

Welcome to Turning Conscience Into Action, the Earth Charter podcast. Join Mirian Vilela, Earth Charter International Executive Director, in her fascinating conversations with great thinkers, scholars and activists from around the world who are working in the fields of sustainability, ethics, education and social transformation. Our purpose is to generate new insights on how to face current global challenges and inspire informed action.

Okay, so today we have the pleasure of having a conversation with Kartikeya Sarabhai, who is joining us from Ahmedabad, India. Kartikeya is the founder of the Center for Environmental Education in India. He is also a member of the Gandhi Agram in Ahmedabad. He has been involved in the Earth Charter Initiative for many years, especially as a board member of the Earth Charter International Council. So thank you for joining us today. So I would like to start our conversation today, asking you a question about education.

You have been involved in environmental education for so many years. And then now with the whole movement of education, purchasing, development, ESD. So what is ESD for you? And why is that important to current times? My own interest in education really started with my interest in development. And I was looking at, at that time, India's developmental issues, poverty, hunger, the whole process of nation building, of strengthening democracy. And I saw education or communication as a way of achieving this.

And so it's in a number of ways, not looking at education only in a formal sense, but also looking at ways in which people communicate with each other. At that time, we were looking at satellites for reaching out to rural communities, which were very distanced, and saying, how do you reach out to people who don't even have a road connection? And this is, we are talking about the 70s now. And that interest then got interested in looking at how people behave in urban environments for different types of situations and on the environment side.

But really saw education as a strong vehicle for change. And in many ways, environmental education in India had that roots. But when education for sustainable development was sort of formally done, it just fitted in like a glove, if you like, to what we were talking about it doing. I was part of the Indian delegation in 92 when we went to Rio. And at that time had argued strongly that countries like India need to look at an alternative path to development. Because the paradigm of development, the main paradigm was bound to fail if more people became rich the way, say the Americans were rich, if we consumed that much per capita.

There was no way we could reach there. And if you want to change the way people behave, if you want to change the way people aspire, if you want to change what people feel is meaningful in life, it can only happen through education. So that was my interest. And therefore when education for sustainable development happened, and when we shortened it to ESD, I often use the word that one of the most important part of that word is the fourth letter, which is four. It is education for sustainable development.

It's not sustainable development education. So it's not about sustainable development. It is education which leads to sustainable development. It was an action oriented how people got involved. And that is really how I saw education in the first place. So the fourth letter is not even in the acronym? It is not. And I've even talked on that. I've even talked on saying the missing name in the acronym is the most important one, which is the four. And it's not ESD, SDE, sustainable development education.

That could have been a subject. Yes, that's a very good point of clarity. It's not just any kind of education, right? It's for something. It is for something. This education is about. And this education is for. And I think that's a fundamental difference between ESD and other things. And that is what then when people went into the sustainable development goals, then you now you had a goal and you have education for sustainable development or sustainable development goals. So now you had an agenda put in front of you and you say, can education be one of the drivers because obviously education can't do it all.

You need technology. You need better systems. You need you need governance. You need a number of things. However, education is to my mind the core of it because it touches people and it touches the way people behave, people change, the way people take opinions and how the world shapes as a result of people. So that is how I saw ESD. That's good. Thank you so much, Katie K for sharing this major difference of the four. It's really for something different in the ESD proposal. Can you share with us some examples that illustrate the difference between conventional education and ESD?

Like a practical example of how to make it happen in practice, education for sustainable development. Well, you see conventional education, formal education is usually first of all siloed in different disciplines, which is one very major problem because anything which you see does not come that way. There is no problem on earth, which is purely chemistry or probably physics or purely social science. So there is that integration. And the minute you start with development or society, the integration happens.

So that was one. It also had, because it was four, it also has the element of solving problems and therefore critical thinking. So critical thinking became very important. Now in normal education, traditionally education was to bring people up so that they blend into society. It was socialization. It was not rocking the boat if you like or not shaking the foundations. So even if you, when we go to school, when we see children in very primary age groups, they ask wonderful questions and they come up with wonderful solutions.

