CHAPTER III

BODY: SAREERAMADYAM KHALU DHARMASADHANAM

Gandhiji’s journey along his experiments with truth pervades all the realms of human existence—the body, the mind and the soul. He realized the complementary, contributory and mutually dependent nature of these basic principles of life and interpreted them with the help of natural hygiene and Nature living. He conceptualized that such a life would pave the way for a comfortable and fruitful journey along the experiments and experiences in the entire span of one’s life. Being a visionary of extraordinary elegance he could foresee the relevance of this theory in practical life. He knew how it was practicable to the masses of India in their relentless struggle for political and spiritual freedom.

Adhering to simple living Gandhiji pondered over the various aspects of health and realized the importance of health as the most precious wealth on earth. As bodily health is vital for internal development, so nourishing food is essential for physical health. The quality of food
should help the entire satisfaction of man's full abilities. A healthy body is essential for one to serve one's purpose in life. Ayurveda says:

*Ayu Kamayamenana dharmardha Sukhasadhanam*

*Ayurvedopadeseshu Vidheya Paramadara*

It contains this message: one who desires a successful life and attainment of physical and spiritual victory, should follow the science of health.

Gandhiji proved that Nature living would make a man perfectly healthy. He engaged in his lifelong Karma or incessant chain of actions to a high level of satisfaction. He demonstrated the possibilities of cherishing health through Nature living. Any one who is in need of health should reach it by mastering the simple techniques of practical Nature cure. One should safeguard the golden treasury of health through a life in harmony with Nature. Gandhiji pointed out the need of a general knowledge of the body and how to 'live for health', for health is of supreme relevance to man. With a critical bend of mind Gandhiji stressed the need of accumulating awareness of one's own body on a utilitarian perspective. He says:
We must first know enough of our body, our own house, our village and its surroundings, the crops that grow there and its history before going on to anything else. General knowledge broad-based on this primary knowledge, alone can enrich life.  

As in all other aspects of his experiments, he insisted on the importance of identifying the value of health before it is lost. He adopted his own unique method of prevention, which he proved to be absolutely better than cure. It is a method that recognizes health not merely as the state of being free from symptomatic diseases but also a positive quality of the body. It is centered on a right philosophy of life, which approves the value of natural hygiene or Nature living. He proved how disease is a symptom of fallen health and unhygienic means of life bring about poor health or absolute loss of health. Gandhiji was fully conscious of a cardinal point: poor health stands in the way of the development of the mind and spirit. His prolonged experiments with health as wealth brought him to identify the basic relevance of the ancient concept: “Sareeramadyam Khalu dharma sadanam” i.e., a healthy gross body is the most vital aspect of successful human existence. Gandhiji insisted on the relevance of a healthy body, which “is put to its right use if we exercise self restraint
and dedicate ourselves to the service of the whole world." This sublime aspect of his faith clarifies the subtle truth that rendering the best possible service to humanity was the goal of his life. To attain this goal he advocated and practised Nature living. He demonstrated how the chemistry of the components of simple living promotes the rapid development of the positive qualities of human body. These qualities, in turn, would catalyze the zestful approach to root out the pangs of the daridranarayanastha in the poverty stricken villages of our land. It is with this aim that Gandhiji popularized natural hygiene and vegetarian dietetics.

Gandhiji's interest in dietetics and search for ideal food regimen were initiated when he was a young student of Law in London. He continued those experiments till the very eve of his life. He declared:

Medical opinion is mostly in favour of a mixed diet, all though there is a growing school, which is strongly of the opinion that anatomical and physiological evidence is in favour of man being a vegetarian. His teeth, his stomach, intestines etc seem to prove that nature has meant man to be vegetarian.5

Gandhiji held strong ideas regarding how to bring about rapid change in the conservative attitude towards food:
He was convinced that disease was due to some maladjustment in
the system, and all that was necessary to overcome it was to help
nature to rectify the wrong. A fruitful way of aiding nature to do
this and maintaining the body in health, he believed, was through
proper diet. He therefore became involved in research on Diet.\(^6\)

Gradually he became a staunch believer and practitioner of
vegetarianism and Nature cure. He admitted: “I have always been in
favour of pure vegetarian diet.”\(^7\) He realized the perennial significance
of the correct food required for the positive attunement of the body.

