CHAPTER II

INFLUENCE OF KATHIAWAR ON GANDHIJI

Gandhiji was born in 1869 at a time when the British were in the process of establishing their hegemony in India. His birth synchronized with the expansion of British administrative power in India. "The British did not enter the Peninsula until 1808, and did not establish effective control until 1862; Gandhi's boyhood therefore, was passed in a region just beginning to feel the full impact of British rule." ¹ Gandhi's personality reflects the conditions of the nineteenth century in which he was reared, i.e., he was essentially a product of his times. A study of Gandhi at local and national levels is necessary to understand his personality.

Regionalism has played a significant part in the history of India. Divergent regions have made India an entity. In this respect one may point out that regional diversity has given rise to specific ethos in each region. But at the same time a generality characteristic of all regions has been found. This signifies the factor of 'unity in diversity' in India. Regional influences have played a significant role in shaping the personality of Gandhi. A study of the nineteenth century social 'complex' of Kathiawar will show that Gandhi's personality was

moulded by the then regional influences. "The Mahatma superimposed certain idealized images drawn from his early Kathiawad experiences, on his vision of India. He wanted to be like what he imagined Kathiawad to have been in the past."^2

However, the moorings of a society cannot be circumscribed to a particular period. For, there is always sequence and continuity in the life of a society. Past influences the present, and the present influences the future. It is absolutely essential that changes in social life have to be studied from such a perspective.

**Family background**

As a social group natural family consisting of male, female and children is supposed to be found at all levels of civilization; the joint family among the Hindus is somewhat related to the ethos of a particular caste and religion and is a significant socializing force. The joint family with its affiliations to caste and religion is vital to an understanding of Gandhiji's personality. Gandhiji's socialization in the traditional family had its influence on his later thinking. "The influence of the family on Gandhi is especially clear in his early days."^3

The network of relations in the joint family system makes an individual more dependent on it. Gandhiji, when he had to

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2. Ibid, p.2.
3. Devanesan, Ibid, p.95
leave for England, had to make his choice after consulting a number of his relations. Yet ultimately he had to deviate from the sanctions of the community and leave for England against their wishes.

Gandhiji had all the warmth and affection of a domestic felicity. As he grew up he had to take different roles causing anxiety and conflict. "Torn by anxiety for his father, distracted by a jealous passion for his attractive young wife from the time he was thirteen, struggling with textbooks in an unfamiliar language (since few people he knew actually spoke English), he became morbid and introspective. He felt a sense of guilt about all sorts of matters because the sounds from the sick room of his dying father prevented him from any natural enjoyment of life...

His boyhood was a training period in the part of self-denial though he did not begin to feel he had achieved mastery over himself till he was thirty-six."  

Gandhiji before he left for England had very little knowledge of his religion and the details of the turmoil arising out of the social reform movements. It was in England and later on in South Africa that he imbibed greater knowledge of India's culture and religion. Gandhiji, of course, has made reference to "a wave of reforms" in Rajkot and he has confessed that he had never read a paper till he got to London. "Gandhi's vague allusions

4. Devenesan, pp.118-119
to the wave of reform passing through Rajkot, indicate that British rule, missionary activities and western education were having an impact on the traditional way of life of various communities in Kathiawar. The experiences he described show a conflict between his Vaishnava upbringing and the disturbing desires for social freedom.\(^5\)

That is why Gandhiji while a student did not get real grounding in various aspects of life. He was married at thirteen and had to pursue his studies. Writing on the problems of study and marriage Gandhiji has himself stated "Heaven knows how many youths are in the same plight as he. Only in our present Hindu society do studies and marriage go thus hand in hand." In his later life Gandhiji became a crusader against early marriages.

Gandhiji's student life was quite normal. As a student he was neither a dunce, nor very impressive. He himself has stated that he was a mediocre student. While a student in the high school he used to absent himself from the evening classes in gymnastics and cricket in order to nurse his ailing father. Later on he has confessed that he did a mistake in neglecting gymnastics.

Gandhiji from his younger days developed the art of being truthful. There were occasions when he had to lie to his parents about his meat-eating with a friend. He

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5. Devanesan, op.cit p.127
decided to stop taking meat as long as his parents were alive, often he had to lie to his mother that he was not hungry when asked to take dinner, though meat-eating was considered essential at that time to drive away the British.

