
UNIT 5 GANDHI'S VIEWS ON HUMANKIND AND EARTH

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5.1 INTRODUCTION

Our ancient scriptures, religions and sages perceived all life as one- as stemming from one universal Truth. Vasudaiva Kutumbakam, one such dictum of India means, the world with all its living organisms is one big family. Then again the *Atharva* Veda says that the Earth is 'Dharti *Mata*'- our Mother and similarly in Greece, the earth is called '*Gaia*'- Goddess Earth. Buddhism believes in the concept of "dependent origination" or interconnectedness of all life. Nothing in this world exists alone and everything comes into being and continues in response to causes and conditions.

Poet Rabindranath Tagore stated: "Man misses himself when isolated; he finds his own larger and truer self in his wide human relationship". British poet John Dunne wrote "No man is an island, Entire of itself. Each is a piece of the continent, A part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less... Each man's death diminishes me, For I am involved in mankind."

Gandhi too holds similar beliefs when he says "I believe in [the] absolute oneness of God and, therefore, also of humanity. What though we have many bodies? We have but one soul. The rays of the sun are many through refraction. But they have the same source. I cannot, therefore, detach myself from the wickedest soul (nor may I be denied identity with the most virtuous). Whether, therefore, I will or not, I must involve in my experiment the whole of my kind".

Aims and Objectives

After studying this Unit, you should be able to understand

- Paradigm shifts in different eras and Gandhi's unchanging holistic view;
- Major influences that shaped Gandhi's thoughts regarding **Humankind** and Earth; and
- How in mind, body and soul, Gandhi lived in harmony with the environment and Earth.

5.2 CIVILISATIONAL PARADIGMS

Well known management expert Peter Drucker observes that every few hundred years in Western history, there occurs a sharp transformation. For instance about three hundred years ago there was a transition from the agricultural era to the industrial era and towards the end of the 20th century, we have entered the communications era.

What is a paradigm? Willis Harman defines it as "the basic way of perceiving, thinking, valuing and doing, associated with a particular vision of reality". So when civilisation moved from an agricultural era, to the industrial era, there was a paradigm shift from how mankind perceived and understood the self, universe and society. For instance the scientific advance that took place in the West encouraged a materialistic view of human beings and life, a perspective in which adversarial relationships have come to exist between living beings and their environment. This has, in turn, led people to destroy the environment and to exploit the natural world. In a speech given at a Gandhi Memorial lecture in 1992, Dr. Daisaku Ikeda described this central flaw of modern civilisation as one which led to a sense of isolation and fragmentation in all areas of life and society. That is, lines of separation were drawn between the human being and the universe, between humankind and nature, between the individual and society, between different peoples, between means and ends, between the sacred and secular and so forth. In the midst of this ever greater fragmentation, the individual human being was forced into a state of isolation.

Gandhi personally witnessed the dangers of the industrial revolution that had started in Britain in the 18th century where steam engines and textile factories, fuelled primarily by coal, was rapidly expanding and spreading to Europe and America. With it came a new agriculture and population growth catering to the increased demand for a work-force in the factories as well as the markets to buy their manufactured goods. In South Africa he witnessed not only the exploitation of the natives and the poor indentured labourers by the Europeans, but also how- fired by their greed- they were depleting the rich soil of Africa of its natural resources. Underlying all this was the West's anthropocentrism- a human centred view of the universe wherein man thinks all other forms of life are there to serve him and for him to exploit and dominate over.

In such a scenario, at the start of the 20th century, Gandhi wrote in his seminal work *Hind Swaraj* that "this modern civilization is such that one has only to be patient and it will be destroyed". What he advocated in this book was an antithesis to many aspects of modern civilisation. His was a holistic approach to life that, turning away from fragmentation and isolation, aspired to integration and harmony.

At that time, to most people it seemed inconceivable that such industrialisation would lead to destruction and unhappiness and they dismissed Gandhi and his views in *Hind Swaraj* as taking civilisation back to primitive times. But Gandhi was ahead of the times and warned the people about the evils inherent in an urban-industrial society. He said- "I whole-heartedly detest this mad desire to destroy distance and time, to increase animal appetites and go to the ends of the earth in search of their satisfaction". He declared that "the earth provides enough to satisfy every man's needs, but not every man's greed".

According to analysts, when scientific and economic development takes place there is an explosion of population. The world population today stands at 6.8 billion. With the rise in population has come environmental degradation of alarming proportions. In such a time Gandhi's prophetic warning rings in our ears "a time is coming when those who are in

mad rush today of multiplying their wants, will retrace their steps and say: what have we done?"

And this is exactly the question that man is **asking** now. Fortunately in this new era with its explosive growth of **information** technology and communications, a new global consciousness and culture is emerging. Duane **Elgin**, author of ***Voluntary Simplicity*** and ***The Living Universe*** feels that this rapidly emerging "global brain" is forging new bonds of relationship in the human family. He feels there is a new emerging paradigm which he calls the "reflective/living-systems" paradigm or perspective. As the title suggests, he feels there is a shift in humankind to self reflect and make conscious choices. This is so close to Gandhi 'turning the search light inwards'. Secondly, he suggests that people are now **becoming** aware and believe that the universe is a living, dynamic entity and not a lifeless matter and empty space. This new paradigm shift **from** a view of separatism and isolationism to one which sees an interrelatedness between peoples and man and the cosmos is again what Gandhi was advocating all along.

In a later section we will incorporate a comparison drawn by him between the typical American view of life and the new emerging alternative world view which tends towards the Gandhian world view. But first let us understand the Gandhian world view.

Dr.Savita Singh writes in her book ***Global Concern with Environmental Crisis and Gandhi's Vision***, that Mahatma Gandhi had not left behind any **document** on environmental ethics or its protection, nor did he stage any kind of non violent protest against deforestation or the construction of dams. But he did much more than this. He led a life which was in complete harmony with himself, his surroundings and others. The life style he adopted and some of the key influences that shaped his world views is elaborated in the next section.

The following table prepared by Duane **Elgin** with **Coleen LeDrew** compares and contrasts the industrial era world view with the newly emerging alternative **world** view which tends towards the **Gandhian** world view.

Table 1: Contrasting Paradigms .

The emphasis is on conspicuous consumption. The "good life" depends on having enough money to buy access to pleasures and avoid discomforts.	The emphasis is on conscious consumption. The "good life" is an ever-changing balance of inner and outer, material and spiritual, personal and social, etc.
Identity is largely defined by material possessions and social position.	Our sense of self grows through our conscious, loving, and creative participation in life.
Emphasis is on personal autonomy and mobility.	Emphasis is on personal growth and community.
The individual is defined by his or her body and is ultimately separate and alone.	The individual is both unique and an inseparable part of the larger universe. Our being is not limited to our physical existence.
It is natural that we who are living use lifeless material resources for our own progress.	It is natural to respect all that exists as integral to the larger body of life.
Cutthroat competition is the norm. You compete against others to make a killing.	Fair competition is the norm. You cooperate with others to earn a living.
The mass media are dominated by commercial interests and are used to promote a high-consumption culture.	The mass media awaken to the challenge of sustainability and begin to explore more workable and meaningful approaches to living.
Nations adopt a "lifeboat ethic" in global relations.	Nations adopt a "spaceship Earth ethic" in global relations.
The welfare of the whole is left to the workings of the free market or government bureaucracies.	Each person takes responsibility for the well-being of the world, enabling high levels of decentralization and freedom at the local level, and a sustainable harmony at the global level.

Source - <http://www.newhorizons.org/future/elgin2.htm#table>

5.3 INFLUENCES ON GANDHI'S LIFE

Many were the influences in Gandhi's life which helped to shape his views on Humankind and Earth. As a young boy he got his practical understanding of **Ahimsa** and gentleness towards all creatures from his mother as you will see from the following incident. A deadly scorpion ran across the floor straight to his mother's bare feet. Young Mohandas cried out in alarm Mother! a scorpion ! It will bite you! Kill it ! His mother said quietly, - "Be still, my son. If you do not frighten it, I shall not be hurt. She watched the insect crawl up upon her heel, taking her pallu from her shoulders picked up the scorpion and dropped it out of the window. "Now it will neither harm me, nor I it", she remarked gently. Watching his pious, puritan mother keep her endless fasts he also learned the importance of fasts in self mastery.

Gandhi came from a family of **statesmen**- his grandfather, father and uncle were successful prime ministers in Porbandar. So right through his schooldays he heard and observed the language of diplomacy, of importance of dialogue with people from all walks of life and

different religions. Love for his ailing father brought out great compassion and nursing skills in him and thus shaped his merciful nature to serve and tend to others sufferings.

His truthfulness and love for his mother helped him uphold his promise to abstain from wine, women, and meat during his college days in England and it became his **first** lesson in self restraint and abstinence.

Gandhi was also greatly influenced by the intellect and integrity of the young jeweler and poet Raychandbhai. He found in him a person who could conduct commercial transactions amounting to thousands of rupees with great business acumen coupled with integrity and also remain a real seeker after Truth.

As has been already mentioned in other courses, books too played a major role in shaping his thoughts. Sir Edwin Arnold's translation of the **Gita** and his other works like **The Light of Asia** on Buddha and **Life of Mahomet and his Successors** helped him to see the many-sidedness of religious truths. Adolf Just's **Return to Nature** further strengthened his belief in vegetarianism and naturopathy. John Ruskin's **Unto This Last** had such a profound influence on him that he changed his way of life by establishing the Phoenix Settlement. Tolstoy's **The Kingdom of God is Within You** converted him into nonviolence based on the ideas from the New Testament. His doctrine of Trusteeship was largely influenced by the idealism of **Ishoupanishad**. The **Bhagavad Gita** and **Snell's Discussions of the Maxim's of Equity** helped shape his ideas on Aparigraha or Non possession.

5.4 BASIC PHILOSOPHY

Holistic Nature

Having read about some key influences by people and books let us now study some key concepts, life style and thinking that grew out of them. As mentioned before, **Gandhi's** basic philosophy on humankind and Earth was influenced by the vedic perception **Vasudaiva Kutumbakam**- the world is one family. His every word and action was pervaded a global and cosmic sensibility. His was a most holistic approach to life that, turning away **from** fragmentation and isolation, aspired to integration and harmony. The following declaration by Gandhi clearly expresses his holistic nature and approach. "I could not be leading a religious life unless I identified myself with the whole of mankind, and that I could not do unless I took part in politics. The whole gamut of man's activities today constitutes an indivisible whole. You cannot divide social, economic, political and purely religious work into watertight compartments. I do not know any religion apart from human activity. It provides a moral basis to all other activities which they would otherwise lack, reducing life to a maze of "sound and fury signifying nothing".

Truth

In Gandhian Thought and Life-Style, truth is the sovereign and most important principle, which includes numerous other principles. According to Gandhi, truth or truthfulness ought to be the very essence and breath of our life. Truth here is not just about speaking the truth but also being truthful in thought, speech and action and for there to be harmony and consistency amongst each of these. He felt the more truthful we are, the nearer we are to God. For him, the principle of Truth and Truthfulness is not only a view of life, but also a way of life. Gandhi in fact went a step further and declared '**Truth is God**'.

