CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION: THE CONTEXT AND ESTIMATE OF RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHY OF GANDHI

Gandhi’s philosophy is considered as universal and timeless philosophy. He has attained an iconic status in the world and in history. His life has been considered as the sun of the Indian solar system, radiating peace with his philosophy of non-violence, emitting rays of truthfulness and shining in the hearts of millions of people for his unforgettable contributions. The beginners may find it difficult to understand his ideologies as his language is quite incomprehensible. But going through it with concentration and a deeper understanding one may find that it is truly an inexplicable experience. The experience would reveal the religious and social ideas adopted and developed by Gandhi, first during his period in South Africa from 1893 to 1914, and later in India that were further developed by later “Gandhians,” Vinoba Bhave and Jayaprakash Narayan. Outside of India the work of Martin Luther King Jr. can also be viewed in this light. ‘In 1912 Gandhi entirely abandoned the practice of law and henceforth devoted his entire time and energy to the service of the community’. On his return to India, he was not successful to become a lawyer because of his extreme devotion to truth. In 1893, he went to South Africa as a lawyer to a rich merchant but soon got indulged in politics to help the Indians who were leading a miserable life there. In 1894, he founded the National Congress to defend the Indians in South Africa. In 1913, he returned to India and plunged himself in the struggle for independence of the people. He led many Civil Disobedience Movements and was imprisoned by the British rulers several times. In 1942, he led the Quit India Movement which led to freedom in 1947, thus fulfilling the dreams of millions of Indians.
The simplicity of Gandhi’s life changed the lifestyle of many. It is through non-violence, one of the greatest ideals, that he preached throughout his life, he had proved his strength to the world. Going deeply into his experiences and his ‘experiments with truth’ will give a ray of hope to many to achieve what they thought would be impossible. The impossible becomes possible by adopting the principles of Gandhi. His principles of truth and non-violence appealed to many and those who practiced his principles had found an inner peace, which he radiated to others and marched through life's struggles with firm and undaunted steps.

Religious dimension of Gandhi’s thought leads us to note the importance of his philosophy which holds the ideals of Truth, Nonviolence, Truth-force and Welfare of all. The ideals, which underpin the whole philosophy, are relevant to all humankind. Also, it can be universal despite being fundamentally religious, as its religious position stresses not so much the Hindu interpretation of reality as the beliefs are common to all major religions. It holds that no religion is inferior or superior to the other. All religions are worthy of equal respect and in one sense to be equal. As all religions are creations of mortal and imperfect human beings, no single religion can embody or reveal the whole or absolute truth.

5.1 THE SEARCH FOR TRUTH

Gandhi had regarded God as Truth. The inevitable means to know this Truth is Love which emanates from the heart of a man where God dwells. “Love is the strongest force the world possesses and yet it is the humblest imaginable.” Gandhi believed that God resides in every human being. He firmly believed, “My God does not reside up above. He has to be realized on Earth... within you, within me.”
Further to this Gandhi writes, “I embarked on the fast in the name of Truth whose familiar name is God. Without living Truth, God is nowhere. In the name of God we have indulged in lies [and] massacres.... I am not aware if anybody has done these things in the name of Truth. With the same name on my lips I have broken the fast.... If the solemn pledge made today [to stop the ethnic cleansing of Moslems in New Delhi] is fulfilled, I assure you that it will revive with redoubled force my intense wish and prayer before God that I should be enabled to live the full span of life [125 years according to traditional Hindu lore], doing service of humanity till the last moment.”4 So, Gandhi regarded God and love as one. To him, “When you want to find truth as God, The only inevitable means is love, that is, non-violence. And since I believe that ultimately means and ends are convertible terms, I should not hesitate to say that God is love.”5

Gandhi was acclaimed as the embodiment of non-violence. He attracted many people in the world through his thought and action. Particularly, his ‘My Experiments with Truth’ and the claim of ‘My Act Speaks Unerringly’ have still been a great attraction to many philosophers and religious scholars who consider them as a worthwhile contribution to the ongoing discussion on truth and reconciliation in interfaith dialogue which would certainly help to work for peace in the world. Every single aspect of human interest has not been touched by him. In all his efforts in this regard, he made it more knowledgeable. This was his lifelong earnest quest for truth. He considered that Truth is the law of evolving humanity - Being in the midst of Becoming- in the world of our experience.

As Gandhi believed that loving humanity is loving God. For he stated, “I love all mankind as I love my own countrymen, because God dwells in the heart of every human being, and I aspire to realize the highest in life through the service of humanity.”6
Gandhi’s principles, actions, writings moved the masses and shown the society as well as the Government of the day its roots. As he was considered a man of action, his action was based on high moral principles, inspired by spiritual seeking, and guided by prompting of a religiously mystic nature. He had an unshakable faith in the moral order of the universe. His conviction was that Truth was his goal and that it was the highest value. Truth for Gandhi meant the realization by him in thought, word and deed of the unity of existence, unity of all beings and life. That is the meaning of his ‘seeing God face to face’. This idea was to be steadily but incessantly attained through non-violence (ahimsa) alone.

Gandhi opines that single definition of God is not possible. He stated, “There are innumerable definitions of God, because His manifestations are innumerable. They overwhelm me with wonder and awe and for a moment stun me. But I worship God as Truth only. I have not yet found Him, but I am seeking after Him. I am prepared to sacrifice the things dearest to me in pursuit of this quest. Even if the sacrifice demanded be my very life, I hope I may be prepared to give it. But as long as I have not realized this Absolute Truth, so long must I hold by the relative truth as I have conceived it.”

The underlying fact of the concept of Truth according to Gandhi is that God can be realized only by knowing of what relative truth is. It is important to remember that relative truth has many sides and it is ever changing. What appears true today may not be true tomorrow. Or what appears to be the truth to us does not necessarily appear to be the truth to others. We cannot therefore say that we possess the Truth and so our understanding of Truth is the right one. Gandhi view is that we must develop the ability to look at everything from different perspectives and have the humility to understand that we could be wrong. Such an attitude will enable the seeker of truth to find the eternal Truth or God.
Gandhi believed in everlasting cosmic evolution. In his outlook, every kind of being shows a trace of dialectical tension between *himsa* (violence) with *ahimsa* (non-violence). It is through the more developed the structure of evolution, the more dominant the non-violent factor is seen. A human being, considered as perfect and final product of such evolution, has tamed the *himsa* with *ahimsa*. Therefore, humanity is inseparably connected with non-violence which brings permanent solution to any problem by right means and constructs human relations, and violence leads to denial of the human kind and destruction of a human being as such. The proclamation of the greatness of any being with violence can also be disastrous. It may destroy such kind of being and slow down the pace of evolution. Such approach is comprehensive and cohesive. Therefore, non-violence is the only means for being human and promoting human values.

If weapons are used in violence to achieve an end which would only be temporary, Gandhi developed *Satyagraha, ahimsa*, non-co-operation and mass civil disobedience as his ideals and considered them as a powerful weapons to meet the organized violence of the mighty authority. He stated that, ‘No. I swear by non-violence and Truth together standing for the highest order of courage before which the atom bomb is of no effect’. ⁸ He had contributed more than anyone else to mobilize the strength of the great masses of humanity in India. Gandhi derived his theory of *Satyagraha* from his doctrine of Truth. He holds that, ‘Finite man cannot grasp the whole Truth- not even relative truth in its entirety. What may therefore appear as Truth to one person may appear as error to another person. And yet both of them may be right from their respective points of view’. ⁹ Gandhi’s *Satyagraha* was not an abstract philosophy but a philosophy of action. Truth to him meant not the uttered word, not the professed belief but something that has to be lived. If we say one thing and do not practice it we live untruth.
To work out in full all the implications of the ideals he professed, was Gandhi’s *sadhana* or striving for truth. He asserts that every sphere of life aims to realize Truth. In this case it took the form of the strict observance—of their full implications of the five cardinal vows of truth. Non-violence (*ahimsa*), truth (*Satya*), non-stealing (*asteya*), celibacy (*brahmacharya*) and non-possession (*aparigraha*). Gandhi was seeking Truth not for intellectual satisfaction but for spiritual transformation. He stated, ‘but He is no God who merely satisfies the intellect, if He ever does. God to be God must rule the heart and transform it. He must express Himself in every the smallest act of His votary’. This he believed can only be done through a definite realization more real than the five senses can ever produce. Sense perceptions often are false and deceptive, however real they may appear to us. His view is that God can be proved not by extraneous evidence but in the transformed conduct and character of those who have felt the real presence of God within is commendable. Such a testimony is to be found in the experiences of an unbroken line of prophets and sages in all countries and climes.

