

“REVISITING GANDHIAN PHILOSOPHY OF SIMPLE LIVING THROUGH THE LENS OF SLOW MOVEMENT AND MINIMALISM FOR CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION IN CONTEMPORARY ERA”

Authored by - Dr. Pratik Salgar

Abstract

Industrialisation has impacted world environment resulting in Climate Change. Human lifestyle has direct nexus with industrialisation which impacted World Environment. Laws and policies regarding Sustainable Development shall take into account environmental issues. It is challenge before laws and policies to achieve sustainable development globally. It is not only challenge before state to achieve sustainability through supportive laws and policies. But it is more about how citizens pursue laws and policies.

From citizen centric purview, fundamental duties of citizens play vital role in achieving sustainability. Indian philosophies, specifically Gandhism emphasise simple living of human being. Gandhian version of simple life rejects industrial culture as violent, competitive and destructive of nature and thus unsustainable in long run. Time has come to revisit Indian philosophies to combat with Climate Change. Western philosophies like Minimalism and Slow Movement are aiming at simple lifestyle of human which has already been there in Indian philosophies long back.

Researcher here tried to analyse Gandhian aspect of simple lifestyle in relation with Minimalism and Slow Movement against Climate Change. Suggestions and recommendations by researcher will be significant as to law-policy implementation to achieve sustainability.

1. Introduction:

पिपीलिकार्जितं धान्यं मक्षिकासञ्चितं मधु ।

सुखेन सञ्चितं द्रव्यं समूलं हि विनश्यति ॥¹

"Grain collected by ants, honey collected by bees, and wealth accumulated by a greedy person, will all be destroyed along with its source."²

Above-mentioned Sanskrit *shloka* highlights an eye-opening message for humans and imposes a duty on human beings not to store resources only for themselves. The concept of sustainable development was described by the 1987 Brundtland Commission Report as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."³ Thus it also applies to the consumption of natural resources as well. Central idea of 'Sustainable Development' is also on similar lines. Before discussing about consumption of resources, it becomes significant to discuss 'need' of human being. Once people get used to a certain luxury, they take it for granted. Then they begin to count on it.⁴ Finally they reach a point where they can't live without it.⁵ Lifestyle of human being decides the needs/wants. According to needs of human production of goods is done which promotes industrialisation. As per Indian scenario, in post-independence era, to combat with unemployment and poverty, policies were aiming at industrialisation. Industrialisation then reached to such an extent that 'environmentalism' has started developing around 1980s and accordingly the first statute was enacted in 1986, i.e. The Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.

Before this development, environmentalism was only confined to the rich people in society and the poor and tribal people were dependant on natural resources for their livelihood. With industrial development, environment was degraded to such an extent that it became big reason of concern for poor people as well and that is evident from Chipko Movement. The first thing to remember about Chipko is that it was not unique. It was representative of a wide spectrum of natural resource conflicts in the 1970s and 1980s — conflicts over forests, fish, and pasture; conflicts about the siting of large dams; conflicts about the social and environmental impacts

¹ Facebook, <https://hi-in.facebook.com/SanskritPearls/posts/10156920545043831/> (last visited March 20, 2022).

² Subhastita Ratsabhandagar

UNESCO, <https://en.unesco.org/themes/education-sustainable-development/what-is-sdgs#:~:text=Sustainable%20development%20is%20the%20overarching,to%20meet%20their%20own%20needs.%E2%80%A0> (last visited March 20, 2022).

⁴ Good Reads, <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/7886728-one-of-history-s-fewst-iron-laws-is-that-luxuries-> (last visited March 20, 2022).

⁵ Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* 98 (Penguin Random House UK, 2015).

of unregulated mining.⁶ In all these cases, the pressures of urban and industrial development had deprived local communities of access to the resources necessary to their own livelihood.⁷ This creates the question mark on human lifestyle, consumption of resources and environmental sustainability.

