CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION
M.K. Gandhi, the father of the nation (1869 - 1948) tried very hard throughout his life to put into practice the ideals, which he deemed to be the highest. He tried to practise whatever he preached. He was not only a devoted worker but a first rate thinker as well. It has been truly said that his life was a continuous series of experiments with truth.

Though Gandhi was not an academic philosopher, yet like any other philosopher of civilization and culture, he tried to understand the nature of man, society, civilization, religion, and the host of other important concepts. He did not prefer to rest satisfied with mere understanding of human society like many other philosophers. He wanted to change it. This is why Gandhi occupies a unique position in the galaxy of philosophers. Though Marx realized the wisdom of the saying that a philosopher has not only to understand the world but also change it, yet he did not take any active initiative to change it. It was Gandhi alone who made sincere attempts to make a fruitful combination of theory and practice. There is no doubt about the fact he has left behind him a very sophisticated and well articulated system of social philosophy. In his early life and career Gandhi coined a new term for articulating his vision of Indian society and the way he wanted to transform it in accordance with his vision and imagination. This overall term was Sarvodaya, literally the "welfare of all". Satya and
ahimsa are two terms as old as the Sanskrit language, which Gandhi used in equation respectively with God, the quintessence of human existence and with Love both in a positive sense. Gandhi was a devotee of truth and he identified God with truth and emphasized on truth rather than God. He believed that only truth can furnish a common basis for all religions. Gandhi often stressed that it was his search for truth which led him to politics. At one place he said, "If I seem to take part in politics, it is only because politics encircles us today like the coil of a snake from which one cannot get out, no matter how much one tries. I wish therefore to wrestle with the snake."\(^1\) As a practical man, he realized that his "social work would be impossible without the help of political work."\(^2\) In other words, he regarded human life as one indivisible whole. According to Gandhi, true democracy can never come through untruthful and violent means. Since he fought for the attainment of truth he named it as Satyagraha. The philosophy of Satyagraha is essentially practical. It does not resemble those systematic fancies spun out by academic theorists which are often too neat and logical to be true to life. Gandhi taught what he himself practised and what he considered to be practicable. Besides truth Gandhi also believed in Ahimsa or non-violence. He believed man to be naturally non-violent. The main theme of Gandhi revolved round truth, ahimsa and love which seem to be absent in the present society. We are living amidst violence and hatred, and ahimsa seems to be a distant dream to us, a kind of coloured vision. Self-interest, corruption, selfishness, cruelty, violence and other evil forces have completely

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1. Gandhi, M.K., Young India, 12-5-1920
2. Ibid., 6-3-1931
engulfed the human society. Gandhi himself admitted that love is not an easy exercise. It is very easy to hate, but very difficult to love. One must have tremendous strength of character in order to love. Love embraces everyone even enemies. Hence Gandhi believed that ahimsa is meant only for the strong and never for the weak. He also stated that though violence seems to represent strength, actually it arises out of fear, which is a sign of weakness. Ahimsa is a dynamic process of dedicated effort to restrain oneself from doing injury to others. As a Sanatani Hindu, Gandhi declared a powerful tradition of ahimsa, non-injury. Hinduism asserts that there is no dharma, that is law of life, greater than truth. Ahimsa as a means has a sacred place in Hindu thought.

As a social idealist Gandhi found that untouchability in Hinduism was a crime against humanity. He began to fight against it. For the untouchable whom Gandhi named Harijans, he felt the deepest concern and did the greatest service. The removal of untouchability became one of the most important missions of Gandhi's life. He refused to enter temples to which Harijans were not allowed to enter.

To analyse Gandhian thought, it is useful to look at the basic concepts in his philosophy. Swadeshi, bread labour, non-possession, trusteeship, non-exploitation and equality are basic concepts of his thought. All these are inter related and have equal importance.
Describing these concepts briefly, we may say that swadeshi may be interpreted as self-reliance. The relevant idea of development in Gandhian thought is expressed by Swadeshi. Bread-labour provides an ethical dimension to swadeshi. Not only must one be self-reliant, one also has a duty to earn one's bread by doing labour for others. The labour one does for others is in the service of others. Non-possession involves the idea of reducing one's standard of living voluntarily. In this modern industrial society, one of the assumptions of production is that people will own commodities. Consumption is defined in terms of ownership and possession. By contrast, non-possession implies common ownership. Trusteeship is the duty to use one's advantages for the benefit of others or society, not for the advantages of the person himself or herself. Gandhi talked of trusteeship not only with regard to landlords and capitalists but also with regard to everyone who has more of anything, money, talent, physical power etc. than the common people. Each is to use his talents or profession or strength for himself only to the extent of his need, the rest is to be utilized in the service of the society.

