



Civitas - Revista de Ciências Sociais

ISSN: 1519-6089

ISSN: 1984-7289

Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio Grande do Sul

Krejčík, Jiří

From Gandhi to Deendayal: Contradictions of conservative
Hindu tendencies in Indian environmental thinking

Civitas - Revista de Ciências Sociais, vol. 19, núm. 2, 2019, Maio-Agosto, pp. 374-390

Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio Grande do Sul

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15448/1984-7289.2019.2.31973>

Disponível em: <https://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=74260479006>

- Como citar este artigo
- Número completo
- Mais informações do artigo
- Site da revista em redalyc.org

redalyc.org

Sistema de Informação Científica Redalyc

Rede de Revistas Científicas da América Latina e do Caribe, Espanha e Portugal

Sem fins lucrativos acadêmica projeto, desenvolvido no âmbito da iniciativa
acesso aberto

Dossier: Sustainable development? Social and environmental conflicts

From Gandhi to Deendayal

Contradictions of conservative Hindu tendencies in
Indian environmental thinking

De Gandhi a Deendayal

*Contradições nas tendências conservadoras hindus no
pensamento ecológico indiano*

De Gandhi a Deendayal

*Contradicciones en las tendencias conservadoras hindúes en el
pensamiento ecológico de la India*

 Jiří Krejčík¹

Abstract: This article examines the traditionalist and conservative trends in the environmental thinking in India, especially in the works of M. K. Gandhi and Deendayal Upadhyay. Special attention is paid to the latter's concept of integral humanism, which has recently become a widely discussed idea in the Indian public discourse. Exploring their ideological bases, Gandhian spiritual radicalism and Deendayal's integral humanism are placed into the broader trend of the Indian nationalist and environmentalist thinking, showing the possible convergence of ecology and social conservatism. Analyzing the implications of the authoritarian and non-egalitarian tendencies in the society, it shows how the Indian environmentalist movements drawing on Brahminical traditions and Gandhian thinking become prone to be hijacked by the Hindu nationalism.

Keywords: India. Environmentalism. Traditionalism. Hinduism. Hindu nationalism. Integral humanism.

Resumo: Este artigo examina as tendências tradicionalistas e conservadoras no pensamento ambiental na Índia, especialmente nos trabalhos de M. K. Gandhi e Deendayal Upadhyay. Uma atenção especial é dada ao conceito de humanismo integral, desse último autor, que recentemente se tornou uma ideia amplamente discutida no discurso público indiano. Explorando suas bases ideológicas, o radicalismo espiritual de Gandhi e o humanismo integral de Deendayal são colocados na tendência mais ampla do pensamento nacionalista e ambientalista indiano, mostrando a possível convergência da ecologia e do conservadorismo social. Analisando as implicações das tendências autoritárias e não-igualitárias na sociedade, isso mostra como os movimentos

¹ Czech Academy of Sciences, Institute of Sociology (Prague, Czech Republic).



ambientalistas indianos, baseando-se nas tradições bramânicas e no pensamento de Gandhi, tendem a ser sequestrados pelo nacionalismo hindu.

Palavras-chave: Índia. Ambientalismo. Tradicionalismo. Hinduísmo. Nacionalismo hindu. Humanismo integral.

Resumen: Este artículo examina las tendencias tradicionalistas y conservadoras en el pensamiento ambiental en la India, especialmente en las obras de M. K. Gandhi y Deendayal Upadhyay. Se presta especial atención al concepto de humanismo integral de este último, que recientemente se ha convertido en una idea ampliamente discutida en el discurso público en India. Al explorar sus bases ideológicas, el radicalismo espiritual gandhiano y el humanismo integral de Deendayal se ubican en la tendencia más amplia del pensamiento nacionalista y ambientalista de aquél país, mostrando la posible convergencia de la ecología y el conservadurismo social. Al analizar las implicaciones de las tendencias autoritarias y no igualitarias en la sociedad, muestra cómo los movimientos ecologistas hindúes que se basan en las tradiciones brahmínicas y el pensamiento gandhiano son propensos a ser secuestrados por el nacionalismo hindú.

Palabras-clave: India. Ambientalismo. Tradicionalismo. Hinduismo. El nacionalismo hindú. Humanismo integral.

Introduction

The Hindu tradition provides us with many accounts on the relation between human and nature. Therefore it is not surprising that another relation – between environmentalist and Hindu conservative and nationalist ideologies and politics in India – is being discussed in the present days. Contrary to the West, where the problems of environmental degradation and pollution have been largely opposed and critiqued by the left scholarship, the ecological issues in India has been addressed primarily by environmental movements drawing on the Hindu religious traditions and holy texts such as Vedas and Purāṇas, Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata. Promoting the image of rich and glorious Indian past, this specific form of Indian environmentalism emphasizes return to pre-colonial village society, which is perceived as a site reinforcing community, national identity, and culture in natural harmony with the environment. In opposition to this, the Western version of a modernized, industrialized humanity is condemned as an alien concept harmful to the Indian society (Sharma, 2011, p.251-252).