A healthy mind dwells in a healthy body and both are fundamental
to man’s spiritual development as well. The thing which nourishes and
builds up the body is food and the relevance of satvic, vegetarian food
is emphasized in the Bhagavad Gita.\(^8\) Gandhiji said: “Whilst it is true
that man cannot live without air and water, the thing that nourishes the
body is food. Hence the saying, food is life.”\(^9\) The food man eats
frames his total personality. The kind of food one consumes influences
the developing of his psyche as well as his physique. Gandhiji
advocated the ideal way of maintaining human health through natural,
balanced and complete vegetarian diet followed by a daily regimen
observing personal hygiene and keeping a clean environment. He
believed in natural health and vital economy and primary health promotion or prevention, which is better than cure: "Nature has provided us with sufficient reserve of vitality."\textsuperscript{10} He realized the spirit of what Hippocrates, the Father of modern medicine, preached - one's food is one's medicine. He seems to have approved that:

The human being has his Vital Reserve in the body, but he cannot get at the Reserve all at once. Its location inside is, and shall always, be, a mystery to everyone. As Sri. C. Rajagopalachari, put it in some other contest:

We know the pattern of the cloth

But not the loom that weaves;

We can, like children,

Look at the dial of the watch

But cannot open the case there of

Any one trying to know the exact location of the Vital Reserve, or trying to know the quantum, or the quality, thereof, through dissecting the human body, or through the so-called powerful scientific instruments, will fail to find it for it is a super physical
and super chemical. A Yogi, or a realized saint, can visualize this
source, but to the ordinary individual, it shall always remain a
mystery.\textsuperscript{11}

Gandhiji's life in harmony with Nature was an interpretation of the
mystic aspect of this theory. \textit{Satyagraha}, the most powerful weapon
that he operated against evil was forged in the fire of this mystery. It
was also “based on the belief in the potency of self suffering for a
noble cause. Yet for all his simplicity, for all his ‘ascetic’ ways,
Gandhiji was no killjoy and woe-begone ascetic always seeking an
opportunity for self torture.”\textsuperscript{12} In intricate situations he sought the
assistance of the tremendous energy locked up in the Vital Reserve.
This mysterious source of aid made him successful in attuning the
body to suit the purpose of his existence and remain wonderfully
healthy till he breathed his last.

Gandhiji was a religious man and he wanted every body to lead
a life, which helps him realize the ultimate truth. Hindus consider the
body as important as the soul. Their attitude in the past towards the
body and \textit{senses} is summed up:
Asceticism, i.e. the strict control of all the senses, something amounting to the suppression and even torture of the senses is an ancient “ism”, common to almost all religions. The *Atharva Veda* permits self-torture for attainment of psychical powers over Gods, men and nature. The terrific development of will and the tremendous concentration of mind was believed to endow the individual with great physical powers. The *Upishads*, however, take a more joyous view of life and love to think of the senses as fresh, strong and vigorous. There is the well known powerful simile of the *Katha Upanishad* of the “Soul as the master of the chariot, the body the chariot, the intellect charioteer and the mind the reins. The senses are the horses and their roads are the sense objects...” A man of restraint mind and right understanding has his senses controlled like the good horses of the charioteer.\(^\text{13}\)

Gandhiji was fully conscious of this religious concept. But his ascetic attitude urged him to be more concerned with the moral perspective. The basis of his vegetarianism was not physical, but moral: “A vegetarian is made of a sterner stuff. Why? Because it is for the building of the spirit and not of the body...”\(^\text{14}\) “Therefore the only
basis for having vegetarian principles is, and must be a moral one.15 It is this somopsychic basis, which helps man to shun his beastly tendencies like greed, grief, hatred, enmity and pride and develop his righteous tendencies like purity, strength, health, joy, cheerfulness and love. Moreover vegetarians enjoy improved sanitary conditions than non-vegetarians.