The changes in the physical climate system, most notably more intensive extreme events, have adversely affected natural and human systems around the world, contributing to a loss and degradation of ecosystems including tropical coral reefs; reduced water and food security; increased damage to infrastructure; additional mortality and morbidity; human migration and displacement; damaged livelihoods; increased mental health issues; and increased inequality.⁸ Over 97% of scientist agree that humans cause climate change. Humanity's accelerated burning of fossil fuels and deforestation have led to rapid increases of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere and global warming.⁹ These facts underline the seriousness of Climate Change and its impact on human lives. In this technologically developed era, it is a need of time to take an action against this. In its 2018 special report, the IPCC warned that we only have until 2030 to prevent the worst impacts of climate change.¹⁰ From this perspective, United Nations has set sustainable development goals which are to be achieved till 2030. It is a challenge before every nation to achieve these goals because 'environment' is such a complex subject which has to be dealt by considering many aspects. Environmental laws and policies need to consider various aspects as to achieve sustainability. At the other end, it is not only responsibility of the governments to make the laws and implement those to achieve required object; but it is equal responsibility of citizens to follow their duties. Good governance is combined effect of state action and citizen duties. As discussed in previous part, human lifestyle has nexus with industrialisation and sustainable development. Thus, to achieve good governance in environmental sustainability human lifestyle is an aspect which may be considered from citizen duty centric view.

⁶ The Hindu, <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/the-past-present-of-indian-environmentalism/article451665.ece> (last visited March, 23 2022).

⁷ Id.

⁸ Rita Adrian & others, *Climate Change 2022 Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability: Summary for Policymakers*, The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (Feb. 27 2022, 11:30 AM), https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_WGII_FinalDraft_FullReport.pdf

⁹ The Nature Conservancy, <https://www.nature.org/en-us/what-we-do/our-priorities/tackle-climate-change/climate-change-stories/climate-change-frequently-asked-questions/> (last visited March 24, 2022).

¹⁰ Earth Day, <https://www.earthday.org/5-terrifying-climate-change-facts-are-halloween/> (last visited March 24, 2022).

Climate change can be overwhelming. The science is complex, and when it comes to future impacts, there are still a lot of unknowns.¹¹ While real solutions will require action on a global scale, there are choices you can make in your day-to-day life to lessen your personal impact on the environment.¹² Thus, it is high time now to overlook human lifestyle.

Gandhi offered, as an alternative, a code of voluntary simplicity that minimized wants and recycled resources-his own letters were written on the back of used paper. One of Gandhi's best known aphorisms is: 'the world has enough for everybody's need, but not enough for one person's greed:' an exquisitely phrased one-line environmental ethic.¹³ Researcher here deals with principles of Simple Lifestyle by Mahatma Gandhi along with philosophies of Minimalism and Slow Movement with special reference to Climate Change action.

2. Capitalism: Driving Force for Current Pattern of Consumption

Capitalism is often thought of as an economic system in which private actors own and control property in accord with their interests, and demand and supply freely set prices in markets in a way that can serve the best interests of society.¹⁴ Modern capitalist systems usually include a market-oriented economy, in which the production and pricing of goods, as well as the income of individuals, are dictated to a greater extent by market forces resulting from interactions between private businesses and individuals than by central planning undertaken by a government or local institution. Capitalism is built on the concepts of private property, profit motive, and market competition.¹⁵

Current consumption of the goods is capitalism driven. The market has become so wide that numerous corporations provide a variety of services and goods and every corporation provides endless choices available for consumers. This has created the current societal structure which is based on the idea of consumption and commercialization, opposed to the earlier

¹¹ Nytimes, <https://www.nytimes.com/guides/year-of-living-better/how-to-reduce-your-carbon-footprint> (last visited March 20, 2022).

¹² *Id.*

¹³ Ramesh Chandra Gupta, *Environmentalism: A Global History 30* (Penguin Random House India 2016).

¹⁴ International Monetary Fund, <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/2015/01/6/basics.htm> (last visited March 23, 2022).

¹⁵ Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/capitalism> (last visited March 24, 2022).

societies that were more work-based and industrialized.¹⁶ Thus, it is clear that the current consumption pattern is capitalist and it is ultimately having impact on lifestyle of public at large.

3. Slow Movement:

"Slowness is the forgotten dimension to time. Unlike chronological time, it is non-linear, time here and now, time that works for you, extraordinary time. So why be fast when you can be slow? Slowness is also about balance, so if you must hurry, then hurry slowly."