'Truth is God' dominated all the activities of Gandhi and was the guiding principle, solace and inspiration in his life-style. He perceived Truth as the very embodiment of the Absolute which is ruled, governed and guided by Truth. To him, God as Truth, the Law of Dharma or righteousness were all one and the same. In short, he saw the Universe as a function of Truth and as a function of the law of Dharma.

The same universal Truth was in each creature on the planet and all beings were thus interconnected and one family. In his own words, "To see the universal and all-pervading spirit of Truth face to face one must be able to love the meanest of creation as oneself" and "I want to realize brotherhood or identity not merely with the beings called human, but I want to realize identity with all life, even with such things as crawl upon earth...all life in whatever form it appears must be essentially one". And as a seeker of the Truth, he felt he could be one with this God only through serving humanity since God was in each and every being and not in heaven or down below.

Non Violence or Ahimsa

Hand in hand with his absolute belief in Truth was his belief in Non violence. To him they were the obverse and reverse of the same coin. In 1916 Gandhi distinguished between the negative and the positive meanings of Ahimsa. In its negative form, it means not injuring any living being by body or mind. In its positive form, Ahimsa means the greatest love and the greatest charity towards all and for followers of Ahimsa to love their enemy and bear no hatred and ill-will towards them. Gandhi's insistence on hating the evil and not the evil doer can be seen in how he made friends with his oppressors in South Africa as well as the British in India. Non violence was the very lifeline of Gandhi and in Romain Rolland's words "religious by nature".

Sarvodaya and Antyodaya

As mentioned earlier, Ruskin's *Unto This Last* had a great impact on Gandhi's thinking and the outcome was Sarvodaya. Sarvodaya, or welfare of all, laid great emphasis on the welfare of the last man i.e. Antyodaya. In Gandhi's opinion in a Sarvodaya social order, people will be bound together by love and compassion, goodwill and understanding. Above all there would be no place for an armaments industry and nuclear missiles; hence there would be no threat from nuclear or chemical wars.

Trusteeship and Non possession

Gandhi saw humankind's role as a trustee of all other living creatures. Gandhi's doctrine of Trusteeship held that all things of the world must be enjoyed by renunciation. So he wanted the rich to become trustees of their surplus wealth for the good of the society since society was an extended family. In April 1938 he declared that a Trustee has no heir while the community or society had a legitimate right in the property of the rich industrialists. He was not advocating charity or alms giving by the wealthy but he was calling out for a more equitable society where even the poor and downtrodden could lead a decent comfortable life through bread labour. According to Pyarelal, the "Trusteeship plan is a philosophy of life and organization, a method of management and a method to bring about inter-personal relationships. It envisages a new structure and system of organization based on non violence, welfare of all and the sharing of responsibilities".

Uplift of Women

In Gandhi's holistic vision, women too got their rightful and equal place. Until then, the

word human was generally taken to mean only 'man'. Fifty percent of the world's population consists of women. Agriculture scientist Prof. M.S. Swaminathan often reminds us that it is women who gave us culture. While men went out hunting and gathering food, it was the women who stayed back, collecting and growing plants near their homes, which led to the beginning of settled civilisation and an agrarian way of life. During Gandhi's time, the status of women in India was appalling. They were an oppressed and marginalised lot. Gandhi was fully aware that India, during the Vedic times, had treated women with respect and equality. During his three years in England and later in South Africa too, he keenly observed the role played by the European women there and how they contributed equally with men to society. Gandhi passionately set out to reform the social inequality and gender bias in India. He worked tirelessly for the uplift of women and brought them to the forefront in the freedom struggle. He also incorporated welfare of women as an important item in his Constructive Work Programme.

We can get a glimpse of the egalitarian society Gandhi envisioned for India when he wrote, "Men have not realized that woman must be a true help mate of man in the mission of service. Woman has been suppressed under customs and law for which man was responsible and in the shaping of which she had no hand. In a plan of life based on non-violence, woman has as much right to shape her own destiny as man has to shape his.....(Men) have considered themselves to be lords and masters of women instead of considering them as their friends and co-workers."

Today, in our modern and industrialised world, there is a great awareness about gender equality and importance of women, but in Gandhi's times his thoughts and actions which were pro-women and pro-poor, was indeed revolutionary.

5.5 GANDHIAN CONCEPT OF HUMANKIND

The industrial revolution brought in its wake communism and capitalism. While both these ideologies aim at quite opposite goals, they nevertheless converge at the same place as far as high technology, environmental degradation, nuclear and arms race, centralised economic and political power are concerned. World views have also been strongly influenced by Darwinism, Newton and Descartes. Darwin was of a generation which believed that Christian, scientific civilisation was superior to any other and also believed in the theory of 'the survival of the fittest'. This phrase amounted to a death sentence for many of the indigenous tribes and natives in many parts of the world, as it seemed to imply that since they had taken no part in the development of modern scientific advancement, they were doomed by natural law to be overtaken by more vigorous and modern cultures. Furthermore, Greek scientists saw matter as being made up of atoms which they felt were passive and intrinsically dead and which they believed were controlled by external forces of spiritual origin. Such beliefs gave rise to the dualism between matter and spirit and body and mind. Such a mechanistic view was held by Newton and until the end of the nineteenth century the mechanistic Newtonian model of the universe dominated all scientific thought. In addition to these views was the West's anthropocentrism or human-centredness where they think human beings are at the centre of everything and that man is to control the nature and environment.

In such a background Gandhi's holistic views on man and his environment truly stand out, shedding light on all of mankind. Like Peter Kropotkin who believed in the existence of a symbiotic relationship between and within species, Gandhi too subscribed to this view of mutual aid. The inter-connectedness of all living and non living beings is the essence

of Gandhian thinking. For him, man was not merely a physio-chemical aggregation, but a spiritual entity. His focus was on spiritual growth. He did not deny economic growth so long as it was based on an ethical and spiritual foundation. In 1921, he stated "I do want growth, I do want self-determination, I do want freedom, but I want all these for the soul. I doubt if the steel age is an advance upon the flint age, I am indifferent. It is the evolution of the soul to which the intellect and all our faculties have to be devoted"

Man and Brute

Gandhi believed in the evolution theory saying that perhaps we were all originally brutes and that we became men from a slow process of evolution from the brute. What distinguishes man from the brute? He said, 'Man has reason, discrimination and free will such as it is. The brute has no such thing. It is not a free agent, and knows no distinctions between virtue and vice, good and evil. Man, being a free agent, knows these distinctions, and when he follows his higher nature, he shows himself far superior to the brute, but when he follows his baser nature, he can show himself lower than the brute'. However he felt that Man's nature is not essentially evil and that brute nature does yield to the influence of love.

While he was fully aware of the existence of brute and angel in a human being's life, he had unconditional belief in the innate potential for goodness in the depths of each human being which was indivisible with the all pervading universal truth. To him every human being was a creation of the Maker and hence it was wrong to hate, disrespect or harm any human being. It is this belief that made him insist on hating the evil and not the evil-doer. Since there was such an intricate connection with all life, he believed that if one man gained spiritually, the whole world would gain with him while if one man were to fall, the whole world would fall to that extent.

Man and God

Gandhi also believed in equality of all men. He believed implicitly that all men were born equal. He said that all men whether in India or England or America, no matter what their circumstances, had the same soul; hence for any man to claim superiority over others was unmanly. Of course outwardly and in a superficial sense there were physical and mental differences but inherently all were equal. All such differences arising out of race, skin colour, body, mind and country were transient; beneath all such transience was a soul that was eternal and one with the Truth. He also believed that all life was a manifestation of one God or supreme Truth as is evident in his statement- "what though we have many bodies? We have but one soul. The rays of the sun are many through refraction. But they have the same source".

5.6 ONE WORLD

Having briefly touched upon some major Gandhian concepts we can now understand Gandhi's view on humankind. Gandhi was never adhered to narrow ideas of nationalism. While he did admit that nationalism was essential for the progress of any nation, he felt that one should espouse a higher view like that of a world community. He once declared, "I want my country to be free. I do not want a fallen and prostrate India. I want an India which is free and enlightened. Such an India if necessary, should be prepared to die, so that humanity may live".

On what basis did he envisage such a world community? It was because of his

unconditional belief in the goodness inherent in each human being. He believed that by seeking the way or the truth, man could attain great spiritual heights and see the interconnectedness of all life and build a non violent society leading to a world community. His Sarvodaya project is a new and alternative model of society, which is humanistic and focused on the needs of the community as a whole.

Gandhi's views on Earth and Environment

Gandhi stood for simple living and believed in voluntary reduction of one's wants. He said we should take from nature only as much as absolutely necessary and recycle the wastes back to nature. In one of his earliest speeches in India he said, "I venture to suggest that it is the fundamental law of Nature, without exception, that Nature produces enough for our wants from day-to-day, and if only everybody took enough for himself and nothing more, there would be no pauperism in this world".

5.7 SUMMARY

Fortunately, world views are slowly moving toward a major paradigm shift in that, people are realising that the world is not made of just matter or things but living phenomena. Valentine Tereshkova, the first woman in space once spoke of her experience in space- "Anyone who sees the Earth from outer space, even only once, cannot fail to be assailed by a sense of reverence and love for this planet that is our home". To her, the earth was like a great Mother supporting all life –mountains, forest, oceans, birds, insects, animals, fish and human beings and that we must never allow this small, fragile, blue, shining planet to be covered by the black ash of a nuclear war.

Many noted thinkers like Lyall Watson in his book *Lifetide- The Biology of the Unconscious* presents the idea that living things on Earth are not separate entities but live in symbiosis, in a matrix of inter-relations. Jim E. Lovelock's Gaia- *A New Look at Life on Earth* explores the Gaia hypothesis that humanity is part of a vast evolving universe and the Earth, our home, is one giant living organism with a unique community of life. Duane Elgin's book *Voluntary Simplicity* is about how to live a conscious life within the laws of natural systems. And in his book *The Living Universe* he gives solutions for building a sustainable future namely by understanding the universe as uniquely alive and not dead and fragmented. He explains how the non-living view of the universe has led to materialism, consumerism and global environmental degradation. To transform the crises faced by our planet he says we must shift from the view of separation and exploitation and learn to live sustainably on the Earth, in harmony with one another, and in communion with the living universe. Gradually the wisdom of Gandhi and other thinkers are being echoed by others, and forgotten values such as harmony with nature, a sense of connectedness with others, equality and diversity are being rediscovered.

5.8 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. How are Gandhi's views different from Darwinism and anthropocentrism?
2. Briefly describe some major influences in Gandhi's life which influenced him in his views on humankind.
3. Compare the industrial era world view with the newly emerging alternative world view.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Singh, Savita., Global Concern with Environmental Crisis and Gandhi's Vision, A.P.H Publishing Corp., New Delhi, 1999.

