CHAPTER VI
ETHICAL BASIS OF GANDHI’S WORLD-VIEW

Article 1
Ethics and Metaphysics

In the last chapter we discussed Gandhi's ideas of self-realisation which is variously termed in different religions as salvation, nirvana, liberation, moksha etc. It may not be out of place to mention here that a thinker who sets self-realisation or 'seeing God face to face' as the Summum Bonum of life and insists that every act of the human individual should lead to it, is indulging in a risky endeavour, treading on slippery grounds, so to say, because he is most likely to be dubbed as an escapist taking easy flights from the hard realities of life. For example, note the objections that a social researcher like Daniel Yankelovich raises to the search for self-fulfilment (1). He argues that the so-called devotion to inner development leading to self-fulfilment or self-actualization (which is an inevitable step in the direction of self-realization) is anti-social, and a moral and social absurdity and does not contribute to society's well-being (2).

As we have already seen, for Gandhi self-realization is not an eschatological ideal but a very historical and pragmatic one to be ceaselessly pursued and achieved here and now. Nor is it a private or individual ideal to be sought after in solitude and seclusion and to be attained all by oneself to the exclusion of the others. On the contrary, Gandhi affirms that moksha is impossible unless and until our fellow human beings also reach that level of attainment. Thus, in the Gandhian framework, moksha means the liberation of all, sarvodaya. And it is not just the liberation of human beings only, but even of the non-sentient objects of the world (3).
VI. 1. 1. Ethical path to spiritual goal

It becomes, therefore, the bounden duty of all to engage ceaselessly in action. *karma*, promoting the welfare of others and alleviating their sufferings, *lokasaṃgraha*, in order to prepare the entire humanity fit for God-realization. Special mention shall be made here that Gandhi does not rule out from, but incorporates into his concept of self-realization its secular overtones viz., the integral development of the total personality of the human individual by facilitating the full flowering of the potentialities and capabilities latent in him. Thus it becomes clear that the attempt for self-realization is not a private or individual endeavour only, but a collective and communitarian venture calling for an integral approach embracing all fields of human activities.

Man is born to act and sans action there is no life (4). Self-realization is to be achieved not by giving up action under the fear or pretext that they are binding, but by constantly engaging in action (and yet be not bound by them) in such a way that they help us in gaining fitness for *moksha*. In this perspective spirituality embraces ethics and both become as inseparable as the two sides of the same coin. Spiritual pursuits to become effective and socially relevant have to follow the ethical path. That is why Gandhi said with unerring accuracy that an independent search for truth requires an intensely moral life (5).

Thus, as metaphysics and ethics are organically related in Gandhi's *weltanschauung*, in order to appreciate its wholistic nature it is essential to have a proper understanding of his ethical ideas. What is being attempted here is a brief exposition of the relation between ethics and metaphysics and also the major ethical ideas of Gandhi, viewing Gandhian ethics as a synthesis of the ethics of perfection and the ethics of action (6).
VI. 1. 2. Ethics and mysticism

The question of the relation between metaphysics and ethics has been a bone of contention among philosophers. Dr. Albert Schweitzer, for example, argues that in the last resort, the aim of a world-view is our spiritual unity with the infinite Being, and therefore, the perfect world-view is mysticism because it is in mysticism that man realizes spiritual union with infinite Being (7).

Mysticism is the perfect form of world-view. In this world-view man endeavours to arrive at a spiritual relationship to the infinite Being to which he belongs as a part of Nature. He studies the Universe to discover whether he can apprehend and become one with the mysterious will that governs it. Only in spiritual unity with the infinite Being can he give meaning to his life and find strength to suffer and to act (8).

But, argues Dr. Schweitzer, although mysticism in the sense of spiritual union with the Ultimate Reality, the supreme Being, is in its nature the perfected kind of world-view, all mysticism down to the present is unsatisfactory because it denies the world and life and has no ethical content (9). As a possible and necessary solution to this paradox what Dr. Schweitzer suggests is a "simple synthesis" of mysticism and ethics (10).

Dr. Radhakrishnan, answering Schweitzer's criticism and expatiating the Indian philosophic position vis-a-vis the relation between mysticism and ethics points out that, "any ethical theory must be grounded in metaphysics, in a philosophical conception of the relation between human conduct and ultimate reality. As we think the ultimate reality to be, so we behave. Vision and action go together" (11). Highest ethics, according to Dr. Radhakrishnan, "must be rooted in other-worldliness. This is the great classical tradition of spiritual wisdom" (12). It must be clarified here that other-worldliness does not mean world and life negation. It means, on the other hand, that life has a dimension of transcendence. We are amphibious beings (Plotinus) and live on earth and in a world of
VI. 1. 3. The Gandhian synthesis

In order to know and realize truth, one must cease to identify oneself with the separate ego shut up in the walls of the body. "We must renounce the narrow horizon, the selfish interest, the unreal objective. This is an ethical process. Truth can never be perceived except by those who are in love with goodness. . . ." (15). Thus there is no inconsistency between mysticism and ethics. "Inner perfection and outer conduct are two sides of one life" (16). Gandhi knew this fundamental indivisibility of metaphysics and ethics and tried to achieve a synthesis of mysticism and ethical conduct not just at the level of thought but at the level of life.

Dr. Schweitzer admits this great achievement of Gandhi and says that Gandhi has completely spiritualized and thus ennobled what is this worldly by the non-worldly (17). Dr. Schweitzer writes:

By a magnificent paradox, Gandhi brings the idea of activity and the idea of world and life negation into relationship in such a way that he can regard activity in the world as the highest form of renunciation of the world. . . . so in Gandhi's spirit modern Indian ethical world and life affirmation and a world and life negation which goes-back to the Buddha dwell side by side (18).

Article 2

Gandhi's Ethical Ideas

VI. 2. 1. The means - end question: as the means so the end

In weltanschauung as in systematic philosophy, axiology follows teleology (19). It is generally accepted that ethical considerations mainly depend upon the scale of values that we hold dear. The fundamental question in ethics, of course, is what we ought to do? If the answer is 'we must act morally', the poser is raised: What is the aim of morality, or why should we act morally, after all? This question naturally leads us to the domain of teleology. Acting morally is inseparably connected
with the question of the meaning and purpose of existence. As we already saw, the ultimate aim of life, to Gandhi, is the realization of God or Truth and therefore, we must adopt such means as would surely lead us to the ultimate end. Thus we can see that closely connected with the question of end is the question of means.

The means-end problem has been one of the most widely debated issues in Ethics. There are two dichotomous views about it, one which holds that the end justifies the means and the other that means must be pure and moral. "Communists, Fascists as well as most practical politicians believe in the maxim, 'the end justifies the means'. That is, if the end is desirable, even means like cunning, deceit and violence are justified, if they help us to achieve the end" (20). On the contrary, for Gandhi, the end and the means are so closely related that the end grows out of the means. "The means may be likened to a seed, the end to a tree, and there is just the same inviolable connection between the means and the end as there is between the seed and the tree" (21). Gandhi also wrote that means and end are convertible terms (22). Realization of the goal, according to him, is in exact proportion to the means we employ (23). In the Hind Swaraj Gandhi argues thus:

If I want to deprive you of your watch, I shall certainly have to fight for it; if I want to buy your watch I shall have to pay for it; and, according to the means I employ the watch is stolen property, my own property, or a donation. Thus we see three different results from three different means (24).

Gandhi is very particular that it is not enough that the end just looks very noble and laudable, but that the means also must be equally noble, just and moral. Writing on socialism Gandhi said: "This socialism is pure as crystal. It, therefore, requires crystal like means to achieve it. Impure means result in impure end" (25). He totally disapproved of the violent means advocated by the Western socialists for enforcing socialist
doctrines. Gandhi went to the extent of declaring that means are every thing in the means- end question. "They say, 'means are after all means'. I would say, 'means are after all every thing'. As the means so the end. . . . There is no wall of separation between means and end. (26).

The question arises: Why does Gandhi insist so much on the purity of means? One of the reasons that Gandhi gives in justification of his emphasis on means is the fact that man can only strive and cannot command the results. "Indeed, the Creator has given us control (and that too very limited) over means, none over the end" (27). Gandhi has recorded his indebtedness to the Gita in developing this attitude to the means- end question. Also, the Gita doctrine of nishkama karma (action without attachment), according to Gandhi, teaches us that a good deed produces only a good result (28).

