

Cite as: Anand, Subhash. (2006). Ahimsa: The Ecophilic Vision of Gandhi (Version 1.0). Jnanadeepa: Pune Journal of Religious Studies, Jan-June 2006 (9/1), 45-62.
<http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4266648>

Ahimsa: The Ecophilic Vision of Gandhi

Subhash Anand

Dept of Indian Studies, JDV, Pune 411014

Abstract:

The author studies the profound notion of Ahimsa as the ecophilic vision of Gandhi and points to its role in dealing with the ecological crisis of today. He visualizes a new world of healthy individuals in a healthy community on a healthy planet, sharing with one another the bounty of the one Father and Mother of all. This is part of Gandhi's quest, his concern for *loka-sangraha*, his *seva* to *hari-jana*, his worship of Hari (God), his search for Truth, his faith in *advaita*. The Gandhian ashram embodies this search and anticipates in some way the goal of that search. Only when ecophilia is part of a greater search will it be truly effective. Only when our concern for ecology shapes our life-style will it be credible and transformative.

Keywords:

Ecophilia, M. K. Gandhi, Advaita, inter-relatedness, personal commitment, ashram, satyagraha, Mother Nature.

Gandhi introduces his autobiography with these words: “I simply want to tell the story of my numerous experiments with truth, and my life consists of nothing but those experiments” (39\2-3).¹ For him “truth is the sovereign principle, which includes numerous other principles” (39\4). Thus his search for truth is an integral search: it embraces all aspects of his life. For this reason Gandhi’s search includes “experiments with non-violence, celibacy and other principles [wrongly] believed [by others] to be distinct from truth” (39\4). He concludes his autobiography with the words: “I can say with assurance, as a result of all my experiments, that a perfect vision of Truth can only follow a complete realization of Ahimsa” (39\401).²

A. Advaita as the Foundation of Ecophilia

Ahimsa is not just non-violence, but love (42\481), nay an “identification with everything that lives” (39\401). Life taught Gandhi that “the nearest approach to Truth was through love” (48\404), and love is “the only inevitable means” (42\405). His life was a series of experiments not only with Truth but also with ahimsa (39\350). Elsewhere Gandhi claims: “I am making an experiment in Ahimsa on a scale perhaps unknown in history” (53\333). Gandhi was very much inspired by the *Bhagavad-Gīta*, which he describes as his “perennial guide to conduct” (27\315), “an infallible guide of conduct” (39\211), “the book *par excellence* for the knowledge of Truth” (39\600). This text reports Krishna urging Arjuna to work for *loka-saṅgraha* (3.20, 25), holding creation together. Commenting on 3.35, Gandhi says: “A wise man should be as industrious and work as hard as others; only, he should work for the good of the world, disinterestedly and without attachment” (32\172).³ Gandhi’s search for Truth is also his struggle for *loka-saṅgraha*, an *eco-philía*,⁴ a love for the integrity of creation.

Advaita as Inter-relatedness of all Reality

We can understand Gandhi’s insistence on ahimsa only if we appreciate his basic presupposition: the inter-relatedness of all reality. Though not an Advaitin in the traditionally understood sense, Gandhi

believes in some kind of *advaita*, “in the essential unity of man and for that matter of all that lives” (25\390). Beyond life, Gandhi affirms the oneness of all creation:

Science, both physical and metaphysical, tells us that we are all identical both physically and spiritually... our bodies are made up of the same five elements, there being no difference on account of origin, race or sex... [and] an inward view will reveal only one soul pervading us all (42\77).

Gandhi’s view finds its corroboration in contemporary writings. Let me quote just one:

There is a deep web of relationships within our human lives, a web that bonds us both to all those people who have impacted our lives in a variety of ways and to the whole of creation. The atoms that make up our selves have existed for more than fifteen billion years. My atoms were, perhaps at one point, stars before they later became part of the planet Earth. My atoms were perhaps part of the mountains and the seas, or a bird or a tree, and later may have been part of a rose or another human. In a way I am everything.⁵

Humans experience the inter-relatedness of reality within themselves: “The human body is the universe in miniature. That which cannot be found in the body is not to be found in the universe. Hence the philosopher’s formula, that the universe within reflects the universe without” (77\2).⁶

