CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: GANDHI AND HIS IDEOLOGY

Gandhi had a many-faceted personality. The outward simplicity of his life and his single-minded devotion to nonviolence cloaked innumerable deep currents of ideas, disciplines, loyalties and aspirations. He was at once a saint and a revolutionary, a politician and a social reformer, an economist and a man of religion, an educationist and a journalist - all rolled into one with the weapons of Truth and non-violence, he inspired the entire nation with patriotism and idealism. He was a very great reconciler of opposites and one without a strain or artificiality. He loved greatly and accepted unreservedly that truth can reside in opposites.

Gandhi's life was one long and ceaseless saga of endeavour in which he added, bit by bit and piece by piece, to his stature culminating in the advancing fullness of his personality. There was nothing mystic or miraculous about his development and growth, from a common man into the unsurpassed Mahatma of India’s history. It is open to each one of us to see how he advanced, step by step, gathering innumerable fragments of truth, one by one and piecing them together, in the crucible of his life, ready to look at facts, understand their significance, face any consequence in the pursuit of a cause, suffer any penalty for a mistake, recover lost ground again, but always advancing, open-minded and without fear and dedicated selflessly to reach and hold the truth of a matter at any cost. He was, therefore, not born a Mahatma. He grew into one. He was a common man who pulled himself up to a most uncommon height. Gandhi knew this about himself and that was why he called his autobiography, The Story of My Experiments with Truth. Experimentation was one of the deepest
passions of his life. He experimented with food, health and cure, clothes and dress, politics and economics, education and reform, organization and revolution, ethics and spirituality, with almost everything that his life knew as part of life. With relentless logic and courage he broke new ground in every direction and yet had the depth and width of mind to separate defeat from success, the false from the true, the unreal from the real and the chaff from the grain. He attempted to integrate all his aims and achievements into the unity of his personality.

Dr. K G Saiyidain observes: “Gandhi was essentially a very humane person, gentle, modest, affectionate, humorous, and ready to talk to, and listen to everyone, never giving the impression that he considered others inferior to him” (1970: 6). Gandhi had a great sense of humour. Gandhi’s supreme quality was his all-embracing humanism which did not recognize the usual categories of the high and the low, the rich and the poor or of the religious or political labels which men and women wore, or the caste names under which they paraded themselves or suffered their ‘fated’ ignominy. For him the prince and the peasant, the wealthy and the poor, the employer and the employee were on the same plane. He had no favourites. He always sided with people who laboured to banish injustice, exploitation and religious and racial discrimination and fought against them under the banner of ahimsa. He always tried to do something good for the weak, the downtrodden, and the Harijans, who were ill treated by the society. His concept of truth rested on his assumption that goodness exists in every individual and that it only needs to be awakened.
Gandhi worked on himself as a jeweler works on an uncut diamond and shaped his personality in such a way that became the greatest personality of the millennium. He was extraordinarily introspective and self-critical. While he judged others compassionately, he was ruthless in his own judgment. His life was a journey from an ordinary human being to a super human one. His whole life is thus a continuous experiment in search of truth. He was always seeking, always learning and always eager to acquire new knowledge.

It would be no exaggeration to say that he had performed many miracles during his lifetime and that his message was a source of perennial inspiration and encouragement to the people all over the world for all times to come. He was a psychologist in one respect and an idealist on the other, in the sense that he could feel the pulse of India and its people on whom he exerted such a tremendous influence.

However, after a perusal of some books and other stray theses and articles on Gandhi’s concept of life and the deep impact he left on Indian life and polity, I am led to believe that Gandhi still continues to be the enigma he was during his lifetime. Intensive study is needed to explore the many hidden facets of that enigmatic personality in order to present him before the 21st century public, so that the true contribution made by him to the understanding of wholesomeness of life may be properly judged and appreciated. I have therefore attempted, in my own modest way, to reinvent the Mahatma in the light of contemporary writing in Indian English Literature reflecting his spirit.
Gandhi had many qualities—love and compassion were major among them. He believed that there could be no salvation for us as individuals or for our crazy, hate-filled world, unless love becomes a widespread inspiration. Basically, he was a socialist and his sole aim was the real service of mankind. He was the real lover of mankind, except the exploiters, killers and oppressors. The whole world was his family. He loved all mankind as he loved his countrymen because he believed that God dwells in the heart of every human being, and so he aspired to realize the highest in life through the service of humanity.

His love was all embracing and universal with no boundaries of caste, creed, economic status or religion. He wanted to vanquish all social evils from the Indian society and wanted India to become a paradise on earth. His love enabled him to win the hearts of all. He returned good for evil. The writers writing in different languages in those days were mostly persons who had come either directly under his influence and many of whom had taken part in the freedom movements, or were highly influenced by his ideals.

His social activities were development-oriented and his idealism was democratic, rural and homogeneous in nature. It was not only the literary writers who played an active role in reflecting the contemporary Gandhi-mania of the entire country but the nationalist press and local newspapers and journals which portrayed the bhakti cult of the Mahatma through different anecdotes, feature articles, soft news and of course, snippets also contributed a great deal in propagating his views on life and morals. They portrayed how Gandhi, a
diminutive person of clay, was slowly developing into a demi-god with superhuman powers and a positive message for the entire human race like the Buddha or Christ had done earlier in human history. The Gandhian whirlwind swept over the length and breadth of India, upsetting all the established political and social strategies. In the words of Jawaharlal Nehru: “Gandhi… was like a powerful current of fresh air that made us stretch ourselves and take deep breaths” (1946: 361). The myth of the Mahatma was the result of the projections of the existing patterns of popular beliefs about the worship of the holy miraculous sages in rural India. Gandhi’s teachings became so popular and aphoristic that they were pronounced as homilies and home truths. The more they discussed, the more did they gain in importance and magnitude.

Emphasis on simple living and high thinking was reflected in all writings of contemporary Indian English writers chiefly Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand and R. K. Narayan. The basic thrust of Gandhism was to rekindle in man the urge to do good to others, which was not extinct but lay dormant in him. He objected to the use of machinery as it brought centralization and caused economic exploitation and violence. In today’s context, his ideology is much required at every stage of life. He strongly believed that every countryman must get basic facilities and that property must be decentralized so that everyone gets justice. There must be a sense of cooperation between the employer and the employed. Today no one tries to understand the other; and man is self-centered, interested in his own well being,
caring for none. Here Gandhian ideology would be of immense help as a cementing force.

Mankind would be richer by inheriting the legacy of Gandhi: He was a great son of India, not only for the ceaseless struggle he launched for its liberation from the yoke of foreign imperialism; he was great also because he wanted every Indian to feel proud about its ancient glory and its infinite capacity to carve out a place of an eminence for itself among the comity of nations in the times to come. As it happens with all great movers of history, his influence was not confined to the frontiers of India alone…His inspiring profile captivated the world. As R C Majumdar observes, his movement proved itself to be a “baptism of fire which initiated the people into a new faith and new hope, which inspired them with a new confidence in their power to fight for freedom” (1969: 368).

Gandhi was an inspired soul and a man of deep love and faith. In a distracted world, his deathless spirit symbolizes his quest for moral redemption and liberation of moral power. For ages he will be remembered and reckoned as the prophet of the Divine Kingdom of Truth, love and peace. He was a wise man, who may be said to have heralded the dawn of a spiritual epoch in human history. In the words of Pathan: “Gandhi embodied the best qualities of the mythological heroes in the past, the celibacy of Rama, the statesmanship of Vidur, the Ahimsa of Buddha and the love and tolerance of the Christ” (1987: 24).

One usually draws his ideas from his parents and home life, from his environment, from traditions, from reading and from studying books, men and
events. Satya or truth caught hold of him very early in life. And he abhorred telling a lie. Some incidents can be quoted from his early life in school and at home to prove this point. He refused to copy from his neighbouring student in an examination even when the teacher hinted at it. As he didn’t want to tell a lie to his mother, he abstained from meat-eating which he had begun at the instance of his companion. His home influences, especially those of his austere mother, were all for a strict and virtuous life, a deep religious faith.

