**Study Material**

**4th Semester**

**Paper 402**

**Unit II**

**By Koushiki Dasgupta**

**Was Gandhi an Environmentalist ?**

Mahatma Gandhi has become a symbol of peace and nonviolence to the whole world.  He was a leader and a social reformer of extraordinary stature and authority. However, it is not common to think of Gandhi as an environmentalist.  Although, admittedly, he wasn’t an environmentalist in the modern sense (the major environmental problems of the present emerged in the post-Gandhi era), yet the Gandhian ideals – including, centrally, the idea of Swaraj or self-rule – enable a practical of sustainable development that can be implemented without compromising the quality of life. Indeed, Gandhi’s oft-quoted 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 modern environmentalist thinking.

Gandhi was a practitioner and ardent advocate of vegetarianism. He also practiced “nature cure,” a traditional Indian form of medicine that is now achieving a semblance of some acceptance in the West. He was a dedicated practitioner of frugality, of recycling and reuse, and a trenchant critic of various aspects of modernity. Most major Indian environmentalists today are influenced by the precepts of Gandhi’s Satyagraha – nonviolent resistance, which in some extreme cases may even include fasting unto death – in opposing the political status quo. Gandhi’s firm belief in nonviolence (with vegetarianism as a just one particular consequence of this faith) made him open to and protective of all diversity, including the diversity of life (today’s term’s of choice is biodiversity), of culture and society, and of spirituality. One cannot help admiring the beautiful philosophical and moral coherence of Gandhi’s worldview. Complementary to the principle of Swaraj (self-rule) was that of Swadeshi (self-sufficiency), with ensuing “decentralization of power.” These concepts have more ecological significance than may seem at first blush. The Gandhian policy of Swadeshi fostered self-reliance through the use of indigenous products, as a way to boost India’s economy and employment rate. While rampant industrialization caused a degradation of India’s biodiversity, this principle of Swadeshi, if applied thoughtfully and consistently to all economy, would have gone a long way in fostering environmentally friendly and sustainable models of development.

. Gandhi had cautioned the world, much before any modern day environmentalist, about the problems of large-scale industrialization, which we are confronting today. Gandhi visualized that mechanization will not only lead to industrialization, to massive urbanization, to unemployment, but will also lead to the destruction of environment. His seminal work, Hind Swaraj, written a hundred years ago in 1909 warned of the dangers the world is facing today in the form of environmental destruction and the threat to the planet. The Gandhian idea becomes still more relevant when sustainable growth and development is to be achieved because he emphasized on production by the masses instead of mass production. According to him this will result in the development of an economic system that can minimize environmental degradation and achieve sustainable development. His idea of Swaraj or self-rule enables a practical sustainable development that can be implemented without compromising the quality of life..

He was an environmentalist if we discern the implications of his social, political, and economic ideas on the environment. Many environmental movements in India have drawn inspiration from Mahatma Gandhi. He cannot be called an environmentalist if we do a mechanical content analysis of his statements based on the present understanding of environmental issues, since words like 'environment' and 'ecology' do not appear in his Collected Works. The Encyclopaedia of Human Ecology edited by Julia R Miller and others did not have an entry on Gandhi in their otherwise impressive list. This article seeks to look at the implications of his ideas for an ecologically sound system of living.

Environmental consciousness is a phenomenon that gained momentum only in the last five decades or so. But it is implicit in worldviews, traditions, culture, religion, and folklore. Ecology is a subject that seeks to understand the relationship between living organisms and their environment. Human ecology visualizes human beings and their environment as constituting an integrated whole. The Western tendency to compartmentalize everything into different categories does not agree with the ecological perspective. Gandhi saw everything in an interrelated way. In his writings, we find elements of economics, politics, and sociology suffused with an interconnectedness informed by ethics. Gandhi said: 'I believe in advaita (non-duality), I believe in the essential unity of man and, for that matter, of all that lives.' J C Kumarappa, Gandhi's economist, who developed his ecological views in a clearer fashion, said: 'In the traditional archives of knowledge, religion, sociology, and economy have all been reserved their separate and exclusive spheres. Man has been divided into various watertight compartments. The left hand is not to know what the right hand does. Nature does not recognize such divisions. She deals with all life as a whole.'