Non-exploitation determines the relationship between various agents in economics; the consumer, the producer, the employer, and the workers. It involves the concept of equality. In Gandhian thought equality is an important and comprehensive concept, which brings humanity among the various economic relations and activities. Equality does not imply lack of diversity.
Gandhi held that he did not evolve any new philosophical system. Of course, he stood for certain ideals which were of universal significance till date today. Gandhi considered human personality as an integrated whole. Such a conception gave a new outlook on life. His philosophy is an all-comprehensive philosophy.

Gandhi was the efflorescence of Hindu tradition and culture. If ever the Vedas the Upanisads and the Gita become the working principle in a single individual, it was only in Mahatma Gandhi, where they found full expression and manifestation.

The dedicated work of Gandhi for communal harmony and religious tolerance was an outstanding contribution towards building up social solidarity. Thus both in the cultural and social systems Gandhi has tried to effect changes. His emphasis on individual reformation becomes extremely significant. His insistence on individual reformation is to be interpreted in this context. Gandhi tried to approach the social order from different angles at the same time. He wanted to transform the cultural social and personality systems simultaneously to usher in a social order of a more acceptable nature, so that for an Indian, Gandhi's dreams would have come to exist. The dedicated work of Gandhi for communal harmony and religious tolerance was an outstanding contribution towards building up social solidarity. Thus both in the cultural and social systems Gandhi has tried to effect changes. In a society where conflict is a regular phenomenon, social change can be ushered by synthesizing the conflicting cultural values and norms paving the way for a new social
order. To day, at this complex juncture of our society, it is relevant for us to analyse the Gandhian principle of non-violence, when morality, love and truthfulness have collapsed and the society has become corrupt in all spheres - whether it in politics, education, religion and so on.

In order to understand how Gandhi became a philosopher of life it is necessary to know certain facts and experiences of his life. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born on October 2, 1869 at Porbandar in Gujrat, in a middle class Bania (Baishya) family. His father Karamchand became Dewan of Porbandar. His mother Putlibai was deeply religious, gentle and devout, and unrelenting in her observance of the prescribed rituals of fast and prayer. She left a deep impression on the mind of her son who almost worshipped her.

The play "Harischandra" which he witnessed in his childhood left a vivid impression on him. The king Harischandra sacrificed all he had for the sake of truth. He captured Gandhi's heart and inspired him for the practice of truth. Referring to this play Gandhi wrote, "This play- Harischandra - captured my heart...... Why should not all be truthful like Harischandra? Was the question I asked myself day and night. To follow truth and to go through all the ordeals Harischandra went through was the one ideal it inspired me." 3 The story of Prahlada contained in "Bhāgavata purāṇa" also moved him deeply. The boy Prahlāda, who suffered untold hardships without

3. M.K. Gandhi, Autobiography, p.4
abandoning his faith in God became a living model for him. Gandhi found an illustration of "soul force" theory in the story of Prahlada, who disobeyed his father for the cause of truth. He perhaps modelled his technique of "Satyagraha" on the fearless determination of Prahlada. His faith in the equality of religions or toleration for all faiths was derived from the discussions which his father used to have had with his Muslim, Parsi and Jain friends. During his childhood, a scavenger named Uka, an untouchable used to attend his house for cleaning latrines. When he was forbidden to touch him, Gandhi told his mother unhesitatingly that she was entirely wrong in considering physical contact with Uka as sinful".4 Thus Gandhi's heart rebelled against the inhuman practice of untouchability even from his early age. He subjected every religious and social practice to the best of reason.

When Gandhi was only thirteen years old and going to school, he was married to Kasturba who was of the same age. He passed his matriculation at 17 and after a short time in a college at Bhavanagar went to England to study law. In 1891 he was called to the Bar. He returned to India with the intention of setting up practice, but did not succeed in the attempt. Then a business concern in Porbandar offered him a law suit and in this connection he went to South Africa, for the first time. In 1893 he set forth full of jest to try his luck in South Africa. This was the turning point in Gandhi's career. He was profoundly shocked at the humiliation to which Indian in South Africa were subjected and determined to fight against the injustice. He settled at Durban in Natal and founded the Tolstoy farm and Phoenix Coloney

with a few co-workers dedicated to the cause, all living in austerity, equals in every way. He tried out many social and political experiments and perfected his famous Satyagraha and non-violent opposition to injustice. As an Indian he belonged to the oppressed race in South Africa and suffered many insults. He was thrown out of a train in the middle of a cold night for daring to travel first class, dragged down from a coach by a swearing conductor and only just saved by his fellow passengers. He was stoned and kicked by a white mob in Durban.

