In the previous chapter the growth and characteristics of nationalism as developed in Bengal in the pre-Gandhian period have been analysed. In this short chapter an attempt will be made to explain the basic foundation of the Gandhian ideology. And the interaction between the two (Bengali nationalism and the Gandhian ideology) would be dealt with on the following chapters.

The Gandhian outlook was basically different from that of the militant nationalists of Bengal. Gandhi combined in himself the dual role of a saint and an active politician and tried to create a fusion of religion and politics in a single mould. He used all his energies to introduce into the nationalist struggle such moral values as truth and non-violence. He made this attempt because he was basically a religious man and he was profoundly influenced since his boyhood by Vaishnavism, Jainism, Ramayana of Tulsidas, philosophy of the Gita as well as by Christian values, particularly the Sermon on the Mount. Equally powerful was the influence of the idea of Ruskin, Thoreau and Tolstoy. These ideas had no doubt a political significance, but they were more related to humanism than nationalism. The intensive study of Tolstoy's books led him "to realise more and more the infinite possibilities of universal love." 1 Referring to the

influence of Ruskin on himself Gandhi wrote that he learned three basic principles from his book *Unto This Last*. They were: (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, in as much as all have the same right of earning their livelihood from their work, (3) That a life of labour, i.e., the life of the tiller of the soil and the handicraftsmen, is the life worth living. The ideas of Thoreau and Tolstoy influenced Gandhi's concept of Swaraj, a state in which everyone would be his own ruler. The nationalist movements in the west which inspired many Indian national leaders left Gandhi absolutely unimpressed. He admired Mazzini not for his role as the prophet of Italian nationalism but for his "writings on the duty of man that every-man must learn how to rule himself". The "machinations" of Cavour and the activities of Garibaldi and Victor Emanuel appeared to him rather repulsive. He wrote: "What substantial gain did Italy obtain after the withdrawal of the Austrian troops? The gain was only nominal".

His reaction to the British rule in India was largely that of a religious man. The ancient civilization of India based on religion was considered by Gandhi as much superior to the

2. Ibid., p. 182.


4. Ibid., p. 68.
modern civilization of the West, and his complaint against the British rule was that under it India was going to be corrupted by "godless" Western civilization. He wrote: "The tendency of the Indian civilization is to elevate the moral being, that of the Western civilization is to propagate immorality. The latter is godless, the former is based on a belief in God. So understanding and so believing, it behoves every lover of India to cling to the Old Indian Civilization even as a child clings to the mother's breast". His main enemy, therefore, was the "godless" Western civilization. "Your hatred against them" (the British), he advised the Indians, "ought to be transferred to their civilization". "It is", therefore, "not necessary for us", he observed, "to have as our goal the expulsion of the English". His goal was Swaraj which could be attained by the people by developing themselves morally and by exercising control over themselves — over their own passions. "Real home-rule is self-rule or self-control," he asserted. He further stated: "It is Swaraj when we learn to rule ourselves. It is, therefore, in the palm of our hands". Swaraj, according to Gandhi, was dependent on the ability of the people to lead a moral-religious life of self-control by rejecting the lures of the Western civilization, and he believed that "those  

5. Ibid., p. 63.  
6. Ibid., p. 66.  
7. Ibid., p. 65.  
8. Ibid., p. 104.  
9. Ibid., p. 65.
alone who have been affected by Western civilization have become enslaved. It is my deliberate opinion, he asserted, that India is being ground down, not under the English heel, but under that of modern civilization.

Though Gandhi's ideas had passed through a process of evolution, there was a basic consistency in his approach which was first clearly explained by him in 1909 in the book Hind Swaraj. He retained the moral-religious concept of Swaraj explained there throughout his life.