Another reason for Gandhi's uncompromising insistence on right means is his conviction that the theory of end justifies the means is not only ethically wrong but also fraught with dangerous consequences. Gopinath Dhawan summarizes the arguments of Gandhi on this question as follows:

the theory permits recourse to violence, fraud, untruth, opportunism etc., provided the end is just. But these means, instead of helping us to advance on the path of progress, lead us to regard human beings as means rather than ends, deaden our finer feelings and result in oppression and cruelty. Besides, there can generally be no certainty that a violent action is always motivated only by a good end. The tyrant and the terrorist invariably plead laudable ends when perpetrating the most outrageous crimes. Further, it is dangerous ethics to make the success of an action or policy the criterion of its propriety. There is, moreover, all the difference between what passes for success, quick results mostly short lived and real, enduring achievements that require a long period of gestation. Violence and deception, terror and Machiavellian diplomacy might seem to score for the time being over truth and love, justice and open dealing. But the victory is partial and transitory and the gains mere burdens. Good means alone can lead us to lasting peace and progress (29).

History and contemporary experiences bear ample testimony to the truth of Gandhi's assertion that 'as the means so the end'.
VI. 2. 2. Vows and their observance

It is against this background that we must examine the means that Gandhi prescribes for realising the ultimate goal of life. Gandhi avers that in order to see the universal and all pervading spirit of truth face to face one must be able to identify oneself with everything that lives and love the meanest of creation as oneself. This is impossible without self-purification. "God can never be realised by one who is not pure of heart" (30). More over, one has to reduce oneself to zero (31). "But the path of self-purification is hard and steep. To attain to perfect purity one has to become absolutely passion free in thought, speech and action, to rise above the opposing currents of love and hatred, attachment and repulsion " (32).

One has to undergo a hard process of self discipline in order to achieve this state of purity and humility. For this Gandhi prescribes a course of eleven vows of Truth, Non-violence, Non-stealing, Celibacy, Non-possession, Bread-labour Control of the palate Fearlessness, Equality of religions, Self-reliance, Non-observance of untouchability. The first five of these vows occur in the famous Yogasutra of Patanjali. They are known as Yamas or Cardinal restraints and were considered by Hindus as indispensable for moral growth and self-realisation. In Jainism they are known as Mahavrtas. Gandhi prescribed these five restraints and the other six rules as vows obligatory for the inmates of the Satyagraha Ashram at Sabarmati.

Observance of vows Gandhi considered indispensable for attaining ethical discipline which is the starting point of any moral and spiritual advance (33). Gandhi defines a vow thus: "to do at any cost something that one ought to do constitutes a vow" (34). But Gandhi also adds that taking a vow does not mean that we are able to observe it completely from the very beginning, it does mean constant and honest effort in thought, word and deed with a view to its fulfilment (35). Emphasising the significance
of taking vows Gandhi writes:

I have no doubt in my mind that a vow is like a rudder - a life regulator. And just as a rudderless ship is lost, so is a life without a vow. For, after all, a vow means a religious determination to carry out a decision for self-restraint even at the cost of one's life. . . . not to take the vow is to trust one's little self. To take it is to distrust oneself and to trust only God (36).

Thus we see that the vow has a crucial role to play in the acquisition of virtue and discipline necessary for a selfless worker and in enabling one to pursue the path of self-realisation. It is, therefore, necessary to examine the eleven vows and bring out their significance in Gandhian ethics.

a) Truth

As we saw in the article on the Ultimate Reality, Truth for Gandhi is the Sovereign Principle, God, who combines in Himself Truth, Knowledge, Bliss (Sat-Chit-Ananda). Devotion to this Truth is the sole justification for our existence, according to Gandhi. What Gandhi emphasises in Truth as a vow is not its metaphysical nature but its ethical aspect. Truth in its absolute form cannot be comprehended by the human individual because of the inherent limitations of the instruments of cognition. "We cannot through the instrumentality of this ephemeral body see face to face Truth which is Eternal" (37).

So Gandhi makes a distinction between Absolute Truth and relative truth. Truth as comprehended by the individual human being is what he calls relative truth; it is the truth according to one's own light. What one must do is to act on the basis of his comprehension of truth. Gandhi reminds us that relative truths are sparks of the Absolute and therefore, if we follow them we are sure to reach the Absolute eventually. He says, "as long as I have not realised this Absolute Truth, so long must I hold by the relative truth as I have conceived it" (38). But in order to realise this Truth it is necessary to practise the precepts preached by the Gita viz., abhyasa - single minded
devotion to Truth and vairagya - indifference to all other interests in life (39). Quest for Truth also involves tapas - self-suffering, sometimes even unto death (40).

Truth, according to Gandhi, is the substance of morality and therefore, the vow of truth is not to be understood merely to mean that we speak the truth. "There should be Truth in thought, Truth in speech and Truth in action" (41). "As truth is the substance of morality, man is a moral agent only to the extent that he embodies and seeks truth" (42). Truth, understood thus in the ethical sense, is the basis of human co-existence. Human relations at all levels can be maintained only if it is truthful. It is, indeed, an uncharitable paradox that in order to gain utility even untruth has to pretend and claim to be truth. Thus, Truth becomes the sovereign ethical law for Gandhi. "It is the talisman by which death itself becomes the portal to life eternal" (43). The observance of the law of Truth is placed at the apex of ethics because Gandhi believed that without truth it is impossible to observe any other principles or rules in life (44). As a matter of fact, other principles are deducible from Truth and are meant to subserve it (45). In short, in order to gain fitness for self-realisation one must observe the law of Truth in thought, word and deed and in all walks of life.

b) Non-violence - Ahimsa

What is being attempted here is not a detailed discussion of the concept of ahimsa; ahimsa as an ethical principle alone is considered here.

"Although Gandhi regarded satya or truth as the highest value", writes Raghavan N. Iyer, "his name is commonly identified with the concept of on ahimsa or non-violence" (46). According to Gandhi truth and non-violence are like two sides of one and the same coin or like two sides of a smooth, unstamped metallic disc (47). Yet for him Truth is primary because, as he says, non-violence was discovered during his search for truth. "The

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jewel of non-violence was discovered during the search for and contemplation of truth" (48).

Like the other concepts, Gandhi’s concept of ahimsa also is based on his metaphysics. It is the practical application of his intuitive perception of the oneness of all creations. As all life is fundamentally one, the force that binds us together must be love and not hatred (49). Gandhi writes:

We are all bound by the tie of love. There is in everything a centripetal force without which nothing could have existed . . . . even as there is a cohesive force in blind matter, so must there be in all things animate and the name of that cohesive force among animate beings is love. . . . where there is love there is life. hatred leads to destruction (50).

As non-violence in its active form is goodwill towards all life, it is the bounden duty of all to apply this law of love to every situation in life (51). Gandhi saw that all religions without exception teach non-violence (52). In the Hindu tradition the great epic Mahabharata prescribes non-violence as the supreme duty. ahimsa paramo dharma.

Here a closer look at the meaning of ahimsa is called for. The Sanskrit word ahimsa, is a derivation of the negative prefix ‘a’ (not) and ‘himsa’ (killing on injury). Etymologically, ahimsa means giving up the desire to injure, harm or kill. Ahimsa is usually translated as non-violence and therefore, at first sight it appears to be a negative concept which it really is not. On the negative plane it is understood to mean not only refraining from doing physical injury to others but taking care not to hurt the feelings and beliefs of our fellow human beings., Gandhi identifies harsh words and harsh judgements, ill-will, anger, spite, cruelty, torture of man and animals, the oppression of the weak, the hurting of their self-respect etc., as forms of himsa (53). To him the essence of violence is exploitation (54).

Ahimsa has a very positive thrust as well and it is this positive aspect that Gandhi emphasises more than the negative.
It calls upon its votaries to love others, love even the enemies as one loves oneself.

In its positive form, *Ahimsa* means largest love, the greatest charity. If I am a follower of *Ahimsa* I must love my enemy. I must apply the same rules to the wrong doer, who is my enemy or a stranger to me, as I would to my wrong doing father or son. This active *Ahimsa* necessarily includes Truth and fearlessness. As man cannot deceive the loved one, he does not fear or frighten him or her. . . . (55).

Thus it is clear that for Gandhi *ahimsa* means not only the negative forms of non-injury and non-killing but the positive form of active love. "*Ahimsa* means 'Love' in the Pauline sense, and yet something more than the love defined by St. Paul, although I know St. Paul's beautiful definition is good enough for all practical purposes" (56). It sounds as though Gandhi sums up all the positive aspects of *ahimsa* when he says: "Non-violence is soul-force or the power of the Godhead within us. We become God-like to the extent we realize non-violence" (57).