Gandhi had been three years in South Africa. Returning to India he worked for the cause of the South African Indians. Again he went to South Africa. After his return to India in 1914 he had the initiation into Indian politics under Gopal Krishna Gokhale, a great leader in his own right. Gandhi stood for co-operation with the British Government in the first Great War on the pious hope that after this war was won, the authorities would respond sympathetically to the aspirations of the Indian people. Though he helped the government in recruiting soldiers for the army yet he was much disillusioned, after close of war, when the Government did not look with favour towards the nationalist feelings and passed the Roulatt Act to suppress the people. This infuriated Ganlhi and he could no longer co-operate with the British whom he called “Satan”. Then he asked his country-men to observe national hartal against the black laws. The authorities came with an iron hand upon people and on April 13, in 1919 a large number of people were killed by general Dyer at Jallianwala Bagh at Amritsar. It was called Jallianwala Bagh Massacre. The entire country was
burning with flames of resentment. Gandhi started the non-cooperation movement which changed the lives of the people. People non-cooperated with everything that was British. They boycotted the British goods. They gave up the state titles. By the close of 1920, Gandhi was the undisputed leader and head of the Indian National Congress. The Congress was fighting for immediate Home Rule. They refused co-operation with Government, including non-payment of taxes. The movement was a success but Gandhi suspended it after an incident of violence at Chauri Chaura incident when congressmen attacked the police station during the non-cooperation movement.

On the midnight of 31st December, 1929, the Congress passed the Purna Swaraj (complete Independence) resolution. Gandhi started the “Salt Satyagraha” which caused immense turmoil in the country. This would be the beginning of a civil disobedience campaign in which laws made by the state would be broken. Civil disobedience would begin by breaking the salt law. On March 12 Gandhi started from his ashrama a march to Dandi, a village on the sea coast 241 miles away, for twenty-four days. Thousands of people joined the procession. Gandhi was arrested and taken to Yervada Central Jail. The Government was in distress and finally, in 1931, had to release Gandhi, Nehru and other leaders. As soon as Gandhi was out of prison he asked for an interview with the Viceroy, Lord Irwin. Gandhi – Irwin Pact was signed on March 4th, 1931. Irwin agreed to release all the political prisoners.
In August 1942 the All-India Congress Committee met in Mumbai. Gandhi started his “Quit India” movement and gave a call of “Do or Die” to his countrymen for achievement of freedom. The Government promptly arrested him that night but the people were restless. All over India there were strikes and disorder. The spirit of rebellion spread like a wild fire all over the country. At many places, the people formed the “Swaraj Governments”. The demand for Indian independence had grown into a world-wide question. Apart from India’s own attitude, American and other countries pressed Britain to grant freedom to India which was for India, a victory for non-violence. Jinnah, the leader of the Muslim League, demanded a separate Muslim State before freedom was given to India. On June 3, 1947, Attlee, the British Prime Minister, announced the plan for partition. The Congress and the Muslim League accepted it. For Gandhi, it was a spiritual tragedy. Lord Mountbatten, the Last British Viceroy, was anxious not to delay the ushering in of independent India and independent Pakistan. He shortened the time limit for the British to India. Thus on August 15, 1947, India’s long struggle and suffering for freedom was over. Gandhi’s mission succeeded but the cult of hatred and violence continued to hold sway. A fanatic Nathu Ram Venayak Godse shot him dead in New Delhi on a prayer meeting in the evening of January 30, 1948. The entire mankind was bereaved by his death. He lived and died for the sake of peace and welfare of all mankind.

Concluding it, we can say that although Gandhi was deeply rooted in the Indian ways of life, he has also intimately familiar with the West. He observed the West very closely during his three
years in England and over twenty years in South Africa. He was trained as a lawyer in London and practised as one in South Africa, enjoyed close intellectual contacts with his Christian and Jewish friends, some of whom lived with him on his communal farm, studied more works on Christianity and Islam and extensively read European writers, including Plato, Bacon, J.S. Mill, Ruskin, Tolstoy, Thoreau and Marx etc. Therefore he was able to draw upon both the Indian and Western traditions of thought and interpret each in the light of the other.

As a man of action Gandhi led many anti-racist campaigns in South Africa and later become the unquestioned leader of the Indian independence movement. Gandhi was the first man to invent an unusual method of political struggle and one of the few in history of try the method simultaneously on moral, religious, political, social, economic and cultural fronts.

