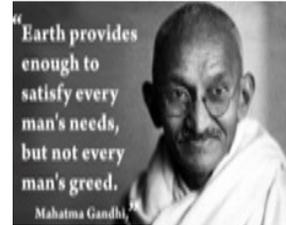
Few men and many women hugging a tree each to prevent their felling



Bhisochwar Pathak



- Mahatma Gandhi was a visionary .Way back 1909 he had written in journal "Hind Swaraj", The current mode of development is exploitative of man by man and of nature by man". He had also said-



- He was an avid believer in cleanliness. **He believed in said-**
 - 1) "Sanitation is more important than independence".
 - 2) "Everyone must be his own scavenger".
 He believed that all humans have an intimate relationship with nature and therefore, everyone needs to learn to respect nature, understand and appreciate that nature gives us all that is needed for our survival.
- Respect and live in harmony with the environment. Save it through Gandhian approach to environmental ethics.
- All students should inculcate Gandhian approach to environmental ethics and do their bit to protect environment and spread awareness about the same.



Check Yourself

1. A principle which we can use to denote whether some act is good or bad or right or wrong comes under the categories of:
 - a. Opinion
 - b. Thought
 - c. Rule
 - d. Ethics
2. Major cause of decline of water in water table is:
 - a. Lack of water
 - b. Mixed it with some chemicals
 - c. Being of new bore well and tube wells
 - d. All the above
3. Ramdana laddu is being made from:
 - a. Corn
 - b. Coconut
 - c. Amaranthus
 - d. Ficus
4. Mother nature has enough for our needs but not for our needs. Who said this saying?
 - a. M.K.Gandhi
 - b. L.B. Shastri
 - c. Vinoba Bhave
 - d. J.L. Nehru
5. Bisnoi sacrificed their lives to save the local tree named:
 - a. Aak
 - b. Khedji
 - c. Babool
 - d. Bamboo

Ans: 1.d 2.d 3.c 4.a 5.b



Stretch Yourself

1. Give any two examples of temporary and permanent settlement.
2. Define the term urbanization.
3. Name the largest slum of India.
4. What is hamlet?
5. Define shanties.



Test Yourself

1. Explain with example for this quote.
“Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah, Sarve Santu Niramayah.”
2. How does environmental ethics inculcate in children and youth?
3. Why do we consider Gandhiji as first environmentalist for India,
4. Describe traditional practices in India to conserve environment.
5. How can corporate follow environmental ethics in their business