This article will aim at examining the traditionalist and conservative approach towards both nature and society, which has gained momentum in the Indian environmental movements since the 1970s. After a brief summary of the main ideological trends in contemporary Indian environmentalism, namely

the Gandhian spiritual radicalism with its strong traditionalism and anti-modernism, a special attention will be paid to Deendayal Upadhyay, whose political ideas of integral humanism, adopted as the official doctrine of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh and Bharatiya Janata Party, puts considerable emphasis on environmental protection and responsible use of natural resources, and who is presented as a figure comparable to Mahatma Gandhi by the contemporary Hindu nationalist forces. Analysing the ideological basis of Deendayal's integral humanism, we will place his philosophy into the broader trend of Indian nationalist and environmentalist thought, examine both its alleged and actual resemblance with Gandhian philosophy, and show its main problematic points, especially the convergence of ecology and social conservatism which constitutes an important and persistent feature of Indian environmental thinking.

Ideological trends in Indian environmentalism

Compared with the Western countries, the history of the Indian environmentalism as a political subject is a few decades younger. During the Nehruvian era, an emphasis was put mainly on rapid industrialization of the country, and the environmental issues came into sight only in the 1970's with the Indian response to the environmental challenges being somehow different from the Western one. While the environmental movements in the modernized and industrialized (and also relatively rich and egalitarian) European and North American countries paid attention to the so-called sustainable development aiming at preservation of the life standards and conservation of the remainders of intact nature within the boundaries of national parks, the Indian answer to environmental problems has been different. Starting with the *Chipko* movement with its resistance against tree logging in the Himalayan region in the 1970s, Indian environmental movements focus primarily on preserving the livelihoods of the pre-modern villagers. Apart from the non-violent Gandhian methods of tree-hugging, the *Chipko* movement was also remarkable for its interconnection with indigenous practices, local traditions, culture and religion, especially under the leadership of the Gandhian activist Sunderlal Bahuguna, who soon became one of the leading figures of Indian environmentalism (Guha, 2002, p. 447-450).

After the 1984 Bhopal disaster, which brought further attention to the ecological issues, the Indian environmentalism grew into one of the world's largest environmental movements with considerable diversity. Ramachandra Guha identifies three different strands in Indian environmentalism: Crusading Gandhian, Appropriate Technology, and Ecological Marxism (Guha,

1988, p.2580). According to the *Ecological Marxists*, the systemic economic change is viewed as logically prior to ecological stability. Thus, political action towards that end becomes an overriding priority. The *Appropriate Technologists* are more pragmatic, as they argue for a mix of traditional and modern knowledge, synthesis of agriculture and industry, and Western and Eastern technological traditions to fulfil the needs of social justice, local self-reliance, and environmental stability. The most interesting of these strands, however, is the *Crusading Gandhian* one. This approach draws heavily on Gandhian school of thought, which promotes the virtues of village life and rejects the Western modernity and industrialization. In this view, pre-capitalist and pre-colonial village community is taken as an exemplar of ecological and social harmony. Such unpolluted village, based on local resources and recycling, should be capable of sustainable production of its own milk, grains, fruit, vegetables, and khadi.

Christopher Key Chapple offers an even more elaborate classification of the Indian environmental traditions, dividing the indigenous Indian environmentalism into several trends according to the religious sensibilities (Chapple, 1998, p.13-37). Thus, the *Brahminical models* seek to find their inspiration for environmental rhetoric in the earlier phases of Indian religious history, especially in the texts of Vedas and traditional epics. The *tribal models*, on the other hand, aim at learning from the indigenous wisdom and ways of living. The *Post-Gandhian* models develop the post-modern critique of Western consumerism with the Gandhian thinking as their ideological ground.¹ The *Renouncer models*, involving the Buddhist, Jaina, and Yogic environmentalism, postulate the alternative to the Brahminical tradition in the ascetic religious philosophies.²

The principal problem of these traditional Indian environmentalist models, and of the Brahminical model, in particular, is their romantic and unidimensional view of the past which indeed includes certain flaws. First, the past is largely created based on theology and myths without any historical evidence. Moreover, this idealisation of the traditional society is by its very nature strongly nationalistic, as it blames all the problems on Western colonialism, and ignores the social inequities and environmental problems, which pre-dated the colonial conquest, such as patriarchy, caste system, or deforestation (Mukta and Hardiman, 2000, p. 113-133).³ Thus, there are some

¹ This anti-modernist essentialism at its strongest can be found namely in the works of Vandana Shiva, one of the leading figures of eco-feminism (cf. Shiva, 1988).