But as they grow older, their questions become more and more structured. They only ask questions in that and that freedom has somehow gone. So now, each theme, which was looking at critical thinking, looking at values, so that's where I suppose the Earth Charter comes in so importantly. It was not just science you're learning or not just social science, but you also questioning the ethics behind what you do. And I think that's very much part of this thinking. But it also means that the structure in your education needs to be different.

You can't have that type of education where you be a bell at the end of 35, 40 minutes and say now your inquiry time for that is over and go to the next class. You let children develop. You don't say, sorry, you can't ask that question here because it's a question. This is a physics class and not the chemistry one or something else. So I think you also

can't look at people and say, don't observe, but focus on what is written in the book. And I often have given that example of my friend's child being asked what do birds eat?

And the child said, birds eat cows. And there was laughter in the class and it was the wrong answer. But you could see drought in the birds and you could see outside your windows while just sitting on dead cattle. But the correct answer was that birds eat grain and insects because that's what the textbook said. So what you're saying is education was the book, not what you observe. And books are normally not contextualized. Books come from a different place. They're not contextualized and books are not your own experience and life is changing.

And things around you are changing. And books by definition sometimes have to stereotype. They say people in India are like this or people in Costa Rica are like this or people like this is what they do and things like that. So how do you develop character? How do you develop your own set of learnings? I think ESP brought in an environmental education, brought in a perspective, which I think is a very important part of how education is transforming itself. But it requires teachers who are confident to be able to handle that education because education is just trying to do it.

So you can say even confident and flexible, maybe creative. Joint learners, co-learners. I mean, when I'm asked to say, tell me one thing which a teacher should do, I said a teacher should be able to get up and say, I don't know. Let's find out together. Does the teacher feel confident enough to tell a class, even of toddlers, that look frankly I don't know the answer. Let's find out. How should we find out? How do you make life and education discovery inquiry, searching? So these are all parts of it.

But basically it's all good education. It's not only ESP is one label for it, but basically you're going towards good education and there are many thinkers who have got that in the past. Yes, totally. I totally agree with that. So from what we have just heard from you, you mentioned that the difference between conventional education and ESD is that conventional education is basically structured in disciplines and ESD should be envisioned in an interdisciplinary way, but also as a way or a space in which allows people to develop critical thinking and also address or question the values that underlie their lifestyles or their decisions.

Yes. And also to observe, also to observe, question and observe. The book is one source. The book is certainly one source, but they observe and you have to allow them to open their vision. There are many other things to it. For instance, I think you have to learn that there is not one truth. There's not one true answer to something. And that's a very big realization. So say, is this right or is that right? So things are in context. Things are contextual. What is right and what is wrong is contextual and not necessarily absolute.

So there are many other hidden things in a good new education. But I think education is changing. And I think in the future, what has already happened is that the sort of monopoly which a teacher had is going. Today, I know that if I'm giving a talk and I say something, I can see several people in the audience googling to say what I said is correct. They have an alternative source to know what is there. That's one of the major differences, right? A hundred years ago, people would go to a university or school to access information.

There's no information in their telephone. No, absolutely. I used to, when I was a student, I remember the library, which I went to at Harvard. The books I was reading were on the ninth basement. And I would go nine floor down and search for it and read it. Today, I have more information on my phone, more access. Maybe it is biased also. Maybe it is not. It's biased in many ways, but it is still there. Yeah, but certainly the new generation certainly has more access to information, but not necessarily learning how to process, analyze, question and make use of it.

So that's exactly the point of what new education needs to be. That new education needs to make you understand how you search, how you process, how you separate false information from correct information. Because you certainly don't need information to be remembered in that sense. You need to understand how to deal with the information that you want. And also, so much of information is not necessarily reliable, which you get. People have their strong points of view, which is why different communities are looking at the same websites, the same thing which reinforces what they think.

And not go to other things. And I mean, we've seen sort of almost people falling into major groups in many countries.

There are two sets of beliefs, when in fact, earlier in their might have been a thousand sets of beliefs, and in some you and I might agree and some you and I might not agree. But it's not a whole bunch of values, which I go together for a whole bunch of thinking. But now that we are getting reinforced type of education, we fall into certain boxes. And I think there are many things which a new education policy is going to change. And interestingly, the COVID pandemic has brought about this huge unwittingly change, which is that many, many people, many children, all the children in Andhrabaad schools, for instance, are now learning online.