A human ecology perspective is thus holistic. Gandhi did not recognize separate rules for separate spheres of human life, but saw all spheres in an integrated manner. The issues currently discussed under the label of environment were not prominent during his lifetime. However, his description of the modern (industrial) civilization as a 'seven-day wonder' contains a prognosis and a warning. Gandhi had anticipated most of the environmental problems that we face today. He envisaged an ecological or basic needs model centred on limitation of wants in contrast to the modern civilization that promoted material welfare and profit motive. Gandhi said: 'A certain degree of physical harmony and comfort is necessary, but above a certain level it becomes hindrance instead of help. Therefore, the ideal of creating an unlimited number of wants and satisfying them seems to be a delusion and a snare.' According to him, a man who multiplies his daily wants cannot achieve the goal of plain living and high thinking. He warned against the perils of industrialization. He said: 'God forbid that India should ever take to industrialization after the manner of the West. The economic imperialism of a single tiny island kingdom (England) is today keeping the world in chains. If an entire nation of 300 million took to similar economic exploitation, it would strip the world bare like locusts.'

Jainism influenced Gandhi. Jainism looks at nature as a living entity and exhorts human beings to continually purify themselves by respecting the diverse life forms. Hinduism also looks at nature and all life forms with equal reverence. Rabindranath Tagore represented nature in his poems and works. Shanti Niketan, the institution that he founded, was another example of nature-friendly study and living.

Gandhi drew on a number of Western thinkers, who, although were not wholly against the modernist project, romantically cherished the pre-industrial order. John Ruskin, for example, was critical of industrialization in that it had sapped human sensibility and destroyed the harmonious relationship humans had with nature. Henry David Thoreau, American poet and naturalist, whose essay on civil disobedience had influenced Gandhi, even believed that nature could exist without humans. Edward Carpenter, who was influenced by John Ruskin and Hindu mysticism, also wanted to lead a life that was simple and close to nature. His critique of civilization was a major influence on Gandhi's first book Hind Swaraj. Carpenter, a socialist, was also an early animal rights activist. What is special about all these thinkers is a kind of romanticism about nature and a general distaste for industrial civilization and urbanization. We also have statements of Gandhi expressing similar romanticism. The example of St. Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of nature and animals, certainly appealed to Gandhi.

Lord Bhikhu Parekh says that Gandhi took exception to the anthropocentric view that man has unlimited right to lord over the non-human world and instead proposed a cosmocentric anthropology that 'establishes a more balanced and respectful relationship between him and the natural world, assigns the animals their due place and provides the basis of a more satisfactory and ecologically conscious philosophical anthropology'. In fact, Gandhi's ecological concerns emerged from his focus on a basic needs model of social order that would not exploit nature for short-term gains, but take only from it what is absolutely necessary for human sustenance. Gandhi had to concede that life involves a certain amount of violence to nature even if it is unintended. What we can do is to minimize it.

Gandhi had been a major influence on a number of writers like E F Schumacher and deep ecologist, Arne Naess, who called his own brand of environmentalism 'biospherical egalitarianism', and points out that he was influenced by the Mahatma's metaphysics. Gandhi has been, and continues to be, the major influence on the environmental movements in India. Chipko movement, the largest environment movement in Asia as well as a good number of Indian environmentalists and environmental historians such as Vandana Shiva, Anil Agarwal, Madhav Gadgil, and Ramachandra Guha have acknowledged their debt to Gandhi's ideas. Guha has described him as the 'single most important influence on the environmental movement'. But, he says that it was left to J C Kumarappa and Mira Behn to build an ecological programme along Gandhian lines. But what is special about all those influenced by a Gandhian brand of environmentalism is their exclusive focus on the rural areas.

Gandhi did not talk much about the abstract notion of Earth, but he talked a lot about land and soil. To support the agricultural economy, he also emphasized artisan economy (spinning of clothes with charkha, repairing of agricultural tools, arts and crafts) that made these rural peasant communities free from depending on machine-made and mass-produced industrial goods and tools.

