
UNIT 1 INTRODUCING GANDHI

Structure

- 1.1 Introduction
 - Aims and Objectives
- 1.2 Gandhi's Methodology
- 1.3 Synthesis of the Material and the Spiritual
- 1.4 Nationalism and Internationalism
- 1.5 Summary
- 1.6 Terminal Questions

Suggested Readings

1.1 INTRODUCTION

"The greatest fact in the story of man on earth is not his material achievement, the empires he has built and broken but the growth of his soul from age to age in its search for truth and goodness. Those who take part in this adventure of the soul secure an enduring place in the history of human culture. Time has discredited heroes as easily as it has forgotten everyone else, but the saints remain. The greatness of Gandhi is more in his holy living than in his heroic struggles, in his insistence on the creative power of the soul and its life-giving quality at a time when the destructive forces seem to be in the ascendant."

- **Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan**

How does one introduce Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi? As a frail man, striding across the globe like a colossus? As the indomitable champion of social justice and human rights? As a 'half-naked' saint seeking complete identification with the poor and the deprived, silently meditating at the spinning wheel, striving to find the path of salvation for the suffering humanity?

It was Winston Churchill who contemptuously described Gandhi as a 'half-naked fakir' and an 'old humbug', adding that it was "alarming and nauseating to see Mr. Gandhi, a seditious Middle Temple lawyer, striding half-naked up the steps to the Vice-Regal Palace, to parley on equal terms with the representative of the King Emperor". However, the eminent historian, Will Durant, in his *Story of Civilization*, commenting on historic developments in China and India in the first half of the 20th century, wrote:

China followed Sun Yat Sen, took up the sword and fell into the arms of Japan. India, weaponless, accepted as her leader, one of the strangest figures in history and gave to the world the unprecedented phenomenon of a revolution led by a saint, and waged without a gun ... He did not mouth the name of Christ, but acted as if he accepted every word of the Sermon on the Mount. Not since St. Francis of Assisi has any life known to history been so marked by gentleness, disinterestedness, simplicity and forgiveness of enemies.

Of all the great figures of the 20th century, Gandhi has perhaps best stood the test of time. In the aftermath of a century of unprecedented mass violence, many see in him the prophet of the only possible future for mankind, a future without hatred, greed and lust for power. Interest in Gandhi's thought and actions, far from diminishing, are on the increase, and his message to the world appears uniquely relevant. He remains however, in many ways, an enigma.

One of the greatest paradoxes in relation to Gandhi is the contrast between the diversity of perceptions of him in his lifetime, and the very limited range of iconic representations retained of him by posterity.

In his lifetime, Gandhi had been perceived successively and simultaneously as a Bolshevik, a fanatic, a trouble-maker, a hypocrite, an eccentric, a reactionary, a revolutionary, a saint, a renouncer, a messiah, and an avatar. He was likened both to Lenin and to Jesus Christ, indicating the wide scope of representations. After his death, two views of him have become dominant. In India, he is celebrated as the 'Father of the Nation'; outside India, he is remembered as an apostle of non-violence. Such impoverishment in the range of representations is partly due to the selective way in which collective memory works, but it also owes a lot to deliberate attempts at appropriating him.

Aims and Objectives

After studying this Unit, you will be able to understand:

- The basic unity of purpose and aim in Gandhian thought.
- How Gandhi discussed social, economic and political problems from a higher moral and humanistic vantage point.
- The necessity to study Gandhian thought both in its entirety and in its setting and context.
- How Gandhi straddles the two worlds of nationalism and internationalism effortlessly.

1.2 GANDHI'S METHODOLOGY

Looking back from the vantage point of the first decade of the 21st century, it seems nothing short of a miracle as to how, in the first decade of the 20th century, Gandhi launched his crusades against racialism, colonialism, runaway industrialism, religious fundamentalism and violence. He heroically opposed the treatment of his fellow-countrymen in South Africa by courting for himself the humiliation of the humblest Indian so that he might, in his own person, face the punishment meted out for disobedience. When he called for non-cooperation with the British in India, he himself disobeyed the law and insisted that he must be among the first to go to prison. When he denounced the adoption by India of Western industrialism, he installed a spinning wheel in his own house and laboured at it daily with his own hands. When he set out to combat inter-communal violence, he faced death by starvation, in an act of penance, for the errors and sins of others.

Gandhi taught us the doctrine of *Satyagraha*, not as a passive submission to evil but as an active and positive instrument for the peaceful solution of all kinds of differences – personal, national or international. He showed us that the human spirit is more powerful than the mightiest of weapons. He applied moral values to political action and pointed

out that ends and means can never be separated, for the means ultimately govern the end. If the means are evil, then the end itself becomes distorted and at least partly evil. Any society based on injustice must necessarily harbour the seeds of conflict and decay within it, so long as it does not get rid of that evil.

In Gandhi, there was a confluence of different influences which guided him to mould a mighty instrument of Satyagraha and gave direction to his mission: A Gujarati hymn from India, a New Testament from Palestine, a book from Russia, a pamphlet from America, a book and the Suffragette influence from Britain, and many more. All these influences came together to lead Gandhi, as if by a hand of destiny, into the battlefield of the 20th century to wage one of the noblest battles that have been fought by a single human being for the liberation of an entire nation. They combined to make Gandhi the greatest non-violent revolutionary of the age.

Gandhi was not an intellectual in the academic sense of the term. He was not a scholar or a philosopher. He was not a theoretician. His thinking had the quality of a creative genius. He was pre-eminently a man of action. He has written a great deal but his writings are designed as a guide to action and not for the acquisition of knowledge. They are generally concerned with the solution of his actual problems, arising out of the many-sided and complex situations of his time. The discussion of theory is always brief and sketchy. As soon as Gandhi had an idea or a plan, he tried to put it into practice and induced others to do likewise. In the latter case, he had naturally to explain his ideas and plans. But the explanations were brief and suited to the person, place and occasion. The guidance given was practical. Generally the instructions and the explanations were conveyed through correspondence, newspaper articles or brought out in committee discussions and speeches. Gandhi has written a few books. But even these are concerned with particular problems. They are not written with the object of explaining his system of thought rationally and logically argued in all its implications. The writings are generally free from references to other thinkers and authors. For popularising his ideas and converting the people to his way of thinking and action, Gandhi, as a practical reformer, relied more on example than on precept or preaching.

Whatever their external form of presentation and expression, Gandhi's ideas are new and revolutionary. They arise out of the creative mind of an individual to whose reforming zeal the social situation and the difficulties of those times are a challenge. For him historical precedents and examples are no barrier to fresh thinking and discovery.

Gandhi did not acquire his ideas and knowledge merely from books. He did not pass his time in libraries and museums poring over musty volumes. Much of his knowledge was the result of direct contact with life and the practical experience it offered. He, therefore, placed his ideas before the public not in the language of the learned but in that of the average intelligent man and woman. He was a man of the masses and spoke to them in their own simple language, which they understood. He addressed them not about what he had read and studied in books but what he had seen, sensed, experienced and thought about. He described his own observations and his reactions to them. This is the method that has characterised great religious reformers and prophets.

Gandhi offers no such convenient theories, logically and mathematically worked out. There are, as we have said, many gaps in reasoning, and apparent contradictions. Gandhi thought so rapidly that he jumped over many connecting links in the chain of reasoning. These links the practical worker or the theoretical student has to provide from his own intelligence, observation and experience.

Gandhi discussed economic and political problems from a higher moral and humanistic point of view. If, therefore, a young man wants to study Gandhi's economics and politics, he will have to content himself with very meagre systematic literature on these subjects. He will have to wade through a mass of material which he must arrange and systematise for himself. It is the first major difficulty in understanding Gandhi's thought and schemes of reform. His ideas need to be systematised, co-ordinated and correlated. The trends in his thinking on the many subjects he discussed are scattered throughout his writings. They have to be arranged.

Gandhi views life as an organic whole. His concrete schemes are, therefore, intimately and organically connected with one another. Unity is achieved through some definite guiding and regulating ideas, values and principles.

1.3 SYNTHESIS OF THE MATERIAL AND THE SPIRITUAL

Gandhi seeks to synthesise the material and the spiritual, the individual and the collective life. He has, therefore, to deal with both the sets. As occasion demands, he emphasises the one or the other. For instance, he often said that he could "carry God to the poor in a bowl of rice". This being so, it is easy to misunderstand and misinterpret him by focussing attention and emphasis on one side and ignoring the rest of his thought and thus distorting and perverting his meaning and intention. Often he has been attacked both by the spiritualists and the materialists. The former have accused him of lowering the purity of spiritual life by mixing it with economics and politics. The socialists and the communists have often charged Gandhi with confusing economic and political issues with his ideas of truth and non-violence and his philosophy of means and ends. They asserted that they were out to achieve the political and economic emancipation of the people and should have nothing to do with moral and spiritual issues. People could not and, do not therefore, understand Gandhi's insistence on spiritual values. They think that the questions of political freedom and economic equality are the supreme issues and public attention must not be diverted from these to moral problems which are irrelevant. They argue that nobody has the right to sacrifice the economic and political interests of the masses to considerations of morality; the destiny of a nation or of the masses cannot be played with like that. Individuals may have the right, and under certain circumstances even the duty, to sacrifice their personal interests to achieve moral ends, but a nation has no right to sacrifice its material interests for moral ends. Such critics fail to see that Gandhi never sacrificed what he considered the true interests of the country or of the masses; only he did not view those interests narrowly. He saw no inherent conflict between a country's real political and material interests and the fundamentals of morality. He thought that neither individuals nor groups can dispense with moral considerations.

Gandhi was often accused of having accentuated the communal problem by his effort at spiritualising politics. Religion, the critics said, must be kept apart from politics. Gandhi's effort to make politics conform to the fundamentals of morality is confused by critics with a desire to establish a theocracy in India.

It is also complained that he is against all scientific knowledge and discovery because he advocates the pre-eminence of human values over mere physical conquest of nature and the multiplication of material wants and goods. Since he advocates education through purposeful activity, he is supposed to be against all intellectual knowledge. His critics fail to understand

that what he aims at is deeper and fuller intellectual knowledge, which can be acquired best through co-operative work and experience.

Gandhi sees no conflict between the national good and the international good. The narrow nationalists, however, have not hesitated to denounce his humanism as surrender of national interests. The intellectual internationalists, on the contrary, accused Gandhi of narrow and aggressive nationalism. Both sides support their respective arguments with what they consider appropriate quotations cut off from their context.

Gandhi's thought must be considered in its entirety and in its proper setting in Indian conditions of the time and the problems he had to solve. The local and temporal over-emphasis, wherever it exists, must be toned down to bring out the proper relation of the parts to the whole scheme of his thought and philosophy. Any point or points under-emphasised must be clearly brought out. Sometimes gaps must be filled to make the thought and the expression consistent with the whole scheme. Often, the local colour has to be toned down to bring out a universal principle. Above all, the whole thought has to be correlated to Gandhi's own conduct and life.

Gandhi's thoughts and ideas are new and revolutionary and yet he claims no originality for them. He often asserts that in his ideas he merely follows in the footsteps of the old prophets and reformers and tries to "fulfil the law and the commandments" and is offering nothing new to the world. This was not said merely out of modesty. Gandhi, in disclaiming originality, is only working in consonance with the genius of his people.

Truth and non-violence, to Gandhi, were "as old as the hills". His application of these principles to politics and to collective life generally, he would have us believe, is also old. He only claims to use these on an extended canvas to enable him to offer a solution to the new problem, created by ever-increasing and more destructive weapons of violence invented by modern science and technology. The cottage and village industry programme is, of course, old, in spite of its new application and implications in an age of centralised and mechanised big industry. Basic education is at the root of all education. All knowledge, to begin with, was acquired by humanity through observation, activity and experiment.

Gandhi's reputation for originality is accepted by the learned at its face value. They think that he tries to foist on the people some outworn and discarded thought or institution. In the words of the so-called radicals, he tries to put back the hands of the clock of progress. The contention is that what he advocates has been tried in the past often enough and found wanting. The criticism misses the revolutionary aim and spirit underlying Gandhi's thought. The form is old but the spirit, the intention and the application are, new. It is not so much the particular activity undertaken that is revolutionary, as the urge behind it, the spirit that inspires it and the purpose in pursuance of which it is undertaken. Removal of untouchability, advocacy of cottage industry, prohibition and even non-cooperation were advocated by previous reformers in India. Gandhi has, however, made them dynamic and fit them into a vast revolutionary movement, for creating a more just and equitable social order. They do not merely reproduce the old urges or the old mentality.

For instance, his advocacy of cottage and village industries did not mean that people should forever remain content with their present oppressive poverty. His advocacy of decentralised industry in preference to centralised, mechanical big industry had a special purpose under the circumstances prevailing in India. It was to provide work for the unemployed and under-employed starving masses. As in former days, people were not compelled to take to it for want of scientific and technical knowledge. Now it served a new national purpose, that

of providing the unemployed a better substitute than the unemployment dole in the West. It cannot, therefore, be considered as a backward or revivalist movement.

Closely connected with this tendency of Gandhi to repudiate all claim to originality is his habit of fusing old terms and phrases for his revolutionary ideas and activities. He avoids the use of foreign and technical terms. It is quite possible that if the *charkha* have been as fashionable in the modern times as knitting is, however superfluous it sometimes may be, it would have stood a better chance with the upper classes than it does today. After all, considering our tropical climate and the extent of unemployment and underemployment, the charkha is both more useful to the individual and the nation than knitting. If in his political writing Gandhi, instead of using the terms 'Non-Violence' and 'Truth' that have moral and spiritual associations and are readily understood by the mass mind, had used the words 'Disarmament' and 'Open Diplomacy', there was every chance of his being better understood and appreciated by the modern mind. He would, in that case, have been regarded as a practical politician. He would have given proof of working for international peace. He might have even won the Nobel Peace Prize.

If again, Gandhi, instead of using the terms 'village and cottage industries' which the masses understand, had used the term decentralisation of industry, he would have been perhaps better understood by the educated. If his new scheme of education had been called poly-technicalisation of education as it is styled in Russia, it would have been perhaps better received by the educated. If instead of using the term 'Ramaraj' he had talked of democracy he would have been better appreciated by the educated in India. The modern mind has to free itself from this "tyranny of words" before it can understand and appreciate Gandhi's thought.