-Geir Berthelsen¹⁷

As a result of industrialisation, speed of development has rapidly increased which impacted human lives too. Pace of human life has increased tremendously. Now it is the time to ask ourselves that do we need this much pace of development..? Rather e should ask ourselves that are we 'developing' while running with time..?? One can understand easily that whenever we are rushing fast; we miss many facets which play vital role in human development. It is well said by Great Artist Padmavibhushan Hariprasad Chaurasia that, "journey is more beautiful than the destination because, after reaching destination you realise that you missed many beautiful moments just because you were concerned about your goal to be achieved." Paradox is that Hariji has realised this after reaching his destination and high position in life. This may be a lesson for everyone in this technological era that we need to slow down our pace and enjoy the life fullest. Slowness here simply means doing right things at right time with appropriate pace. The dichotomy between speed and slowness must be as old as humanity itself, but it is true that since the Industrial Revolution, acceleration has not stopped.¹⁸ The cult of speed, and doing more and more things, has led many people one day to stop and realize that the fact of working a lot, traveling a lot, or filling the entire schedule with activities, prevents them from enjoying the activities.¹⁹

The Slow Movement aims at cultural shift towards slowing down life's pace. A cultural movement in favour of slowing down in a world obsessed with speed is a useful prequel to any

¹⁶ Kleiderly, <https://www.kleiderly.com/our-blog/the-psychology-behind-consumption> (last visited March, 23 2022).

¹⁷ Slowr, <https://www.slowr.co/slow-living-201/> (last visited March 15, 2022).

¹⁸ Barcelona, <https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/dafabricadelsp/en/noticia/the-slow-movement-a-philosophy-of-life-992353> (last visited March 11, 2022).

¹⁹ *Id.*

debate about prosperity and macroeconomic policy.²⁰ This movement started with the protest by Carlo Petrini against opening McDonald's restaurant in Rome in 1986. Over the period of time this did not remain just the protest but it has become a subculture and way of life. Digging deeper, we will find that there are many other slow areas like slow cities, slow fashion, slow travel etc. Slow cities have an object to slow down pace of human life, to design the space for human which will be having less or no traffic, to improve quality of urban areas, to take care of environment, to promote healthy lifestyle and preserving nature of local cultural heritage. Kate Fletcher has coined 'Slow Fashion' in 2007 which aims at quality over quantity. It is more about sustainable and eco-friendly fibres, materials, fabrics.

Slow Movement has started in 1986, the same year in which India adopted The Environment Protection Act. Rather it would be fair to say that the two different parts of the world have started moving in altogether different directions by breaking their cultural barriers. Developed nations had very fast pace which they thought to be slowed down unlike India which wanted 'development' at the cost of environmental degradation. Fundamentals of slow cities, slow fashion or slow travel were already the aspects of blissful life in Indian culture which also reflected in Gandhian Principles of simple life. Specifically, Indian Classical Art forms do believe in slowness as a fundamental of creative beautifulness. Similarly it has reflected in many facets of human lives. Thus, it would not be exaggeration to say that Indian lifestyle has departed from their original culture which was very much sustainable, simple and eco-friendly.

With more people forced to slow down and simplify their lifestyles, interest in the slow movement has increased during the pandemic. In fact, Google reported a 4x increase in the number of YouTube videos with 'slow living' in the title in 2020 vs 2019. While some of these clips depict an idyllic rural existence which is far from the reality of most, the increase in this video content demonstrates a desire to reconnect with meaningful hobbies, nature and ourselves.²¹

Slowing down the speed of development would give us the chance to know our priorities and accordingly making laws-policies sustainable. We may not have felt the need to have legal framework for protecting our environment if we were successful in following our eco-friendly

²⁰ Rethinking Prosperity, <http://rethinkingprosperity.org/cultural-vision-what-is-the-slow-movement/> (last visited March 08, 2022).

²¹ Slow Living Ltd, <https://www.slowlivingltd.com/what-is-slow-living/> (last visited March 10, 2022).

culture and way of life. Mahatma Gandhi has also articulated this through his philosophy of simple life.