Gandhiji's experiments in dietetics were set in harmony with human behaviour. He knew how human behaviour is both psychosomatic, and somapsychic. The body influences the mind and vice versa. The Indian dietetics recognizes three types of food, which generate satwic, or righteous qualities, which generate rajaswic or agitating qualities and the third category, which brings forth tamasic or sedentary qualities. Non-vegetarian recipes promote agitating and sedentary qualities. In addition to this fact Gandhiji had his own reason for disapproval of non-vegetarian or flesh food. It was primarily based on his feelings on the flesh of fellow creatures being used for palate satiation against natural ethics and antagonistic to man's psychological and physiological needs. Unnatural food creates unnatural responses in human body. This would result in the accumulation of toxic wastes, which culminates in the unhealthy condition of the body and the mind.
Gandhiji was not willing to compromise on principles of dietetics, which he believed to be right. But he was always accommodative of different opinions and always adopted necessary changes when he was convinced of their validity. His kitchen was a mini laboratory where he experimented on different recipes. He published or expressed his opinions about a recipe only after personal experimentation and scrutiny. Gandhiji's denouncement of non-vegetarian recipes was also based on his personal experience or first hand information from his associates or acquaintances or backed by scientific authorization.

Gandhiji was very critical about the traditional physicians in this country. He criticized their over zealous attitude to quote from the ancient texts and scriptures rather than to depend on practical observation. According to him the practice of modern medicine is based on a policy of violence to life. It is harmful to the living body and it ruins health:

I have indulged in vice, I contract a disease, a doctor cures me, the odds are that I shall repeat the vice. Had the doctor not intervened, Nature would have done its work, and I would have acquired mastery over myself, would have been freed from vice and would have become happy.
He had indulged in the practice of Hygiene is adherent to the principle of non-violence. Hence it is in harmony with the laws of Nature and Health. He advocated and practised Nature living and Naturopathy because he found the system to be the most reliable, near and dear to truth and God. His research on questions relating to diet must have its inspiration from India’s ancient wisdom. However the evolution of his inquisitive ventures in dietetics and Nature living, started from his boyhood. It began with his adventure of eating goat’s meat and his pledge to his mother not to touch meat again. He experimented innumerable diet regimens and many a method of naturopathic therapy. He administered them on himself and others. He continued his ceaseless efforts of introspection, correction and refinement towards realization of his true self through Nature living:

I had great faith in Nature Cure methods, but there was nobody to help me with practical guidance in their use. With the help of whatever knowledge I could gather by reading a little Nature Cure literature, I tried to treat my self by diet regulations.¹⁷

Gandhiji had clear ideas about human body. His ideas sprang from absolute scientific observations:
For Gandhiji the body was a machine, intricate, fine, wonderful, unique— to be cared for as the most valuable possession. But like other machines man’s mind or rather his soul, was to be the master of this machine. This most, delicate and precious piece of machine has to be used for the pilgrim’s progress to the city where the soul dwells in peace. For the journey the body was to be nurtured and kept as valuable trust. It must be tempered to endure heat and cold, to resist disease to stand the strain of work and the stress of noble fights.\textsuperscript{18}

He criticized the modern concepts of health and body development. He was apprehensive about the compartmentalized and segmentised approach instead of holistic one. The pampering of one faculty at the cost of other or the mechanistic approach instead of the physiopsychic is absolutely harmful:

In health means body at ease.... He is a healthy man whose body is free from all diseases, he carries on his normal activities without fatigue. Such a man must be able with ease to walk ten to twelve miles a day and perform ordinary physical labour without getting tired. He can digest ordinary simple food. His mind and senses are in a state of harmony and poise.\textsuperscript{19}
Gandhiji puts forth in the most simple but factual way what he conceives about health. He also adds: “This definition does not include prize fighters and such like. A man with extraordinary physical strength is not necessarily healthy. He has merely developed his musculature, possibly at the expense of something else.” With these explanations he tries to eliminate the generally cultivated misconception of a macho physique as a symbol of sound health. Everybody should have a thorough knowledge about his/her body as a prerequisite to be healthy, to keep oneself at a standard level of health.

Gandhiji adheres to the Indian concept that the human body is made up of five elements: “The human body is composed of what the ancient philosophers have described as the five elements. These are earth, water, vacancy, light and air.” The first three elements earth, water and fire are contributed by the food we eat and the water we drink. The fourth element is mainly contributed by the air we inhale while breathing and fifth element is the volume occupied by our body.