² For another possible classification of Indian environmentalism, see also Patrick (1993).

³ See also Rangarajan and Sivaramakrishnan (eds.) (2011).

ties between nature and nationalism emerging from the Indian environmentalist tradition, which are further reinforced both in the Gandhian and in Hindu nationalist thinking.

Critique of modernity in Gandhi's spiritual radicalism

Although he never dealt with the questions of ecology directly, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1848) is widely considered as one of the pioneers of Indian environmental thinking: he was a champion of vegetarianism, recycling, and alternative medicine long before these ideas became part of the Western environmental discourse, and his village communities have been practicing the Indian version of “sustainable development”. Although Gandhi would never describe himself as an environmental philosopher, his thoughts inspired a vast array of environmental movements both in India and in the West. It is not a mere coincidence that Arne Næss, the founding father of deep ecology, was an ardent student of Gandhi. From the original focus on the peaceful resolution of group conflicts, Næss’ concern gradually shifted to the relation between humans and nature (Naess, 2005). His concept of deep ecology, introduced in 1972/73, aims at turning the public attention from “shallow” fight against pollution and resource depletion to the “deeper” principles of diversity, complexity, autonomy, decentralization, symbiosis, egalitarianism, and classlessness, drawing inspiration from the traditions which do not operate with the instrumental approach to the nature as it is characteristic for the modern civilization (Naess, 1973, p.95-100).

The strong anti-modernist stance and skepticism to anything coming from the West is perhaps the most strenuous feature of all Gandhi's writings. In his view, there is no need to adopt the Western model of modernization and industrialization, as Indian values are supposedly traditional, communitarian and religious (Gandhi, 2014 [1909], p. 56-59). In Gandhi's view, every kind of industrialization would inevitably lead to exploitation in the industrial cities and unemployment in the countryside. However, as Partha Chatterjee argues, Gandhi's critique of modern civilization does not stop with his condemnation of industrialism. In fact, it is a fundamental critique of the entire bourgeois society, its economic life based on individual property, its depersonalized laws of the free market, its political institutions of representative democracy, its spirit of innovation and belief in scientific progress, its rational and secular approach to philosophy, ethics, art and education (Chatterjee, 1984, p. 162-162).⁴

⁴ See also Gandhi (2014 [1909], p. 27-30).

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

We have managed with the same kind of plough as existed thousands of years ago. We have retained the same kind of cottages that we had in former times and our indigenous education remains the same as before. We have had no system of life-corroding competition. Each followed his own occupation or trade and charged a regulation wage. It was not that we did not know how to invent machinery, but our forefathers knew that, if we set our hearts after such things, we would become slaves and lose our moral fibre. [...] And where this cursed modern civilization has not reached, India remains as it was before (Gandhi, 2014 [1909], p. 57-58).

The ultimate goal of the Gandhian political thinking was the utopia of *Rāmarājya*, whose ruler, by his natural moral quality, always adhere to truth and expresses the collective will. The economic organization of production is arranged in a perfect four-fold *varṇa* system – so perfect that it allows a just system of division of labour without any differences in status and any trace of caste discrimination. The system of specialization and reciprocity assures that there is no unhealthy competition and no difference in status between the workers (Chatterjee, 1984, p. 165).

While rejecting the historicism of other nationalist writers such as Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar who explained the caste system as a result of historical abuse of the temporal power by the religious dignitaries (Ambedkar, 2016, p. 128), Gandhi even did not share their confidence in rationality and scientific knowledge, preferring instinctive faith to scientific reasoning. In his view, truth does not lie in history; the truth is a moral and transcendental category, achievable only in the experience of one's life.

A similar approach can be seen in Gandhi's interpretation of colonial subjugation. The reason for the conquest of India was not that the Indians would lack the necessary technical or cultural attributes to resist the Western powers, but precisely the opposite: the Indians were not morally strong enough to resist the glitter of modern "civilization only in name" (Gandhi, 2014 [1909], p. 30). And, finally, even the characteristic Gandhian anti-modernism is to be explained on moral grounds: the modern science and technology, cities and factories are not harmful primarily because they exploit the workers,

plunder the natural resources or deprive the people of their livelihoods, but because they make all the goods, services and places readily available, thus inciting impiety and consumerism in the people. This contamination of human spirit, however, eventually leads to the devastation of the material world: an immoderate person needs more resources to satisfy her needs than is her community able to produce.

