Hopper Lecture 2019: Gandhi, Environmentalism and the World Today Transcript

Craig Johnson:

Good afternoon, everyone. Hello. My name is Craig Johnson and I'm director of the Guelph Institute of Development Studies here at the University of Guelph.

I'm absolutely delighted to welcome you here today for the 2019 Hopper lecture in International Development. By my count this is the 23rd Hopper lecture that we've had here on campus, and it's the second in our World in 2030 Speaker Series, that's happening this year at the University of Guelph.

The Hopper lecture is named after Dr. David Hopper, who was the first president of IDRC: the International Development Research Centre. Dr. Hopper spent his formative years conducting his doctoral fieldwork in India, as well as serving briefly as an associate professor in the Ontario Agricultural College; so it's particularly fitting that Dr. Ramachandra Guha is here today to deliver the annual Hopper lecture.

I note that today also marks the beginning of the global climate strike - what better way to reflect on the excesses and injustices of our world system by learning about the life, and the work of Mohandas Gandhi.

In a moment I'll invite our president and vice-chancellor Dr. Franco Vaccarino to introduce Dr. Guha; before doing so I'd first like to acknowledge that we reside on these ancestral lands of the Attawandaron people, and more recently the treaty lands and territories of the Mississaugas of the Credit.

We recognize the significance of the Dish with One Spoon Covenant to this land, and offer our respect to our Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee and Métis neighbours as we strive to strengthen our relationships. Today this gathering place is home to many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples and this acknowledgement reminds us of our important connection to this land where we learn and work.

Finally I'd like to extend a special thanks to a number of people who are instrumental in making today possible. Debbie Bowie, Rachel Estok, Sharada Srinivasan, and especially Steffi Hamann.

I'd also like to thank IDRC whose endowment has supported the Hopper lecture since 1993. Now I'd like to invite our president and vice chancellor Dr. Franco Vaccarino to give the opening remarks. Dr. Vaccarino.

Franco Vaccarino:

Well thank you very much Dr. Johnson - Craig - for those kind remarks and for kicking off this wonderful, wonderful lecture; it's my pleasure of course to welcome all of you to the University of Guelph and to the Hopper lecture which always appreciate people receiving a bit of context for the lecture, and understanding our connection with Hopper lecture, and we were talking about that with Dr. Guha earlier.

Today's Hopper lecture highlights themes that are central it's really central to the mission of the university: the themes of internationalism, and you hear more and more about that as a priority for us, environmentalism, and of course sustainability in its largest sense it's the largest sense of that word.

And all of these things are really at the core of our mission, which is captured in a very simple two words: "Improve Life." And the simplicity I think reflects also the profundity of those two words "to Improve Life" and it's something that I really like that tagline because of its simplicity and it's just a reminder of why we do what we do.

Today's lecture also commemorates the 150th birth anniversary of Ghandi and it's a celebration, it's also part of our ongoing series called "The World in 2030." So in 2015 the United Nations launched 17 Sustainable Development Goals to be achieved by the year 2030 and these goals include tackling tough and complex issues like poverty, hunger, equity, and climate change.

And they're driven by a common purpose and denominator, and that is: to leave no one behind. You know any one of these themes on their own are certainly something we strive for but that reminder to leave no one behind reminds us of the breadth and the depth of the challenges at hand, and to do it in a complete way. And I'm so pleased that this year's Hopper lecture is hosted by the newly created Guelph Institute of Development Studies.

And the Institute's mandate is to promote positive and inclusive a change in the world. This aligns with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and really in my mind, there's a simple kind of concept that captures the mandate, and that is making sure that we keep our humanity, our humanity at the center of a very rapidly changing and fast-paced world.

I'd also like to thank Dr. Sharada Srinivasan from our Department of Sociology and Anthropology who's been working to enhance our international relations with India and who's been instrumental in bringing today's speaker to Guelph. Dr. Srinivasan has been a great support, a great colleague, and truly a leader as we have continued to strengthen our ties with India which is a real priority for us in the months and years ahead.

And now, it's my absolute pleasure and I'm especially delighted to introduce this year's Hopper lecturer Dr. Ramachandra Guha. Dr. Guha I consider one of the preeminent living historians of Gandhi, and I have to say it was a particular pleasure getting to know Dr. Guha over lunch and

it's amazing when you have a focused event like a lunch how much you can cover in a very short period of time, and I had the good fortune of hearing some of Dr. Guha's insights.

Dr. Guha of course is an acclaimed writer and historian based in Bengaluru in South India, his books include a pioneering environmental history called "The Unquiet Woods," a social history of cricket called "A Corner of a Foreign Field" and a history called "India after Gandhi." His most recent book project is a two-volume biography whose titles are "Gandhi Before India," and "Gandhi: The Years That Changed the World."

Reflecting the breadth of his interest and achievement among his numerous awards, many awards Dr. Guha has received, the Fukuoka Prize for contributions to Asian Studies, and the Daily Telegraph Cricket Society Prize, ladies and gentlemen, please join me in welcoming Dr. Ramachandra Guha.

Ramachandra Guha:

Thank you Frank, thank you Craig, thank you all for being here. This is, as the vice-chancellor reminded us, the 150th birth anniversary year of Mohandas Gandhi. The actual date is on the 2nd of October and the last few weeks I've been on a roadshow speaking about him, but I promise you I'm gonna give you a new and special talk which I've never given anywhere ever before.

In keeping with the Hopper lecture, David Hopper is someone who worked in my country, who helped head an institution, the International Development Research Council, that has nurtured, sustained, high quality research on development, including in my country, and I thought in consultation with Sharada and Craig, that I should speak on Gandhi, but on a theme related to the legacy of Hopper, the work of Guelph in sustainable development, and so I'm going to speak on a rather little known aspect of Gandhi's life and legacy, his work, as what I would call a proto-environmentalist.

He did not use the word environmentalist it wasn't common in his day. But some of things he said, and did, and reflected of on, have a direct bearing to the climate change and environmental crisis today.

And as a historian, as a student of Gandhi's thought, I have been able to excavate I think enough evidence to suggest that, not that Gandhi has a solution stored for environmental problems today, not that he anticipated all our environmental problems today, but still it would be useful for us, and salutary for us, to listen to some of the things he said, scattered through his many writings on politics, society, culture, non-violence, are actually some very acute reflections which I'm going to offer you on the environmental predicament.

Gandhi, I'm going to begin with a description of Gandhi's visit to Oxford in the Year 1931. He had gone to England after a very long time, and he was called to Oxford to speak. And there was an Indian student who was in the audience he's someone who's utterly forgotten now but

in his time he was a very well-known Indian journalist, his name was D.F. Karaka and he was also incidentally the first Indian president of the Oxford Union.

And as an Oxford student here he was, at Baylor College, while the greatest living Indian had come to speak. And he wrote about this visit of Gandhi to Oxford, that the students who flocked to hear Gandhiji speak came there, to see with the naked eye and in the flesh, the man who with Christ, Lenin, Shakespeare, will go down through the ages and one who belongs not to an age, but to all time. Now note the juxtaposition of the names. Why Christ?

Because England is last dear Christian country; why Shakespeare? Because Shakespeare was the greatest writer ever produced by England, while Lenin because it's just a decade after the Russian Revolution, and many, certainly Oxford students, are enchanted by the ideas of Bolshevism. All three Westerners, and here he is telling them that look: here is this man from my country, just in a loincloth, not in a three-piece suit, speaking softly, but, in time to come he will rank with Christ, Lenin, and Shakespeare.

Now 90 years later, I think we can leave Lenin out of the equation. And maybe the Buddha. But here is a man who will rank with Christ, the Buddha, and Shakespeare, and Darwin, perhaps and Einstein, you can add a few names but Lenin certainly goes out of the window. Okay, but here is a precocious anticipation by a young Indian student of the future moral greatness of his countrymen.