Religion for Gandhi is identified with ethics rather than theology. Therefore, most of Gandhi’s major concepts and methods of struggle are not absolutist concepts. It would not be fair to judge and analyze Gandhi’s philosophy through some absolutist concepts and ideas. At times he was vulnerable to temptations but he developed the moral strength to resist, proving the spirit to be stronger than the flesh. This points to the solution to the problems in the world. Similarly, having experienced people’s struggle for survival have evolved a way to brave the challenges of violence, untruth, evil and death with fortitude, hard work, truth, benevolence and respect for life. In this connection, it should be mentioned here that the most significant concept that is relevant to revalidating Gandhi is “*Swaraj*” or “Self-rule”. It is not merely an economic concept, but it is also a political concept. In 1909, Gandhi wrote *Hind Swaraj*, in Gujarati, and then translated it into English.
The book *Hind Swaraj* outlined his vision of independent, self-reliant India. According to Gandhi simplicity remains the first fundamental principle. Non-violence constitutes the second principle. His economic thought for dignity and sanctity of manual labour is considered to be the third cardinal principle. The fourth principle of Gandhian economics is regarded for human values.¹²

Society based on non-violence can only consist of groups settled in villages in which voluntary co-operation is the condition of dignified and peaceful existence.¹³ Hinduism doesn’t recognise human beings as mere material beings. It’s understanding of human identity is more ethical-spiritual than material. It considers the right of happiness to be the highest fundamental right of all humans. The ultimate goal for Hinduism is material and spiritual well-being of the mankind. That is why a sense of immortality and divinity is attributed to all human beings in Hindu classical thought. Gandhi differentiates between religion as formal organization and religion as ethics and spirituality, which teaches unconditional love for the neighbour. Within these arguments Gandhi gives reasons to support tolerance which later culminated into *Sarvadharma Samabhava* (equality of all on law) as a state of human consciousness.

Human beings have an urge to seek out truth. Every individual has strong drive to learn new things and grow in understanding. Unquenchable thirst for discovery, adventure, intellectual curiosity, experimentation and philosophical enquiry is a fundamental characteristic of the searching mind. Sometimes, one may willingly submit himself to suffering in order to achieve it. It is obvious that a serious search is a prerequisite to discovery. Gandhi claims that he was a humble seeker after Truth and bent upon finding it. Further, he believed that, the search for truth is a divine search, for it is ultimately a search for God.
Gandhi firmly asserted that a seeker after truth should be humbler than the dust. Arrogance and self-righteousness are sure signs of ignorance. Our understanding of reality, of truth, is developmental and evolving. Individuals can only hold to ‘partial’ truths, and are in need of correction and adjustment. In his opinion one needs to understand that there is a great need for humility, to know Truth which has its own laws, physical laws in the universe, and the spiritual laws, with inevitable consequences if those laws are broken.

Gandhi’s Philosophy is Spiritual, Universal and Timeless. He aims at the spiritual Truth in all his social, political, economic and educational endeavors. As long as man lives on earth, he cannot separate himself from all these. Hence, Gandhi stressed that everyone should aim at the spiritual Truth in their different spheres of life. All religions teach the path leading to spiritual state that is peaceful, disciplined, ethical and wise. The undisciplined mind is the root cause for all problems. It is the cause for selfishness and other unethical activities. If religion refers to the human body then spirituality is the soul of a faith tradition. Spirituality helps one to realize unity in the midst of diversity. For most people, spiritual awakening is a gradual process. The spiritually enlightened souls will realize the difference between unity and uniformity.

Today, people who belong to various religions give more importance to rituals or ritualistic practices or sometimes try to make their religion for material prosperity but the spirituality in every religion is not remembered, and given importance. Sometimes they are ignored or neglected. But religions play great role in bringing peace and harmony in the midst of people in the world. In any circumstance or situation religion should not be the cause for chaos and disharmony among people. Sometimes misunderstanding or misinterpretations of religions become the cause for the loss of human life. In a country with diverse religions, until and unless there is harmony between the various religious groups, no progress can be made by a nation. It is as in the case of
Hindu system of philosophy that regards all religions as containing the elements of truth in them and enjoins an attitude of respect and reverence towards them all. While doing so, it is necessary to get rid of the fear that a reverent study of other religions is likely to weaken or shake one's faith in one's own. Gandhi respected all religions, but he was a firm believer of his own religion. For he states, “A religion has to be judged not by its worst specimens but by the best it might have produced.”

5.1.1 Gandhi’s passion for Truth

There are certain definite principles that Gandhi followed in his life. The first principle is that God is truth, and Truth is God. The second principle is the search for truth, or the independent investigation of truth. The search for Truth for him was a lifelong passion. And he felt that it is an obligation of every human being and it must be weighed by reason and tested in practice. The third principle is his unbiased nature to any religious stand. Every world religion has truth in it. A study of the world’s religious scriptures will show that there is some common element in every religion. For example, all religions teach that every individual is essentially a spiritual being; that there is a divine intelligence at the heart of the universe to which one is intimately related, that love is the primary expression of spirituality. Further, he stated that all religions teach about ethics. They teach us how we should conduct ourselves, and they identify many of the virtues, such as: humility, compassion, kindness, self-control, truthfulness and so on. Gandhi’s statement explains his profound view, ‘God is Truth and Truth is God’, “To me God is Truth and Love; God is ethics and morality; God is fearlessness. God is the source of Light and Life and yet He is above and beyond all these.” The fourth principle is that no one religion can legitimately claim to be the exclusive bearer of truth.
As early as 1905 Gandhi declared that the time had passed when the followers of one religion could stand and say, ‘ours is the only true religion and all others are false’. But his view is that God, Allah, Rama, Narayan, Ishwar, Khuda were descriptions of the same Being; seems to be a healthy principle in a given context of religious plurality. Gandhi’s profound view is, “God’s grace and revelation were not the monopoly of any race or nation.”\textsuperscript{16} For Gandhi, Truth is a reality larger than any one religion, but in which all are ultimately grounded. At the same time, he believed that all religions are imperfect because they are transmitted, interpreted and practiced through imperfect ways. Thus, error enters into the religious beliefs and practices of all religions. “I came to the conclusion,” Gandhi wrote in 1927, “that all religions were right but every one of them was imperfect, imperfect naturally and necessarily, because they were interpreted with our poor intellects, sometimes with our poor hearts, and more often misinterpreted.”\textsuperscript{17} And in another place he said: “We have not realized religion in its perfection, even as we have not realized God. Religion of our conception, being thus imperfect, is always subject to a process of evolution and reinterpretation. Progress towards Truth, towards God, is possible only because of such evolution. And if all faiths outlined by men are imperfect, the question of comparative merit does not arise.”\textsuperscript{18} Gandhi firmly holds that the defects in the religion should be overcome with a right spirit. His view is all faiths constitute a revelation of Truth. Reverence for religious faith should not blind us to their faults. “We must be keenly alive to the defects of our own faiths also, yet not leave it on that account, but try to overcome those defects.”\textsuperscript{19}

Fifth, it is significant that, the study of other religions can deepen one’s own faith and lead to \textit{sarva-dharma-samanvata}, or, ‘having equal regard for all faiths and creeds’.\textsuperscript{20} Gandhi boldly said, “I hold that it is the duty of every cultured man or woman to read sympathetically the scriptures of the world,”\textsuperscript{21} further he said, “If we are to respect others’ religions as we would have them
to respect our own, a friendly study of the world’s religions is a sacred duty…” Gandhi maintained the position that all the religions are fundamentally equal. We must have the innate respect for other religions as we have for our own. We must have not mutual toleration, but equal respect. It is through the cultivation of such attitudes and practices, Gandhi seemed to say, that we would be freed to live and work together in greater peace and harmony for the well-being of all.