Khoshoo, T.N, and Moolakkattu, John.S., Mahatma Gandhi And The Environment, TERI, New Delhi, 2009.



UNIT 6 GANDHI AND HUMAN ECOLOGY

Structure

6.1 Introduction

Aims and Objectives

6.2 Essence of Human Ecology

6.3 Social Life- A Complex Interdependent Whole

6.4 Gandhi and Nature

6.5 Ecological Balance

6.6 Limits to Growth

6.7 Enjoyment in Renunciation

6.8 Summary

6.9 Terminal Questions

Suggested Readings

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Human ecology, one of the latest arrivals on the social science scene, has borrowed its conceptual framework and methods from plant and animal ecology. Malthusianism, Darwinism, the social survey movement, and human geography are among the precursors of human ecology, which first received systematic formulation by Park and others in about 1915. It strives for the objective depiction and analysis of the spatial, temporal, physical, and technological bases of social life. The capacity for symbolic communication, rationality, relatively great mobility, and formal organisation and control and the possession of a technology and culture distinguish human beings from plants and animals; the recognition of these differences makes human ecology a unique social science discipline. It is concerned with localised, or territorially delimited, social structures and phenomena, the community being the core concept. The definition of natural, as distinguished from administrative, areas and of regions has been one of its chief theoretical and practical contributions. The discovery of the patterns into which social phenomena group themselves and of the coincidence of the patterns has had important implications for social control and planning. Ecological facts, not being self-explanatory, must be understood in the light of socio-cultural and psychic phenomena.

Aims and Objectives

After studying this Unit, you should be able to understand

- The Concept of Human Ecology; and
- Why Mahatma Gandhi is called a great human ecologist.

6.2 ESSENCE OF HUMAN ECOLOGY

Human ecology is a perspective, a method, and a body of knowledge essential for the

scientific study of social life, and hence, like social psychology, a general discipline basic to all the social sciences. Human ecology is less concerned with the relationship between man and his habitat than with the relationship between man and man as affected, among other factors, by his habitat. In distinguishing it from plant and animal ecology, the unique characteristics of man and the human community are stressed. Unlike plants and animals, human beings in large measure make their own environment; they have relatively great powers of locomotion and thus are less attached to the immediate habitat in which by nature they are placed; they are conditioned by their capacity for symbolic communication, by rational behaviour, and by the possession of an elaborate technology and culture. Moreover, in human aggregations we find the life of the individuals regulated by conscious controls, by rules, norms, and laws, and by formal organisations and institutions. The early literature of human ecology was much concerned with the distinction between the community and the society. The former stressed the symbiotic relations, spatial and temporal dimensions, physical structure, competition and the division of labour, whereas the latter stressed communication, consensus, common norms, values, conscious social control, and collective action. Unfortunately these two ideal- typical aspects of human social life have frequently been confused with concrete realities. Thus there has been a failure to see that all communities are also societies and all human societies bear at least some of the characteristics of communities. Competition, for instance, among human beings never takes the form of a blind struggle for life and survival. Rather, it manifests itself as a more or less regulated and controlled struggle for a living and for status. Whereas in the plant and the animal world the mechanisms of collective behaviour, such as there are, are built into the structure of the organisms and can truly be described in terms of reflexes and instincts, the behaviour of the human world can be understood only in the light of habits, customs, institutions, morals, ethics and laws.

Even when planning was primarily physical planning it offered great hospitality to the methods and findings of human ecology; but since planning has developed to include the economic and social designing or redesigning of the community, human ecology has found an even more important place in it. Planning aims at the optimum use of resources and the rational integration of community life. Such knowledge as the human ecologist has been able to obtain about the location of industry, the distribution, segregation, and succession of population, the areas of influence of social institutions, and the interrelationship between the physical, the technological, the economic, the political, and the cultural aspects of community life has proved itself indispensable.

It should be noted, however, that human ecology has not been merely the handmaiden either of the other social sciences or of such practical arts as planning. It has, in recent years, developed a substantial body of scientific knowledge in its own right and has also drawn upon other branches of social science for its data and hypotheses. Thus, for instance, studies of communication, public opinion, markets, and voting have contributed immensely to the formulation of the problems of human ecology, the data with which the discipline works, and the explanations and interpretations toward which it strives.

Although the most intensive studies of human ecology have been concerned with urban and rural communities, human ecology has also been applied to larger areas and to world-wide phenomena. Thus the patterns of urbanisation, the trends of migration, the interrelations between national states, the functions of frontiers, and the problems of minorities, among others, have been studied at least in a preliminary way by the methods of human ecology; and there is every reason to believe that in the future the knowledge gained from local small-scale research will be applied to the world as a whole.

6.3 SOCIAL LIFE- A COMPLEX INTERDEPENDENT WHOLE

The accumulation of vast bodies of precise, descriptive material and its graphic presentation by means of maps and diagrams has unfortunately led some investigators to assume that the facts are either self-explanatory or that one set of ecological facts can be adequately interpreted in terms of other ecological data. In the ecological studies of delinquency, insanity, family disorganisation, religious life, political behaviour, and social institutions it has sometimes been naively assumed that, once the spatial distribution of people, institutions, functions, and problems has been traced and their concentration and dispersion noted, there remains nothing for the ecologist to do but to relate these phenomena to other ecological data to arrive at valid explanations. This view overlooks the fact that social life is a complex interdependent whole. Material conditions of existence are, of course, important factors in the determination of social structure and personal characteristics and behaviour. Subsistence, competition, the division of labour, spatial and temporal arrangements and distributions are important aspects of the material conditions of existence and, in turn, of social life. But they are not the whole of social life. On the contrary types of attitudes, personalities, cultural forms, and social organisations and institutions may have as significant an effect in shaping ecological patterns and processes as the latter have in conditioning social and social-psychological phenomena. Indeed, in view of our present-day knowledge concerning social causation, we might well be predisposed to follow the general principle that physical factors, while by no means negligible in their influence upon social life and psychological phenomena, are, at best, conditioning factors offering the possibilities and setting the limits for social and psychological existence and development.

6.4 GANDHI AND NATURE

Mahatma Gandhi, who emerged as a leader during India's struggle to separate from the British Empire, is best recognised as a proponent of non-violence as a method of resolving conflicts. But his beliefs extend beyond the political arena. From his writings it is obvious that Gandhi treasured nature and argued for the conservation of biodiversity. He stated that because "a human being has no power to create life, he has, therefore, no right to destroy life", and "the earth provides enough for everyman's needs but not for everyman's greed".

The propensity to accumulate commodities, cramp the soul and degenerate into the morbid desire to make a fetish of external goods of life. The luxury of the ascendant classes, therefore, makes them morally deprived. The monopolisation of the things by a few men at the top is unjust. Moreover, accumulation is condemnable because it is not possible to be practiced by all. "I venture to suggest," he observed in one of his earliest speeches in India, "that it is the fundamental law of nature, without exception that nature produces enough for our wants from day to day, and if only everybody took enough for himself and nothing more, there would be no pauperism in this world". He did not want to dispossess anybody; he went on to say, "I should then be departing from the rule of ahimsa. But I do say that you and I have no right to anything that we really have until these millions are clothed and fed better. You and I must adjust our wants, and even undergo voluntary starvation in order that they be nursed, fed and clothed" (Collected works of Mahatma Gandhi, vol. XIII).

Man, by virtue of his ever unsatisfied desire for more and more, **has** made a hell of this planet. Increasing ecological imbalance, environmental degradation, vanishing flora and fauna, unhampered population explosion and deteriorating human values all are the outcome of this greed of the modern Homo-Sapientia.

Gandhi without consciously attempting at a systematic theory explained the phenomena of the exploitation of natural resources through alienation also. He was of the opinion that the more nature was overpowered, the more alienated man will become **from** nature. He simultaneously wanted to focus on the relationship between man and his natural environment which would end exploitation, which in turn is the very cause of exploitation of nature. But this alienation of man from nature has also paved the way of alienation from himself also. His true self is what man can discover through the search for truth following the path of non-violence. Gandhi has a full view of man, his spiritual, cultural and social aspects as much as his economic needs. This led him to advocate that man must adjust himself to nature and not the other way round. He would not permit imbalance to be created between man and his environment.

Gandhi was of the firm belief that every development effort must be addressed to the last person first- a belief that forms the basis of his concept of *Antyodaya*- or, unto the last. Gandhi further held that two conditions were essential to sustain a morally and materially sound attack on poverty, inequality and unemployment: First, austerity or consumption ethics: "He (who has made the ideal of equal distribution a part of his being) would reduce his wants to a minimum, bearing in mind the poverty of India". Second, a discerning and-deliberate choice of technology- away from the imitative and addressed to India's own and unique problem: If I could produce all my country's wants by means of 30,000 people instead of 30 million, I should not mind it, provided that the thirty million are not rendered idle and unemployed". In order to translate these ideas on the ground he proposed the institution of "village republics" in the political realm, and the pursuit of "village self-sufficiency" **as** the basis of economic development. By the latter he meant that production and consumption should be as proximate as possible, and based on the proper use of local resources. To ensure that the goal of self-sufficiency was made an integral part of the planning process and the economic system, he repeatedly stressed that "the first concern of every village will be to grow its own food crops and cloth". The rest of the industrial apparatus was to be so designed as to reinforce such an economic base: "I do visualise electricity, shipbuilding, iron works, machine-making and the like existing side by side with village handicrafts. Hitherto industrialisation has been so planned as to destroy the village and the village crafts. In the state of the future, it will **subserve** the villagers and their crafts".

For a keener, more practical understanding of the developmental tasks that lay ahead, of problems and prospects, Gandhi sponsored an economic survey of **Matar Taluka in Khera** (Kheda) district (**Gujarat**), in 1929. In a note to the survey team headed by Professor J C Kumarappa, Gandhi clarified his methodological approach, stating that the "Indian economy should be built **from** the bottom by a posteriori method of securing rock bottom facts and draw therefrom, by the most rigid process of reasoning scientific conclusions which no amount of juggling could controvert" (Kumarappa, 1952). The title page of the survey bore the following quote from the epic Mahabharata, which is the embodiment of Indian values of spiritual and worldly life: Are large tanks dug in your kingdom at proper distances, by which agriculture has not to depend entirely on rain? Are the agriculturalists in your kingdom in want of food or seed? The survey- highlighted

the need to meticulously harness natural resources, and listed the following as developmental priorities: a detailed and scientific soil survey; bringing of wasteland under cultivation; improving water distribution systems, i.e. increasing the capacity of tanks and reducing the brackishness of well water; improving grazing lands and fodder production; substituting kerosene with castor oil lamps; promoting indigenous and local production of cloth in preference to mill-made or imported goods. These measures were expected to generate substantial additional employment and income in the survey area and were environment friendly.

6.5 ECOLOGICAL BALANCE

Society has come to realise slowly that earth, unimaginably rich in natural resources, is limited in the amount of abuse that it can bear without disastrous effects on the biospheres. Perhaps we failed to perceive this earlier because we have been so busy enjoying the benefits of the technological advancement that we had not had time to think about tomorrow.