Thus we see that Gandhi accepts the interpretation of *ahimsa* that it is not merely a negative state of harmlessness but a positive state of love, of doing good even to the evil doer. If this be so, the question arises: What is unique or special about Gandhi's advocacy and practice of *ahimsa*? In fact, what is unique about Gandhi's *ahimsa* is the way he applied it to life. Refusing to draw any distinction between private and public morality, Gandhi insisted that *ahimsa* like Truth should be as much a rule in public affairs as in private affairs. Gandhi gives it a new implication and a new significance of which all the previous exponents of the law of *ahimsa* were not aware (58).

Non-violence as the basis of personal life was taught by seers and saints like Mahavira, Gautama the Buddha, Zoroastier, Jesus Christ, Prophet Mohammed et. al. "All these taught that for self-realisation . . . man should strictly observe truth and non-violence and undergo suffering." (59). But what is unique in Gandhi's doctrine of non-violence is that he put it forward not
only as the basis of personal life but also as a technique of fighting social evils and for bringing about desirable social changes. Gandhi also demonstrated that non-violence can become a way of life and a technique of action not merely by individuals but by a whole community if properly taught and trained (60).

As an ethical discipline the *ahimsa* that Gandhi prescribes has the widest and deepest significance and connotation. In the Gandhian framework *ahimsa* is essentially positive and dynamic and means love and good will towards all life. Love is used here in the sense of identity with the object loved (61). *Ahimsa* is not the crude thing it has been made to appear. Not to hurt anything is, no doubt, a part of *ahimsa*. But it is its least expression. "The principle of *ahimsa* is hurt by every evil thought, by undue haste, by lying, by hatred, by wishing ill to anybody. . . ." (62). So a votary of *ahimsa* shall not harbour even an uncharitable thought against his opponent or adversary. "But it does not mean helping the evil-doer to continue the wrong or tolerating it by acquiescence. On the contrary, love, the active state of *ahimsa*, requires you to resist the wrong-doer by dissociating yourself from him even though it may offend him or injure him physically" (63).

A votary of *ahimsa* believes in conquering evil by good. "Love does not burn others but burns itself" (64). It means that while a votary of *ahimsa* shall not put up with injustice, he shall not, at the same time, inflict injury on the perpetrator of injustice. Resist evil he must, but he must be willing to accept all the consequences of such resistance upon himself. In order to love the opponent and undertake self-suffering one must achieve as complete self-purification as is humanly possible (65). Through a rigorous practice of self-discipline the votary of *ahimsa* must achieve self-mastery. Then only will he be able to serve the community and help them in their onward march towards the goal of self-realization.
It has to be noted here that though Gandhi wants non-violence to pervade every action of man, he does not make a fetish of his creed of non-violence. He knew only too well that "perfect non-violence is impossible so long as we exist physically, for we want at least some space to occupy. Perfect non-violence, while you are inhabiting this body, is only a theory like Euclid's point or straight line, but we have to endeavour every moment of our lives" (66). As all life in the flesh exists by some himsa, Gandhi says, "the body itself is a house of slaughter" (67). We can see from his pronouncements and his practice that he was very rational and pragmatic in his insistence on non-violence.

For instance, a miserably maimed calf that could not even turn on its side without experiencing excruciating pain, was administered a quietus by means of a poison injection at the instance of Gandhi and as expected, there was a huge flutter over the issue. Defending the euthanasia, Gandhi wrote:

The trouble with our votaries of ahimsa is that they have made ahimsa a blind fetish and put the greatest obstacle in the way of the spread of true ahimsa in our midst. . . . there may be far more himsa in the slow torture of men and animals, the starvation and exploitation to which they are subjected out of selfish greed . . . than in the benevolent taking of life. . . . (68).

Gandhi went to the extent of saying that, "should my child be attacked with rabies and there was no hopeful remedy to relieve his agony, I should consider it my duty to take his life. . . ." (69).

Gandhi made a distinction between real violence under the cover of non-violence and real non-violence but apparently violent (70). Explaining his position vis-a-vis genuine and pseudo non-violence Gandhi wrote:

To cause pain or wish ill or to take the life of any living being out of anger or selfish intent is himsa. On the other hand, after a calm and clear judgement to kill or cause pain to a living being with a view to its spiritual or physical benefit from a pure, selfless intent may be the purest form of ahimsa. . . . The
final test as to its violence, or non-violence is after all the intent underlying the act" (71).

Deliberating further upon the same problem Gandhi said that although mental attitude is the crucial test of ahimsa it is not the sole test. "To kill any living being or thing save for his or its own interest is himsa, however noble the motive may otherwise be. . . . reference to both intent and deed is thus necessary in order finally to decide whether particular act or abstention can be classed as ahimsa" (72). Thus it becomes evident that while Gandhi raised the ideal of non-violence to sublime heights, he took special care not to make a blind fetish of it as the literalists are generally prone to do.

Gandhi believed that non-violence is a means within our reach and therefore, ahimsa is our supreme duty. "Ahimsa is the attribute of the soul, and therefore, to be practised by everybody in all the affairs of life" (73). Thus, Ahimsa becomes a cardinal and pervasive value in Gandhian ethics.

c) Chastity - Brahmacharya

According to Gandhi self-purification which is vital for the search after and identification with Truth is impossible of achievement except through the observance of the vow of brahmacharya and therefore, it may be designated as the kingpin on which swivels the other vows of the Ashramites. It may be mentioned in passing that of all the ideas of Gandhi this is, perhaps, the most controversial one. Gandhi has acknowledged his indebtedness to Raychandbhai, whose influence is the most predominant factor in his realization of the importance of observing brahmacharya (74). It was in 1906, even before he had launched satyagraha in South Africa that he took the final vow of brahmacharya (75). And it was his irrepressible desire to devote himself to the service of the community in a totally selfless manner that prompted him to relinquish his desire for children and take to brahmacharya (76).
The concept of brahmacharya is a badly misunderstood one. The term has been taken in the most narrow sense of abstaining from sex. Gandhi writes:

mere control of animal passion has been thought to be tantamount to observing brahmacharya. I feel that this conception is incomplete and wrong. Brahmacharya means control of all the organs of sense. He who attempts to control only one organ and allows all others free play, is bound to find his effort futile (77).

So Gandhi goes on to suggest that a person who is resolved to control one organ of sense must likewise control the rest and if you practice simultaneous control in all directions the attempt will be scientific and possible of success.

In the light of the above perception Gandhi defines brahmacharya thus: "charya means course of conduct, brahmacharya conduct adapted to the search of Brahma i.e., Truth. From this etymological meaning arises the special meaning viz., control of the sense" (78). Bringing out the comprehensive sense of the concept of brahmacharya Gandhi gives the following explanation:

The full and proper meaning of Brahmacharya is search of Brahma. Brahma pervades every being and can therefore, be searched by diving into and realising the inner self. This realisation is impossible without complete control of the senses. Brahmacharya, thus means control in thought, word and action of all the senses at all times and in all places. . . . I have no doubt that it is possible to practise such Brahmacharya in thought, word and action to the fullest extent" (79).

Gandhi lays down certain conditions for the observance of this cardinal vow. It may be more accurate to say that instead of laying down rules Gandhi, in the light of his numerous experiments, sets down certain principles which would serve as landmarks and guide the aspirants in the path of Truth. Self confidence (faith in oneself) and faith in the grace of God are essential for a successful practice of the vow. Without these an aspirant's mind will be tossed on the boisterous sea of doubt (80).

The second principle that Gandhi stresses is the need for a clear and correct perception that a particular thing must be renounced i.e., a sort of aversion for it. Quoting Niskulanand
that "Renunciation without aversion is not lasting", Gandhi
argues that a vow of renunciation is the natural and inevitable
fruit if the desire is gone (81). Gandhi places the control of
the palate as the first essential condition for the successful
observance of this vow.

I found that complete control of the palate made the
observance very easy, so I now pursued my dietetic
experiments not merely from the vegetarian's but also
from the brahmachari's point of view. As a result of
these experiments I saw that the brahmachari's food
should be limited, simple, spiceless and, if possible,
uncooked (82).

Another aid to the observance of brahmacharya is fasting.
Fasting undertaken with a view to control the senses is very
helpful, provided it is not mechanical fasting where a person
keeps his body without food but feasts his mind upon all sorts
of delicacies. "Fasting is useful when mind co-operates with
the starving body, that is to say, when it cultivates a distaste
for the objects that are denied to the body" (83). Gandhi
considers the mind to be at the root of all sensuality and
therefore, believes that extinction of the sexual passion is, as
a rule, impossible without fasting which may be said to be
indispensable for the observance of brahmacharya (84).

In short, for Gandhi brahmacharya means control of the
senses in thought, word and deed. Even an impure thought is a
breach of brahmacharya. A man who appears to control his body may
be nursing evil thought in his mind. That is why control of the
mind also is vital.

