



# Mahatma Gandhi's Vision of Clean India

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On 2nd October, 1869, the coastal city of Porbandar in Gujarat, a Harappan relic, and at that time, more popularly known as the birthplace of Sudama, the friend of Lord Krishna, witnessed the birth of a child who was to change the destiny of Porbandar, and of India. The child was none other than Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and Porbandar is now known the world over - for being the birthplace of Mahatma Gandhi. Mahatma Gandhi played a significant role in India's independence and became the champion of the cause of peace and non-violence. His birthday is now celebrated as the International Day of Non-Violence by the United Nations and he is remembered by one and all in India as the Father of our Nation.

Mahatma Gandhi's thoughts and actions were not limited to peace, non-violence and independence. He also advocated and shared his thoughts on various aspects of the society, particularly for ensuring overall and inclusive development of India and the world. Mahatma Gandhi warned against the destructive development of the West, used the Charkha as a symbol for promoting decentralized growth, initiated Harijan, a Journal for creating a just and egalitarian society and focused on traditional ways of doing things.

However, the one aspect of human society that was closest to Mahatma Gandhi was that of sanitation and cleanliness. If Gandhi had to choose between working for India's independence and sanitation, he would have instantaneously chosen the latter. Gandhi was of the firm belief that Sanitation is even more important than political freedom. Sharing his thoughts on what makes an ideal village, in the Journal Harijan, Gandhi had written, "An ideal village will be so constructed as to lend itself to perfect sanitation." Sanitation and cleanliness were the first problems, according to Gandhi, that needed to be addressed in the making of an

ideal nation. In all these years, we have remembered Gandhi for his non-violent struggle for India's independence, but his other teachings - especially on cleanliness and sanitation - are both very relevant and the need of the hour.

On 2nd October 2014, Mahatma Gandhi's 145th birthday, the Prime Minister of India Shri Narendra Modi held a broom in his hand and led the country for adopting Gandhi's vision of a Swachh Bharat. When the Prime Minister of the world's largest democracy swept the roads clean, not only was the world awe struck, it also served as a reminder to all Indians about the vision and values of Mahatma Gandhi that are entrusted to every Indian, coming from all sections of the society. During his struggle for independence, after Gandhi travelled to different parts of India, he made an observation that Swaraj or independence will have no value for India if we do not improve our dirty habits. He was referring to the lack of adequate toilets and sanitation facilities mainly in rural India and the resulting open defecation that he witnessed. Throughout the freedom struggle, Mahatma Gandhi kept reminding his followers, of the deep rooted connection between Swaraj and sanitation. His quest for cleanliness and sanitation did not obviously conclude with India's independence. While addressing the partition refugees at the Kurukshetra camp in 1947, Gandhi did not forget to remind them that the cleanliness and sanitation of their refugee camp was in their own hands and that they must make every effort to keep the camp clean and hygienic.

Mahatma Gandhi was also deeply interested in Naturopathy and wrote at length about the various cures found in Nature. Gandhi was of the belief that sickness is a result of unhealthy living and therefore man himself is responsible for the diseases he contracts. His

teachings provided solutions for many ailments and his focus remained on preventing diseases through keeping a healthy body and maintaining healthy and hygienic surroundings. Gandhi strongly advocated that the most important part of a house or a workplace is the lavatory, which must be kept clean at all times for ensuring freedom from diseases. Gandhi wrote in Navajivan, a weekly newspaper edited by him, that a lavatory must be as clean as the drawing-room. Gandhi felt that dirty open spaces, narrow lanes with no ventilation, and unhygienic urinals and lavatories led to the spread of diseases in human beings. He therefore advocated that each one of us need to take the responsibility of our surroundings and keep them clean by using our own hands. He also suggested methods of safe disposal of human excreta, to ensure that flies and insects are not able to spread diseases. Further, Gandhi was also a champion of the cause of composting of biodegradable waste, and often urged his followers to not throw away food and kitchen waste but bury the garbage just below the surface of the ground, so that it can become manure in due course of time. It is this attribute of Mahatma Gandhi that needs to be shared with citizens of India and the world today to rid the planet of the ongoing waste management crisis.

Wherever Gandhi went, he always remembered to monitor and assess the cleanliness and sanitation of that place, and alerted people whenever he found unclean lavatories, piles of unattended waste or puddles of standing water. Gandhi did not even exclude religious places from his analysis and was often found telling people that religion and sanitation have to be seen as one since Cleanliness is not next to - but is Godliness in itself. Gandhi was particularly disappointed after visiting the Holy River Ganga at Haridwar during the Kumbh Mela in 1915. He later penned down his grievance in Young India, an English weekly edited by him, where he said, "I had gone there full of hope and reverence. But while I realized the grandeur of the holy Ganga and the holier Himalayas, I saw little to inspire me in what man was doing in this holy place." He further wrote, "To my great grief, I discovered insanitation, both moral and physical...There is defilement of the mighty stream, the River Ganga, even in the name of religion."

Unfortunately, the holy River Ganga – and other holy rivers in India – continue to fight the pollution menace even till the present day. Gandhi had, some 100 years

ago, noted and urged that the bank of the holy River Ganga is not the place that men and women should use for their morning ablutions. Instead it is a place where all of us should sit in quiet contemplation and find God. It is hoped that all Indian citizens will pay heed to this advice of Mahatma Gandhi and help keep our holy rivers clean and hygienic.

The most notable contribution of Mahatma Gandhi towards keeping India clean was his teachings of simple living and high thinking. Gandhi advocated that each person follow a simplistic lifestyle, consuming only so much that is required for living a healthy life and not so much so as to become extravagant. Gandhi was wary of generating waste and his teachings encouraged his followers to minimise the generation of waste. Gandhi used to frown at the large-scale wastage of flowers that were given to him in his welcome and also when he found people wasting food by returning uneaten plates. Gandhi was so disturbed by such behaviour, which he attributed to "bad breeding", that he wished to organise an educational campaign against this menace. Mahatma Gandhi's teachings are as relevant today as they were in pre-independence India. While 1947 brought political freedom to India, Gandhi's dream of a Clean and Hygienic India remains unfulfilled even in the present day. Mahatma Gandhi had a vision of total sanitation for all, and an India where all parts of the country are clean and without waste. Cleanliness is the Gandhian way of living and it is this message that must reach all citizens of India so they can help achieve the unfulfilled dream of Mahatma Gandhi.

The year 2019 will mark the 150th anniversary of the birth of Mahatma Gandhi. It will also mark five year of the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan or the Clean India Campaign which is led from the front - by the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi. The Swachh Bharat Abhiyan has provided every Indian with an opportunity to work towards fulfilling the dream and vision of Mahatma Gandhi. It is the responsibility of all of us to take necessary steps for ensuring cleanliness, hygiene and sanitation around us at all times. It is only after achieving 100% cleanliness and sanitation that we would have paid our real tribute to the Father of our Nation, Mahatma Gandhi.

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