Gandhi was not fascinated with wilderness and rainforests like naturalists. We do not see him visiting places of interest to naturalists. Yet he believed that nature should be allowed to take its own course. Gandhi even prohibited people to stock medicines against poisonous bites and talked about the possibility of co-existence with the non-human world. In fact, ecological life was part and parcel of Gandhian ashram life. Since Gandhi's cottage in Sevagram was not reptile-proof, he often had to pick up snakes with the help of a pair of long tongs that he always kept, and release them in places far away from the people. He looked at all life as sacred and all human beings as part of the divine, living in harmony with other beings. Suffering of all living beings was of concern to him. Gandhi realized that there is some kind of continuity between lording over nature and lording over other 'inferior' people as in colonialism. Human beings have to be trustees of the lower animal kingdom. This notion of stewardship of the Earth, and all living beings on it is the hallmark of Gandhian ecology. Conservation was a part of Gandhi's day-to-day life. He would use water most sparingly. It could be said of money and other personal resources also. He also found the need to conserve his sexual energy for larger goals. One could dismiss them as austere practices associated with him in a personal capacity. Since Gandhi did not try to distinguish between his personal and public life at any point in time, he conveyed the value of conserving resources for the future generation. In all these he personified a true ecologist. His antipathy towards urbanization also reflected an attitude full of implications for the environment. In some ways, his bania thriftiness came in handy as an environmental principle worthy of adoption. Gandhi had a special love for the cow. It epitomized the sub-human world, and he saw cow protection as one of the duties of human beings that enables them to relate themselves best with the non-human world. This is because the cow not only provides nourishing milk for the family, but also helps us in agriculture, both for tilling the land as well as for supplying the necessary manure.

Ahimsa, for Gandhi, envisaged or subsumed an awareness of the interdependency of all life. Ahimsa can emerge only in a disciplined environment in which a person renounces pleasures of the body for a higher spiritual pursuit. Vandana Shiva, an ecofeminist and environmental activist who acknowledges Gandhian influence on her thinking and work has embarked on programmes like seed satyagraha to protect biodiversity and seed, and prevent it from becoming the monopoly of a handful of corporations. Gandhi is also often called the father of appropriate technology.

He advocated small, local, and village-based technology that allowed its users to relate themselves with what they produce. For him technological progress was not a sign of real progress. The Charkha represented the ideal technological equipment for Gandhi. A technology that would not replace human labour was what was in his mind. E F Schumacher was strongly influenced by this idea of Gandhi who popularized it through his concept of 'intermediate technology'.

From a Gandhian perspective, the present environmental mess, ranging from deforestation, soil and biodiversity loss, to pollution and climate change, is not a disease but only a symptom. A good doctor treats the disease and not the symptom. The disease is the very concept and patterns of growth and development that are being followed everywhere.

In conclusion, we can say that Gandhi's environmentalism fitted in with his overall vision for India and the world that sought to extract from nature what is absolutely necessary for human sustenance. His ideas on environment are intimately linked with his ideas relating to the polity, economy, health, and development. His asceticism and simple living, a rural-centred civilization based on village autonomy and self-reliance, handicrafts and craft-centred education, emphasis on manual labour and absence of exploitative relationships are infused with elements of an ecological vision. Even his approach to gender did not attempt to break the connection with nature, but to manoeuvre within it and provide some space for women to uplift themselves. It is, therefore, no wonder that Gandhi is a major inspiration for many environmental movements worldwide, particularly for those who link their movement with larger concerns for human sustenance and development. He would not be an inspiration for radical environmentalists who allow little space for human sustenance and livelihood issues. Although he was not anthropocentric in his approach, he was not prepared to allow the question of human survival to be sidelined in discussions on environment. Finally, non-violent methods of Gandhi also represent an evolutionary approach to resolving disputes within an overall ecological frame. There is now a rethinking on the desirability of development. An idea like 'happiness' does not suggest that high level of material progress is necessary to realize it. Gandhi's environmentalism, it must be admitted, is largely built on ecological practices of peasants and tribal communities.