The planet earth we inhabit is a single living, pulsating entity and the human race an interlocking extended family. The land, water and the atmosphere which constitute its environment and support come from some 0.36 million species of plants and more than a million species of animals. The unprecedented human interference into the environment has upset the delicate ecological balance of our planet. Ruthless exploitation of non-renewable natural resources has created havoc and if allowed to continue can result in a series of major ecological disasters that can disrupt life on this planet. Some of the most dramatic cases of tempering with the environment are man-made fires, slash and burn agriculture, mineral mining, dumping of sewage and industrial wastes, introduction of new transport system into natural areas, persistence of nuclear testing and disposal of nuclear wastes, the danger of global warming and the attenuation of our ozone shield, the menace of deforestation leading to destruction of many species of flora and fauna, devastation of landscape by herbicides, introduction of pests into new areas, over population, overgrazing coupled with drought, extensive air and water pollution, and the poisoning of the food chain, the malign underworld of drugs and the alarming spread of communicable diseases. All these problems which the human race share in common, and in order to solve them people must try to attain as complete an understanding of their environment as possible.

The survival of man depends on how judiciously he manages the earth and maintains the quality of his overall environment. One fact we must bear in mind is that our genetic makeup cannot adapt to a changing environment such as rise of carbon-dioxide, or to reduce oxygen content in the air we breathe, all due to too much of fossil fuel burning and destruction of vegetation, too much of toxic substances in our air and water etc. We cannot develop resistance to toxic effects of many poisonous materials we are pouring out in the atmosphere, water bodies and soil. It is indeed a wonder how we are bearing the onslaughts of ecological backlashes in our environment. We are reaching the limits of tolerance on most fronts and any greater onslaught might result in major catastrophes. Man has no option other than to seriously fight to be united and concerted at all levels-individual, communities, villages, towns, districts, states, governments and inter-governmental bodies, continental and global. In this endeavour short term personal or regional interest must be subordinate to the global and long range interest. This can be achieved through mass education, enacting uniformly standard laws etc. To save our environment, all nations,

all religions and all human races have to stand united on a common platform guided by sound ecological principles alone. Simultaneously we have to control the human population or at least ensure a zero per cent rise level. If these are not handled on a war footing, our biosphere will be in danger of a major catastrophe.

6.6 LIMITS TO GROWTH

In a commentary on the report, "The Limits to Growth- a Report to the Club of Rome", the Executive Committee of the Club expressed this view:

"We are convinced that realization of the quantitative restraints of the world environment and of the tragic consequences of an overshoot is essential to the initiation of new forms of thinking that will lead to **fundamental** revision of human behaviour and by implication, of the entire fabric of the present day society. We affirm finally that any deliberate attempt to reach a rational and enduring stage of equilibrium by planned measures, rather than by chance or catastrophe, must ultimately be founded on a basic change of values and goals at individual, national and world levels". And they did not hesitate to use highly dramatic language, such as the following:

"The concept of a society in a steady state of economic and ecological equilibrium may appear is to grasp, although the reality is so distant from our experience as to require a Copernican revolution of the mind. Translating the idea into deed, though, is a task filled with overwhelming **difficulties** and complexities. We can talk seriously about where to start and only when the message of 'the limits to growth' and its sense of extreme urgency, are accepted by a large body of scientific, political and popular opinion in many countries. The transition in any case is likely to be painful, and it will make extreme demands on human ingenuity and determination. As we have mentioned, only the conviction that there is no other avenue to survival can liberate the moral, intellectual and creative forces required to initiate this unprecedented human undertaking".

The concept of earth's finiteness is by no means new. But its corollary, expounded in the report, that due to the planet's finite dimensions, there are necessarily limits to human expansion, was growing against the grain of growth culture prevailing in the world. The successes of the material revolution had made this culture arrogant. It was and is the culture of a civilisation of quality which neglect quality and which couples its arrogance of the real life-supporting capacity of the planet with the extravagant exploitation of its resources and the **insufficient** erratic use of human capacity.

The growth syndrome which has developed is well known. When no remedy of society's ill is in sight, faith in growth takes over. Growth is considered as a super medicine. By producing abundantly one can try to meet all wants and satisfy demand or if demand is lacking, it can be created artificially. But now it is apparent that a policy of bounty can solve some problem indeed and alleviate others, but it is just a palliative and not a permanent solution. Indeed it is not being realised that this syndrome may mean the tragic end of earth resources and consequently the growth itself.

Alvin Toffler, in his best seller, 'Future Shocks' has well described the inexorable price we are paying for this technology which we are told is being developed for our benefit.

"Our technological powers increase but the side effects and potential hazards also escalate. We risk **thermo** pollution of the oceans themselves, overheating them, destroying immeasurable quantities of marine life, perhaps even melting the polar ice caps. On land

we concentrate such large masses of population in such **small** urban technological islands, that we threaten to use up the air's oxygen faster than it can be replaced, conjuring up the possibility of new **Saharas** where the cities are **now**. Through such destruction of natural ecology, we may literally in the words of biologist **Barry commoner** be destroying this planet as a suitable place for human habitation".

Like the club of Rome or **Alvin Toffler**, Gandhi did **not employ** nor did he require a computer to arrive at his conclusions. Common **sense** told him that this western-style industrialisation of the whole of mankind could **never be implemented**. He wrote as early as in 1928: "God forbid that India should ever **take to industrialism** after the manner of the west. If an entire nation of 300 million (**the figure has now risen to more than 900 million**) took to similar economic **exploitation**, it would strip the world bare like locusts" (Young India, 1928, p.422). **Gandhi attacked western industrialisation craze on many grounds. Unmindful exploitation of natural resources leading to destruction of ecological balance is one main ground among them.**

No single factor, according to Gandhi, has contributed more to the **phenomenon** of worldwide erosion of natural resources than the greater **possibilities** that have been opened up for getting rich quickly with the help of new and **powerful machines**. **Nineteenth century system of rule and huge overseas financial investments by the European powers**, gave rise to a heavy, ceaseless drain of food and raw materials **from the countries** affected by it. Vast regions of earth were as **a result depleted of their soil fertility**. In the words of Jacks and Whyte, "The New World acquired in a few years the fruits of the old world's thousand years struggle with Nature" (The Rape of Earth, 1952, p.82). Western nations achieved a meteoric burst of prosperity and power for themselves without straining their own resources within their **own borders but only by robbing other countries of their natural resources that had been maintained for thousands of years**. In the exploited countries, as in India, population increased, roads and railways were built; there was rapid expansion of trade and industry, new cities **sprang up**, higher living standards were achieved for privileged class, forests were cleared, **pastures brought under cultivation**, insects and vermin 'which hold the balance **between the organic and inorganic forces** were annihilated". But all this outward show of progress in the exploited country was paid for in progressive deterioration of natural **resources, silted up rivers, recurring floods, droughts, dust-storms and famines and diseases due to the deepening poverty and lowered stamina of the masses.**

6.7 ENJOYMENT IN RENUNCIATION

In this context a mantra from Eshopanishad, "*Eshavasyamidam Sarvam Yatkinch Jagatyam Jagat*" becomes quite significant". Our **spiritualists** have analysed it only **from spiritual angle, which is true**. But when **we analyse it from the view point of physical energy, environment and consumption** we find that **whatever we know by seeing, listening, smelling, tasting and touching by means of our senses like eyes, ears, nose, tongue, skin, etc. and by our imagination, they all are only expressions of an original energy by which the whole of this universe has come into existence. This energy has no definite form of its own, but it has the capacity to assume any type of form. It keeps changing from one form to another. The process of this change is called Jagat, which is a gum dhatu of Sanskrit language. Similarly, the word 'Sansar' also is used, "yeh sansarati iti sansarah"** i.e. the process of continuous change or transformation that is taking place every moment. There cannot be more scientific definition **and explanation except this.**

In the next line of the same mantra, it is said "*the tyakteen bhunjitha, ma griddhah kasyawiddhanam*". According to physical energy point of view, it means that such energy cycles are self-established, which keep on emitting plenty of renewable energy. Therefore, the advice and counseling offered to humanity is that we should consume only such energy, which are self-established, self-energised and self-emitting. Do not break those energy cycles. Do not intercept or discontinue that self-energised automatic process of nature. Do not harm or eliminate the natural resources of energy. If we follow this basic mantra, our coming generation can avail of the resources of this planet indefinitely; otherwise, it would mean great danger to the very existence of human beings. Also we will be leaving nothing to our next generations, through our irreversible sinful acts.

Our life pattern now requires that our demands and consumption should be strictly limited. This is what our ancient scriptures and cultures teach us. Also in other religions and faiths of the world, the same teaching is contained viz how to use our scarce natural resources. Minimum use of water is advocated and its wastage is regarded as sin in the Jain religion and in Islam. In Hindu Vedic culture, the digging of ponds on the full moon day, worshipping all animals, birds, snakes, water, air, fire, etc are advocated. These are some examples. These beliefs have been made a compulsory part of our religious duties and daily life style, only for the protection of nature. The preaching to the human being in each religion of the world is to limit his consumption by the careful use of our scarce natural energy, by exhausting what are known as 'renewable resources' by ensuring their recycling and by checking our consumer life styles. In this way, the deleterious and depletive effect on natural resources can be reduced and our environment could be saved from degradation and pollution.

6.8 SUMMARY

Indeed, Gandhi was a human ecologist in the broadest sense. His teachings dealt with all aspects of human life, including nature and the environment, sustainable development, humans as members of the world community of species, as well as health, education, and the role of women as conservators of nature. Gandhi's concern for human welfare embraced everyone, including the poor and impoverished. For every project or programme, he recommended that humans "recall the face of the poorest and weakest man you may have seen and ask yourself if the step you contemplate to take is going to be of any use to him.

As a witness to the unrestricted use of India's resources by the British, Gandhi became keenly aware of the value of resources. He believed that humans must find ways to conserve and use all resources wisely. Not only did he become a knowledgeable leader in the ethics of human life but also he emerged as a practical environmentalist. Gandhi was concerned about sustainability, both in his personal life and for all humankind. He wrote, "we cannot have ecological movement designed to prevent violence against Nature, unless the principle of non-violence becomes central to the ethos of human culture". His opinion about sustainable development, or eco-development, as he calls it is as follows: "it is economic development based on ecological principles of environmental harmony, economic efficiency, resource (including energy) conservation, local self-reliance, and equity with social justice" and make him the great human ecologist.

6.9 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. What do you mean by Human Ecology?
2. Why is Mahatma Gandhi called a great Human Ecologist?

SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT 7 **GANDHI ON CONSERVATION OF NATURAL RESOURCES**

Structure

7.1 Introduction

Aims and Objectives

7.2 Ancient India's views on Environment and Conservation

7.3 Return to Nature

7.4 Life in Tolstoy Farm and Ashrams in India

7.5 A Culture of Greed

7.6 People Inspired by Gandhi's Thoughts on Environment and Conservation

7.7 summary

7.8 Terminal Questions

Suggested Readings

7.1 INTRODUCTION

At the start of the 20th century when the tentacles of the industrial revolution was spreading itself rapidly in the West, Gandhi foresaw that a time would come when those in a mad rush to multiply their wants, would retrace their steps and say: what have we done? He shuddered to think of the inevitable disaster if India were to take to industrialisation in the manner of the West. It was a lone cry in the wilderness as the West subscribed more to the Keynesian theories and values. In 1930, during the world-wide economic recession, Lord Keynes had actually said that "for at least another hundred years we must pretend to ourselves and to every one that fair is foul and foul is fair; for foul is useful and fair is not. Avarice and usury and precaution must be our gods for a little longer still. For only they can lead us out of the tunnel of economic necessity into daylight". The world scoffed at Gandhi's warnings when he said "The economic imperialism of a single tiny island kingdom (the UK) 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." He had anticipated most of the environmental problems that we face today.

Today one of Gandhi's best-known aphorisms, that the "the earth provides enough to satisfy every **man's** needs, but **not** every **man's** greed" has become a popular slogan all over the world encompassing the essence of nature and its conservation. In fact the preamble of the Earth Charter which was formally launched in 2000 echoes these sentiments of Gandhi when it says, "We stand at a critical moment in earth's history, a time when humanity must choose its future.... The choice is ours: form a global partnership to care for Earth and one another or risk the destruction of ourselves and the diversity of life.... Fundamental changes are needed in our values, institutions, and ways of living. We must realize that when basic needs have been met, human development is primarily about being more, not having more".

Aims and Objectives

After studying this Unit, you should be able to understand

- Ancient India's views on environment and conservation;
- Culture of greed- Views of environmentalists from the West and East;
- a Life in Gandhi's Ashrams;
- Influence of Gandhi's thoughts on conservation on the environment movement in India.

7.2 ANCIENT INDIA'S VIEWS ON ENVIRONMENT AND CONSERVATION

India's ancient religious books, literature and folklore point towards maintaining a harmonious and humane attitude towards nature and the environment. Our scriptures taught us to respect and revere nature as it supports our life, as well as all living beings on the planet. Daily life and activities, religious festivals, were all greatly influenced by the seasons and planetary positions especially of the sun and moon. Houses were built and designed by first determining the east and west direction (in other words the sun), a small garden for trees and medicinal plants was a must. When forest wood was cut for the kitchens there were rules for the people to plant new trees. The concept of Panchavati (literally grove of five trees) set down rules of planting five important trees like Banyan, Pipal, Ashoka, Bela, Harda or the trees common to that particular region thus ensuring that man would live in an environment where there is foliage and many trees. Practically Panchavati required every Indian to plant five trees and tend to them till they matured and to worship them. This was an act of returning one's debt of gratitude to mother earth. Gandhi's own views were similar as is apparent from the following lines: "I find in the practice of tree worship an instinct of deep pathos and poetic beauty. It symbolizes true reverence for the entire vegetable kingdom, which with its endless panorama of beautiful shapes and forms, declares to us as it were with a million tongues the greatness and glory of God."

7.3 RETURN TO NATURE

With urbanisation and modern man's hectic pace of life, we have sadly moved away from nature. This is a pity because if we only paused and observed nature there is a lot we can learn from her. For instance the earth supports a trees and plants right from the seedling stage. The plant or tree in turn gives back to the earth when it sheds its leaves or when it flowers or fruit fall down. These leaves and flowers decompose and become invaluable compost replenishing the earth once more. So the cycle of 'giving, supporting and returning' goes on in nature. Moreover out of convenience we easily resort to using disposable goods, be it tissues, glasses, plates and even cameras. But the Gandhian economy teaches us to recycle or create new products out of waste material. Only when a society takes pains to limit its wants and consumption and recycle things can we have a sustainable economy.

Gandhi took a holistic view of life and did not view the various spheres of life in watertight compartments. This holistic view is very much in tune with human ecology. Through his own example he wanted us to limit our wants saying that while he

acknowledged that a certain degree of comfort was necessary, beyond a certain level it would be a hindrance rather than a comfort or help.

After reading Adolf Just's book '**Return to Nature**', Gandhi was convinced that he should share his life not only with human beings but also with animals, birds, plants and trees in the environment. He tried to return or give back to nature what he took from nature and also led a life of voluntary simplicity so as to restrict how much he took from nature. His was not the Western anthropocentric view that man is superior to nature and thus can freely exploit or subjugate it. Rather he believed that life has to be led with mutual sharing and not exploitation in order to lead a peaceful, sustainable life. He said, "I venture to suggest that it is the fundamental law of nature, without exception, that Nature produces enough for our wants from day to day, and if only everybody took enough for himself and nothing more, there would be no man dying of starvation in this world."

7.4 LIFE IN TOLSTOY FARM AND THE ASHRAMS IN INDIA

Life in the Ashram was one of simplicity and in harmony with nature. He believed that with simple living, the resources of the earth could be conserved and thus sustain life on the planet. Let us take a look at how Gandhi lived with his large group of satyagrahis on Tolstoy Farm.

Gandhi believed that "the great Nature has intended us to earn our bread by the sweat of our brow", and so there was no concept of keeping workers or servants. Everyone joined hands in sharing all the work- in bread labour or manual labour. The cottages were erected by themselves with mud bricks and corrugated sheets.

The nearest big city Johannesburg was at a distance of 21 miles one way, yet the settlers walked this entire distance both ways and carried home-cooked food. Not only were all expenses cut down by not maintaining a horse carriage or eating out, but in addition the walking helped even the physically frail to become healthy.

Sanitation and Waste Disposal

Gandhi was of the firm belief that defecating in the open and spitting, blowing one's nose on the road was a sin against God and humanity and smacked of total disregard and inconsideration to others. He felt even a forest dweller, if he did not properly cover and dispose of his waste deserves to receive a heavy penalty for his act. He explained to the people how by such thoughtlessness we were spoiling our sacred river banks and its waters, providing excellent breeding grounds for flies so that even when we bathed in the water our bodies were being defiled.

Despite the large number of settlers, there was no refuse or dirt anywhere on the Farm. All rubbish was buried in trenches sunk for that purpose. Night soil was put into square pits which were one and a half foot deep and then fully covered by the excavated earth so that there was no trace of bad odour. Over a period of time, this was converted to manure for the farm thus saving lakhs of rupees as well as ensuring a hygienic way of waste disposal without the outbreak of epidemics.

It was a rule in the Ashram that nothing should be wasted. Every effort was made to recycle everything. Even the sticks used for cleaning the teeth were cleaned and dried

and used as fire wood. He used water very sparingly. No water was permitted to be thrown on the roads. All waste water was collected in buckets and used to water the trees. Kitchen waste was converted to compost.

Vegetarianism and Dietetic Experiments

Before leaving for England Gandhi had promised his mother that he would not touch wine and meat. In England he found that the people just did not understand the concept of vegetarianism and many friends tried to persuade him to eat meat even saying, 'what is the value of a vow made before an illiterate mother, and in ignorance of conditions here?'. But Gandhi was adamant and did not yield; though in his heart he was waiting for the day when he would openly be able to eat meat and make every Indian a meat-eater. But all this changed when he read Salt's '*Plea for Vegetarianism*'. From then on he became a vegetarian by choice and the spread of vegetarianism became his mission. He read all the books on vegetarianism that he could lay his hands on, like the '*Ethics of Diet*', '*The Perfect Way in Diet*' and as a result of all this literature, dietetic experiments took an important place in his life. To Gandhi, vegetarianism contained practical, ethical, religious and medical values. He came to the conclusion that man's supremacy over the lower animals did not mean that man should prey upon the latter, but that man should protect all lower beings and that there should be mutual aid between the two. He also found vegetarian food to be less expensive. Rejection of all spices and condiments was more conducive to a health and though food tasted bland he soon came to the conclusion that the real seat of taste was not the tongue but the mind.

Though the settlers were of different nationalities and religions, there was a unanimous approval for operating a single kitchen where only vegetarian food would be cooked. Gandhi encouraged organic farming of both fruits and vegetables. The settlers ate home grown vegetables and fruits along with home-baked bread made from coarse wheat flour ground by them, from which the bran was not removed, home-made groundnut butter and marmalade. 'Wheaten coffee' made of roasted, powdered wheat grains proved to be an excellent substitute for tea, coffee and cocoa.

Clothing

Boycott of foreign cloth and spinning of Khadi not only paralysed the British economy and played a key role in gaining our freedom, but also Khadi utilised local resources, men and material and the traditional talents and skill that were in abundance in the India - providing employment to millions. Also as Gandhi explained; wearing Khadi instead of artificial or machine-made cloth was more suited for the Indian hot weather. Khadi, he explained, easily absorbed the sweat from our bodies and thus was better for the skin. Gandhi himself shed his western dress down to a loin cloth and chaddar as he wanted to identify himself with the poorest of the poor of India.

Paper

Mirabehn once wrote about how she loved to silently watch Gandhi handle his writing work. "Nothing is ruffled or damaged by his hands and nothing is wasted". Apparently he would take a small piece of paper to write a letter. Finding it bigger than required for his communique, he would fold it and tear it into two neat halves measuring 3"x5" and then write whatever he wanted to write. He would then put it into a little basket for outgoing letters. The next letter to be written is even shorter, so he would pick up a post

card and write on it. For writing articles, he would extract a number of old sheets, with writing on one side, but unused on the other- his “**pusti**” sheets. These were a collection of blank pages mostly from backs of letters and other communications which came in endless numbers by post.

Even pencils were used till they were just a stub. There is a very famous incident which **Mirabeen** recounts when Gandhi could not find his pencil. All staff members helped him in his search. Not being able to find it, somebody brought him a new pencil. But Gandhi wanted his little stump. So somebody brought him another stump. Gandhi said, "Do you expect me to be satisfied with somebody else's stump? Supposing you had lost your child, would you be satisfied if somebody brought you another child and said, 'take this one instead?' After that a fresh desperate hunt was made and at last the little stump was found and given to a beaming Gandhi.

Self-sufficient Villages and Village Industries

'How to turn waste into wealth' was how Gandhi summed up the objectives of the Village Industries to the British. By encouraging village industries, he wanted to create employment for thousands of villagers and shake them off their indolence. Gandhi's concept of the self-sufficient village which produced enough for its own consumption was also a great aid to conservation. On the other hand, when we consume things which are produced in far off places, the resultant need for transportation increases fuel consumption, pollution and cost.

Farming

Gandhi paid great attention to soil fertility and quality. He warned the people not to resort to the modern mechanised ways of farming blindly as they may give great yields quickly but in the long run it would deplete the soil and make it infertile. Instead, he encouraged the making of organic manure which not only enriched the soil, but maintained village hygiene and sanitation also, due to its effective way of disposal. He also admired the methods of organic farming conducted by Albert Howard in Indore, wrote about his methods of making organic fertilizer from a mixture of cow dung, farm wastes, wood ash and urine.