5.1.2 Love and Truth

Every religion contains Truth which will lead us to know the one absolute Truth. If so, there is no use of fighting with other religious groups because we can see that there is truth in all religions. And such knowledge will help us to remember that the purpose of all the great religions of the world is fundamentally to help us live lives that are more peaceful, more enriching and more fulfilling. One key way of doing this is through service to others. Gandhi states that we can find the absolute Truth as God only through the means of love.

It is necessary to understand that the way to transform our attitudes is not through thought alone, but through the transformative power of love, a power that binds the universe together and which is the practice of truthfulness and non-violence. Where there is love there is peace and life; hatred leads to destruction.

5.2 EQUAL RESPECT FOR ALL RELIGIONS

Gandhi and his followers believed that religious person should have equal respect for Hinduism, Islam etc., because all these religions are equally good and satisfying. “Positive secularism” is defined as “sarva-dharma-samabhava”, “equal respect for all religions”. It is learnt that Hindu tradition has always been wholeheartedly pluralistic. It cherishes a principle of modesty in judgment, aware
of the limitations of each human viewpoint. It respects the urge to seek the truth which alights in every soul. It has compassion for the limitations of the human intellect. History shows that Hinduism practises equal tolerance towards all sects of Hindu provenance, and towards Zoroastrianism, Judaism and pre-colonial Syrian-Christianity. It was always abided by the rules of Hindu pluralism: ‘live and let live’.

Hinduism believes in diversity and consequently accepts that people of different temperaments, circumstances and levels of understanding develop different viewpoints and different forms to express even the same viewpoint. Toleration does not imply equal respect for the insights and values taught by the sects concerned. It is an application of the true *ahimsa* spirit, true spirit of love, viz. accepting the right of existing entities including ethnic identities and religious traditions to continue their existence. But this doesn't mean that Hinduism considers all doctrines and practices as of equal value. It never was anti-logical nor anti-realistic; therefore, it never required people to suppress both their rational faculty and their temperamental inclinations.

Gandhi was a model for creative encounter between religions. He had a strong tradition of religious devotion, who considered himself to be a religious person who inherited his religiosity from his family. The open mindedness of his fellow men is learnt from their approach towards different people from different religious traditions. As his father invited them to talk about the basic principles of their religions not only kindled Gandhi’s intellectual and spiritual curiosity but inculcated in him a deep sense of toleration and respect for all religions and which made him to devote his life to study religions as the main subject. While he had made deep study of his own Hinduism, he also made reverential study on the scriptures of the major religions of the world-Christianity, Islam, Jainism, Buddhism and the Parsi faith.
5.3 RELIGION AND RELIGIOSITY

It is noteworthy to mention here that Gandhi’s study of world religions was not academic but existential. Intellectual understanding of the principles of those religions was not the main understanding of his study of different religions. His sincere effort was to assimilate their moral and spiritual principles and synthesise them into his own religiosity. This view was typically his own and the following points may help us to understand his concept of religion. His religion is not a customary or sectarian religion, but what he termed as the religion that underlay all religions and which brought us face to face with our Maker. Gandhi wrote: “It means a belief in the ordered moral governance of the universe…. This religion transcends Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity etc. It does not supersede them. It harmonizes them and gives them reality.”

For him, there was no religion higher than truth and righteousness. He identified one’s religiosity or religious spirit as that “permanent element in human nature which counts no cost too great in order to find full expression and which leaves the soul utterly restless until it has found itself, known its Maker and appreciated the true correspondence between the Maker and itself.”

For Gandhi religion to be called religion should help one to solve the existential problems of life. So he said: “Religion which takes no count of practical affairs and doesn’t help solve them, is no religion.” Gandhi also believed and stated repeatedly that as religion has an overarching influence on life, the spirit of one’s religion should pervade all her/his activities. He stated that all his activities were a practical application of his religious convictions and faith. He went to the extent of saying that even his politics were derived from his religion. He wrote: “politics bereft of religion are absolute dirt, ever to be shunned. Politics concern nations and that which concerns the welfare of nations must be one of the concerns of a man who is religiously inclined, in
other words, a seeker after God and Truth… Therefore, in politics also we have to establish the Kingdom of Heaven.”

5.4 RELIGION AND MORALITY

Gandhi considered morality to be the essence of religions. His point of view is, true religion and true morality are inseparably bound up with each other. He wrote: “as soon as we lose our moral basis, we cease to be religious. There is no such thing as religion overriding morality. Man, for instance cannot be untruthful, cruel and incontinent and claim to have God on his side”. Gandhi’s religion was a synthesis of the best in all major religions. To a question; “would you say, then, that your religion is a synthesis of all religions?” he answered, “yes, if you will”. But he hastened to add that he would call that synthesis his Hinduism, and for a true Christian, that synthesis was Christianity and for a Muslim that was Islam. After a reverential study of the major religions of the world Gandhi came to the conclusion that all religions were fundamentally equal. He understood that all religions arose as answers to the fundamental and perennial human quest for the meaning and purpose of existence.

To Gandhi all religions seek the same God and proceed from the same God. For him, as religions sought the same Truth, there was truth in all of them. But as religions came down to us through the instrumentality of human beings, they shared the inevitable imperfections that go with human instruments. So, all religions have some error in them, argued Gandhi. He stated further that as all religions were true yet imperfect, the question of comparative merit or superiority did not arise. All religions were equal and therefore, there was no need or justification for changing one’s religion and getting converted to another. The ultimate goal of all religions was to guide the believers to deliverance. Further, it is possible to achieve it through the religion into which one was born. Therefore, he argued, in order to seek salvation or
deliverance there is no need to change one’s religion. He rejected the claim of any religion to be superior to the others and also the practice of proselytisation as totally unjustified and unwarranted. This view of Gandhi would promote peace and harmony in society today.

In response to a question, if God is one, and belief in one God is the corner-stone of all religions why are there many religions instead of one religion- the Religion that Gandhi claimed to be his? Gandhi answered this question thus: “belief in one God is the corner-stone of all religions. But I do not foresee a time when there would be only one religion on earth in practice. In theory, since there is one God, there can be only one religion. But in practice, no two persons I have known have had the same and identical conception of God. Therefore, there will, perhaps, always be different religions answering to different temperaments and climatic conditions.”

People in various parts of the world conceived and organized their own religions because they were necessary for the people to whom they were revealed. But Gandhi proceeded to add that he could foresee a time when “people belonging to different faiths will have the same regard for other faiths that they have for their own. I think that we have to find unity in diversity…. We are all children of one and the same God and therefore, absolutely equal.”

Since Gandhi held a strong position that all religions owe their original inspiration to one and the same God, he subscribed to the view that all religions were fundamentally equal. So he believed in the essential truths of all religions of the world and insisted that we respect other religions as we respect our own. He also pointed out that “if we are to respect others’ religions as we would have them to respect our own, a friendly study of the world’s religions is a sacred duty”.

Therefore, Gandhi called upon every one of us to do ‘a reverential and sympathetic study’ of the scriptures of other religions. He said that it was the duty of every cultured man and woman to do so. Such a study, he believed, would certainly create an atmosphere of mutual understanding, tolerance and
respect. In this context Gandhi introduced another significant idea concerning inter-religious encounter. We know and admit that there are certain ideas, customs and practices in all religions that are not universally acceptable. Some of them have been described as even repugnant to human reason and morality.