**Importance on the Concept of Man:**

In Gandhi’s philosophy stress is always laid on the individual as the starting point of social regeneration. Because to him the problem of the group is essentially the problem of the individual. Man is above all the soul, and the progress of society depends on the soul-force of the average individual. Gandhi viewed man in his concreteness, both as an individual and as a member of a social group. He was of the opinion that man’s moral and ethical behaviour lies not in abstractness of a transcendental life, but a real earthly life itself.
Gandhi’s principle of social reconstruction is essentially the principle of reorientation of man through purity and poignant in thought and action.

Man constitutes the most important vital part in the society. Gandhi never isolates man from society because he finds no distinction between men and man. To him all men are equal because all men are divine. As an eternal apostle of Truth, Beauty and Goodness in man, Gandhi emphasizes upon the efflorescence of inherent divinity in man simply because he believes that the essence of man is the essence of God.

Gandhi’s thought on the concept of man was based on Indian religions tradition. His outlook was moulded mainly by the Hindu religion, though he was influenced by the ethical ideals of Jainism, Christianity and Islam. He was deeply influenced by the fundamental teachings of the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Gita, the Puranas and all these go by the name of Hindu scriptures. Man’s position is central in Vedanta which is grounded in the Vedas and Upanisads.5

Gandhi’s conception of nature of man is based on his metaphysical conviction. Gandhi was highly influenced by the Upanisads. According to Upanisads man has no existence independent

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of God. Thus Gandhi’s philosophy could be called a kind of monism. As an Advaitin, he finds no contradiction between man and God and between man and the lower order creation. He believes in the reality of one Supreme God and man is an expression of that one reality. Bodily and the spiritual aspects of man both are expression of God. Man is essentially Divine and spiritual. An element of Divinity present in every man is expressed in various ways. Gandhi speaks of a man as a “Spark of the Divine fire”, a part of God. According to Gandhi by using these Divine elements in the right manner, man can bring heaven on this earth. Gandhi stresses the oneness of man on the one hand and service to God on the other.

The Vedas never view man as a separate entity but as the companion of God, as a part of the whole Being and as an instrument of the Divine.

The Gita’s concept of man is both ethical and practical which is based on devotion, knowledge and action with more emphasis on action than the other two. The Gita identifies the individual self with self of all. Also, there is no antagonism between the natural and the spiritual. Of the books that influenced Gandhi, it may be said without any fear of contradiction that the Gita occupies a pre-eminent place. He once said, “I must confess to you that when doubts hunt me, when disappointments stare me in the face, and when I see not one ray

7. Sri Aurobindo, Essays on the Gita, Quoted from Indian Thought An Introduction, ed. by Donald H. Bishop. p. 254.
of light on the horizon I turn to the Bhagavad Gita and find a verse to
comfort me, and I immediately begin to smile in the midst of
overwhelming sorrow........ I owe it to the teaching of the Bhagavad
Gita."8 Hence the Gita became Gandhi’s “infallible guide of conduct”
and a “dictionary of daily reference.”9 He found a ready solution to all
his troubles and trails in the Gita. Concepts like “aparigraha” (non-
possession) and “samabhāva” (equality) gripped him. The message of
the Gita, as Gandhi understood it, is to do action without having any
intention for reward. Gandhi adopted the principles of the Gita and
formulated the qualifications essential for a satyagrahi, such as truth,
non-violence, non-attachment, renunciation, self control and so on. The
Gita’s concept of “non possession” and “equality” shaped Gandhi’s
thought in the formulation of his theory of trusteeship. The Gita ideal
of “service without self” and of “action without attachment” broadened
his vision and equipped him with extraordinary stamina and faith for
his public life.10

The concept of ahimsa (non-violence) is the bedrock of
Jaina and Buddhist thought. Though Gandhi was immensely influenced
by the Jaina concept of non-violence, he could not accept the literal
interpretation of the doctrine. He did not emphasise the undue
sacredness of subhuman life in preference to human life. Gandhi was
influenced by the basic tenets of Buddhism such as non-violence, non-

hatred, compassion, renunciation and so on. The Buddhist doctrine that hatred does not cease by hatred but by non-hatred attracted him most.

Gandhi was much impressed by the voluntary poverty and humility of the Prophet. He understood Islam as a religion of peace like Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity. He believed that Islam stands for the brotherhood of man, but not for the brotherhood of Muslims alone. This concept of universal brotherhood in Islam also led him to the theory of non-violence! The Prophet’s practical instinct as a social reformer combined with his intense faith in God was the constant strength and support to Gandhi in his own struggles.11

Thus we can say that from the Indian perspective, man is a spiritual being, not an animal or any other material object. Man is more than matter. He is a vibrant living being. Here, Indian thought affirms a non-Darwinian view of man.