Non-edible oil soap making: Gandhi was aware of the shortage of edible oils so with the help of **Dr.J.C.Kumarappa** they found a way to make soap out of non-edible oil. During the season villagers gathered neem seeds, crushed them in oil presses and from the Neem oil made different types of soap. As a result there was also an awareness to grow more trees and plants from which non-edible oil could be produced.

Leather craft and shoe-making: He wanted shoes and leather items to be made only from 'ahimsa leather', i.e., from the hides of animals that had died naturally. Similarly he encouraged 'ahimsa silk', i.e. silk made from cocoons from which the silk worm had turned to moths and flown away.

Cow Protection: Through the Goseva Sangh, Gandhi sought to improve the conditions and breeding of cows. Gandhi was pained to see the cruelty inflicted on cows and bullocks and even threatened to go on foot rather than on a bullock cart if they continued to strike them with spiked sticks. His basic stance was to protect beings weaker than man.

Nature Cure

With the growing simplicity of his life, Gandhi's dislike for medicines steadily increased. After reading Just's *Return to Nature*, he started experimenting with earth treatment and soon became an ardent advocate of both Kuhne's hipbaths and earth treatment. Nature cure to Gandhi was a way of life that assisted the patient to bring out his own curative powers from within his body.

Prayer and Yoga

Daily prayer, meditation, fasting and yoga were a routine in the ashram. In fact Gandhi was constantly asking people to 'turn the searchlight inward' and purify their hearts as much as possible. Gandhi knew that unless people developed spiritually, they would not be able to limit their wants, adopt a life of simplicity, or feel compassion for their fellow human beings, other living beings and the environment.

7.5 A CULTURE OF GREED

Why is consumerism which is fired by greed detrimental to the environment? This is because over-extraction, over-fanning, over-consumption are all leading to pollution of the air, water, soil and also denuding the forests thus greatly harming the ecological system.

According to John Seed, also known as the Green Monk, we are in the middle of the sixth mass extinction that has taken place on this planet since life began. Five times before, we lost at least half of the flora and fauna so unless something is urgently done towards conservation there would be a major catastrophe. According to him, we live in a culture of greed and consumption in which media has greatly misled people into believing that happiness lies in "having more". Underlying this unrestricted pursuit of wants is the illusion that 'the nature out there and the nature inside us is different'. This illusion is the cause of all our environmental problems. The reason for this illusion of separation is anthropocentrism, or the human folly in thinking that human beings are at the centre of everything. But what the science of ecology and the wisdom of the indigenous people reveal is that the world is a web and human beings are only a strand. If we destroy one strand, we destroy the other strands and thus destroy ourselves.

Albert Schweitzer, a contemporary of Gandhi had said, "Man has lost the capacity to foresee and to forestall. He will end by destroying the earth".

In his book 'Small is Beautiful', Schumacher pleads with his readers to listen to this wisdom of Gandhi rather than to Lord Keynes-as people were want to- for whom ethical considerations were not merely irrelevant but he actually thought them to be a hindrance. Schumacher supports Gandhi's views on reducing our wants and greed. if we have to save planet earth and her inhabitants and achieve 'permanent peace'. He writes, "The cultivation and expansion of needs is the antithesis of wisdom. It is also the antithesis of freedom and peace".

It is only in the last five decades that the ecological consciousness gained momentum and the classic book that launched the environment movement is Rachel Carson's 'Silent Spring'. She writes, "We still talk in terms of conquest, We still haven't become mature enough to think of ourselves as only a tiny part of a vast and incredible universe.

Man's attitude toward nature is **today** critically important simply because we have now acquired a fateful power to alter and destroy nature".

"But man is a part of nature, and his war against nature is inevitably a war against himself. The rains have become an instrument to bring down from the atmosphere the deadly products of atomic explosions. Water, which is probably our most important natural resource, is now used and re-used with incredible recklessness".

"Now, I truly believe, that we in this generation, must come to terms with nature, and I think we're challenged as mankind has never been challenged before to prove our maturity and our mastery, not of nature, but of ourselves."

7.6 PEOPLE INSPIRED BY GANDHI'S THOUGHTS ON ENVIRONMENT AND CONSERVATION

J.C.Kumarappa

Though Gandhi wrote and spoke at length about the ideal way to live, he did not formulate a clear economic theory. The credit goes to one of Gandhi's closest disciples, J.C.Kumarappa, who is considered to be one of the pioneers of the ecological movement in India. His book *'Economy of Permanence: A quest for a social order based on non-violence'* was founded on Gandhi's principles of Truth and Non violence. In fact he never deviated from Gandhian thought and said that any economy associated with Gandhi's name should subscribe to the principles of Truth and Non violence. This book has often been cited as an example of 'green thought'. He said, "we should never lose sight of that great teacher, mother Nature. Anything that we may devise, if it is contrary to her ways, she will ruthlessly annihilate sooner or later. Everything in nature seems to follow a cyclic movement. Water from the sea rises as vapour and falls on land in refreshing showers and returns back to the sea again."

As we can perceive, his economy was based on the 'Natural Order' and he believed that human beings had a moral obligation to live in harmony with nature, of which material resources were an integral part. Using simple examples of birds, animals and bees he classified 'types of economy in nature' into five categories- parasitic, predatory, enterprising, gregationary and service oriented. According to Kumarappa, there were two kinds of material resources- one was the non-renewable type such as coal, mineral, petroleum, etc, which was the 'Reservoir Economy' and the other was the kind which could be increased by man's effort and hence inexhaustible- such as timber, cotton, etc., which was the 'Current Economy'. In an article on Kumarappa and his Economic Philosophy, authors V.M.Govindu and D.Malghan explain that "in Kumarappa's scheme of things, a 'Reservoir Economy' is predatory in nature because the society draws on resources that it has not contributed to in any manner. This leads to a short circuiting of the chain of rights and obligations. The 'Current Economy' on the other hand is predicated on societies fulfilling these obligations."

As one can gather, much of his work concerned the careful use of natural resources. He also appealed to the British not to tax the poor peasants for grazing their cattle or to allow more land for growing of crops rather than growing of cash crops like jute, tobacco and sugarcane.

E.F.Schumacher

Very similar to **Kumarappa's** views on non-renewable resources is that of E.F Schumacher who was an economist, deeply influenced by Gandhi. He likened fossil fuels or the non-renewable resources to 'natural capital' which had been provided by nature and which human beings took for granted. He warned that if we **steadfastly** insisted on treating this 'natural capital' as expendable, as if it were income, **civilisation**, and life itself, would be endangered.

Post-independence, Schumacher even served as an adviser to the Planning Commission of India and introduced the concept of 'Appropriate **Technology**'. In 'Small is Beautiful' he writes, "As Gandhi said, the poor of the world **cannot** be helped by mass production, only by production by the masses... The technology of mass production is inherently violent, ecologically damaging, self-defeating in **terms** of non-renewable resources". He explained that on the contrary, production by the **masses** was compatible with the laws of ecology and gentle in its use of scarce resources.

Sunderlal Bahuguna

The Chipko (Hug the Trees) movement which by far has been one of the largest environment movement in India was led by Sunderlal **Bahuguna**, who had been blessed by Gandhi one day before Gandhi's assassination. He **and** his wife **Vimla** were Sarvodaya workers trained by **Gandhi's** British disciple, Sarla **Devi**. In April 1973 he led the peasants of **Mandal**, a village in the Garhwal Himalaya and successfully thwarted the felling of trees for commercial use by hugging the trees.

Other notable environmental activists influenced by **Gandhi** are Chandi Prasad Bhat who worked on ecological restoration in the Himalayan **region**, **Vandana Shiva** who has launched her 'Bija Satyagraha' to protect biodiversity and **seed**, Medha Patkar and Ramachandra Guha.

7.7 SUMMARY

Dr.Sushila Nayar, a close associate of Gandhi, **summarises** it well by saying- Gandhi stood for simple living, walking on foot where possible, making maximum use of one's own hands and supplementing human labour with **animal** power and simple machines which did not become masters of men. Gandhi **believed** in voluntary reduction of one's wants and taking **from** nature only as much as was absolutely necessary, returning the wastes back to nature, so that the process of **recycling** and renewal could go on and protect the natural resources. He knew that the natural resources of planet earth are not inexhaustible, a truth which has been realised by **scientists**, long **after** Gandhi had presented it to mankind in the early years of the 20th century. When Gandhi wrote Hind Swaraj, many thought he was turning the clock and wanted to **fake** us back into the middle ages. We now realise that he was far ahead of his times- **be** it the area of ecological balance, protection of environment and conservation of natural **resources** or in comprehending the importance of simple living and the dignity of labour.

7.8 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Briefly explain Gandhi's famous aphorism "the earth provides enough to **satisfy** every man's needs, but not every man's greed".

2. Describe Gandhian life style and how you feel it is conducive to conservation.
3. What changes do you think you can make to your life style which will aid in conservation?

SUGGESTED READINGS

Schumacher, E.F., *Small is Beautiful*, a study of economics as if people mattered, Vintage Books, London, 1993.

Carson, Rachel., *Silent Spring*, Other India Press, Goa

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UNIT 8 **GANDHI'S VILLAGE: AN IDEAL ECOLOGICAL UNIT**

Structure

8.1 Introduction

Aims and Objectives

8.2 Gandhi's Ashrams

8.3 Ecology: Definition

8.4 Gandhi's Ideal Village

8.5 Village or Gram Swaraj

8.6 Self-sufficient Village Republics

8.7 Summary

8.8 Terminal Questions

Suggested Readings

8.1 INTRODUCTION

On his return to India from South Africa in 1914, **Gandhi** promised **Gopal Krishna Gokhale**, whom he considered his political guru that **for** one year he (Gandhi) would travel the length and breadth of India to understand and gain experience about the country. Gandhi accordingly travelled third class on trains and went into villages and thus got a first hand knowledge of the social and economic conditions of ~~the~~ villages. Furthermore, his early Satyagrahas in Champaran and **Kheda** (1917 and 1918) also opened his eyes to the economic exploitation of the **villagers** by the British. Since eighty per cent of the population of India lived in villages, for Gandhi, the economic and social revival of the seven **lakh** villages was a top priority. In his own words- "To serve our villages is to establish Swaraj. Everything else is but an idle dream". Many years later, in 1933, on his nation-wide tour in which he covered 12,500 miles in nine months, penetrating into some of the remotest villages on foot, he saw the plight of the deprived sections of society, and he brought in even more reforms into his concept of Gram Swaraj.

Having witnessed the ills of industrialisation in England, he wanted to protect India **from** following in its footsteps saying, "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".

On the other hand, he had experienced the advantages and joys of the community Ashrams he had set up in South Africa- Phoenix and Tolstoy Farm. These ashrams were self-sufficient centres where people of different castes, faiths and nationalities lived harmoniously with each other, as well as the environment. The community life, which he developed in these ashrams, consisted of the inmates doing manual labour, cooking, agriculture and crafts. These experiments in his ashrams gave him a vision for developing

the seven lakh villages of India into village republics which were self-sufficient units with decentralisation, trusteeship, swadeshi, nai talim or basic education, bread-labour, full employment, equality and cooperation.