Gandhi does not belong to the company of nature's great ones. He belongs rather to the ordinary run of humanity, from whose ranks exceptional individuals have sometimes arisen, through sheer force of their character and will power, by the painful process of growth and evolution. In his early life, Gandhi gave little promise of his future work and mission. His career as a student was not marked by any particular outstanding ability. He says he was "good". He went to England to qualify for the bar, as any ambitious young man belonging to a middle-class family in those days might have done. His going to South Africa was a professional accident, which might have happened to any young Gujarati barrister of those days. His prolonged stay there had no political urge behind it. It came about almost through a fortuitous circumstance in which design and choice played no part. All that distinguished him in his early age was his truthful nature, his utter sincerity and honesty.

The continuous growth and evolution of Gandhi's personality and his ideas through the years present another difficulty in systematising his thought. Often it is not easy to discover the guiding lines in their purity or to reconcile varying statements made at different times and under different circumstances. There are apparent inconsistencies. Answering the charge of inconsistency, he says: "At the time of writing I never think of what I have said before. My aim is not to be consistent with my previous statements of a given question, but to be consistent with truth as it may present itself to meet the given moment. The result has been that I have grown from truth to truth; I have saved my memory an un-due strain and, what is more, whenever I have been obliged to refer to my writings even of fifty years ago with the latest, I have discovered no inconsistency between the two".

Yet another great difficulty in systematising Gandhi's thought arises from his making no distinction between the theoretically possible and what was practically so. In 1920, he talked

of winning 'swaraj' in one year, provided the nation carried out the programmes he had placed before it. That a nation, with centuries of slavery behind it, would be able to fulfil the programmes was only a theoretical possibility. Practically it was not only not possible but also not even probable.

In his book *Hind Swaraj*, he has talked of machinery and the factories as if these could be altogether eliminated from the life of a nation. He also talks of doctors and drugs as if they could be entirely dispensed with. There are many institutions whose functioning can and should be modified for social health; but Gandhi would talk as if he wanted their entire elimination and held that this was possible.

Gandhi's habit of stating his propositions and plans as if they were practical, presents one more difficulty in interpreting his thought. He always said that the theoretically possible was also the practical. The difference between the possible and the ideal must be clearly brought out to understand Gandhi's thought. Gandhi's thought then must be judged and evaluated on its own merits and not always on Gandhi's arguments. The student must not content himself with Gandhi's reasoning and his style or the words and the expressions he used. Like every great reformer his thought is greater than his words and arguments. Often his conduct is more revealing and eloquent than the arguments he advances for a particular course of action. In studying him, therefore, note must be taken not only of the spoken or written word but also of his life, the way he faced and met critical situations, organised institutions and behaved towards friends and opponents. His public and private life was an open book. Therefore, his writings must be studied along with it. The writings alone may not bring out the full implications of his philosophy of life-individual and social. Further, the student must rely on his own intelligence, knowledge and experience for a proper understanding of Gandhi's ideas, policies and programmes.

1.4 NATIONALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

The popular image of Gandhi depicts him as an ardent nationalist who was engaged in selfless and dedicated service for the liberation of India from British colonial domination, through non-violent techniques of political action. This, indeed, is true. Gandhi was deeply involved in the struggle for political emancipation and social and economic reconstruction of India, to which he devoted his whole attention. However, what is often not understood is that Gandhi did so in a world context. His contributions to Indian political independence should not be viewed as concerning only one or two nations in an isolated manner. Gandhi himself had said: *"My mission is not merely the freedom of India, though today it undoubtedly engrosses practically the whole of my life and the whole of my time. But through the realisation of the freedom of India, I hope to realise and carry on the mission of brotherhood of man. My patriotism is not an exclusive thing. It is all-embracing and I should reject that patriotism which sought to mount upon the distress or exploitation of other nationalities."*

Gandhi's movement for national independence was, in a way, aimed at the reordering of the world power structure, which was based on the imperial-colonial pattern of international relations. He wanted freedom for India, not to isolate her from the rest of the world, but to promote international cooperation. True international cooperation was possible only when the interacting nations were sovereign and equal before international law. In Gandhi's own words, *"My notion of Purna Swaraj is not isolated independence but healthy and dignified interdependence. My nationalism, fierce though it is, is not exclusive,*

not designed to harm any nation or individual. Legal maxims are not so legal as they are moral. I believe in the eternal truth of 'sic utere tuo ut alienum non laedas' - use thy own property so as not to injure thy neighbour's." By ending colonialism, he hoped to remove one of the root causes of exploitation and domination of weaker countries by stronger ones.

As Erik Erikson in his book, 'Gandhi's Truth' points out, Gandhi and the Indian nationalists maintained that British colonialism had resulted in the exploitation and draining of the Indian sub-continent in four areas of national life, the economic and political, cultural and spiritual. Therefore, Gandhi had declared, "We hold it to be a sin before man and God to submit any longer to a rule that has caused this four-fold disaster to our country."

Gandhi attacked the evil at its very root; he wanted to destroy the institution of colonialism, to begin with in India, and thereby put a stop to the 'four-fold exploitation' with a view to restore India's identity. Gandhi wanted to achieve this in a novel way through a non-violent revolution, through the *Satyagraha* movement. Unlike the Marxist-Leninist line which undermines the individual role in history and maintains that an unjust social and economic system can be attacked by bringing the state under the dictatorship of the proletariat through a revolution, Gandhi held that "the root of the problem does not lie in the authority of the state, but in the character of the individual which has made the existence of that state possible." Therefore, Gandhi set to bring about a radical transformation of the unjust social system not through coercion or through transference of power to a centralised state, but through individual reformation and non-violent social and political action. This he called the *Satyagraha* movement, a movement led by a moral force which is generated by a sincere desire to follow the path of Truth in individual behaviour and social action.

Satyagraha was not merely an instrument for realisation of political, economic and other material ends but also a state of spiritual and moral self-transformation in man. Through such a movement he strived to secure an India of his dreams, an independent India free from colonial domination, and where the individual would have the integrity to contribute to a high moral order which would create and maintain social justice and harmony.

After obtaining political independence, Gandhi wanted India to become an ideal democracy. A democracy established on the principle of non-violence was to be of a unique kind. Gandhi's ideal non-violent democracy was a federation of decentralised, self-sufficient, self-administered, interdependent and cooperative village republics. In such a democracy power was decentralised. In an ideal non-violent democracy of Gandhi's conception there was no need of a state. Gandhi had said, "Political power means capacity to regulate national life through representations. If national life becomes so perfect as to become self-regulated no representation becomes necessary. There is then a state of enlightened anarchy. In such a state everyone is his own ruler. He rules himself in such a manner that he is never a hindrance to his neighbour. In the ideal state, therefore, there is no political power, because there is no state." But Gandhi knew the limitations in realising such an ideal. So he added, "But the ideal is never fully realised in life."

Here Gandhi's 'anarchy' is not the one that leads to disorder but that which relates to a condition of statelessness as a result of the existence of an enlightened harmony that dispenses with the necessity of a state to enforce behaviour patterns. The power structure of a non-violent society would be distributed in such a way that each individual or each cooperative unit of individuals would constitute a power unit, and society would equilibrate itself on the basis

of the existence of this power structure. In his ideal stateless democracy or enlightened anarchy, there was no use of force in any form, whereas society acquired equilibrium by individual perfection. Such a non-violent society would consist of groups of settled villages and life would be regulated through cooperation, bread-labour and mutual love. Individuals in a non-violent society were to work for the establishment of a social order which ensured the greatest good of all.

A non-violent India was expected to strive for removal of injustice anywhere and crusade for the cause of suffering humanity in any part of the world. Gandhi's patriotism "was not exclusive; it was calculated not only not to hurt another nation but to benefit all in the true sense of the word." Gandhi had said that "we want freedom for our country, but not at the expense or exploitation of others, not so as to degrade other countries. I do not want the freedom of India if it means the extinction of England or the disappearance of Englishmen. I want freedom of my country, so that other countries may learn something from my free country, so that the resources of my country might be utilised for the benefit of mankind. My idea of nationalism is that my country may become free, that if need be, the whole country may die so that the human race may live. There is no room for race hatred there. Let that be our nationalism." His movements for self-government (*swaraj*) and for the use of home-made goods (*Swadeshi*) might have come into conflict with the interests of other countries, especially those of England. But then Gandhi's movements were directed primarily against the injustices done by England in keeping another nation in subjugation by force, thereby denying it opportunities for free development. He believed that by enabling India to be free he was not only helping India but also Britain in an indirect way, i.e. by removing the possibility for England to be unjust to another nation. Besides, the moral strength, which an independent India could give to other subject nations, was another factor which convinced Gandhi that true nationalism was a contribution to internationalism. Thus, Gandhi wanted national independence before international cooperation': "You want cooperation between nations for the salvation of civilization, I want it too, but cooperation presupposes free nations worthy of cooperation. If I am to help in creating or restoring peace and goodwill and resist disturbances thereof, I must have the ability to do so and I cannot do so unless my country has come to its own. At the present moment, the very movement for freedom in India is India's contribution to peace. For so long as India is a subject nation, not only is she a danger to peace, but also to England which exploits India. Other nations may tolerate today England's imperialist policy and her exploitation of other nations, but they certainly do not appreciate it; and they would gladly help in the prevention of England becoming a greater and greater menace every day. Of course, you will say that free India can become a menace herself. But let us assume that she will behave herself with her doctrine of non-violence, if she achieves her freedom through it and for all her bitter experiences of being a victim of exploitation". Gandhi's prediction, indeed, came true. India's achievement of freedom generated a wave of nationalistic movements in many subjected nations. The Afro-Asian resurgence and realisation by colonial powers of the necessity to end colonial rule and the subsequent gaining of freedom by several countries could be linked with Gandhi's freedom movement.

Thus a colonially oriented world social structure has given way to a more democratically oriented one. The world power structure underwent a transformation in a non-exploitative direction. Yet the world is not devoid of exploitation, the old imperial-colonial pattern of power structure has been replaced by new types of alignments and power blocs. The world society of today retains its feudal characteristics in spite of the fact that colonies have received their freedom. The economic domination of a few countries still indirectly influences the less affluent

developing countries. The time lag in economic development and technical progress is fully utilised to compensate for the loss of colonial power or realise neo-imperialistic ambitions. Though every national independent state is sovereign and such sovereignty is respected and all states are treated as equals before international law, in actuality the world scene today is a big power gamble in spite of the existence of the United Nations. "It (the United Nations) has already revealed its impotence to settle any serious conflict among the great powers. The great and small powers ignore it in connection with most important problems - the United Nations has degenerated into a mere screen for the power politics of the artificial and incidental majority of world state. Having neither the moral authority nor adequate physical power, it cannot perform the miracle of eliminating war and erecting a temple of eternal peace." (Pitirim Sorokin).

It is in this connection that the Gandhian view of a world social order merits consideration. Gandhi did not believe in the efficacy of a United Nations, because the United Nations, for all its virtues, is no help to creating, maintaining or enlarging the number of states. A modern state, with its military strength, always possesses potentialities for suppression of freedom internally and creation of wars or international conflicts externally. The establishment of a world state by merely extending the characteristics of a modern state, with or without surrendering national sovereignties, would suffer from the deficiencies of the latter, when viewed from a Gandhian angle. A world sovereign state above all national states may, after all, not be able to establish or maintain a peaceful world society, in spite of the military strength or power it may possess. Gandhi's opposition to the U.N. is to be understood in this perspective. He was opposed to the U.N. in so far as it possessed the attributes of a nation-state in regard to military potential and in regard to its opposition to decentralisation of power and freedom of human development. However, it may not be construed from this that Gandhi was totally opposed to any type of international organisation. If the U.N. functioned on the basis of the moral principles, Gandhi would not have difficulty in accepting the same.

The following quotations of Gandhi are of significance in the context of his understanding of Nationalism and Internationalism:

- "I would like to see India free and strong so that she may offer herself as a willing and pure sacrifice for the betterment of the world. The individual being pure sacrifices himself for the family, the latter for the village, the village for the district, the district for the province, the province for the nation, the nation for all."
- "My religion has no geographical limits. There is no limit to extending our services to our neighbours across state-made frontiers."
- "I believe that true democracy can only be an outcome of non-violence. The structure of a world federation can be raised only on a foundation of non-violence and violence will have to be totally given up in world affairs".
- "I do want to think in terms of the whole world. My patriotism includes the good of mankind in general. Therefore, my service to India includes the service of humanity. Isolated independence is not the goal of the world state. It is voluntary independence. I want to make no grand claim for our country. But I see nothing grand or impossible about our expressing our readiness for universal interdependence rather than independence. I desire the ability to be totally independent without asserting the independence". Such a federation of independent sovereign states will not circumscribe the national state but would permit it full freedom, will remove the causes of friction and conflict that may arise from time to time and promote harmony and social justice.

In the words of Jawaharlal Nehru, “Gandhi was an intense nationalist; he was also at the same time a man who felt he had a message not only for India but for the world, and he ardently desired world peace. His nationalism, therefore, had a certain world outlook and was entirely free from any aggressive intent. Desiring the independence of India he had come to believe that a world federation of interdependent states was the only right goal, however distant that might be”.

The Gandhian model of power distribution in a national or world context is enunciated in the following statement which Gandhi made in elucidating his concept of decentralised state power: “There will be ever-widening, never-ascending circles - at last the whole becomes one life composed of individuals, never aggressive in their arrogance but ever humble, sharing the majesty of the oceanic circle of which they are integral units. Therefore, the outermost circumference will not wield power to crush the inner circle, but will give strength to all within and derive its own strength from the centre.”

The Gandhian view of a world social order is essentially one of a moral order. *Satyagraha* (soul force) symbolised for Gandhi the attainment of moral ends through moral means. *Satyagraha* as a philosophy of social action was not merely an instrument to attain political, economic and other material ends, but for the spiritual and moral transformation of man. It was a soul-force generated out of a motivation to follow the path of truth and non-violence and was based on self-help, self-sacrifice and faith in God.