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

The problem of Gandhian utopia, however, lies in the fact that his model of ideal society is closely linked with the orthodox Brahminical interpretation of Indian history. In fact, the idealization of the pre-modern Indian village is largely problematic, as it ignores the question of oppression of untouchable Dalits (Sharma, 2012, p. 46). Although Gandhi personally was a strong opponent of untouchability (Kolge, 2017), considering it a sin going directly against the ‘spirit of the Vedas’, which represented “purity, truth, innocence, chastity, humility, simplicity, forgiveness, godliness, and all that makes a man or woman noble and brave,” (Gandhi, 1964, p. 27) he was largely criticized by the Dalit leaders such as Ambedkar. Gandhi’s idealist Hindu traditionalism, pursuing the end of untouchability by the means of de-ritualizing of caste and making the unclean work of Dalits honorable (Zelliot, 1972, p. 70) was seen as overly pathetic and paternalistic.⁵

Integral humanism of Deendayal Upadhyay

The concept of integral humanism, formulated by Deendayal Upadhyay in 1965, has recently become another widely discussed political philosophy

⁵ The Gandhian paternalism can be easily seen in the very term Harijan (person of Hari, i. e. of the god Vishnu) which Gandhi popularized among the Indian public but which is regarded as patronizing by the Dalit activists.

with Hindu traditionalist leanings and environmental overtone. However, contrary to the Gandhian thinking, which serves primarily a personal code of conduct pursuable in the domain of ethics and only overlapping from the personal to the political, integral humanism has much more political implications. Deendayal Upadhyay (1916-1968) served as a long-time General Secretary and later President of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, the forerunner of the present day Bharatiya Janata Party. His thesis on Integral Humanism (*Ekātma Mānavavād*), given in a series of speeches in Bombay from 22nd to 25th April 1965, tried to propose the basis for the system of governance and development allegedly best suited to the Indian nation and its people (Upadhyay, 1992 [1968]).

Immediately accepted as the new political philosophy of the Jana Sangh, integral humanism was formulated in direct opposition to Nehruvian, Marxist, and liberal political philosophies in order to find an indigenous model of Indian development. As a political program, it draws largely on Gandhian thinking.⁶ Apart from morality in politics, its central vision is *swadeshi* (self-sustainable production and consumption) and decentralization of economy in small-scale industries (Jaffrelot; Hanse, 1998, p. 71-73). As Meera Nanda points out, integral humanism is almost an exact paraphrase of Gandhi's vision of a future India: both seek a distinctive path for India, both reject the materialism of socialism and capitalism, both reject the individualism of modern society in favor of a holistic community based on *varṇa* and *dharma*, both insist upon an infusion of religious and moral values in politics, and both seek a culturally authentic mode of modernization that preserves Hindu values (Nanda, 2009, p. 217).

Seemingly discarding the discredited ideology of Hindutva (Savarkar, 1969 [1923]), integral humanism has been widely promoted by the BJP and the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in recent years in an attempt to formulate the new national ideology of India and credit Deendayal with the role of the new 'father of the nation' instead of Gandhi. Appropriating some significant elements of the Gandhian discourse, such as insistence upon religious and moral values in politics and aspiration to develop an indigenous

⁶ There were several tensions within Hindutva over its approach to *swadeshi* (national self-reliance) versus globalization: even after 1991 RSS protested against foreign and multinational products, while at the same time there were fears in the BJP that the Congress would now win over the traditional Sangh Parivar constituency, consisting of the small traders and industrialists. As a compromise, the economic policy of the BJP had to be reformulated in a more *swadeshi*-oriented way. This renewed statement enabled the BJP to criticise the Congress for opening the Indian economy to the West on the one hand, and promoting the idea of capitalist growth and free market within India on the other one. For more details, see Hansen (1998).

economic model preserving Hindu values, the concept of integral humanism was used to downplay the original aggressive Hindu communal overtone of the Jana Sangh ideology.

Allegedly following the tradition of the Vedantic doctrine of *advaita* (non-dualism) developed in the 8th century by Adi Shankara, Upadhyay claims that the character of the Indian nation is formed by the unifying principle, which is present in every object in the universe. Neglecting the legacy of other schools of Indian philosophical thought, Upadhyay asserts that the principal characteristic of the “Bhāratiya culture” is that it looks upon life as an integrated whole, where the diversity in life is merely an expression of the internal unity (Upadhyay, 1992 [1968], p. 25).

Similarly to V. D. Savarkar (1883-1966) and another ideologue of the RSS, M. S. Golwalkar (1906-1973), Upadhyay approaches the Herderian conception of the nation, in which the nation is formed not by the social contract, but is self-created as the emanation of the “national soul” and inherent cultural attributes:

According to the Bhāratiya traditions, a Nation is an organic living entity which has come into existence on its own and has not been made up of, or created by, any group of persons (Upadhyay, 1992 [1968], p. 61).