This inter-relatedness of all is dynamic in character: “a human is made of earth. His body springs from the earth and derives its sustenance from the various forms which earth takes” (28\206). Thus a polluted earth will be a source of pollution to humanity. The converse is also true: “Purification being highly infectious, purification of oneself necessarily leads to the purification of one’s surroundings” (39\402). Elsewhere Gandhi says: “I do not believe... that an individual may gain spiritually and those who surround him suffer... I believe that if one man gains spiritually, the whole world gains with him and, if one man falls, the whole world falls to that extent” (25\390). The whole of creation is held together by “the

universal and all-pervading Spirit of Truth” (39\401). Thus, there is a certain oneness, a certain non-duality in all reality, because all reality comes from, is sustained by, and finds its fulfilment in the Real, in Truth. Gandhi even says that “the sum total of all that lives is God” (26\571). The whole of creation mediates the presence of “the one and the same Creator” (39\221). Hence violence to any creature, however small it may appear to be, is equivalent to closing oneself to Truth that is God.

Inter-relatedness as Personal Communion

We humans are persons. We experience inter-relatedness not merely in terms of causality, but also - and much more powerfully - in terms of interpersonal relations: others have significance not merely in terms of my need, but by virtue of what they are. This approach is also an essential feature of ecophilia. Our concern for ecology cannot be merely in terms of *our* survival, for then we would continue to function within the framework that has resulted in the present ecological crisis: nature merely as subservient to human needs. We need a new attitude towards environment, an attitude of love: ecophilia. This is possible if in some way the inter-relatedness of all reality is ultimately personal, grounded in the supremely personal creative power.

The reader will naturally ask: “Does Gandhi accept God as personal?” In his writings we come across such clear statements as “God is not a person. He is the Law and also the Law-giver... It means that man would reap as he sows” (79\228; 84\306). Gandhi spells out the religious meaning of this understanding of God: “When we pray to the Law, we simply yearn after knowing the Law and obeying it we become what we yearn after” (50\240). God seems to be like the sun: if you open your window you get the sunshine; if not you remain in the dark. The sun can do nothing about it!

Gandhi does not claim to be a consistent thinker (39\3-4). Hence it should not surprise us that sometimes when he speaks of God, we find that he uses certain expressions that are more intelligible in a personalistic understanding of God: God is love (37\349; 48\405), God has compassion (29\142), God hears the prayer of those who trust in Him (40\120), God can be found only through love, not any

love, but the type of love we find in the lives of great devotees like Mirabai (90\41). Hence a more correct statement of Gandhi's position can be given in his own words: "If God is not a personal being for me like my earthly father, He is infinitely more" (57\165).

The created reality is not just something, but the sacrament of somebody, of the personal Divine that grounds its existence. To that extent it is sacred. The practice of ahimsa is built upon this presupposition. A person is an end-in-onself. One's worth is not in terms of usefulness to others, but flows from one's own inner being. Hence love – the accepting of and the being accepted by the other as the other – is the most appropriate expression of a personal being. Therefore in as much as we are persons, we become fully ourselves only through love. To put it differently, if human beings become authentic through love, it is because they alone are "made in the image of God" (31\101), of that God who is Love. Love enables me to find the other meaningful precisely as the other. Love, thus, calls me to transcend myself. This is not possible without ongoing purification, for only by it we can create space for the other as the other. Hence, "without self-purification the observance of the law of Ahimsa must remain an empty dream" (39\401).

Personal Communion as Commitment

Gandhi believes that "this life is given to us for repaying our debts" (53\417). According to the *Śatapatha-brāhmaṇa* (1.7.2.1-5), all of us are born in this world with four debts (*catur-ṛṇa*). We are indebted to our parents for our birth, to nature for all the wonderful things we receive from her, to the sages from whose wisdom we learn, and to our society for providing us all that comes to us in the form of culture: language, art, etc. This text brings out the central truth of our existence: we owe an immense debt not only to humans but also to nature around us.

What little we know tells us beyond the shadow of doubt that if the sun-god rested even for a day from his ever ceaseless *tapascharya* [penance], we would perish... Thus we are most intimately connected with every living creature in the world and with everything that exists; we ought to try and know something about our benefactors, the shin-

ing divinities gliding in the sky (49\297).

