**GANDHI’S VIEWS ON NATURE AND ENVIRONMENT**

“The Earth has enough resources for our need but not for our greed.” This most often quoted phrase by Gandhi depicts his concern for nature and environment. Gandhi’s views on environment consist of moral, spiritual and non-violent dimensions. To him, the hallmark of development of man consisted not in materialism or consumerism but in spiritual self-realization, a character heavily loaded with morality and non-violence. The craving for materialistic wants was alien to him for it hindered the path to one’s realization. His simple living and high thinking reiterated his love for all living beings, which is the very manifestation of God’s creation. His concept of non-violence thus encompassed all living beings and embodied the eternal values of life in his thought and actions.

Gandhi was greatly influenced by Adolph Just’s book ‘Return to Nature’ that further strengthened his conviction that if a man desires to live a wholesome life, he will have to share his life with not only humans but all living beings - birds, animals, plants and the whole ecosystem. Man must return to nature what he takes from her. He abhorred violence, in any form, towards animals or other living beings. Gandhi thus expressed his sense of the unity of all life. He wrote in Harijan in 1937, “I do believe that all God’s creatures have the right to live as much as we have.” Gandhi was a great believer in *advaita* (non-duality) and in the essential unity of man and all lives (Young India, 1924). Thomas Weber brings an interesting perspective on how Arne Naess, who was thoroughly influenced by Gandhian philosophy, interprets the link between self-realisation and non-violence. Weber’s interpretation is as follows:

1. Self-realisation presupposes a search for truth.

2. All living beings are one

3. Himsa (violence) against oneself makes complete self-realisation impossible

4. Himsa against a living being is Himsa against oneself and.

5. Himsa against a living being makes complete self-realisation impossible (T. Weber,

Gandhi and Deep Ecology, Journal of Peace Research, vol.36, No.3, May 1999). The ancient Indian religious philosophy, thought and action and practices point out to a harmonious relation between man and other living beings. Gandhi was an ardent believer of this philosophy of Vedanta, a combination of spiritual faith and scientific thought.

**Gandhi’s Critique of Modern Civilization**

Gandhi was undoubtedly a visionary who could foresee the ills of industrialization and modernization. He was ‘an early critic of the dehumanizing character of modern industrial civilization. It is in the context of new value orientation and the quest for human survival threatened by environmental and ecological crisis that the re-discovering of Gandhi’s warning of ‘industrialise and perish’ has to be seen’ (Savita Singh, pp.58-59). His Hind Swaraj depicts his understanding of the chaos the modern civilisation would usher in. Having witnessed the human devastation that industrialisation had caused in England, he warned us of the impending dangers of an urban industrial society. He was baffled at the thought of India being heavily industrialised and its culture eroded through dehumanising. Gandhi firmly believed that India lives in its villages. And to erode its village’s culture and civilisation via technology, machinery and industrialisation, to him, amounts to sin. He warned the youth not to be carried away by the glitter of the modern civilisation because ‘its defects are well known but not one of them is irremediable’. He advocated village life as the goal, as India is an inheritor of rural civilisation.

**Man-Nature Relationship**

Nature, according to Gandhi, is a source and force of inspiration and not exploitation. Gandhi fervently appealed to men to desist from exploiting others and inflicting violence on them. It pervades all living beings including nature and natural resources. Gandhi was against disturbing the nature and ecological system that provides health and fertility to all. Gandhi believed in the universal co-existence and subscribed to the principle of reverence for all lives. His non-violence in this way is universal law of life and it manifests in love for all creatures (Ibid). Gandhi’s vision thus has a clear and decisive moral and spiritual dimension in its approach to nature.

Gandhi firmly opposed the western view of man’s conquest of nature. He warned against man’s overpowering over nature that might result in his alienation to natures’ system. He also cautioned against using nature for unlimited mass production and consumption purposes. Gandhi’s vision of upliftment of all *Sarvodaya*, implies a healthy development and environment than can be evolved by man to ensure his harmonious existence with nature and other living beings. What he preached and practiced corresponds to what we today call as eco-friendly measures and living in harmony with nature.

**Village Vs Urban Life**

Gandhi disapproved the concept of industrialised urban cities wherein material comforts and extensive use of machinery occupy a prominent place. He insisted on developing the village, teaching the villagers the importance of health, hygiene, sanitation and education to bring about positive change in their lives. His scheme of development included elimination of poverty through self-sufficiency in villages, promotion of village, small-scale industries, handicrafts and the use of local resources. Gandhi favoured developing thousands of cottage and village industries as they would provide an outlet for the creative faculties and resourcefulness of the people. This would help in solving the unemployment problems while assuring jobs to the needy and addition to the nation’s wealth. The village development would also arrest the mass migration of the villagers to cities in search of employment, thus avoiding any stress on urban resources. Gandhi’s reverence for nature and his advocacy for using the natural resources frugally stems from his concept of unity of man with all, including other living creatures. He implemented these ideals in real life with sincerity to evolve a sustainable society. He brought forth a close link between nature and the existence of man; he appealed for respecting the five elements of nature – Earth, Water, Ether, Sunlight and Air, without which the human existence would be jeopardized.