Deendayal’s organic concept of a nation goes so far that the nation is compared to the human being, who is obliged to follow her natural instincts, otherwise, she suffers from various illnesses and mental disorders. Thus, “the basic cause of the problems facing Bharat is the neglect of its national identity” (Upadhyay, 1992 [1968], p. 13), i. e. its principal natural instinct. Upadhyay is vague in his definition of the inherent nature of the Indian nation, but it is quite evident that similarly to Savarkar in his *Hindutva* (Savarkar, 1969 [1923]), he reduces the Indian nation to the Hindu community. Referring to William McDougall’s psychology of group mind, he theorizes about different modes of thinking of Hindus and Muslims, which he allegedly discovered in conversation with Vinoba Bhave and M. S. Golwalkar,⁷ concluding that:

⁷ “There can be found honest and good people in Hindus as well as in Muslims. Similarly rascals can be seen in both the societies. No particular society has a monopoly of goodness. However, it is observed that Hindus even if they are rascals individual life, when they come together in a group, they always think of good things. On the other hand when two Muslims come together, they propose and approve of things which they themselves in their individual capacity would not even think of. They start thinking in an altogether different way. This is an everyday experience.” See Upadhyay, Deendayal (1992 [1968], p. 38).

Similarly to the human beings, even a nation has a soul. There is a technique name for it. In the “Principles and Policies” adopted by the Jana Sangh, this name is mentioned. The word is *Chiṭi*. According to McDougal [sic], it is the innate nature of a group. Every group of persons has an innate nature. Similarly every society has an innate nature, which is inborn, and is not the result of historical circumstances (Upadhyay, 1992 [1968], p. 41).

While *Chiṭi* stands for the nation’s soul our consciousness, the power that energizes and activates the Nation is called *Virāt* (Upadhyay, 1992 [1968], p. 80). Similarly to *Prāṇa* in the human body, *Virāt* is the capacity which maintains balance and cohesion of the nation, ensuring that the differences within the nation do not lead to conflicts and the nation follows its *Dharma*. Therefore, the task for the Indian nation is to wake up its *Virāt* in order to revive its glorious past.

As Chetan Bhatt observes, Upadhyay’s “integralism” is an elementary reduction of the complexity of Hinduism, legitimized through the language of *advaita*. Apart from ignoring the diversity of Indian philosophical tradition and picking up only the non-dualist philosophy, Upadhyaya even reduces the concept of *dharma* from the universal principle of virtual behavior to a sort of general will of the Indian nation. Because of this strong reductionism, however, the nation and its *Chiṭi* are strongly Hindu in their character, and the national affiliation is thus measured by the religious commitment of the members of the nation (Bhatt, 2001, p. 156). Based on the myth of *Virāt-Puruṣa*, where the Brahmins were created from the head of the primeval cosmic man, Kshatriyas from hands, Vaishyas from his abdomen and Shudras from legs, Upadhyay even defends the existence of the caste system.⁸

In his search for a united nation, Upadhyay also rejects the federal constitution, as it allegedly goes against the unity and indivisibility of the *Bhārat Māta*. Instead, Upadhyay proposes a unitary constitution based on the panchayat (village council) system, while the federal system should be centralized:

According to the first para [sic] of the Constitution, ‘India that is Bhārat will be a federation of States’, i.e. Bihar Māta, Bangl[ia] Māta, Punjab Mata, Kannada Māta, Tamil Māta, all put together make Bhāratmāta. This is ridiculous. We have thought of the provinces as limbs of Bhāratmāta and not as individual mother. Therefore our constitution should be unitary instead of federal (Upadhyay, 1992 [1968], p. 53).

⁸ The *Puruṣa Sūkta*, however, is considered to be a medieval or modern insertion into the Rgveda by such various scholars as Max Müller and Ambedkar. See Ambedkar (2016, p. 105-128).

Since *Dharma* is considered a supreme power, Upadhyay's ideal of the state is the "Dharma Rājya" – i. e. the state which is subject to *Dharma* and which is in contrast with the secular state (Upadhyay, 1992 [1968], p. 54-60). *Dharma Rājya*, however, does not mean that the state would adopt theocracy; it is rather a conception where the state is considered a natural living indivisible entity. Rejecting the notion of popular sovereignty based on its fallibility, Upadhyay identifies the national unity with *Dharma*, which he uses to attack all the secessionist movements:

Nowadays people advocate that the merger of Goa should be decided by referendum, that there should be plebiscite in Kashmir etc., etc. This is wrong. National unity is our *Dharma*. Decision concerning this cannot be made by plebiscite. This type of a decision has already been taken by the nature. Elections and majority can decide as to who will form the government. The truth cannot be decided by the majority. What the government will do will be decided by *Dharma* (Upadhyay, 1992 [1968], p. 58-59).

The philosophy of integral humanism, however, is not restricted to the social order. Deendayal Upadhyay puts into account also the relation of the man and nature, especially in terms of use of natural resources and environmental degradation. Exploitation and instrumental use of nature are frequently mentioned in Deendayal's texts and speeches – often as a product of the modern Western civilization, which is seen as materialistic and hedonistic in contrast with the *Bhāratiya* culture which also recognizes the importance of nature in human life (Nene, 1991, p. 79). The land is not looked upon merely as a means of production, but respected as a holy, loving and benevolent mother (Nene, 1991, p. 80), and the national question extends to the issue of protection of domestic natural resources.