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In Modern times, Indian environmental movements focus primarily on preserving the livelihoods of the pre-modern villagers. Apart from the non-violent Gandhian methods of tree-hugging, the Chipko movement was also remarkable for its interconnection with indigenous practices, local traditions, culture and religion, especially under the leadership of the Gandhian activist Sunderlal Bahuguna, who soon became one of the leading figures of Indian environmentalism. Ramachandra Guha identifies three different strands in Indian environmentalism: Crusading Gandhian, Appropriate Technology, and Ecological Marxism According to the Ecological Marxists, the systemic economic change is viewed as logically prior to ecological stability. Thus, political action towards that end becomes an overriding priority. The Appropriate Technologists are more pragmatic, as they argue for a mix of traditional and modern knowledge, synthesis of agriculture and industry, and Western and Eastern technological traditions to fulfil the needs of social justice, local self-reliance, and environmental stability. The most interesting of these strands, however, is the Crusading Gandhian one. This approach draws heavily on Gandhian school of thought, which promotes the virtues of village life and rejects the Western modernity and industrialization. In this view, pre-capitalist and pre-colonial village community is taken as an exemplar of ecological and social harmony. Such unpolluted village, based on local resources and recycling, should be capable of sustainable production of it's own milk, grains, fruit, vegetables, and khadi.

The principal problem of these traditional Indian environmentalist models, and of the Brahminical model, in particular, is their romantic and unidimensional view of the past which indeed includes certain flaws. First, the past is largely created based on theology and myths without any historical evidence. Moreover, this idealisation of the traditional society is by its very nature strongly nationalistic, as it blames all the problems on Western colonialism, and ignores the social inequities and environmental problems, which pre-dated the colonial conquest, such as patriarchy, caste system, or deforestation. Thus, there are some ties between nature and nationalism emerging from the Indian environmentalist tradition, which are further reinforced both in the Gandhian and in Hindu nationalist thinking.

**Critique of modernity in Gandhi's spiritual radicalism**

Although he never dealt with the questions of ecology directly, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1848) is widely considered as one of the pioneers of Indian environmental thinking: he was a champion of vegetarianism, recycling, and alternative medicine long before these ideas became part of the Western environmental discourse, and his village communities have been practicing the Indian version of “sustainable development”. Although Gandhi would never describe himself as an environmental philosopher, his thoughts inspired a vast array of environmental movements both in India and in the West. It is not a mere coincidence that Arne Næss, the founding father of deep ecology, was an ardent student of Gandhi. From the original focus on the peaceful resolution of group conflicts, Næss’ concern gradually shifted to the relation between humans and nature His concept of deep ecology, introduced in 1972/73, aims at turning the public attention from “shallow” fight against pollution and resource depletion to the “deeper” principles of diversity, complexity, autonomy, decentralization, symbiosis, egalitarianism, and classlessness, drawing inspiration from the traditions which do not operate with the instrumental approach to the nature as it is characteristic for the modern civilization

The strong anti-modernist stance and skepticism to anything coming from the West is perhaps the most strenuous feature of all Gandhi's writings. In his view, there is no need to adopt the Western model of modernization and industrialization, as Indian values are supposedly traditional, communitarian and religious. In Gandhi's view, every kind of industrialization would inevitably lead to exploitation in the industrial cities and unemployment in the countryside. However, as Partha Chatterjee argues, Gandhi's critique of modern civilization does not stop with his condemnation of industrialism. In fact, it is a fundamental critique of the entire bourgeois society, its economic life based on individual property, its depersonalized laws of the free market, its political institutions of representative democracy, its spirit of innovation and belief in scientific progress, its rational and secular approach to philosophy, ethics, art and education

The critique of modern civilization in Hind Swaraj is based on the simple fact that Indian civilization was able to resist any kind of change. This very ahistoricity is seen as an ultimate proof that it had found the true principles of social organization. According to Gandhi, the Indian cultural values are communitarian, unmaterialistic and spiritual, and indifferent to the ideas of progress and development:

We have managed with the same kind of plough as existed thousands of years ago. We have retained the same kind of cottages that we had in former times and our indigenous education remains the same as before. We have had no system of life-corroding competition. Each followed his own occupation or trade and charged a regulation wage. It was not that we did not know how to invent machinery, but our forefathers knew that, if we set our hearts after such things, we would become slaves and lose our moral fibre. And where this cursed modern civilization has not reached, India remains as it was before The ultimate goal of the Gandhian political thinking was the utopia of Rāmarājya, whose ruler, by his natural moral quality, always adhere to truth and expresses the collective will. The economic organization of production is arranged in a perfect four-fold varṇa system – so perfect that it allows a just system of division of labour without any differences in status and any trace of caste discrimination. The system of specialization and reciprocity.