4. Minimalism:

Minimalism didn't started with protest like Slow Movement has started but it has emerged for the first time through the art forms. "Minimalism is the intentional promotion of the things that bring you joy and the removal of those that do not."²² Minimalism emerged in New York in the early 1960s among artists who were self-consciously renouncing recent art they thought had become stale and academic. A wave of new influences and rediscovered styles led younger artists to question conventional boundaries between various media. By the end of the 1970s, Minimalism had triumphed in America and Europe through a combination of forces including museum curators, art dealers, and publications, plus new systems of private and government patronage.²³ Minimalism is defined as a design or style in which the simplest and fewest elements are used to create the maximum effect.²⁴ Minimalism calls for a strategy and slowly it becomes a habit that soon transitions into a lifestyle. To begin with, it is important to acknowledge the core values and meaning behind minimalism to truly appreciate minimalist living. The beauty of minimalism is that it has no standard of perfection. Every decision that you take is personal and you are the one who determines the purpose of it in your life.²⁵

Minimalism is nothing but Gandhian philosophy of minimal wants of life as he stated in his book 'The Story of My Experiments with Truth' which talks about his simple and minimalistic lifestyle. Rather Mahatma Gandhi was the original proponent of minimalism, rooted in the Indian way. In an essay in 2019, architect Riyaz Tayyibji analysed Gandhi's buildings. Sabarmati Ashram was made from burnt brick, handmade tiles, and sawn timber, all sourced locally.²⁶

Minimalism helps us to distinguish between 'need' and 'greed'. Most of the environmental sustainability issues are revolving around this problem. Understanding Minimalism helps us to clarify the concept of 'right' and 'reasonable restrictions'. Exercising one's right doesn't mean

²² Break The Twitch, <https://www.breakthetwitch.com/minimalism/> (last visited March 15, 2022).

²³ The Art Story, <https://www.theartstory.org/movement/minimalism/> (last visited March 19, 2022).

²⁴ Break The Twitch, [supra note 19.](https://www.breakthetwitch.com/minimalism/)

²⁵ Prakati, <https://www.prakati.in/how-can-we-adapt-to-a-minimalist-lifestyle/> (last visited March 23, 2022).

²⁶ Beautiful Homes, <https://www.beautifulhomes.com/design/feature/simple-and-natural-minimalism-in-design-the-gandhi-way.html> (last visited March 15, 2022).

overriding another's right. For that one should decide the need. The need which overrides another's need is greed. This is not only about human beings but we co-share planet Earth with all living beings like animals-birds-creatures. Everyone has equal right over the resources we possess. Reasonable restrictions on our rights justify this philosophy of 'need'. True essence of this philosophy surely develops compassion for human beings and living beings on this planet which reflects in following *shloka*:

जीवेषु करुणा चापि मैत्री तेषु विधीयताम् ।²⁷

*"Be compassionate and friendly to all living beings"*²⁸

Now Minimalism has started reflecting in Judiciary as well. Minimalism is a methodology for judicial decision-making that essentially advocates that judicial decisions should be made on the narrowest possible grounds sufficient to decide the dispute before the court, while leaving larger questions of principle for decision by the political branches, or deferring to their stance on such principles.²⁹ Minimalism therefore deals with the issue of how the court should go about the decision-making exercise, and touches on both the approach of courts in constitutional adjudication, as well as the substantive outcome of such decisions.³⁰ Therefore, from judicial-policy-lawpoint of view, Minimalistic lifestyle if adopted will try to make out needs of society along with individual which will show the path towards sustainability.

5. Combating Climate Change Action through Gandhian Simple Lifestyle: Today's Need

With thorough discussion of Slow Movement and Minimalism one can understand that these are not new ideologies for India. Idealistic lifestyle has reflected in India's Traditional Knowledge. Specifically, Gandhian principles of simple life have basis in Minimalism and Slow Movement. Gandhi's critique of Western industrialization has of course profound implications for the way we live and relate to the environment today. For him "the distinguishing characteristic of modern civilization is an indefinite multiplicity of wants", whereas ancient civilizations were marked by an "imperative restriction upon, and a strict

²⁷ My Sanskrit, <https://www.mysanskrit.in/food-morning-5/> (last visited March 15, 2022).

²⁸ Buddha Chakam 23-53

²⁹ Manupatra, <http://docs.manupatra.in/newsline/articles/Upload/B5E6875A-6939-490C-BBE3-B2A4D08BD9A6.pdf> (last visited March 15, 2022).