Gandhiji belonged to the Vaisya caste. But the Gandhis were not distinguished as traders but as professional servants of Rajput rulers of Porbandar. "Gandhi's career reflected many personality traits, long valued in his caste, such as industry, capacity and astonishing versatility, which enabled Baniyas before him to achieve great success in varied fields,"

Gandhiji's grand father Uttamchand worked as Diwan of Porbandar under Rana Khimaji (1818-1831). His father worked as an assessor for some time in the Rajasthanik Court which was established in 1873 to settle disputes between the chiefs and their vassals. The Gandhis were noted for their reputation as conciliators and men of independent judgment. Devenesan has pointed out that though Gandhi makes only two passing references to the Rajasthanik Court in his autobiography (pp.11-15), "It probably had a greater effect on the development of his thinking than is generally realized. It is likely that his dislike for the British style Courts of Kathiawad

6. Devenesan, op. cit p.27
and Bombay, his rejection of lawyers in Hind Swaraj, and his conception of the function of law were rooted in his memories of his father’s work as an arbitrator in the Rajasthanik Court and his unconscious idealization of its methods and aims. 7

Conflict of Cultures

At the time of Gandhiji’s birth some sort of transitional anomie prevailed. The cause was the presence of old and new patterns which gave rise to problems of adjustment. On one side Hindu tradition had its hold and on the other western influences had started percolating into the socio-cultural life. Though we cannot deny that the early influences of caste and religion had their indelible imprint on Gandhiji’s later life, we can see that Gandhiji’s synthetic approach was the result of the conflict of cultures prevalent at the time of his birth. Gandhiji was very much influenced by the western liberal ethic though he was against its materialism. Devanesen has pointed out that while Gandhi was rooted in a rich Indian tradition, he was subjected to very powerful forces of acculturation. 3

Religious background: Traditions of religious tolerance

Gandhiji had his birth in the city of Porbandar in

7. Devanesan, op. cit, p.86
Kathiawar. Kathiawar played a prominent part in the western part of the country. It was the meeting ground of divergent races and religions. This diversity and ethnic heterogeneity gave rise to tolerance on the part of Gandhiji. At young age Gandhiji got grounding in tolerance. "In Rajkot, however, I got an early grounding in tolerance for all branches of Hinduism and sister religions. For, my father and mother would visit the Haveli as also Shiva's and Rama's temples, and would take or send us youngsters there. Jain monks also would pay frequent visits to my father and would even go out of their way to accept food from us non-jains. They would have talks with my father on subjects religious and mundane. He had besides, Mussalaman and Parsi friends, who would talk to him about their own faiths, and he would listen to them always with respect, and often with interest. Being his nurse, I often had a chance to be present at these talks. These many things combined to inculcate in me a toleration for all faiths...."9

Gandhiji grew up in an atmosphere where different religions had their sway in the region. Kathiawar was equally holy for Vaishnavas, Saivites and Jains. Gandhiji hailed from a Vaishanava family which had a great bearing on his personality. He had a rich religious experience

from his childhood. Putlibai, his mother was highly religious and keenly observed all the religious festivals with devotion. "The outstanding impression my mother has left on my memory is that of Saintliness." These early influences enabled Gandhiji to look at all the religions with equanimity. The deep religious fervour implanted in the childhood days in the family and the larger arena, later on made Gandhiji attribute all natural calamities like famines and earthquakes to the wrath of God. Like Rajasthan, Kathiawar was a land of Rajputs. "The songs and ballads depicting the Rajput courage, would give Gandhi a tendency towards hero worship and the legends would fill his mind with images and visions of a glowing past, a past which would inspire the Mahatma's conception of Ramarajya. The great Indian epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, would appeal all the more to the grown man who had listened as a boy to the local epics of the Rajputs of Kathiawar. An idealized Rajput State was Gandhi's political ideal for India."  

**Influence of Jainism**

We have already seen that Kathiawar tended to be a meeting ground for different religions. But the influence of Jainism preponderated over others. The Jain philosophy and teachings impressed Gandhiji from his younger days. When he was in South Africa the influence of Jainism kept him in

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10. Devanesan, op.cit, p.7
good stead. His conception of passive resistance and later on his principle of Satyagraha had their deep roots in Jainism. But Gandhiji considered Jainism as part of Hinduism. "I do not regard Jainism or Buddhism as separate from Hinduism." 11

The Jains as a religious sect have been noted for their staunch and unswerving faith in Ahimsa. Their daily activities are directed with a view to cause no harm or injury to any living creature. They have the custom of finishing their dinner before sunset so as not to harm any living creature. The habit of covering one's nostrils and mouth arose out of a strict observance of the canons of Ahimsa. The technique of **padayatra** (walking tours) later on adopted by Gandhiji is derived from the traditions of Jain Acharyas. Later on Gandhiji's intimate disciple Vinoba Bhave's **padayatras** for Bhoodan or land-gift movement have become highly inspiring and revolutionary in their character. The non-violent technique of Gandhiji has acquired a practical shape through Bhoodan and Gramdan.