Gandhi's theory of non-violence is a positive philosophy and not a passive ethics. It is based on the assumption that men who wish to practise it must have certain moral and spiritual pre-requisites, a positive love for all beings and the pursuit of truth. The tradition of non-violence perhaps existed in all cultures but Gandhi converted it into a practical ethics which could be applied in day to day life. This offered tremendous possibilities for contemporary India as well as the whole world. Here was an alternative to physical force which had so far been acknowledged as the *sine qua non* of the social order in the soul force (*Satyagraha*) or the spiritual and moral power.

Acharya Kripalani supplements this point in the following passage: “The moral principles which guide the conduct of individuals in the social field must also guide their conduct in the political and the international fields. If we are to be saved from the cruel contradictions of a moral man living in an immoral (or at best amoral) political and international world order, we must find a unifying principle in life which will save us from this moral dichotomy. This unifying principle, Gandhi holds, is supplied as in social life so in political and international life and conduct by morality.”

Assessing the contributions of Gandhi, Albert Schweitzer wrote, “Gandhi continues what Buddha began. In the Buddha, the spirit of love set itself the task of creating different spiritual conditions in the world; in Gandhi, it undertakes to transform all worldly conditions. Would the world tend to order itself in the directions indicated by Buddha and Gandhi or dismiss them as other worldly, Utopian, and set to destroy itself by the creation of artificial power blocs, perpetuation of exploitation and promotion of international conflicts? Sanity would undoubtedly advocate for choosing the twin path of spirituality and morality in international relations and establishment of a self-sustaining harmonious world social order. But are we sane?”

1.5 SUMMARY

Gandhi's life, lived in conformity with certain basic principles was, integrated and coordinated. It made a harmonious whole. His teachings and schemes of reform also

reflect the same integration and co-ordination, with a basic unity of purpose and aim. This unity is not always apparent to a superficial student of his life and his speeches and writings. The elements of the unity are there, but they have not been reduced to a system. Gandhi himself never attempted a systematisation of his thought. Like many of the old reformers and prophets, he was content to act in a given situation and solve life's problems, as they arose or presented themselves to him, in the light of his basic moral principles. Like them, he left the task of logical ordering and systematisation to others. The solutions he offered to the problems that confronted him, the country and even the world, were practical and often coloured by the times and circumstances in which they arose. It is no wonder that Gandhi created no new system of philosophy, creed or religion.

Gandhi's non-violence or *Satyagraha* was intended not only to solve national problems of injustice but also international conflicts and wars. He considered war as a morally degrading and brutalising phenomenon and hence, emphasised disarmament and creation of a non-violent civilisation. Pacifism, according to him, must be total and not partial, and must find its expression in a broad movement that seeks not merely abolition of war but of the entire non-pacifist civilisation. Gandhi maintained that the dread of atom bomb or nuclear weapons would not abolish wars or usher in a peaceful social order. A peaceful world social order was possible only through the positive philosophy of non-violence.

Gandhian principles of the moral order are not based on self-interest or individual enjoyment, but on the social objective of *sarvodaya*, or happiness for all. The logic of altruism cannot be deduced from egotism, the love of society from the love of oneself, the whole from the part. Gandhi's altruism was derived from the concept of mankind, even all creation. Gandhi's was a 'creative altruism', which was characterised by pure, continuous and unbounded love for all.

1.6 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Although Gandhi was not an intellectual or a scholar in the academic sense, his thinking had the quality of a creative genius. Substantiate.
2. Explain, with examples, how Gandhi synthesised the material and the spiritual.
3. What are the difficulties encountered by the student in systematising Gandhian thought?
4. What are Gandhi's views on nationalism and internationalism? How does he reconcile the two?

SUGGESTED READINGS

1. J.B. Kripalani., Gandhi – His Life and Thought, Publications Division, Government of India, New Delhi, 1971.
2. M.P. Mathai, M.S. John and Siby Joseph, ed., Meditations on Gandhi, Concept Publishing House, New Delhi, 2002.
3. Louis Fischer., The Life of Mahatma Gandhi, Harper Collins, London, 1982.
4. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan., Mahatma Gandhi – Essays and Reflections, Jaico Publishing House, Mumbai, 2005.
5. M.K. Gandhi., The Story of My Experiments with Truth, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 2007.

UNIT 2 FORMATIVE YEARS

Structure

2.1 Introduction

Aims and Objectives

2.2 Community, Family and Neighbourhood

2.3 Early Education

2.3.1 Tasting the forbidden fruit

2.4 Study in England

2.5 Summary

2.6 Terminal Questions

Suggested Readings

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This Unit will trace the beginnings of an extra-ordinary man. What role did Gandhi's community play in moulding his character? Similarly, what were his family and neighbourhood like, and what role did they play in instilling those sterling qualities and values that set him apart from other people? What were the experiences of his early education? After completing his matriculation, Gandhi chose to study law in England, and spent close to three years there. What experiences did he undergo there and how did they shape his character?

Aims and Objectives

After studying this Unit, you will be able to understand:

- The defining moments and incidents in Gandhi's early life.
- The role played by his parents, his immediate family, and his neighbourhood
- The role played by his school(s), his teachers and his friends in very impressionable periods of his life.
- The varied experiences he underwent as a law student in England.

2.2 COMMUNITY, FAMILY AND NEIGHBOURHOOD

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born at Porbandar in Gujarat on 2nd October 1869. He belonged to a respectable middle-class modh Bania family (businessmen), whose members had long ago abandoned their traditional caste occupation of trade, and taken to administrative service. His grandfather, father and uncle were Prime Ministers in some of the Indian Princely States in the peninsula of Kathiawar before Independence. About this, in his Autobiography, Gandhi says: "For three generations, from my grandfather, they have been Prime Ministers in several Kathiawar States."

Gandhi's grandfather, Uttamchand, served as Prime Minister to the princeling of Porbandar.

Uttamchand handed the office down to his son Karamchand who passed it to his brother Tulsidas. Karamchand was the father of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi.

Political intrigues forced grandfather Uttamchand out of the Prime Ministership of Porbandar and into exile in the nearby little state of Junagadh. There he once saluted the ruling Nawab with his left hand. Asked for an explanation, he said: "The right hand is already pledged to Porbandar!" Mohandas was proud of such loyalty: "My grandfather," he wrote, "must have been a man of principle."

Gandhi's father likewise left his position as Prime Minister to Rana Saheb Vikmatji, the ruler of Porbandar, and took the same office in Rajkot, another miniature Kathiawar principality, 120 miles to the north-west. Once, the British Political Agent spoke disparagingly of Thakor Saheb Bawajiraj, Rajkot's native ruler. Karamchand sprang to the defence of the ruler. The Agent ordered Karamchand to apologise. Karamchand refused and was forthwith arrested. But Gandhi's father stood his ground and was released after several hours. Subsequently he became Prime Minister of Wankaner.

"Karamchand Gandhi", his son Mohandas wrote, "had no education save that of experience; he was likewise 'innocent' of history and geography, but he was incorruptible and had earned a reputation for strict impartiality in his family as well as outside.' He was a lover of his clan, truthful, brave and generous, but short-tempered. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was the fourth and last child of his father's fourth and last marriage.

Gandhi's home life was cultured and the family, by Indian standards, was well-to-do. There were books in the house; they dealt chiefly with religion and mythology. Karamchand once owned a house in Porbandar, a second in Rajkot and a third in Kutiana, but in his last three years of illness, he lived modestly on a pension from the Rajkot prince. He left little property.

Gandhi's elder brother Laxmidas practised law in Rajkot and later became a treasury official in the Porbandar government. Karsandas, the other brother, served as Sub-Inspector of Police in Porbandar. Both brothers died while Mohandas K. Gandhi was still alive. A sister, Raliatben, four years his senior, survived him.

Monia, as the family affectionately called Mohandas, received the special treatment often accorded to a youngest child, and a nurse named Rambha was engaged to look after him. His warmest affection, however, went to his mother Putlibai. He sometimes feared his father, but he loved his mother and always remembered her 'saintliness' and her 'deeply religious' nature. Writing about her in his Autobiography, Mohandas states:

The outstanding impression my mother has left on my memory is that of saintliness. She was deeply religious. She would not think of taking her meals without her daily prayers. Going to 'Haveli' – the Vaishnava temple – was one of her daily duties. As far as my memory can go back, I do not remember her ever having missed the 'Chaturmas'. (Literally, a period of four months. A vow of fasting and semi-fasting is taken by the devout during the four months of the rains.) She would take the hardest vows and keep them without flinching. Illness was no excuse for relaxing them. I can recall her once falling ill, when she was observing the 'Chandrayana' vow, but the illness was not allowed to interrupt the observance. To keep two or three consecutive fasts was nothing to her. Living on one meal a day during 'Chaturmas' was a habit with her. Not content with that, she fasted every alternate day during one 'Chaturmas'. During another 'Chaturmas' she vowed not to have food without

seeing the sun. We children on those days would stand, staring at the sky, waiting to announce the appearance of the sun to our mother. Everyone knows that at the height of the rainy season, the sun often does not condescend to show his face. And I remember days when, at his sudden appearance, we would rush and announce it to her. She would run out to see with her own eyes, but by that time, the fugitive sun would be gone, thus depriving her of her meal. "That does not matter," she would say cheerfully, "God did not want me to eat today." And then she would return to her round of duties.

Gandhi records that his mother was also well informed about all matters of State, and was well respected for her intelligence. Gandhi would often accompany her to the court, and he remembers the many lively discussions she had with the widowed mother of the ruler, Thakore Saheb.

As was the custom in those days, Mohandas was married at the early age of thirteen. His bride was Kasturbai, the daughter of a Porbandar merchant named Gokuldas Makanji. About his early marriage, Gandhi writes in his Autobiography:

It is my painful duty to have to record here my marriage at the age of thirteen. As I see the youngsters of the same age about me who are under my care, and think of my own marriage, I am inclined to pity myself and to congratulate them on having escaped my lot. I can see no moral argument in support of such a preposterously early marriage.

It would be useful, and interesting to narrate one or two incidents involving the young couple. Gandhi had come across little pamphlets in which matters like child marriage and conjugal love had been discussed. Lifelong faithfulness to the wife, inculcated in these booklets as the duty of the husband, remained permanently imprinted in his heart. Furthermore, the passion for Truth was innate in him, and to be false to his wife, was therefore, out of question. But the lesson of faithfulness had also an untoward effect. To quote Gandhi:

If I should be pledged to be faithful to my wife, she also should be pledged to be faithful to me. The thought made me a jealous husband. Her duty was easily converted into my right to exact faithfulness from her. I had absolutely no reason to suspect my wife's fidelity, but jealousy does not wait for reasons. I must needs be forever on the lookout regarding her movements, and therefore she could not go anywhere without my permission. This sowed the seeds of a bitter quarrel between us. The restraint was virtually a sort of imprisonment. And Kasturbai was not the girl to brook any such thing. She made it a point to go out whenever and wherever she liked. More restraint on my part resulted in more liberty being taken by her and in my getting more and more cross. Refusal to speak to one another thus became the order of the day with us, married children. I think it was quite innocent of Kasturbai to have taken those liberties with my restrictions. How could a guileless girl brook any restraint on going to the temple or on going on visits to friends? If I had the right to impose restrictions on her, had she not also a similar right? All this is clear to me today. But at that time, I had to make good my authority as a husband!

In his Autobiography, Gandhi clearly acknowledged his love and passion for his wife and demanded it to be reciprocated. A bold admission by Gandhi regarding his passion even as his father was on deathbed, speaks volumes of his firm adherence to truthful speaking.

“If passion had not blinded me,” Gandhi ruminated forty years later, “I should have been spared the torture of separation from my father during his last moments. I should have been massaging him and he would have died in my arms...The shame of my carnal desire at the critical moment of my father’s death is a blot I have never been able to efface or forget,” writes Gandhi remorsefully, when he was nearly sixty.

2.3 EARLY EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS AND OUTSIDE

Gandhi’s initiated education was at a school in Porbandar, where he encountered more difficulty in mastering the multiplication table than in learning naughty names for the teacher.

Gandhi was about seven when his father left Porbandar for Rajkot to become a member of the Rajasthanik Court. At Rajkot, he was put into a primary school. From this school, he went to a suburban school and then to High School. During this period, Gandhi does not remember ever having told a lie, either to his teachers or to his school-mates. Being a shy child, he took as his books and his lessons as his sole companions. He inculcated the habit of being at school at the stroke of the hour, and to run back home as soon as school closed.

In his first year at the Alfred High School in Rajkot, when Mohandas was twelve, a British educational inspector named Mr. Giles came to examine the pupils. They were asked to spell five English words. Gandhi mis-spelt ‘kettle’. The regular teacher saw the mistake and motioned Mohandas to copy from his neighbour’s slate. Mohandas refused.

Recounting this incident in his Autobiography, Gandhi states:

I would not be prompted. It was beyond me to see that he wanted me to copy the spelling from my neighbour’s slate, for I had thought that the teacher was there to supervise us against copying. The result was that all the boys, except myself, were found to have spelt every word correctly. Only I had been stupid. The teacher tried later to bring this stupidity home to me, but without effect. I could never learn the art of ‘copying’.

Yet the incident did not in the least diminish my respect for my teacher. I was, by nature, blind to the faults of elders. Later I came to know of many other failings of this teacher, but my regard for him remained the same. For I had learnt to carry out the orders of elders, not to scan their actions.

Two other incidents of the same period are worth remembering.

One day, he came across a book purchased by his father, *Shravana Pitribhakti Nataka*, a play about Shravana’s devotion to his parents., which Mohandas read with intense interest. He also saw a picture of Shravana carrying, by means of slings fitted to his shoulders, his blind parents on a pilgrimage. These left an indelible impression on his mind. “Here is an example for you to copy,” Gandhi told himself.

Another play, ‘Harishchandra’, captured his heart. He was never tired of seeing it. “Why should all not be truthful like Harishchandra?” was the question Mohandas asked himself constantly. “To follow Truth and to go through all the ordeals Harishchandra went through was the one ideal it inspired in me!” writes Gandhi in his Autobiography.

“I was not regarded as a dunce at the High School!” writes Gandhi. He always enjoyed

the affection of his teachers. Certificates of progress and character used to be sent to his parents every year, and he does not recollect ever getting a bad certificate. In fact, in the fifth and sixth standard, he even obtained scholarships of Rs. Four and Ten respectively, although he chooses to thank Good Luck more than his merit for the achievement. In his words, "I used to be astonished whenever I won prizes and scholarships. But I very jealously guarded my character. The least blemish drew tears to my eyes..."