Now, they didn't have that. And once they learn online, they don't only go to their school, they go in other sources, they talk to each other, they learn from each other. So I think there's a lot of change. Schools, you were asking me some of the other changes. For instance, schools split children up into age groups.

Now, it is true that in one subject, two of us might be at the same level. But in another subject, I might be at a different level. And that's not possible in the school, because I'm put into basically a box approach. And I think that will change. So I think more and more learning-oriented seekers, learners, and people who have skills in processing, people with skills in critical thinking, in being able to articulate values, in being able to discuss, being able to have tolerance, and which is what brings the Earth Charter to so much more relevant today than when it was written, because it really is talking about that future, or preparing you for the future.

Now, the futures of education is an initiative that UNESCO has embarked to develop some ideas for how we envision the futures of education.

Much of what you have said, I think, will lead us to this question of how do you envision the futures of education. So what are the three points you would envision that would become normality in the futures of education?

Well, some of the things I've already said, but one is the fact that you can access anywhere and anywhere in the world. Of course, currently, language and time zones are still a barrier. But I think another couple of years, language will not be a barrier, because Google or something will simultaneously translate for you. So listening-wise, you will probably be able to listen. So even that barrier will disappear. And therefore, you will be able to source and talk from wherever you are. That's, I think, one big difference. The fact that you will not be now relying, therefore, on single sources is going to be there.

And I think, to my mind, young people, understanding that they need to take charge in some ways, that their opinion counts, that they are no longer to be kept saying, you're too young or you're too small to discuss the future of the nation or future of climate change. And I think children see other children doing this. They have points of view. And up till now, they used to be a small minority in a house. But now they can link up with other children. They see movements. They see other things. So I think it's going to be a very exciting future. I think we're just seeing the fringe of it just now. We are seeing the little, little experiments doing little parts of it. Because the fundamental institution, which is the school, the college, has yet not really changed. Just like the library has not changed.

But the library is changing extremely rapidly, whether they like it or not. So the library will have to take a different meaning, just like the school will. So at some stage, that institution will change. Now, the institution will finally change when certification becomes different. Then I no longer have to go to a school to get my certification. And therefore, once the minute you separate certification from number of years in the school for residency, then I have free to learn as long as I go for that certification. Now, that will change the minute people who are hiring for jobs value a certificate more than a master's degree. And this is going to happen. So the minute they say that a Earth Charter certificate is what I want.

They're not in a different business because the institutions are already looking for different sort of skills that are not necessarily showing in a certificate. Yes, they are looking for it. It helps us now to think about the next question, which would be what's different? What do you think is the relevance of your charter to the current times? What do you think is the value of it as an educational instrument?

Well, first of all, the Earth Charter document itself and the way it reads is continuous to be one of the most powerful ethical statements, which can help you guide you in our effort to become sustainable. And while sustainability 20 years ago, when the charter was first brought out, was a word which few people knew. Today, you will find any number of children talking sustainability, you will find any number of businesses, whether they do it or not is a different issue. But they will still talk that we are trying to be sustainable. You will find packaging which is sustainable, you will read it in your supermarkets, you will read it in your schools. But to go to sustainability, it can't be done just through new technology.

So you're not going to have this super cars or super vehicles, which don't use fuel. And there is a source of power which does not end, but you can live as recklessly and carelessly as you want. It is going to be something where we have to learn to live differently, not to enjoy. I think one will be able to do things which are very exciting. But one has to realize

that one cannot do it at the cost of other members of the society. One can't do it at the cost of nature. One cannot do it at cost of exploitation. So suddenly, I find that I'm eating something which comes out of a highly exploitative process. In my way of looking at that chocolate, for instance, becomes different. And I'll now read whether I'm getting a free, I'm getting a chocolate which is followed some ethical principles.