**Other religious influences**

In the 19th century, Kathiawar was a fertile soil for religious ferment. A number of religious reformers-Hindu, Jain and Christian had their moorings in Kathiawar. This religious ferment had its impact on the religious bent of Gandhiji.

11. Young India, 20-10-1927
Gandhis were Vaishnavas worshipping Vishnu in the form of Krishna. Gandhiji's family belonged to the Vallabhaacharya sampradaya which came under severe criticism for its 'gross epicurianism' by Swaminarayana Sampradaya that had come into existence in the 18th century. The way, Thakorji, the image of Krishna, was worshipped in the Havelis, the predominance of congregational form of worship in the Havelis and the daily worship of Krishna in the family shrine with Bhajans and the kind had their impact on young Gandhi. Devanesen points out that "the interest Gandhi showed in dietetics can also be partly traced to the worship in the haveli, an incredible number of vegetarian dishes were cooked by the Vallabhaacharis for the daily repasts of Thakorji. The Mahatma's noted cleanliness reflects the daily baths given to Thakorji as part of the ritual." 12

Christian influences in Kathiawar

As in other parts of India, British rule in Kathiawar was accompanied by the proselytising activities of Christian missionaries. As late as 1841, the Irish Presbyterians were the first to enter Kathiawar. It was reacting to Christianity when Gandhiji was a boy. "The feeling of dislike and opposition were still sharp and raw and they were reflected in Gandhi's own feelings." 12. Devanesen, op. cit
"... I developed a sort of dislike for it (Christianity). And for a reason. In those days Christian missionaries used to stand in a corner near the high school and hold forth, pouring abuse on Hindus and their gods. I could not endure this..." Conflict of religious plays an important role in the meeting of two civilizations and is reflected in the personality of Gandhiji. Gandhiji's attitude to Christianity changed in many ways and he was destined to be described as the most Christlike man of the 20th century. But he never truly rose above some aspects of his early emotional reaction to missionary activities in Rajkot; it continued to colour his attitudes to Christians and Christianity for the rest of his life. "The history of the Missionary movement in Kathiawad ought, therefore to throw some interesting light on the sociological origins of Gandhiji's highly determinative reactions to Christianity as a boy." Later on Gandhiji started a movement through Harijan Sevak Sangh to stop conversion of depressed classes to Christianity and this might be attributed to his early reactions to Christian activities.

Hindu-Muslim Unity

A perusal of the history of Kathiawar makes us understand that the developments in Kathiawar greatly influenced

14. Devanesen, op. cit p. 47
Gandhiji’s thinking and attitudes. People of Kathiawar accepted the Muslim rulers as their own and Kathiawar maintained Hindu-Muslim unity. This had a great bearing on Gandhiji’s attitude on communal harmony and Hindu-Muslim unity. “This is an important factor in studying Gandhiji’s approach to the communal problem from the time of his student days in London when he belonged to a Muslim organisation, the Anjuman Islamia, to the time of his assassination in the hate-filled atmosphere of Delhi.”

Next to attainment of freedom, Gandhiji gave utmost thought to the Hindu-Muslim unity and eradication of untouchability. It is due to his perseverance and ceaseless efforts that Indian society is becoming more and more open and the neglected communities are getting the wherewithal to develop themselves. After independence government has taken strong measures to put an end to untouchability. Of course, untouchability is yet to be seen here and there, but the changing conditions forebode its complete death. As regards Hindu-Muslim unity the picture is quite different. Gandhiji, in spite of his earnest endeavour to bring about harmony among the two communities did not completely succeed. Even to this day the problem of Hindu-Muslim unity and amity remains a puzzle. View points may differ as to why Gandhiji failed in this regard. However, a sociologist has to perceive the problem from an historical perspective.

