CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND: EIGHTEENTH AND NINETEENTH CENTURIES

Gandhiji was very much influenced by the conditions that existed in India when he finally returned from South Africa in 1915. The Pre-Gandhian social reform movements and the deteriorating political conditions, as a result of suppression of the urges of people for self-government by the British colonial Government, provided impetus for the emergence of Gandhiji's leadership. India was in a state of crisis and was in need of a charismatic leader who could bring tranquillity and order.

Gandhiji's struggle against racial inequalities in South Africa provided a framework for the Indian struggle. When he returned to India he gave much thought to Indian political situation and step by step arrived at the conclusion that only non-violent method could succeed in the face of the mighty British Empire as the Indians had no other weapons. His immediate concern was to secure political freedom and reform the traditional social institutions as they had lost their relevance. The twin instruments he developed for this purpose were Satyagraha and the constructive programme. The effectiveness of these instruments as factors of change in Indian society will be discussed in the ensuing chapters.
The background factors are detailed below with a view to unravel the significant factors that gave rise to Gandhiji's leadership.

**Industrial Revolution**

Eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are epoch-making in certain respects. During the period the west experienced the disappearance of feudalism and emergence of scientific spirit. Science and technology influenced the revolutionary changes that took place in Britain and western Europe. Harnessing of steam and electricity and the use of machinery made possible revolutionary industrial changes. In 1770 England was ripe for industrial revolution. Factories came to be established on a scale unknown before in places which later on developed as towns. Domestic production which was hitherto the predominant feature of economic life lost its significance. Large scale production became the order of the day. Goods came to be produced in abundance necessitating Britain and other west European countries to search for markets outside. Colonization became a necessary phase of the industrial revolution. The industrially advanced nations of the west began to colonize the countries of Asia and Africa. Initially they sought entrance into these continents as traders and gradually established themselves as rulers. Along with trade proselytizing activities of Christian missionaries also commenced. Thus the history of the
eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is the story of the colonial activities of the English, the French, the Dutch and the Portuguese in Asia and Africa. These developments had their impact on India. "...The new forces which had emerged after the Industrial Revolution had destroyed feudalism in Europe and under the British those very forces were destroying the old medieval society in India."¹

Indian conditions

India had the experience of being ruled over by different groups of invaders from time to time. But at no time the entire sub-continent had come under one banner. India was constituted of a number of feudal States which fought among themselves for a paltry territorial gain and did never unite against outside invaders. This was always an invitation for an outsider to look at India with covetous eyes. Under the Mughal rule efforts were made to bring together different parts of the country under their suzerainty. A perusal of the history of this period reveals that the Mughals did not totally succeed in their efforts.

The British came to India with trade interests. The East India Company became the centre of their activities. Though trade was their main concern, they did not keep aloof from political activities. The constant

¹ Vyas, K.C. The Social Renaissance in India, p.183
bickerings among the feudal states gave cause for the British to fish in the troubled waters. Gradually by playing with the politics of these States, the British secured political foothold in the country. The Battle of Plassey in 1757 laid the foundations of their domination. The British brought with them their language and culture that greatly influenced the social framework of the country. During the British rule, it became possible to administer the country with one law as the British had acquired control over almost all the areas. This was facilitated by the modern means of communications and transport as well as through the British system of education. "Through English education India came into contact with the western ideas at a very opportune moment, when they were dominated by the French Revolution and the Age of Illumination, India awoke from the slumber of ages as a result of the impact. Rationalism took the place of blind faith, individualism supplanted the tyranny of dogma and traditional beliefs and authorities, and ideas of social justice and political rights shook off the lethargy and cast off the fatalism or determinism of ages..." 