Gandhi's religion was, however, not denominational and ritualistic in character — it was universal in scope and humanistic in essence. By God and religion he understood such moral values as truth, non-violence, love and service to man. As he himself wrote: "To me God is Truth and Love, God is ethics and morality." The only way to serve God, he believed, was to serve humanity, and he observed: "My creed is service of God, and therefore, of humanity." Gandhi, therefore, did not become a recluse but remained in society to serve man in order to realize God. "Man's ultimate aim," he observed, "is the realization of God, and all his activities, social, political, religious, have to be guided by the ultimate aim of the vision of God." This view on social service led Gandhi to

10. Ibid., p. 64.
11. Ibid., p. 41.
12. N.K. Bose, Selections from Gandhi (Navajivan, Ahmedabad) 1957, p. 3.
13. Ibid., p. 25.
14. Ibid.
enter into public life, and he was brought to the political field as a consequence of his social service activities.

In South Africa Gandhi launched a movement for the removal of the hardships and disabilities which the Indian people living there were suffering from and this movement brought him in conflict with the Government. Coming back to India he started local movements against specific grievances in Champaran, Ahmedabad and Kheda. As in South Africa, most of these movements also led him to a confrontation with the political authorities, but he took up these activities essentially in the spirit of a social worker. Analysing the role of Gandhi during this period Judith M. Brown wrote:

"(He) was no politician in the ordinary sense of the word. He seems to have had no clear plan for a career or ambition for power, but to have visualized himself as a religious devotee and a public worker, whose duty it was to forward his ideal of Swaraj wherever possible and to right obvious wrongs wherever such came to light." 15

The satyagraha against the Rowlatt bills of 1919 was the first exclusively political movement organized by Gandhi. He entered directly into the political field because of his experience of a close relation between politics and social service activities which he undertook as a part of his religious duties. Gandhi himself wrote during this time: "My bent

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is not political but religious and I take part in politics because I feel that there is no department of life which can be divorced from religion and because politics touch the vital being of India almost at every point. It is therefore absolutely necessary that the political relation between Englishmen and ourselves should be put on a sound basis. I am endeavouring to the best of my ability to assist in the process." He soon emerged as the supreme leader of the Indian National Congress and guided it till the achievement of national independence in 1947. But his social activities also continued to grow and they did not remain subordinate to his political activities. He did never forget that the ultimate mission of his life was religious and not simply political. Gandhi could not echo Tilak's demand: "Swaraj is my birth-right and I must have it." Swaraj, in Gandhi's view, was essentially a duty, a moral-religious duty, and his involvement in politics was a natural corollary of what he considered his social and religious duty. That is why he continued to defer as far as possible to define Swaraj politically in the nationalist struggle, though he was continuously pressed by the Bengali nationalists to do so right from the beginning. With reference to the Non-co-operation Movement launched by Gandhi in 1921, Upendra Nath Bandopadhaya, a prominent nationalist leader of the revolutionary group of Bengal, wrote: "Some people began to say that the

major objective of the Non-co-operation Movement is to usher in a new age in the world by preaching the ideal of non-violence; the establishment of political Swaraj in India is only a subsidiary objective." 17 Explaining the reasons why he came to the field of politics, Gandhi himself wrote: "I am but a humble seeker after Truth and bent upon finding it. I count no sacrifice too great for the sake of seeing God face to face. The whole of my activity, whether it may be called social, political, humanitarian or ethical, is directed to that end. And as I know that God is found more often in the lowliest of His creatures than in the high and mighty, I am struggling to reach the status of those. I cannot do so without their service. Hence, my passion for the service of the suppressed classes. And as I cannot render this service without entering politics, I find myself in them." 18

On the eve of launching the Non-co-operation Movement he tried to make his position clear. He wrote: "The politician in me has never dominated a single decision of mine and if I seem to take part in politics, it is only because politics encircle us today like the coil of a snake from which one cannot get out, no matter how much one tries. I wish, therefore, to wrestle with the snake, as I have been doing." 19 Again, during