³⁰ Mital Satish and Aparna Chandra, *Of Maternal State and Minimalist Judiciary: The Indian Supreme Court's Approach to Terror-Related Adjudication*, 21 National Law School of India Review 51, 53 (2009).

regulation of, these wants.³¹ Industrialisation has resulted into increase of wants of human and change in lifestyle. Now, it is high time to choose 'need' instead of greed. Small things in day-to-day life will make larger impact across the globe. As a part of this, we have to now revisit Gandhian concept of simple lifestyle.

It needs hardly any mention that entire problem of environmental hazards and degradations are rooted in the scientific-technological development leading to large scale and speedy industrialization and the consequent socio-culture upheavals the world over.³² Underlying a strategy of imitative industrialization was the adoption of the most 'modern' technologies, with little regard for their social or ecological consequences. In theory there were, of course, many options available to the Indian state. The technologies adopted could be capital or labour intensive; they could be oriented towards satisfying the demand for luxury goods or fulfilling the basic needs of the masses; they could degrade the environment or be non-polluting; they could use energy intensively or sparingly; and they could use the country's endowment of natural resources in a sustainable fashion or liquidate them; and so on.³³ Even with these available possibilities; we failed to notice this and accordingly implement through law and policy. Rather than imitation; we could have been relied more on traditional knowledge and Gandhian way of simple living. Gandhi experimented with and wrote a great deal about simple living in harmony with the environment but he lived before the advent of the articulation of the deep ecological strands of environmental philosophy.³⁴ Now, in this technological world, if we think from development point of view, there is no harmony with environment. Rather environment and development are considered to be antonyms. Gandhian lifestyle considers environment as friend of human. Rather human being is part of nature and thus human lifestyle need to be in tune with nature.

Lowering individual carbon footprints from 16 tons to 2 tons doesn't happen overnight! By making small changes to our actions, like eating less meat, taking fewer connecting flights and line drying our clothes, we can start making a big difference.³⁵ Climate change, deforestation, overgrazing, fisheries collapse, food insecurity, and the rapid extinction of species are all part

³¹ Ramchandra Guha, *How much should a person consume?* 299 (Permanent Black and the University of California Press 2006).

³² M K Gandhi, <https://www.mkgandhi.org/environment/the.htm> (last visited March 12, 2022).

³³ Madhav Gadgil & Ramchandra Guha, *This Fissured Land: An Ecological History of India* 162 (Oxford University Press 1992).

³⁴ M K Gandhi, <https://www.mkgandhi.org/environment/evnl.htm> (last visited March 10, 2022).

³⁵ The Nature Conservancy, <https://www.nature.org/en-us/get-involved/how-to-help/carbon-footprint-calculator/> (last visited March 15, 2022).

of a single, over-arching problem: Humanity is simply demanding more from the Earth than it can provide. By focusing on the single issue, we can address all of its symptoms, rather than solving one problem at the cost of another. Also, it makes the self-interest to act far more obvious.¹⁶ By revisiting Gandhian philosophy of simple lifestyle we need to understand that rather than enforcing the 'right'; now we have to be more conscious about our 'duty' and that it the ultimate humanism.

6. Conclusion and Suggestions

Minimalism distinguishes between 'need' and 'greed' and slow movement aims at slowing down the pace of development. Both of these aspects are significant for sustainable and eco-friendly human lifestyle. Mahatma Gandhi has emphasised the same aspects in his philosophy of simple lifestyle. Thus, it is concluded that even though Minimalism and Slow Movement are contemporary movements; those are reflected long back in Gandhian philosophy of simple lifestyle. One can change small things in life which will bring larger impact. Being Indians, we know our climatic and geographical conditions. With that one should manage needs of life but should avoid greed for lavish lifestyle. Thus, at each point, human should think about need and then only should move ahead if it is required for fulfilling need. If the needs of human are minimalised then it will impact on production of various commodities which helps to reduce industrial pollution and carbon footprints. Ultimately, simple lifestyle will lead to combating climate change.

¹⁶ Global Footprint Network, <https://www.footprintnetwork.org/our-work/climate-change/> (last visited March 26, 2022).