We experience every moment of our lives that often,
while the body is subject to our control, the mind is
not. This physical control should never be relaxed
and in addition we must put forth a constant endeavour
to bring the mind under control. We can do nothing
more, nothing less (85).

Gandhi admits that the observance of brahmacharya is
difficult, but it is not impossible. There is no limit to the
possibilities of brahmacharya but it is impossible of attainment
by limited effort.
An aspirant of brahmacharya will always be conscious of his short-comings, will seek out passions lingering in the innermost recesses of his heart and will incessantly strive to get rid of them... let no one think that it is impossible because it is difficult. It is the highest goal and it is no wonder that the highest effort should be necessary to attain it (86).

Gandhi, while reminding the aspirant of his duty to strive after the goal, sounds a note of optimism when he says "... let me make it clear that those who desire to observe brahmacharya with a view to realising God need no despair, provided their faith in God is equal to their confidence in their own effort" (87).

Although Gandhi is not sure about how his thoughts originally got directed towards brahmacharya, he realised later that observance of brahmacharya is a sort of sine qua non for selfless and dedicated service to the community (88). Just as brahmacharya is a comprehensive concept, its implications and uses are as varied as they are vital. Originally brahmacharya was conceived as a virtue to be followed by the individuals in their search after Brahman. But for Gandhi it is not a cloistered virtue. For him human society is a ceaseless growth, an unfoldment in terms of spirituality. And brahmacharya has a vital role to play in this spiritual evolution.

As in the case of ahimsa, Gandhi is not a literalist or fanatic in the advocacy of the vow of brahmacharya also. "Absolute renunciation, absolute brahmacharya is the ideal state". says Gandhi, "if you dare not think of it, marry by all means, but even then live a life of self-control" (89). Gandhi draws a distinction between the ideals of absolute brahmacharya and married brahmacharya and says that both are essential for those who aspire to a spiritual or higher life (90). Ideally speaking, one who would strictly obey the law of ahimsa – ahimsa meaning universal love – cannot marry as it would create a boundary wall round his love. But Gandhi doesn't consider marriage as unnatural or unnecessary. "Marriage is a natural thing in life and to consider it derogatory in any sense is
wholly wrong. . . The ideal is to look upon marriage as a sacrament and therefore, to lead a life of self-restraint in the married estate” (91).

For Gandhi, the ideal that marriage aims at is that of spiritual union through the physical. The human love that it incarnates is intended to serve as a stepping stone to divine or universal love (92). Gandhi is of the view that the law of brahmacharya is the right law to be followed in married life especially in sexual relations between husband and wife. It is Gandhi’s considered opinion that sexual union is meant not for pleasure but for bringing forth progeny. "And union is a crime when the desire for progeny is absent " (93). Gandhi is quite conscious about the significance and sublimity of the act of generation and that is why he insisted that it shall not be carried out whimsically or in a flimsy manner. So Gandhi says, "the world depends for its existence on the act of generation, and as the world is the playground of God and a reflection of His glory, the act of generation should be controlled for the ordered growth of the world" (94). Gandhi views the question of birth control also from this spiritual point of view. He says that "there can be no two opinions about the necessity of birth control. But the only method handed down from ages past is self-control or brahmacharya. It is an infallible, sovereign remedy doing good to those who practise it" (95).

Gandhi is admittedly opposed to the artificial methods of birth control propagated by modern Western medical science. "Artificial methods are like putting a premium upon vice. They make men and women reckless. . . . Adoption of artificial methods must result in imbecility and nervous prostration. The remedy will be found worse than the disease" (96). Gandhi also views artificial contraception as a means to escape the consequences of one's acts and so he considers it immoral. He holds that if we educate ourselves to believe that sexual
indulgence is harmful, sinful, unnecessary and can be controlled. We shall discover that self-restraint is possible (97). In short, Gandhi considers sex urge as a fine and noble thing. There is nothing to be ashamed of in it but it is meant only for the act of creation. He also believes that proper sex education will help in the conquest and sublimation of the sex passion (98).

There is a social implication of the practice of brahmacharya which should also be noted here. As a great advocate of the emancipation of women, Gandhi, appreciating their great qualities of courage and self-sacrifice, wanted them to take an active and leading role in the satyagraha campaigns and constructive programmes. The most congenial atmosphere for large scale women's participation can be created only when there is observance of the vow of brahmacharya. It gives an assurance to women that they are safe in the company of men and vice versa (99). Thus the observance of the vow of brahmacharya contributes considerably to individuals as well as societies in their evolution towards higher spiritual goals.

d) Control of the palate

Patanjali did not include control of the palate among the Yamas on cardinal vows. But Gandhi elevated it to an independent observance and placed it next to brahmacharya. "Control of the Palate is very closely connected with the observance of brahmacharya" (100). In the light of the experiments he conducted in dietetics in South Africa Gandhi asserts that complete control of the palate made the observance of brahmacharya very easy (101).

In his famous monograph on health Gandhi writes "a Sanskrit text says that a man becomes what he eats. . . . one who has not been able to control his palate will never be able to control the other senses. If this is true, it is clear that one should take just enough food for the requirements of the body and no more" (102). So every one who wants to have control over his
mind and body should take food as we take medicine i.e., just the required quantity, not less, not more. The body is not a refuse bin to be stuffed with what the palate demands. Thus if we follow this observance many things taken just to please the palate can be and must be given up.

As a result of wrong food habits most of us become slaves of the sense organs instead of keeping them under our control. Gandhi reminds us that food is meant to sustain the body. His body has been given to man as a means of self-realisation i.e., realisation of God. A person who has made this realisation the object of his or her life will never become a slave to the animal passions (103). So by perpetual vigilance and by resolutely setting our faces against indulgence we can successfully control the palate. Gandhi suggests that a common kitchen where this principle is observed will be very helpful in this regard. He also recommends fresh fruits and nuts as the ideal food for a brahmachari.

Thus, we come to realise that control of the palate, though it might appear to be a trivial matter is of immense importance from the point of view of the health of the body, control of the mind and the sense organs and therethrough realisation of the ultimate purpose of existence viz., self-realisation.

e) Non-stealing

Non-stealing or asteya is one of the cardinal vows laid down by Patanjali. That non-stealing is a universally acknowledged ethical principle is not hard to see. But in the Gandhian scheme it assumes a revolutionary significance. For Gandhi non-stealing is implicit in Truth. A man of Truth and Love cannot even cherish the idea of stealing. But what is stealing? It is, in fact, Gandhi’s description of theft that lends the concept of non-stealing its revolutionary content. It is theft (1) to take anything belonging to another without his permission, even if it
be with his knowledge; (2) to take something in the belief that it is nobody's property, for example things found on the roadside; (3) to take something from another even with his permission if we have no real need of it; (4) to improperly multiply our wants; (5) to desire acquisition of anything belonging to others (104).

Gandhi classifies theft as physical or external theft and mental theft which is subtler but far more degrading than the physical. He is also equally concerned with the theft of ideas and plagiarism and condemns it in unequivocal terms (105). Thus we can see that if we apply Gandhi's definition of theft to our own lives, as Gandhi himself admitted, "we are all thieves in a way" (106). Gandhi was familiar with the dictum of Proudhon that "all property is theft". But he is far ahead of Proudhon for he enunciates that to covet and to take anything that one does not need for his immediate use and keep it is thieving.

Gandhi has, with revolutionary farsight related the tendency in man to covet, to grab, to steal and to possess with the consumerist mania. As early as 1909 he exposed and condemned the craze for material aggrandizement in the Hind Swaraj. Later, he wrote: "We are not always aware of our real needs, and most of us improperly multiply our wants and thus unconsciously make thieves of ourselves. If we devote some thought to the subject we shall find that we can get rid of quite a number of our wants" (107). In fact, the craze for material wants, Gandhi identifies as a major cause of poverty in the world. "One who follows the observance of non-stealing will bring about a progressive reduction of his own wants. Much of the distressing poverty in the world has arisen out of breaches of the principle of non-stealing" (108).