The *Śatapatha-brāhmaṇa* tells us that we can repay our debt to nature by offering a sacrifice (*yajña*), as this was considered to be the most effective way of maintaining the order of nature (*ṛta*) that is so important for human well-being.⁷ Needless to say, the *yajña* spoken of here is the Vedic sacrifice.

Modern science has confirmed the ancient insight: human wellbeing and integrity of creation are inter-related. Gandhi is aware of this:

Doctors say that 99 per cent of all the diseases are caused by insanitation, by eating things not fit to eat and by lack of proper nutrition... Today pure water, pure earth, and pure air are not available. We live sheltered from the sun (85\213).

If we wish to be healthy we need to respect the basic laws of life:

Disease springs from a wilful or ignorant breach of the laws of nature. It follows, therefore, that timely return to those laws should mean restoration. A person who has tried nature beyond endurance, must either suffer the punishment inflicted by nature or, in order to avoid it, seek the assistance of the physician (85\264).

Gandhi sees a relation also between human misdeeds and natural calamities. Speaking of the earthquake in Quetta in 1925, Gandhi said: "A man of prayer regards what are known as physical calamities as divine chastisement" (61\161). This is how Gandhi responded to the floods in Gujarat in July 1927:

We would do well to regard it as a punishment for our sins. There is not only no great difference between moral sins and economic sins, but on the contrary the two kinds of sins are closely related. Among the three classes of sins, telling lies, dirtying the river-water and raising an opium or tobacco crop in the fields in place of wheat there is only a difference of degrees, none of kind (34\267).

Here I presume that the latter two are examples of economic sins: economic planning that is more concerned with monetary gain and even disregards the overall welfare of humans. Our experience

teaches us that ecological violence is sinful and suicidal. “Every evil-doer, unless he mends his ways, is bound to destroy himself” (90\228).

Ecophilia consists not merely in a negative attitude: avoiding all that can destroy the integrity of creation; it also calls for action that will positively nurture the symbiotic character of our environment. Gandhi knows that the *BhG* had already given a new meaning to ‘*yajña*’:

‘*Yajña*’ means an act directed to the welfare of others, done without desiring any return for it... ‘Others’ embraces not only humanity, but all life... From this definition of *yajña* it follows that a primary sacrifice must be an act which conduces the most to the welfare of the greatest number in the widest area, and which can be performed by the largest number of men and women with the least trouble (44\241).

The *BhG* reminds us of the *Puruṣa-sūkta* (3.10), that presents a primordial *yajña* as the origin of creation.⁸ Commenting on this, Gandhi say: “*Yajña* having come to us with our birth, we are debtors all our lives and thus for ever bound to the serve the universe” (44\242).

Certain beliefs of our ancestors about the efficacy of *yajña* may not stand the test of modern science, but we need to go beyond a particular belief and respond to the concerns enshrined in those beliefs.

We need not go into the question whether *yajñas* purify air, for it is irrelevant to ask, in connection with a religious ritual, whether it results in such a trivial benefit as the purification of air. Modern physical science can give us better help in that regard... The principles are the same at all times and in all places. But the practices based on them vary from age to age and country to country (30\193).

We can maintain the integrity of creation only through a spirit of self-sacrifice, for then whatever we plan and do will be in the larger interests of humanity. “Selfless work there [in the *BhG*] is described

characteristically by one beautiful word called *yajña*” (34\458). We need to find out what is the best course of action today, and act accordingly.

Yajna is a beautiful and highly suggestive word. Its meaning, therefore, can change and expand with the growth of our knowledge and experience or with changing times. The word can be interpreted to mean worship, sacrifice or service of others. Understood in this sense, *yajna* always deserves to be revived (30\192).