Aims and Objectives

After studying this Unit, you would be able to understand

- The Community life in Gandhi's ashrams in South Africa and India;
- The importance of Gram Swaraj or Village self-reliance;
- The significance of Village Industry.

8.2 GANDHI'S ASHRAMS

South Africa- Phoenix Settlement and Tolstoy Farm

Gandhi aspired to realise a village community throughout his life. The first attempts were made in South Africa at Phoenix Settlement and Tolstoy Farm. More lasting attempts were made in India at Sabarmati and Sevagram. In her book, 'Global Concern with Environmental Crisis and Gandhi's Vision', Dr. Savita Singh writes, "Gandhi built his ashrams in wastelands adjacent to villages. The aim of these experiments was to bring back a generation gone astray under the onslaught of Western industrial culture as also to prepare a model for the seven lakh villages and prove the efficacy of living in harmony with nature and the fruits of bread labour". The ashrams in fact were precursors for the Gram Swaraj movement and village industries.

What was it that motivated Gandhi to think of starting an ashram in the first place? It was a book, 'Unto This Last' by Ruskin, lent to him by his friend Henry Polak. This book had a great impact on Gandhi- particularly the point "That a life of labour, i.e., the life of the tiller of the soil and the handicraftsman, is the life worth living".

Gandhi lost no time in procuring 100 acres of land situated amidst sugar plantations, served by a spring and many fruit trees, in a place called Phoenix, 14 miles from Durban. He proposed that the printing press for *Indian Opinion* be shifted to this farm, on which every one should labour, drawing the same monthly allowance of 3 pounds irrespective of colour and nationality and attending to the press work in spare time. However not everyone agreed to settle down there as the place was overgrown with grass, uninhabited and infested with snakes. The nearest station too was two and a half miles away. However they all agreed to work for the press and bring out the *Indian Opinion*.

Within a month a big shed seventy-five feet long and fifty feet wide was erected by the joint effort of all of them for the press. Eight buildings of corrugated iron and thatched roofs were built for the settlers. Thus the **Phoenix Settlement** started in 1904. The settlers were divided into the 'Schemers' and the 'Workers'. The schemers had to make a living by manual labour. They were given three acres of land around the press. No land was fenced in and just narrow paths divided the holdings. On the days the *Indian Opinion* was to be printed, there was a flurry of activity- Gandhi and Polak corrected the proofs, the printers ran off the corrected pages, the children folded and wrapped the journal.

Every Sunday all the residents met in Gandhi's cottage for a community prayer in which

recitations from the Gita, Koran and the Bible, Christian hymns and Gujarati bhajans were sung cutting across all race and religion barriers. One of the inmates, Millie Graham Polak describes life in the Phoenix settlement as a community life in the miniature. "Gandhi as the benevolent patriarch had no special privilege except to look after everybody else. The house resounded with laughter as the children joined with the parents every morning in the grinding of wheat in a hand-mill. The evening meal was a pleasant hour, interspersed with light conversations and serious discussion".

In order to sustain the Satyagraha struggle in South Africa, Gandhi felt the need to lodge the satyagrahis in a co-operative farm and so in 1910 he set up the **Tolstoy Farm** on a 1100 acre land which was given rent free to him by **Mr. Kallenbach**. The farm was twenty one miles from Johannesburg. The seventy-five odd residents hailed from all parts of India and espoused different religions. They were served by a common vegetarian kitchen and led a **frugal** and hard life. All of them, including the children, had to do their quota of manual labour. Vocational training was also given to the youngsters. Kallenbach learnt shoe-making from the Trappist Monks and taught this craft to the residents. Since the morning hours were devoted to farm work and domestic duties, the school for imparting literary training was kept for after the mid-day meal.

India- Sabarmati and Sevagram Ashram

- As mentioned earlier, India, since ancient times, has had its people living in the **villages**- in fact 80% of its population lived in villages. However, the villagers were steeped in poverty, ignorance, malnutrition and due to terrible insanitation and unhygienic conditions the people suffered from terrible diseases. Those who had managed to get education had moved into the city to further their prospects while completely ignoring the lot of their brethren back in the village. Under the British rule the natural and human resources of the country had any way been ruthlessly exploited and on top of that, their attempts to convert the ancient traditions of India and to convert India from village life to town life was totally destroying India's structure- its culture and economy- from the very roots. The only connection the British seemed to keep with the village was to exact revenue from them.

Gandhi took stock of the situation and immediately foresaw the total ruination that was taking place unless he did something for the villages. With 80% of India's population in villages, Gandhi knew that if the village perished then India would perish. He therefore gave all his attention to this foundational work and persuaded everyone who wanted freedom of India from the British, to go a step further and think of 'Poorna **Swaraj**' and bring true freedom to the villages. This was the spirit behind **Gandhi's** Constructive Programme and its practical implication was, 'Village Reconstruction'.

On his final return to India, Gandhi lost no time in seeking to establish a community settlement in India also. He first established his Satyagraha Ashram in Kochrab, a small village near Ahmedabad in 1915. But two years later, after an outbreak of plague, he shifted this ashram to a place on the banks of the **Sabarmati** river. From the very outset the Ashram was mainly **concerned** with the fight against untouchability and later in 1933 it was given up for a **centre** for the removal of untouchability- **Harijan** Sevak Sangh.

Gandhi then decided to settle down in a poor village in Segaoon, near **Wardha** with a population of just 600 which lacked bare amenities like a **pucca** road, shop or **post** office. Later it was renamed as **Sevagram**. Sevagram became the pivotal point for all

the historical happenings that ultimately led to India's independence. In J.C.Kumarappa's words, it was "the defacto capital of India".

The experiments carried out in Sevagram reveal the utopian dream of Gandhi, namely a village republic with self-rule by the villagers who are able to live with true dignity and freedom. Life in the ashram was one of simplicity and a daily routine. The day began at four o'clock in the morning with communal prayers and spinning. Breakfast was served at dawn. Then after a brisk walk Gandhi would spend time in his mud hut, writing. Lunch was served at 11 am with all inmates squatting on the floor in the verandah. This was followed by reading, spinning, and meditation. Dinner was served at 5 o'clock after which there were inter-faith prayers. Like the ashrams in South Africa, it was a classless community where everyone engaged in bread-labour, spinning, craft-work and lived harmoniously with each other. At the ashram he taught the people cattle-keeping, nature-cure, hygiene and sanitation, compost making, eradication of untouchability, cropping patterns and irrigation practices. He taught them to live a life of sharing and mutual aid amongst themselves and with the eco system so as to be able to show the world at large that a sustainable future lies in human beings living in small communities in tune with nature.

8.3 ECOLOGY: DEFINITION

The dictionary meaning of ecology is:

1a. The science of the relationships between organisms and their environments. Also called **bionomics**.

1b. The relationship between organisms and their environment.

2. The branch of sociology that is concerned with studying the relationships between human groups and their physical and social environments. Also called **human ecology**.

3. The study of the detrimental effects of modern civilization on the environment, with a view toward prevention or reversal through conservation.

4. The political movement that seeks to protect the environment especially from pollution.

Gandhi suggested three balances to be maintained in order to lead a life of peace and harmony on this earth. These were the balances between (i) the interests of human beings and Nature (ii) the individuals and the society they constituted, and (iii) the physical and spiritual desires of man. Gandhi envisioned a society where men lived close to nature and closer still to each other. The small village communities he conceived gave such opportunities for people to be close to each other as well as with nature. The bread labour, Nai Talim and inter-faith activities also helped in the development of the body, mind and spirit. Having understood the meaning of ecology it will be interesting to study and understand how Gandhi's ideal village took into consideration all the above points-the social, human and political aspects so as to create a truly self-sufficient village republic.

8.4 GANDHI'S IDEAL VILLAGE

I would say that if the village perishes, India will perish too. It will be no more India. Her own mission in the world will get lost."

Since ancient times India has been a land of relatively autonomous and self-governing village communities which based their life on dharma and righteousness. The British rule disintegrated these village communities by subordinating them to a formal and centralised legal system. In doing so, the traditional foundation was demolished and along with it the inner cohesion which had kept the Indian village going for thousands of years. The study tour that Gandhi undertook for one year on the advice of **Gokhale** helped him to see the pathetic reality of India- the horrible trains with a sea of humanity, shoving and jostling each other, the dirty roads, the heaps of refuse and night soil at the entrance of villages- all this shook Gandhi to his core.

As a first step Gandhi appealed to the educated city dwellers to return to the villages with a spirit of service and make a beginning by **making** the village cleaner by their own labour and removing illiteracy to the best of their ability. This was no easy task as Gandhi was not oblivious to the actual realities of Indian villages. He admitted that, "Instead of having graceful hamlets dotting the land, we have dung heaps. The approach to many villages is not a refreshing experience. Often one would like to shut one's eyes and stuff one's nose; such is the surrounding dirt and offending smell".

But then he shared with them his dream of how he envisioned his beloved India to be. He pictured India not as a poverty-stricken India teeming with ignorant millions but one which was continuously progressing and tapping the genius within her. He appealed to the educated class to join him in making India's villages into a republic which would have no illiterates, in which everyone is usefully occupied, has nourishing food, **Khadi** (meaning yarn spun by themselves) to clothe themselves, well ventilated homes, with a strict sense of hygiene and sanitation and which will be governed by a Panchayat. On another occasion he defined his ideal Indian village as follows:

"An ideal village will be so constructed as to lend itself to perfect sanitation. It will have cottages with sufficient light and ventilation built of a material obtainable within a radius of five miles of it. The cottages will have courtyards enabling householders to plant vegetables for domestic use and to house their cattle. The village lanes and streets will be free of all avoidable dust. It will have wells according to its needs and accessible to all. It will have houses of worship for all, also a common meeting place, a village common for grazing its cattle, a co-operative dairy, primary and secondary schools in which industrial (i.e. vocational) education will be the central fact, and it will have Panchayats for settling disputes. It will produce its own grains, vegetables and **fruit**, and its own Khadi. This is roughly my idea of a model village." Furthermore, he pointed out that 'all should make it a point of honour to use only village articles whenever and wherever available. Given the demand there is no doubt that most of our wants can be supplied by the villages. When we become village-minded we shall not want imitations from the West or machine-made products.'

8.5 VILLAGE OR GRAM SWARAJ

Thus we can see that for Gandhi, freedom in its truest sense was the uplift and Swaraj of the village and its inhabitants. So he set about **reconstructing** the Indian society based on the village system with the village as the basic unit. He called this Gram Swaraj. Based on the above quotation by Gandhi about his utopian village, we can understand that he wanted the village to produce basic useful goods for consumption purpose rather than trade and the governance was to be bottom-up, not top-down. The basic principles of Gram Swaraj as laid down by Gandhi were:

1. Supremacy of Man- Full Employment
2. Body-Labour
3. Equality
4. Trusteeship
5. Decentralisation
6. Swadeshi
7. Self- Sufficiency
8. Co-operation
9. Satyagraha
10. Equality of Religions
11. Panchayat Raj
12. Nai Talim

8.6 SELF-SUFFICIENT VILLAGE REPUBLICS

Constructive Programme- Khadi and Village Industries

How did Gandhi go about achieving his village republics and how did he picture its functioning? What did he mean by it being self-sufficient? Were they to work in isolation? Would not that defeat the whole picture of world being one family? The underlying spirit behind the revival of the village was Sarvodaya or welfare of all.