While rejecting the historicism of other nationalist writers such as Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar who explained the caste system as a result of historical abuse of the temporal power by the religious dignitaries Gandhi even did not share their confidence in rationality and scientific knowledge, preferring instinctive faith to scientific reasoning. In his view, truth does not lie in history; the truth is a moral and transcendental category, achievable only in the experience of one's life.

A similar approach can be seen in Gandhi's interpretation of colonial subjugation. The reason for the conquest of India was not that the Indians would lack the necessary technical or cultural attributes to resist the Western powers, but precisely the opposite: the Indians were not morally strong enough to resist the glitter of modern “civilization only in name” And, finally, even the characteristic Gandhian anti-modernism is to be explained on moral grounds: the modern science and technology, cities and factories are not harmful primarily because they exploit the workers, plunder the natural resources or deprive the people of their livelihoods, but because they make all the goods, services and places readily available, thus inciting impiety and consumerism in the people. This contamination of human spirit, however, eventually leads to the devastation of the material world: an immoderate person needs more resources to satisfy her needs than is her community able to produce.

Similarly, the British industrialism is interlinked with economic and political imperialism and is in a constant need for colonies suitable for exploitation. The disintegration of the inner value system, thus, inevitably ends in the breakdown of the country, nation, and environment. Furthermore, Gandhi was well aware that the British model could not be transposed to India with a 250-million population. Inspired by his favorite authors John Ruskin and Leo Tolstoy (and unlike his third inspirational source, Henry David Thoreau), he saw the ideal of human coexistence in a self-sufficient village community with own natural and human resources. It is, however, necessary to add that Gandhi did not promote the existing Indian villages, but rather their ideal models which he wanted to rehabilitate as an alternative to the urban industrial civilization. Most interestingly, he regarded the caste system as a perfect division of labour to achieve this kind of harmony.

The problem of Gandhian utopia, however, lies in the fact that his model of ideal society is closely linked with the orthodox Brahminical interpretation of Indian history. In fact, the idealization of the pre-modern Indian village is largely problematic, as it ignores the question of oppression of untouchable Dalits Although Gandhi personally was a strong opponent of untouchability considering it a sin going directly against the ‘spirit of the Vedas’, which represented “purity, truth, innocence, chastity, humility, simplicity, forgiveness, godliness, and all that makes a man or woman noble and brave,” he was largely criticized by the Dalit leaders such as Ambedkar. Gandhi's idealist Hindu traditionalism, pursuing the end of untouchability by the means of de-ritualizing of caste and making the unclean work of Dalits honorable was seen as overly pathetic and paternalistic. Gandhi had cautioned the world, much before any modern day environmentalist, about the problems of large-scale industrialization, which we are confronting today. Gandhi visualized that mechanization will not only lead to industrialization, to massive urbanization, to unemployment, but will also lead to the destruction of environment. His seminal work, Hind Swaraj, written a hundred years ago in 1909 warned of the dangers the world is facing today in the form of environmental destruction and the threat to the planet. The Gandhian idea becomes still more relevant when sustainable growth and development is to be achieved because he emphasized on production by the masses instead of mass production. According to him this will result in the development of an economic system that can minimize environmental degradation and achieve sustainable development. His idea of Swaraj or self-rule enables a practical sustainable development that can be implemented without compromising the quality of life..

He was an environmentalist if we discern the implications of his social, political, and economic ideas on the environment. Many environmental movements in India have drawn inspiration from Mahatma Gandhi. He cannot be called an environmentalist if we do a mechanical content analysis of his statements based on the present understanding of environmental issues, since words like 'environment' and 'ecology' do not appear in his Collected Works. The Encyclopaedia of Human Ecology edited by Julia R Miller and others did not have an entry on Gandhi in their otherwise impressive list. This article seeks to look at the implications of his ideas for an ecologically sound system of living. Environmental consciousness is a phenomenon that gained momentum only in the last five decades or so. But it is implicit in worldviews, traditions, culture, religion, and folklore. Ecology is a subject that seeks to understand the relationship between living organisms and their environment. Human ecology visualizes human beings and their environment as constituting an integrated whole. The Western tendency to compartmentalize everything into different categories does not agree with the ecological perspective. Gandhi saw everything in an interrelated way. In his writings, we find elements of economics, politics, and sociology suffused with an interconnectedness informed by ethics. Gandhi said: 'I believe in advaita (non-duality), I believe in the essential unity of man and, for that matter, of all that lives.' J C Kumarappa, Gandhi's economist, who developed his ecological views in a clearer fashion, said: 'In the traditional archives of knowledge, religion, sociology, and economy have all been reserved their separate and exclusive spheres. Man has been divided into various watertight compartments. The left hand is not to know what the right hand does. Nature does not recognize such divisions. She deals with all life as a whole.'