Gandhiji says:

All human activity is carried on by means of the mind aided by the ten senses. These are the five senses of action, i.e., hands, feet,
mouth, anus and the five senses of perception, i.e., the sense of touch through the skin, of smell through the nose, of taste through the tongue, of seeing through the eyes and of hearing through the ears. Thinking is the function of the mind and some people have called it the eleventh sense. In health all the senses and the mind act in perfect co-ordination.  

If one is healthy all the different organs may be working in an orderly and efficient manner. Just as in a machine, a fault in any of the component parts impairs the functioning of the machine as a whole; any disorder in any part of the human body affects the whole system. "Therefore he who takes indigestion and constipation lightly does not know the a, b, c, d of health." Any aspect of unhygienic style of life brings damage to the whole system of the body.

Gandhiji was very much concerned about the spiritual relevance of the body. He says: "The human soul is a part of the universal spirit or God. When all our activity is directed towards the realization of this link the body becomes a temple worthy for the spirit to live in." The body is put to right maintenance only if we dedicate ourselves to the service of the world through simple techniques of Nature-living. The attunement of the body would help one in one's relentless efforts for
self-realization. Since man is interlinked to God and His creation, he has to perform his duty to himself and the society and to the almighty. Therefore he is delegated with the responsibility to keep his body temple clean and efficient, so as to be sensitive enough to feel the throbbing of the eternal spirit within him. Due to this cause he has to nourish his body with the proper diet, which provides for the balanced growth and development of all the five elements, which manifest into his lovely healthy body. The body, in turn, assists man in his endeavour for liberation from the entanglements. This is a prominent aspect of Gandhiji’s Nature-living. It is man’s duty to provide such care and feeding of his body as to enable him to perform the Swadharma or duty according to his position to the best of his ability. The body may be allowed to enjoy all healthy relaxation including the habit of sleeping in the open under the canopy of the sky and the stars. “As a matter of fact no clothes are necessary at night when one sleeps covered with a sheet. Tight fitting clothes should be avoided even during the day.”25 He was convinced of a total physical relaxation which catalyses self-realization.

Being a Vaishnavite by birth, Gandhiji was predisposed to a vegetarian diet at home. His parents were very strict to tradition; his
mother usually observed various kinds of penance and fasting and took a very moderate diet. As a youth, Gandhiji was eager to join his mother in devotional rituals involving fasting and moderate diet, more due to his zeal to please his mother than due to any reverence for the ritual. This habit was tremendously helpful in the development of his positive attitude towards regulated diet.

The Gandhi’s were vaishnavas. My parents were particularly staunch vaishnavas. Jainism was strong in Gujarat, and its influence was felt everywhere and on all occasions. The opposition to and abhorrence of meat-eating that existed in Gujarat among the Jains and Vaishnavas were to be seen nowhere else in India or outside in such strength. These were the traditions in which I was born and bred.26

Gandhiji recalls that even though he was ‘extremely devoted’ to his parents the frenzy of the reform blinded him and he was bent on the ‘reform’ and supported some of the views of the meat eaters.

The wave of ‘reform’ that swept his place at the time was that Indians should take to meat eating to become strong enough to beat the English and the latter rule over the former because they, the English
are meat eaters. Like any other youth at the time Gandhiji also took to meat eating more under the persuasion of one of his intimate friends and also due to the thinking that, "meat eating was good that it would make me strong and daring, and that if the whole country took to meat eating, the English could be overcome." Occasional meat eating went on for a year, all the time feeling guilty in his mind to be unfaithful to his parents. Eventually Gandhiji took the decision not to take meat during his parent's lifetime. The decision led him to, the epoch making experiments in vegetarian dietetics.

In 1887 at the age of eighteen, Gandhiji sailed to England for his studies in law. At the time he took a vow with his mother not to touch meat or wine or women. He recalls how during his one-month journey in deck he successfully resisted compulsion and temptation from fellow passengers to take meat and wine which the English thought to be unavoidable to thrive in the cold climate of their country. To a passenger friend who advised him to take meat and wine he said: "I have solemnly promised to my mother not to touch meat and therefore I cannot think of taking it. If it be found impossible to get on without it, I will far rather go back to India than eat meat." Gandhiji was proud of his resistance at that time against meat and wine, which was
mainly due to his steadfastness to keep his vow with his mother. While staying as a paying guest at houses in England he was almost semi starved.