Introduction of English education in schools and colleges in India facilitated the influx of western influences. This produced great awakening which later on became a sustained factor in the struggle for self-governent. Self confidence was

2. Majumdar, Dr.R.C., Three Phases of India's Struggle for Freedom, p.5.
on the increase among the Indians and they began the
study of their history and culture in order to gain
insight into historical process. Speaking on the
impact of the west on India, Dr. R.C. Majumdar points
out "But one of its most precious gifts was the birth
of nationalism in India. The most important factor that
contributed to it was the sudden revelation of the past
glory and greatness of the Hindus." 3

Impact of Industrial Revolution

Industrial Revolution in Great Britain changed
the economic framework of India. Initially it ruined
handicrafts. Later a process of industrial development
set in. However, the pace of industrialisation was
rather slow as the British were quite indifferent in
this regard. They took more interest to procure raw-
materials for their factories in England than work for
industrialisation in India. India, actually became a
dumping ground for the finished goods of England. The
flow of Indian goods came to be restricted so as to
protect their home industries. "The East India Company
looted Bengal to fill its coffers. India's ruinous
condition was demonstrated by a famine in Bengal in 1770
in which ten million people died... By 1813 the Company's
monopoly of the Indian trade had been terminated and a new
policy of exploitation begun. It was designed to expand

3. Ibid.
the Indian market for British manufacturers and to increase India's production of raw materials for the benefit of British industry. In the name of free trade British products were allowed free entry into the country while tariffs were raised high against Indian goods entering England. In 1787 the exports of Dacca muslin to England accounted to three million rupees, in 1817 they ceased altogether. By 1850 India who for centuries had exported cotton goods to the whole world was importing one-fourth of Britain's cotton textile exports.  

An adverse effect of all these was to destroy Indian cottage and village industries. "...The Industrial Revolution and the hostile policy of the East India Company had a destructive effect on the handicraft industries in India. The decline of the handicrafts industries in turn had destructive economic and social effects. Economically more pressure was brought to bear on the land, and socially, the functional basis of the caste system began to crumble."  

The process of industrialisation in the country also hastened the decay of cottage and village industries. The machine-made goods filled the markets in abundance. They were sold at cheaper rates compared to

the handicraft products. Consequently the traditional market for handicrafts was lost. This caused unemployment to the artisans forcing them to fall back on agriculture as their sole means of survival. Those who did not get footing in agriculture had to migrate to the towns and cities in search of employment. "Between 1770 and 1900 years- 130 years- there were twenty-two famines. Millions of people died of starvation and the survivors had not much strength to resist the evils of foreign domination. In 1834 Lord Bentinck, the then Governor General reported that "the misery hardly finds a parallel in the history of commerce. The bones of the cotton weavers are bleaching the plains of India." 6

The revolt of 1857 greatly influenced the British politics. One immediate consequence of the revolt was to make the British Sovereign directly responsible for the governance of India. In 1858 Lord Canning was appointed as the first Viceroy and by a Royal proclamation it was announced that "we hold ourselves bound to the natives of our Indian territories by the same obligation of duties which bind us to all our other subjects. In their prosperity will be our strength, in their contentment our security, and in their gratitude our best reward." Later events in the country, however, belied the proclamation. Discontent increased and no effort was made by the administration to find out the root cause for it. It appeared

6. Tendulkar, D.G. op.cit
as though the administration was indifferent to the agony of the people.

**Birth of Reform Movements**

In the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, a number of social reformers came forward with a view to eradicate social evils. The primary objective of all the movements during the period was to instil social consciousness among the people and fight through reforms all the social evils that were proving dead weight to any progress. The movements though localised were greatly responsible for the new awakening among the intellectuals. There is no doubt that by this time i.e., by the middle of the 19th century western political ideas had started influencing the minds of the educated. Such influences were greatly responsible for the upsurge of national feeling found during the period. Prof. M.N. Srinivas has succinctly described the changes brought about by the British rule. "British rule produced radical and lasting changes in Indian society and culture. It was unlike any previous period in the Indian history as the British brought with them new technology, institutions, knowledge, beliefs and values. The new technology, and revolution in communications which this brought about, enabled the British to integrate the country as never before in history." 7

---

7. Srinivas, (Prof) M.N., Social Change in Modern India, p.46
The rise of social reform movements in India in the 19th century has to be perceived in the light of these western influences. "Implicit in westernization are certain value preferences. A most important value, which in turn subsumes several other values, is what may be broadly characterised as humanitarianism, by which is meant an active concern for the welfare of all human beings irrespective of caste, economic position, religion, age and sex. Equalitarianism and secularization are both included in humanitarianism." Further pointing to the effects of westernization in India, Prof. Srinivas points out: "... The introduction of reforms and the British legal system involved the changing or abolition of customs claiming to be a part of religion. This meant that religious customs had to satisfy the test of reason and humanity if they were to be allowed to survive. As British rule progressed, rationality and humanitarianism became broader, deeper and more powerful, and the years since the achievement of independence have seen a remarkable increase - a genuine leap forward - in the extension of both. The attack on untouchability which independent India had launched provides a striking example of such extension. No alien government would have dared to declare the practice of untouchability in any form an offence, or to enforce the right of Harijans to enter...