One who observes non-stealing has to be, as Gandhi says, humble (109). What is most significant and what lends an added contemporary relevance to Gandhi's exegesis of the age-old
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of
non-stealing
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nd
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consequent
grinding
poverty
affecting
millions
of
people
all
over
the
world.
One
is
reminded
of
Emile
Zola's
deeply
disturbing
comment:
"behind
every
great
fortune
is
a
crime".
Thus,
if
one
is
to
acquire
real
freedom
and
serve
our
fellow
beings
and
move
towards
the
higher
goal
of
self-
realization,
one
must
invariably
observe
this
important
ethical
principle.

f) Non-possession

Though
Gandhi
thinks
that
the
vow
of
non-possession
or
voluntary
poverty
follows
that
of
non-stealing
as
a
matter
of
course,
his
brief
explanatory
note
on
the
vow
is
replete
with
revolutionary
ideas
and
suggestions
that
are
highly
relevant
in
the
contemporary
world
context.
For
Gandhi,
possession
of
superfluous
things
is
a
crime
against
God
and
humanity.
"A
seeker
after
Truth,
a
follower
of
the
law
of
Love
cannot
hold
anything
against
tomorrow"(110),
because
it
is
against
the
Divine
Law.
Faith
in
God
and
the
craving
for
possession
can
ill
go
together.
If
we
repose
faith
in
His
providence,
we
should
rest
assured
that
He
will
take
care
of
everything
we
require
(111).
But
we
are
men
of
little
faith
and
so
engage
ourselves
in
the
rat-race
of
acquisitiveness
and
possessiveness,
ignoring
the
Divine
Law.
It
means
that
the
individual
human
beings
are
degraded
morally
and
spiritually.

At
the
larger
level
we
find
that
while
the
rich
have
a
superfluous
store
of
things
which
they
do
not
need,
millions
are
starved
to
death
for
want
of
sustenance.
"If
each
retained
possession
only
of
what
he
needed,
no
one
could
be
in
want,
and
all
would
be
in
contentment"(112).
The
contemporary
world-
experience
of
resource
depletion,
drying
up
of
the
sources
of
energy
and
other
related
problems
have
convinced
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to
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out
of
the
present
crisis
is
to
take
"the
initiative
in
dispossession"
and
"keep
possession
within
moderate
limits”. We must understand that civilization in the real sense of the term consists not in the multiplication but in the deliberate and voluntary reduction of wants. This alone promotes real happiness and contentment and increases the capacity for services (113). Thus the vow of non-possession, though seemingly impossible, must be kept constantly in view and in its light our possession must be critically re-examined and reduced progressively and voluntarily. This, according to Gandhi, is indispensable for the realisation of the ultimate goal of life.

Here Gandhi introduces another very significant perspective. The human body itself is a possession from the standpoint of pure Truth. It is the desire for enjoyment that creates bodies for the soul and therefore, in order to free the soul from the cycle of births and deaths this desire should vanish.

We thus arrive at the ideal of total renunciation and learn to use the body for the purpose of service so long as it exists, so much so that service, and not bread becomes with us the staff of life. . . . Such an attitude of mind brings us real happiness and the beatific vision in the fulness of time (114).

The observance of non-possession is applicable not only to the realm of things but also to the realm of ideas and thoughts. Thoughts and ideas that turn us away from God and from serving humanity must be scrupulously dispossessed. In fact, it is not difficult to see that most of the ills of the contemporary world are due to a careless and obtuse acceptance of ideas and views. What parades as knowledge is often veiled vested interests or sheer charlatanism deceptively burnished. “It makes the mind wander and even reduces it to a vacuity, and discontent flourishes in endless ramifications of evil” (115). That is why Gandhi said elsewhere that a man of truth should also be a man of care. Thus we can see that Gandhi considers a meticulous and diligent practice of the vow of non-possession indispensable in the moral and spiritual progress of individuals and societies.
Fearlessness

According to Gandhi, fearlessness is essential for the growth of the other noble qualities in the human individual. Without fearlessness, no one can follow Truth or Ahimsa. During his tour of India immediately after his return from South Africa, Gandhi found that India was seized with a paralysing fear. "We may not open our lips in public. We may only talk about our opinions secretly" (116). In order to save the people and the country from the grip of such demoralizing and paralysing fear, he prescribes the vow of fearlessness. In the Gandhian scheme of ethical discipline, fearlessness connotes freedom from all external and internal fear. External fear consists of the fear of disease, bodily injury and death, of dispossession, of losing one's nearest and dearest, of losing the reputation or giving offense and so on (117). Gandhi does not share the common supposition that one who overcomes the fear of death surmounts all other fears. For instance, there are misers who will rather die than part with their property. In order to become truly fearless, we must overcome internal foes like criminal passion, anger, etc.

Gandhi advises cultivation of non-attachment to the body as the easy way to become fearless. "All such fears (external and internal) revolve round the body as the centre, and will, therefore, disappear as soon as we get rid of attachment for the body" (118). Gandhi quotes from the first verse of the *Isa Upanishad*: "enjoy the things of earth by renouncing them" and suggests that we must shake off not only our attachment for the body but also for wealth, for family and other things similar if we want to progress towards the goal of fearlessness. "Perfect fearlessness can be attained only by him who has realised the Supreme, as it implies freedom from delusion. One can always progress towards this goal by determined and constant endeavour, and by cultivating self-confidence" (119).
Gandhi reminds us that there is only One whom we have to fear, that is God. "When we fear God, then we shall fear no man, however high placed he may be, and if you want to follow the vow of Truth, then fearlessness is absolutely necessary" (120). Without this divine attribute of fearlessness we will not be able to serve our brethren and attain ineffable peace and see Satyanarayanan (the God of Truth) face to face (121).

h) Non-observance of untouchability

"Untouchability means pollution by touch of certain persons by reason of his birth in a particular state or family" (122). It was widely practised in Hinduism in the guise of religion. Orthodox Hindus believed that untouchability as practised by them was enjoined by the Shastras and that great evil would befall them and their religion if it was removed (123). But Gandhi considered untouchability as an 'excrescence', an 'untruth', 'the biggest blot on Hinduism' and 'a great lie' (124). Not only is it unreasonable but also morally degrading and abominable to think that a person should be treated an untouchable or unapproachable because of his birth. Gandhi calls it rank irreligion fit only to be destroyed. "By treating removal of untouchability as an Ashram observance", writes Gandhi. "we assert our belief that untouchability is not only not a part and parcel of Hinduism but a plague, which it is the bounden duty of every Hindu to combat" (125).

Gandhi, therefore, wanted not only his Ashramites but every genuine Hindu not to practise segregation of any kind, not to treat anyone as his inferior for any reason whatever. He exhorted the Hindus to fraternize the untouchables, to associate with them in a spirit of love and service, "deeming himself purified by such acts, redressing their grievances and other evils due to the slavery of ages and inspiring other Hindus to do like that" (126).

When he started his first Ashram in India, Gandhi
accepted an untouchable family also as inmates. Troubles started brewing both inside and outside. Monetary help was stopped. There was also an internal storm in the form of protest from the other members of the Ashram. But Gandhi persisted. Eventually the storm settled down, bickerings subsided and Gandhi records that it was a very valuable lesson to the Ashram and "we could proclaim to the world that the Ashram would not countenance untouchability. . . . "(127).

Removal of untouchability for Gandhi is not just an attempt to purify Hinduism of an ineffable blot. It means love for and service of the whole world and thus merges into ahimsa. "Removal of untouchability spells the breaking down of the barrier between man and man, and between the various orders of Being" (128). It is, thus, a great unifying and amalgamating process, an endeavour which would lead mankind to the spiritual experience of the oneness of creation.

Although untouchability and the consequent reduction of millions and millions of human beings to a state bordering on slavery is found only in India, we find similar barriers that segregate and separate man from man almost everywhere in the world in different social systems. So the vision behind the vow of the non-observance of untouchability has universal relevance.

i) Bread-labour

The vow of bread-labour means that every man and woman must work in order to live (129). One who does not do body labour has no right to eat. This divine law that man must earn his bread by labouring with his own hand was first stressed by the Russian writer Bondaref and later on Tolstoy gave it wider publicity. It was upon reading one of Tolstoy's essays that the principle came home to Gandhi. In fact, he was familiar with the idea after reading Ruskin's Unto This Last. According to Gandhi the same principle has been set forth in the third chapter of the Gita where we are told that he who eats without offering
sacrifice eats stolen food. Sacrifice here can only mean bread-labour (130). Gandhi reads the same meaning in the Biblical injunction: 'in the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat thy bread'.

The idea behind bread-labour, according to Gandhi, is that every healthy individual must labour enough for his food, and his intellectual faculties must be exercised not in order to obtain a living or amass a fortune but only in the service of mankind (131). The advantages of observing the law of bread-labour are several. If the law is observed the invidious distinctions of rank would be abolished, "all men would be equal, none would starve and the world would be saved from many a sin" (132). If all i.e., capitalists and labourers worked for their bread, the distinctions of rank would be obliterated and peace and goodwill will prevail.