Now when Karaka said this, I think he had three aspects of Gandhi's legacy in mind, and it's those three elements of Gandhi's legacy that are best known today. One of course is his invention of a technique of protest against unjust authority known as satyagraha, or non-violent civil disobedience, and that technique of protest, first forged by Gandhi in South Africa, and then elaborated in India, has of course been used very widely in North America and the civil rights movement, in Eastern Europe groups like Solidarity, in Myanmar, in Tibet and in countless other places.

The second aspect of Gandhi's relevance to the world was his principled opposition to discrimination based on caste and gender. So he was a freedom fighter who fought for freedom without using violence. At the same time he was a social reformer, who shone a sharp spotlight on the deep divisions within Indian society, and sought to remove or at least mitigate them.

And the third aspect of Gandhi's legacy which perhaps is of, but all these three are of great relevance, and third in India today of the most relevance, his promotion of interfaith harmony. His belief that, religious communities, although they worship different gods, are different cultural orientations, could actually live peaceably together. That's something he particularly tried in India with Hindus and Muslims, it was for the cause of Hindu-Muslim harmony that he lived and gave his life. But Gandhi's ideals of interfaith harmony and religious pluralism are entirely relevant to North America, to Israel and Palestine, to Syria to Tibet, and many other places.

So I think when Dosabhai Karaka said in 1931 prophetically, that Gandhi will come to live with Christ, Shakespeare, and so on, what he had in mind, and what we have in mind, as if he were to endorse his judgment, that Gandhi still lives, what we would have in mind is his legacy in these three areas, as someone who believed that injustice must be opposed but always non-violently, as someone who believed that no society was perfect: India, America, Great Britain, and Canada were reviled by deep inequalities and hierarchies and forms of discrimination, based on caste, gender, race, sexuality and those needed to be overcome.

And the third legacy of course, was his promotion of interfaith harmony. But I've got to suggest to you that there's a fourth element in Gandhi's legacy, and that was his environmental court. Was Gandhi an environmentalist? Could we consider that, as the fourth major plank of Gandhi's legacy to us today? Now, if you ask Indian environmentalists today they'll say: "of course yes."

The two most celebrated Indian environmental movements, have been the Chipko movement, the peasant protest movement against deforestation in the Himalaya, and the Narmada Bachao Andolan, the movement against a large dam that was and that is still just as we speak displacing peasant and tribal people in central India. And these two, I mean, they are kind iconic to the Indian environmental movement. Regrettably I don't know that much about about Canadian environmentalism.

But Chipko and Narmada are to Indian environmentalism, what, maybe Silent Spring, and Three Mile Island are to US environmentalism. And both these movements were led by Ghandians. The Chipko movement was led by two male Ghandians: Chandi Prasad and Sunderlal Bahuguna, the Narmada movement was led by a female Ghandian: Medha Patkar. They would say that, what they are doing in opposing destructive development practices, in promoting decentralized forms of sustainable living, are directly inspired by Gandhi.

They themselves live a kind of Ghandian lifestyle, they wear homespun, they live lives what a simplicity transparency like Gandhi, they are totally nonviolent, like Gandhi they have enormous physical courage, they've gone on long fasts, they face police beatings. As an acknowledgment of their debt to Gandhi, they often begin their programs on 2nd October, Ghandi's birthday, or 30th January, which is Ghandi's martyrdom day. So if you ask Indian environmentalist today was Gandhi an environmentalist, they'll say: "of course yes, that's why we are environmentalists too."

But they are activists, they aren't scholars like myself, so I'm gonna ask the question: was Gandhi really an environmentalist? Did he in his writings, anticipate the contours of the environmental debate as we know it? Some scholars, who claim that Gandhi was an early environmentalist, cite his anti-industrial polemic of 1909 Hind Swaraj, Gandhi wrote a book called Hind Swaraj which is a critique of Western civilization, it's also a defence of non-violence, and if you ask you know Gandhians they'll say: "Yes! Hind Swaraj provides an alternative development perspective."

But actually doesn't at all, if you read Hind Swaraj you'll find that despite its eloquent denunciation of industrial culture, the book has nothing to say about human relations with nature at all. In my own excavation of Gandhi's writings, Gandhi's writings incidentally are incredibly extensive they cover 97 volumes of his collected works. In my own excavation of his writings the first intimations of what I am calling a proto-environmentalist sensibility occurs in an article of April 1930, where he makes a telling contrast between the city dweller and the farmer.

And the contrast is in terms of the connections to nature and the natural world. I will read out a long quote, one of many long quotes I will read out to you, because these are quotations of Gandhi that are little-known and that it's important that I give them to you in their fullness to buttress my case that he was indeed a proto-environmentalist. So here's the first of several long quotes, from a newspaper article of April 1913, that is in all the anthologies of Gandhi's writings, I quote:

"A farmer cannot work without applying his mind. He must be able to test the nature of the soil, what changes of weather, know how to manipulate his plow skillfully, and be familiar with the movement of the stars, the Sun, and the moon. However clever a city dweller may be, every time he goes to a farmer's house he feels altogether out of his element. The farmer can say how much seed should be so sown by looking at the stars, he can judge the direction even at night, he can make certain deductions from the voice and speed of birds, for instance when certain birds cluster or sing together, he sees in that a sign of the approach of the monsoon. Thus the farmer knows enough of astronomy, geography, and geology to serve his needs."

I think this is important to say it in Guelph University but it even more important to say it in an Indian university, where the students are upper caste city dwellers and think farmers are complete idiots. Alright, so here is Gandhi in 1913, having said all this, he's demonstrated "the farmer knows enough of astronomy, geography, and geology to serve his needs. He has to feed his children, and has therefore some ideas of the duty of man, and residing as he does in the vast open spaces of his earth of this earth he naturally becomes aware of the greatness of God. Physically it goes without saying that the farmer is always sturdy, he is his own physician when ill, thus we can see that the farmer does have an educated mind."

Now this extraordinary quotation from 1913, because it is Gandhi he brings in a spiritual angle, to claim towards the end that the farmer is close to closer to God than the urban man but disregard that. Otherwise the burden of this passage is resolutely pragmatic. It is to demonstrate to the Indian urban reader that the farmer, far from being an illiterate fool as the middle-class Indian might think him to be, has an intimate knowledge of the land, of the seasons, of the birds, and the animals, that makes him more educated than the townsmen.

The farmer is more educated than the townsmen, in that he and he uses the gendered language of the time, he or she, is more connected to nature, and the natural world and hence more free to take care of the responsibilities of living in nature and the natural world, so this is

1913. The next year Gandhi leaves South Africa; after spending 20 years in the diaspora and goes back to India and tries to make a name as a political activist in India. Now Gandhi had been away from his homeland for more than 20 years.

His mentor a great social reformer sadly forgotten in India today, called Gopal Krishna Gokhale, told him, when you go back, spend a year traveling around India. So that's what he did. So he traveled around India acquainting himself, really for the first time with the ecological, cultural, social, economic diversity of India, and he continued to travel throughout India all his life.

1914, 1915, 1916, 1917, he organized a protest movement in Champaran in Bihar, in 1918 he organized the protest movement in rural Gujarat, and through these travels and encounters he came face to face with colonialism as a system of economic exploitation. In South Africa, where Gandhi lived in the cities, and where he represented the small Indian diaspora community, he knew of colonialism as a system of racial exclusion.

Indians can't got there, they can own property there, they can't go to college, they can't cross provincial boundaries. But in India, through his travels our countryside, he came to understand that colonialism was also a system of economic exploitation. And from this understanding he arrived at the conclusion, and this is in a sense the central analytical grid of my lecture today, he came to the conclusion that it would be impossible for India to emulate Western models and Western patterns of industrial development.