So I'm now concerned beyond the product. Now the Earth Charter gives you a holistic view. It's not only about climate change. It's not only about democracy. It's not only about other living creatures, but it has put so many different ideas together. Long before, if you like the sustainable development goals, put all of these things together.

The SDGs have also done it and I think has in many ways been inspired by the charter opposition that it puts the fact that these problems cannot be solved separately. They are things which are holistic and one of the main things on ESD and education is the whole school approach and the holistic thing. It's not something which you just learn in different parts. So I think the Earth Charter has a way of integrating the way you look. It's just like you have critical thinking as one important part of ESD and education for the future. Ethical thinking is equally important just like you need to be critical, you need to be ethical and ethical doesn't mean following a set of given norms.

Thou shall not type of things, but being able to question yourself and to say whether in this act for my own conscience, am I acting in a way which is ethical because you are putting into different situations.

And Earth Charter helps because I always need to go do something. I don't want to be alone, I want to understand and Earth Charter is a network. Earth Charter is a movement, it is a thing. So how do I build up a community of people around the world who share the way I approach a problem? The way I think, the way we do it, but not necessarily a solution. The solutions could be different in different contexts. So I think it's extremely valuable, but it's not currently used as much as it should be. The Earth Charter is not known by as many people and I think therefore the efforts of the Earth Charter to have more and more people be exposed to the Earth Charter and be able to therefore use it is where we need to go.

But I see the Earth Charter and its educational approach very much part of that future of education. You mentioned about the sustainable development goals, the SDGs, but you all in relation to the Earth Charter, can you share with us what you have been thinking in terms of the linkages between the Earth Charter and the sustainable development goals? What are they different, are they complementary? How do you see the two when you bring them together, the sustainable development goals, SDGs and the Earth Charter? Well, I certainly see them very complementary to each other. One is a set of goals, as it's called and then there are the 169 targets and by no means is it a perfect listing. It is a work in progress.

Already we are finding that there are issues which are not specifically mentioned, whether it was plastic waste or pollution or so many other populations. Many things are not mentioned there, but it certainly gives a direction. But the way Earth Charter comes into it is if you see the way the Earth Charter is there, it talks about nature, it talks about human

relationship to the planet, how do we relate to the planet? How do we see it just as an anthropocentric world in which the humans have everything is either justified because we are there or is it something which has a place on its own or do I only value it? Do I only value the Amazon because it's giving me an oxygen or do I value it for more than that?

So I think what the Earth Charter does is it almost puts up this whole thing in a sort of spiritual way. It tells you, also makes you appreciate what this planet is all about, how fortunate all of us are in being able to be on one of the only planets so far that we know which has life and such abundant life and how do we relate to that? And therefore it goes back to thinkers all over the world who have also questioned these things, who have also thought about these things, how we relate. And I think the sustainable development goal is about where you want to go, what is the progress, what is considered development in the human context. I mean, is it just that we should all have a car for instance, should every family on the planet have a car?

And that's not what, that's what will never happen if it happens, the world will probably collapse if it's a car like today. And so that is obviously not, not a goal, but we have to come to a way in which we live and explore. So I think what it did was to start a whole journey of questioning and exploring what is sustainability. I've been myself talking about and writing about sustainability of urban environments. What is a sustainable city going to be in the future? And just like what is sustainable education, what is education? Will education have this whole thing where it stops at a certain age? And then for the rest of my life, I would say don't education or is education something which is now going to be a continuing process for all of us because there are new things.

Of course, every time we buy a new gadget, we have to learn about it. And probably many adults are learning about it from their children, how to use their phone or to use their computers or how to use the Zoom. So I think it's bringing about new equation, new ways of thinking. And I think there's certainly change, but we don't know what it's going to be. But other charter is certainly going to be very much at the center. I like when we say, when we envision that the sustainable development goals set a common agenda and set and define some goals in their charter offers the ethical values that underline the goal, but also the way to achieve them.

As you rightly say, the way in which we could look at values, education and even their charter as references that help us to raise some good questions on the consequences of our actions and decisions. So there is a pillar four of their charter. The last part of your charter articulates a number of values and principles around the idea of democracy, non-violence and peace. Could you offer your own maybe ideas or your comments on how do you think that fourth pillar of your charter is articulated and the importance of that idea of democracy, non-violence and peace as part of the whole idea of sustainability and community? In many ways, the fourth pillar articulates it in so many words, but some of the ideas are also there in earlier parts.