Gandhi recollects once receiving corporal punishment. He did not mind the punishment so much as the fact that he was accused of being untruthful. The incident is worthy of being recounted in Gandhi's own words:

When I was in the seventh standard, Dorabji Edulji Gimi was the headmaster. He was popular among boys as he was a disciplinarian, a man of method and a good teacher. He had made gymnastics and cricket compulsory for boys of the upper standards. I disliked both. I never took part in any exercise, cricket or football, before they were made compulsory. My shyness was one of the reasons for this aloofness, which I now see was wrong. I then had the false notion that gymnastics had nothing to do with education. Today I know that physical training should have as much place in the curriculum as mental training.

I may mention, however, that I was none the worse for abstaining from exercise. That was because I had read in books about the benefits of long walks, which has still remained with me. These walks gave me a fairly hardy constitution.

The reason of my dislike for gymnastics was my keen desire to serve as nurse to my father. As soon as the school closed, I would hurry home and begin serving him. Compulsory exercise came directly in the way of this service. I requested Mr. Gimi to exempt me from gymnastics so that I might be free to serve my father. But he would not listen to me. Now it so happened that one Saturday, when we had school in the morning, I had to go from home to the school for gymnastics at 4 o'clock in the afternoon. I had no watch, and the clouds deceived me. Before I reached the school, the boys had all left. The next day, Mr. Gimi, examining the roll, found me marked absent. Being asked the reason for absence, I told him what had happened. He refused to believe me and ordered me to pay a fine of one or two annas.

I was convicted of lying! That deeply pained me. How was I to prove my innocence? There was no way. I cried in deep anguish. I saw that a man of truth must also be a man of care. This was the first and last instance of my carelessness in school. I have a faint recollection that I finally succeeded in getting the fine remitted. The exemption from exercise was of course obtained, as my father wrote himself to the headmaster saying that he wanted me at home after school.

But though I was none the worse for having neglected exercise, I am still paying the penalty of neglect. I do not know whence I got the notion that good handwriting was not a necessary part of education, but I retained it until I went to England. When later, especially in South Africa, I saw the beautiful handwriting of lawyers and young men born and educated in South Africa, I was ashamed of myself and repented of my neglect. I saw that bad handwriting should be regarded as a sign of an imperfect education. I tried later to improve mine, but it was too late. I could never repair the neglect of my youth. Let every young man and

woman be warned by my example, and understand that good handwriting is a necessary part of education. I am now of the opinion that children should first be taught the art of drawing before learning how to write. Let the child learn his letters by observation as he does different objects, such as flowers, birds, etc., and let him learn handwriting only after he has learnt to draw objects. He will then write a beautifully formed hand.

Two more reminiscences of my school days are worth recording. I had lost one year because of my marriage, and the teacher wanted me to make good the loss by skipping a class – a privilege usually allowed to industrious boys. I therefore had only six months in the third standard and was promoted to the fourth after the examinations which are followed by the summer vacation. English became the medium of instruction in most subjects from the fourth standard. I found myself completely at sea. Geometry was a new subject in which I was not particularly strong, and the English medium made it still more difficult for me. The teacher taught the subject very well, but I could not follow him. Often I would lose heart and think of going back to the third standard, feeling that the packing of two years' studies into a single year was too ambitious. But this would discredit not only me, but also the teacher; because counting on my industry, he had recommended my promotion. So the fear of the double discredit kept me at my post. When, however, with much effort, I reached the thirteenth proposition of Euclid, the utter simplicity of the subject was suddenly revealed to me. A subject which only required a pure and simple use of one's reasoning powers could not be difficult. Ever since that time, geometry has been both easy and interesting for me.

Sanskrit, however, proved a harder task. In geometry, there was nothing to memorize whereas in Sanskrit, I thought everything had to be learnt by heart. This subject also was commenced from the fourth standard. As soon as I entered the sixth, I became disheartened. The teacher was a hard taskmaster, anxious, as I thought, to force the boys. There was a sort of rivalry going on between the Sanskrit and the Persian teachers. The Persian teacher was lenient. The boys used to talk among themselves that Persian was very easy and the Persian teacher very good and considerate to the students. The 'easiness' tempted me and one day I sat in the Persian class. The Sanskrit teacher was grieved. He called me to his side and said: "How can you forget that you are the son of a Vaishnava father? Won't you learn the language of your own religion? If you have any difficulty, why not come to me? I want to teach you students Sanskrit to the best of my ability. As you proceed further, you will find in it things of absorbing interest. You should not lose heart. Come and sit again in the Sanskrit class."

This kindness put me to shame. I could not disregard my teacher's affection. Today I cannot but think with gratitude of Krishnashankar Pandya. For if I had not acquired the little Sanskrit that I learnt then, I should have found it difficult to take any interest in our sacred books. In fact, I deeply regret that I was not able to acquire a more thorough knowledge of the language, because I have since realized that every Hindu boy and girl should possess sound Sanskrit learning.

It is now my opinion that in all Indian curricula of higher education, there should be a place for Hindi, Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic and English, besides of course, the vernacular. This big list need not frighten anyone. If our education were more systematic, and the boys free from the burden of having to learn their subjects

through a foreign medium, I am sure learning all these languages would not be an irksome task but a perfect pleasure. A scientific knowledge of one language makes a knowledge of other languages comparatively easy.

The above mentioned incidents greatly depict the gradual but a firm evolution of Gandhi's thoughts and ideas.

2.3.1 Tasting Forbidden Fruit/My Experiments with Meat

Gandhi's physique was frail compared with his older brother's, and especially compared with a Moslem friend named Sheik Mehtab, who could run great distances with remarkable speed and spectacular in the long and high jump. These exploits dazzled Gandhi.

Gandhi regarded himself as a coward. "I used to be haunted," he asserts, "by the fear of thieves, ghosts and serpents. I did not dare to stir out of doors at night." He could not sleep without a light in his room; his wife had more courage than he and did not fear serpents or ghosts or darkness. "I felt ashamed of myself."

Sheik Mehtab played on this sentiment. He boasted that he could hold live snakes in his hand, feared no burglars and did not believe in ghosts. Whence all this prowess and bravery? He ate meat. Gandhi ate no meat; it was forbidden by his religion. The boys at school used to recite a poem which went:

*Behold the mighty Englishman,
He rules the Indian small,
Because being a meat-eater
He is five cubits tall.*

'If all Indians ate meat, they could expel the British and make India free. Besides, argued Sheik Mehtab, boys who ate meat did not get boils; many of their teachers and some of the most prominent citizens of Rajkot ate meat secretly, and drank wine, too.' Sheik Mehtab propagandised Mohandas and finally the latter yielded. Sheik Mehtab brought cooked goat's meat and bread. Gandhi rarely touched baker's bread, and he had never even seen meat. The family was strictly vegetarian and so, in fact, were almost all the inhabitants of the Gujarat district in Kathiawar. In the resolve to make himself an effective liberator of his country, Gandhi bit into the meat but became sick immediately.

Inspite of a nightmare, he decided to continue the experiment. It continued for a whole year.

The sin of consuming and liking meat was made greater by the sin of lying. In the end he could not stand the dishonesty and, though still convinced that meat-eating was 'essential' for patriotic reasons, he vowed to abjure it until his parents' death enabled him to be a carnivore openly.

By now Gandhi developed an urge to reform Sheik Mehtab but the naïve and younger Gandhi was no match for his shrewd friend who offered revolt and adventure. Sheik even once led Gandhi to the entrance of a brothel. The institution had been told and paid in advance. Gandhi went in. "I was almost struck blind and dumb in this den of vice. I sat near the woman on her bed, but I was tongue-tied. She naturally lost patience with me and showed me the door, with abuses and insults." Providence, he explains, interceded and saved him despite himself.

Mohandas also pilfered a bit of gold from his older brother. This produced a moral crisis. He had gnawing pangs of conscience and resolved never to steal again. Confessing his mistake to his father, he made a full, written statement of the crime, asked for due penalty, promised never to steal again and, with emphasis, begged his father not to punish himself for his son's dereliction.

Karamchand was moved to tears after his son's confession but tore up the paper and lay down in silence. A remorseful Mohandas sat near him and wept, never forgot that silent scene. Sincere repentance and confession induced by love, rather than fear, won him his father's "sublime forgiveness" and affection.

Lest he give pain to his father, and especially his mother, Mohandas did not tell them that he absented himself from temples. He did not like the 'glitter and pomp' of the temples. Religion to him meant irksome restrictions like vegetarianism which intensified his youthful protest against society and authority. And he had no 'living faith in God'. Who made the world; who directed it, he asked? Elders could not answer, and the sacred books were so unsatisfactory on such matters that he inclined 'somewhat towards atheism'. He even began to believe that it was quite moral, indeed a duty, to kill serpents and bugs.

When Karamchand died in 1885, Putlibai took advice on family matters from a Jain monk named Becharji Swami, who helped Gandhi to go to England.

After graduating from high school, Gandhi enrolled in Samaldas College, in Bhavnagar, and found the studies difficult and the atmosphere distasteful. As a friend of the family suggested, if Mohandas was to succeed his father as Prime Minister, he had better become a lawyer and the quickest way was to take a three-year course in England. Gandhi was most eager to go. But he was afraid of law; could he pass the examinations? Gandhi was interested in medicine but was objected to it by his brothers.

Mother Putlibai disliked parting with her last-born and was worried about the finances apart from relative's reproach. Having set his heart on England, Mohandas sought permission from his uncle. The latter discouraged him because European-trained lawyers forsook Indian traditions, took to cigars, ate everything and dressed "as shamelessly as Englishmen". But he would not object if Putlibai agreed.

Gandhi tried to get a scholarship from the Porbandar government but the British administrator of the state rebuffed him curtly without even letting him present his case.

Mohandas even wanted to pawn his wife's jewels as they were valued at high cost. Finally, his brother promised to supply the funds, but his mother was apprehensive about the young men's morals in England. Here, Becharji Swami, the Jain monk, came to his rescue and administered an oath to Mohandas who then solemnly took three vows: not to touch wine, women and meat. This earned his mother's consent.

In June 1888, Gandhi left for Bombay with his brother but that did not end his tribulations. He was discouraged on the grounds of hostile weather. Meanwhile, the Modh Baniyas of Bombay heard about the projected trip, and summoned Mohandas to explain as their religion forbade overseas voyages because Hinduism could not be practised there. The resolve to go ahead resulted in Mohandas getting ostracised. Undaunted, he set sail to Southampton on 4 September 1888. The voyage to England gave Gandhi 'a long and healthy separation' from his wife and his new born child, Harilal.

2.4 STUDY IN ENGLAND

Gandhi had himself photographed shortly after he arrived in London in 1888. Despite the impressive features, the eyes seem to mirror puzzlement, fright, yearning; they seem to be moving and looking for something. The face is that of a person who fears coming struggles with himself and the world. Will he conquer his passions, he wonders; can he make good?

In England, this shy young man found himself at sea. He often yearned for home and the tender affection of his mother. The vow never to touch meat left him half-starved and caused his friends much embarrassment, owing to a false sense of social decorum, born of inferiority complex from which most of the Indians suffered in those days. But Gandhi would not yield to the pressure of his well-meaning friends. For him “a vow was a vow and could not be broken”. He found a vegetarian eating house in Farringdon Street, near Fleet Street, not far from the Inner Temple where he studied law. He invested a shilling in Henry Salt’s *A Plea for Vegetarianism* which was being sold at the entrance. Inside, he ate his first hearty meal in England. This further strengthened his resolve. He was no more a vegetarian because of the vow but because of free choice. About this, he says:

I had all along abstained from meat in the interest of truth and of the vow I had taken, but had wished at the same time, that every Indian should be a meat-eater and had looked forward to being one myself freely and openly some day, and to enlisting others in the cause. The choice was now made in favour of vegetarianism, the spread of which henceforward became my mission.

The literature on vegetarianism that he made it a point to read initiated him in the science of dietetics, and experiments therein occupied an important place in his life. Also, it brought him in contact with some notable persons of the time. With a youthful zeal, he became the Secretary of a Vegetarian Club. Though eager to speak, he always felt tongue-tied, and was at a loss to know how to express himself. His incapacity to express himself freely lasted throughout his stay in England. He says: *My constitutional shyness has been no disadvantage whatever. In fact I can see that, on the contrary, it has been all to my advantage. My hesitancy in speech, which was once an annoyance, is now a pleasure. Its greatest benefit has been that it has taught me the economy of words.*

Having disappointed his friends in the matter of food, he tried to satisfy them by making of himself an English gentleman. He took lessons in dancing and playing on the violin. He succeeded better with his dress. But he continued to live a simple life. He had limited funds and these he used with the utmost economy, keeping account of every penny he spent. He writes: *“This habit of economy and strict accounting has stayed with me ever since, and I know that as a result, though I have had to handle public funds amounting to lakhs, I have succeeded in exercising strict economy in their disbursement, and instead of outstanding debts have had invariably a balance in respect of all movements I have led.”*

This plain and simple living did not make his life dreary. On the contrary, his simple living, he says, “harmonized my inward and outward life; my life was certainly more truthful and my soul knew no bounds of joy”.

Gandhi had, during his stay in London, moved chiefly among vegetarians, reformers and

clergymen. The last-mentioned were anxious to mould and save his soul in their particular way, which, however, made no impression on him. But his contact with clergymen made him think deeply about religion and introduced him to his own. He studied the *Gita* in Arnold's translation and greatly liked it. He also read Arnold's *The Light of Asia*. He read the Bible. The Old Testament did not impress him. But the New Testament, especially the Sermon on the Mount, with its absolute and unconditional Non-Violence appealed to him, as its teachings conformed with the Vaishnavite ideas and practices in which he had been brought up at home. He thought that in spite of the war setting of the *Gita*, its fundamental morality was not different from that of the New Testament.

In spite of his three years' stay in England, Gandhi remained as diffident and shy as ever, "sitting tongue-tied, and never speaking, except when spoken to". His efforts at public speaking were a dismal failure. At a farewell party given to friends, all that he could say with difficulty was, "Thank you, gentlemen, for having kindly responded to my Invitation." He knew no law that would be useful to him in his practice in the Indian courts. But he had remained true to the three vows he had taken at the instance of his mother before leaving for England.