Commitment as Service

Gandhi loved to use symbols to express himself. He expresses his concern for ecology by promoting *go-sevā*, the service of cows. “In *gosevā* of my conception, I include all living creatures” (55\407). For him cow-protection “is infinitely more than mere protection of the cow. The cow is merely a type for all that lives... Man becomes then not the lord and master of all creation but he is its servant” (26\545). Thus if cow-protection is symbolic of a wider concern it “can only be secured by cultivating universal friendliness, i.e., Ahimsa” (25\520). Hence Gandhi’s attitude towards the cow is indicative of his attitude towards the whole of mute creation. In his opinion “cow-slaughter and man-slaughter are... the two sides of the same coin” (25-519). What Gandhi seems to be suggesting is that a person who is violent with nature will not hesitate to be violent with other human beings. It is a question of attitude. Gandhi sees himself not as the owner but as the trustee of creation. The task of a trustee is not merely negative % protecting the property entrusted to him or her % but also positive. Hence cow-protection “included cattle-breeding, improvement of stock, humane treatment to bullocks, formation of model dairies, etc” (39\338-39).

Once an interviewer said to him:

If I have properly understood you, then the distinctive feature of your idea of cow-protection is complete adherence to truth and non-violence, absence of communal ill will, utmost forbearance and love, and attention to the economic aspect... Isn’t this your particular point of view regarding *goseva*?

Gandhi's reply was terse but forceful: "Perfectly true" (55\408). It does not surprise me that Gandhi sees communal harmony as one aspect of *gosevā*. In 1929 Gandhi reversed the equation 'God is Truth' and maintained that 'Truth is God'. He hoped that in his search for God not only all believers but even the atheists could be his partners because they too are open to truth (48\404-05). Only when all humans, whatever be their religion, work together can we preserve and promote the integrity of creation – this being one expression of our search for truth.

Gandhi often spoke of *harijana-sevā*. "Harijan service will always be after my heart and will be the breath of life for me, more precious than the daily bread" (55\366). Gandhi sees the Harijan as a symbol of all the oppressed: "if you are a Harijan, you are done for. You may not expect justice" (58\85). He reminds us that "God is the helpless," and then asks "who could be better fitted to be called Harijans in this sense than the millions whom the insolence of men has made the outcasts of society" (63\231)? There is an intimate relation between social justice and ecophilia. This is also suggested by the word *hari-jana*: a creature of God.⁹ If we can be disrespectful towards some humans, seeing their significance only in terms of the service they can render to others, then we will tend to be disrespectful towards the rest of creation too. Social justice is an expression of ahimsa. Persons who are guilty of ecological violence do not think of others and their needs. They use their money-power to rape the earth, using her for their sinful gain.

B. The Ashram as the Expression of Ecophilia

Just as *go-seva* and *harijana-sevā* are symbols Gandhi used to effectively communicate his vision, so too is the ashram, "a community of men of religion" (AO\3). It was an important element of Gandhi's approach, once again expressing his thought through life. When in 1915, he founded an ashram close to Ahmedabad, there was some discussion as to what name it should have: Tapovan? Sevashram? Gandhi explains the eventual decision: "Our creed was devotion to truth, and our business was the search for and insistence on truth... So my companions and I selected the name 'Satyagraha

Ashram', as conveying both our goal and our method" (39\314). The ashram is a concrete expression of Satyagraha.

Ashram: A Call to Being-at-Home

The word ecology is derived from a Greek word denoting a house or a home (*oikos*). Hence, in its broadest sense, ecology is the art of being-at-home. We % at least most of us % try not only to keep our home neat and tidy, but also wish to make it beautiful and homely. Because "man is both an individual and social being" (34\418), he can never be at home all alone. The ecological task calls for collaboration of different thinkers, be they of the same faith community or of other religious traditions or even 'unbelievers'. But if we accept ecophilia as an essential component of satyagraha, as a way of life, then it calls for the being-at-home not only of individuals with themselves, but also of people among themselves, a community in which there is a struggle to relate life and thought, praxis and theory. This is suggested by the very nature of ahimsa. Real love brings people together, without any form of discrimination. The community is the embodiment of this love, a sacrament that not only expresses the power of love but also leads to a greater experience of its depth.

Telling us the reason for the foundation of the Satyagraha Ashram, Gandhi says: "My life is devoted to the quest of truth. I would live and, if need be, die in prosecuting it, and of course I would take with me as many fellow-pilgrims as I could get" (AO\7). Yes, the ashram is both the method and the goal of satyagraha, once again illustrating another principle of Gandhi "that ultimately the means and the end are convertible" (48\405). If the search for Truth includes concern for the integrity of creation, then the ashram is both the method and the goal of ecophilia: the integrity of creation will be guaranteed only when we all work together to make the earth our one home, our *sva-deśa*, and we all one family.