Difference of opinion and even conflicts arise when such ideas and practices are brought to the fore and criticised as they are related to one’s religious sensitivity. It was in this context that Gandhi introduced an idea relating to the right of a person to point out and criticize such defects. Gandhi drew a fine but crucial distinction between one’s right to criticise one’s own religion and other religions. While it was the right and perhaps even the duty of a person to point out the defects in one’s own religion with a view to purify it and improve it, his duty in terms of other religions must be of unreserved reverence, insisted Gandhi. The responsibility of pointing out and correcting the defects in other religions must be left to the followers of those religions. It requires enormous spiritual strength, moral courage and readiness to sacrifice, which Gandhi demonstrated.

Gandhi’s view is one must try to set one’s own house in order rather than attempting to set the others’ right. Let charity begin at home. Gandhi wrote: “But it is no business of mine to criticise the scriptures of other faiths or point out their defects. It is and should be, however, my privilege to proclaim and practice the truths that may be in them. I may not, therefore, criticise or condemn the things in the Quran or the life of the Prophet that I cannot understand….” The advice of Gandhi is to do a reverential study of the scriptures of other faiths with a view to imbibing what is good in them so that we may improve ourselves as a true believer of our own faith and thus make it better and nobler.
Sarvadharma Samabhava, equal respect to all, was not merely a theoretical proposition for Gandhi. For him it was a vow, an observance and an act of faith. He practised it assiduously in his life and thus obliterated the demarcating line between religions. Gandhi showed us how to live a creative religious life which, in fact, was a translation of the spirit of Sarvadharma Samabhava into demonstrable practice. The significance of this way of living one’s faith in the multi-religious context of the contemporary world has to be appreciated.

It would be appropriate to conclude by quoting another significant statement of Gandhi: “The need of the moment is not one religion but mutual respect and tolerance of the devotees of different religions. We want to reach not the dead level but unity in diversity. Any attempt to root out traditions, effects of heredity, climate and other surroundings is not only bound to fail but is a sacrilege. The soul of religion is one but it is encased in a multitude of forms. The latter will persist to the end of time. Wise men will ignore the outward crust and see the same soul living under a variety of crusts.” An objective examination of this approach would convince one that it can provide a useful frame work for a healthy and mutually enriching relation between religions.

5.5 RELEVANCE OF GANDHI AND HIS THOUGHT

Relevance of Gandhi and his thought are timeless. It is as old and mightier as the Himalayas. As Sam Pitroda rightly writes, “While the twenty-first century has been defined by globalization, free markets, privatization, liberalization… it has also been marked by violence, extremism, inequity, poverty, and disparity. Amidst all this, if one poses the question of relevance of Gandhi to our age, one is struck by an astounding need for him for our times.” Gandhi was not a blind orthodox but made reforms wherever necessary. He therefore detested the practice of untouchability and castism.
The researchers who take effort to make detailed study on the philosophy of Gandhi are fortunate because whatever he said and wrote during his very busy and active life is made available to us through the eighty and odd volumes of *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, published by the Government of India. Moreover, there are plenty of documents in the form of what his contemporaries, followers and other not only in India but all over the world have written about him. There is also a documentary film which projects Gandhi’s life and works. Thus it leads to the second ideal Non-violence which he considered it a godly quality which everyone should follow. Thus Gandhi inspired the mass and mobilised them through the principle of non-violence. This became a powerful arrow in his quiver which he used against the opponent. As he stressed on self-suffering which he considered as the other name of non-violence enhances the spiritual power in man and prepares his path to achieve goal.

Gandhi’s focus on the well-being of the poorest and weakest member of society was in the root of his economic thought. It aimed at providing full employment for the poor, for all potential members of the work force, so that these workers can provide for their own necessities by their own efforts, in dignity, without depending on charity. He was not opposed to technology, but advocated a proper mix of technology-intensive and labor-intensive production. Therefore, his focus on rural economics has once again become a thought which can generate not only massive employment opportunity, but also provide economic self-sufficiency.

Besides his economic thoughts, his contribution to national unity is being felt the most when the nation is confronting ideologies challenging its very unity and integrity. Gandhi’s thoughts on nationalism were based on the native spiritual and cultural traditions. He never called himself a “Hindu nationalist” rather he believed in and propagated the concepts of *Dharma* and *Rama Rajya* as part of his social and political philosophy. For him
*Rama Rajya* meant peace and justice for all, and he emphasized that it meant respect for all religions.

Today majority of people and nations are religious. Religion is a socio-political force that affects local and international events. It can be traced that some of the most contemporary conflicts including conflicts in the Middle East, Northern Ireland, the Balkans, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Tibet, and Kashmir are due to socio-political forces. In new terms of terror, religion has been a factor in events that took place in early 1990s to the attacks of September 11, 2001. On the other hand, in terms of peace building, religion has been explicitly involved in transformations such as the recovery of post-apartheid South Africa and the non-violent transitions from authoritarianism to Democracy that took place in East Germany, Poland, and the Philippines. It should be noted that more than 1000 representatives of transnational as well as indigenous religious traditions gathered for the UN Millennium Summit of World Religious Leaders and brought the message of world community’s unprecedented recognition of religious peace building. As one’s religious faith springs from the bottom of heart, religion can bring social, moral, and spiritual resources to the peace building process. Religion can transform the life of individuals. Such transformation happens through spiritual maturity, which radiates peace outward and affects peace on every level from the intrapersonal to the international world of peace building.

Non-violence as a mean to achieve ends was popularized by Gandhi. He considered non-violence as the means to attain the end or goal, i.e. Truth, which he considers God. Religion, to Gandhi, is simply the pursuit of truth under a different name. But the discovery of truth passes through the human medium, so that in one way or another religions are human mediations of truth and as such open to critique. In order to achieve this goal, Gandhi also treated with equal importance the subjects like morality, *Satyagraha* (holding of truth), detachment, world-peace and so on. It is important to notice the fact here
that the keystone of the philosophy of Gandhi is Truth, synthetic or total truth, the truth of the law of human living, the truth underlying human evolution in the direction of higher, nobler, more and more harmonious and happy living.

Non-violence is not a withdrawal or resignation from all real fighting against wickedness. On the contrary, the non-violence of Gandhi’s conception is a more active and real fight against wickedness than retaliation whose very nature is to increase wickedness. It is not a fight against evil doers but it is a fight against evil itself. He considered non-violence and Satyagraha as sharp double edged sword, a spiritual weapon, which can blunt the edge of the tyrant’s sword. When a Satyagrahi uses this weapon, he will disappoint the opponent’s expectation that he would be offering physical resistance. The adherent of Satyagraha offers resistance to the soul of the opponent that would elude him. It would at first dazzle him and at last compel recognition from him, which recognition would not humiliate but would uplift him.

It is obvious that Gandhi’s tireless effort helped him to live nearer to truth and understand the meaning of life more profoundly than others and was able as a result to act as a leader of his people. One may say that in a certain fashion, Gandhi fulfilled the expectations that people had of the spiritual mature. Besides being a politician and a national leader, he was a yogi, ascetic and spiritual guru to many. Gandhi was himself aware of his own spiritual power, when he said: “I should certainly like to narrate my experiments in the spiritual field” which are known only to himself, “and from I have derived such power as I possess in the political field.”

It is this spiritual power that gave him enormous strength to meet difficult situations in his life through the means of eternal principles, ahimsa and satyagraha. While he was explaining the reason for not accepting the title of mahatma (great Soul), he humbly stated that he made experiments in order to find out from life’s truths or human truths or finite truth through which
eternal Truth can be realized as almost in the manner of a scientist. He did not claim to be a true scientist because he could not provide any concrete evidence with scientific exactitude for his methods and neither had he any concrete results of his experiments, which modern science demands. Gandhi did not think himself as a special person like whom others could not be. For him if something is possible and can be achieved by one, then it can be achieved by all.