The purpose for which Gandhi came to England receives only a few lines in his reminiscences, far fewer than his dietetic adventures. He was admitted as a student at the Inner Temple on 6 November, 1888, and matriculated at London University, in June 1890. He learned French and Latin, Physics, and Common and Roman Law. He read Roman Law in Latin. He improved his English and had no difficulty in passing the final examinations. Called to the Bar on 10 June, 1891, he enrolled in the High Court on 11 June, and sailed for India on 12 June, 1891. He had no wish to spend a single extra day in England, after spending two years and eight months there.

2.5 SUMMARY

Gandhi gave absolutely no indication, during his formative years, of the greatness that would be thrust on him. He considered himself as one who could not put his heart and soul into academics. With a habit of deprecating his good qualities, which was usual with him throughout his life, he writes that he had no high regard for his abilities and was surprised when he was awarded prizes and scholarships. He was hard-working and conscientious in his studies. He carefully guarded his character and was very sensitive to rebuke or punishment.

There was nothing that specifically marked him out as the future great man in the making except his conscientiousness born of a shy and sensitive nature, and his scrupulous regard for truth. He states: "One thing took deep root in me – the conviction that morality is the basis of things, and that truth is the substance of all morality. Truth became my sole objective."

Gandhi's years in England at a formative phase must have shaped his personality. Gandhi did not learn essential things by studying; he was the doer, and he grew and gained knowledge through action. Books, people and conditions affected him. But the real Gandhi, the Gandhi of history, did not emerge, did not even hint of his existence in the years of schooling and study. Perhaps it is unfair to expect too much of the frail provincial Indian transplanted to metropolitan London at the green age of eighteen. Yet the contrast between the mediocre, unimpressive, handicapped, floundering M. K. Gandhi, barrister-at-

law, who left England in 1891, and the Mahatma, the leader of millions is so great as to suggest that until public service tapped his enormous reserves of institution, will-power, energy and self-confidence, his true personality lay dormant. To be sure, he fed it unconsciously; his loyalty to the vow of no meat, no wine, no women, was a youthful exercise in will and devotion which later flowered into a way of life. But only when it was touched by the magic wand of action in South Africa did the personality of Gandhi burgeon. In *Young India* of 4 September, 1924, he said his college days were before the time “when I began life”.

2.6 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Describe the defining moments and incidents in Gandhi’s early life that played an important role in shaping his character.
2. Outline the role played by Gandhi’s parents, his family and his neighbourhood in instilling noble qualities in him.
3. Describe the varied experiences of Gandhi as a law student in London.

SUGGESTED READINGS

1. M.K. Gandhi., *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, Navajivan Publishing House, ahmedabad, 2007. (recent edition)
2. J.B. Kripalani., *Gandhi – His Life and Thought*, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, New Delhi, 1971.
3. Louis Fischer., *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi*, Harper Collins, London, 1997.
4. N.P. Shukla., *Mahatma Gandhi*, Manglam Publishers, Delhi, 2007.
5. Ramachandra Guha., *The Last Liberal and Other Essays*, Permanent Black, Ranikhet, 2003.

UNIT 3 INDIAN INFLUENCES: EPICS, NARRATIVES, GITA, RAICHANDBHAI, FOLKLORE

Structure

3.1 Introduction

Aims and Objectives

3.2 Influence of the *Ramayana*

3.3 Influence of the *Bhagvad Gita*

3.4 Influence of other Scriptures and Folklore

3.5 Influence of Raychand Bhai

3.6 Summary

3.7 Terminal Questions

Suggested Readings

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Gandhi's very struggle for freedom was the result of the deep impact of Indian philosophy. He was better known as the Mahatma, as he represented a complete accord between his thought, word and deed, and moral and spiritual values against the forces of barbarism. One finds in him a harmonious blend of saintliness and statesmanship in his long career as a social reformer, a political leader, a saint, a true lover of humanity, and an apostle of peace and non-violence. Gandhi was a fine product of Indian culture. He was nurtured and sustained by the perennial inspiration of Indian philosophy, said to represent the confluence of all that is best in the Indian thought from the early Vedic age to the age of the modern Indian renaissance. It has been rightly observed that Gandhi embodied in himself the highest ideals of ancient Indian civilisation.

Aims and Objectives

After studying this Unit, you will be able to understand:

- The various Indian influences on Gandhi, in general
- The influence of the *Ramayan* and the *Bhagvad Gita*
- The influence of other scriptures and folklore; and
- The influence of Raychand Bhai.

3.2 INFLUENCE OF THE RAMAYANA

Though born into a staunch Vaishnava house, and deeply aware of his mother's religious inclination and practices, Gandhi initially showed no inclination for any kind of religious belief. He had not even let himself be tied down to his family's strict vegetarian fare. Influenced by a Muslim friend, he had readily succumbed to meat-eating. Then, all at

once, he was drawn into the reading of the ancient epic, the *Ramayana*. It happened under curious circumstances.

While his father was recovering from an illness in Porbandar, every evening he used to listen to a reading of the *Ramayana* by a great devotee of Rama, one Ladha Maharaj of Bileshvar. It was said of Ladha Maharaj that he cured himself of his leprosy, not by any medicine, but by applying to the affected parts *bilva* leaves which had been cast away after being offered to the image of Mahadeva in Bileshvar temple, and by the regular repetition of the *Ramayana*. His faith, it was said, had cured him of his affliction. Gandhi writes in his 'Autobiography' that listening to Ladha Maharaj's reading of the *Ramayana* was a delightful and fascinating experience. To quote Gandhi:

"Ladha Maharaj had a melodious voice. He would sing the Dohas (couplets) and Chopais (quatrains), and explain them, losing himself in the discourse and carrying his listeners along with him. I must have been thirteen at that time, but I quite remember being enraptured by his reading. That laid the foundation of my deep devotion to the Ramayana. Today, I regard the Ramayana of Tulsidas as the greatest book in all devotional literature."

Yet another experience deserves mention. As a young schoolboy, Gandhi was in perpetual dread of ghosts, thieves and serpents. He could not sleep at night without a light in the room. An old maid in the family, Rambha, offered the suggestion that by frequent recitation of religious verses from the *Ramayana*, he could be rid of those absurd fears. Gandhi relates this experience in his Autobiography:

"I had more faith in Rambha than in her remedy, and so at a tender age, I began repeating Ramanama to cure my fear of ghosts and spirits. This was, of course, short-lived, but the good seed sown in childhood was not sown in vain. I think it is due to the seed sown by that good woman Rambha that today Ramanama is an infallible remedy for me."

Close to his sixtieth year, casting his eyes back to his boyhood days, Gandhi acknowledged his debt to "that good woman Rambha". In his words:

"When a child, my nurse taught me to repeat Ramanama whenever I felt afraid or miserable, and it has been second nature with me with growing knowledge and advancing years. I may even say that the word is in my heart, if not actually on my lips all the twenty-four hours. It has been my saviour. In the spiritual literature of the world, the Ramayana of Tulsidas takes a foremost place. It has charms that I miss in the Mahabharata and even in Valmiki's Ramayana."

At this juncture, it must be clarified that Gandhi's *Rama*, the *Rama* of his prayers, was not the historical *Rama*, the son of Dasharatha, the King of Ayodhya. According to Gandhi, "*Rama is the eternal, the unborn, the one without a second. Him, alone, I worship. His aid, alone, I seek.*"

Yet another clarification may be in order here, relating to Gandhi's views on God, Truth and *Rama*. In his words: *Though my reason and heart long ago realized the highest attribute and name of God as Truth, I recognize Truth by the name of Rama.*

God, *Rama* and Truth became, in Gandhi's mind, synonymous, interchangeable terms. It is worth recalling that twice, when confronted with death, he uttered the words, "*He Rama!*" On the first occasion, when he was beaten brutally on a South African street;

he is stated to have fallen down unconscious with the name of *Rama* on his lips! It happened again at the prayer ground in New Delhi on 30th January 1948. Struck by an assassin's bullets, "*He Ram!*" were the last words he is stated to have uttered, with one trembling hand raised in forgiveness and blessing, before falling to the ground.

3.3 INFLUENCE OF THE *BHAGVAD GITA*

A few words about the contents of the *Bhagvad Gita* may be useful here. It is a poem of 700 stanzas of two to eight lines each, and divided into 18 'discourses'. The verses vividly narrate the historic warfare between two royal houses, tied by kinship. The *Gita* is a small part of the epic, the *Mahabharata*. The date of its composition is ascribed to the period between the fifth and second centuries B.C.

Gandhi read the *Bhagvad Gita* in his early youth in an English version, in 1889. As a student in London, he was barely 20 years old. Up to that time, the concept of *Ahimsa* had hardly entered his awareness. He had been strongly moved in his boyhood by a Gujarati poem, the essence of which was that even one's enemy could be won over with love. In London, when some English friends made him read *The Song Celestial*, his reaction was unexpected and quick. He has recorded that he read the entire contents of the book with fascination, and that he was particularly impressed by the last nineteen verses of the second chapter.

It was long after his student days in London that Gandhi, having improved his Sanskrit, read the *Gita* in the original, and even translated it into Gujarati, with his comments and notes. This volume was released on 12th March 1930. This version was re-translated into English by Mahadev Desai.

A word, first, about the impact of the *Gita* on Gandhi deserves mention. He is on record as having stated that this work, along with the *Upanishads* filled his whole being, and that he found in it a solace that he missed even in the deeply stirring *Sermon on the Mount*. The *Gita* was, for him, the key to the world's scriptures. In 1925, he wrote in *Young India*:

When doubts haunt me, when disappointments stare me in the face, and when I see not one ray of light on the horizon, I turn to the Bhagvad Gita, and find a verse to comfort me; and I immediately begin to smile in the midst of overwhelming sorrow. My life has been full of external tragedies, and if they have not left any visible and indelible effect on me, I owe it to the teachings of the Bhagvad Gita.

Again, in 1936, Gandhi wrote in *Harijan*:

The Gita has become for me the key to the scriptures of the world. It unravels for me the deepest mysteries to be found in them. I regard them with the same reverence that I pay to the Hindu scriptures. Hindus, Mussalmans, Christians, Parsis, Jews are convenient labels. But when I tear them down, I do not know which is which. We are all children of the same God."

Mahadev Desai stresses this point thus: "*Every moment of Gandhiji's life is a conscious effort to live the message of the Gita.*

Orthodox Hindu pundits, however, looked upon Gandhi as a renegade, and they drew from him the following comment:

“For me, Sanatana Dharma (orthodox Hinduism) is the vital faith handed down from generations ... and based upon the Vedas and the writings that followed them. For me, the Vedas are as indefinable as God and Hinduism... The Vedas are remnants of the discourses left by unknown seers ... Then arose a great and lofty-minded man, the composer of the Gita. He gave to the Hindu world a synthesis of Hindu religion, at once deeply philosophical and yet easily to be understood by any unsophisticated seeker. It is the one open book to every Hindu who will care to study it. Even if all other scriptures were reduced to ashes, the seven hundred verses of this imperishable book are quite enough to tell one what Hinduism is and how one can live up to it.”

The impact, however, is an intrinsic part of the interpretation. In Gandhi's view, “the canon of interpretation is to scan not the letter but to examine the spirit”. He believes that the *Gita* is an allegory describing the inward conflict in which mankind is perpetually involved. The literal interpretation of the texts is, of course, far simpler. The verses vividly narrate the historic warfare between two royal houses tied by kinship. When Arjuna, the great Pandava warrior, shrinks from the obligation to destroy his own people in battle, he is reminded by Krishna, his divine charioteer and friend that the warrior's duty takes precedence over all else.

On the other hand, treated as an allegory, the fight is between the baser impulses in us (as represented in Duryodhana) and the higher impulses (as in Arjuna) – our own body being the field of battle. Here is a never-ending struggle between the forces of darkness and of light, not the picture of what happened thousands of years ago, but that of what is going on today in every human heart. In Gandhi's words, *“It is the description, not of a war between cousins, but between the two natures in us – the good and the evil. It is the description of the eternal duel going on within ourselves given so vividly as to make us think, for the time being, that the deeds described therein were actually done by human beings.”*

The *Gita*, says Gandhi, presents some basic problems which are hard to solve, but it is free from any kind of dogma and it gives us in a short compass “a complete reasoned moral code”, which satisfies the intellect as well as the heart. Its appeal is universal.

In any case, the author of the *Gita* proves the futility of war. The victories amid the debris of destruction have produced nothing but misery. What difference would it have made, if the vanquished had won? Gandhi stresses that it is wrong to be obsessed with the battles and their result. While some of the verses in the *Gita* cannot be easily reconciled with the teaching of non-violence, it is far more difficult to set the whole of the *Gita* in the framework of violence.

Nevertheless, the central teaching of the *Gita*, according to Gandhi's interpretation, is not *himsa* but *ahimsa*; this is proved mainly in the second and eighteenth chapters. The logic he uses is that while *himsa* is impossible without anger, attachment and hatred, the *Gita* takes us to a state that excludes all petty nuances of violence.

What, then, is the object, the means and the message of the *Gita* as understood by Gandhi? Its object is to show the best way of attaining self-realisation. But what is the means to that end, which is indeed the essence of all religious endeavours? Desirelessness – renunciation of the fruits of action – this is the centre around which the *Gita* is woven. And how is this renunciation to be achieved? In the words of the *Gita*, as quoted by

Gandhi in his article, “The Message of the *Gita*”: “By desireless action; by renouncing the fruits of action; by dedicating all activities to God, that is, by surrendering oneself to Him, body and soul.”

And for this purpose, right knowledge is imperative, the knowledge based on true devotion. This devotion is no blind faith and does not involve rosaries, offerings and the like. It is no intellectual feat but a “constant heart-churn”. The true devotee is selfless, ever-forgiving, unaffected by happiness and misery, sorrow and fear and exultation; he treats friend and foe alike; he is untouched by respect or disrespect, praise or blame; he has a disciplined reason and loves silence and solitude. And finally, devotion of such calibre is inconsistent with strong attachments.

Gandhi quotes the *Gita*’s words: “Do your allotted work, but renounce its fruit; be detached and work; have no desire for reward.” This, he believes, is the *Gita*’s unmistakable teaching. Mahadev Desai has discussed this interpretation ably in his book, the *Gospel of Selfless Action*.