We have seen that in explaining the relation between satya and ahimsa, Gandhi falls back on the concept of *advaita* (non-dualism). In a very real sense, the Gandhian ashram is an experience of *advaita*: people who are different in many ways come together in love, so that they experience one mind and one heart. They are many and yet

one. This existential *advaita* is grounded precisely on the fundamental metaphysical insight of Gandhi: God, the supreme Satya, “alone is and nothing else exists [independently of Him]” (48\405). The ashram is also moving towards a fuller realization of *advaita*, towards an in-depth experience of being-at-home with themselves, with other humans, with the rest of creation, and with God, the one Womb of us all. Only then will ecophilia attain its depth.

Being-at-Home with Our Self

Almost all the evils that plague our society and our environment have their source in our hearts. We have distorted ideas of self-actualization and development, of happiness and prosperity. The problem becomes more acute when our discerning capacity is darkened by the cloud of greed and passion. “Excessive greed for anything is the root of all evil” (51\260). A lasting concern for ecology can only be guaranteed by truth, truth accepted by our minds and hearts. Gandhi tells us that during the evening prayer “the last 19 verses of the second chapter of the Gita” are read. He continues: “These verses describe the *sthitaprajna* (the man of stable understanding), which a Satyagrahi too must acquire, and [they] are recited in order that he may constantly bear them in mind (51\33). The *sthitaprajña* finds joy within himself. He has control over his senses. He is free from attachment and greed. Non-stealing (*a-steeya*) % having “more than the minimum that is really necessary” (51\58), and non-possession (*a-parigraha*) are two of the vows that Gandhi expects the ashramites to practice.

To arrive at this state of mind, the individual has to search his heart and purify himself. Hence “if insistence on truth constitutes the root of the Ashram, prayer is the principal feeder of that root” (51\22). Prayer aims at

self-purification. When we speak out aloud at prayer time, our speech is addressed not to God but to ourselves, and is intended to shake off our torpor... To propitiate this Truth [God] is *prarthana* [prayer] which in effect means an earnest desire to be filled with the spirit of Truth (51\36-37).

Without this spirit of inner search we will not be attentive to divine inspiration.

Mankind is notoriously too dense to read the signs that God sends from time to time [through natural calamities]. We require drums to be beaten into our ears, before we could wake from our trance and hear the warning, and see that to lose oneself in all is the only way to find oneself (34\398).

There is a good deal of congregational prayer in the ashram, but this is not enough.

One who never prays by himself may attend congregational prayers but will not derive much advantage from them. They are absolutely necessary for a congregation, but as the congregation is made up of individuals, they are fruitless without individual prayers. Every member of the Ashram is therefore reminded now and then that he should of his own accord give himself up to self-introspection at all times of the day (34\38-39).

In his own life, Gandhi gave a great place to silence. He wishes his coworkers to do the same, but he knows he is making a difficult demand. He himself tells us: "Not everyone, however, can observe complete silence... That is why we live in communities and, adding up small measures of silence, rest content with a little happiness" (21\269). The ashram offers the inmates the possibility of silence. It is, thus, a call to individuals to be at home with themselves. Only then will the members arrive at the Truth, with their minds and hearts.

Being-at-Home with Our Brothers and Sisters

The ecological task is too big to be handled by any single community, religion or nation. It calls for the collaboration of all people of good will. The ashram brought together Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Parsis, and others (AO\5). The land for the Tolstoy Farm in South Africa the forerunner of the Gandhian ashram was bought and made available by Gandhi's 'German friend Kallenbach' (AO\5). When we work together we also wish to share life, and when we share life we also wish to work and serve together. Gandhi got the inspiration to move towards life in a commune after reading John

Ruskin's *Unto the Last*. "I determined to take *Indian Opinion* [a paper he was publishing] into a forest," he tells us, "where I should live with the workers as members of my family" (AO\1).