"Bread-labour", holds Gandhi, "is a veritable blessing to one who would observe non-violence, worship Truth, and make the observance of bramhacharya a natural act" (133). Gandhi also lays down his priority in bread-labour. As food is the first among the primary or basic necessities of life, agriculture is given top priority in the list of bread-labour (134). But as everybody is not in a position to take to agriculture, a person can spin or weave or take up some such productive labour connected with the primary necessities of life (135).

Objection was raised by critics that as body labour is given a pride of place in bread labour, there is little scope for intellectual development in it. But Gandhi avers that his experience is just the reverse. Intellectual development is often supposed to mean mere knowledge of facts concerning the universe. Gandhi does not accept this view. According to him if intellectual progress spells understanding and discrimination there is adequate provision in bread-labour for the same. "Everything including sanitary service must be done
intelligently, enthusiastically and for the love of God. Thus there is scope for intellectual development in all departments of Ashram activity” (136).

The principle of bread-labour is Gandhi’s revolutionary contribution to ethics. Through the observance of this vow, he helped to revolutionise people’s attitude to work by highlighting the dignity of labour. This has great relevance especially in the Indian context. The false pride of the high caste and upper class Hindus who preferred intellectual work to manual labour and looked down upon such essential, though menial, jobs as scavenging and sanitation was rudely shocked and shattered by the principle of bread-labour. The general apathy towards work and the acquired tendency to idleness that plagued the Indian masses needed an urgent solution and Gandhi’s law of bread-labour answered that crying need. It is clear, thus, that the vow of bread-labour is essential for the all round development of the individuals and that if observed by all in its true spirit it will certainly help in the creation of a Sarvodaya social order.

j) Equality of religions – Sarvadharmanasamabhav

Though the roots of the principle of equality of religions can be traced to the Hindu Bhakti movement (137), the credit for raising it to the status of an ethical principle to be assiduously practised not only by the Ashramites but also by all who want to live in peace and harmony with their fellow-men and promote each other’s welfare certainly goes to Gandhi. As has already been pointed out religion is the mainspring of all activities of Gandhi and for him a religion that did not concern itself with all aspects and dimensions of life was no religion at all. “Religion which takes no account of practical affairs and does not help to solve them is no religion”, said Gandhi (138).

It must be mentioned here, even at the risk of repetition, that by religion Gandhi does not mean formal or customary religion but the religion that underlies all religions.
and which brings us face to face with our Maker. Gandhi also believed that the spirit of religion should pervade all our activities but he again cautions us that here religion does not mean sectarianism. "It means a belief in the ordered moral government of the universe... This religion transcends Hinduism, Islam, Christianity etc. It does not supersede them. It harmonizes them and gives them reality" (139). It is this understanding of the harmonizing capacity of religions (which is their basic purpose) that prompted Gandhi to declare repeatedly that though religions are many, Religion is one (140). In short, religion means to Gandhi a deep faith in God and in the moral governance of the universe and organising life and its activities strictly in accordance with this moral law.

Gandhi identifies morality as the essence of religion and adds that "true religion and true morality are inseparably bound up with each other. Religion is to morality what water is to the seed that is sown in the soil" (141). For Gandhi morality coupled with reason is the standard for judging any religious doctrine, and he goes to the extent of saying that he can tolerate unreasonable religious sentiment if it does not contravene morality. "I reject any religious doctrine", declares Gandhi, "that does not appeal to reason and is in conflict with morality. I tolerate unreasonable religious sentiment when it is not immoral" (142). Emphasising the importance of practising moral precepts Gandhi says: "As soon as we lose the moral basis, we cease to be religious. There is no such thing as religion overriding morality. Man, for instance, cannot be untruthful, cruel and incontinent and claim to have God on his side" (143). Because of Gandhi's persistent emphasis on the moral content of religion, the coefficient 'ethical' got affixed to his version of religion.

The question naturally comes up: Why there are many religions when as Gandhi says Religion is one? Without answering
this question it is not possible to understand or appreciate Gandhi's concept of Sarvadharmaśamabhāv—equality of religions. It will profit us to remember here that as a practical idealist, Gandhi always proceeds from the real to the ideal, from 'is' to 'ought'. A fact it is that there are many religions in the world. Since belief in one God is the corner stone of all religions, in theory there can be only one religion. "But I do not foresee a time," writes Gandhi, "when there would be only one religion on earth in practice...", because, "in practice no two persons I have known have had the same identical conception of God. Therefore, there will, perhaps, always be different religions answering to different temperaments and climatic conditions" (144).

But as all religions proceed from the same God and are rooted in the same moral principles, Gandhi argues that they are more or less true. He uses the expression "more or less" purposefully. No religion can be perfect because religion is conceived by man and man by nature is imperfect. "I say 'more or less' because I believe that everything that the human hand touches, by reason of the very fact that human beings are imperfect, becomes imperfect" (145). Gandhi writes subsequently:

And if we are imperfect ourselves, religions as conceived by us must also be imperfect. We have not realised religion in its perfection, even as we have not realised God... And if all faiths outlined by men are imperfect, the question of comparative merit does not arise. All faiths constitute a revelation of Truth, but all are imperfect and liable to error" (146).

Thus Gandhi's position is impeccably logical: as religion proceeds from the same God there is truth in it, but as it comes down to us through the imperfect human instrumentality, it has error in it and although basic moral principles are the same, as they are interpreted and presented by men who are imperfect by nature, there are more than one religion in the world. So Gandhi avers that "Religions are different roads converging on the same
point. What does it matter that we take different roads so long as we reach the same goal" (147).

Gandhi's concept of the equality of religions flows spontaneously out of these basic premises. If all religions are equally true and imperfect, the question of comparative merit and the superiority of one over the others do not arise. When there are more than one interpretation of the same aspiration and experience which interpretation is to be accepted as the right one? "Everybody is right from his own standpoint, but it is not impossible that everybody is wrong. Hence the necessity of tolerance..." says Gandhi (148).

He admits that tolerance is an inadequate word because it may imply a gratuitous assumption of the inferiority of other faiths to one's own. Taken positively, tolerance gives us spiritual insight and we gain true knowledge of religion which breaks down the barriers between faith and faith. In fact, what Gandhi means is not a mere tolerance of the other religions but equal respect for all religions. "My position is that", says Gandhi, "all the great religions are fundamentally equal. We must have innate respect for other religions as we have for our own. Mind you, not mutual tolerance, but equal respect" (149). And equal respect for all religions is a dynamic concept with Gandhi. It means a reverential study of the scriptures of all religions, especially of other religions than one's own.

In this context Gandhi brings in a significant point about the right of a person to criticise religions. He draws a fine but crucial distinction between one's right to criticise one's own religion and other religions. While it is the right, and perhaps even duty, of a person to point out the defects in his own religion and criticise it with a view to purify it and keep it healthy, his attitude to other religions must be that of unreserved reverence. Gandhi writes:

But it is no business of mine to criticise the
Gandhi proposes this approach to the followers of all faiths and affirms that it is through such a reverential approach to faiths other than our own that we can realise the principle of equality of religions.

The principle of the equality of religions obviates the necessity of conversion in the sense of a change of religious labels. As different religions are equally true and equally imperfect, Gandhi cannot reconcile himself to the idea of conversion. "Having reverentially studied the scriptures of the world, I have no difficulty in perceiving the beauties in all of them. I could no more think of asking a Christian or Mussalman or a Parsi or a Jew to change his faith than I would think of changing my own," says Gandhi (151). He considers conversion in the sense of proselytisation a major error and a great impediment to world's progress towards peace. Gandhi was not against cases of voluntary conversion but they would be very rare, he believed. "Cases of real honest conversion are quite possible", concedes Gandhi. "if some people for their inward satisfaction and growth change their religion, let them do so" (152). But he considered them exceptions and said: "I am against conversion whether it is known as suddi by Hindus, tabligh by Mussalmans or proselytising by Christians" (153).

_Sarvadharmasamabhav_ or equality of religions is not a mere theoretical matter for Gandhi. In a multi-religious society like India, it has a direct, practical bearing on how men behave towards each other. Gandhi exhorts:

_The need of the moment is not one religion, but mutual respect and tolerance of the devotees of the different religions. We want to reach not the dead level but unity in diversity. Any attempt to root out traditions, effects of heredity, climate and other surroundings is not only bound to fail but is a_
sacrilege. The soul of religion is one but it is encased in a multitude of forms. The latter will persist to the end of time. Wise men will ignore the outward crust and see the same soul living under a variety of crusts (154).

In the light of this perception Gandhi adds that what is needed is living friendly contact among the followers of the great religions of the world and not a clash among them in the fruitless attempt on the part of each community to show the superiority of its faith over the rest. "Through such friendly contact it will be possible for us all to rid our respective faiths of shortcomings and excrescences" (155).