8. Ibid, p.48
temples and draw water from upper caste wells in villages."

The humanitarian work of Christian missionaries also motivated leaders to work for social reform. "... The British-western attack resulted in a re-interpretation of Hinduism at both the ideological and institutional levels, and the conversion of lower castes (especially Harijans) to Islam and Christianity was an important factor in producing a changed attitude among the Hindu elite towards caste and untouchability."  

Introduction of English education resulted in the emergence of an educated elite who became primarily responsible for starting agitation for self-government and for attempts to get rid off the social abuses prevalent in the society.

Prof. Srinivas identifies the few who were influenced by western ideas as the "New Elite" and their "role was seminal in ushering in of new India." "I shall not call them the 'Middle class' in as much as the term is used in different senses by different scholars, and I am not certain that the new elite- e.g., Ram Mohan Roy, the Tagores and Swami Vivekananda- always hailed from, or formed the middle class."

Among the leaders of the various reform movements, Raja Ram Mohan Roy was the first to implant the seeds of

9. Ibid, p. 49
10. Ibid, p. 50
11. Ibid, p. 60
resurgence in the country. He took pains to learn English when English schools were not yet established and started a movement for putting an end to certain evil customs and practices among the people. He started agitation against suttee or self-immolation. The practice made young girls of tender age to sacrifice their lives. On account of Raja Ram Mohan Roy’s persuasion with the government, the practice was abolished in 1828. He founded the Brahmo Samaj to wean the people from meaningless conventions and stop conversion of intellectuals to Christianity. He recognized the slogans of the French Revolution—liberty, equality and fraternity—as highly meaningful and relevant to the conditions of subjugated India. He was the first man to represent India in the British Parliament and was the first Indian to go to England to give evidence before a Parliamentary Committee.

".... The Brahmo Samaj of Bengal had its repercussions all over the country.... " 12 The Offshoot of Brahmo Samaj in Bengal was the Prarthana Samaj in Bombay founded in 1869. It took up social reform. Leaders like R.G. Bhandarkar, Justice Ranade, Shri. Narayan Chandavarkar showed keen interest in the movement for social reforms. Another institution that did much to popularise social reforms was the Sarvajanik Sabha started in Poona in 1870 by Ganesh Vasudev Joshi. He propagated Swadeshi and spun yarn daily for his own wear.

The journalistic activities of leaders in Maharashtra, Madras and Bengal were also greatly responsible for the new awakening in the country. Agarkar and Tilak started the English weekly *Maharatta* and the Marathi weekly *Kesari* to propagate and prepare the people for national service. The *Hindu* in Madras and the *Amrit Bazar Patrika* in Bengal played similar roles. After Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Dadabhai Navroji (born in 1825) played an important part in the history of India. He championed the cause of women's education and did much to popularise social reform through his Gujarati journal *Rast Goftar*. As Professor of Gujarati in the University College, London, he familiarised India to the English. He became an unofficial ambassador for India. His 'Poverty and Un-British Rule in India' published in 1917 helped to unravel the exploitative vested interests of the British rule in India. Twice he was the President of the Indian National Congress.

The scholarly literature of 1850-1900 enkindled the flame of self-respect in the country. "It is important to remember that the elite played a creative role in re-interpreting Indian thought, traditions, culture, and history in response to European criticisms. Their role was far from restricted to borrowing things, ideas, and institutions from the British; the borrowing was selective and the borrowed item subjected to elaboration and re-interpretation."  