5.5.1 Man’s life in the scientific world

With the scientific and technological developments, we can no longer live as isolated individuals and it is impossible too. Our activities and thinking now include not only the country we belong to, but world at large. We live in the midst of diversities such as diversity of religion, caste, class, colour, race, creed, language, custom, culture etc. This is an important development. Therefore, the dream of world peace cannot be realized without refining the individual consciousness. Every individual should take tireless effort to refine and develop his consciousness on values, anger against injustice, action, affiliation, personal integration and world consciousness. Values are most important for promoting peace in the world. Intolerant attitude towards injustice should be the attitude of every peace seeker. One’s action should be directed to find an opportunity to transform the culture of war and violence into a culture of peace and non-violence. The culture of peace can underpin sustainable development, environmental protection and the well-being of each person. World peace is certainly possible only when we give respect to all life and maintain dignity of each human being without discrimination or prejudice.

Violence should be rejected in all its forms. By practicing active non-violence, in physical, sexual, psychological, economical and social forms, will certainly create together new forms of Solidarity. This will make great change in the world. In particular, such practices towards the most deprived and
vulnerable such as children and adolescents and by sharing our time and material resources in a spirit of generosity to put an end to exclusion. Eradicating and political and economic oppression, by defending freedom of expression and cultural diversity will pave way to peace and harmony. Giving preference always to dialogue and listening without engaging in fanaticism, defamation and the rejection of others will help to peaceful atmosphere in the midst of people around us.

Further, by promoting consumer behaviour that is responsible and development practices that respect all forms of life and preserve the balance of nature on the planet and by contributing to the development of our community, with the full participation of women and respect for democratic principles, in order to create together new forms of solidarity will make world peace possible.

5.5.2 Global spiritual awakening in the scientific world

The awakening to religious, social and ethical consciousness in individuals, that is, love, brotherhood and goodness is the need of the hour to ensure world peace in these days of Scientific and Technological development. Undoubtedly, the most significant outcome of this global spiritual awakening will be the advent of world peace. And leads to the cessation of conflicts on every level. Such a lofty goal will be the ultimate mark of the success of this evolution. Various attempts had been made for ages to achieve peace by various means such as negotiations, alliances, and even war itself. All these strategies had been unsuccessful. Mental peace in the individuals alone will bring peace in the world. Peace, both inner and outer, is based upon individual and collective spirituality. The mind which is the progenitor of action, is more powerful than the level of physical action. Certainly, the spiritual is more powerful than either the mind or the action since both are a result of the
spiritual condition of the individual. The awakening of spirituality will produce peace by uplifting the spiritual condition of the world.

There are many ways to accomplish the awakening of spirituality. The first and most obvious way is by raising the level of consciousness in individuals. The second way is by these individuals and groups creating institutions that will focus on creating world peace based on spiritual principles. This is the inevitable outcome of those who engage in conscious evolution. These ways help in global awakening which will be continuously enlarged and intensified. In the final analysis outer peace comes from inner peace. Inner peace arises from the experience of one’s truthfulness. That will help one another to know one’s inner peace and true nature.

The intriguing question of the present scientists regarding the expansion of the universe made them to understand that there is no limit to the universe. The Infinite Potential is also holistic. In other words, each part contains the whole. In every atom, the entire universe exists. The great mystery is that in the intangible reality nothing dies because nothing was born. All things always were. Everything is and always was and always will be.  

Religious people believe that the Infinite Potential is God. This God is in everything, therefore there is no place one can go and not be in. The problem with life on earth believes in the view that the world is permanent. The capability of awakening our conscious reality to an infinite awareness will enable one to understand the true nature of the world. As we are so overwhelmed with life, we are so confused in the manifestations of the physical universe that we cannot see God within which we reside. “The eternal God is your resting place and underneath are the everlasting arms.”42 When one realizes the truth that the infinite immortal soul which resides within him resides within each and every human being, will begin to see that the real challenge in this time and place is to emphasize and honour that immortal soul.
5.5.3 Peace by right understanding of religions

Religious understanding of the world would certainly help one to maintain peace. It is because religions teach us that we are all children of God. Though there are rules in the society or State for maintaining peace, religious understanding of the world comply with peace in all areas such as religious, social, economic and political. Human beings who are so confused in the manifestations of this reality that they harm other human beings and create chaos and pain in the world. It is indeed the need of the hour to reach out to the entire world, to all races, religions, and nations in peace and an effort to provide each human being with the dignity that we all deserve.

Our efforts should never stop working to end only hunger, strife and wars but importantly we should reach out in an effort to peacefully integrate each other into a just society and not view others outside our race, religion or nation as a target to be manipulated for one’s own self enlargement. Tireless effort should be made to stop exploiting others, stop the economic enslavement of others. We must stop destroying the environment upon which we all draw our sustenance. There is nothing more contrary to World Peace than living in the ignorance that we can justify the killing of others. The killing of others because of one’s race, religion or nationality and sociopathic leaders who promote war and disharmony should be prosecuted like any other criminal.

5.6 RESPONSIBILITIES OF LEADERS

Any leader, whether political, social, economic or religious should have consciousness of promoting goodness, unity and solidarity in the midst of people. On any circumstance they should not be the cause for disharmony, violence, disunity in the midst of people. At the same time those who have demonstrated their ability to promote the common good by positions of power in society should be honoured, awarded and those positions should be denied to
those rebel rousers whose only goal is their own self-gratification, self-development, self-improvement at the expense of other human beings.

At present the world is rapidly awakening to a new consciousness which increases the level of peace in the world at large. Though it is said there can never be perfect peace because the nature of the universe is changing and change always brings a certain level of chaos and conflict, it is possible to increase the level of peace by kindling more and more awakening in everyone to that understanding. In the words of Dalai Lama, “When we have inner peace, we can be at peace with those around us. When our community is in a state of peace, it can share that peace with neighboring communities.”

Gandhi felt that there was no need to start any new religions or religious philosophical school. Indian philosopher, Dhirendra Mohan Datta, interprets this to mean that Gandhi was no initiator of new ideas and neither did he create in the academic sense any satisfying new philosophical systematization, but nevertheless made his own selection from innumerable traditional doctrines and united them in his own way. This led to a new philosophical totality although part were ancient.

Gandhi’s life-story and his extensive written works, which consist mainly of newspaper articles, letters and notes recording, his oral answers to various questions inspired and influenced directly on the life of millions. Gandhi acquired wide knowledge through the conversation he had with political and religious leaders, businessmen, professors and ordinary farmers. The famous Indian philosopher S. Radhakrishnan says that the problem of philosophy has been approached in two ways. Some take a certain group of phenomena and leave the relationship between them unexplained, while others look at the world as a totality and seek for a synthesis which covers great multiplicity of the universe. Gandhi is one of the latter. He seeks for a
synthesis. He also seeks a general valid solution to life’s everyday problems and as he goes along, he develops a personal philosophy.

When Gandhi was asked what his basic motive was - was it religious, social or political? He answered that it was purely religious and that he could not lead a religious life unless he identified himself with the whole of mankind that he could not do that without participating in politics. Participation in political life was for him a means to the religious life. Politics is the application of religion. If we wish to understand Gandhi as a politician, it is important first to understand Gandhi as a religious personality. Gandhi was a karma Yogi (man of action), who aimed at perfection through morally justified actions. Gandhi’s ideas were based upon religious traditions, not political, juridical, philosophical or economic. He always tried to base his political and economic doctrines on religion. He defended economic independence (swadeshi) on the ground that it originally meant the soul’s final emancipation and freedom earthly bonds. The origins of Gandhi’s political and economic ideals are to be religious tradition. Two questions must be borne in mind when considering Gandhi’s relationship to religion. Firstly, What, for example, was his relationship to certain historical religions, like Hinduism and Christianity, in their modern forms? And, secondly, what were Gandhi’s own ideas about what we call a universal religion? Gandhi considered himself a Hindu on the basis of his birth and upbringing. Although he considered himself as Hindu, his concept of religion points to a general religion which is common to different religions. Gandhi says that when he speaks of different religion, he does not mean conventional or usual religion or traditional religion, but that religion which is at the root of all religions and that this fundamental religion harmonizes the historical religions and makes them valid.