By reading the scriptures of the world with equi-mindedness towards all faiths, we will be able to assimilate the spirit of religions as Gandhi did. The result of an honest observance of the law of equality of religions will entitle one to say with Gandhi that. "if I could call myself, say, a Christian, or a Mussalman with my own interpretation of the Bible or Koran, I should not hesitate to call myself either. For then Hindu, Christian and Mussalman would be synonymous terms" (156). Moreover, it is the only available solution with us for the religious problems we confront in the modern plural societies.

k) Self-reliance - Swadeshi

Etymologically the word Swadeshi has only the limited meaning of one's own country. But as a vow for self-discipline, Gandhi has elevated it to the level of a key concept in his ethical scheme (157). Gandhi considers swadeshi as the law of laws ingrained in the basic nature of man. In its ultimate spiritual sense it stands for the final emancipation of the soul from her earthly bondage and realizing her oneness with all life (158). It is in the light of this interpretation that Gandhi defines swadeshi thus: "Swadeshi is that spirit in us which restricts us to the use and service of our immediate surroundings to the exclusion of the far remote" (159). He further explains that swadeshi is the spirit within, which dictates one to serve
his next door neighbour to the exclusion of any other (160).

This definition of *swadeshi* might seem to go against the spirit of universal love and service advocated by Gandhi. Expatiating upon why he insists on serving one’s immediate neighbour to the exclusion or sacrifice of the interest of the rest, Gandhi writes:

A man’s first duty is to his neighbour. This does not imply hatred for the foreigner or partiality for the fellow countrymen. Our capacity for service has obvious limits. We can serve even our neighbour with some difficulty. If every one of us duly performed his duty to his neighbour, no one in the world who needed assistance would be left unattended. Therefore, one who serves his neighbour serves all the world. As a matter of fact, there is in *swadeshi* no room for distinction between one’s own and other people. To serve one’s neighbour is to serve the world. Indeed, it is the only way open to us of serving the world (161).

Gandhi further adds:

I believe in the truth implicitly that a man can serve his neighbour and humanity at the same time, the condition being that the service of the neighbour is in no way selfish or exclusive, i.e., does not in any way involve the exploitation of any other human being. The neighbours would then understand the spirit in which such service is given. They would also know that they would be expected to give their service to their neighbours. Thus considered, it would spread like the proverbial snowball gathering strength in geometrical progression encircling the whole earth (162).

The law of *swadeshi* is based on a recognition of the scientific limitation of human capacity for service and also on the perception that “all living beings are members of one another so that a person’s every act has a beneficial or harmful influence on the whole world” (163). So even ‘the little nameless acts of kindness and of love’, in the language of the poet, done to the immediate neighbour exert a positive impact on the entire humanity. The law of *swadeshi* does recognize the fact that there are good men who leave their own place and move all over the world serving their non-neighbours. Their activity is not an exception to the law of *swadeshi*. Only their capacity for service is greater. But we must remember that a common man cannot do uncommon work (164).
According to Gandhi, the law of swadeshi is the swadharma of the Gita interpreted in terms of one's physical environment. In other words swadeshi is swadharma applied to one's immediate environment. Gandhi hears the echo of swadeshi in the exhortation of the Gita: "It is best to die performing one's own duty or swadharma. paradharma or another's duty is fraught with danger" (166).

Gandhi warns the votaries of swadeshi against making it a fetish. Although Gandhi advocated khadi as the necessary and most important corollary of the principle of swadeshi in its application to society (167), he warns that "it is the greatest delusion to suppose that the duty of Swadeshi begins and ends with merely spinning some yarn and wearing Khadi made from it" (168). It is expected of a votary of swadeshi to study carefully his environment and to help his neighbours wherever possible by giving preference to local manufacturers even if they are of an inferior grade or dearer in price than things manufactured elsewhere (169). Gandhi also reminds us that, "to reject foreign manufacturers merely because they are foreign and to go on wasting national time and money in the promotion in one's country of manufactures for which it is not suited would be criminal folly and a negation of the swadeshi spirit. In swadeshi there is no room for ill-will or hatred. It is a doctrine of selfless service and has its roots in the purest ahimsa, Love" (170).

By making a multi-dimensional concept like swadeshi an observance for self-discipline Gandhi has successfully linked the individual and social dimensions of self-realization.

VI. 2. 3. Rights Vs. Duties

A survey of Gandhian ethics will certainly be incomplete if his views on rights and duties which is an important constituent of ethics, are not enumerated. Gandhi was aware of the controversy that ranged over the question of the precedence of rights over duties or vice versa and he knew that
it was a crucial issue in public life. There are two polar views in this controversy. One side argues that as a right is a claim to a condition which the individual considers indispensable for a wholesome life and the development of his potentialities as a person, priority must always be given to rights rather than duties. The other view, generally upheld by people who hold positions of power and privileges, undervalues the importance of rights and over emphasises the need for the performance of duty with the concealed objective of perpetuating the existing inequalities and exploitation. From the very beginning of his public life in South Africa Gandhi had to grapple with questions of the rights of vast sections of people and he tried most selflessly and heroically to win for them their inalienable rights without at the same time forgetting in the attempt to emphasise their duties along with their rights. Therefore, Gandhi is, perhaps, one of the most competent persons to depose on this vital ethical question.

Gandhi always emphasised the need to think of one's duties first and foremost and leave the rights to take care of themselves for he believed that rights followed upon the proper fulfilment of one's duties and not vice versa (171). It is Gandhi's studied opinion that the true source of right is the performance of duty. "If we all discharge our duties, rights will not be far to seek. If leaving duties unperformed we run after rights, they will escape us like a will-o'-the wisp. The more we pursue them, the further will they fly" (172). If all people simply insist on rights and not duties, Gandhi said, there would be utter confusion and chaos. On the contrary, "If instead of insisting on rights every one does his duty, there will immediately be the rule of order established among mankind" (173).

Referring to the correlation between rights and duties Gandhi again says:
I venture to suggest that rights that do not flow directly from duty well performed are not worth having. They will be usurpations sooner discarded the better. . . . If you apply this simple and universal rule to employers and labourers, landlords and tenants, the princes and their subjects, or the Hindus and the Muslims, you will find that the happiest relations can be established in all walks of life without creating disturbance in and dislocation of life and business which you see in India and in other parts of the world (174).

Proper performance of duty will generate the power of non-violence among the people, a force that is really invincible, according to Gandhi. Only in such an atmosphere created by the proper performance of duties will the individuals and societies be able to evolve towards their higher goals.

VI. 2. 4. Yajna or Sacrifice

Closely related to the principle of the disinterested performance of duty is the idea of yajna or sacrifice which ranks very high in the Gandhian scale of values. According to Gandhi, yajna means an act directed towards the welfare of others, done without desiring any return for it whether of a temporal or spiritual nature. An 'act' here must be taken in its widest sense, and includes thought and word, as well as deed. 'Others' embraces not only humanity but all life (175).

It is obvious from what Gandhi says that he uses the word yajna in the sense of dharma understood as the cosmic principle which holds the universe as one (176). That is why Gandhi says that the world cannot subsist for a single moment without yajna (177), and that yajna is duty to be performed or service to be rendered all the twenty four hours of the day (178).

Gandhi agrees totally with the position of the Gita that yajna came with the Creation itself (179), and therefore, as far as the individuals are concerned yajna comes to them with their birth. In other words Yajna, for Gandhi is the duty that originates from the fact that man is a conscious agent. When one is born one inherits a legacy. Indeed, we are inheritors of a great, mighty and vast legacy. Other than what our fore-fathers have made, there is Nature's abundance also at our
disposal. It looks strange that we are given access to something which is not the product of our labours. As we did not create any of this, what is our duty towards it? Gandhi says: "yajna, having come to us with our birth we are debtors all our lives, and thus for ever bound to serve the universe. And even as a bond slave receives food, clothing and so on from the master whom he serves, so should we gratefully accept such gifts as may be assigned to us by the Lord of the Universe" (180).

A whole gamut of consequences flows from this if we accept this position. For example, take our duty in terms of natural resources. As we have not made any of them but just inherited the plenty from Mother Nature, our duty must be to minimise our use. use we must though, and to replenish as much as possible what we take. In other words, as man is capable of understanding the laws of Nature and being a conscious agent as he can have mastery over his deeds, it is his duty to act in accordance with Nature's law to ensure that all his activities conform to dharma, the sustaining principle. Understood thus, yajna is centripetal action proceeding from the base to apex, the Ultimate Principle (181).