Finally we may point out that the Indian tradition holds that the ideal man is primarily a moral one, purified man, a religious man. Gandhi honours man as man embodied in God – “Naranarayana” which is nothing new in Indian philosophy. Again he reminds us in the particular sense that the person who is poor is also a mouthpiece of God – “Daridranarayan”. Gandhi was specially interested in bringing about a radical change in the society by involving man in work which is worship.

In the West, Gandhi was influenced by Tolstoy, Ruskin and Thoreau who gave importance to individual and his capability of changing society. Tolstoy's "The Kingdom of God is within you" left a deep impression on Gandhi. Tolstoy condemned all forms of violence. He believed that all human problems could be solved only by love. In the absence of love violence would be the rule of life. Tolstoy advocated resistance to evil by inflicting suffering on oneself. Referring to unjustified laws he wrote, "Men have Long Known that it is unreasonable to obey a law the justice of which is doubtful, and so they cannot but suffer in submitting to a law which they do not recognise as reasonable and binding."\(^\text{12}\) Tolstoy maintained that one should peacefully disobey the bad government at the cost of self suffering. Ruskin's work "Unto This Last" exerted tremendous influence on Gandhi's thought and action in the economic realm. As Gandhi wrote, "\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots the one that brought about an instantaneous and practical transformation in my life was "Unto This Last". I translated it later into Gujarati entitling it Sarvodaya (the welfare of all)'\(^\text{13}\) The following three principles were considered by Gandhi as significant ideas of this book:

a) Individual good is identical with the good of all;
b) Any work is a good as any other; and

c) A life of labour is the only life worth living.

\(^{12}\) Leo Tolstoy, The Kingdom of God and Peace Essays, p.145.  
\(^{13}\) M.K. Gandhi, Autobiography, p. 224.
Gandhi was influenced by Thoreau's essay on "Civil Disobedience" in perfecting his non-violent technique of resistance. Thoreau refused to submit to any tyrannical authority. Under an unjust government, in Thoreau's opinion, the proper place for a just man is the prison. He regarded the individual first "as a man" and then "as a subject". His ideas inspired Gandhi in advocating non-cooperation movement in India. Gandhi was a great fighter for social reforms. His social reform starts from the individual. He was of the opinion that by due performance of duties by all individuals, there will be peace in society. Though he was a great social reformer, he believed that social reforms would become effective only when the individual reforms himself. Like Marx, Gandhi was also a revolutionary. But his was a peaceful non-violent revolution. Elimination of violence in the social context implies mental and spiritual changes in man, who in his motivation must free himself from everything that involves physical force and violence.\textsuperscript{14} It is through the spiritual and religious power of man that such a transformation of both individual and society is possible. Gandhi wanted an all round transformation of society in the political, economic, social and moral fields to be effected by a radical transformation of the character of the individual, by a process of spiritualising both men and society. Like any other philosopher of civilization and culture, Gandhi tried to understand the nature of man, society, civilization, religion and host of other important concept. Gandhi was alone who made sincere attempts to make a fruitful combination of theory and practice. He was not only a thinker but a

\textsuperscript{14} T.M.P. Mahadevan (ed): Truth and Non-violence, p.176.
devoted worker also. Gandhi always laid stress on the individual as the starting point of social regeneration. His philosophy provides permanent solution to many of our existing problems where it requires proper training and patience. His entire philosophical systems are completely normative. His ultimate aim was the regeneration of society through non-violent means and creation of a decentralised economic structure and social equality based on the right kind of education. Gandhi wanted to build a new cultural inheritance of man, based on psychosocial equality. The pillars of this socio-cultural reconstruction are: non-violence, equality, truth and morality. Through transformation of the individual, in the light of these principles, man would free himself from the negative aspects which had appeared throughout the history. Hence Gandhi’s whole teachings and thoughts are appreciable and in this context, more relevant in the contemporary society. Gandhi’s thoughts differ from those of others, for he stressed that human life is not divided into water-tight compartments as social, economic, political, moral, religious etc. Rather he considered human personality as an integrated whole. Such a conception gave a new outlook on life. It is an all-comprehensive philosophy.

The need of today is to promote Gandhism and to promote Gandhism is to make his teachings relevant to present day society. To make them relevant today, we need research and experimentation in an objective manner, without deviating from the fundamental social goal of Sarvodaya, through non-violence and peace.