I mean, the minute I say respect for other forms of life, I'm already talking about non-violence and peace. It's not only between humans that we talk. So the fourth pillar puts it in a certain articulation, but it is something that permeates all of the charter. And the minute we say we respect other people, democracy is a central pillar of how we

operationalize that respect. Now, nobody has found the perfect democratic way, model. There must be 50% of America is probably thinking that this is not democracy, because obviously there was a whole lot of people, maybe a small minority, but they felt differently. Now, France has its own way of eliminating and doing several rounds of elimination. Britain or India has elect people and then they elect people.

That's what I'm talking about, not only participatory democracy, but democracy even in the family who takes decisions between a man, a woman and children. How is democracy the village one? How many weightages do you give or weightages do you give to people? The whole idea of corruption, for instance, which is also dealt with in the charter. Is it something which is done or not done? There are many fields here, I think, where it is just an acceptable practice. It's not even considered corruption to do certain things. That's how it is done. So you give someone extra. Now, in some cases, you might call it tipping. In some cases, you might call it gifts. I mean, the whole corruption thing of using power to leverage something which is not. And it's as old as history, human kind.

So many of these things are inherent in people. And unless you are conscious about it and find ways of dealing with it, we will not be able to do that. And so therefore, some of those principles are just making something important, which is consciousness. Yes. So the whole consciousness of those actions, because it is not, can I say that I am not corrupt, for instance? I think that corrupt thoughts do come to my mind.

It's not as if they don't. And if I take the true meaning of it, there might be actions which are questionable that I might have done. But am I conscious of it? Am I dealing with it? Am I trying to be less so? Do I abate it? What do I do? And do I use influence? So do I not? Today, there is not a single bed in any of the hospitals in Amdabad for a COVID patient. They're all full. If I had a serious case in the family who needed a bed, would I use my influence to get it? Or would I stand in line?

So I have to ask that question. It's all very well when it's an easy decision. But if it's not an easy decision, then do I do it or don't I do it? So I think the critical thinking of yesterday and the consciousness which we are trying to build up through a charter, these go together. These go together to really be more aware of what I'm doing and also to recognize that in a very pure sense, it's not possible sometimes to be totally nonviolent because there are people who use violence in various ways. Violence towards the food you eat, for instance. So you can't preach. You can't preach.

What do you mean about violence towards the food we eat?

I'm grown up in a society which is essentially vegetarian. And it's not that I've chosen to be vegetarian. I've always grown up. It's very easy for me to say I'm vegetarian. But is that something that justifies me to say everyone should be? It should not be. And so then we talk about different things. And we say, yes, but can you be more human, for instance? Can you do something else? So that is a compromise. What does being more human mean? Well, more human means if you see the way some cattle are kept and the way they are butchered, you would turn anyone's stomach, for instance. And today you can go and buy eggs, for instance, from free-dining chicken. I don't know how free-dining they are,

but they're chicken which have had their lives as opposed to stuck in a small production thing.

So my value for another life form, whether it is milk or this, is something which I respect or don't respect. Now, whether I decide to draw my line somewhere does not necessarily give me a right to my mind to draw the same line for you or someone else.

It is for you to decide where your parameters will be after you read the charter, for instance. Where would you draw? What would you think? But it gives you a way of looking at it to see how you would do it in your life, professional life, in your society, in your individual, in your business life. How would we do it? And the fact that I ask the question, that's where your consciousness comes in, if I'm conscious about this, is there a way I could do it differently. And what we saw, for instance, during the COVID times was that some of the poorest in our cities, they really hurt very, very badly. And they were just left alone. It was okay for people who are better off, but it was not even handed. And we could have perhaps much, much, much better.

You raised a very interesting point about how we deal with the issues of values. It cannot be done from an angle of imposing in a vertical way. It has to come from within. But maybe one answer to that would be about laying some information, context or circumstances and asking the right questions and let people generate their own answers rather than give their own answers. Right?