It is from this premise that Gandhi moves forward to *ahimsa*. If there is no desire for fruit, there can be no ground for *himsa*. At the back of violence, there is the desire to attain the desired end. Gandhi, however, is not dogmatic on this point. The *Gita* was not written, he admits, to establish *ahimsa*. In those ancient times, the contradiction between *ahimsa* and warfare was barely visible. Even so, Gandhi had complete faith in the wisdom of the sage who composed the *Gita*.

The Gandhian interpretation of the *Gita* has not been accepted without challenge; in fact, it has been rejected by scholars who take the traditional view. Gandhi, they say, has distorted the meaning of the *Gita*, superimposing on it his own concept of non-violence. Killing under certain circumstances was a duty that the *Gita* affirmed. There was no plausible ground to say that the *Gita* represented the eternal conflict between the forces of good and those of evil.

Besides, Gandhi was reading the *Gita* in the light of the *Sermon on the Mount*. Commenting on this, Vincent Sheean writes: “An assumption that this was a Christian interpretation of the *Gita* is, it seems to me, an unjustifiable step. If you grant him the initial bold leap, in which Kurukshetra becomes the heart of man, all the rest of his interpretation is well within the framework of the *Upanishads* and the text of the *Gita*. His reasons for making that bold leap were all based upon his perception of self-evident truth (i.e. self-evident to him) as shown by the long study of the *Gita* itself.

Answering adverse comments, Gandhi confirmed in the strongest terms that non-violence was a tenet common to all religions, and that, in India, its practice was reduced to a science. Even if that practice was now nearly dead, “the eternal law of answering anger by love and of violence by non-violence” could well have a revival.

Apart from *ahimsa*, the second great principle that Gandhi derived from the *Gita* was that of *Karma Yoga*, the path of action.

After the publication of his Gujarati translation of the *Gita* in 1930, Gandhi in Yervada Jail, received a complaint from an Ashram member that the book was difficult to understand. In reply, Gandhi wrote a series of letters to the Ashram, each of which dealt with a particular chapter of the *Gita*. The first letter was written on 4th November, 1930. These letters were translated into English by V.G. Desai and released in book form in 1960 under the title *Discourses on the Gita*.

The essence of *Karma Yoga* was expounded in Gandhi's *Discourses*. Krishna explains to grief-stricken Arjuna, who views with horror the vast carnage at Kurukshetra, that his sorrow was baseless, arising from a delusion. Besides, only their bodies would perish, as they must, but not the souls inhabiting them. "The soul cannot be wounded by weapons, burned by fire, dried by wind or drowned in water." Then Krishna proceeds to *Karma Yoga*, the way of action. "It is up to us to do our duty without wasting a single thought on the fruits of our action ... Unworried about the fruits of action, a man must devote himself to the performance of his duty with an evenness of temper. This is Yoga, or skill in action. The success of an act lies in performing it, and not in its result, whatever it is. Therefore be calm and do your duty without fear of consequences."

This Discourse ends thus: *"The river continuously flow into the sea, but the sea remains unmoved; in the same way, all sense-objects come to the Yogi, but he always remains calm like the sea. One who abandons all desires is free from pride and selfishness and behaves as one apart, finds peace."*

In the next discourse, Krishna again urges Arjuna to do the "terrible deed": *"Freedom from action cannot be attained without action; wisdom never comes to a man simply on account of his having ceased to act. Man does not become perfect merely by renouncing everything. One who sits with folded hands is a fool."*

Gandhi's comment on this chapter is that life is meant for service alone, and must have a "sacrificial character". And real service, he defines, is the one rendered with the spirit's detachment.

In the next three chapters of the book, Gandhi expounds the *Gita's* message of *anasakti*, selfless action, and the means of practising it. One must be unaffected by pleasure or pain, success or failure, and have no hankering for the fruits of action. The remaining chapters dwell on the ways by which *anasakti* is to be achieved.

What did Gandhi mean by '*anasakti*'? To quote his very utterances:

1. *Anasakti* means the renunciation, to move towards the planets of devotion, knowledge and work that individual good merges in the common good.
2. *Anasakti* is *Ahimsa*. He remarks: *"After forty years of unremitting endeavour, I feel perfect renunciation is impossible without perfect observation of Ahimsa in every shape and form."* *Anasakti* is the coin of which *Ahimsa* and *Satya* are the obverse and reverse sides.
3. *Anasakti* consists of these points:
 - (a) Desireless action;
 - (b) Dedication of all actions to God; and
 - (c) Surrendering oneself to God, that is, by surrendering oneself to His body and soul.

Significantly, Gandhi held the unorthodox view that any book, however sacred, could not be interpreted in one way alone. The meanings of great works were subject to a "process of evolution". In the words of Gandhi: *"The Gita is not an aphoristic work; it is a great religious poem. The deeper you dive into it, the richer the meanings you get. With every age, the important words will carry new and expanding meanings. But its central teaching will never vary. The seeker is at liberty to extract from this treasure any meaning he likes, so as to enable him to enforce in his life the central teaching."*

Gandhi adds that the “*Gita is not a collection of do’s and don’ts. What is lawful for one may be unlawful for another. What is permissible at one time or in one place may not be so at another time and in another place. Desire for fruit is the only universal prohibition.*”

A final word about the *Gita*’s doctrine of *Karma Yoga*, which Gandhi made the keynote of his life. Writing in the *Harijan* under the caption, “The Gospel of Bread Labour”, he said: “*If I had the good fortune to be face to face with one like him (the Buddha), I should not hesitate to ask him why he did not teach the gospel of work, in preference to one of contemplation. I should do the same, if I were to meet these saints (Tukaram, Gyaneshwar and others).*”

3.4 INFLUENCE OF OTHER SCRIPTURES AND FOLKLORE

Gandhi was also influenced by *Manusmriti*. He learnt from it that truth underlies morality, and that leading a moral life was absolutely essential. In Gandhi’s own words:

“*But the fact that I had learnt to be tolerant to other religions did not mean that I had any living faith in God. I happened about this time to come across ‘Manusmriti’, which was amongst my father’s collection. The story about creation and similar things did not impress me very much, but, on the contrary, made me incline somewhat towards atheism. But one thing took deep root in me – the conviction that morality is the basis of things, and that truth is the substance of all morality. Truth became my sole objective. It began to grow in magnitude every day; my definition of it also has been ever-widening.*”

Gandhi was also influenced by the *Upanishads*, the scripture said to be the first to give the message of non-violence. The *Chhandogya* declared that non-violence was an ethical quality of man. Patanjali held out non-violence as one of the five cardinal disciplines of man’s life; he did not believe that it was merely a negative doctrine of avoidance of violence, but stressed that it manifested goodwill towards all.

Hindu ethics, since the time of the *Upanishads*, had always laid stress on the virtue of *ahimsa* towards all living beings, human and non-human. According to some, *ahimsa* is expressly mentioned for the first time in the *Chhandogya Upanishad*, “where five ethical qualities, one of them being ‘*ahimsa*’ are said to be equivalent to a part of sacrifice of which the whole life of man is made an epitome”.

Gandhi was influenced by the story of Harishchandra. As a boy, after getting permission from his father, he once witnessed a play on ‘*Satyavadi* (the ever-truthful) *Harishchandra*’. He remarked that Harishchandra captured his heart. He said, “Why should not all be truthful like Harishchandra, was the question I asked myself day and night. To follow truth and to go through all the ordeals Harishchandra went through, was the one ideal it inspired in me.”

Gandhi was also deeply influenced by the story of Shrivana’s devotion to his parents. He read the play ‘*Shrivana Pitribhakti*’ with intense interest which left an indelible impression on his mind. He learnt the lesson of ‘selfless service and devotion’ from the pictures depicting Shrivana carrying, by means of slings fitted to his shoulders, his blind parents on pilgrimage. Shrivana became his model.

3.5 INFLUENCE OF RAYCHANDBHAI

Gandhi writes in his autobiography: *“Three moderns have left a deep impress on my life and captivated me: Raychandbhai by his living contact; Tolstoy by his book, ‘The Kingdom of God is Within You’; and Ruskin by his ‘Unto This Last’.* I have said elsewhere that in moulding my inner life, Tolstoy and Ruskin vied with Kavi (Raychand Bhai). But Kavi’s influence was undoubtedly deeper if only because I had come into closest personal touch with him.”

Rajchandra Ravjibhai Mehta *alias* Raychand (Raichand) Bhai was a jeweller and a poet. He was spotless in character; had a vast knowledge of the scriptures and a burning passion for self-realisation. He was also known as *Shatavadhani*, that is, one who can remember or attend to a hundred things simultaneously. Born of a Vaishnava father and Jain mother, Raychand dedicated himself towards Jainism and showed a deep leaning to Vaishnavism towards the end of his life. To him, God is self and self is God. God has no abode outside the self which is a conscious substance. It is permanent and eternal. In its contact with the earthly things, it gets polluted in *Karmic* veils. But a sound knowledge of its true nature leads to *Nirvana*. Perfection, non-attachment, truth, non-violence, universal benevolence and the like are cardinal virtues which deemed universal observance.

A closer analysis would reveal that the ‘living contact’ between Gandhi and Raychand Bhai was very short, since they first met in 1891 and Kavi died in 1900. During this short period, they had scanty correspondence and very few meetings. Gandhi described his relationship with Raychand in Gujarati as *gaadha parichay* (deep acquaintance), and not *angata mitrata* (intimate friendship).

The influence of Raychand Bhai on Gandhi was not so deep as he claimed. Both of them understood it clearly that their paths were different. D.K. Bedekar observes: *“Raichand came to have a tremendous influence on Gandhi, though the two youths were so dissimilar in their lifestyles and urges.”*

Here, the mental disposition of Gandhi when he first met Raychand is noteworthy. On that very day, his elder brother disclosed the news of his mother’s death, which caused him a ‘severe shock’ and ‘shattered his cherished hopes’. He was also then physically exhausted due to seasickness. So Raychand Bhai cast a mystical spell over Gandhi at a time when he was exhausted, both mentally and physically. The later correspondence between the two was when Gandhi was in South Africa, undergoing some sort of a ‘spiritual crisis’ owing to the scant knowledge of Hinduism amongst people of other faiths. After that correspondence, Gandhi came to India in 1896. So far as it is recorded in Raychand’s biography, the two friends did not meet again. Hence the ‘living contact’ between the two was a dim and bloodless one.

The influence of Raychand Bhai on Gandhi is perhaps best summarised by Jalandhar Pal:

“The fact is that the ‘Mahatma’ was then just sprouting in the Gandhi of flesh and blood, who fervently looked for a guideline and found it in Raychand for the moment. Raychand Bhai initiated Gandhi in a zealous quest to know the inherent potentiality of human beings. He acted as a midwife of Gandhi to deliver his own being. In this sense, Kavi’s influence on Gandhi is remarkable. It should not, however, be stretched too far.”

3.6 SUMMARY

No individual, however great he may be, can ever transcend his surroundings. It is through participation in his surroundings that he realises his true self. Gandhi is a living incarnation of this. He did not attain his extraordinary power from any extra-terrestrial source. He derived his mental and physical nourishment from the spatio-temporal relations, from the traditions of human civilisation, both Oriental and Occidental, and above all, from his ceaseless and varied experiments with Truth in the course of his life. He acknowledges his debt to the forerunners without hesitation. His writings, especially his 'Autobiography', brilliantly bring out the roots and the influences which gave shape to his thought.

With Tennyson's 'Ulysses', Gandhi could boldly declare: "*I am a part of all that I have met!*" Of the thousand roots and influences, we have taken into account only a few, the salient ones. As he was an ardent and ceaseless experimenter with truth, his eclectic yet sceptic mind tested all ideas which he came across, in the hard grindstone of his own experience, and modified, changed, enriched, and sometimes abandoned them. What we have tried to do in this Unit, is to study the effect of these ideas in the form of influences.

3.7 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. "God, Rama and Truth became, in Gandhi's mind, synonymous, interchangeable terms." Explain.
2. What is the object, the means and the message of the *Bhagvad Gita*, as understood by Gandhi?
3. What were the other scriptures and folklore that influenced Gandhi?
4. Examine the view that 'although Raychand Bhai's influence on Gandhi is remarkable, it should not be stretched too far'.

SUGGESTED READINGS

1. M.K. Gandhi., The Story of My Experiments with Truth, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 2007-recent edition).
2. Bhabani Bhattacharya., Gandhi, The Writer, National Book Trust, New Delhi, 2002.
3. Ramesh Betai., Gita and Gandhiji, Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, 2002.
4. Jalandhar Pal., The Moral Philosophy of Gandhi, Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, 1998.
5. K.S. Bharathi., The Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi, 1998.

UNIT 4 WESTERN INFLUENCES: RUSKIN, THOREAU, TOLSTOY AND QUAKERS

Structure

- 4.1 Introduction
 - Aims and Objectives
- 4.2 Influence of John Ruskin
- 4.3 Influence of Henry David Thoreau
- 4.4 Influence of Leo Tolstoy
- 4.5 Influence of the Quakers
- 4.6 Summary
- 4.7 Terminal Questions

Suggested Readings

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Although Gandhi was an Indian and a staunch nationalist, there was a profound influence of the West on him. He was very largely influenced by Western thinkers and writers. He himself acknowledged his indebtedness to the West in the following words: *"I have nothing to be ashamed of if my views on Ahimsa are the result of my Western education. I have never tabooed all Western ideas, nor am I prepared to anathematize everything that comes from the West as inherently evil. I have learnt much from the West, and I should not be surprised to find that I had learnt something about Ahimsa too from the West."*

Elsewhere he states: *"I do not think that everything Western is to be rejected. I have condemned Western civilization in no measured terms. I still do so, but it does not mean that everything Western should be rejected. I have learnt a great deal from the West and I am grateful to it. I should consider myself unfortunate if contact with, and the literature of the West had no influence on me."*

Mahatma Gandhi is rightly described as the heir of the immortal heritage of humanity, "which knows no age or weariness or defeat". As Dr. S. Radhakrishnan pointed out, *"It is a foolish pride that impels some of us to combat all external influences. Every spiritual or scientific advance which any branch of the human family achieves, is achieved not for itself alone but for all mankind."*

Aims and Objectives

After studying this Unit, you will be able to understand:

- How John Ruskin's book, 'Unto This Last' wielded a profound influence on Gandhi;
- The influence of Henry David Thoreau's ideas on Freedom, the Right to Resist and Civil Disobedience.
- Leo Tolstoy's magnificent works and their deep impact on Gandhi.