Gandhi was a reformer of Hinduism. His concern was to purify the religion from immoral and traditional factors. He asserted that religion should guide men into spiritual and moral development. Historical religions are
criticised by Gandhi. He had enormous spiritual strength to say that he would reject Hinduism if he found it to be in conflict with the moral sense or opposed to his own spiritual growth. He did not approve of everything that was taught in the name of Hinduism. Further, he considered it his duty to point out the mistakes that Hinduism was guilty of in order to purify it. His understanding of religion was that the influence of religion can be found in daily social intercourse.

Gandhi firmly believed that all religions are of equal value. He recognized the fundamental equality of all religions. He was prepared to be critical especially towards Hinduism, because he himself is a Hindu, has been brought up in its culture and is more familiar with it than other religions. He was ready to accept from other religions that which seems to him to be good, but he hesitates to criticise them as he was uncertain of his knowledge of them. He considered that the Holy books of all religions generally inspired, but there are too dangers in interpreting them: first, they are received through human prophets and, second, they are explained by interpreters.

Gandhi’s approach to religion is also an immense contribution to the Indian ethos. Man gives less importance for ethical, moral, religious and spiritual values as he gives more importance to pleasures of his senses which prompt him to be more and more ambitious. The focus on ethics, values and cultural change is increasingly recognised as an important element of public sector reform. It is this ambition which lies at the back of materialism. As a result of all this, the entire energy of the individual is being spent in indulging in his ego and his pleasures. There is no time for man to think about his fellow men and think of world peace, non-violence and of the ways of bringing them about. Peace and non-violence are no more subjects of his thought. He tries to grab things by any unethical means. In the present day thousands of scientists are busy inventing destructive weapons. A huge amount of money has been spent for buying and making arms and weaponry. Thousands and thousands of
soldiers are either undergoing training in the use of arms or staging war rehearsals.

Gandhi gave the world a new thought on non-violence and sustainable living. Non-violence (ahimsa) is a basic law of life according to Gandhi and considered it as the only true force of life or a fundamental principle of being. It is the goal of human life and identical with love, truth and God. A clear understanding of the same would help us to consider their relevance for today's world, and particularly for India. Fearlessness is the requisite of spirituality. The quality of fearlessness made him venture new trails and produce novel political strategies like ahimsa (nonviolence), satyagraha (truth-force).

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Gandhi’s firm conviction was that not simply ascetic and devotional indulgences that may possibly suit the fancy of a few religious pacifists and confused poets, but precepts fundamentally necessary if man is to recover his right mind. “For me there can be no preparation for violence. All preparation must be for non-violence if courage of the highest type is to be developed.... If there are women who when assailed by miscreants cannot resist themselves without arms, they do not need to be advised to carry arms. They will do so.”

It is due to lack of understanding of the concept of non-violence constant inquiry is made as to whether to bear arms or not. People have to learn to be naturally independent. If one remembers the central teaching, namely, that the
real, effective resistance lies in non-violence, he will mould his conduct accordingly. He stated, “And that is what the world has been doing, although unthinkingly. Since it has not the highest courage, namely, courage born of non-violence, it arms itself even unto the atom bomb. Those who do not see in it the futility of violence will naturally arm themselves to the best of their ability.”

The force of wisdom of great thinkers and mystics should appeal and needs to be measured by their ability to stimulate and guide those who are actively involved in a commitment to transform the world. Gandhi's principles have acquired scriptural values found in almost every religious scripture. However, the need of such teachings can raise disturbing questions when the dilemmas, difficulties and tensions are acknowledged in the world due to various issues. As the world runs at great speed towards changes, human beings are in the midst of atmosphere of tension, violence, differences of opinion, unemployment and inflation globally, it is reasonable or logical today to raise such questions as being raised again and again about the relevance of Gandhian philosophy which is based on truth and non-violence which he considered the evolution of spirituality.

People failed to realize the significance and importance of the principles of Gandhi where he lived, worked and sacrificed his life. At the same time, it is important to note that people of other countries feel the relevance of Gandhian thought. It is being felt that his philosophy is in need of the hour for adopting more willingly everywhere and its relevance is being felt more actually today due to many of the terrorist incidents which are cruel and intolerable deeds of the terrorists in the recent history. The organizations and networks that inspire such wicked activities need to be eliminated only by enormous spiritual strength.
American President Barack Obama has been inspired by the Gandhian message of peace. While he had invoked the legacies of Gandhi and Nelson Mandela, he stated he was filled with hope and inspiration as he had the privilege to view this testament to Gandhi’s life. He praised Gandhi that he is a hero not just to India but to the world. He further stated that, it is time to heed the words of Gandhi: Intolerance is itself a form of violence and an obstacle to the growth of a true democratic spirit.

The present day educational system lays a great deal of emphasis on intellectual development. Educationalists’ concentration is to produce excellent teachers, scientists, lawyers, administrators, educationists and businessmen. This is an essential need of the society. But unfortunately, it has been a difficult task to produce high quality ethical, religious and spiritual men. The unbalanced exercise given to our brain makes it malfunction or dysfunction.51 This imbalance has made the whole human personality unbalanced and becomes the cause of violence. Only a balanced personality can bring about non-violence. By giving proper education and training to the future generation the problem of violence can be solved to a greater extent. Any obstacle to the growth of a true democratic spirit can be removed only by right education. It is necessary that our educational system should aim at a balanced development of the intellectual and emotional aspects of the personality. Nevertheless, steady support should be extended to the people who put tireless efforts to give peace education and training.

People give more importance to historicity of religion, external rituals etc. External rituals are very easy to follow than to follow the values of love, compassion, forgiveness in one’s life. The original spiritual values are either lost its value or are pushed back by external rituals. The doctrines, beliefs and practices of religions should establish peace within oneself, with others and with God. To seek God one need not go on a pilgrimage or light lamps and burn incense before or anoint the image of the deity or paint it with red
vermilion. For, He resides in our hearts. If we could completely obliterate in us, the consciousness of our physical body, we would see Him face to face.

Gandhi emphasised on the education which gives importance to all-round development of an individual. Unless the development of the mind and body goes hand in hand with a corresponding awakening of the soul, the former alone would prove to be a poor lopsided affair. Unfortunately, wrong teachings of some religious educators become the sources of divisions, tensions, violence and they become a great threat to the society. It should be admitted that the differences in the religions play vital role in causing restlessness in the society. Gandhi did not ignore the problems that religious fanatics would create and thereby disturb peace in the community. There is no doubt that religion, spirituality and God impacted Gandhi in a very special way from his childhood.

Gandhi considered that any violence occurs in the name of God is the worst form of evil. God is the essence of compassion, love, respect and understanding. It is only human beings who have divided the image of God according to their imagination. It is because they want to relate God to the fragment of Truth which they consider precious. If one wishes to bring back some semblance of sanity in people’s understanding of religion it should be done in a friendly at the same time revered study of all the scriptures as the sacred duty of every individual.

The chief traits of Jainism have influenced the mind of Gandhi. The highest achievement of the moral life according to Jainism is of course omniscience that involves omnipresence and omnipotence, which includes both physical and spiritual power. Gandhi asserted that spiritual experience cannot be accurately described. Another philosophy which influenced Gandhi’s mind was by the Vallabhaite, a South Indian Brahmin, occupied such a prominent position in the life of Gandhi. Though Gandhi was not a student of philosophy;
yet the conceptions he developed about the nature of God are worthy of consideration even by philosophers.