Gandhi was born into a Vaishnava family inclined to the ideals of vegetarianism and ahimsa. It had a comparatively a stricter code of discipline. He was born and bred in an atmosphere where the idea of Ahimsa ruled. As Gandhi grew up in life, love of truth became his main guide in everything he thought and did. He realized that truth was the bases of all ethics, and ethics was the base of practical religion. Gandhi was inspired by this attitude of Ahimsa which is prominent in Hinduism as well as in Buddhism and Jainism. He was also inspired by the Christian doctrine of love and charity. This was the secret of his tireless effort to take up the cause of the fallen and the down-trodden, the weak and the suffering. He developed the doctrine of Ahimsa into a dynamic and inspiring force for fighting the ills of his time. His whole life is an illustration of the development and evolution of his ideas and their practice in connection with truth and non-violence. He had to face many difficulties especially because he wanted to demonstrate how these principles were not mere doctrines to be praised and repeated parrot like but were to be put into practice to elevate human life and arouse consciousness.
As a child Gandhi had fear of ghosts and spirits. It was his family servant Rambha “who suggested as a remedy for the fear the recitation of Ramanama” (Gandhi 2007: 29). This worship of lord Rama remained with him forever. Reading of scriptures also played vital role in framing his personality. His visits to Haveli and Shri Rama and Shiva Temples and the discussions with Muslim friends of his father combined to inculcate in him toleration for all faiths. He endeared himself to everyone throughout the world through the sheer force of his personality, inherent humanity, simplicity and his impeccable outlook on life.

The prominent writers who greatly influenced Gandhi in formulating his philosophy of life were Plato, Ruskin, Thoreau, Mazzini, Tolstoy, Emerson, Dadabhai Naoroji and Romesh Chander Dutt. Gandhi never became a disciple to anyone nor did he ever want anyone to become his disciple. However, he had been greatly influenced by some great thinkers and writers. He states in his autobiography: “Three moderns have left a deep impress on my life and captivated me, Raychandbhai by his living contact, Tolstoy by his book *The Kingdom of God is Within You*; and Ruskin by his *Unto This Last*” (Ibid: 83).

Raychandbhai was a jeweler, a man of high moral character and learning. Gandhi regarded him as his mentor and enjoyed the closest association with him. He had a great regard for his intellect and moral earnestness: “I have tried to meet the heads of various faiths and I must say that no one else has ever made on me the impression that Raychandbhai did… In my moments of spiritual crisis, therefore, he was my refuge” (Ibid: 83).
While writing about celibacy in *My Experiments With Truth* Gandhi paid Raychandbhai high tributes for inculcating in him the importance of celibacy in life. As a follow up to Raychandbhai’s directions, Gandhi abandoned items of food like milk etc. that stimulated animal passion.

Raychandbhai’s influence on Gandhi’s observance of celibacy was profound. Gandhi felt that if he were to devote himself entirely to the service of the community, he must relinquish all carnal desires and for wealth and live the life of a vanaprastha- one retired from household cares. He vowed to observe total celibacy and abstinence from sex in 1906 and was gratified that his wife didn’t object to his resolution.

He realized that control of the palate was a pre requisite to the observance of this vow, so he started experimenting with his food. All food that stimulated the tamsik desire (i.e. the desire for indulgence in sex or such other physical appetites) was to be shunned altogether. It is for this reason that he abandoned cow’s milk and took to goat’s milk which produced a sedative effect on the mind. He considered fasting to be an essential external aid to celibacy. A celibate uses his senses in a different way- he uses his eyes to see glories of God, he uses his ears to hear the glories of God and he feeds the inner man to keep the temple of God in good repair.

According to Gandhi “Brahmacharya means control of the senses in thought, word and deed” (Ibid: 194). He felt that the object of marriage should be intimate friendship and companionship between man and woman. It should not stand for sexual gratification. He considered marriage as a means of cleansing the hearts of
the couple of sordid passions. In his view a husband and a wife could live ideally without recourse to lust if they were bound by the true spirit of companionship. Gandhi opined that: “procreation is a natural phenomenon indeed, but within specific limits. A transgression of these limits imperils womankind, emasculates the race, induces disease, puts a premium on vice and makes world ungodly” (Cited in Gupta 1970: 47-48).

For Gandhi the vow of celibacy was the greatest source of inner strength. He was opposed to the use of contraceptives as a measure of family planning. He writes, “In brahmacharya lies the protection of the body, the mind and the soul” (2007: 192).

Gandhi studied Tolstoy’s books intensively which left a deep impression on him. Summing his impression, he wrote: “I began to realize more and more the infinite possibilities of universal love” (Ibid: 148). Tolstoy considered ‘the teaching of love’ as the main law of life. All the injustices and calamities of mankind would come to an end with true love. He felt that love must replace violence. He approved of the method of passive resistance for attaining liberation. In his letter dated 25 April, 1910 Tolstoy wrote to Gandhi: “I consider …passive resistance to be of the greatest importance not only for Indians but for whole of the mankind” (Shifman 1969: 23). Gandhi considered Tolstoy as his guide and regarded himself “as a humble follower of that great teacher whom I have long looked upon as one of my guides” (Ibid: 11).
As to his relations with Tolstoy, he wrote once in ‘Young India’ that they were of a devoted admirer who owed him much in his life. He learnt from him that one must practise sincerely what one preaches.

As a student, Gandhi had practically read nothing outside textbooks. Whatsoever he happened to go through either came to him by chance or was recommended or presented by his friends. The result was that, whatever he had read was, in fact, thoroughly assimilated and profitably utilized in his day to day life. It was thus a case of intensive, and not extensive, study. The salutary effect of this selective, limited study was that Gandhi never had any confusion or conflict in his mind. His views, therefore, came to have a unique blending of profundity, simplicity and clarity. Once while traveling from Johannesburg to Durban by train in South Africa, Gandhi read Unto This Last. Gandhi liked it so much that he later translated it into Gujarati and titled it ‘Sarvoday’. Gandhi, in fact, said:

I discovered some of my deepest convictions reflected in this great book of Ruskin, and that is why it so captured me and made me transform my life… it brought about an instantaneous and practical transformation in my life… and I determined to change my life in accordance with the ideals of this book (2008: 3).

He listed the following things that he learnt from this book,

1  The good of the individual is contained in the good of all.

2  A lawyer’s work has the same value as the barber’s in as much as all have the same right of earning their livelihood from their work.
3 A life of labour i.e. the life of the tiller of the soil and the handicraftsman is the life worth living (Ibid: 3).

Gandhi read Henry David Thoreau’s *On the Duty of Civil Disobedience* and *Life Without Principle* which had a great influence on him. He realized that possession of power and riches was a crime under an unjust Government and that poverty in this case was a virtue. Thoreau had advocated individual disobedience to a government if a person did not agree with it in principle. In this way Thoreau’s revolt was a one-man affair. It was directed against a state which was far from powerful. Gandhi almost half century later was wholly concerned with the arousal of mass revolt. His gigantic task was to organize the resistance of the oppressed millions against an alien state, which had few scruples about the application of naked brute force. Tolstoy’s love force and Thoreau’s idea of civil disobedience were, in fact, the base of Gandhi’s successful passive resistance movement. Reading Romesh Chander Dutt’s *Economic History of India*, Gandhi became aware of the economic exploitation of the Indians by the British rulers; Dutt did not criticize the British rulers; instead he whole heartedly praised the efforts of some of the public spirited ones. He exposed their profit oriented policy, elaborating that it was a policy of a trading company.

The study of Dutt’s book and Gandhi’s association and discussions with his contemporaries provided the background to Gandhian economic thought: “The demands for the abolition of the salt tax, the ‘khadi’ movement, the cry for the
revival of the village industries and the policy of prohibition – all have their roots in the economic ideas of Ranade, Gokhale and Tilak” (Kaul 1975: 27-28).

Gopal Krishna Gokhale also influenced Gandhi to a greater extent. Gandhi regarded him as his political ‘Guru’. Gokhale who founded the ‘The Servants of India Society’ held that one who wanted to lead a religious life couldn’t avoid plunging into politics, as service of people was impossible without taking part in political activities. Gandhi acknowledged this: “In the sphere of politics the place that Gokhale occupied in my heart during his lifetime and occupies even now, was and is absolutely unique” (Ibid: 134).