During the period a number of Indian and western scholars through their works brought to light the ancient wisdom of the land. Orientalists like Ravindralal Mitra, Bhandarkar and Tilak through their works showed to the west that originality and scholarship were not the monopoly of the west. Sir Edwin Arnold's 'Song Celestial' and 'Light of Asia' and Maxmuller's 'India- What Can It Teach Us' and the writings of a number of other western scholars also contributed to the resurgence of national spirit in India. In fact, "Western and Western-inspired scholars provided new and objective perspectives for Indian civilization."¹⁴ Indian society in spite of its hoary past had become moribund. That might have been the reason why Indians had to be told about their worth by western scholars. "It is ironic," says Prof. Srinivas, "that it was largely the work of British and European scholars that had brought to light the greatness, versatility, and antiquity of Indian civilization. This discovery contributed to the self-respect of Indians and gave them confidence to face the west as equals, and to demand freedom, and the right to develop."¹⁵

Thus the British rule indirectly helped Indians especially the intellectuals to evaluate the customs and traditions of the country in the light of rationalism and liberalism. As a result, various reform movements emerged to purify the Indian social system out of its evils. Side by side a spirit of national identity emerged. A sharp rise

¹⁵ Ibid, p.32
in nationalism was the result of the introduction of railways, growth of the press and the spread of education.

The earlier social reformers on account of the western influences became highly critical of the traditional values and norms that governed the society. "One feature however of this reformist movement was a certain disregard for the past and a spirit of revolt from the time-honoured and traditional beliefs of the country, which arose from an undue glamour presented by the western institutions and heightened greatly by the political prestige associated with them." As a reaction to the denationalising tendencies, Arya Samaj in the North-West and theosophical movement in Madras came into being. Dayananda Saraswati established Arya Samaj to revive the ancient glory of India. "Back to the Vedas" was the cry of Aryasamajists. Annie Besant started the Theosophical Society to popularise the wisdom of ancient India. Ramakrishna Mission also came into being during the period to bring about spiritual awakening among the people. Swami Vivekananda's message- "Arise, Awake, Stop not till the goal is reached"- became a battle cry for spiritual resurgence in India. The renaissance in the religious field was also greatly responsible for the new life and ethos seen in the country.

16. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, op.cit p.13
Birth of Indian National Congress

The birth of the Congress was preceded by activities that led to a consensus on the need for an all India organisation to fight for national interests.

"It is believed that the idea of organising a vast political gathering was first conceived by Surendranath Bannerjee under the inspiration furnished by that gathering of the princes and people of India in 1877."¹⁷ In 1877 Bannerjee attended the great riunter held in Delhi.

"In 1878 Bannerjee visited Bombay and Madras Presidencies in order to stimulate public opinion on the reactionary policy pursued by Lord Salisbury in raising the age limit for the Civil Service Examination to 19 years, and to prepare an All India Memorial to be presented to the House of Commons on the Civil Service question."¹⁸

In 1885 the first Conference of National leaders under the name of the Indian National Congress was held in Bombay on the 28th December. A.C.Hume, a British official was responsible for preparing the ground for the emergence of Indian National Congress. He came to understand that India was seething under political discontent. He felt seriously that unless some vent was found for the discontent, the country would disintegrate through terrorism and revolt. Thus he resolved to open a safety-valve for the unrest and the Congress became an outlet.

¹⁷ ibid
¹⁸ Ibid, p.10.
"The history of the Congress is really the history of India's struggle for freedom." The early leaders in the Congress placed faith in the Englishman and in England and they were hopeful that England would do justice to India. They did not think in terms of radical programmes like boycott of foreign goods, etc. "It requires no imagination to see," writes P. Sitaramayya, "that they would have been scandalized by such ideas. Nor could such programmes be evolved before the partition of Bengal, the reactionary policies of Curzon and Minto, or the South African experiences of Gandhiji, or the Jallianwala-Bagh Massacre."  

As years rolled from 1885 to 1915 Congress became more radical and began to represent various interests in national life. "Year after year the Congress met and increasingly became a national platform for the progressive forces in the land. But it was not until 1905- that it acquired the character of a real mass movement. A new life burst forth into the country in the years 1905-09 and it gave birth to two new schools of nationalism, distinguished for their faith in self-reliant and independent action."