Everything was strange - the people, their ways, and even their dwellings. I was a complete novice in the matter of English etiquette and continually had to be on my guard. There was the additional inconvenience of the vegetarian vow. Even the dishes that I could eat were tasteless and insipid. I thus found myself between Scylla and Charybdis. England I could not bear but to return to India was not to be thought of.29

In these circumstances, Gandhiji was tremendously encouraged by Nature living. He wandered about in search of vegetarian restaurants. His interest in books on the subject had been a milestone in his life. The first book he got on vegetarianism was Plea for vegetarianism by Henry Salt. The book brought about an alchemic transformation in Gandhiji. He said:

I read Salt's book from cover to cover and was very much impressed by it. From the date of reading this book, I may claim to have become a vegetarian by choice. I blessed the day on which I had taken the vow before my mother. I had all along abstained from
meat in the interests of truth and of the vow I had taken, but had wished at the same time that every Indian should be a meat-eater, and had look forward to being one myself freely and openly some day, and to enlisting others in the cause. The choice was now made in favour of vegetarianism, the spread of which hence forward became my mission.30

Salt's book stirred up in him the aptitude and enthusiasm for dietetic studies. He got hold of all available books on vegetarian dietetics. They include The Ethics of Diet by Howard William, The Perfect way in Diet by Dr. Anna Kings Field, and Health and Hygiene by Dr. Allison. The Ethics of Diet provided a historical account of human dietetics from the earliest period and made out that all philosophers and prophets from Pythagoras and Jesus down to those of the modern age were vegetarians. Dr. Allison's writings were on curative systems based on regulated vegetarian diet.

Gandhi came in contact with staunch vegetarians like Sir. Edwin Arnold the renowned author of Song Celestial and Light of Asia, Dr. Allison, Mr. Hills and Mr. Howard. He formed a vegetarian club in England and the contribution of these acquaintances to vegetarianism was immense. The result of all those readings and
contacts was his enthusiasm in dietetic experiments, which came to take an important place in his eventful life. Health was the principal consideration of these experiments, which eventually evolved to spiritual dimensions.

Gandhiji’s scheme of experiments in dietetics was unique. He “was the first great man who gave us the idea not of food but of Diet, i.e. how much food, how prepared, how served for purposes of health, not for pleasure.” The simplicity he adopted in shaping the idea had been a true reflection of his inward change. It was naturally expressed in every sphere of his life including his explorations in dietetics. In addition to his active participation in the vegetarian club, Gandhiji joined the vegetarian society in England and subscribed to their weekly journal. During this time, in England there were three distinctive cults of vegetarianism. According to the first, only flesh of animals and birds included in the meat category, fish, eggs and milk included in the diet. In the second category, fish was also considered as a flesh food, but not eggs and milk. The third category had the extreme view and abhorred all animal products including eggs, milk and milk products.

Gandhiji put on himself to several tests in dietetics. Those included living on bread and fruit alone at one time, and another time
giving up starch food altogether and feeding on cheese, milk and eggs alone. Gandhiji observed many minor changes in his cravings and appetites. He said: “The mind having taken a different turn, the fondness for condiments wore away.”\textsuperscript{32} He stopped taking sweets and condiments, began relishing, spinach, boiled without condiments, gave up tea and coffee. Gandhiji realized that “the real seat of taste was not the tongue, but the mind”\textsuperscript{33} and learnt that, “pleasure was a by-product of clean nourishing simply prepared diet.”\textsuperscript{34} He adhered to this simplicity till the end of his life.