Gandhi was so much fascinated by the Gita that he used to cram a verse or two everyday. He had committed to memory thirteen chapters in this way. The result was that to him the Gita became an infallible guide of conduct. “It became his dictionary of daily reference” (Ibid: 198). He got invaluable help from the Gita in his moments of gloom.

Gandhi was also impressed by the New Testament. He stated in his autobiography: “the Sermon on the Mount …went straight to my heart” (2007: 63). The effect of this reading was that his mind tried to unify the teaching of the Gita and the Sermon on the Mount. He realized that renunciation was the highest form of religion. Teachings of Surdas and Shamal Bhatt had also left an indelible mark on Gandhi. In all humility he accepted his faults. He put into practice the teachings of these great writers. Shamal Bhatt’s following lines took a firm grip on him and became his guiding principle:
For a bowl of water give a goodly meal;
For a kindly greeting bow thou down with zeal;
For a simple penny pay thou back with gold;
If thy life be rescued, life do not withhold.
Thus the words and actions of the wise regard;
Every little service tenfold they reward;
But the truly noble know all men as one,
And return with gladness good for evil done (Cited in Bhattacharya 2002: 10).

These lines had a deep impact on Gandhi’s mind. Its precept- return good for evil-became his guiding principle. It became such a passion with him that he did numerous experiments with it. The plays ‘Shravana Pitribhakti Natak’ and ‘Harishchandra’ also left a deep impression on his mind. Both Shravana and Harishchandra proved to be living realities for him.

Gandhi’s life and thought were in a continuing process of evolution, an empirical testing and correcting, as he translated his thoughts into action. He saw no religion as absolutely perfect but believed in the fundamental truth of all the great religions. However, his ideas were all firmly rooted in the Indian religious tradition. Hinduism wholly satisfied his soul and filled his being. The Bhagavad Gita was a source of comfort in the face of the external tragedies of his life.
Gandhi had been influenced by native Hindu element as well as Western thinkers. More than any other influence, Gandhi was affected by the ideas and the living examples of the members of the Jain cult whom he came to know as a boy and as a young man. The influence of the idea of non-violence may be traced to Jain religious tradition that induced in him a view of life basically governed by the concept of ‘jiva’. Gandhi owed his faith in the many-sidedness of reality to the Jain doctrine of ‘anekantvada’.

Geoffrey Ashe is of the opinion that the West is much more predominant in the development of Gandhi’s mind. In his biographical study of Gandhi he maintains that the London phase in Gandhi’s life was decisive:

England could at least supply the thinking of a temperate climate, and a culture rooted in law and logic and definition. Even eccentricity, even revolt had the same tinge, this was the kind of thinking Gandhi desperately needed. Westerners could not westernize him but they could teach him his own people’s wisdom better than his own people….And so the philosophy which he finally took back East with him was a fertile hybrid (1968: 40-41).

Both native Hindu element and Western thought influenced him and none of it can be excluded. On economic front his ideal was of Sarvodaya. Sarvodaya means welfare of the last- lowest of the lower most. While making plans for rebuilding India, he thought how much they would benefit the poor. His protest of the
machines, views on khadi, Gramodhyog, hard work, abstinence, principle of trusteeship, new education- all these had Sarvodaya as their base.

Gandhi has thus picked up all that was good, assimilated them, practised them and then preached them. In other words, what has come to be known as Gandhian Ideology is nothing but what is good and noble in life. It has, therefore, achieved universality and is as relevant today as it was during his life time. It stands for truth, non-violence, fearlessness, self help, simplicity, honesty, voluntary poverty, love for all and hatred for none, religious toleration, decentralization of power, equal status for women, and self-realization through self-restraint and self-abnegation. It also advocates a life of celibacy, and considers fasting to be necessary as an external aid. It is against the use of foreign goods, untouchability, economic suppression, and deep rooted prejudices and superstitions.

On the practical plane, it encourages the establishment and growth of cottage industries so as to make the villagers and poor artisans self dependent. On the wider social plane, it means discontinuance of untouchability and social discrimination, and an abandoning of economic suppression and deep rooted prejudices and superstitious beliefs.

Gandhi’s works

(Most of these are compilations from Gandhi’s articles in periodicals he edited from time to time, as compiled by the Navjivan Press, Ahmedabad)

1. *An Autobiography*

2. *All Men Are Brothers*
3 Constructive Programme
4 The Message of the Gita
5 Economics and Industrial Life and Relations, Vol. I, II and III
6 From Yervada Mandir
7 Hind Swaraj
8 India of my Dreams
9 In Search of the Supreme, Vol. I, II and III
10 Key to Health
11 My Non-violence
12 My Religion
13 Non-violence in Peace and War, Vol. I and II
14 Political and National Life and Affairs, Vol. I and II
15 Satyagraha (Non-violent Resistance)
16 Satyagraha in South Africa
17 Towards a New Education
18 Truth Called Them Differently
19 Sarvodaya (The Welfare of All)
20 Village Swaraj
Starting his political career in India with the Champaran Movement in 1917, Gandhi struck immediate rapport with the masses, thinking with their minds, speaking their language, but so inexorably projecting his own ideology on to their minds as to transform their attitude to themselves and to their social ambience. His most singular achievement was pulling the masses out of the quagmire of ignorance, fear and apathy. He taught them the basic virtue of ‘abhaya,’ fearlessness. As Nehru points: “The essence of his teaching was fearlessness and truth, and action allied to these, always keeping the welfare of the masses in view” (Nehru 1946: 361). The emancipation of the masses from fear was the main achievement of the Champaran Movement and it was for this that the title of ‘Mahatma’ was spontaneously conferred on him by the masses.

Gandhi did not teach anything new. Seers and sages, from time immemorial, have been emphasizing certain eternal values and their observance in daily life. He only reiterated them. As he himself concedes: “I have nothing new to teach the people. Truth and non-violence are as old as the hills” (Gandhi 1936: 49). But the uniqueness of Gandhi’s teaching was that he practised before he preached. This appealed to the masses and they unhesitatingly accepted whatever he taught and followed him, wherever he led. He led them ultimately to independence. This is precisely what sets Gandhi apart from other leaders of his day.

Till his death Gandhi never wavered from his faith as a ‘sanatanistic’ Hindu. He had great reverence for the Hindu scriptures- the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Bhagavad-Gita. The eternal values of Hinduism like truth, ‘dharma’ and non-violence had great appeal for him. But he was never sectarian or dogmatic. He always
maintained that no religion is infallible or perfect. Every religion had some element of truth in it. He observes: “After a long study and experience, I have come to the conclusion that (1) all religions are true, (2) all religions have some error in them, (3) all religions are almost as dear to me as one’s own close relatives. My own veneration for other faiths is the same as that of my own faith” (Cited in Rayudu 2000: 21).

It was therefore, inevitable that he should ultimately go beyond all traditional concepts of religion and come to believe in a transcendental religion, the very basis of all religions. Answering a query of S. Radhakrishnan, Gandhi says: “I often describe my religion as the Religion as the religion of Truth, of late, instead of saying God is Truth, I have been saying Truth is God, in order more fully to define my religion... Nothing so clearly describes my God as Truth” (Radhakrishnan and Muirhead 1958: 21).

Gandhi believed that all religions lead to the same goal i.e. the realization of Truth, and never differentiated between one religious set and another; nor did he consider one as superior to the other:

I believe in the fundamental truth of all great religions of the world. I believe that they are all God given, and I believe they were necessary for the people to whom these religions were revealed. And I believe that, if only we could all of us read the scriptures of the different faiths, we should find that they were at the bottom all one and we were helpful to one another (Kriplani 1970: 339).
Though the meaning of religion in the Hindu concept of dharma is not without complexities, Gandhi tried to make it broad enough to lend it a universal character. His idea of religion was not totally esoteric. He knew that every religion was connected with some belief system supported by rituals. He tried to get rid of the rituals as far as possible. To him religion was a human institution made by human ingenuity to solve practical problems as well as spiritual matters.