18. "A Bad comparison" in Young India, 11 September 1924.
19. "Neither A Saint Nor A Politician" in Young India, 12 May 1920.
the Civil Disobedience Movement he observed: "My work of social reform was in no way less than or subordinate to political work. The fact is that when I saw that to a certain extent my social work would be impossible without the help of political work, I took to the latter and only to the extent that it helped the former. I must therefore confess that the work of social reform or self-purification of this nature is a hundred times dearer to me than what is called purely political work."²⁰

The political work to which he was brought logically as a result of his social service activities urged him to spiritualize politics. This he tried to do in two ways: by insisting on the adoption of peaceful and moral means, particularly truth and non-violence, and by placing before the country the picture of a non-violent social order which he thought would be conducive to a moral and spiritual life. He stood for a simple, decentralized and rural society because he believed that a moral, religious and non-violent way of life might arise only against such a social background. He was opposed to large-scale production and the 'craze for machinery' because he believed that material prosperity beyond a certain stage led to moral and spiritual degradation. He wrote: "The only statement that has to be examined is, whether it can be laid down as a law of universal application that material advancement means moral progress."²¹

²¹ N.K. Bose, n. 12, pp. 76-77.
answer was in the negative, and in order to explain his point he gave a few illustrations. "Rome", he continued, "suffered a moral fall when it attained high material affluence. So did Egypt, and so perhaps most countries of which we have any historical record. The descendants and kinsmen of the royal and divine Krishna too fell when they were rolling in riches. We do not deny to the Rockfellers and the Carnegies possession of an ordinary measure of morality but we gladly judge them indulgently. I mean that we do not even expect them to satisfy the highest standard of morality. With them material gain has not necessarily meant moral gain. In South Africa, where I had the privilege of associating with thousands of our countrymen on most intimate terms, I observed almost invariably that the greater the possession of riches, the greater was their turpitude."

It is unnecessary to raise here the question as to whether the illustrations referred to by Gandhi can stand the test of historical scrutiny. It is equally futile to raise any philosophical controversy about the definition of morality. The fact is that Gandhi like many other religious thinkers believed that man, individually as well as collectively, suffered moral decay as a result of material affluence. He concluded: "If I were not afraid of treading on dangerous ground, I would even come nearer home and show how the possession of riches has been a hindrance to real growth. I venture
to think that the scriptures of the world are far safer and sounder treatises on laws of economics than many of the modern text books. The scriptures convinced him that contentment was a great human virtue, and that man could reach the stage of contentment only by keeping his wants voluntarily limited instead of running relentlessly after more and more material prosperity. The modern trend towards higher and higher standard of living through large-scale production and expansion of industries appeared to him demoralizing, and he wrote: "As it is, the rich are discontented no less than the poor. The poor man would fain become a millionaire, and the millionaire a multi-millionaire." In order to avoid this craze for material wealth Gandhi wanted every man to remain contented with the satisfaction of his basic natural wants without demanding more. Such a society alone, he argued, could establish the principle of economic equality. In 1947 he wrote: "What was best was that nobody should possess more than he would himself use." Earlier, he pointed out that "the real implication on equal distribution is that each man shall have the wherewithal to supply all his natural wants and no more." Production of goods on a large scale through factories would give rise to a scramble for the possession of wealth and to exploitation and violence. He, therefore, wrote: "You cannot build non-violence on a factory civilization, but

22. Ibid., p. 76.
24. Ibid., 25 August 1940.
it can be built on self-contained villages. ... Rural economy, as I have conceived it, eschews exploitation altogether, and exploitation is the essence of violence. You have, therefore, to be rural-minded before you can be non-violent." Explain-ing the point further he wrote several weeks later: "Simple homes from which there is nothing to take away require no policing; the palaces of the rich must have strong guards to protect them against dacoity. So must huge factories." Gandhi obviously recognized the influence of socio-economic factors on the spiritual life of man, and, therefore, he tried to create a society which he believed would be most suitable for man's spiritual development, as he understood it.