Deendayal criticizes the economic structure and system of production driven by consumerism, which induces people to desire and use things which are being produced by the capitalist industry. This eco-destructive consumerism leads inevitably to ultimate destruction, as it disturbs the equilibrium of nature (Upadhyay, 1992 [1968], p. 64-54). It is, therefore, necessary to use only such amount of the natural resources which nature itself will be able to replenish:

Keeping in view the aim of human life, we must endeavour to see how with the minimum of fuel, man proceeds to his goal with the maximum speed. Such a system alone can be called civilization. This system will not think of merely a single aspect of human life but of all its aspects including the ultimate aim. This system will not thrive on the exploitation of nature but will sustain nature and will in turn itself be nourished (Upadhyay, 1992 [1968], p. 66).

Similarly to Gandhi, Deendayal sees the “monster of mechanized industry” responsible for the decline of moral and spiritual values. This process directly threatens the Bhāratiya culture, as the mechanical industrialization has provided an opportunity for both political and economic imperialism (Nene, 1991, p. 21). Instead of blind adoption of foreign technique,⁹ India should find an integrated approach based on its cultural tradition, social value and material needs, using the family as the basis of the decentralised production system, which should provide a fair distribution and create a self-reliant and self-sufficient economic system (Kelkar, 1991, p. 112). This goal is, among others, pursued by the Deendayal Research Institute, founded in 1972 by Nanaji Deshmukh in Chitrakoot, to develop a model for the development of rural areas based on Deendayal Upadhyay’s integral humanism. Its projects running in surrounding villages concentrate on “health, hygiene, education, agriculture, income generation, conservation of resources, and social conscience that is both sustainable and replicable”, with the aim of self-reliance of the rural communities.

Hinduism and environmentalism

The problem of the traditionalist approach to nature and society, proclaimed both by Gandhi and Deendayal, lies in the fact that it perceives the existing social hierarchies and disparities as natural. In the belief of many Hindus, the entire universe was created out of the sacrifice of Puruṣa, the primeval man. As the *Puruṣa Sūkta* proclaims the continuity between humans and the cosmos, both natural features and social structure are perceived as innate, perennial and changeless in the Brahminical Hinduism. Among the authors tending towards the Brahminical environmental models, the caste system is often perceived as an ancient concept of sustainable development or as an equivalent of the natural principles in the social sphere (Kavoori, 2002, p. 1156-1164). However, similarly to Murray Bookchin’s critique of deep ecology from the position of social ecology (Bookchin, 1991 [1982]), we must not ignore the “structural” character of environmental problems and treat them as unseparated from the social issues when examining the environmental models rooted in Brahminical tradition. Thus, we must deal not only with their relation towards nature and environment but also with the economic, ethnic or cultural conflicts they neglect.

⁹ Interestingly, DDU often uses analogies with machines and tools when describing natural processes: “Coal is needed for running an engine but engine is not made for merely using the coal. Our effort always is to produce maximum possible mechanical power by using minimum possible quantity of coal. Similarly, we must see how with a minimum use of resources, men can reach their ideal in life” (Nene, 1991, p. 78-79).

The non-dualist doctrine of *advaita* followed both by M. K. Gandhi and Deendayal Upadhyay, is often framed as a philosophy with inherent features of environmental ethics. However, as Lance Nelson shows, this perception is rather misleading. In the Brahminical tradition, the universe exists not as a community, but as a hierarchy, in which gods stand above human beings, which in turn stand above animals and plants (Nelson, 1998, p.66). If we accept this view, we cannot even agree with the notion of the caste system as a harmonious division of labour in society. Seeing their ideal society in the *varṇa* system, both Gandhi's *Rāmārājya* and Deendayal's *Dharmārājya* would deprive certain sections of the population of their basic rights, be it Dalits or Muslims and Christians. This 'eco-casteism', to use the term of Mukul Sharma, which is grounded in justification of the caste system and standing in opposition to modernity and enlightenment, is further accompanied with the subthemes of 'eco-organicism', which sees nature as divine and society conforming to its laws, and 'eco-naturalism' which pursues the protection of life in its 'natural order' – which can often be synonymous with the conservative Hindu Brahminical ideas (Sharma, 2017, p. 19-23).

