

# Gandhiji's 150th anniversary

October 8, 2019

**Source:** *The Hindu*

**Manifest pedagogy:** 150th year of Gandhian anniversary is being celebrated this year. In this context the central government has given the call of "Swachhta Hi Sewa". In this context, apart from the usual importance that UPSC gives to Gandhiji there is higher possibility of more questions on him across the spectrum ranging from History to Ethics. So it is good to have a clear idea on what Mahatma's views are on various issues of importance. The current article gives a clear picture of what his views are on Cleanliness and Sustainability.

**In news:** October 2nd, 2019 marked the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi.

**Placing it in syllabus:** Important contributors in freedom struggle

## **Dimensions:**

- Gandhi's views on the need for Sanitation
- Gandhi's views on cleanliness as a spiritual practice
- Gandhi's views on sustainability
- Gandhian views on materialism (small is beautiful)
- Gandhian views on need based living

## **Content:**

### Gandhi's views on the need for Sanitation:

- Along with the struggle for India's independence, Gandhi led a continuous struggle for sanitation, cleanliness, and efficient management of all categories of wastes throughout his public life.
- In his 'Guide to London', he had quoted, "**Cleanliness is**

**next to godliness”.**

- In South Africa itself Gandhi had developed a passion to destroy the **twin ‘evils’ of ‘Untouchability’ and ‘insanitation’** and he took to scavenging himself.
- In India, post Non-cooperation Movement (1924) his movement for sanitation took a much more active form.
- He said, **“Outward filth is only a sign of the uncleanness in our minds.”**
- He stressed on **modifying western methods of sanitation to suit our requirements.**
- He claimed to have **“become a sanitary inspector”** and had experimented with converting **night-soil into manure** at Phoenix Settlement (South Africa) and had continued this system in the Sabarmati Ashram.
- He said that to fight against “old prejudices and old habits”, sustained **education and legislation were essential.**
- He considered it radically unjust to have made scavenging a separate class’s duty with the lowest social status, calling them **‘untouchables’.**
- He started a **national movement for the ‘removal of untouchability’**, according equal social status to the ‘untouchables’ and improving their living and working conditions.
- Between 1931-1942, he instituted a **18-point ‘Constructive Programme’** which included apart from ‘Removal of Untouchability, ‘Village Sanitation’ as well as ‘Education in Health and Hygiene’.
- Gandhi even went on ‘fast unto death’ for recognition of ‘untouchables’ as an equal part of the Hindu society and then set up **Harijan Sevak Sangh** and undertook an all India tour for ‘Removal of Untouchability’.
- He opined that **educating villagers in sanitation work and healthy diet** was the “only real medical service”.
- In his **‘ideal village’** there would be no filth and darkness, and no plague, cholera or small-pox.
- He wanted people to practice the art of sanitation and

look to the education and proper living of scavengers and ensure equitable wages and social justice for them.

### Gandhi's views on cleanliness as a spiritual practice:

- Gandhi in his writings always insisted on the importance of cleanliness.
- In his 'Young India', he wrote **"A clean body cannot reside in an unclean city"**.
- He saw **cleanliness as an important aspect to reach or access God rather than 'goodness'**.
- Gandhi's view on sanitation was a reinforcement of caste system, which revolves around ritual purity and pollution.
- By **linking cleanliness to spirituality**, Gandhi valorised inhuman practice of manual scavenging.
- A **uniqueness** to India's approach to waste is that even the shade of the untouchable or seeing him/her was considered pollution.
- While in France in 1539 they started to dissociate waste from religion, **in India, dirt even now continues to associate with the religious idea of purity and pollution.**
- Recent studies reveal that Indian toilet behaviour also asserts the same point that **sanitation behaviour is influenced by religious beliefs.**
- Gandhi regretted that our cleanliness compared to that of other nations, was based upon habit of taking daily bath and of keeping our cottages clean and tidy.
- He felt that **"only when there is both inner and outer cleanliness, it becomes next to godliness"**.
- He insisted that **inward cleanliness is the first thing that should be taught** and other things would follow after the first.