A human ecology perspective is thus holistic. Gandhi did not recognize separate rules for separate spheres of human life, but saw all spheres in an integrated manner. The issues currently discussed under the label of environment were not prominent during his lifetime. However, his description of the modern (industrial) civilization as a 'seven-day wonder' contains a prognosis and a warning. Gandhi had anticipated most of the environmental problems that we face today. He envisaged an ecological or basic needs model centred on limitation of wants in contrast to the modern civilization that promoted material welfare and profit motive. Gandhi said: 'A certain degree of physical harmony and comfort is necessary, but above a certain level it becomes hindrance instead of help. Therefore, the ideal of creating an unlimited number of wants and satisfying them seems to be a delusion and a snare.' According to him, a man who multiplies his daily wants cannot achieve the goal of plain living and high thinking. He warned against the perils of industrialization. He said: 'God forbid that India should ever take to industrialization after the manner of the West. The economic imperialism of a single tiny island kingdom (England) is today keeping the world in chains. If an entire nation of 300 million took to similar economic exploitation, it would strip the world bare like locusts.' Jainism influenced Gandhi. Jainism looks at nature as a living entity and exhorts human beings to continually purify themselves by respecting the diverse life forms. Hinduism also looks at nature and all life forms with equal reverence. Rabindranath Tagore represented nature in his poems and works. Shanti Niketan, the institution that he founded, was another example of nature-friendly study and living.

Gandhi drew on a number of Western thinkers, who, although were not wholly against the modernist project, romantically cherished the pre-industrial order. John Ruskin, for example, was critical of industrialization in that it had sapped human sensibility and destroyed the harmonious relationship humans had with nature. Henry David Thoreau, American poet and naturalist, whose essay on civil disobedience had influenced Gandhi, even believed that nature could exist without humans. Edward Carpenter, who was influenced by John Ruskin and Hindu mysticism, also wanted to lead a life that was simple and close to nature. His critique of civilization was a major influence on Gandhi's first book Hind Swaraj. Carpenter, a socialist, was also an early animal rights activist. What is special about all these thinkers is a kind of romanticism about nature and a general distaste for industrial civilization and urbanization. We also have statements of Gandhi expressing similar romanticism. The example of St. Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of nature and animals, certainly appealed to Gandhi. Lord Bhikhu Parekh says that Gandhi took exception to the anthropocentric view that man has unlimited right to lord over the non-human world and instead proposed a cosmocentric anthropology that 'establishes a more balanced and respectful relationship between him and the natural world, assigns the animals their due place and provides the basis of a more satisfactory and ecologically conscious philosophical anthropology'. In fact, Gandhi's ecological concerns emerged from his focus on a basic needs model of social order that would not exploit nature for short-term gains, but take only from it what is absolutely necessary for human sustenance. Gandhi had to concede that life involves a certain amount of violence to nature even if it is unintended. What we can do is to minimize it.

Gandhi had been a major influence on a number of writers like E F Schumacher and deep ecologist, Arne Naess, who called his own brand of environmentalism 'biospherical egalitarianism', and points out that he was influenced by the Mahatma's metaphysics. Gandhi has been, and continues to be, the major influence on the environmental movements in India. Chipko movement, the largest environment movement in Asia as well as a good number of Indian environmentalists and environmental historians such as Vandana Shiva, Anil Agarwal, Madhav Gadgil, and Ramachandra Guha have acknowledged their debt to Gandhi's ideas. Guha has described him as the 'single most important influence on the environmental movement'. But, he says that it was left to J C Kumarappa and Mira Behn to build an ecological programme along Gandhian lines. But what is special about all those influenced by a Gandhian brand of environmentalism is their exclusive focus on the rural areas. Gandhi did not talk much about the abstract notion of Earth, but he talked a lot about land and soil. To support the agricultural economy, he also emphasized artisan economy (spinning of clothes with charkha, repairing of agricultural tools, arts and crafts) that made these rural peasant communities free from depending on machine-made and mass-produced industrial goods and tools.