You remember we had this person on the Earth Charter Council who was an Inuit, right? She was, what was her name? Harriet Rasmussen.

So she was telling me, she was telling me how there was this discussion on wailing.

And Kamla Chaudhary, who was also on the council, and a vegetarian, actually supported the fact that the Inuits should be able to do their wailing, but the Japanese should not. Now that is a culturally, traditionally contextual answer because the way that culture respected a whale, the way they did something was very different from something which is commercial. In our state of Orissa, for instance, there are no rules, but all the fishermen there stopped fishing during this morning season.

They say that this is the time when the fish should be left alone.

You know, but it's not coming out to a municipal or a government law. It's coming out to a tradition of respect for that. Yes, we are doing an Indian dancer. When they, before they do their dancing, my mother used to be a dancer. They ask forgiveness on the Earth because they're going to stamp on it.

You know, so they understand that there are things which act themselves, maybe violent, but to the extent that you are living, you will have to, there is a certain definitional violence which is there, but do I do it out of greed or do I do it within my frame? I mean, that's very, very important. So I think looking at this, looking at all of those pillar four ideas of democracy, non-violence and peace have really to be seen in context. And I think the world today can do a lot without understanding that.

A lot without understanding. Even societies treat it differently. You know. It's a very good point about looking at this through the lenses of the context in which each one of us are cultural context, social context. It's very important, very important point. And I thank you for that. Now in 2010, you and your team at the Center for Environment Education, CEE, you put together a very interesting publication that looks at the linkages between the Gandhian thinking and their Shadda principles to look at the synergies between them. Could you share with us some of the synergies that you see between the Gandhi philosophy and the Earth Charter? This was a little booklet which we did and it was a wonderful exercise for us here.

And also it made the people understand the relevance of the Charter and what they thought, what they knew here, which they knew Gandhi. And it was 10 years of the Earth Charter, a wonderful celebration which we all had together. But if you see some of those words, I mean there's so much in this book, but it talks about ensure that all communities at all levels guarantee human rights and fundamental freedoms is the Earth Charter writing. And Gandhi talks about, I look at upon an increasing in the power of the state with the greatest fear, because although I apparently doing good, I minimize the, that's the greatest harm to mankind by destroying individuality which lies in the root of all progress.

So he understands the value of the individual and the respect of the individual, which is very much a part of how the Earth Charter looks upon. And the whole issue of exploitation of resources, manage the use of renewable resources such as water, soil, forests, etc. They do not exceed rates of regeneration and the protecting the health ecosystem. That's Earth Charter. But Gandhi, when he says Earth provides enough to satisfy everyone's needs, but not for everyone's greed, he is making that distinction between need and greed. And that's not so different between when Kamala Chaudhary applies that to the innuents hunting one whale for their community for the six months or whatever, to compare to someone who is killing mindlessly to make a beauty product and throw you away more sweet.

So I think how society sees it, where do we draw that night? So again, without being preachy, and I think Gandhi was not, but Gandhi very much believed in his own standards for himself, which are very, very difficult for anyone.

My life is my message, is one of the messages Gandhi says, my life is what he lived, what he believed in. There are jokes or stories around that. I don't know if the story is true or not. There's a story, little story, that this mother goes to Gandhi and says, please tell my child not to eat too much sugar. So Gandhi says, okay, come back in 10 days. So she wonders why. So when he comes back in 10 days, Gandhi tells his child, don't eat too much sugar. So the mother said, but you could have said that on that first day. He said, but I realized that I was eating too much sugar at that day. So first I had to stop eating it myself before I could say.

It's probably a made up story. I don't know if it's true or not. It's a wonderful story. He picks how Gandhi thought that he experiments with himself and over the years, he also changes. So when you see Gandhi quotes at different parts of his life, he's also evolving, he's also searching, he also realizes that some views, they're not correct and change. And I think that was very important about democracy, not violence and peace, any number of things Gandhi has talked about. And he absolutely believed in that democracy, believed

so much in peace. The one area which she perhaps has not contributed as much to as the charter is in the natural world, the natural world and the elements.