Gandhi's reservations about the industrialization of India are usually ascribed to moral grounds. The idea that he thought city people are selfish, that consumers are greedy, and competitive. But they also had markedly ecological undertones. Take this remarkable passage from his journal "Young India" of December 1928; just listen to this very carefully, this is what Gandhi is writing in 1928, I quote:

"God forbid that India should ever take to industrialization after the manner of the West. God forbid that India should ever take to industrialization of the manner of the West. The economic imperialism of a single, tiny, island kingdom 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 locust."

In my view, I may be biased here, but in my view, the operative phrase is "after the manner of the West." He didn't say "God forbid that India take to industrialization full stop." That's not what he said. Gandhi knew, as well as the next Indian, that this was a desperately poor country, with where illiteracy, poverty degradation, starvation deeply disfigured the country, and after the British left, they had to be removed. But somewhere he was saying to find ways of lifting the people out of poverty, or providing a dignified lifestyle to everyone, providing them access to decent education, health, the clean environment, safe housing, we had to find ways that were different from the West.

Because unlike the West at a comparable stage of industrialization, we did not have-India would not have enjoyed access to the vast colonial resources of the West. Which is why he says: "the economic imperialism of England is 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." Also in the 1920s Gandhi said: "To make India like England and America, is to find some other races, and places of the earth for exploitation."

"As the West-" he said, "has already divided the known races outside Europe for exploitation, and there are no new worlds to discover, what can be the fate of India trying to eat the West?" What can be the fate of India if the West economically, not culturally, or aesthetically, the answer to Gandhi's question: "What can be the fate of India trying to eat the West?" is now painfully obvious for in the last few decades we have attempted precisely to make India like England and America, however, without the resources, without the access to resources and markets enjoyed by European and American nations when they began to industrialize, India has to rely on the exploitation of its own people, and its environment.

The natural resources of the countryside have been increasingly channelized to meet the needs of the urban industrial sector. Now I live in Bangalore, and I recently wrote a column which this [inaudible] gave a rather sensationalist title "How Many Rivers will Bangalore Drink?" It was an account of my hometown as it's expanded where it's got its water from. When my father was growing up in Bangalore in the 1930s and 40s Bangalore had 70 large lakes and tanks. From which he drew a fair amount of its water supply, the rest came from wells.

Then as it started expanding, 20 miles from Bangalore a reservoir was built to cap the waters of two small rivers. In the 1970s we began foraging further, because the city started growing faster, and faster and all it also started industrializing and it was a lot of water needed for industrial as well as domestic needs. And in the 1980s a project was started to pump water up the Cauvery which is 70 miles away and up a plateau of 2,000 ft. And now there's scarcity, because we've gone from 2 million to 8 million in 30 years, so now there's a plan to get water for Bangalore from the Sharavathi which is the northwestern corner of the state to the Western Ghats 200 miles away.

So, Gandhi anticipated this; that the natural resources of the countryside have been channelized to meet the needs of the urban industrial sector, and this has accelerated as monumental degradation, while depriving rural and tribal communities of the traditional access to forest water pasture and so on and so forth. Meanwhile, the modern sector has moved aggressively into the remaining resource frontiers of India the Northeast and the Andaman and the Nicobar Islands. Perhaps Gandhi would not have been surprised, as he recognized a bias towards urban industrial development could result only in a one-sided one-sided exploitation of the hinterland.

In 1946, he expressed this with characteristic lucidity: "The blood of the villages is the cement with which the edifice of the cities is built." So here is Gandhi's understanding of industrial

development. India needs to "develop," Indian needs to emancipate its population from property, tragedy, illiteracy, ill health, bad sanitation, but has to find ways of doing that do not adopt the same resource intensive, capital intensive, energy intensive methods adopted by the West.

Now he is not laying out a systematic alternative development plan for a number of reasons: One, he is not a systematic thinker, secondly he's doing many other things, he's trying to free India from the British to non-violence, he's trying to get Hindus and Muslims to live peaceably, he's trying to read India the scourge of untouchability, he's trying to bring women into public life, he's cultivating a cater of collaborators and colleagues and co-workers, so it's a mistake to think, some people who think Gandhi has an environmental charter to offer us and that's a mistake.

The very interesting hidden clues perceptive, appointed and often deeply insightful to understand why India made a mistake in mindlessly after 1947, imitating a Western model of industrial development. Now Gandhi himself was someone who believed that Indian development should be based on village renewal, but at the same time he understood that the Indian village was not a beautiful idyllic place. The Indian village was ridden by caste hierarchies, Indian villagers had forgotten how to maintain their common property resources.

And in 1937, Gandhi for a long time idealized the Indian village, I mean I think idealized is the right phrase, in 1937 a reader wrote to him saying, you know "what is an ideal village, you always talk about an ideal village, what is an ideal village?" And one of the remarkable things about Gandhi incidentally was that like other powerful men in politics and elsewhere he listened, and he sometimes answered a criticism.

So he got this letter, "so you talk about the ideal village, you romanticize the village, what is your ideal village?" The letter came from a villager in Birbhum in Bengal. And Ghandi replied, and what I'll quote to you is-I've got a copy of Gandhi's vision of an ideal village, because it's very very interesting, it's from January 1937, "This is my ideal village: it will have cottages with sufficient light and ventilation, built of a material obtainable within a radius of 5 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. This village will have common wells, not privately owned by the rich farmers, common wells accessible to all. It will have houses of worship to which all castes can go, a common meeting place, a village common for grazing its cattle, a co-operative dairy, primary and secondary schools in which industrial education will be the central fact, and it will also have Panchayats so village councils for settling disputes.

This is my ideal-this is my model of an ideal village. So the many elements of this picture that fit nicely into the utopia of the contemporary environmentalist: local self-reliance, a clean and hygienic environment, and the collective management and use of those gifts of nature so crucial for survival, water and pasture. But Gandhi also had a very strong practical bend. In the

1930s he got very interested in the problem of soil fertility, and the depletion of soils that were undermining the productivity of Indian agriculture. And he in 1946 towards the end of his life, I mean he's already in his late 70s at this stage, and he's still thinking about these things, alongside everything else he's thinking about, he writes an article in his magazine, where he warns against the excessive mechanization of agriculture, because as he puts it "trading in soil fertility for the sake of quick returns, will prove to be a disastrous short-sighted policy, it will result in virtual depletion of the soil."

Gandhi incidentally, was an enthusiastic supporter of organic manure. Which as he wrote "enriches the soil, improves village hygiene, and save foreign exchange, and enhances crop yields at the same time. it's mistakenly believed that Gandhi was anti-science but it in his interest in soil fertility, he worked closely with the great pioneering organic scientist Albert Howard, and he reached out to him, studied his writings, wrote about him in in his journals.

Now, what I've tried to do so far, is present you scattered pieces of evidence, you know, the thing about Gandhi is that there is [inaudible], there is no "Communist Manifesto," "State and Evolution," "Leviathan," "Discovery of India" even for an area of "Discovery of India" for Ambedkar you may have "Annihilation of Caste" is no [inaudible] if you want to understand Gandhi's political moral, social, environmental thought, if you have to go through the 90 volumes and pick out things.

Now, maybe you can accuse me of cherry-picking but I think what I picked-the cherries I picked, and quoted for you today, give you a clear sense that Gandhi had an intuitive understanding of the ecological limits to unbridled industrialization. God forbid that India take to industrialization in the manner of the West, it will strip the world bare like locusts, it may be China and India are stripping the world bare as locusts.