Gandhi was not fascinated with wilderness and rainforests like naturalists. We do not see him visiting places of interest to naturalists. Yet he believed that nature should be allowed to take its own course. Gandhi even prohibited people to stock medicines against poisonous bites and talked about the possibility of co-existence with the non-human world. In fact, ecological life was part and parcel of Gandhian ashram life. Since Gandhi's cottage in Sevagram was not reptile-proof, he often had to pick up snakes with the help of a pair of long tongs that he always kept, and release them in places far away from the people. He looked at all life as sacred and all human beings as part of the divine, living in harmony with other beings. Suffering of all living beings was of concern to him. Gandhi realized that there is some kind of continuity between lording over nature and lording over other 'inferior' people as in colonialism. Human beings have to be trustees of the lower animal kingdom. This notion of stewardship of the Earth, and all living beings on it is the hallmark of Gandhian ecology. Conservation was a part of Gandhi's day-to-day life. He would use water most sparingly. It could be said of money and other personal resources also. He also found the need to conserve his sexual energy for larger goals. One could dismiss them as austere practices associated with him in a personal capacity. Since Gandhi did not try to distinguish between his personal and public life at any point in time, he conveyed the value of conserving resources for the future generation. In all these he personified a true ecologist. His antipathy towards urbanization also reflected an attitude full of implications for the environment. In some ways, his bania thriftiness came in handy as an environmental principle worthy of adoption. Gandhi had a special love for the cow. It epitomized the sub-human world, and he saw cow protection as one of the duties of human beings that enables them to relate themselves best with the non-human world. This is because the cow not only provides nourishing milk for the family, but also helps us in agriculture, both for tilling the land as well as for supplying the necessary manure.

Ahimsa, for Gandhi, envisaged or subsumed an awareness of the interdependency of all life. Ahimsa can emerge only in a disciplined environment in which a person renounces pleasures of the body for a higher spiritual pursuit. Vandana Shiva, an ecofeminist and environmental activist who acknowledges Gandhian influence on her thinking and work has embarked on programmes like seed satyagraha to protect biodiversity and seed, and prevent it from becoming the monopoly of a handful of corporations. Gandhi is also often called the father of appropriate technology. He advocated small, local, and village-based technology that allowed its users to relate themselves with what they produce. For him technological progress was not a sign of real progress. The Charkha represented the ideal technological equipment for Gandhi. A technology that would not replace human labour was what was in his mind. E F Schumacher was strongly influenced by this idea of Gandhi who popularized it through his concept of 'intermediate technology'. From a Gandhian perspective, the present environmental mess, ranging from deforestation, soil and biodiversity loss, to pollution and climate change, is not a disease but only a symptom. A good doctor treats the disease and not the symptom. The disease is the very concept and patterns of growth and development that are being followed everywhere.

In conclusion, we can say that Gandhi's environmentalism fitted in with his overall vision for India and the world that sought to extract from nature what is absolutely necessary for human sustenance. His ideas on environment are intimately linked with his ideas relating to the polity, economy, health, and development. His asceticism and simple living, a rural-centred civilization based on village autonomy and self-reliance, handicrafts and craft-centred education, emphasis on manual labour and absence of exploitative relationships are infused with elements of an ecological vision. Even his approach to gender did not attempt to break the connection with nature, but to manoeuvre within it and provide some space for women to uplift themselves. It is, therefore, no wonder that Gandhi is a major inspiration for many environmental movements worldwide, particularly for those who link their movement with larger concerns for human sustenance and development. He would not be an inspiration for radical environmentalists who allow little space for human sustenance and livelihood issues. Although he was not anthropocentric in his approach, he was not prepared to allow the question of human survival to be sidelined in discussions on environment. Finally, non-violent methods of Gandhi also represent an evolutionary approach to resolving disputes within an overall ecological frame. There is now a rethinking on the desirability of development. An idea like 'happiness' does not suggest that high level of material progress is necessary to realize it. Gandhi's environmentalism, it must be admitted, is largely built on ecological practices of peasants and tribal communities.