I mean, that is relatively was something which Gandhi didn't get all that much time in sense, perhaps the opportunity to reflect on. So there are parts of the charter which deal with humans and society and peace and things which are not, but it's still a very lovely book.

But certainly he's thinking contributed a lot to how do we envision participatory democracy? How do we organize society and governments? Could you say that we could say Gandhi influenced the drafting of the first charter? Or we can see the voice of Gandhi through the first charter?

A few hours ago, today, I was on a meeting with the Ben Gurion institution in Israel. And Ben Gurion had a few photographs of people he respected in his, in this room, which is being preserved. But the only one in his bedroom, there's only one photograph. And that was on Gandhi. And it shows how this man, the purity of his thinking, and to some extent, simplicity of his thinking was so, so infectious and influenced so many people, whether it was Nelson Mandela or Ben Gurion here or Martin Luther King or so many others, that it was there. And I think that thinking obviously several people who were part of helping to draft the charter, either consciously or unconsciously, had some of those ideas have come into it.

The charter has its roots in several other wonderful thinkers around the world. And that is another reason why such a wonderful document that it brings the confluence. And if you remember, when we did this book, we thought we would also do a series of other thinkers, and I think we should still do that, get someone else to write about something else, because it tells us how these ideas have a confluence to it. And they are ideas which are written in humanity, true sets, or someone who is superman on the planet.

Well, certainly Gandhi questioned human lifestyles and he questioned the way society is organized. And managed themselves. And probably this is also one of the purposes of the charter, to question the way in which we organize ourselves as societies, how we manage lifestyles, or human lifestyles. It's just that it's different in time, but the challenges are similar in a way. Yeah, I think India, from that very thinking, was very conscious in 2015, when the climate change agreement was signed in Paris, to insist that the word lifestyle is put in the preamble.

You know, in 1992, the same time the Earth Charter was originally conceived, the senior president Bush said that American lifestyle is not up for negotiation.

And that you would not come to Rio if that was on the table, or if the Earth Charter was on the table, for that matter. And that was of sacrifice, which had to be paid. But it was all the way in 2015, that perhaps for the first time, it is recognized that it is ultimately lifestyle, which determines you cannot blame the energy producer and consume as much energy as you want.

You know, I mean, the producer is not making it for themselves, they're making it for the consumer, who is using it. So sanitizing ourselves by saying that, look, I am not doing it, is not good enough. So you have to really think through that whole chain of processes to understand what you're doing. And Gandhi really did that. So he, the spinning wheel, for instance, which is so much associated with him, he knew nothing about it in 2015, when he came to Andhrabaad.

What's the symbol of that? The symbol was that he came, and he said, wouldn't it be wonderful if I had some magic trick or something, which I could give anyone who was unemployed, I could give something and the person could have a decent, dignified living, anyone, and as many people as you want. And he was looking for it, and when he found the spinning wheel, he said, this is one of my solutions, that I can give it to anyone. So if you say, you're unemployed, here it is, you spin. And if you spin, you are making cotton, you're making by hand. And of course, it's a wonderful texture to wear and to do things. But he saw it as a means of liberating people.

It was a way of liberating, it was not the spinning wheel per se, but it's a way of liberating people from centralization, from saying the only way for production is huge factories, people are only consumers. All these things have changed. I think a lot of the environment and sustainable development thinking is also talking about differently. Even things like electricity, which you earlier could never think of in a decentralized way. Now you're saying I put some solar panels on my rooftop, and I will also build a house which is less consuming or electricity I might even generate it. And therefore decentralization is also very much part of Gandhi's thinking. And Gandhi, and we are trying just now, I was telling you about sustainable cities. And I will share that little blog with you.

But what we are saying was, it wouldn't it be wonderful if cities had also small wards or districts within the city, where a lot of things could be happening there. And these are all like a little village where you can walk around, you can do things, and you can shop there. And only for certain things, you have to actually go on to traffic, which takes you somewhere else. So there are many ways, and I think all of this is going to change the way people think. Already post COVID, many large factories in India have said that, large businesses in India have said that we are going to continue with 80% from home. Yes, so the current pandemic is forcing us to change the way we do things.