To see the ashram merely as the living together of co-workers would not be a fair assessment of what Gandhi had in mind. The ashram is meant to be a miniature of what the whole world should be if we all want to be concerned with the integrity of creation. The ashram offers us an ecophilic life-style. Gandhi explains:

At the Ashram we hold that Swadeshi is a universal law. A man's first duty is to his neighbour... As a matter of fact there is in Swadeshi no room for distinction between one's own and other people. To serve one's neighbour is to serve the world. Indeed it is the only way to serve the world (AO\67).

To think globally and to act locally that is what Gandhi seems to be suggesting. The ashram presents us the real possibility of a life-style that is non-violent, non-exploitative, non-self-centred and yet deeply joyful and fulfilling. It demonstrates forcefully the truth of ecophilia: the more humans respect the integrity of creation the more will they be happy and healthy.

Being-at-Home with God Our Father

The members of the ashram "did not merely imagine but had a loving faith that the Ashram was God's" (AO\11). Gandhi finds this way of thinking in the *BhG*: God is deeply concerned with the well-being of His creation. He is always engaged in protecting it. If need be, He even descends on the earth to uphold goodness (3.24; 4.7-8). The concern for ecology is also a sharing in God's concern for His creation. "We desire to recognise and realize Him, to become one with Him, and to seek to gratify that desire through prayer" (AO\36). The more we come close to God, the more we come close to His creation. Then we realize that "service of His creation is the service of God" (63\233). Nay, the person of deep prayer sees God in all creation, and all creation in God (*BhG* 6.30-31; 9.4). Thus the service of creation becomes a contemplative experience. Then ecophilia becomes theophilia.¹⁰

We noted above that the *sthitaprajña* is free from all forms of selfishness. For this he needs to go through rigorous discipline. But this is not enough. The *BhG* insists that he needs to ‘see’ God (2.59). Consumer greed is one of the most powerful causes of ecological depletion and destruction. The people who produce and flood our markets with consumer goods will not hesitate to use violence to crush those who oppose them. The “Satyagrahi relies upon God for protection against the tyranny of brute force” (83\258).

There is another reason why our concern for ecology should be rooted in deep prayer. As noted above, this is a task that calls for the collaboration of all people of good faith. The ashram brings together like-minded people, but people who are still pilgrims with all their weaknesses and shortcomings. Hence there is a need to deepen the bond of unity. Gandhi insists that congregational prayer is “a means for establishing the essential unity” (83\152). We are one because we all come from God and only God’s grace can enable us to live in loving communion and service.

Being-at-Home with Nature Our Mother

Gandhi was determined that his first experiment in ashram living should be in the forest (AO\3). There could be a practical reason explaining this choice: the land on which he and his companions could work was more easily available away from the city. I am inclined to think that there was also a subconscious factor in this choice: the ancient practice of *vānaprastha*. In the first two *āśramas*, % *brahmacarya* and *gārhasthya* % we are more concerned with the first three goals of human life (*puruṣārthas*): economic well-being (*artha*), aesthetic and emotional fulfilment (*kāma*), and moral development (*dharma*).¹¹ Life in a forest, which makes communion with nature easier, is seen as more helpful in realising our transcendental orientation, the fourth and final goal (*mokṣa*), and this was also Gandhi’s deepest longing (39\3).

The ashram enabled Gandhi to experience the silence he wanted since, as he tells us: “it has given me peace I cannot describe, and it enables me to commune with Nature” (67\306). Communion with nature is important for our full growth.

Both children and grown-ups love dramas and the spectacular scenes they present. But no drama composed or acted by human beings can ever equal the great spectacle which Nature has arranged for us on the stage of the sky [the movement of the stars]... The more we meditate on this miracle of God, the more we grow spritually (49\297-98).

For this reason it is not enough to read printed books. We need to “read the book of nature, learn the language of trees, listen to the music of spheres in the sky, watch the drama enacted in it every night” (51\259). For the same reason, even before they learn the alphabet, we should tell children about “nature’s beauty, the sky, the trees and plants” (51\6). The forest is a source of wisdom:

When a man enters the forest he is bound to make friends with trees, leaves, birds and animals... and, by the time he emerges from the forest, would have gathered such knowledge which would be helpful to himself and which would enable him to guide his neighbours. We need to create a forest in our heart (65\309-10).