He had an intuitive understanding of the global limits to unbridled industrialization. He had an interest in rural renewal, in sustainable agriculture, in alternative technology, and of course what I have not talked about so far his own life style, which was, you know, bearing he virtually needed nothing at all. In fact if you go to the Gandhian archive as I have, his replies were written on the back of some of these letter. So at the level of a macro analysis of economic development, his prescriptions for rural reconstruction, his interest in alternative sustainable technologies, his ethics for living, and in all these ways Gandhi was an early environmentalist.

Okay now I'm going to complicate the picture. What are the problems with the Ghandians generally, is that they look absolutely uncritically at Gandhi. So they will tell you Gandhi's writings provide all the answers to our environmental crisis today. This is a problem many great, visionary, charismatic thinkers have. You know Karl Marx famously said "I am not a Marxist." I am sure that if the great Indian emancipated B.R. Ambedkar was alive today he would say “I am not an Ambedkarite,” and I think Gandhi would also have said “I am not a Gandhian.” Because the Ghandians of today often fetishize Gandhi.

They fetishize Gandhi in, you know, sometimes in their lifestyle, they don't like people who don't wear homespun, they don't like people who enjoy love, or occasional glass of whiskey whatever else right. But also, they fetishize Gandhi in that, they think Ghandi provides all the answers, you just, like Karl Marx, or like Ambedkar, or like Christ, and the Buddha, and Muhammad, there's no text right. I think likewise, I'm someone who studied Ghandi all my life, and I'm also someone who is admired Gandhi all his life. I mean if I did not have an admiration for Gandhi I won't spend 20 years writing his biography.

But my admiration is qualified, it's nuanced, it's qualified by understanding that he made mistakes while he lived, and more so by the fact that his ideas don't provide an absolutely credible internally consistent charter for what India or the world should do today. So what I'm going to do towards the last part of my talk is to complicate the picture.

So I think I have hopefully, demonstrated to you, that Gandhi provides a body of ideas, and a vocabulary of protest against unjust laws, that can be useful to the environmental movement, both as a thinker and as an activist, he can be of great use of the environmental movement. But I'm not gonna ask, are there ways the heritage of Gandhi may actually limit the environmental movement?

Does Gandhi provide all the answers to those working for environmental renewable today? Some environmentalists are saying that he does, absolutely. Some friend of mine [inaudible] wrote to me some years ago, he said: "For each and every environmental crisis, or event, or challenge, one can find inspiration and guidance in Gandhi." Now this kind of certitude is that of the devotee.

I mean you find it in people of faith, but you also find it in people of political faith as well, you know, I'm sure that there are people in India today tell you that for each, and every social, or political, or cultural, environmental crisis, Narendra Modi has an answer. So here is a Gandhian saying the same thing, for each, at every, environmental event, or crisis, or challenge, one can find inspiration and guidance in Ghandi, you know this is a serious Ghandian activist telling me this.

Now this, emphatic statement I think must be qualified. Indeed, I believe that when it comes to the environmental debate, Gandhi does not provide all the answers, sometimes even he does not even ask the right questions. And I'm going to in the last part of my talk, alert you to two crucial limitations of Gandhi as an environmental thinker. They may be limitations of Gandhi as a moral philosopher, as a political activist, as a social reformer, that's a separate debate.

But although Gandhi was a precocious environmentalist, although he had a clear, sharp, perceptive understanding of the global limits to unregulated economic growth. Although he had a practical interest in sustainable alternatives at the level of the village, the farm, the craft, he as an environmental thinker, he limits environmentalist today in two crucial ways. First it is striking how heavily focused on the countryside are the horizons of Gandhi, and Gandhian environmentalists.

So Gandhi said, India lives in her villages. That was wrong even at the time, and it's spectacularly wrong today. India lives in more and more inner cities too. And Indian environmentalists working in the Gandhian tradition have yet to come to terms with the fact that Indians will soon have the largest urban population in the world. The consequences of rapid, and unregulated urbanization in India are with us. Massive pollution, overcrowding, water shortages, inadequate housing, and sanitation, and inefficient system of transportation, waste of energy, and so on and so forth.

But Indian environmentalists haven't engaged with this, because they've taken their clue from Gandhi. India lives in the villages, you have the Chipko movement over forests, you have the Narmada movement over water, you have the gundam arjun, and neom giri movement over tribals and mines, but you have really no urban environmental movement in India of a proper and sustainable way. It is coming, now for example, in Chennai, there is now a movement for the reunion, revival of water bodies.

But environmental activism in India has been massively biased towards the countryside, and this is also very much an aspect of Ghandi's legacy, environmental scholarship in India also has been heavily biased towards the countryside. If we look at the work that's been done by historians, sociologists, political theorists, legal specialists on the environment it's: forest law, water, or mining law. Energy, transport, housing, these are things that-urban environmental issues are not something that dominate the literature.

So that's one area in which Gandhi's thought limits environmentalism, that he had no interest in the city at all, and India is more, and more of an urban economy, an urban civilization, with its own massive range of environmental problems to go with it. Like the city, the wilderness had no attraction for Gandhi. It is true that his practice of vegetarianism, and non-violence oriented Gandhi towards a respect for all life, yet, by all accounts, he was hardly moved by the glories of unspoiled nature, you know he was in many ways, he had an underdeveloped aesthetic side.

You would find Tagore and Nehru writing about the setting Sun but not Ghandi, right. This may be attributed to a severely practical temperament, for there was nothing of the romantic in Gandhi. There is a contrast here as I have already suggested with Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first prime minister, who was deeply appreciative of the natural beauty of India. There is a near mystical quality to Nehru's invocation in his last will and testament of his affinity with the soil, the mountains, and the rivers of India.

There's an anecdote to illustrate this contrast between Gandhi and Nehru which I'd like to tell you. It's unpublished, it lies in a document that was given to me by the great British historian E.P. Thompson, before he died. E.P. Thompson's father Edward Thompson worked in India. He was a British missionary sympathetic to Indian aspirations and knew Gandhi and Nehru well. And in his years in India, the 20s and 30s, Edward Thompson, E.P. Thompson's father, Edward Thompson's senior came to really love the landscape, the countryside, the wildlife, the mountains of India.

In 1937, Congress ministries were formed for the first time in different provinces. When they were formed Edward Thompson was sent by the [inaudible] trust to India on a mission, and while traveling around India, with the Congress already in power in several provinces, self-rule had begun, Edward Thompson tried hard to interest the Congress leaders in the cause of saving India's disappearing wildlife. He told them: animal after animal is either extinct or on the danger list. You know 1930s-by the way, animal after animal was extinct, on the danger list, largely because of the deprecated instincts of British rulers and Indian manages.

The population of the tiger had gone from 40,000 in 1850 to 2,000 in 1940, because of this kind of savage depredation, so Thompson was very upset about this, and he confronted Gandhi, he went to Sevagram, Gandhi's ashram in central India. With the problem because Gandhi was the de-facto dictator of the Congress, all the chief ministers of the Congress provinces in Madras and Bombay and so listen to Gandhi, so Edward Thompson goes to Gandhian tells him, look all these animals are disappearing, and you must do something about your government in Ceylon.

Mahatma merely joked saying, "we shall always have the British lion." But then noting the disappointment of Thompson's face, Gandhi asked him to speak to Jawaharlal Nehru, who might have more interest, and indeed, Nehru did. When Thompson told Nehru about the disappearance of these animals, great Indian animals, the tigers, the rhinoceros, the cheetah, the lion, and so on and so on- the elephant, Nehru wrote a letter to the chief ministers of congress-ruled states, and a year later Nehru was able to write to Edward Thompson with some pride, that C. Rajagopalachari's last act as chief-minister of Madras was to create the Periyar Nature Reserve.