Gandhi's insistence on moral means and the picture of ideal society which he placed before the country brought him immediately into sharp conflict with the militant nationalists of Bengal. These ideas cannot be traced to the thought and practice of any school of nationalist leaders of Bengal of the pre-Gandhian period. The Liberal-Moderates stood for the rise of a perfectly modern industrialized society in India and their respect for constitutional means had no relation to the Gandhian doctrine of non-violence. The Extremists were not averse to violence, and a section of them, the underground revolutionaries, were clearly in favour of it. They (the extremists) tried to take advantage of religion to promote nationalism

25. Ibid., 4 November 1939.
26. Ibid., 30 December 1939.
(Ganapati festival of Tilak, for example) or to turn nationalism itself into a religion (Bankim Chandra, Aurobindo, for example). Gandhi did not belong to this tradition. He was a religious man who entered into the nationalist movement and not a nationalist who used religion for his purpose. Instead of giving religion a nationalist content he tried to introduce religion (spiritual and moral values) into the nationalist movement. The difference between the two is wide, and should not be lost sight of. The Gandhian values appeared irrelevant and redundant and even a positive hindrance to the militant nationalists of Bengal, and their straight nationalist logic appeared to Gandhi as immoral, striking at the root of his religious view of life. Gandhi looked at the Indian nationalist movement as an integral part of a world-wide movement. In his view it was a movement to create a moral and non-violent society through moral and non-violent means.

This outlook of Gandhi was not shared by the militant nationalists of Bengal at all. But inspite of basic differences they accepted Gandhi's leadership on tactical ground. They were attracted towards him because of his charismatic hold over the Indian masses and his phenomenal gift for moving and mobilizing them to great acts of courage and sacrifice. They accepted some of Gandhi's ideas also not out of conviction but

27. Gandhi once said to Mr. Polak: "Most religious men I have met are politicians in disguise. I, however, who wear the guise of a politician, am at heart a religious man." Cited in Gopinath Dhawan, The Political Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi (Navajivan, Ahmedabad, 1946), p. 35.
of necessity. In other words, they accepted them purely from the point of view of expediency. They, for example, accepted non-violence only as a policy and never as a creed. They accepted non-violence because a violent movement against the British was not considered feasible. The more radical section accepted it simply as a means for mass awakening, and they tried to supplement it by violent means whenever possible. This uneasy compromise with Gandhi was possible because he was satisfied with the tactical acceptance of his ideas for the time being by the Congressmen and did not insist on their acceptance in the true spirit in which they were conceived by him. Gandhi believed that he would be able to demonstrate the efficacy of his ideas gradually and thus ultimately convert to his views the people who would follow him on tactical ground at the initial stage. In a letter to the Times of India on 31st July 1941 he wrote: "With me no doubt non-violence is an end in itself ... With the vast majority of Congressmen it is and must remain a means. The weakness is thus inherent though none the less regrettable. The marvel is that in spite of the weakness, twenty years experience has not weaned Congressmen from the non-violent policy, though it is open to change it at any time." In 1942 he again admitted: "If I had started with men who accepted non-violence as a creed, I might have ended with myself. Imperfect as I am, I started with imperfect men and women, and sailed on an uncharted..."

ocean. If Gandhi believed that he would be able to convert people who would follow him simply on the ground of expediency, the militant nationalists of Bengal, on the other hand, thought they would be able to influence or pressurize Gandhi to take their line of action. They also believed that under Gandhi's leadership the mass awakening might reach such a height that the struggle for freedom would ultimately outgrow the Gandhian limitations and follow the path of an uncompromising struggle against the British rule. With such an attitude the militant nationalists of Bengal accepted leadership of Gandhi, and this resulted in a set of parallel struggle in Bengal, one against the British government and the other against the Gandhian leadership. We shall deal with that struggle in the next chapter.