4.2 INFLUENCE OF JOHN RUSKIN

In the year 1903, Gandhi, who was a practicing lawyer in South Africa, had an occasion to travel from Johannesburg to Durban in the course of his professional and voluntary work. At the Johannesburg Railway Station, one of his friends, Henry Polak gave him a copy of John Ruskin's *Unto This Last* to read during the twenty-four hour journey, with the remark that he would surely like it. In Gandhi's own words, "*The book was impossible to lay aside, once I had begun it. It gripped me...I could not get any sleep that night.*" He was simply entranced by it. It actually provided the stimulus for an extra-ordinary transformation in his way of life. Gandhi tells of the experience in his own words:

"I believe that I discovered some of my deepest convictions reflected in this great book of Ruskin, and that is why it so captured me, and made me transform my life. A poet is one who can call forth the good latent in the human breast. Poets do not influence all alike, for everyone is not evolved in an equal measure. The teachings of 'Unto This Last' I understand to be:

1. *That the good of the individual is contained in the good of all;*
2. *That a lawyer's work has the same value as the barber's, inasmuch as all have the same right of earning livelihood from their work;*
3. *That the life of labour, that is, the life of the tiller of the soil and the handicraftsman, is the life worth living.*

The first of these I knew. The second I had dimly realized. The third had never occurred to me. 'Unto This Last' made it as clear as daylight for me that the second and the third were contained in the first. I arose with the dawn, ready to reduce these principles to practice."

An immediate consequence was the establishment of the Phoenix Settlement near Durban in 1904, which proved so important to the Satyagrahis in South Africa. Gandhi also translated the book into Gujarati and gave it the title of '*Sarvodaya*', meaning 'welfare of all'.

How does one capture the essence of Ruskin's arguments in '*Unto This Last*'? There is a bitter denunciation of the accepted views on political economy, after John Stuart Mill and other orthodox economists of that time. He pleads for a 'human' view of economics. Men are not mechanical, and the way to induce the best from men is to treat them with affection. Every vocation is to service and every servant should rather die than see the end of his service corrupted. "*For truly, the man who does not know when to die does not know how to live!*" He urges that the real aim of economics is not to accumulate material wealth or power over men, but the promotion of the welfare of people at large – the manufacture of "souls of good quality". For, to accumulate much for one's self is to deny our neighbour his rightful share. He asks the wealthy to curtail luxury now so that all can have it in the future.

Ruskin, upholding the dignity of man, stressed that whatever hurts must be relentlessly rejected. He thought that political economy took no account of the spirit of man and it concentrated on the material aspect of human welfare. He, therefore, attacked the mammon worship in society. He thought that riches were a power like that of electricity,

acting through inequalities or negations of itself. That country, he emphasised, was the richest which nourished the greatest number of noble and happy human beings; that man was the richest, who, having perfected the functions of his own life to the utmost, had also the widest helpful influence, both personal and by means of his possessions, over the lives of the others. There was no wealth but life. His irrefutable conclusion was that true economics was the economics of justice. He believed in the eternal superiority of some men to others, sometimes even of one man to all others and approved the advisability of appointing such person or persons to guide, to lead, or on occasions even to compel and subdue their inferiors according to their own letter, knowledge and wiser will.

Gandhi resembles Ruskin in several respects. Both preach the supremacy of the spirit and trust in the nobleness of human nature; to both character is more important than intelligence; both seek to moralise politics and economics; both emphasise the priority of social regeneration to mere political freedom; both greatly distrust machinery and plead that if employed at all, it should be so used as to free and not enslave men; both insist that the capitalist should adopt a wise paternal attitude in relation to his employees.

However, there are significant points of differences too. Unlike Gandhi, Ruskin did not believe in non-violence, democracy and equality. Gandhi differed from Ruskin in his distrust of the people and in his belief in the rule of the wisest. Both disagreed in their views regarding the nature and functions of the State.

Gandhi has drawn inspiration on education from Ruskin. Both of them attach primary importance to education in their constructive programmes. According to them, education is the discipline of the inherent instinct of man. Both took into consideration the child's essential nature and emphasised that education must begin with the child. Ruskin regarded individual taste, national character and all those things which arose from national character as reflections of home life. Gandhi also stressed the home education. Both attached equal importance to the education of boys as well as of girls. Both were of the opinion that spirit was higher than matter, both of them tried to spiritualise the political, economic and social spheres of human life.

The writings of Ruskin made Gandhi to realise the dignity of labour and the ideal that action for the good of all is the most virtuous principle. Ruskin's *Unto This Last* left such an abiding impact on Gandhi's life and thought that he started experimenting the philosophy contained therein, in his own life, renounced property and privileges, established socialist colonies thereafter, thought in terms of *Sarvodaya* and gave to the translation of the book, the title of *Sarvodaya*, under the impact of Ruskin's book. Gandhi equally believed that differential wage should not be paid for intellectual work in preference to manual work since intellectual labour should not be treated as superior to manual labour.

4.3 INFLUENCE OF HENRY DAVID THOREAU

Gandhi was influenced by the ideas and activities of Henry David Thoreau, the well known American Anarchist who refused to pay taxes as a protest against slavery in America. Thoreau's plea for the supremacy of conscience under all circumstances appealed to Gandhi so much that he admitted that his technique of passive resistance found scientific confirmation in the former's essay on 'Civil Disobedience'. The core of Thoreau's politics was his belief in a natural or higher law. He rejected the idea that the highest responsibility of the individual must be to the State. He refused to recognise a government, which failed to establish justice in the land.

The anarchist view of Gandhi was fully supported by Thoreau's declaration that 'that government is best which governs the least'. Gandhi believed that a free and enlightened State could be established on this planet if its inhabitants could be truthful and non-violent in thought, word and deed.

Thoreau was the first to use the term, 'Civil Disobedience' in one of his speeches in 1849. Gandhi, however, did not derive his idea from the writings of Thoreau. He wrote, 'The statement that I had derived my idea of Civil Disobedience from the writings of Thoreau is wrong. The resistance to authority in South Africa was well advanced before I got the essay of Thoreau on Civil Disobedience. I began the use of his phrase to explain our struggle to the English readers. But I found that even Civil Disobedience failed to convey the full meaning of the struggle. I, therefore, adopted the phrase of 'Civil Resistance' and finally modified even this to 'Non-Violent Resistance'. Thoreau believed in man's natural impulses to goodness, argued for the supremacy under all conditions of conscience and held up the ideal of a future society without any government".

Thoreau's primary contribution to the realm of thought is his plea for defiance of a state based on injustice. A champion of the dignity of man and liberty of the individual, he would sweep aside the obstacles preventing fulfillment of their personality. He advocated a just social and political order devoid of exploitation in the form of slavery. He viewed that the poverty of the poor was the direct consequence of the luxury of the rich. He said:

"Perhaps it will be found that just in proportion as some have been placed in outward circumstances above the savage, others have been degraded below him. The luxury of one class is counter-balanced by the indigence of another. On the one side is the palace on the other are the alms house and 'Silent Poor'. The myriads who built the pyramids to be the tombs of the Pharaohs were fed on garlic, and it may be were not decently buried. The mason who finishes the cornice of the palace returns at night perchance to a hut not so good as a wingman. It is a mistake to suppose that in a country where the usual evidence of civilization exists, the condition of the very large body of the inhabitants may not be as degraded as that of savages".

Thoreau's message is contained in his saying 'if thy hand has plenty, be liberal as the date-tree; but if it affords nothing to give away, be an *azad* or freeman like the cyprus'. He advocated service to fellow beings which may lead to renunciation. He was convinced that every one should earn his bread by his own labour. His very thesis that one can produce his own food for the year only by working for six weeks is a hint that earning one's bread by physical labour is a philosophy that covers even the intellectual.

Freedom

Thoreau and Gandhi conceive of Freedom as obedience to law, not so much to law in the narrow legal sense of the term as to the moral law which is a categorical imperative. It impels men to seek good and to attain it. "A man is free to speak the truth, not free to serve, not to exploit, free to sacrifice himself but not free to kill or injure," says Gandhi. Similarly, Thoreau attaches no value to freedom from a King George, if it is not accompanied by freedom from King Prejudice! Thus, freedom, far from being mere absence of restraint is construed as willing acceptance of restraint and control of self-imposed bonds and obligations. It is submission to the law of one's being and the

conquest of the self, an attempt to correct the false values ascribed to things material, to subdue them and sublimate them. It is a rational synthesis of desires and passions in an integrated life.

Right to Resist

Both Thoreau and Gandhi had to face tyrannical governments. Their problem was the age-old problem which still remains in institutional terms – the problem of a proper choice between conflicting loyalties. It is the problem of the conscientious objector forced to choose between obedience to the laws of the State and the moral law as revealed to him by his conscience. Both believe that the laws of the State should be obeyed *so long as they are just*.

However, submission to an unjust law, far from being a duty is an immoral barter for liberty. Thoreau is of the opinion that if the injustice arises as a result of the necessary friction of the machinery of the government, it may be overlooked, but if it is such that it requires one to be the agent of injustice, then “break the law and let your life be a counter-friction to stop the machine”. According to him, no law should be enforced simply because it is declared to be good by the legislators if it is not really good. He exhorts all the citizens to cultivate enough boldness to rise in revolt against immoral laws and be prepared to lose their lives, if need be, in obedience to eternal laws. Hence his well-known statement: “Under a government which imprisons any unjustly, the true place for a just man is in prison.”

Exhorting the people to cultivate moral courage to resist unjust laws, Gandhi observed: “Swaraj will come, not by the acquisition of authority by a few but by the acquisition by all of the capacity to resist authority when it is abused.” Both Thoreau and Gandhi believed that citizens are men first and subjects afterwards. Gandhi thought that it is the height of good fortune to be in jail in the interest and good name of one’s country.

Civil Disobedience

The method used for protest by Thoreau and Gandhi was Civil Disobedience. Thoreau was the first to use this word in one of his speeches in 1849. For him, it stood for maximum cooperation with all people and institutions when they lead to good, and non-cooperation with them when they promote evil. It included defiance on the part of the people and resignations from their offices on the part of the officers. According to him, a real revolution is accomplished when this happens. Thoreau’s essay on ‘Civil Disobedience’ became a Bible for the Satyagrahis in South Africa, and the teachings of Thoreau were applied by Gandhi for the uplift of downtrodden millions of Indian workers.

Thoreau and Gandhi are two irrepressible optimists and conscientious objectors who courageously fought for right; moral rebels who believed in practising what they preached. Thoreau was certainly not the only influence on Gandhi but he influenced him as many others did and helped him to work out a synthesis of the wisdom of the East and the West in theory and to work as a chosen instrument through whom was presented an attitude and a method which proved to be a panacea for the troubled world.

4.4 INFLUENCE OF LEO TOLSTOY

There is no parallel in modern Indian intellectual history to what Gandhi says he owed to Leo Tolstoy.

Tolstoy exercised a greater influence on him. As we look at Appendix 1 of *Hind Swaraj*, we notice that of the twenty books listed there as many as six were by Tolstoy. Gandhi considered three of these – *Letter to a Hindoo*, *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, and *What is Art* – so important that either he himself translated them or he had others translate them into Gujarati. His adaptation into Gujarati of *Ivan the Fool*, gives us an idea of the high esteem in which he held Tolstoy.

A study of the Gandhi-Tolstoy relationship has a great lesson for us even today. It is that where universal ideas are concerned, cultural origins do not matter: they transcend all cultural barriers. The Gandhi-Tolstoy relationship is valuable for yet another reason. It is a model of how one should go about assimilating ideas taken from other cultures. Gandhi read Tolstoy carefully but critically, and he assimilated only those elements in his works which he thought were necessary for the development of his own original philosophy.

By the time Gandhi came to know Tolstoy, which was in 1894, he was just an unknown Indian lawyer finding his way in South Africa, while Tolstoy - forty one years senior to Gandhi in age- had already reached the zenith of his fame. Their correspondence started only in 1909, a year before Tolstoy's death. They exchanged seven letters in all, four from Gandhi and three from Tolstoy. Tolstoy came to know Gandhi only through *Hind Swaraj* (1909), and Doke's biography, *M.K. Gandhi: An Indian Patriot in South Africa* (1909). Though the duration of their contact was very short, it nevertheless proved to be very significant. Tolstoy had enough time to recognise the historic importance of *Hind Swaraj*, and of what Gandhi was doing in South Africa. Thanks to that contact, Gandhi came to be seen as an inheritor of Tolstoy's moral legacy into the twentieth century.

Looking back on this historic relationship, we see three works of Tolstoy as being especially significant. They are:

- (1) *The Kingdom of God is Within You*;
- (2) *Letter to a Hindoo*; and
- (3) *What is Art*?

They deal with three enduring themes in Gandhian philosophy, namely, the need for spirituality based on a practical love of God and fellow human beings; the problem of violence and its resolution; and the place and function of art in life.

(1) *The Kingdom of God is Within You*

Gandhi read this book in 1894, the year of the first English translated version. As he states in his Autobiography, the book *overwhelmed* him. It was a required reading for members of the Phoenix Settlement and Tolstoy Farm. It was his constant companion during his South African days and all three of his prison stays in South Africa.

The underlying theme of the book is the question of violence and its peaceful resolution. Its basic insight, which remains valid even today, is that peace is a social good, and that there can be no peace on earth, unless there is a genuine spiritual self-renewal among individuals, supported by a strong public opinion favouring peace. By spiritual self-renewal, Tolstoy meant a new understanding of the meaning of pure religion. The essence of pure religion, in his view, lay in "man's faculty of foreseeing prophetically the true meaning of life". As far as the resolution of violence was concerned, he felt that a new appreciation of the relevance of the ethic of the *Sermon on the Mount* was needed.