So nature lovers and those with a focus on the urban environmental world will find no help from Mahatma Gandhi. But between the wilderness and the city lies a vast terrain, home to the 700,000 villages of India which Gandhi spoke of so often and so eloquently. It is here, in this terrain between the city and the wilderness, that Gandhi is life and message admit of more direct application. As in the resistance to environmentally destructive projects, or in the restoration of a sustainable relationship between the agrarian economy and the natural environment.

And all of us without exception, whether living in the city, the countryside, or the wild, can try and simplify our lifestyles lifestyles to the extent compatible with individual circumstances, taking a lead from a man who in his own life made remarkably few demands on the earth. And so it is that the environmental movement must perennially returned to Mahatma Gandhi and yet seek to go beyond him. Thank you very much.

I think we have time for questions? Yeah, so would someone come here if they want to ask questions, or come up here-so I just wanted to say I've given a kind of detailed, scholarly, historical, excavation of Gandhi's ideas and views, but if there are questions on other aspects of the environmental predicament in India today, I'd be happy to answer them as well, or other aspects of Gandhi's legacy, I'd be happy to answer them as well.

Questioner #1:

Thank you so much for a great start on the Gandhi series as well and a great perspective I'm Pavneesh Madan from Veterinary school here, and I'm-it was interesting to hear the interpretation of how the animal welfare kind of aspect was looked into although you said it was more given into Nehru's terrain to take care of the animal issues however, one thing which was very famous with Gandhi and goes the credit goes to him was the goat domestication project, and how goat became his dear animal.

He was one of those people who highlighted the aspect of goat milk in rural population, adaptation of goat as a-for the rural economy. So I was wondering if you could shed some more light being, an historian in that area, of how that came about and how that changed economy in the local villages.

Ramachandra Guha:

No, thank you, that's a very good question. I am not sure I have a complete answer but I'll try. So first I'll have to tell you about how Gandhi started having goat milk. So Gandhi decided to give up drinking milk. You know he was a obsessive food faddist, so he decided to give up many things that he gave up milk, then he almost died. Incidentally, this is something again connected to, broadly to Gandhi environmentalism. It's mistaken that Gandhi was anti-science, I'm glad you're a scientist speaking, Gandhi was saved-it's also a mistake that Gandhi was anti-modern medicine.

In 1924 his life was saved by a surgeon, because of appendicitis. In 1919 his life was saved by a surgeon but he had piles, after that he was almost dying, and the doctor said you have to have milk, he said but I've taken a vow that I will never again have milk, and I don't go back on vows, so his wife Katurba said your vow was about cow's milk. So that's how he took to goat's milk. Okay, now, so it's an interesting anecdote. So, and of course the goat went and the famous story of, you know, Gandhi walking in London in 1931 and a cockney going "Hey Gandhi where's your goat?"

All right now, so, that's how Ghandi got into goat milk. Now, I'm not sure there's a direct connection between Gandhi's, how do I put it, dependence on goats, and this cultivation of goats in his ashram, and the promotion of the goat economy post independence, that connection I don't think is tell-able, but it is important and interesting because, you see, one of the problems, the diversity of Indian agriculture is such, maybe there are other people in this room will know much better than me, that unlike in England, in England you don't have goats, you have sheep to kill and that's it.

But it's a cattle economy, in drier parts of India in the Deccan and in, around the Thar Desert the goat is very important. And it must have been some Indian agricultural scientist who promoted recognizing this diversity, but I doubt there's a direct connection between the

accidental nature of Ghandi taking to goat milk, maybe so the goat became not just a a cow maybe maybe.

Questioner #2:

Thank you for a fabulous lecture - today marks the start of the global climate strikes and I was wondering if you could tell us a bit about how India is viewing climate change.

Ramachandra Guha:

Yeah, so do you want a short answer, a medium answer, a long answer?

Questioner #2:

As much as you're willing to give the audience.

Ramachandra Guha:

Thank you, thank you. So, first of all, I'm going to say something absolutely heretical. In my view, one of the greatest climate criminals in the mortal world is Al Gore. Okay, so if you look at the climate change issue today in 1992 Al Gore wrote a book called "Earth in The Balance." No modern politician knew the dimensions of the environmental crisis as thoroughly as Al Gore did. In the year he wrote "Earth in The Balance," he and Bill Clinton came to occupy the White House. In 1997-preceding 1997, the Kyoto Protocol was being signed. If America had signed, the Europeans were leaders, it's no accident that this young lady is from Europe, from Sweden.

Europeans were absolutely leaders. In 1995, I was in Berlin when Helmut Kohl organized a huge massive climate change, you know, global warming conference and committed all the European countries to cuts in targets. If America under Al Gore and Bill Clinton, who knew the science knew the possibilities, had signed in 1997, China and India would have been compelled to sign. They didn't. Then in 2000 Al Gore ran for election, and didn't mention environment once in his campaign.

After he lost he became an environmental campaigner so this is shocking hypocrisy, I want to put this on record because this is these are things, you know, politicians have a great way of whitewashing their past. So I think the real missed opportunity was 1997, because if America had signed, I can tell you China and India would have been compelled to sign, and then we would not have had the crisis we are facing today. That's the first thing.

Now having done that, now of course Trump is going back again, so, so long as you have America the most powerful, the richest, the most polluting, country in the world, not taking any responsibility, China and India will do virtually nothing; except mitigation because of you know sea-level rise and what they have to do with their coastal cities and so on, right. They are not going to go, I mean I heard just yesterday, in McMaster that coal, so called clean coal, I don't know what they mean clean coal, but clean coal is going from Canada to India, right, so we're not going to stop importing this, you're not going to stop exporting it.

So I think this is a huge issue where the original seller was the America, and possibly Gore and, not the democrats, Gore and Clinton, and they still paying for it. The second thing I'd like to say is that from the perspective of an Indian. I think, India is an environmental basket case, regardless of the climate change crisis. And, the climate change crisis and America, the United States, a lack of – a spectacular irresponsibility – gives successive governments of India the excuse not to tackle their domestic environmental problems.

You know, we are an environment – even if climate change was not taking place, the extraordinary high levels of air pollution, the depletion of groundwater aquifers, the biological death of our major rivers, the chemical contamination of the soil, would all are all seriously threatening our life, our economy, our society, and our future as a civilization in India today. So we need in India to be – that's why Gandhi's ideas and the ideas [inaudible] Gandhi's is so much more relevant regardless of climate change.

Questioner #3:

Hi, your lecture was amazing, just wanted to ask something in regards to one aspect of environmentalism that I feel is often overlooked just because of human reliance on animal products in regards to consumption, clothing, tools, whatever it may be.

So we all know based off, you know, evidence available as to right now that animal agriculture is one of the largest contributors towards the climate crisis. How do you think Gandhian principles would influence, critique, support, or interact, or address animal production-animal agriculture like in 2019?

Ramachandra Guha:

So, I suppose, vegetarianism would be a way forward. Gandhi was not a kind of ideological vegetarian, he was a cultural vegetarian but certainly you know reducing demand for meat. But again, I mean, you know I am really not really someone who's very good at description and policy. Gandhi's, again as I said Gandhi can provide clues, intuitions, ideas, he can't provide a charter or a manifesto, that in so many years after his death we have to maybe find our own ways around it.

Craig Johnson:

Ram I think I promised to moderate the talk, but I-so I'm going to ask you a question. So thank you so much for a wonderful presentation today. I wanted to ask you a question about the impact of Gandhi and what you're calling Gandhian thinking and Gandhian movements on the environmental movement.

And you mentioned earlier in passing that Gandhi was often classified, or characterized, as being anti-science and and I found in my own work that at times a fetishization of science can actually undermine environmental movements and Gandhi was nothing if not a great storyteller, and he had an image that could mobilize people. So I'm wondering what the

relationship between Gandhi and the science of the day, or scientists of the day looked like and how that influenced his thinking.