15. Devanesen, op. cit p.21
Gandhiji viewed freedom struggle a common cause for both the Hindus and the Muslims. He never accepted the two-nation theory nor considered Muslims as a separate community. Gandhiji's optimism in bringing about Hindu-Muslim unity has to be viewed from the context of his early experiences and convictions. Gandhiji practised true religion and he maintained that true religions never separate individuals and groups. Further Gandhiji's experiences of bringing together the two communities on a common platform in South Africa made him quite confident of establishing fraternal bonds between the Hindus and the Muslims even in India. His religious orientation enabled him to love all communities alike. But to a Muslim it appeared paradoxical that an 'orthodox Hindu' can work for the welfare of Muslims. Gandhiji's avowed secularism arose out of his deep religious convictions and this influenced his approach towards Hindu-Muslim unity. Unfortunately the Muslims never considered themselves as part of India and always maintained extraterritorial loyalties on grounds of pan-Islam. Dr. R.C. Majumdar has maintained that "Gandhi's handling of the Hindu-Muslim problem profoundly affected the course of struggle for independence. His anxiety for the Hindu-Muslim unity deserves all praise, but his was a sentimental approach to the problem and was not based on a realistic appreciation of the situation. He perhaps thought that by the magic of his non-violence he would
provide synthesis where none appeared possible. He does not appear to have understood the fundamental differences that separated the Muslims from the Hindus, and were too deep to be healed merely by slogans of friendship and fraternity. He failed to understand the real cause of tension between the two communities, because he did not study the problem in its true historical perspective.  

Now it is a part of history that India got independence only after partition of the country into two halves viz., India and Pakistan. Gandhiji till the end was against such an eventuality. He hoped for good faith to prevail amongst the two communities. But circumstances were beyond his control and he had to become a passive witness of partition. Partition did not solve the problem of Hindu-Muslim unity. Communal violence continued to mar the atmosphere of the country. Hostility between the two countries made them to wage three wars within 25 years. But what remains a fact is that neither India nor Pakistan can de-populate either Muslims in India or Hindus in Pakistan. A conciliatory attitude alone will help the two countries. The same thing applies to the two communities in this country. Obscurantism of either Hindus or Muslims is a great threat to secularism of the country. Prof. A.B. Shah has pointed out that "only a radically secular approach based on the refinement of religion and its relegation to personal

16. Majumdar, R.C. op.cit p. 47
sphere of life will suffice (to solve the problem). In
the words of Jadunath Sarkar, "If India is ever to be the
home of a nation able to keep pace within and guard the
frontiers, develop the economic resources of the country
and promote art and science then both Hinduism and Islam
must die and be born again. Each of these creeds must
pass through a rigorous vigil and penance, each must be
purified and rejuvenated under the sway of reason and
science." (A Short History of Aurangzeb). Such death
and rebirth of religion would have been necessary", says
Prof. A.B. Shah, "even if India were a pure Muslim society.
For the multireligious society that India is, Sarkar's
prescription can be rejected only at the peril of dis-
tegration and prolonged stagnation. Though Gandhi did
not try it, I have a feeling that had he been alive
today he would have endorsed the historian's point." 17

Changes in Kathiawar

The advent of the British brought "Whirl winds of
change" throughout India. Gujarat and the Peninsula of
Kathiawar were no exception to this. The British entered
Kathiawar half a century before the birth of Gandhi; what-
ever changes they brought to Kathiawar, were destined to
play a part in shaping his personality and ideas.
Kathiawar in spite of being a princely state came under

17. From an article on "Hindu-Muslim Question" in Quest,
the subjection of the Mughals and later on of the Mahrattas. It used to pay tributes to these rulers. The tribute collecting campaigns used to disrupt the normal life of Kathiawar. These campaigns were called 'Mulukgiri' expeditions. "The plight of the commercial classes like the Banias whose lives were constantly dislocated by these forays can be easily imagined. When one remembers how vehemently Gandhi protested against the British proposal to follow a 'scorched earth policy', should the Japan invade India, one is tempted to speculate as to the deep-seated aversion of his Bania forbears must have felt for the perennial curse of the Mulukgiri expeditions which frequently devastated Kathiawad."18 The British established their political control in Baroda as in other provinces. With this the ferocious system of Mulukgiri came to an end and by the time of Gandhiji's birth in 1869, settled conditions prevailed.

Gandhiji's boyhood coincided with a period when the British were assuming greater control over Kathiawar. We must turn to the changes inaugurated in Kathiawar by the British after the Mutiny to understand more fully the background of both the rapid change against which the childhood and boyhood of Gandhi were passed as well as the urge to go to England which he says completely

18. Devenesan, op.cit, p.41
possessed him. "The changes unleashed by the British were breaking up the once almost impregnable economy of self-sufficient villages.... A process of industrialisation and urbanisation was at work and altering and transforming the life and outlook of the people."\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{19} Devanesan, op. cit