As Sharma further argues elsewhere (Sharma, 2011, p. 29-42), even the convergence of the Hindu nationalist movement with environmental issues is not a random event. The Hindu Right, with its political discourse, has had an immense power to absorb, coopt, and alter the views of the environmental movements. The Hindu ultra-nationalism, not too much different from the Herderian organic model of a nation, believes that membership in the nation is defined not by the sovereignty of individuals but by natural factors such as ethnicity, religion, blood, and language. Thus, the national identity is always connected with particular territories and landscapes where land, water, rivers, and mountains construct a specific national identity. If we take this further, society is viewed as a natural ecosystem similar to the natural world with its unique and fragile ecological balance, which is endangered by external pollutants and foreign species – immigrants and minorities. Similarly, environmental degradation is seen as a result of the imposition of Western colonialism over the ancient Indian culture, which is supposed to be balanced and sustainable.

Sharma describes the collaboration between 'Green and Saffron' in the sense how environmentalism allies with feudal attitudes and Brahmin orthodoxy and converges not only with Gandhian conservatism, but also with Hindu nationalism, bringing about two simultaneous processes (Sharma, 2011, p. 7). In the process of 'saffronizing of green', environmental movements

and organizations make Hindutva's cultural politics a fundamental aspect of their environmental discourse. On the other hand, the process of 'greening of saffron' means that Hindutva organizations make nature conservation part of their political ideologies and agendas. Since the 1990s, the Sangh Parivar organizations have been raising the issues of environmental and cultural pollution, and a notion of environmental policy, holding the traditional Indian position that nature is sacred, has been mentioned in the BJP Election Manifesto 1998 (Sharma, 2011, p. 25).

Although primarily Gandhian, the concept of nation embedded in nature is not too much different from the position held by the Hindu nationalists such as Deendayal Upadhyay, who perceive the concept of environmental pollution as inseparable from cultural contamination caused by the foreign religions. Thus, in the recent years, we have seen several attempts to hijack the environmental issues by the Hindu Right organizations such as Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), its political offshoot Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and especially Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP). Dominated by religious leaders, the VHP had shown a considerable ability to insert the religious traditions with new meanings, and to politically mobilize the Hindu community under the common banner of Hindutva ideology in the former Hindu nationalist projects, and the Hindutva organizations have made a considerable effort to embed environmental protection into their ideologies. However, in case of appropriating environmental movements, such as the Ganga movement in Uttarakhand, the Hindu nationalist movement has not managed in seizing and exploiting the public feelings and remains relatively unsuccessful (Sharma, 2009, p. 35-42).

Conclusion

As we have seen previously, the Indian environmental movements, had always certain basis for nationalism and conservatism in themselves, be it the 'Crusading Gandhian' approach drawing on the Gandhian ideal of a pristine Indian village, or the 'eco-casteist' trends finding the equivalent of natural ecological balance in the traditional caste system. This environmentalism sees environmental degradation as a result of the imposition of a modern, Western, colonial civilization over a rooted, indigenous, Indian culture. From this point of view, the ruthless exploitation of the natural resources based on the Western model can be countered only by promoting village life, agriculture, and tradition in order to return to the ideal of a Vedic 'golden' age when people lived in harmony with nature. Thus, environmental protection converges both with Hindu nationalism and Gandhian conservatism.

Deendayal Upadhyay's integral humanism, largely drawing on the doctrine of *advaita* and the Gandhian approach to the relation of nature and society, is often seen as an indigenous concept of sustainable development rooted in Indian culture by the proponents of the Hindu nationalism and conservatism. However, with its reiteration of the eco-casteist tendencies of the Brahmanical environmentalist models and its organic concept of nation analogous to the human being, it only echoes the Hindu supremacist understanding of nation which excludes religious minorities. Moreover, unlike the Gandhian ethics, which can be understood as genuinely anti-modernist, the integral humanism of Deendayal Upadhyay adopts the modern concepts of nation and state, which alongside with its emphasis on centralization, disbelief to popular sovereignty and following the principle of *dharma* make it extremely susceptible to authoritarian tendencies. Its adoption as a national ideology can be thus perceived as another step to redefine the Indian nation based on Hindu majoritarianism and reinforce the notion of India as a predominantly Hindu polity.

Funding

The article was written within the framework of the research program "Global conflicts and local interactions", strategy AV21, the Czech Academy of Sciences.

References

- AMBEDKAR, B. R. *Riddles in Hinduism*: the annotated critical selection. New Delhi: Navayana, 2016.
- BHATT, Chetan. *Hindu nationalism*: origins, ideologies and modern myths. Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2001.
- BOOKCHIN, Murray. *The ecology of freedom*: the emergence and dissolution of hierarchy. Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1991 [1982].
- CHAPPLE, Christopher Key. Toward an Indigenous Indian environmentalism. In: NELSON, Lance E. (ed.). *Purifying the Earthly Body of God*: religion and ecology in Hindu India. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998. p. 13-37.
- CHATTERJEE, Partha. Gandhi and the critique of civil society. In: GUHA, Ranajit (ed.). *Subaltern Studies III*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984. p. 153-195.
- GADGIL, Madhav; GUHA, Ramachandra. *Ecology and equity*: the use and abuse of nature in contemporary India. New Delhi: Penguin, 1995.
- GANDHI, M. K. *Caste must go and the sin of untouchability*. Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1964.