And the spinning wheel of Gandhi as a metaphor or as a symbol of inviting people to also change their mindset of how we think. And the symbol of a circle, the symbol of a spinning wheel is also a symbol of a circle. And then the whole circular economy, the whole concept, that nature operates in a circular way, whether it's oxygen or nitrogen or plant matter or everything else, it renews itself. It is not something which you go from A to B with a lot of waste, but it renews. There is no concept of waste in nature. And I think this whole concept which comes with Gandhi, there is no waste in this whole process. Everything gets used somewhere.

So I think these are very core values that I think a charter has captured and put into modern words, in modern language, for sustainability. The philosophies of the world on sustainability, Gandhi being one of them. And I think that's the power of that thing. But I hope it's not narrowing. It doesn't say that, look, this is all that is. It should be something

which opens up. After I read the charter, I want to read more of someone else. And I want to know more about other thinkers and how it applies to my life. So it should be something which enables and empowers me and brings me together with a shared community of people who also understand the importance of sustainability and values in our lifestyle, in our life, and how we move forward with it.

Well, thank you so much for that, Katkeya. If I may, I would like to ask you one last question so that we close our conversation today. We are entering the third decade of the third millennium.

What do you consider are the three biggest challenges of humanity for the current times? And one or two of the possibilities to address these challenges for the current times? Well, it depends how you define them. But one easy way would be to say climate change, biodiversity, and pollution. I mean, that would be one way of looking at it. Another way would be to say human lifestyles, human values, human aspirations. Now, the two are reflective of the same thing. So it depends which way you look at it. So I think the challenge is, of course, the climate change and loss of biodiversity is the consequence of something. The challenge is, ultimately, to do with us, the most powerful, rather short-lived species. I mean, we've not been around that much for all the damage we've done.

We've only had a very miniscule part of this life. And most of it has been over the last 250 years that we've really messed up things.

And hopefully, we come to our senses and look back upon this whole couple of hundred years as being when human beings were not clever enough or not responsible enough to be able to appreciate, understand, and respect this wonderful planet on which we are and the wonder which life is all about, the fact that we are there and look at it. I mean, humans have also done some hugely wonderful things. The fact that you and I sitting on two separate sides of the planet can have this conversation and now see each other and know each other. I mean, that's marvelous, isn't it? It's something which is fiction not so long ago. It was fiction just one generation ago. So I think I'm very hopeful that society will, in fact, pull itself together.

But in order to do that, you have to understand that there's a large number of people who don't think this way. And one has to win it over. It's not through a majority that one can force sustainability through majority. Any more than you can force unsustainable life through a majority.

And I think that is what you're going to see happening. America is one such country, but many others. And I think we have to lead our way to show it together. And I think we today have the technology. We have the means. We hopefully have the intellect. So we need the values. You know, we need to, I mean, we have it. If you think of this, just see what human kind has today. I mean, it's more than ever, which anyone had. So I am only to be positive about the planet. Sometimes there are UV days when you think this, but I think another chapter is a beacon. It's a light, which if you go to, and I know many people who do that, who will go back to the Earth Charter, they're in doubt. So I think it helps you. And there are things that you might not agree with.

There are things that you agree with. There are new challenges which are not mentioned in that because they were not, frankly, in the year 2000, they were not as predominant as they are now. But you still understand the spirit of it and how you have you have you have you have imbibed and how you read it and how you grow it. How you grow those concepts. And at least in Indian thought, where we have no book, none of our religions have a book. So, so they are, they are books and they are only seekers. And you just seek from one to another and you go to another. And I hope we seek, we use a charter as an important milestone to seek and to and to ask questions and to build upon and not to close our thinking, but to open it. And I think it is that's what it's doing.

Well, thank you so much for joining us today for sharing your knowledge, your experience and your wisdom in this conversation. Thank you so much. Thank you and all the best.

If you like this episode, please share it and support our movement by making a donation. This podcast is developed by Earth Charter International. As part of our work, as UNESCO chair on education for sustainable development with the Earth Charter. For more information, visit our website at earthcharter.org.