The two new schools among nationalists came to be divided on the problem of whether reform of society

should have priority over the demand for freedom; the former group came to be known as 'moderates' represented by M.G.Ranade and G.K.Gokhale, and the latter group—the 'extremists', represented by B.G.Tilak. Later on in Gandhiji's activities both became important.

Birth of National Movement

"The period of time between 1900 and 1906 was one of a critical nature in the history of India." Dr. R.C. Majumdar describes the period as "the era of Nationalism." A number of factors contributed to the developments in India during the period. The developments in Italy and the inspiring leadership of Mazzini and Garibaldi vigorously energised the national spirit in the country. The movements for national liberation in Egypt, Persia, Turkey and Russia had their repercussions on India. Leaders started crusading for self-government. "The first five years of the 20th century witnessed the strenuous days of Lord Curzon's rule." The ruthless policies followed by Curzon and later on by Minto augmented the discontent in the country further than the external events. The amended Indian Official Secrets Act of 1904 and the Indian Universities Act created bitterness among the national leaders.

Added to these, the partition of Bengal came as a blow to the people. These unpopular measures "broke the back of loyal Indians and roused a new spirit in the nation." Thus, "... the unrestrained policy of repression did manufacture our patriots and heroes." In 1897 plague broke out in many parts of India. When the country was fighting the epidemic, the British became suspicious of leaders and took repressive measures. In Poona B. Tilak was prosecuted for sedition. He was sentenced to rigorous imprisonment for eighteen months. There were protests throughout the country against Tilak's incarceration and funds were raised for his defence. Added to these, the ill-treatment of Indians in South Africa was an insult to the self-respect of India. During these turbulent days the younger men in the Congress under the trimvirate—Lal, Bal —Pal— Lala Lajpat Rai, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Bepin Chandra Pal became restive and agitated for self-government. Tilak's slogan "Swaraj is my birth right, and I will have it" echoed throughout India.

In spite of countrywide opposition against partition of Bengal, the partition came into effect from 16th October 1905. This led to severe agitation all over the country. "Never, in the history of British India, was any measure of Government opposed so vehemently or persistently and

23. P. Sitaramayya, op. cit, p.67
24. Ibid, p.69
The Swadeshi and Boycott movement was adopted throughout India as the next step to fight for self-government. "The year 1907 was momentous in the history of India. It witnessed the implementing of the new slogans of Swadeshi, Boycott, and National Education in practical programmes." In 1908 Gandhiji himself had stated that "the real awakening of India took place after the partition of Bengal." In 1906 for the first time, the Congress declared the attainment of Swaraj as the goal for which it shall work. "The Congress of 1906, held at Calcutta, was a landmark in the history of the Indian National Movement. The old spell had been broken at last and leaders now spoke out their minds freely. Dadabhai Naoroji, President of the Congress proclaimed the ideal of 'Swaraj' for the people of India. The word Swaraj, the mantra of new aspirations, was uttered for the first time from the Congress platform. "Self-Government is the only and chief remedy. Be united, persevere and achieve self-government, so that millions now perishing by poverty, famine and plague, and the scores of millions that are starving on scanty subsistence may be saved, and India may once more occupy her proud position of yore, among the greatest civilized nations of the west."