First of all, Gandhi outlined and launched his Constructive Programme. The first practical thing he laid out was the charkha programme and spinning of Khadi. For almost four to six months of the year the men in the villages were without work and took to drinking and gambling and behaving atrociously towards their wives and family. Spinning now ensured they were gainfully employed throughout the year, the women earned extra money and the rhythmic operation of the charkha was said to have a therapeutic value. Of course in addition to this people were now wearing clothes spun out of Khadi and thus boycott of British made clothes was complete.

Khadi is a village industry within the reach of the 'last person'. It signifies self-reliance and self-sufficiency. It is human centred, creative, participative, and based on the principles of self-reliance, ecology and peace. Gandhi referred to Khadi as the 'sun of the village solar system' and the other village industries as the planets supporting the sun (Khadi) in return for the heat and sustenance they derived from it.

The other village industries which he helped promote and develop were dairy farming, hand-pounding of rice and corn, soap-making, bee-keeping, pottery, tanning, hand-made paper, ink, handicrafts and **palm-gur**. All of this ensured not only a means of subsistence but also ensured that such village art and skill would not die out. Such focus on the villages also made the migration of able-bodied youth from the villages to the urban centres a less attractive option. In addition Gandhi strongly advised the city dwellers to 'use and purchase only those articles manufactured by the villagers'.

Gandhi was no idle dreamer. Always a man of action and an ever growing dynamic individual, his experiments in his community life the ashrams had taught him **that** it is not possible to be completely self-sufficient. It was not possible to be able to produce everything that was required for a simple basic living. So though the aim was complete self-sufficiency, he advised each village to produce more than the village requirements and exchange it with the surplus from a neighbouring village for in the final analysis 'man is not born to live in isolation but is essentially a social animal independent and interdependent'. Thus, when Gandhi speaks of villages collectively striving for a self contained system, he is advocating the need for regional specialisation and exchange of goods between regions.

Supremacy of Man- Full Employment, Bread/Body Labour

Gandhi's social and economic views were human centred. In his own words 'The supreme consideration is man'. He believed that every man has a right to be happy and ought to have the right to livelihood. In his Hind Swaraj he had been critical about the 'time and labour saving machinery' not because he was against machinery but if the use of such technology was going to replace **human** beings and thus render them unemployed he was against it. He said, "the poor of the world cannot be helped by mass production, only by production of the masses". He was in favour of Appropriate Technology i.e. technology appropriate for rural India where capital was scarce and labour in plenty. So the technology ought to cater to increased production in agriculture and rural industry, should not be capital intensive and should properly utilise man-power so as to solve-the problem of unemployment.

He was emphatic that everybody should be able to get sufficient work to enable them to feed and clothe themselves and make the two ends meet. In continuation with this right to livelihood was his belief in the dignity of labour. This idea first hit home to Gandhi when he read **Ruskin's** 'Unto This Last' and he was struck by the point- "A lawyer's work has the same value as the barber's, as all have the same right of earning their livelihood **from** their **work**". He felt 'How can a man who does not do body labour, have the right to eat'? So in Gandhi's scheme of things, each and everyone had an obligation to engage in productive physical labour.

Equality and Trusteeship

In the very **first** Ashram founded by Gandhi in **Africa**, economic equality was something laid down from the very beginning. Everyone drew the same wage and all tilled the land or worked at the press equally. To him the rich and poor divide was unbearable. He wanted to level down the few rich in whose hands lay the bulk of the nation's wealth and level up the semi-starved naked millions. Of course by this he did not mean to **forcefully** dispossess them as that would resort to violence. Instead he preached trusteeship in which he wanted the rich to become trustees of their surplus wealth for the good of society since society was an extended family. According to Pyarelal, the Trusteeship plan is a philosophy of life and organisation, with methods of management that bring about inter-personal relationships. "It envisages a new structure and system of organization based on non violence, welfare of all and the sharing of responsibilities".

In addition to economic equality Gandhi also ensured equality in the social structure. He gave great importance to the welfare of women and was indeed a revolutionary in bringing about the emancipation of women in India. He not only brought them to the forefront of his satyagraha movement but also strongly denounced the purdah, sati and dowry system, child marriage, and advocated widow remarriage. He wanted equal rights

and duties for men and women and said, "Woman is the companion of man, gifted with equal mental capacities. She has the right to participate in the very minutest detail in the activities of man and she has an equal right of freedom and liberty with him. She is entitled to a supreme place in her own sphere of activity, as man is in his". Gandhi also strongly worked for the uplift of the oppressed Dalit class to bring about a just society.

Self-Sufficiency and Co-operation

Gandhi wanted every village to be self-sufficient in regard to food, clothing and other basic necessities and to never be a burden on society. After having achieved that, he wanted the people to use their spare time for the service of others. He explained that man is a social being and in as much he is independent he is also inter-dependent. He gave the example of a family. Each member while being self-independent is also inter-dependent, and all cooperate and help each other. He wanted everyone to do the same in society, for the nation and the world.

Equality of Religions

From childhood, Gandhi had never made any distinction between, Hindus, Muslims, Parsis or Christians. So he was pained to see the deep division between Hindus and Muslims in India. Till his last breath he fought for communal harmony. He proclaimed that all religions were good and equal and it was only the followers of these different religions who quarreled with one another. Religion was a personal matter and everyone was entitled to retain his or her own religion without interference. He taught, "Every religion has its full and equal place. We are leaves of a majestic tree whose trunk cannot be shaken off its roots...". Thus in his earliest ashrams every evening it was common place for hymns, bhajans and scriptures to be read from the Bible, Gita and Koran.

Panchayat Raj

Gandhi was pained to see the decline of the panchayati raj which was a system of governance since ancient times. With the British system of centralised rule and their ruthless method of revenue collection, the panchayat had all but become defunct. Gandhi set out to revive this and outlined a system of governance whereby the village was to be ruled by an assembly of five people elected annually by the villagers themselves. It was the responsibility of the panchayat to ensure the education of all children in its village, its sanitation, medical care, cleanliness of its wells, and **uplift** of the so-called untouchables.

post-independence, Gandhi gave an amazing blue-print for the future governance by the Panchayat. He described his concept in terms of an oceanic circle. Most organisational charts show a pyramid like hierarchy where there is a top to down rule and approach. Instead, Gandhi spoke of an oceanic circle where he goes beyond the individual village and sees the structure "composed of innumerable villages ever-widening, never ascending circles". They are all at the same level related to each other in the metaphor of the circle, not the pyramid. Moreover, each individual is the centre of his / her own circle and these circles intersect and expand in all direction, but never so that there is any "apex sustained by the bottom". Such a type of structure indicates and enables common ownership, equal opportunity, rights and responsibilities. In this structure every person has a right to contribute to the formulation of policy through participation in various committees at various capacities. There is no management or control from top. Only self discipline and self regulation guides the function of the whole community.

Nai Talim or Basic Education

Gandhi was very distressed to see how ignorant and steeped in superstition the villagers were. Education to him did not mean just literacy, rather for Gandhi literacy was just the beginning of education. It was practical and basic education for the 5 H's- Hand, Head, Heart, Health and Habit. Education through craft was taught along with importance of health and hygiene. This basic education was for children and adults, men and women. The aim of Adult Education was to educate village adults to have a better, fuller and richer lives, both as individuals and in the community. The education was imparted to them through handicrafts and other creative activities.

In addition to all the above points Gandhi also took care to impart sound advice on health and hygiene. He found that eighty percent of the disease in **rural** India was caused either due to malnutrition or lack of hygiene and sanitation. Malnutrition severely affects body and mind development and reduces working efficiency. He advised them to eat hand-pounded rice and jaggery rather than polished rice and sugar, to reduce salt intake and spice, eat more vegetables, boil drinking water, eat meals at specific times. He also told them the importance of personal hygiene and community sanitation and cleanliness saying 'Cleanliness is next to Godliness'. He made them realise how precious the human body was by likening it to a Temple. A Temple was a holy place where God resides and hence should be kept clean. Similarly our bodies should also be kept clean as God is housed within our bodies.

Thus Gandhi had a comprehensive ideal of village Swaraj encompassing the economic, political, social and educational dimensions. Prof. Johan Galtung expresses this quite succinctly in his book 'The Way is the Goal: Gandhi Today' by describing Gandhi's village as a place where individuals led a modest almost puritan life and found joy and contentment in the life of villager, 'but in an uplifted form- with all basic needs satisfied and a high level of self-reliance. No big power to be exercised over millions of people, through the segmentation of modern social life, promised by modernization: you can become minister of education, you minister of health, you minister of public works, etc. Instead of that the power has to be limited to a small unit, a village, and shared with everybody in that unit since it is clear that Gandhi wanted some kind of direct democracy however much it was exercised through the five-person rule at the top of the village, by the Panchayat'.

8.7 SUMMARY

To Gandhi, the village is a primary community, large enough to offer a diversified life and small enough to generate and sustain a sense of community. Johan Galtung summarises it well by saying, "It is a republic steered by the Panchayat – a five person committee. Economically it is self-sustained and self-governed and the people are wise, cultured and courageous to do their own policing and ward off any evil forces from the outside. The village produces mainly for its own consumption, it respects scarcity of resources and there exists a spirit of sharing among the villagers."

As Gandhi's village was to be a self-governing autonomous community, he considered it necessary that it should be **self-sufficient** in its basic needs like food, clothing and shelter. Further, Gandhi's village was not an exclusively agricultural community; it maintained a balance between agricultural and village industries. Jayaprakash Narayan made the following observation- "Gandhiji spoke of self government, self sufficient village republics.

He taught us to visualize the village that does its own policing, settles its own disputes, looks after its sanitation, its education, its industries and its agriculture. He also spoke of establishing equality in the village society."

In his book 'Gandhi's outstanding Leadership' author Alan Nazareth, sums it up well by writing, " Gandhi's leadership in the environmental and ecological fields is clearly seen in his insistence on leading a simple life, keeping one's surroundings clean, protecting animal life, avoiding all wastage and utilizing locally available renewable materials to the maximum extent". To quote Gandhi on the subject- "The real conflict is not between environment and development but between environment and the reckless exploitation of the earth by man".

8.8 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Why did Gandhi focus on village revival?
2. Briefly explain life at the ashrams established by Gandhi.
3. In what way did Khadi and spinning help in village swaraj?
4. Describe Gandhi's ideal village. Give five practical actions Gandhi took to achieve Village Swaraj.

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