Ramachandra Guha:

Thank you it's a great question. So there's a famous quote of Gandhi, which I don't have here, where it's in a talk he gave to a science college in Kerala in 1925, where he says something to the effect of "it is a common superstition that I'm against science" so, Gandhi was wonderful with words, "it's a common superstition...that's not true. I am against science for its own sake, all I ask of scientists is what I asked of my followers, that they orient their science towards alleviating the poverty of Indians."

Okay then it's interesting that he calls his autobiography "The Story of My Experiments with Truth." So Gandhi was, you could say, a scientist who wanted scientists to be grounded. I mean maybe he would have also appreciated the beauty of mathematics and theoretical physics, but in a country as poor as India he expected scientists to orient their work towards making the lives of Indians less degraded, less full of misery.

Now he didn't say that much about science, but I want to say a little bit following your question on Gandhian scientists today. Now a Gandhian scientist after Gandhi, especially in the in the context of the environmental debate, they are two quite remarkable Indian scientists whom Indians don't know enough about, and I'd like to say little bit about them because they are both deeply inspired by Gandhi, and they are also personal mentors of mine. One and, it was a very [inaudible] to see the trajectories, one was a man called [inaudible] he did his PhD in Imperial College, London.

He was a world authority on electrochemistry until recently his textbook on electrochemistry was taught all over the world, and then he discovered Gandhi, left the lab went to the countryside, and started studying the rural economy, and started working on making it environmentally sustainable.

So he pioneered low-cost housing, biogas plants, and also wrote some very important essays, he had in fact, on energy, the climate change, he wrote a magnificent book with three scientists, you know talking in 1988 well before all this, there were four of them, there was a someone in Princeton, a Brazilian, who later became Brazilian Environment Minister, [inaudible] and [inaudible], okay, four continents they wrote a book which is called "Energy for a Sustainable World."

And essentially, he pioneered their what he called a demand side rather than supply-side approach to energy. So for example, Guelph needs 500 megawatts, is short of 500 megawatts. A supply-side approach would be: build a nuclear reactor of 500 megawatts. A demand-side approach would be: let's study the ways in which energy is transmitted, houses are built, cement is used, and can we minimized energy so that we don't even need those 500 megawatts, right. So [inaudible] was, he's an Indian scientist who deserves to be much

[inaudible] inspired by Gandhi to bend his science towards Gandhian principles, modern science, PhD from Imperial College, okay.

The other is someone I worked with very closely, a great ecologist called Madhav Gadgil, again PhD from Harvard. While in Harvard, an ecologist, he wrote a paper that is still a citation classic. He got a job at Harvard, left it, comes back to India. And starts then, working on essentially biodiversity conservation, and harmonizing biodiversity conservation with the rights of villagers living around protected areas.

And there has done the most amazing work, most recently he wrote-now in his 70s, still very very active, most recently his last major piece of work was the long report on the Western Ghats, which is a mountain system around the West, and how if curbs were not put on unregulated mining there would be floods, curbs are not put and they've been floods all across Kerala.

So here are two-I mean especially to other Indians, anyone, two great Gandhian scientists you know who are trained in the greatest Western universities, who achieved true distinction in their fields, and came back to follow Gandhi's ideas and bend their science to the service of the poor. And they've been great models for me and I'm glad that your question has allowed me to pay my tribute to them. [inaudible] and Madhav Gadgil.

Questioner #4:

Hello, first of all thank you so much for your speech, and offering a totally different perspective that I could probably not get off of social media, and I just want to ask you, kind of, in general terms, as an upcoming generation that is far, or a little bit more, globalized and interconnected when it comes to forms of social media, and news sources regarding, you know, concerns of climate, and stuff, that is happening at a faster rate than anticipated.

I know many people my age often feel kind of lost, we don't know where to go, what to do, besides just you know look at predictions; and so I was just going to ask you would there be any way, or could you advise us, where to go or what kind of steps, we can take, considering all these.

Ramachandra Guha:

So I mean I appreciate the urgency and the sentiment behind that question, you know I don't preach. I don't prescribe. I try to study, understand, write, analyze, and so people can do what they want. I don't preach, and prescribe, out of a philosophical preference. Also I have conspicuously failed with my own children, so I wouldn't do it but still but do you respect your concern. Actually two things: the first thing is, this the first comes from Gandhi. That is, Gandhi believed in one step at a time.

Incrementalism is love. Change the life of your home, your family, your state, that's fantastic; don't think you can change the world. So that's, you know, if you live a more decent life, or

more transparent life, if you trespass less on the earth, if you persuade other people around you to trespass less, you know that's a great contribution. Gandhi always said one step at a time. That's one Gandhian principle.

The second Gandhian principle also comes from a phrase of Gandhi, it's a great phrase: "the beauty of compromise" and I'll give you a concrete illustration from an Indian environmental conflict the Narmada dam that I talked about. Now, there is a long history of large dams being built in India which have never fulfilled their promises. So when this new large dam is coming up you have this extraordinary Gandhian activist called Medha Patkar who organized the protest movement against it.

But as she was organizing the protest movement that dam kept on coming up. The slogan of the movement against the dam was "nobody will move the dam will never come up" *Hindi translation* So they were absolutely convinced of their total jsuccess, and they would demolish the dam and no one had to leave there, that was the slogan of the movement. But the state kept on building it, they kept on crushing the movement, and the dam again kept up and up, meanwhile the movement gathered wide support across India. And two Gandhian engineers came up with a compromise – solution.

Originally the dam was supposed to be 460 feet, and if it came up to its full extent, it would displace 150 thousand people. It had already come up to 80 meters or 270 feet, and the activists were still saying: "demolish the dam, no one will move, the dam will never come up." But it has come to 270 feet, billions of rupees have been spent. These two engineers then designed a very interesting technical compromise-solution.

Where they said: don't go up to 450 but, however if you go up to only to 400, you will still reach water to the most drought deprived areas of western India, and you will minimize displacement by 60%. So 60% less will lose their lives, but the activists said, "no, no compromise you're selling out." So that's the second lesson. The beauty of compromise. Don't think you can achieve perfection.

The third thing I'd like to say is related to climate change. You know, I think there's a problem with, there is a climate change excess today. There are many problems, there are many environmental problems in the world today that have nothing to do with climate change, there many social, political problems in the world today, such as religious violence, gender violence, nothing to do with climate change.

Somehow we are being told you know this- the social media is telling you "climate change, climate change, climate change, climate change, climate change!" and I think that is a problem. You know, I think this idea that there is one real problem, one alternative, one solution, and then there'll be utopia. I think this is problematic, so I just caution you, philosophically, not give you concrete advice.

Questioner #3

Yeah, I just had another question regarding Indian scholars, and their views on globalism and how that affects climate change. And one of my favorite scholars, Vandana Shiva, she's a staunch against globalism, do you feel that Gandhi's critique of Western economic systems, Western capitalist systems, are a grassroots, or more rudimentary version of anti globalism, is it fair to classify them as that?

Ramachandra Guha:

You know, I have a problem, you know, I believe you must act in your own street; it's easy to say you're anti-global activists and forget what's happening around you. So I have problems with those who call themselves global anti-global activists. They're normally on a flight going all around the world, preaching this globalization right, so I'm not sure.

Questioner #5

Ram, thank you very much for a very, very stimulating talk I'm sort of struck by, was it 1930 when Gandhi writes about if we industrialize like Britain we will strip the world like locusts. And then you know, your point about how much environmental damage has been done, never mind climate change, in India. I mean, the absolute priority that is being given in India to achieving fantastically high rates of economic growth, is bringing about extraordinary kind of environmental destruction.