By religion Gandhi never meant formal or customary religion, but that religion which underlies all religions. True religion is that which brings us face to face with our Maker: “Religion should pervade every one of our actions. It means a belief in ordered moral government of the universe. This religion transcends Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity etc. It harmonizes them and gives them reality” (Gandhi 1940 445).

His father was a truthful, brave and generous man but a bit short tempered. Though he had little religious training, he was truly a religious man. His mother was also a saintly person. She was deeply religious and never had meals without saying her daily prayers. The environment in which Gandhi grew played a vital role in the shaping of his outlook on life. Gandhi’s recurrent fasts can be understood against this background.

Gandhi read the Gita with two Theosophists in England, who left a deep impression on his mind. He also read Madame Blavatsky’s Key to Theosophy which stimulated in him the desire to learn more about Hinduism. He also read the Bible.
The composite view he held of religion advocated truth, love and ahimsa, which should govern not only man’s personal but political life as well.

In his view the religion that takes no account of practical affairs and does not help in resolving them, is no religion. His attempt was to bring religion closer to man, and to that extent his approach can be called functional. In his view there could be no religion sans God.

Gandhi’s view of religion extended to every field of activity. Being a man of action, he did not look upon any human activity as being apart from religion. In other words, all activity being directed to the goal of transforming man to a higher ethical and spiritual level, religion must necessarily coexist with politics. So Gandhi could never envisage any political activity devoid of a religious basis. For Gandhi, politics was meant to serve people. Only a man who recognizes the divinity that is in him as well as in others and realizes that all are manifestations that ultimate can have such a noble concept of politics.

Gandhi’s work in non-violence was comprehensive and not simply confined to politics or human rights. It was about building positive relationships based on respect, understanding, acceptance and appreciation. In the words of C F Andrews: “It was about eliminating exploitation of all kinds and creating harmony among people where compassion and commitment to principles would be an ideal by which people live” (2008: XIV).

Truth is the foundation of Gandhi’s philosophy. God, therefore, has been referred to as the ultimate or the very epitome of love. His ideal of life and self-
realization, therefore, is couched in ideal terms, when the union of Man and God has been achieved. Truth is difficult to understand but it can be understood by saying that it is what the voice within tells you. Truth cannot be found by one unless he has got an abundant sense of humility. If one desires to delve into the depth of truth, he has to reduce himself to a cipher.

Truth is the only thing that counts. Where it is present, every wrong turns into right. It is an inevitable law of nature. Truth is the sovereign principle, which includes several others principles. This truth is not abstract but is inclusive of thought and action and is the Absolute Truth, the Eternal Principle that is God, because His manifestations are countless. They overwhelm us with wonder and owe and for a moment we are stunned.

He was prepared to sacrifice even the things dearest to him in pursuit of this quest. However, as long as he did not realize that Absolute Truth, he held onto the relative Truth as he had conceived it. That relative Truth remained his beacon light and worked as shield and buckler until he realized the ultimate Truth. Gandhi made Himalayan blunders on his way to attaining it, but he never gave up the effort or got digressed by any allurements or physical gains midway. He himself observed that the path saved him from coming to grief, and he kept moving forward ceaselessly. Often in his progress he had faint glimpses of the Absolute Truth God, and everyday the conviction grew upon him that He alone was real and all else was unreal.
Truth and non-violence were twin pillars of Gandhi’s political creed. Explaining his concept of non-violence, Gandhi observes, “Complete non-violence is complete absence of ill will against all that lives… (it) is therefore in its active form goodwill towards all life. It is pure love” (Gandhi 1922:141). Non-violence involves conscious suffering and in an extremely active force. It has no place for cowardice or weakness. Gandhi always said that the votary of non-violence had to cultivate the capacity for sacrifice of the higher type which would free him from fear. *Satya* is the Sanskrit word for “truth”; *graham* means great enthusiasm and interest. The two words combined may be rendered as the firmness of truth. The term was popularized during the Indian Independence Movement, and is commonly used in Indian languages. It can also mean the force of truth.

The nature of Gandhi’s satyagraha is very dynamic, since it involves sustained mass action against perceived injustice. In Gandhian sense it emphasizes the purity and chastity of the mind as there is no place for hatred or jealousy in it. Hence, satyagraha is a comprehensive concept which can be used to fruitfully achieve social, economic, political justice in the society.

Satyagraha, the weapon forged by Gandhi, is born of truth and non-violence. He used it in his struggle against racism and imperialism. He deployed Satyagraha in campaigns for Indian independence and also during his earlier struggles in South Africa. In traditional violent and nonviolent conflict, the goal was to defeat the opponent or frustrate the opponent’s objectives, or to meet one’s own objectives despite the efforts of the opponent to obstruct these. In satyagraha, by
contrast, these are not the goals. The satyagrahi’s object should be to convert the wrong doer and not to coerce him.

Gandhi envisioned Satyagraha as not only a tactic to be used in acute political struggle, but as a universal solvent for injustice and harm. He felt that it was equally applicable to large-scale political struggle and to one-on-one interpersonal conflicts and that it should be taught to everyone. He founded the Sabarmati Ashram to teach satyagraha.

If satyagraha was a weapon fashioned to fight against the British Empire and make the nation free, Gandhi’s fasts were no less potent and always brought about the desired result. As a devout Hindu, Gandhi was no stranger to fasting. But it was given to him alone to shape this essentially religious practice into a political weapon as well as a means of spiritual self-purification. He always insisted that fast was an integral part of his creed of non-violence which purified both his opponent and himself. He observed that a genuine fast cleanses body, mind and soul. It crucifies the flesh and to that extent sets the soul free. The major satyagrahas undertaken by Gandhi were:

1. Satyagraha in South Africa (1906-1914)
2. Champaran Satyagraha (1917)
3. Kheda satyagraha (1917)
4. Non Co operation Movement (1921-1922)
5. Quit India Movement (1942)
Gandhi’s fasts, particularly those unto death, had a specific purpose such as putting down a communal riot or preventing obnoxious political measures like the Communal Award. Sometimes he also went on fast to atone for the moral lapses of his followers. Whatever the objective, his fasts were not only a clear measure of his spiritual eminence but also thoroughly efficacious as the rioting communities or the alien government fell in line with his wishes.

Since time immemorial untouchability has been prevalent in India and brought in deep cleavages among different strata of the Indian society. The Shudras have been permanently relegated to the lowest position, their divinely ordained dharma or duty being to serve the three upper classes, the Brahmins, the Kshatriyas and the Vaisyas. The untouchables were compelled to live in utter poverty and subhuman conditions in separate unsanitary colonies or wards on the outskirts of villages or outside the city walls.

Gandhi, a believer in equality of mankind, was aggrieved to witness this practice of society. He wanted to remove the blot of untouchability from Hinduism so he admitted Harijans in his ashram and granted them equal status. For this action he lost many Hindu donors. He believed in ‘sarvodaya’ which means ‘universal uplift’ or progress of all. He refused to enter any temple to which Harijans were not allowed. He fought for social justice and human rights of the underdogs.

Gandhi refused to believe that Hindu religion advocated it. The most common sentence of all that he kept repeating in the vernacular was this: “If ‘untouchability’
belongs to the Hindu religion, than I am not a Hindu” (Cited in Andrews 2008: 120). Though he regarded ‘Varnashrama’ as a healthy division of work based on birth, he did not want it to be tainted with arrogant assumption of superiority. Even as a child of twelve, he knew that it was really wrong to consider any human being as untouchable. He often asked his mother why it was wrong to touch Uka, an untouchable, who used to clean the latrines in their house. He often told his mother that she was absolutely wrong in saying that touching Uka was sinful. Of course, he insisted on their going through a process of self-purification by observing the laws of sanitation, giving up meat eating and liquor and such other dirty practices and indulgences.

Political freedom for Gandhi was meant to free the nation from foreign rule and also from the social evils besetting it. So Gandhi waged a relentless battle against the latter. Foremost among the social evils was untouchability. He said: “Untouchability is repugnant to reason and to the instinct of mercy, pity or love. A religion that establishes the worship of the cow cannot possibly countenance or warrant a cruel and inhuman boycott of human beings” (Gandhi 1921: 318-319). He looked upon untouchability not only as a crime against man and God but also as a divisive force breaking up the Hindu society.