The path of service as laid down by the principle of yajna cannot be trodden by one who is not prepared to renounce self-interest (182). But Gandhi cautions us that renunciation does not mean abandoning the world and retiring into the forest. "The spirit of renunciation should rule all activities of life", insists Gandhi (183). A householder, a merchant, a handicraftsman or any other for that matter need not give up their respective station in life to practise yajna. On the contrary, as mentioned above, it is in the performance of their respective functions in whichever stations they are that they must give up indulgence and self-interest and do service in a spirit of renunciation. Thus, selfless and voluntary service done
in a spirit of renunciation transforms all the life of the individuals and therethrough the entire humanity.

VI. 2. 5. Humility

When the preliminary draft of the rules and regulations of *Satyagraha Ashram* was discussed, it was suggested that humility should be accorded a place among the observances. This suggestion was not accepted as humility cannot be an observance by itself. Yet Gandhi considers it as essential as or perhaps even more essential than any of the other observances (184). Humility is a spontaneous virtue and can never come to any one by mere practice. "A humble person is not himself conscious of his humility" (185). A life of service must invariably be one of humility. It requires only a little thought to convince one that we are after all nothing more than a mere atom in the universe (186). It must be borne in mind that inertia is not humility. "True humility means most strenuous and constant endeavour entirely dedicated towards the service of humanity" (187).

**Summing up.**

The universe exists because God is continuously in action without resting for a moment. So in order to serve God and thus become one with Him (self-realisation) we must also serve as unwearied as God (188). For such selfless and ceaseless service the observance of vows will be of great help. Although there is a powerful school of thinkers who suggest that vows are a sign of weakness and hence harmful, Gandhi considers them to be a sign of strength and of immense practical value. "Taking vows is not a sign of weakness, but of strength. To do at any cost something that one ought to do constitutes a vow. It becomes a bulwark of strength" (189).

The experiences of a number of people over the ages corroborate this view that a vow means unflinching determination and helps us against temptation. "Determination
is worth nothing if it bends before discomfort. The
universal experience of humanity supports the view that progress
is impossible without inflexible determination" (190). According
to Gandhi, taking vows and observing them is essential for
character building and self-realisation. For him,

God is the very image of the vow. God would cease
to be God if He swerved from His own laws even by a
hair's breadth. The sun is a great keeper of
observances. . . . All business depend upon men
fulfilling their promise. . . . We should therefore,
ever doubt the necessity and efficacy of ethical
discipline for the purpose of self-purification and
self-realisation (191).

And as we have already seen self-realization, is indeed the goal
of life in Gandhi's weltanschauung.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. The arguments of Daniel Yankelovich (New Rules), against
self-fulfilment are summarised in Peter Russell, Op. cit.,
pp. 159 - 160.

2. Ibid.

3. Gandhi wanted to realise identity with even the crawling
things upon the earth as every thing originates from the
same God. See Young India, April 4, 1929, p. 107.

4. As the Gita says: No one can ever remain really actionless
even for a moment; for every one is helplessly driven to
action by the gunas, born of prakriti. [III. 5.] Gunas
means qualities and Prakriti nature.

5. See footnote 78 Chapter III.

6. Ethics of perfection is understood as a code of conduct
for becoming more perfect through self-purification and
ethics of action is a guide to action through which alone
the ultimate goal of life could be fulfilled.

7. Albert Schweitzer, Indian Thought and Its Development,
Bombay, 1980 edn., p. 11.


9. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan has given us a very detailed and
critical analysis of the reasons adduced by Dr. Schweitzer
for saying that mysticism lacks ethical content and has
answered the charge most forcefully in Eastern Religions
and Western Thought. O.U.P., Delhi, see pp. 58 - 114.


12. Ibid., p. 84.

13. Ibid.
23. Ibid., July 17, 1924, p. 237.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
34. Ibid., p. 51.
35. Ibid., p. 17.
37. From Yeravda Mandir. p. 5.
39. From Yeravda Mandir. p. 3.
40. Ibid.
41. Ibid., p. 2.

43. From Yeravda Mandir, p. 4

44. Ibid., p. 2.

45. Ibid., p. 10.


47. From Yeravda Mandir, p. 8.


52. Ibid., October 20, 1927, p. 352.


55. Speeches and Writings of Mahatma Gandhi (4th edn.), p. 346.


57. Ibid., November 12, 1938, p. 326.


59. Ibid., p. 29.

60. Ibid., p. 30.


64. Ibid., February 2, 1930, p. 60.


67. Young India. October 21, 1926, p. 364.

68. Ibid., November 18, 1926.

69. Ibid.


71. Young India, October 4, 1928, p. 331.

72. Ibid., October 18, 1928, p. 352.
73. Harijan, March 2, 1940, p. 23.
74. Autobiography, p. 171.
75. Ibid., p. 172.
76. Ibid., p. 173.
77. From Yerawda Mandir, p. 13.
78. Ibid., p. 14.
79. Young India, June 5, 1924.
81. Ibid.
82. Ibid., p. 175.
83. Ibid., pp. 175 - 176.
84. Ibid., p. 176.
85. From Yerawda Mandir, p. 13.
86. Autobiography, pp. 176 - 177.
87. Ibid., p. 177.
88. Ibid., p. 173.
90. Ibid., June 5, 1937.
91. Ibid., March 22, 1942, p. 88.
92. Young India, May 21, 1931, p. 115.
93. Ibid., March 12, 1925, p. 88.
95. Young India, March 12, 1925, p. 88.
96. Ibid., p. 89.
97. Ibid., August 19, 1926, p. 289.
98. Harijan, November 21, 1936, p. 322.
100. From Yerawda Mandir, p. 15.
102. Key to Health, p. 35.
103. Ibid.
104. From Yerawda Mandir, pp. 20 - 21.
105. Ibid.
106. Address delivered in the Y.M.C.A. Auditorium, Madras on 16.
1946, p. 182.

107. From Yeravda Mandir, p. 20.
108. Ibid., pp. 20 - 21.
109. Ibid., p 22.
110. Ibid., p. 23.
111. Ibid.
113. Ibid., p. 24.
114. Ibid., p 25.
117. From Yeravda Mandir, p. 27.
118. Ibid., p. 29.
121. From Yeravda Mandir, p. 30.
122. Ibid., p 31.
124. Ibid., March 18, 1933, p. 6.
125. From Yeravda Mandir, p. 32.
126. Ibid.
128. From Yeravda Mandir, p. 33.
129. Ashram Observances In Action. p. 60.
130. From Yeravda Mandir, p. 35.
132. Ibid.
133. From Yeravda Mandir, p. 36.
135. From Yeravda Mandir, p. 37.
137. The Bhakti Movement, a remarkable feature of medieval India, emphasised the Path of Devotion (Bhakti means devotion) for the attainment of salvation and stressed the need for creating a personal rapport between devotees and God. The saints of the Bhakti movement, therefore, propagated the conception of equality of all the followers of different religions, believed in the oneness of God and were uncompromising in their rejection of the caste system and idol worship.

138. Young India, May 7, 1925, p. 164.


141. Ethical Religion, p. 49.

142. Young India, July 21, 1920, p. 4.

143. Ibid., November 24, 1921, p. 385.


145. Young India, September 22, 1927.


147. Hind Swaraj, p. 50.


150. Ibid., March 13, 1937.

151. Ibid., September 28, 1935.


153. Ibid.

154. Young India, September 25, 1925.

155. Ibid., April 23, 1931.

156. Ibid., September 2, 1926, p. 308.


158. From Yeravda Mandir, p. 61.


163. Ashram Observances In Action, p. 68.

164. Ibid., p 59.
165. From Yeravda Mandir, p. 63.
166. The Gita. III. 35.
167. From Yeravda Mandir. p. 64.
168. Ibid., p. 65.
169. Ibid., p. 66.
170. Ibid.
172. Young India. January 8, 1925.
174. Ibid.
175. From Yeravda Mandir, p. 53. Yajna in the Gandhian sense is not to be confused with the Vedic Yajna which sanctions animal sacrifice.
176. Dharma is derived from the Sanskrit root ‘dhr’ meaning to uphold, sustain and nourish. But for this principle of dharma “the universe would be chaos. It is the unifying principle and the prime support of the universe. It is the principle which makes for the cosmic nature of the universe” S. Gopal. Op. cit., p. 136.
177. From Yeravda Mandir, p. 54.
178. Ibid., p. 57.
179. Ibid., p. 54.
180. Ibid., pp. 54 – 55.
182. From Yeravda Mandir, p. 55.
183. Ibid., p. 58.
184. Ibid., p. 45.
185. Ibid., p. 46.
186. Ibid.
187. Ibid., p. 47.
188. Ibid.
189. Ibid., p. 51.
190. Ibid., p. 49.
191. Ibid., pp. 51 – 52.

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