There are several reasons for which we maintain differences with different people in the world at large. Our existence is not possible without them. To develop the value of respect within the self and towards the others is a challenge. Obstacles are encountered in everyday life and self-confidence is needed to deal with the circumstances in a self-assured manner. We need respect to collaborate and to live in a peaceful world. The way one shows respect varies, but its essence is the display of regard for the worth of people, including oneself. We have no ethical duty to hold all people in high esteem or admire them, but we are morally obligated to treat everyone with respect, regardless of who they are and what they have done. We have a responsibility to be the best we can be in all situations, even when dealing with unpleasant people. Respect focuses on the moral obligation to honour the essential worth and dignity of the individual. Respect prohibits violence, humiliation, manipulation and exploitation. It reflects notions such as civility, courtesy, dignity, autonomy, tolerance and acceptance.

The differences such as political, social, economical, geographical, religious may be found in the world but these differences should not be a threat to the human existence. Rather, they should help people to live in harmony. It is the responsibility of every individual to realize the fact that we are so interdependent with one another. We should have a sense of responsibility, feeling of brotherhood and a belief that we are all part of human family. Peace and happiness should not be sought at the expense of others. Greed and jealousy will never bring people together.

Gandhi’s religious and spiritual maturity helped him to love the meanest of creation as one self. He stated that “The whole of my life is saturated with the religious spirit. I could not live for a single second without religion. Many
of my political friends despair of me, because they say that even my politics and all other activities of mine are derived from my religion. I go further and say that activity of a man of religion must be derived from his religion, because religion means being bound to God, that truth naturally God regulates every activity of yours. Gandhi experienced the blessings of God when he gave prior importance to seek God and His righteousness. He was touched by certain passages in the Bible that deeply penetrated into the heart of Gandhi which made him to live a righteous, pure and holy life to serve people. He asserted that the mind is the basis of all sound education. The culture of the mind must be subservient to the culture of the heart.

Gandhi’s religious experience made him to realize that as a religious man his place was not the mountain or in a cave of isolation but to fight for establishing the rights of the weak and liberty for the suppressed. Gandhi regarded education as the light of life and the very source from which was created an awareness of oneness. Gandhi believed that the universality of religion can best be realized through the universalization of education, and that such universalization was the spring board for national integration. Harmony is not brought about overnight. Gandhi advocated the process of patience, persuasion and perseverance for attainment of peace and love for harmony and was firmly convinced of the worth of gentleness as solution for all evils.

Gandhi’s tireless effort for Communal harmony had the pride of place in his constructive programme. He taught every citizen the dignity of labour as a leveling social factor that contributed to a national outlook in keeping with the vision of new India. He always believed that a nation built on the foundation of non-violence would be able to withstand attacks on its-integrity from within and without. He represents a figure of unique integrity, consistency and humanity. The point of departure of his life philosophy and the basis of his theory and activity in practice are freedom and welfare of any human being and prosperity of people and nations of the whole mankind. All his claims were
about the importance of individual autonomy and political freedom, for human life, for modern living, is tested by experience. Obviously, his ideas evolved through experience from a highly simplistic view to more mature, sophisticated and relevant propositions. His thoughts were not only modern, but also mature. He was essentially a path finder and peace maker of both national and international peace as his goal.

Gandhi sincerely appealed to people for the humanization of knowledge for immunization against the ideas of distrust among the communities of the nations and the nationalities of the world. He wanted to save the country from areas of hostility into areas of harmony of faiths through tolerance, so that we could work towards understanding each other. In all his mass contact programmes he specifically aimed at generating a climate of confidence and competition and eliminating misgiving and misconceptions, conflicts and confrontation.

Violence can never be the solution to put an end to the evil in the world. It is irrational to believe when evil rulers or evil men are eliminated the world becomes safer. It is seen, in societies all over the world, the same system has been adopted to deal with criminals. It is believed that crime will be reduced either by imprisonment or eliminating such criminals. For generations this has been practiced with criminals, tyrants and evil men. But it has seen very little impact on crime anywhere. In spite of knowing such results why is that we blindly accept a violent system of dealing with conflicts? We know very well that it does bring solution which is temporary and not a permanent one. The question remains, why we do not want to accept reality? The true civilization of society means a radical transformation in one’s thinking, behavior and attitudes. The world successfully eliminated many evil doers but was not able to eliminate the hate and prejudices that they represented. Even recently the world has successfully eliminated many terrorists like Osama Bin Laden but the humanity that they represented will live on because we have attacked the
symptom and not the malady. The only alternative to the culture of violence is, obviously, the culture of non-violence. Gandhi truly believed that non-violence was the most effective means for achieving peaceful settlement of conflict. Gandhi’s ultimate goal was to discourage acts of violence and encourage a just and peaceful world through non-violence.

5.7 GANDHI- THE LIVING EMBODIMENT OF HARMONY

The great philosophical ideas of Gandhi inspired the world to face the crushing policies with peaceful ones. Gandhi who talks of the Great change in the world finds solution of the problems by following the path of non-violence. Gandhi who is considered to be living embodiment of communal harmony, had studied the history of many religions and scriptures with great reverence. The study of *Gita* had given him the inspiration to follow the path of religion based on *Karma*. He was inspired by the *margas* taught in Gita, especially, the yoga *marga*. Gandhi as a *yogin* had applied yoga to social actions. *Satyagraha* as the instrument of social actions cannot be properly understood without reference to its spiritual components. He was successful in showing the secular application of spirituality. The spiritual foundations of Gandhian philosophy and practices are relevant to today’s world troubled with violence. His thought and actions are oriented more to humans than reason and emotions.

Gandhi spent time to read the Islamic history where he came across the *Karbala* incident which had impressed a lot in his life. The positive aspects that we see in Islam today that are accepted worldwide, the sacrifice by Hussein in Karbala has great influence among them. That was the incident of 680 B.C., happened in the city of Karbala in Iraq, on the bank of river Furat in which the then Syrian ruler Yazid mercilessly murdered Imam Hussein and 72 members of the family, with his huge army, as Hussein moved to *Karbala* to save Islam along with his group of 72 persons. As Gandhi was inspired by this incident, he took 72 persons from different groups of the society for his salt movement.
Gandhi pointed out that spread of Islam in the world is not because of the sword of the Muslim rulers but it is because of the sacrifice of the saints like Hussein. As he was deeply impressed by the martyrdom of Hussein, he stated that with an army of 72 persons as like that of Hussein, he could have won the war of Indian Independence relatively quick. He used to say that if India wants to be a successful nation, it should follow the footsteps of Imam Hussein.

Gandhi affirmed that violence is not at all a solution for any conflict. In fact, conflict helps in material and intellectual advancement if it is understood and handled carefully. As the terrorism and violence are widespread in the world today causing bloodshed, lose of innocent people, fear, anxiety, insecurity, unpeaceful situations, the relevance of Gandhian principles is felt everywhere. His principle of non-violence can be practiced every nook and corner of the world. Gandhi was in favour of using the thoughts against the arms and not the arms against the arms, to fight injustice and inequality. He gave an armament to the humanity in which there was no need to raise arms or make enemies but love to destroy hatred. He believed in changing the society with his thoughts and not with power or force. After the heavy destruction of property and lives in the World War II, when there was no good in the war, at last in 1945, the United Nations Organisation made declaration according to the thoughts of Gandhi. That was, ‘war is no solution to any problem so all problems should be solved through mutual discussions’. All the members of the UNO signed this peace proposal.