25. Dr. R.C. Majumdar, op. cit. pp.25-26
26. P. Sitaramayya, op.cit, p.69
27. Quoted by Majumdar, R.C.
The partition of Bengal motivated Rabindranath Tagore to come down from the ivory tower and throw himself into the movement. He advocated constructive non-co-operation. He composed patriotic songs and addressed large gatherings of students. The passing of the Seditious Meetings Act and the Indian Newspapers Act in 1908 brought the work of public propaganda almost to a standstill. For certain articles in 'Kesari', Lokamanya Tilak then aged 52, was sentenced in 1908 to six years' rigorous imprisonment and a fine of Rs.1,000/- . Tilak addressing the judge declared: "In spite of the verdict of the Jury, I maintain that I am innocent. There are higher powers that rule the destinies of things; and it may be the will of Providence that the cause which I represent should prosper more by my sufferings than by my remaining free." This led to a nation-wide protests and hartals. Students absented themselves from schools and colleges. The textile workers of Bombay struck work for six days. It was the first political strike of the workers in the country. Repression by the Government gave momentum to the militant activities of the revolutionary party. Revolutionaries became active in various parts of the country. They had a strong hold in Bengal and Maharashtra. Aurobindo Ghosh through his articles supported Tilak and the national movement. During this period V.D. Savarkar was arrested (1910) and was tried and sentenced to transportation for life to Andaman islands. With the appointment of Lord Minto as Viceroy in November 1905 there appeared hopes of compromise on the part of the Government. Lord Morley
became the Secretary of State. He placed certain political reforms before the Parliament and they were accepted. In course of time, the Morley-Minto schemes became the Indian Councils Act, 1909. But the reforms side-tracked the issue of self-government of India. Various developments inside and outside India brought the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League together. The Khilafat movement became a common cause for both the Hindus and the Muslims. "As a result of the hostile attitude of Britain towards Turkey, there was rapprochement between the Muslims and the Congress. A new Constitution was adopted at the annual session of the Muslim League in March, 1913. It was under these conditions that at the Karachi Congress of 1913 the Hindus and the Muslims closed their ranks and the Congress placed on record its appreciation of the adoption by the All-India Muslim League the idea of self-government for India." The Congress endorsed the plea of the League for harmonious co-operation between the two communities."  

In the Lucknow Session of the Congress (1916) the two groups in the Congress— the Moderates and the Extremists, were again united. On the merger of the two groups in the Congress, Dr. R.C. Manumdar points out that "the Extremists had to leave the Congress in 1907. But they gathered sufficient strength to force a come-back in 1916. But when the
Moderates walked out of the Congress in 1918, they walked out of the history of Indian struggle for freedom. Nothing indicates more clearly the complete triumph of nationalism than the secession of the Moderates from the Congress."

India of 1915 witnessed the return of Gandhiji from South Africa yet fresh from his experiences there. As per the advice of his political guru- G.K.Gokhale, Gandhiji kept aloof from politics for one year in order to have a clear grasp of the political conditions in the country.

"From 1916 onwards Gandhi appeared on the Indian political horizon as an increasingly significant factor..." India waited after the war for a change of heart on the part of the British Government. Instead she received the Rowlatt Act. The people as a whole resented it. In April 1919 innocent unarmed people were massacred in Amritsar by General Dyer. This outrage wounded India's pride and she rose in revolt against foreign domination."

The revolt took the form of a country-wide non-co-operation against the government. For Gandhiji the struggle in South Africa became a sort of rehearsal for his future struggle in India. He had already tested his non-violent method not only in South Africa but in Champaran (1917) and Kheda (1918). The earlier successes energized Gandhiji to take the famous Satyagraha pledge in 1919 against the passing

30. op. cit. p.38
31. op. cit. Tendulkar, p.25.
of the Rowlatt Bills. In 1920 B.G. Tilak passed away and the reins of national leadership came into the hands of Gandhiji. "With the death of Tilak in 1920 the age of Aurobindo and Tilak was over, the age of Gandhi and Nehru was about to begin. This closes the second phase of India's struggle for freedom." 32

Romain Rolland referring to the emergence of Gandhiji's leadership in 1920 has pointed out: "So long as he lived, Tilak was the undisputed leader of his land. Who could say what would have happened, if a premature death had not taken him off in August 1920? Gandhi who bowed in reverence before the greatness of his genius differed essentially from Tilak in his opinion regarding the political methods of the national movement. If Tilak had continued to live it is certain that Gandhi would have carefully confined his activities to the religious side of the national movement." 33

Thus the configuration of various forces such as political, economic and religious made Gandhiji's leadership a historical necessity. The cultural renaissance arising out of various reform movements provided a framework for the emergence of a charismatic personality who could sustain the emergent forces and pave the way for

32. Majumdar, (Dr.) K.C., op.cit p.39
33. Mahatma Gandhi: A Study in Indian Nationalism, p.14
national liberation and development. Gandhiji's charisma was not improvised from western influences but it was the product of his deep faith in the cultural heritage of India. "Gandhi's charisma had a cultural referent." Accordingly his approach to the masses and problems of the country was oriented in traditional language which proved highly functional in the situation.

34. Rudolph, Lloyd I, and Rudolph, Susanne H; The Modernity of Tradition: Political Development in India, p.159