Equally repugnant to Gandhi was the caste system. However, he makes a clear distinction between caste system and ‘varna dharma.’ ‘Varna’ according to Gandhi, is a division of society based on heredity and aptitude. It is no doubt determined by birth but can be retained only through an observance of the necessary
obligations. It does not carry with it any concept of superiority or inferiority. He observed: “All varnas are equal, for the community depends no less on one than on another. Today varna means gradations of high and low. It is a hideous travesty of the original” (Gandhi 1934: 261-262). In other words, he was against the divisive system of caste as it is today but held that a division of society into classes based on function was not only beneficial but necessary.

As Gandhi was aware that the present day caste system based on birth keeps a large section of people in poverty and ignorance, he evolved a system of education to help them in more ways than one. It was called ‘Nai Talim’ (New Education) or Basic Education or Wardha Scheme of Education. He always maintained that education particularly at the primary and secondary levels, should aim at the integrated and harmonious development of the personality of pupils. He also maintained that development should be the primary goal of education. This could be achieved only by the teacher who became an ideal lesson to his students. Gandhi also held that education necessarily include craft-training which would make one economically self-sufficient. Thus, his ‘Nai Talim’ is naturalistic in its setting, idealistic in its aim and pragmatic in its implementation. Dr. Zakir Hussain, who later became the third president of India, successfully implemented Gandhi’s concept of this style of education at several institutions, including the Jane-Milia University, New Delhi.

To one who abhorred social inequality born of caste system, inequality of sexes was equally odious. After an intense struggle which culminated in his vow of
celibacy, he came to appreciate the true role of women in family and society. The forms of struggle he adopted - satyagraha, prohibition, boycott of foreign goods, and development of cottage industries necessitated the involvement of women in large numbers. Gandhi visualized women as equal partners at all levels of national life. Malavika Karlekar observes: “It is perhaps not a mere coincidence then that today, as the country is driven once again by a range of divisive forces, the strength of women’s mobilization is being acknowledged anew” (Karlekar 1995: 62).

In Gandhian economic spectrum man figures more prominently than wealth. To him human beings themselves were wealth, not gold and silver. There are four cornerstones on which Gandhian economics stands. They are simplicity, non-violence, sanctity of labour and human value. Gandhi built his ideal of economy on the basis of decentralization and village industries which aim at creating self-sufficient and self reliant villages.

Gandhi stressed that man’s happiness did not consist in the multiplication of wants but in voluntary curtailment of desires. Man’s happiness really lay in contentment. Gandhi admitted that it was after reading Ruskin’s Unto the Last that he came to realize the dignity of labour. If everybody lived by the sweat of his brow, the earth would turn into a paradise. Under his trusteeship theory the capitalists would consider themselves as trustees and utilize their wealth and power for the common good of the masses. The important principle underlying Gandhi’s Economic thought was dignity and sanctity of manual labour.
Gandhi was fully aware that freedom would be meaningless to the millions of Indians unless it also meant economic independence. But Gandhi was no economist in the ordinary sense of the word. However, with his abundant common sense, intensely pragmatic outlook and with his fingers on the pulse of the common people, he could formulate the most suitable economic ideology for the Indian masses. He advocated spinning and weaving because it provided work for the overwhelming part of rural population who were without any work for a good part of the year. He always held that whatever goods could be produced by the villagers should not be allotted to urban industries. He preferred production of various goods by the masses to mass production in the factories. Gandhi was aware that production of goods was in direct proportion to man’s wants. So he advocated a limiting of one’s wants. He agreed with J B Kriplani who had said: “The possession of material goods beyond that [one's wants], instead of working for the freedom and happiness of the individual, works for his enslavement and, often, for his unhappiness” (1970: 368).

Gandhi realized that Indians were being exploited because of their illiteracy and poverty. They were neglected and discriminated against in every walk of life. He identified himself with the common man by adopting his attire and his style of living. He completely devoted himself to the national cause and as a result won their unwavering loyalty in return. He gave a new perspective to the national movement of freedom. He felt that freedom from foreign yoke was not enough to bring them any good. To enjoy true freedom people have to free themselves from fear,
cowardice, ignorance, ill-will and intolerance. Self help and simplicity would help
India and the whole world in turn to prosper in life.

The term swaraj is made up of two words, swa- (self), raj- (rule) which mean
self-governance or "home-rule". The word usually refers to Mahatma Gandhi's
concept for Indian independence from foreign domination. Swaraj lays stress on
governance not by a hierarchical government, but self-governance through individuals
and community building. The focus is on ‘political decentralization.’ Since this is
against the political and social systems followed by Britain, Gandhi's concept of
Swaraj laid stress on India developing its own systems of administration and
governance based on its own genius. Swaraj, as conceived by Gandhi, could not be
achieved during his life time; but it inspired a number of popular voluntary
movements subsequent to attainment of independence, which worked as precursors to
several administrative and legislative reforms like the abolition of the Zamindari
system, the land ceiling reforms etc.

Although the word Swaraj means self-rule, Gandhi gave it the content of an
integral revolution that encompasses all spheres of life. “At the individual level,
Swaraj is vitally connected with the capacity for dispassionate self-assessment,
ceaseless self-purification and growing self-reliance” (Gandhi 1928: 772). Politically,
swaraj is self-government and not good government and it means a continuous effort
to be independent of government control, whether it is foreign government or
national. In other words, it is sovereignty of the people based on pure moral authority.
Economically, Swaraj means full economic freedom for the toiling millions. And in
its fullest sense, according to Gandhi, “Swaraj is much more than freedom from all restraints; it is self-rule, self-restraint and could be equated with moksha (salvation)” (Gandhi 1920: 886).

His tolerance of dissent was not confined to political dissent; it went deeper. He could easily embrace an atheist. He had strong faith in God but he never derided atheism. Jawaharlal Nehru, an atheist at large, was the closest to him among all his disciples. A staunch Hindu himself, he firmly believed that love and tolerance were the basic tenets of all religions. All religious paths led to God. It was this infallible belief in God that led him to love all human beings alike and with malice to none. Andrews cites Gandhi’s own words in this regard: “I suggest to you that there is only One whom we have to fear, that is God. When we fear God, then we shall fear no man... and if you want to follow the vow of Truth, then fearlessness is absolutely necessary” (2008: 67).

A passionate lover of humanity, Gandhi espoused the women’s cause from the very beginning. His preaching was directed, against the wrongs done to women in the name of tradition and law. He said that there should be no discrimination between the male and the female child. Both should be treated equally and given equal opportunities of development. He vehemently opposed the system of dedication of girls to temples (i.e. the devdasi system) and forced marriages, prostitution, economic bondage and marital slavery of women. Women’s role is supposed to be confined to the four walls of the house. Gandhi felt that:
more often than not a woman’s time is taken up, not by performance of essential domestic duties, but in catering for the egoistic pleasure of her Lord (husband) and to her own vanities. To me this domestic slavery of woman is a symbol of our barbarism. In my opinion the slavery of the kitchen is a remnant of barbarism mainly. It is high time that our women-kind was forced from this incubus. Domestic work ought to take the whole of a woman’s time (Gandhi WSI 178-179).

Gandhi wanted women to be active taking part in all activities. However, he was against their loading themselves with jewellery. He drew them into India’s struggle for freedom as he thought that this would eventually result in their social and economic emancipation. He believed that without women’s active participation freedom wouldn’t be achieved. The way the women took part in satyagraha is an ample proof of how far he succeeded in bringing about awakening among them. He never considered woman to be the weaker sex; on the contrary he considered her to be the special custodian of all that is pure and religious in life.

According to him, women are in no way inferior to men. Since the Vedic times, they have been held in great reverence as co-sharers of religious and intellectual life. He wanted the women to come out of ‘home’ into the ‘world’; or else their free movement would become restricted, stifling their mental and physical growth. He always considered women as more competent than men in the non-violent fight because they are endowed with infinite patience, possessing the virtue of uncomplaining and silent suffering.
Gandhi traveled throughout India on foot. He saw that people did not have food to eat and clothes to put on. The import of cloth from other countries had deprived the Indian weavers and spinners of their rightful earnings. To pull the rural Indian folk out of this morass he laid emphasis on village industries and Swadeshi products. He revived and encouraged all village crafts. He devised and popularized the spinning wheel so that people could get employment and earn their livelihood. He was not against the use of machines. His ire was directed against the wild craze for machinery. He did not approve of industrialization because, in his view, it would destroy the villages and the village handicrafts.