Gandhiji observed on himself the positive health aspects of a natural, vegetarian diet, which provided the immunity and resistance for the body. During his return journey to India after 1891; after his studies in England, he observed that he alone on board in sea had been in perfect form, almost everybody else was sea sick. The credit he puts to his natural vegetarian diet and his realization that the “body was always a means, never an end.”\textsuperscript{35} This realization urged him to convince the members of his own family, the positive aspects of vegetarianism. His wife and children had mostly been supportive of his dietetic and nature living experiments and daily regimen. He says: “As far was then possible, I stopped taking tea and finished my last meal
before sunset. Guests and visitors also had often been the subjects of his dietetic experiments.

Gandhiji's preference for vegetarianism developed mostly under the European sky. He examined the question of vegetarianism and natural dietetics in its different dimensions viz., practical, economic, scientific, medical and religious. From the economic, practical and scientific perspectives a vegetarian diet is the least expensive and the most abundantly available. The natural way of eating precludes paraphernalia of cooking, expensive condiments, additives and costly fuel. The villagers can cultivate almost all items of their food in their land with their own labour and can be self-sufficient and healthy due to the natural food they get for their consumption. Besides they get good exercise and fitness for the body by the daily labour they exert on land. Even the landless and deprived can invest the labour with land owners and get their wages in terms of natural food items, grains, vegetables and fruits. Gandhiji propagated vegetarian diet and Nature living for he found that it was the most ideal way of life the daridranarayanas, the vast majority of his country folk can follow and afford. He said: “My Nature cure is designed solely for villagers and villages.
Therefore there is no place in it for the microscope, x-rays and similar things."37 He advocated nature living as a people’s programme.

Scientifically, the human physical structure and physiology are not meant for carnivorous diet. The long alimentary canal, less acid secretion in the stomach are meant for frugivorous diet. Man “could take only his mother’s milk and as soon as he had teeth should begin to take solid foods.”38 From this stage vegetarianism may be followed. This concept was widely popularized by Gandhiji.

From the hygienic and medical perspectives vegetarian diet is more advisable. It is considered to be unwise to heat or cook vegetables and fruits. Prolonged cooking in high temperature gets rid of the food with many of the essential vitamins and mineral compounds. It brings about harmful byproducts which may be developed in the food. Moreover, excessive heating annihilates the vital essence, preserved in living vegetables. Spices and condiments have been found to be irritating to the alimentary system. Meat and other animal products produce uric acid and ammonia in the body which bring about total pollution of the body and disturb the entire metabolism.
Gandhiji justified his plea for vegetarianism not only from the ethical and religious points of view but also from the moral and spiritual points of view. From the ethical point of view a man's supreme virtue over lower animals is to be held in esteem. Man should not prey upon the latter, but he should protect the lower; there should be mutual understanding for coexistence. The spiritual or religious argument is that the thought or act to inflict injury and pain to other creature incurs sinful debts for man which demotes him in spiritual progress and entangles him in the mesh work of continuous sufferings. Vegetarian and natural diet begets in him benignant tendencies while non-vegetarian diet begets malignant and aggressive tendencies. A true vegetarian is meant to abstain from all animal products, raw or cooked. He should be tolerant and adjustable to specific habits of food. Gandhiji says: "Vegetarians need to be tolerant if they want to convert others to vegetarianism. Adopt a little humility." Humility can be attained through a readiness to obey the call of Truth.

Gandhiji started his experiments in dietetics in his early days, especially while in England, from the point of view of economy and hygiene. The religious or spiritual aspect of the question was not
considered until he went to South Africa. In South Africa, while in Phoenix and Tolstoy settlements he undertook strenuous experiments and discarded all forms of animal products including milk, discarded salt and even pulses. But he rejoices at the thought of how the seed was already sown in England. "I had gone there a convinced meat-eater and eventually was intellectually converted to vegetarianism." This ultimate conversion culminated in his realization of better possibilities in dietetics and Natural hygiene.
References:


10. M.K. Gandhi, p6


13. N.R. Malkani, p163,164


17. M.K. Gandhi, p7


22. M.K. Gandhi, p2
23. M.K. Gandhi, p2
24. M.K. Gandhi, p3
25. M.K. Gandhi, p5
27. M.K. Gandhi, 18
28. M.K. Gandhi, p37
29. M.K. Gandhi, p38
30. M.K. Gandhi, p41
33. M.K. Gandhi, p48
35. N.R. Malkani, p169


40. M.K. Gandhi, iii