The tribals, whose life is so intimately bound with the forest, are the most ecophilic people I have come across. They also have a very strong community ethos. The more we love nature and experience its beauty, the more will we want to maintain its integrity, and we will want to do this together.

Gandhi’s going to live in a forest may have another significance in the context of ecophilia. Explaining the meaning of *vānaprastha*, Gandhi says: “From fifty to seventy five wife and husband should live apart and wholly devote themselves to the service of the people. They must leave their families and try to look upon the world as a big family” (AO\81). This is exactly what Gandhi wishes to do. On hearing that one of his friends had given up his job to be free to serve others, Gandhi says: “I suppose our forefathers must have had a similar motive in entering *vānaprastha*” (66\69). The ashram embodies Gandhi’s desire to serve the whole of humanity, the whole of creation. Only when we make the service of others one of our major concerns will we do our best to keep the earth healthy for

generations to come. Only then will we be more responsible in using the resources of nature.

All the healthy inmates of the ashram were expected “to work in order to live” (AO\60). This activity too has an ecophilic dimension: “If men did not do body labour, that is, did not cultivate land and grow crops, the rains would stop. My own belief is that natural phenomena are connected with moral behaviour” (49\150). Many parts of India have experienced severe drought, sometimes even through successive years. Deforestation is considered to be one of the factors leading to the failure of the monsoon. Gandhi concurs with this opinion. “The rainfall is low wherever there is no vegetation... If trees are planted in Kutch regularly and diligently, the rainfall there can be increased and the land made more fertile” (28\469). Hence in some parts of our country “tree plantation would be... a religious necessity” (28\457).

Healthy individuals in a healthy community on a healthy earth, sharing with one another the bounty of the one Father and Mother of all % this is part of Gandhi’s quest, his concern for *loka-saṅgraha*, his *sevā* to *hari-jana*, his worship of Hari (God), his search for Truth, his faith in *advaita*. The Gandhian ashram embodies this search and anticipates in some way the goal of that search. Only when ecophilia is part of a greater search will it be truly effective. Only when our concern for ecology shapes our life-style will it be credible and transformative.

Notes

1. I am basing my study almost exclusively on *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, 90 vols., New Delhi: Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1958-84. The references will be given in the text itself: volume number, followed by a slash, followed by the page number. I shall also quote from Mohandas K. GANDHI, *Ashram Observances in Action*, ET V. G. Desai, Ahmedabad: Navjivan Pb. House, (1955) rep. 1959. For this too the references will be given in the text itself: AO, followed by a slash, followed by the page number.
2. Certain non-English words *ahiṃsā*, *āśrama*, *dharma*, *satya*, *satyāgraha* are so much part of Gandhian discourse that they are now part of English and hence, they will neither be italicized, nor will they carry

any diacritical marks. I shall follow this norm also when I am quoting Gandhi's writings. Other non-English words, when part of a quote, will retain the spelling given in the original

3. Gandhi translates *loka-saṅgraha* in 3.20 as "the guidance of mankind" (32\168).
4. The word ecology is derived from the Greek *oikos* (house). See J. A. SIMPSON & E. S. C. WEINER, *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., 20 vols., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989, rep. 1998, vol. 5, p. 58a. The words *philos* and *philia* mean lover and love. Hence the neologism *ecophilia* suggests a love for one's house, a concern for ecology.
5. Cletus WESSELS, *Jesus in the New Universe Story*, Maryknoll (NY): Orbis Books, 2003, p. 124.
6. In ft. nt. 2, the editor supplies the Sanskrit text: *yathā piṇḍe tathā brahmāṇḍe*.
7. For a detailed discussion of this idea see Subhash ANAND, *Hindu Inspiration for Christian Reflection: Towards a Hindu-Christian Theology*, Anand (Gujarat): Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 2004, pp. 2-21.
8. For the detailed discussion of this hymn see "Puruṣa-Yaj-a: Self-giving as the Mystery of Being", *Ibid.* pp. 1-64.
9. The noun *jana* is derived from the verb *jan*, "to be born or produced." See Vaman .S. APTE, *The Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, rev. ed., 1912, rep. 1998, p. 445c.
10. For a detailed presentation of this idea in the *BhG*, see Subhash ANAND, "Contemplation and Secular Involvement", *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection*, 47 (1983), pp. 240-49.