Gandhi did not approve of the education system introduced by the British in India, as it made students only literate and did not prepare them for life. He said: “an education which does not teach us to discriminate between good and bad, to assimilate the one and eschew the other, is a misnomer” (Cited in Khergamkar 2008: 54). He insisted that education should be imparted in the mother tongue. He strongly believed that it should satisfy the requirement of the mind, body and the spirit. He felt that true education was one that made people self-confident and self-reliant. Combining in him love and compassion for all like the Buddha, Krishna and Christ did, Gandhi taught the world not through words but through his deeds. He said that education must be free of cost and compulsory for all and that it must be imparted in the mother tongue. He strongly believed that literary education should follow the education of the hand- the one gift that visibly distinguishes man from the beasts. ‘Nai Talim’ was the name Gandhi gave to education. He believed that the school should actively help in developing the student’s personality, drawing out all his latent
talents and bringing him into harmony with the outside world. This order leads the rejection of book centered system of education and acceptance of a creative and life centered system.

The advancing processes of globalization worldwide have been accompanied by deepening divisions and conflicts—both within and between societies. We see around us a spreading “culture of wars” that justifies the use of coercive means to realize the desired ends. And the situation at the start of the 21st century has become further aggravated with the emerging crisis of control over natural resources. The conflict over competing claims to natural resources witnesses an effort to grab a greater share of the resources; and it also involves different ways of using the resources. The effects of these competing claims have given rise to resistance in multiple forms. In the present scenario of global recession, all ethical values that once guided world economy have been thrown to the winds. There is a cut throat competition everywhere for possession of control over resources and distribution of wealth leading to indiscriminate polarization among the nations. The spectacle is one of a doom from which there seems to be no escape.

It is against this backdrop that the Gandhian ideology of trusteeship assumes importance. Gandhi realized that it was through trusteeship alone that class conflicts could be eliminated and a proper social order established. He did not seek to abolish capitalism. His stress was on the conversion of autocracy to trusteeship through which alone economic equality could be brought about in the society.
In the context of management of natural resources, the public trust doctrine primarily rests on the principle that certain resources like land, water, and forests have such a great importance to the people as a whole that it would be wholly unjustified to make them a subject of private ownership. These resources being gifts of nature should be made available freely to everyone irrespective of his status in life. This doctrine enjoins upon the capitalist’s duty to protect the resources for enjoyment of the general public rather than to permit their use for private ownership or commercial purpose. Though Gandhi had advocated state ownership of land and other means of production, there existed, in his opinion, no room for private property as he propagated the concept of “non-possession”. He stressed that if everyone realized his obligation to serve the community, he would regard it as a sin to amass wealth, which would in turn result in equal distribution of wealth, eliminating calamities like famine or death due to starvation etc. It is the surest way to evolve a new order of life for universal benefit in place of the existing one. Gandhi provided a peaceful alternative to state ownership and expropriation. He visualized a bloody revolution to wield control over resources for creation of wealth in future, and advocated that the rich and the affluent voluntarily abdicate their riches and share power for common good of the masses. Gandhi’s theory of trusteeship was, therefore, not only restricted to bringing about a better social economic order, but to motivate people, particularly, the richer section, to share their happiness with the common folk.

The application of trusteeship would make the public at large the beneficiary of the seashore, running water, air, forests and ecologically fragile lands. The
capitalist as trustee would protect the natural resources. The efficacy of this system does not lie on its forcible application on the capitalists. Nor does it entail any philanthropic or voluntary abdication of wealth on the part of the capitalists. It was a system under which wealth would be appropriately distributed among all strata of society without causing any discontent to anyone.

The central value of the Constructive Programme is the sanctity of the individual, the claim of the individual to his own life, to his own way of thinking consistent with universal good. When Gandhi came back to India from Africa he gave a word of promise to his political guru, Gopal Krishna Gokhale that for one year he would make no speeches and would go around the country and study conditions of the people. The first thing that struck him most was the ‘indescribable’ poverty of people living in villages. The second was colossal illiteracy and ignorance among the people. In place of the people bound together by social laws and customs he found them split into innumerable isolated bites of communities, castes and sub castes. He did not meet any Indians as such anywhere in the sense Indianism connotes but only Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas, Naidus, Untouchables, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs and others. Thirdly he found disease and death everywhere in India.

A compilation of his stray articles and his views on different aspects of Indian life appeared in a book form under the title *The Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place* in 1941 included his views on communal amity, untouchability, prohibition, khadi and other village industries, village sanitation, celibacy, uplift of women, basic education, adult education, hygiene, health, economic equality,
propagation of national language, provincial languages, peasants, tribes, lepers and students.

**Gandhian Literature**

Gandhi wrote voluminously in English which included translations from Gujarati. Most of them were essays, speeches and letters which are journalistic in nature prompted by contemporary political events and queries from critics and followers. As a whole, we can say that Gandhi was an epoch making writer. The directness of his style, his choice of simple words, extensive use of Indian imagery and his sense of humour have secured for him an impeccable position among Indo-Anglian writers. Though not a professional writer, he wrote prolifically in the form of letters and short articles to the editors on subjects like vegetarianism, celibacy etc. They also included reminiscences, anecdotes of autobiographical nature and his views on socio-political issues as solicited by numerous readers. His writings encompassed the entire gamut of contemporary social life with its myriad problems and his views on them all were eagerly sought after. Gandhi, more than anybody else, exemplified vividly Indian politics in English language for more than half a century.

Though Gandhi wrote occasionally in Gujarati and spoke in Hindi and Gujarati he remained an Indian writer of the English language till his death. In the initial years of his stay in South Africa Gandhi wrote letters to the editors and drafted petitions and memoranda on behalf of the Indian community. During this tenure of his stay in South Africa he wrote two most substantial books *Hind Swaraj* and *Satyagraha* which reflect his worth as an accomplished writer.
Gandhi wrote *Hind Swaraj* in 1909 in Gujarati and later on he himself translated it into English. It reflected his sentiments and provided a powerful statement of this new spirit of nationalism. It went far beyond anything the authorities in India were prepared to tolerate, and they banned it as soon as it was published. It was the spring of Gandhi’s career as an upcoming promising writer. The germs of Gandhian political, economic, educational and ethical thoughts can be drawn from Gandhi’s three principal works, namely the *Hind Swaraj, Satyagraha in South Africa* and *My Experiments With Truth*. *Hind Swaraj* was his first major work which reflects how Gandhi looked at the prospects of a resurgent India. His struggle was not merely for political emancipation from the British but for freedom from the bondage of shackles of machines which had come to symbolize modern civilization. He wanted to unleash the springs of Indian culture which the machines had throttled. In fact, this is the major theme dominating the entire Gandhian literature. During the South African period Gandhi’s style and themes of writing got crystallized. Subsequently, in the years that followed 1916-48 two of his well known journals were published, ‘Young India’ 1919-1932 and ‘Harijan’ 1933-48. All his writings appeared in serial form in these two journals. Most of them were written originally in Gujarati and were translated by others. Though Gandhi himself corrected and revised them himself.

*Among Gandhi’s major works in English in translation are The Story of My Experiments With Truth, Satyagraha in South Africa, Discourses on the Gita, and From Yervada Mender-Collection of letters from the Yervada prison* (1932). Other works included, *Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place* and *Key to Health* etc. A great majority of his English writings consisted of letters and numerous
speeches that he delivered at different fora on different occasions. In fact the majority of his writings incorporated in the 102 volumes of his complete works are in English. He also continuously wrote short articles and notes in English in the columns of ‘Young India’ and ‘Harijan.’ These voluminous and numerous writings secure for him a permanent place among Indian writers writing in English.