### Gandhi's views on sustainability:

- In Gandhi's opinion, in any scheme of development, **man**

**should be at the centre.**

- Man has to make **judicious use of natural resources** and the ecological balance should not be disturbed.
- The **objective should not be to build the islands of prosperity in the ocean of poverty but to raise the level of standard of life and to combat poverty.**
- His ideas on sustainability places **more emphasis on moral responsibility of the individual** at the personal, social, national and universal level.
- Gandhi was an economist of masses and an **environmentalist without any structured model.**
- His **trusteeship concept** is for Sarvodaya.
- He believed that power resided in the people and a **mutually interdependent cooperative working** at the world level helps in making noble environment.
- In **Hind Swaraj** 1909, he talked about the dangers of unplanned and reckless industrialization.
- He recommended that the growth oriented theory must be replaced by theories of sustainable development that will not damage but will **guarantee harmonious co-existence of man and the ecosystem.**
- Self-help, self-reliance, decentralization of industries and labour intensive technology are the **qualitative goals of satisfying meaningful life.**
- **Hind Swaraj became the manifesto of sustainable development** after the first 'Satyagraha'.
- In 1911, Gandhi used the phrase, '**Economy of Nature**' which brings out the sensitivity and deeper understanding of human actions vis-a-vis ecology.
- His view that "*the Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's need, but not any man's greed*" may stand as a **one line ethical summary** of his modern environmentalist thinking.

Gandhi's views on materialism:

- Gandhi proposed **Gram Swaraj** i.e. **self-sufficient but**

**inter-linked village republics** with **decentralised small-scale** economic structure and participatory democracy.

- **Dr E F Schumacher**, famous economist (author of “Small is Beautiful”) in 1973, described **Gandhi as the greatest ‘People’s Economist.’**
- He identified the **five main pillars of Gandhian economic thinking.**
  - Nonviolent
  - Simple
  - **Small**
  - Capital Saving
  - Rural Based (Self Reliant and Employment-Orientated)
- Referring to his book ‘Small is Beautiful’, Schumacher had said that when Gandhi talked about **‘Not mass production but production by masses,’** or **‘production and consumption must be reunited,’** he was talking the language of Small is Beautiful.
- Reuniting production and consumption units was only possible if production units were small and it would be **easy to manage and adaptable to local conditions.**
- This would lead to the **minimisation of transport which reduces the cost.**
- Gandhi quoted **‘Bring work to the people and not people to work’.** E.g. **Khadi** requires decentralization of production and consumption, which in turn should take place as near as possible to the source of production.
- **Gandhi’s economic ideals were not about the destruction of all machinery, but a regulation of their excesses.**
- Gandhi rejected the claim made by communists and capitalists alike – that improving the material conditions of life is all-important.
- Instead, he argued that all efforts to improve the human condition are bound to fail unless they **put dharma above pursuit of arth (wealth) and kama (sensual pleasures)**

## Gandhian view on need based living:

- Gandhi put forth **Sarvodaya** concept meaning **'Universal Uplift' or 'Progress of All'**.
- His community centred approach towards sustainability emphasized on 'betterment of human life' and **'ensuring fulfilment of basic needs of all human needs'**.
- The term was first **coined by him** as the **title of his 1908 translation of John Ruskin's tract on political economy, "Unto This Last"**.
- Mahatma Gandhi was of the firm view that the Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's needs, but not for every man's greed.
- In the Sarvodaya society of his dream, every member will be free from any greed for limitless acquisition of material wealth and they will follow the motto of **'simple living and high thinking'**.
- Everyone will get ample opportunity to **produce and earn sufficiently through honest work** for decent and dignified living.
- In such a society, all wealth, including land, will be assumed as **common property** to be utilized for the welfare of all.
- If an individual has more than his proportionate portion, he becomes a **trustee of the excess wealth for the benefit of the less fortunate** members of the society.
- In order to minimize the use of machines in a Sarvodaya society, Gandhi strongly advocated that everyone should do **some productive physical work** at least to earn his/her daily bread.
- **Industry will be conducted on a cottage basis** till all the people in the village are gainfully employed.
- The needs of the village will be determined by the people of the village themselves, through Village Council, representative of the whole village.