I'm particularly struck by the pressures on water, you know, and you mentioned your piece about you know, where does Bangalore's water come from you know, think of the pressures on water in Chennai this summer. I mean India's development surely is going to come up very soon against the problem of water shortage.

What I mean-what's, what action is taking place, what's going on? I mean, you know you mentioned also Modi has an answer for everything, or people think Modi has an answer for everything. He is emphasizing water conservation, supposedly, I just you know wonder, yeah what your observations are about the, ways in which, and the extent to which this particular problem is being addressed.

Ramachandra Guha:

No, it's a very important question, John. You know, I think John Maynard Keynes famously said that, every ruling politician is in thrall to the discredited ideas of an outdated economist. Something like that, I'm quoting him slightly out of, you know, you know the quote, okay.

And what's the problem in India today, is that the political elite; but either they're destroying the environment for nefarious reasons, getting cuts from contractors, or they're destroying it in the mistaken belief, because they're in thrall to economies of the 60s and 70s, who believe that the market can resolve all scarcities, that environmentalism is a luxury only rich countries can

afford, and so on, and so forth. And also there is I think something else, there is the two other constraints to environmental responsibility of the political class.

There is corruption, they are in thrall to outdated ideas, there's the five year election cycle, because you can see I'll give you a job in five years, but you can't say I can clean up all the river of the Ganges in five years, right, and there's a fourth problem which is the first-past-the-post system, because if you have proportional representation you can have an effective Green Party.

That's what we learn from Europe, and unlike here, I don't know what kinda, don't know much about Canada, but in North America you don't, where you have a two-party system right, Republicans and Democrats if you have ten percent- if you have a proportional representation, you can probably have a red green party that gets eight percent in Indian Parliament and is consistently hiring people.

So I think a huge constrain and I don't see any really light at the end of it tunnel, I think we are going to go down, I mean again there's a wonderful image of Gandhi which I didn't quote well he's talking about modern man modern man's enchantment with speed, with technology, with growth, he says it's like a moth circling around a flame, circles so enchanted by the flame, circles faster, and faster, and faster, and faster, and parishes in the flame, right. So they may be something of that kind so they're kind of technological, philosophical material, political economy constraints to environmental responsibility in India.

That doesn't mean we mustn't do scholarship, it doesn't mean activists must not keep on struggling, to at least mitigate some of that suffering but I don't really see environmental wisdom coming in, I think decentralization could be a way forward, and that is being stored. I mean if you look at in my state, Karnataka, you know right now we have a decentralized system in which village councils have no autonomy, they just elect their leaders but they don't have financial autonomy, they can't raise taxes, the natural resources are not under their control, if for example there's a grazing ground.

I mean these examples are the everywhere as you know, there are grazing ground the villages are using it, and are using it sustainably, because they have a common property regime going, and that under the grazing ground gold is found. The chief minister in Bangalore signs an agreement with the gold merchants and gives it away. Because that law allows that.

So, decentralization where local councils may have more control, more autonomy, would lead to more sustainability without a question. So I think we have to think, but, it's a very long haul, I mean in the short term, India's environment is going to degrade further, and further, and the cost of that degradation are going to be borne by the poor. More and more.

Questioner #6

Thank you Dr. Guha for coming to Guelph, I really enjoyed your presentation. I was struck by your comment about whether or not, the world could withstand a country of 300 million developing in the way of the West did. So environmentalism can be focused on how we live,

but, it can also be focused on how many of us are living. And I was wondering if if Gandhi ever despaired about population growth, either in South Asia, or in the world, or elsewhere. Not elsewhere, not meaning Mars.

Ramachandra Guha:

Not really, and this is a very old debate among environmentalists. Is it population in absolute terms or the population versus resource consumed by sections of the population. And of course you know a Bangladeshi diplomat famously said in the UN in the 1970s that you know, if you go to an American supermarket you find not only that one Bangladeshi you know, that seventy Bangladeshis consumers one as much as one American you know.

Ten Bangladeshis consume as much as one American dog, because you go to a supermarket and you see all those dog food things being sold. So there's a problem with making population the most important thing, it is not. It is, obviously, there's a finite number of human beings this world can sustain, but as soon as you prioritize population, you are stigmatizing the poorer parts of the world, and the poorer parts of the richer countries.

There are too many Ram Guhas who – because I live in a nice house, I drive a car. If you look at my carbon footprint, it's that of eighty average Indians, so I always have a problem with making population the centre of the matter.

Questioner #7:

Thank you – thank you Dr. Guha, I just wanted to ask this question that you spoke about Gandhi wanting science to be used on a more practical level, that was what he wanted as a practical application of science, and keeping that in mind, what do you think about India's recent foray into space and can that could that money, or those resources, have been used for clean water, environment, you know, just what are your thoughts on that.

Ramachandra Guha:

So no, I think there is nothing wrong with India going to space. It is wrong with the Prime Minister trying to claim political mileage out of it. You know, search for outside, and there's a something wrong with the Indian scientists – scientific community becoming complicit in the creation of a cult of personality.

So, I right now had the great privilege of occupying a chair for one year in Indian Institute of Science named after Satish Dhawan, who basically built India's space program. Satish Dhawan was an extraordinary scientist, he would have wanted space to be used not merely to demonstrate India's technological might but to use it to solve India's agricultural problems.

Satish Dhawan was someone who was deeply-he was the only major scientist who signed the petition for the Narmada movement about displacement right, now, so I can't say we shouldn't go into space, I think that-but when scientists become complicit in the construction of a personality cult, in a kind of machismo-kind-of-nationalism, that I won't support, that would be

my answer. I don't think we don't have money to-I don't think that would be, because, science is about search, creation, why can't Indians also go to space.

However, the problem is different. That even as our current government is showing so much interest in a space program, it is steadily undermining the institutions of scientific research that have been built over 60 years. For example: agriculture under the Indian Council of Agricultural Research, there are a hundred odd 100 institutes, 60 of them don't have full-time directors. Why don't they have full-time directors? Because under an archaic system the Prime Minister is all centralized. The experts can't decide, the Prime Minister has to sign off on each.

And the Prime Minister does not have the time, or has to make sure that the person appointed is totally loyal to him, before he signs. So, that is the truth, 60 out of 100. It's not a question of space, it's a question of the scientific infrastructure that we have that was built up by visionary Prime Ministers like Jawaharlal Nehru, and needs to be taken to that next level by people-by Prime Ministers who can live in the 21st century, because Nehru also made mistakes, you don't need a Nehru today.

And who can cultivate intellectual autonomy, so that, for example today you cannot appoint a vice chancellor of a university without the Prime Minister's office deciding. So those are the real problems of scientific research and expertise in India today, not space.

Questioner #8:

Thank you so much for your lecture, I was wondering if you could talk a little bit more in general, did Gandhi's ideas about gender and kind of bringing women more into the public sphere relate to his ideas about environmentalism at all, and if not, how do you think gender and environmentalism are important going forward in India?

Ramachandra Guha:

So firstly, the way to understand Gandhi and gender. Is that, from the perspective of 2019, Gandhi was a hopeless anti-feminist patriarch. From the perspective of 1919 when he lived and worked, he did more to bring women into public life than any other male of his time. So he did more than Churchill, or de Gaulle, or Mao, or Roosevelt, or Mackenzie King, or anyone. So in his movements in South Africa women went to jail. In 1924, at a time in which women did not have the vote across the Western world, Gandhi made sure that the Indian National Congress, India's preeminent party, had a female president, Sarojini Naidu.

In the Salt March of the 1930s women went to jail in a deeply conservative society, to come out this treatment, no one would marry you. So Gandhi, however, of course he was not a terribly modern feminist. He was ambivalent about women working, but he created the possibility of women in a very hierarchical, conservative, patriarchal society; Gandhi did enormous amounts to bring women into the public sphere. And in some ways we've gone backwards though.