GANDHI, M. K. *Hind Swaraj or Indian home rule*. Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 2014 [1909].

GUHA, Ramachandra. Ideological trends in Indian environmentalism. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Bombay, v. 23, n. 49, p. 2578-2581, 1988.

GUHA, Ramachandra. Mahatma Gandhi and the environmental movement in India. *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, Santa Cruz, v. 6, n. 3, p. 47-61, 1995. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10455759509358641>

GUHA, Ramachandra. Chipko: social history of an 'environmental' movement. In: Ghanshyam Shah (ed.). *Social movements and the state*. New Delhi: Sage, 2002. p. 423-454.

GUHA, Ramachandra. *How much should a person consume?* Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2006.

HANSEN, Thomas Blom. The ethics of Hindutva and the spirit of capitalism. In: JAFFRELOT, Christophe; HANSEN, Thomas Blom (eds.). *The BJP and the compulsion of politics in India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998. p. 291-314.

KAVOORI, Purnendu S. The Varna Trophic system: an ecological theory of caste formation. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Bombay, v. 37, n. 12, p. 1156-1164, 2002.

KELKAR, B. K. *Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya: ideology and perception*, part III, political thought. New Delhi: Suruchi Prakashan, 1991.

KOLGE, Nishikant. *Gandhi against caste*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2017. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780199474295.001.0001>

MUKTA, Parita; HARDIMAN, David. The political ecology of nostalgia. *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, Santa Cruz, v. 11, n. 1, p. 113-133, 2000. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10455750009358902>

NAESS, Arne. The shallow and the deep, long-range ecology movement: a summary. *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy*, New York, v. 16, n. 1, 1973, p. 95-100. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00201747308601682>

NAESS, Arne. *Gandhi and group conflict: selected works of Arne Naess*, v. V. Dordrecht: Springer, 2005. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-4519-6_83

NANDA, Meera. *Prophets facing backward: postmodern critiques of science and Hindu nationalism in India*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003. <https://doi.org/10.1023/b:sced.0000025700.98122.60>

NANDA, Meera. *The god market*. Noida: Random House, 2009.

NELSON, Lance E. (ed.). *Purifying the Earthly Body of God: religion and ecology in Hindu India*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998.

NELSON, Lance E. The dualism of nondualism: Advaita Vedanta and the irrelevance of nature. In: NELSON, Lance E. (ed.). *Purifying the Earthly Body of God: religion*

and ecology in Hindu India. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998. p. 61-88.

NENE, V. V. *Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya: ideology and perception*, Part II, Integral humanism. New Delhi: Suruchi Prakashan, 1991.

PERITORE, N. Patrick. Environmental attitudes of Indian elites: challenging Western postmodernist models. *Asian Survey*, Berkeley, v. 33, n. 8, p. 804-818, 1993. <https://doi.org/10.1525/as.1993.33.8.00p0306j>

RANGARAJAN, Mahesh; SIVARAMAKRISHNAN, K. (eds.). *India's environmental history: colonialism, modernity, and the nation*. New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2011.

SAVARKAR, V. D. *Hindutva: who is a Hindu?* Bombay: Veer Savarkar Prakashan, 1969 [1923].

SHARMA, Mukul. Passage from nature to nationalism: Sunderlal Bahuguna and Tehri Dam opposition in Garhwal. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Bombay, v. 44, n. 8, p. 35-42, 2009.

SHARMA, Mukul. *Green and saffron*. Delhi: Permanent Black, 2011.

SHARMA, Mukul. Dalits and Indian environmental politics. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Bombay, v. 47, n. 23, p. 46-52, 2012.

SHARMA, Mukul. *Caste and nature: Dalits and Indian environmental politics*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2017.

SHIVA, Vandana. *Staying alive: women, ecology and survival*. London: Zed Press, 1988. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.1991.tb00218.x>

UPADHYAY, Deendayal. *Integral humanism*. Noida: Jagriti Prakashan, 1992 [1968].

ZELLIOT, Eleanor M. Gandhi and Ambedkar: a study in leadership. In: MAHAR, J. Michael (ed.). *The Untouchables in contemporary India*. Tucson: University of Arizona, 1972. p. 69-95.

Received at: 29 Sept. 2018

Approved at: 15 Jan. 2019

Published at: 30 July 2019

Corresponding author:

Jiří Krejčík

Jilská 1

110 00 Prague 1 – Czech Republic

Jiří Krejčík <jiri.krejcik@soc.cas.cz>

PhD. in Political Science (Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague, Czech Republic), Institute of Sociology of the Czech Academy of Sciences (Prague, Czech Republic).

Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9209-7254>