Gandhi first book *Hind Swaraj* is in the form of a dialogue full of similes, metaphors and other embellishments. Some of them are startling in their vividness. It was basically a statement of a doctrinal moral argument written with a view to guide the political struggle in India. The book underwent a change later on in its structure but Gandhi left the ideas propounded in it intact and unaltered. It is the only systematic enunciation of his philosophy. It was written when Gandhi was passing through a turbulent crisis created by dejection with the English leadership on the one hand and by the Extremist moderate division among the congress leaders on the other.

Much of the power of the book is derived from clarity of its argumentation and directness of expression. Gandhi himself said that it was a book that could be placed in the hands of a child. He described it as a severe condemnation of modern civilization.

Between publication of *Hind Swaraj* and *Satyagraha in South Africa* Gandhi continued writing on various issues in journals in English and Gujarati. *Satyagraha in South Africa* is the longest of Gandhi’s books and stands in critical relation to the earlier *Hind Swaraj* and his later autobiography-*My Experiments with Truth*. Gandhi dictated *Satyagraha in South Africa* while in Yervada Jail 1923-24. It was translated into English by Valaji Desai, with the help of Verror Eluin and C.F. Andrews. He
wanted to impress it on the followers of the civil disobedience movement that Satyagraha was derived not from moral theory or doctrine but from experience and practice. Gandhi started his first paper ‘Satyagraha’ in 1919. Soon after that he undertook the editorship of two more papers ‘Young India’ in English and ‘Nav Jivan’ in Gujarati.

An autobiography The Story of My Experiment with Truth was initially written in Gujarati and serialized in journals. Later on it was translated by his secretary Mahadevbhai Desai and corrected by Gandhi himself. Many have reviewed and opined that Gandhi followed in it the form of sequencing of parables as in Buddhist Jataka tales. Individual drama was skillfully blended with the historical epic; it was the story of a quest for freedom and nationhood as well as personal purification and salvation. He even claimed that he had no definite plan before him when he started writing. He wrote as the spirit spurred him at the time of writing. In Gandhi’s own view his life was a chain of experimentation, pushing ahead through a sequence of trials. He wrote of experiments in political, spiritual, physical and even dietary fields. He never claimed any finality about his conclusions and kept his mind open to solutions as suited the most.

His early writings during his stay in England as a law student do not touch upon political issues. However, his writings in ‘Indian Opinion’, letters to editors of South African newspapers, pamphlets and petitions reflect his views on sundry political issues and problems affecting humanity at large.

One of the last texts he wrote was Key to Health in 1942 which too was written originally in Gujarati and later translated into English by Sushila Nayar. Its
Gandhi and Indian Literature in English

Mahatma Gandhi continues to be one of the most popularly discussed and yet many-a-time controversial figure of Indian politics. There is hardly any area in the pre or post-independence India that he had left untrammeled for the sake of development. He is a socio-political figure whom it is impossible to forget or ignore. He has influenced every aspect of human consciousness. There is hardly any discipline that he has left uncommented on. He is an immense source of writing himself and very many writers from as diverse fields as history, political science, philosophy, literature, sociology and other behavioural sciences have him as their central theme. While musing on different books on Gandhi, especially those pertaining to Gandhian impact on Indian Literature in English, one can easily sense that the entire spectrum of contemporary Indian literature was grossly impacted by ‘Gandhian consciousness’. There are vicarious studies and research works that bear Gandhi’s impact.

However, works are still in progress in which there are extent references to his philosophy and his ways of looking at things. Gandhian influence on Indian writing in English finds an ample exposure in any of book on History of Indian English Literature relevant to the pre-independence period. M. K. Naik comments: “Indian Writing in English literature of the Gandhian age was inevitably influenced
by these (the then political and social) epoch-making developments in Indian life” (1982: 83).

In his view, Indian writing in English (Fiction) in particular discovered some of its most compelling themes from Gandhi’s writings and speeches. He is a mine of themes for writers and commentators. Dramatic reconstructions of his life in film and fiction range from Richard Attenborough’s academy award winning film Gandhi in 1982 to Indian English novelists like Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K Narayan and a lot many others. Gandhi gave new strength and confidence to Indian languages that suffered contempt, neglect, indifference and disgrace for a long time. Gandhi laid great stress on simple living and high thinking which was reflected and highlighted by the Indian English authors in their novels and short stories. Almost all of their novels represent events, which distinctly correspond to the examples of actual incidents, and teachings that Gandhi in real life encoded during his visits to various places. The writers writing in different languages during that period were either persons who had come directly under Gandhi’s influence, with many of them having actually taken part in the freedom movements, or were highly influenced by his ideals. Their writings were immensely imbued with Gandhian idealism, his lifestyle and teachings, and his anti-colonial stand. Gandhi was so much a part and parcel of the contemporary literary genre that references to him in many dramas, novels, stories and in poetry of that period was found in galore. In most cases, the Gandhian writers, especially the novelists and short story writers, made Bapu an important, guest character or they made a local Gandhi replica and presented him in
the light of the Mahatma. Not only did the Indians turn Gandhi into a veritable cult; they also transformed him into Rama or Krishna, in flesh and blood, with a divine power to change the destiny of the nation with his Midas’s touch.

Gandhi exercised a tremendous influence on our languages and literatures through his own writings in English and Gujarati. Both Indo-Anglian and vernacular writers came under his influence. His influence on Indo-English novels in the earlier phase was total and integral, as most of the novelists adopted Gandhism to their creative afflatus with a passion that almost borders on religious faith. The novelists translated Gandhian ideology into action and committed it into writing. All this resulted in the fictionalization of Gandhi’s eventful life and his philosophical precepts. They gave Gandhism both gravitas and ambience and adapted to the Indo-English novel. In Indian writing in English Gandhi appears as a force to reckon with. With his appearance, Indian English literature came to acquire close touch with social realities which had largely remained untouched earlier.

Many Indian writers have used Gandhian ideology in their writings because Gandhi set the hearts and minds of Indians afire. In the words of B A Pathan, “Not only that but the eminent writers like K R Srinivas Iyengar named a particular period in Indian literary history the ‘Gandhian Age’ and Dr M K Naik called the strong influence ‘The Gandhian Whirlwind’ (Pathan 1987: 13). Thus, Gandhian ideology renders a vision in which the vivacity and spontaneity of imagination give an added intensity to the literary experience.
The inevitable impact of the Gandhian movement on Indian English literature was the sudden flowering of realistic novels during the nineteen thirties. Novelists turned their attention away from the past to concentrate on contemporary issues. In their novels prevailing social and political problems that Indians found themselves in were given prominence. The nation-wide movement of Gandhi not only inspired Indian English novelists but also provided them with some of their prominent themes, such as “the ordeal of freedom struggle, the East-West relationship, the communal problem and plight of the untouchables, the landless poor, the downtrodden, the economically exploited and the oppressed” (Naik 1982: 118).

Gandhi is introduced into the Indian English fiction in various ways. He appears as a character in Mulk Raj Anand’s Untouchable (1935), The Sword and the Sickle (1942) and Little Plays of Mahatma Gandhi (1991), K A Abbas’s Inquilab (1955), R K Narayan’s Waiting for the Mahatma (1955) and Nagarjun’s Chronicles of Kedaram (1961). Though he does not appear as a character in K S Venkatramani’s Murugan, the Tiller (1927) and Kandan, the Patriot (1932) or Raja Rao’s Kanthapura (1938), Gandhi is the driving force and is represented by idealized characters. Gandhi’s followers appear in Bhabani Bhattacharya’s So Many Hungers! (1947), Mrs. Sahgal’s A Time to be Happy (1957) and R K Narayan’s The Vendor of Sweets (1967).

In the thirties and early forties, Gandhi was not the undisputed leader of the masses. There were many who did not have faith in his non-violent non-cooperation movement. But his social reforms like eradication of untouchability, and picketing
toddhy shops and sarvodaya ideals received the attention of one and all. The humiliated and long-neglected section of the society at last found a leader who championed their cause. Many Indian English novelists like K S Venkatramani and Mulk Raj Anand felt that Gandhi was more effective as a social reformer. This is clearly revealed in Murugan, the Tiller, Kandan, the Patriot and Untouchable respectively. Mulk Raj Anand, R K Narayan, Raja Rao and others in the 1930s and 1940s gave a distinct turn to Indian English fiction. Gandhi played a catalytic role with his love for the lowliest and the lost. He inspired the writers on a scale that cannot be surpassed. The emphasis shifted from the high to the low, from the learned to the illiterate, from the vociferous to the voiceless.