Tolstoy next turned to a discussion of what pure religion was and how it alone could lead to true inner progress. Pure religion had its source in the unconditional love of God, from which flowed the true love of fellow human-beings. And human life, taken at the individual level, was a process of striving to achieve the fullness of this love. The love of God guides human beings not by external rules but by “an inward consciousness of the possibility of reaching divine perfection”. This growth in inner perfection is the necessary spiritual condition that would make life at the social and political level less violent. He called the reality of this development as the kingdom of God. It is a metaphor signifying “a new system of life, free from violence”. This kingdom is found within each individual human being. It can flourish only if we live “according to the light in us”. The development of such an inner kingdom was the end of all true religions. And its attainment depends on human effort. “The Kingdom of God can only be reached by effort, and only those who make such effort reach it.” And effort here meant the effort to rise above external conditions and to follow the truth that is revealing itself within. The ability to cultivate the kingdom within was an ability which all human beings possessed. The kingdom within, then, provides the most effective solution to the problem of violence: it provides a solution superior to that provided by the State and by scientific humanism. This is, more or less, the basic contention of Tolstoy in the book.

Gandhi said, “*It was forty years back when I was passing through a severe crisis of skepticism and doubt that I came across ‘The Kingdom of God is Within You’, and was deeply impressed by it. I was at that time a believer in non-violence. Its reading cured me of my skepticism and made me a first believer in Ahimsa. What has appealed to me in Tolstoy’s life is that he practiced what he preached and reckoned no cost too great in his pursuit of truth.*”

Again, “*He was the greatest apostle of non-violence that the present age has written and spoken on non-violence so fully or so insistently and with such penetrations and insight as he. I would even go further and say that his remarkable development of this doctrine puts to shame the present day narrow and lop-sided interpretation put upon it by the votaries of Ahimsa in this land of ours.*”

While the book *The Kingdom of God is Within You* captivated Gandhi, Tolstoy appreciated the non-violent struggle led by Gandhi. Gandhi said, “I made too an intensive study of Tolstoy’s books. *The Gospel In Brief, What To Do?* And such other books made a deep impression on me. I began to realise more and more the infinite possibilities of universal love”. He not only concurred with the belief of Tolstoy that “The Kingdom of God is Within You”, but realised it in his life by strenuous endeavour. His successful striving after truth was an eloquent demonstration of the Tolstoyan declaration that “The Kingdom of God can only be reached by effort and only those who make such effort reach it”.

(2) *Letter to a Hindoo*

The background to the *Letter* is as interesting as its contents. It was written in response to two letters from Taraknath Das (1884-1958). The first was written on 24th May 1908 from University Station, Seattle, Washington State, and the second on 15th July 1908 from Norwich University, Northfield, Vermont. A former member of Bengal terrorist organisation, Das had emigrated to the United States in 1906. His two letters to Tolstoy gave a brief description of the terrible plight of India under colonial rule. Their purpose was to seek Tolstoy’s support for India’s cause.

Tolstoy took Das's letters very seriously. It took him seven months, 29 drafts and 413 manuscript pages to prepare the *Letter*, which is only about 6,000 words long. That a writer of Tolstoy's stature would devote so much time and effort to compose this document is in itself a sign of its historical importance.

Even though the *Letter* originated as a result of Das's initiative, it probably would never have become famous, had it not been for Gandhi. For, a copy of a typescript of the *Letter* fell into his hands in 1909 while he was in London. To verify its authenticity, he wrote directly to Tolstoy. He had also asked permission, if the document proved to be authentic, to have it published in both English and Gujarati. The permission was readily granted, and Gandhi edited and translated it.

The *Letter* makes two basic points. The first is that "the chief, if not the sole" cause of the enslavement of India is the absence of a pure religious consciousness in all nations, including India. Nations no longer believe in a spiritual element in their lives, an element which manifests itself in the love of God and fellow human beings.

Secondly, Indians are implicated in their own enslavement. Tolstoy pointed to them that they were repeating "the amazing stupidity" indoctrinated in them by their European teachers such as Herbert Spencer that force could be resisted only with force. The conclusion is clear: "If the people of India are enslaved by violence, it is only because they themselves live and have lived by violence, and do not recognize the eternal law of love inherent in humanity".

Tolstoy's conclusion was that India's liberation lay with Indians liberating themselves from the belief that violence could liberate them. They should begin to believe in the power of the soul and in that of a public opinion favourable to non-violence.

(3) *What is Art?*

The first question that will cross the mind of anyone who looks into Appendix I of *Hind Swaraj* is this: Why would Gandhi include in it two works on art by two of Europe's greatest art critics, Ruskin and Tolstoy? The reference is to Ruskin's *The Political Economy of Art* or, in its revised title, *A Joy For Ever*, and to Tolstoy's *What is Art?* What have Western art and art criticism to do with India and its swaraj? What made Gandhi think that all serious students of his philosophy should read these works as well?

Living in a pluralistic society, Gandhi saw how art could bring different people together. He was able to invent and popularise universal symbols such as the charkha and khadi. His loincloth itself expressed 'the agony' of his soul for the poverty of the masses and his solidarity with them. A bare body and bare head, he said, were signs of mourning for India's plight. It was painful for him to eat or dress as rich people do, so long as the poor did not have enough to eat and enough to cover their bodies with.

Whatever critics and art historians might say, those who knew Gandhi personally well, or those who were artists themselves, saw the artist in him. Here, perhaps, E.M. Forster expresses the idea better than most. Speaking of Gandhi, he said that he was with the great artists, though art was not his medium. And Tagore, in the end, came to understand him as an artist. Nehru called him "the perfect artist".

Of the three works of Tolstoy, some consider '*What is Art?*' to be the most significant, for it gives us a unique entry into Gandhi's mind and feelings. We see him inventing new symbols, using them to shape public opinion, and to move people to action.

Gandhi agreed with Tolstoy's reminder to the mass of humanity, the language of Christ, that "We are all sons of one father, no matter where we live or what language we speak; we are all brothers and are subject only to the law of love, which the common father has implanted in our hearts". Tolstoy pointed to the division of men into castes: one labouring, oppressed, needy and suffering; the other idle, oppressing and living in luxury and pleasure. Gandhi upheld the Tolstoyan dictum that an ideal state would be an ordered anarchy, in which everyone would rule himself in such a manner that he would never be a hindrance to his neighbours.

Love is the basis of Tolstoy's principles of non-resistance and non-cooperation. He asserts, in his '*Three Parables*' that 'Evil must not be driven out with evil, that all resistance by violence merely increases the evil'. Tolstoy's philosophy of Christian anarchism repudiates the authority of the state and private property, for they are based on physical balance. His philosophy is the application of the teaching of the *Sermon on the Mount*, which contains the essence of Christianity, teaches us to live in peace with all men, to harbour anger towards none, and to love all men alike without distinction of nationality.

Tolstoy was the great apostle of *ahimsa*. His penetration into the efficacy of this weapon was deep. None in the West had so fully read and understood *ahimsa* as Tolstoy. J.J. Doke is of the opinion that the miscellaneous writings of Tolstoy, especially on ethical, religious and allied problems were traced out, read and digested by Gandhi; He calls him a disciple of Tolstoy. Gandhi wrote his first letter to Tolstoy in October, 1909, in which he described the passive resistance which was going on in Transvaal for three years. Tolstoy replied to this letter, addressing Transvaal Satyagrahis as 'dear brothers and co-workers'. In 1910, Gandhi laid the foundation of Tolstoy Farm which was to become a laboratory for experiments on the philosophy and teachings of passive resistance.

Tolstoy condemns the State and its machinery, law courts, police and military, private property and capitalism, even the schools, as all these offend against the law of love. He is opposed to the use of force, payment of taxes, and compulsory military service. He lays great stress on the moral regeneration of the individual.

There are some facts which differentiate Gandhi from Tolstoy. Gandhi is more practical than Tolstoy. Gandhi's idea of non-violence is also slightly different as he defined *Ahimsa* in the sense of avoidance of injury to any creature out of anger; Tolstoy took *Ahimsa* in the sense of avoidance of force in all forms. As life involves violence, Tolstoy turns away from it; Gandhi, on the other hand, followed the *Gita* ideal of action which preaches action without attachment. In certain circumstances, even killing may be called *ahimsa*, as life involves some amount of violence. Therefore, Gandhi follows the *Gita*'s ideal of action and resists evils with the detachment of spirit. Gandhi did not accept Tolstoy so far as the question of reincarnation is concerned. Gandhi wrote to Tolstoy, "Reincarnation or transmigration is a cherished belief with millions in India, indeed, in China also. With many, one might almost say, it is a matter of experience, no longer a matter of academic acceptance. It explains reasonably the many mysteries of life". Gandhi did not find anything new in Tolstoy. Therefore, he said. "There is no doubt that there is nothing new in what Tolstoy preaches. But his presentation of the old truth is refreshingly forceful. His logic is unassailable. And, above all, he endeavours to practice what he preaches. He preaches to convince. He is sincere and earnest. He commands attention".

Tolstoy had renounced the happy-go-lucky life and lived the life of a poor peasant, swept and cleaned his own room, his clothes and shoes, worked with peasants in his own estate Yasnaya Polyanna, ploughed and furrowed the land, worked for peasant families who were running short of labour, and sometimes performed all the farm operations for a poor widow, who could hardly afford to engage hired labourers. This life of renunciation and dedication to the service of the poor and the oppressed had such a great appeal for Gandhi that he refashioned his life accordingly. He renounced his property and embraced voluntary poverty, clothed himself like a poor peasant, made ample use of his limbs to earn his bread and travelled in third class railway compartments after he opted for a life of renunciation. To quote Pyarelal, "It was not Tolstoy's writings alone, but the example of his life, his passion for truth and ceaseless striving after perfection that enthroned him in Gandhi's heart In him he found kindred spirit, a single-minded seeker after truth, an aristocrat turned peasant and shoe maker in pursuit of the meaning of life who dedicated his wealth and talent and genius to the service of humanity, while he himself strove to live by his body labour".

Tolstoy believed in the efficacy of manual labour for earning one's bread. He made a plea for manual labour in the interest of the poor and also in the interest of the rich. His life was dedicated to the purpose of promoting the objective of an egalitarian society. His philosophy breathed in a large measure the message of extinguishment of socio-economic disparities, privileges, exploitation and creation of a society, whose cornerstones are equality, fraternity, fellowship, renunciation, non-exploitation and bread labour.

4.5 THE INFLUENCE OF THE QUAKERS

The most notable exponents of Christian non-resistance and pacifism are the Quakers. It was George Fox who founded the Quaker Society of Friends in 1652. Fox, William Penn, Isaac Pennington and Robert Barclay were the leading Quakers of the seventeenth century. Penn established in Pennsylvania the first Quaker Settlement, otherwise known as the 'Holy Experiment'. In the beginning, the Quakers had to suffer persecution and martyrdom. But the Toleration Act of 1689 put an end to this.

The Quakers are noted for their firm opposition to war and violence, and for their advocacy of peace. According to Beales, the entire Christian Peace Movement was largely Quaker in origin. Thus, they may as well be called the fathers of Christian pacifism. As early as 1660, George Fox described the Quaker attitude to war in a statement to Charles II as follows:

We utterly deny all outward wars and strife and fighting with outward weapons, for any end or pretence whatever; this is our testimony to the whole world.

The Quakers believe that the attempt to secure the triumph of right through the application of physical force is based on a false philosophy. The Quakers do not merely stand passively and protest against war. Since 1917, they have added a constructive programme to their movement. After World War I, the Quakers carried on agricultural and social reconstruction work as well as typhus prevention, famine relief and child feeding in Serbia, Poland, Austria, Russia and Germany.

Gandhi must have been influenced by the Quakers in his opposition to war and violence and his strong advocacy of peace, pacifism and Non-Violence.

4.6 SUMMARY

The depth of Gandhi's wisdom and the rich variety of his thought do tell us that he was a man of varied influences and experiences. While he was not a great reader, whatever he read he read carefully and assimilated its contents and central message, to be put into practice in his personal and public life.

He himself acknowledged that the "three moderns have left a deep impression on my life, and captivated me: Raychandbhai by his living contact; Tolstoy by his book, *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, and Ruskin by his book, *Unto This Last*." He made his first contact with Tolstoy's writings in 1893-94 and with those of Ruskin in 1904. While Tolstoy's *Kingdom of God* made him realise the infinite possibilities of universal love, cured him of his skepticism and sowed the seed of an invincible belief in non-violence, Ruskin's *Unto This Last* brought about an instantaneous and practical transformation in his life.

Neither Thoreau nor Gandhi equated civilisation with mere technological advancement or sheer conquest of the physical environment. Man has traversed a long and tortuous distance from savagery to civilisation. Though man's achievements have been titanic, civilisation has become sick, neurotic and satanic. Condemning some of the "achievements" of man, Gandhi believed that the railways and the machines represent the true badge of slavery of the Indian people, as they do of the Europeans. In one of his works, Thoreau asks: *Have we no culture, no refinement but skill only to live coarsely and serve the devil; to acquire a little worldly wealth or fame or liberty, and make a false show with it, as if we were all hulk and shell, with no tender and living kernel to us?*

That the parallelism of views between Gandhi and Thoreau is not accidental is evident from the fact that ten years after writing his *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi observed that though the views expressed therein were his, he had made an attempt to follow Eastern and Western writers including Thoreau and Emerson.

4.7 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Describe the essence of John Ruskin's 'Unto This Last' and the nature of its influence on Gandhi.
2. What are the major ideas of Henry David Thoreau and how did they influence Gandhi?
3. What are the major arguments of Leo Tolstoy in 'The Kingdom of God is Within You'? Are they similar to Gandhi's views on the subject?
4. Attempt an overview of the Western influences on Gandhi.

SUGGESTED READINGS

1. M.K. Gandhi., *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 2007. (recent edition)
2. M.P. Mathai., M.S. John and Siby Joseph., ed., *Meditations on Gandhi*, Concept Publishers, New Delhi, 2002.

3. Usha Mehta., Mahatma Gandhi and Humanism, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Mumbai, 2000.
4. D.K. Dutta., Social, Moral and Religious Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi, Intellectual Publishing House, New Delhi, 1980.
5. James Mathews., The Matchless Weapon – Satyagraha, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1989.
6. Bhabani Bhattacharya, Gandhi, the Writer, National Book Trust, New Delhi, 1969.



ignou
THE PEOPLE'S
UNIVERSITY