So, one of Gandhi's great-great-great female associates was someone called Hansa Mehta who was in Indian constituent assembly, and who incidentally helped frame the UN Declaration of Human Rights. And among among her contributions to the UN Declaration of Human Rights, were to change man to humanity. She was one of the females mentored by Gandhi. After independence she became vice-chancellor of a new university in Baroda.

One of whose products is India's only post-independence Nobel laureate, this physicist Venki Ramakrishnan. Now, no good Indian university today has a female vice chancellor, because the men have come back. So, that says Gandhi was a pioneer in bringing women to public life but of course, he did not have the ideas you and me would have. My daughter would find him a hopeless reactionary and some respects he was in the way he treated his wife for example, he expected his wife to follow him. Right, but he did bring a lot of women into public life.

Now in professional life, gender and environmentalism, it is a long and complex debate. I urge you to read the writings of the Indian economist Veena Agarwal, if you've not read them; you you know her writings? Yeah, so I think that of course that, it's somewhere, that's very important, I mean I think, she's talked about it, and Gandhi didn't really talk about that. But he did say this: that he was not a feminist, but he did much more to bring women into public life than any other political, male political leaders of this day.

Sharada Srinivasan:

I follow the question on gender, so in the last few years we have seen quite a bit of revisionist history going back to Gandhi, saying he's a racist and bringing down his statues in some parts of Africa, and also within India quite a few critical scholars talking about Gandhi as a casteist. So how do we do we abandon Gandhi, how do we engage with all this criticism? It would be nice to hear from someone like you.

Ramachandra Guha:

I think you know, he wrote a great deal, and you know a lot of it is-his ideas evolved. So if you take both race and caste, Gandhi was a racist as a young man. He goes to South Africa in the 1890s and he's a racist. He had-you know, Indians are racist. They are. That culture, including, you know as the [inaudible] in 2020 also they're racist. Gandhi thought as a young man when he was in South Africa, that the Europeans were the most civilized, Indians were almost as civilized, and Africans were backward.

But it in his 20 years in South Africa he outgrew that racism. And by the time he left, he had decisively repudiated it, and proof of this is found in the statement he makes in the 20s and 30s, his conversations with people like W. E. B. Du Bois, with Howard Thurman who was Martin Luther King's mentor, who goes to Sarah Graham and talks to Gandhi, and whom Gandhi says, it is through you, negroes which the term of the time, that the message of non-violence already the word. So, much of the criticisms of Gandhi are racist-motivated, uninformed, anachronistic.

Likewise with caste, he slowly moves-I mean I talked about is a great length in McMaster yesterday, he begins by saying untouchability is bad, but the caste system can remain. Then the next step is to go towards promoting intermixing, as in the temple entry movement, interdining and finally intermarriage as well. And Gandhi had this great capacity evolve and grow, partly based on experience. With race it was experience; the longer he lived in South Africa, the more he saw the Africans, worked with them, and saw that you couldn't just you know dismiss them in a patronizing or prejudiced way.

With caste, offer this critique, I mean if you look at the evolution of his views on caste, it is the great social reformer Narayana Guru, and then Ambedkar who push him towards taking a more critical position. Unfortunately a lot of the criticism of Gandhi is, you know, based on selective quotation out of context. He's continuously evolving you know, and moving towards a more capacious understanding of the world.

This is not to say that he was flawless, or fault-less. I mean, for example his treatment of his wife, his family, ashramites, his experiments with celibacy which placed a burden on his people, I mean yeah.

Questioner #9

Hi, I just wanted to say thank you so much your presentation was a really interesting perspective for me that I've never heard before. But my question is I've been studying the Indian independence revolution for a while in a couple different classes, and I know that there are very many different perspectives, and different nationalists that worked for different things during the movement, and obviously, Gandhi is one type of perspective but, did this environmental perspective permeate to any other nationalists, or was it just just him.

Ramachandra Guha:

But, again I didn't have time in my talk but your question allows me to elaborate on this. There were other people in the 20s and 30s, before India became independent, warning India not to emulate, mindlessly Western styles of industrial development. There were other early environmentalists in India. Very active.

Two of them were Gandhi's close followers, one was an economist called J.C. Kumar Appa, who greatly inspired E.F. Schumacher's "The Small is Beautiful" and was an environmental economist, there's a new biography of J.C. Kumar Appa called "The Web of Freedom." So he's in the 20s and 30s – here is an economist saying when we become independent we must find most sustainable forms of energy, and technology to develop. He's one. Another person, I briefly mentioned Albert Howard who is a pioneer of organic agriculture who actually worked in India for many years.

The third person, who was a great personal favorite of mine, and on whom I hope one day to write a little bit, was a Scottish town planner called Patrick Geddes, who lived in India in the 1920s. And who, unlike Gandhi, recognized that we were also an urban civilization. And drew a

series of town plans on how to make Indian cities more habitable, how to conserve natural, and cultural heritage, and how to you know, promote sustainability in terms of water, and transport within.

So there were a series of precocious environmental thinkers in India, in the 20s and 30s, who after we became independent, the political and intellectual elite comprehensively disregarded as backward reactionaries who had no relevance to India becoming strong, modern, industrialized. And then in the 1970s you had the rebirth of environmentalism, to the movements I described.

So there was a lot of interest, Gandhi was not the only person thinking along these lines, but he was the only political leader thinking along this.

David B. MacDonald:

Just two very quick questions. My mom's from Trinidad where a lot of indentured laborers live, and I'm just wondering if you could comment maybe on Gandhi's view of the British Caribbean and Indians there, and secondly what what happened to Gandhi's kids, I mean that some of them seem to have really fallen off the rails, and I'm wondering if you could comment a bit on that because it's-I'm always fascinated by his personal story of that.

So I mean on the second question, if you have the patience to read 1600 volumes of my biography you will get all the details haha. But very briefly, Gandhi had four children. With the first he had a deeply problematic relationship, Harilal, whom he expected too much off, and who was like destroyed by his father's expectation, became an alcoholic, and there is a wonderful film on him, Harilal.

The second son, Manilal, stayed in South Africa and was part of the anti-apartheid struggle, and was known to Nelson Mandela and so on, and there is a good biography of him. The third son, Ramdas, just had a quiet life in Nagpur, the fourth son, Devdas, was a major figure in the Indian independence struggle, and the editor of the major nationalist newspaper "The Hindustan Times" for 15 years, and went to jail and so on, so, that's the story of the children.

On the first, you said you come from Trinidad, you know Gandhi may not even have known where Trinidad was, he was not a pretty well-read man, but he had an extraordinary English associate called C.F. Andrews, who was a Christian priest, I mean a mark of Gandhi's capacious Catholicism, Gandhi's closest friend was a British Christian priest called Charles Freer Andrews, whom he met in South Africa when Gandhi was fighting for the indentured labourers in South Africa.

And then Gandhi goes back to India in 1915, and C.F. Andrews spends the next 15 years traveling through the Caribbean, through Fiji, through Kenya, campaigning successfully for the abolition of indentured labourers. So the campaign to abolish indentured labor in the Caribbean, and in Fiji, and in East Africa, is led by one of Gandhi's-inspired by one of Gandhi's

closest associates, quite a remarkable man, C.F. Andrews and you can read his 8 biographies. Thank you.

Craig Johnson:

Well, thank you. Before you leave, you're not quite done yet. Ram, thank you so much for a wonderful talk, I think your exposition has really opened our eyes into, both the life of Gandhi, but also the implications that his life continues to have in the world today. It's a small token of our appreciation, a hint it's not one of your books, but thank you very much, thank you so much.