Mulk Raj Anand has been the most prolific of the trio. His contribution to Indian English fiction of social realism is incontrovertibly great. His Untouchable depicts the story of the low caste boy, Bakha. It is basically a tragic drama of the individual caught in the net of the age-old caste system. Anand explored the social ramifications of Gandhian ideology by seeking to locate it in the lives of common men and women and of their endeavour to acquire social dignity. Anand’s creative afflatus was chiefly directed in the propagation of social equability and he was a social evangelist “committed” to bring amelioration into the lives of the ‘have-nots’. Anand is objective in his portrayal of Gandhi. He makes the innocent victim, Bakha, listen to every word of Gandhi in rapt attention, in the hope that his misery and humiliation would come to an end. But Gandhi offers no immediate solution. Instead, it is the flush system that raises some hope of relief in Bakha, the untouchable. In
Coolie he presents a poverty-stricken protagonist, Munoo. Both novels are a plea for downtrodden, the poor and the outcast, who face economic hardship and emotional humiliation in a rigid social structure. His Two Leaves and a Bud depicts the story of a middle-aged peasant, Ganger, from a village in Punjab. In The Sword and the Sickle, Anand shows how, Lalu, the protagonist, though impressed by Gandhi’s peasant like appearance and sincerity, refused to be convinced of the effectiveness of Gandhi’s non-violent struggle. Both in Untouchable and The Sword and the Sickle, Anand questions the effectiveness of Gandhian solution to the problems of untouchables and the peasants.

Raja Rao brought into fiction his metaphysical propensities to make his novel Kanthapura essentially a Gandhian myth so that the freedom struggle gets the lineament of a spiritual struggle in which the good and the evil are interlocked. He projected Gandhi as the political leader and an ‘avatar’ to guide the people and activate them into political action. Unlike Anand, Raja Rao does not present Gandhi as a character in Kanthapura. Nevertheless, he gives a vivid and faithful account of the impact of Gandhi on rural India. The image of Gandhi as presented by Raja Rao is an exemplary image because to him Gandhi was an avatar of Vishnu. To many people in Kanthapura, Gandhi is the invisible God and Moorthy the visible avatar. Moorthy’s efforts to eradicate untouchability and make the villagers spin, weave and wear hand-spun cloth meet with some resistance. But he slowly succeeds in making the freedom struggle take roots in Kanthapura. As the oppressive government uses brute force against the villagers, some of them die and others leave Kanthapura and settle in a
new village. Moorthy is drawn towards the Congress activities led by Jawaharlal Nehru. Though Kanthapura is destroyed, the spirit of the villagers remains undaunted. They believe that he would bring them swaraj and they would be happy.

In the words of Naik, “Bhabani Bhattacharya is a novelist (who was) strongly influenced by Tagore and Gandhi” (Naik 1982: 213). Like Raja Rao, Bhabani Bhattacharya in his novel *So Many Hungers!* presents the impact of Gandhi on people through the idealized character, Devesh Basu is a truly Gandhian character- in precept as well as in practice- he stands for love, truth and non-violence. Devesh is non-violent both in thought and action. As with Gandhi, his love embraces all. He dislikes the British rule in India but not the British.

In *Inquilab*, K. A. Abbas presents Gandhi as a votary of Hindu-Muslim unity with his unflinching faith in the oneness of religion and as an apostle of non-violence. The protagonist, the young, Anwar Ali’s baptism into Gandhism takes place at the highly impressionable age of eight. Every day, Anwar sits beside his father and listens to the elders talking about Rowlatt Bills, Martial Law, Hartal, Congress, Muslim League, Gandhi’s satyagraha and ahimsa. Of them: “two things instinctively appealed to him- not to obey the unjust laws of the Government and not to kill anyone” (Abbas 1955: 8). He learns from his father the meaning of Swaraj. Thus, Anwar is influenced by Gandhi even before he meets him. He remembers what Gandhi repeatedly tells people about religion. Gandhi declares: “My Hindu instinct tell me that all religions are more or less true. All proceed from the same God, but all are imperfect human instrumentality” (Gandhi Y I 1924: 180). The young Anwar in the *Inquilab* appears to
have understood Gandhi well, and so for him Gandhi remains the only peacemaker to Anwar. He decides to meet Gandhi in spite of his father’s newly developed hatred of Hindus.

Gandhi greets Anwar with a smile and asks him to sit down. Anwar does not know how to convey his anguish to the Mahatma. He bursts into tears: “Oh Mahatmaji,’ he cried out between the sobs, please do something about these Hindu-Muslim riots. Please! Please! Only you can save us all” (Abbas 1955: 128).

After saying these words, he looks at Gandhi’s face and feels relieved: “Now he knew why they called him Mahatma, a great Soul. On his face was a look of such suffering, kindness and pity, as if he personally felt the misery of every single human being” (Ibid: 128). Gandhi appears more prominently in R K Narayan’s *Waiting for the Mahatma*. Narayan’s Gandhi loves truth and children, enforces discipline, lives with the untouchables, preaches non-violence, stays where people are suffering and inspires people to take part in the freedom movement.

Jagan in *The Vendor of Sweets* becomes a follower of Gandhi because he ardently desires to be revered as a follower of Gandhi. Gandhi’s speech at Malgudi explaining the real significance of human action and service inspires Jagan. He goes on chanting the name of Bapu day in and day out and always tells others that every action of his was influenced by Gandhian principles. He spins every day for an hour and wears home-spun cloth. He wears only “ahimsak chappals” –sandals made from the hide of animals that died a natural death.

Like R K Narayan, Nagarajun also presents an exemplary image of Gandhi in his *Chronicles of Kedaram*. Like Jagan in *The Vendor of Sweets*, Vanchi in
Chronicles of Kedaram subverts Gandhian ideals to feather his own nest. But Nagarajun presents characters like Nirmala who adore Gandhi and adopt his teachings in their daily life to the last dot.

The writers adopted Gandhian ideology as it appealed to them. The freedom struggle of India under the leadership of Gandhi gave these novelists a common platform. It was an exciting emotional experience, a renaissance of nationalist feeling, a new experience of seeing this love man shaping and manipulating India’s destiny. It revived their interest in the cultural heritage of India which they had lost touch with through western education and provided them themes and thoughts.

Thus, a study of Indian English fiction reveals that almost all major writers were profoundly affected by Gandhi. The novelists like Venkatramani, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, R K Narayan, Bhabani Bhattacharya, K. A. Abbas, Nagarajun, Chaman Nahal seek to present Gandhi in their own characteristic way. Under Gandhi’s influence writers moved their scene from town to the village, their characters from highly educated to the common men, they took up themes of untouchability, orthodoxy, superstitions, slavery, exploitation etc. Here it is appropriate to quote from Bhabani Bhattacharya’s Gandhi The Writer:

Inspired by him (Gandhi), they turned towards the depiction of the life of common man, the poor and the illiterate, particularly in the villages. Their prose style became less ornamental, less designed for the highbrow scholar. Simple, direct, natural… the literature of the Gandhian era aimed of appealing not to the class alone, but the masses
as well…. There was a reaction against absolute values. The writers
drew largely on life for their themes and new horizons opened up
before them” (2002: 236-237).

There was a great impact of Gandhi on more recent writers like Nehru, Raj
Gopalachari, Vallabhbhai Patel, J.B. Kriplani, Morarji Desai, G. Ramchandran and
Vinoba Bhave etc. Similarly those who were opposed to Gandhi also contributed to
the Indian writings in English. Amongst the opponents of Gandhi Naik enlists
Subhash Chandra Bose, M.N. Roy, B.R. Ambedkar, V.D. Savarkar, Shyam Prasad
Mookarjee and S.A. Dange and others.

The following chapter looks at the Indian fiction in English influenced by
Gandhian ideology.