There can be no manner of doubt that this universe of sentient beings is governed by a Law. The existence of everything is possible under certain law. One cannot think of Law without a Law giver. Gandhi would say that that the Law-giver is God. When we pray to the Law we simply yearn after knowing the Law and obeying it. We become what we yearn after. Hence, there arises the necessity for prayer. Though our present life is governed by our past, our future must by that very law of cause and effect be affected by what we do
now. To some extent, therefore, when we feel the choice between two or more courses we must make that choice. Questions such as why evil exists and what it is are questions which appear to be beyond our limited reason. It should be enough to know that both good and evil exist. And as often we can distinguish between good and evil, we must choose the one and shun the other.\textsuperscript{53}

It is by freeing oneself from all the means which fulfils selfish desires and stand for truth and justice would enable a person to attain enlightenment or finding the Truth or God. While he marches towards such an end an act of boldness is required to face challenges or even not be afraid of the consequences like losing one’s own life. It is only when we reach that level of spiritual power that non-violence will become relevant. Spiritual power gives such strength to face situations in life. Gandhi possessed this spiritual power which made him to say, “I am prepared to die but there is no cause for which I am prepared to kill.”\textsuperscript{54}

It is not enough to respect only individual human beings. It is also necessary to respect different cultures, different ways of life and different belief systems. Danger lies in our becoming competitive, in believing that ours is the only way and the best way and attempting to impose our way on others. It is also necessary to understand even if one’s way is said to be the best way to Truth it should be made known gently, patiently. Any attempt is made to known forcibly or expecting the result at great speed would result in vain or it would bear negative impact.

Gandhi’s experiments on simple and sustainable living followed his own spiritual progress. Religion is the beginning of a spiritual journey. Right understanding of one’s own religion would lead to an understanding of spirituality, that is the acceptance and respect for different ways of worship. When we come to know who we are and the role we have to play in the creation, we understand that we are part of nature. If nature is affected our life
also will be affected. It is due to ignorance one thinks that humans are not part of nature. Gandhi’s view is, we are here not to conquer nature but to enjoy the nature. Any attempt to conquer nature will destroy our habitat and our survival would become difficult. Gandhi as a spiritual being and a visionary, was far ahead of his times. For example, he was energy conservator par excellence. Spirituality helped him to have compassionate view of nature. Any effort to conquer nature and human beings will end in destruction.

When we progresses on the path of spirituality our priorities in life will also change. As we evolve spiritually we become more tuned to things around us and that includes nature. We start enjoying the beauty of nature, appreciating it and this helps us in preserving it as much as possible and hence is a step towards sustainable living. In all religions of the world the respect for nature is preached and the maxim of simple living and high thinking is ingrained. The whole purpose of our existence is to increase personal and societal infrastructure. Personal infrastructure includes our health, happiness and general well-being. By improving our personal ‘infrastructure’ through spirituality, we become better human beings and it helps us in our emotional growth and evolution. By giving back to the society, its ‘infrastructure’ increases and thereby we help in mankind’s evolution. Both these activities when carried out simultaneously, can give us great joy and satisfaction – a message that Gandhi gave through his actual work and experiments.

When Gandhi speaks of violence he mentions two kinds of violence viz physical and mental violence. One may be aware of physical violence which is considered to be active form of violence whereas mental violence is considered to be passive violence which hurts the heart of other persons knowingly or unknowingly. Sometimes one may not consider it a violence at all. It is said oppression in all its forms; insulting, ill-treating, disrespecting etc. are considered as passive forms of violence. Acts of passive violence generate anger. It generates physical violence. Thus, it is passive violence that fuels the
fire of physical violence. It is necessary to put out the fire of physical violence by cutting off the fuel supply. Violent act will put down one’s dignity and self-respect. Gandhi clearly stated that unless change takes place in an individual no one can bring change collectively. Always one desires to see the change in other person first. A change of heart cannot be legislated, it must come out of conviction.

Non-violence is always relevant for all centuries because it is the natural response of any civilized human being. Violence is unnatural. Man becomes violent by observing the nature of animals. It is a learned behavior. If violence is human nature then no man would live on earth. His existence would be impossible. Though man was born with the instinct and the ability to kill, but if he learns to get rid of greed, selfishness and all the negative attributes that govern one’s life and move towards the more positive attributes of love, compassion, understanding and respect certainly peace will prevail everywhere. The common factor of all religions is non-violence.

Non-violence is the peaceful means to bring about a positive and lasting social or political change. Most people ask a legitimate question as why should non-violence be used when violence offers more tangible and faster solutions? No matter how pure and sublime one’s aim is, use of violence to achieve it can never be justified. Gandhi clearly stated that violence breeds violence. Further, he mentioned that pure goals can never justify impure or violent action. Non-violence is a “tool” that is available to all at all times. There is no need for any resources to acquire this tool. All can practice non-violence at any time. Most importantly, non-violent approach breaks the cycle of violence and counter-violence. The cycle of violence results in massive bloodshed and deaths.

Technological developments have placed at the disposal of the mankind almost unlimited means of exploitation of the material wealth. This exploitation in a way leads to the possibility of violence, either in the form of
physical force or threat of it. In the materialistic society of today, lust of power and wealth dominates everything, non-violence seems a redundant term. Since the economic interests vary between individuals will lead to clash with one another. Sometimes one has to resort to violence to serve one’s ends, which directly or indirectly leads to the ruin of society. The technological advancements resulting in highly sophisticated and nuclear weapons have all added to the dimensions of damage and destruction caused by violence. This growing tendency of violence in modern society is to some extent is attributed to the modern lifestyle in which patience, perseverance, mutual regard, tolerance, dedication, sacrifice find little place. Thus, it is a great challenge to every living being on earth.

The nuclear explosions have several times shakes the life of man on earth because arms race is built on the unsound foundations of violence. If we wish to have a society based on love, justice, equality respect and reason, it should be built on the solid rock of non-violence. Violence today has become so rampant that it seems to have acquired some kind of legitimacy. It is feared that if the growing violent attitude of individual as well as mass level continues, it may ultimately wipe out mankind from the earth.

The tragic march towards ruination can be stopped if mankind pursues the principles of non-violence as a guiding force. It teaches us that violence provides favourable condition for the germination and spread of many social evils such as hatred, disrespect, intolerance, etc. Where there is loss of patience, perseverance, true courage, dedication there is absolutely no sense of values at all.

Though, non-violence has been interpreted differently by various people the concept is largely based on the fundamental good qualities of a man. It completely negates the use of threat, physical force and violence in any situation or anywhere or any time or with anyone. One must avoid inflicting
pain on others by words, thoughts and deeds to win one’s goals however true and justifiable it may be. The religions of the world gave to a stricken and crestfallen humanity the similar message of non-violence. Gandhi considered it a spiritual weapon. One who practices Non-violence needs enormous spiritual strength. As man suffers from a poverty of spirit that stands in contrast to scientific and technological abundance, Gandhi’s firm conviction was that every step on science which will be taken with spiritual thoughts will lead to unity, harmony and peace in the world. The richer we have become materially, the poorer we have become morally and spiritually. He stated that when religion responds perfectly to the language of the heart true spiritualism paves its avenues in the inward worth of mankind. Therefore, Gandhi was very well aware of the benefits and evils of materialism and he knew that the answer to all problems lies in the spiritualism.

As mentioned earlier, Gandhi’s philosophy is spiritual, universal and timeless. His aim was to attain the spiritual Truth in all his social, political, economic and educational endeavors. Emphasizing the importance of non-violence, Gandhi asserted that peace will never come until one achieves the spiritual power. Non-violence is not the weapon of the coward, but of the brave and courageous. Non-violence is a philosophy of life which has received due recognition in East first and is being recognised in the West also. It is important to mention here that 2nd October, the Gandhi’s birth date has been declared to be observed as ‘International Non-violence Day’ every year from 2007. Finally, Gandhi urges each one of us to seek God through our own active pursuit of truth and non-violence. He invites us to pursue the spiritual, political, economic and social depths of peace with the same perseverance, determination and sacrifice that he undertook for peace and harmony in our society.