CHAPTER – II

TRUTH AND NON-VIOLENCE
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Dimensions of Truth

‘Truth’ and ‘non-violence’ are the two key concepts in Gandhi’s philosophy. In his thought, ‘Truth’ occupies the central place with, of course, non-violence coming second. Gandhi considered his entire life as a series of experiment with truth. One of the reasons for Gandhi’s fascination for this word was that even an atheist who does not believe in God values truth. Further, words such as ‘true’, ‘truth’ and ‘truthful’ are very commonly used notions in our daily conversation. Since Gandhi was addressing to the common masses and not to professional philosophers, he must have thought that the word ‘truth’ would suit his purpose admirably well. Yet, contrary to appearance, ‘truth’ signifies several ideas and principles. The first thing to note is that it is an abstract and a sophisticated concept and in everyday discourse the words “true” and “truthful” occur more frequently than the word ‘truth’. Gandhi used the notion ‘truth’ in a comprehensive sense to convey quite a good deal of ideas. Moreover, a proper understanding of Gandhi’s view of ‘non-violence’ requires that we understand what he meant by truth. In this chapter we shall explore the genealogy of the concept, inquire into the various contexts in which Gandhi employed this term with a view to explain how the two

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basic ideas of truth and 'non-violence' are intimately connected in Gandhi's thought.

To begin with let us pay attention to some of his famous remarks on the nature of truth.\(^2\) He says,

To me, 'Truth is God' and there is no way to find Truth except the way of 'non-violence'.

God is, because Truth is. We embark upon the search, because we believe that there is Truth and that it can be found by diligent search and meticulous observance of the well-known and well-tried rules of search ... Even the atheists who have pretended to disbelieve in God have believed in Truth.

As I proceed in my quest for truth, it grows upon me that truth comprehends everything. I often feel that ahimsa is in truth, not vice versa. Out of truth emerges love and tenderness.

What ... is truth? A difficult question; but I have solved it for myself by saying that it is what the voice within tells you.

Truth is the substance of all morality.

Truth is love.

\(^2\) The quotations are from *All Men are Brothers* Chap. II, K. Kripalini (ed.) Ahmedabad, 1960.
The first thing we can notice is that Gandhi is employing the word in a very comprehensive sense and his search for truth is not merely the truth of factual sentences. Thus truth in Gandhian thought has many dimensions. Ordinarily the words 'true' and 'false' are predicated of sentences. In this sense the question 'What is truth?' can be a question either of the meaning or of the criterion of truth. In academic circles, philosophers have debated on such issues and versions of correspondence, coherence and pragmatic theories have been advanced to answer these questions. Gandhi, in his search for truth, surely was not primarily interested in such questions.

Cognitive Truth

Gandhi’s conception of truth does, however, cover the cognitive truth predicated of units of language. Sentences, statements or propositions are true when they represent facts in the world or reality accurately. Truth, in this sense, is other than reality.

This factual truth, however, has reference to persons. When a proposition is said to be true it is the assertion of the proposition that is true. A sentence is a written mark or uttered sound. A string of words that merely issues forth from someone’s mouth may not be an assertion. A parrot may succeed in producing a sound similar to what we utter when we speak, but the sounds produced by the parrot do not make a meaningful sentence. It is neither true nor false. Assertions
are statements made by someone meaning to say something. Thus the ascriptions of truth or falsity are, in an important way, ascriptions to persons via their assertions. Further, truthfulness is manifested in persons in their devotion to facts, eagerness to ascertain the facts before arriving at any conclusion and in following the dictates of reason.³

**Truth in Morality**

We also consider persons to be truthful or untruthful in a much deeper sense.⁴ A person is not truthful simply because he or she has made a true statement. To say that someone is truthful, several things are presupposed. Someone is truthful only when he says what he believes to be the case. If he deliberately tells something which is inconsistent with what he believes to be true we would refuse to consider such a man as truthful even if what he says turns out to be true. Imagine the following situation. A man is taking wine. But a father tells his inquisitive son that the man is taking his medicine. The father lied to his son. The real content of the glass is unimportant to the question whether the father is truthful. Suppose that the glass contained medicine, which the father mistook as wine. In such a situation his statement will turn out to be true, but we all will agree that he lied to his son and thus he was untruthful. Truth affects our beliefs in two distinct ways. The distinction can be brought out with the help of another

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example. A political analyst in course of his lecture, after giving detailed evidence, asserts the sentence 'it is my considered belief that war will break out within six months'. Suppose that he also utters this statement to a psychiatrist under whom he is undergoing treatment. His statement uttered in course of his lecture ($S_1$), and his statement made in reply to the psychiatrist's question ($S_2$) are true or false on altogether different grounds. Suppose that the war did not ultimately break out. Also suppose that when he spoke to the psychiatrist he did believe, though mistakenly, that the war was going to break out within six months. In that case $S_1$ will be false but $S_2$ will be true. Now imagine the case to be the other way round. Suppose that the war really broke out within six months but he did not believe so when he said that. In this case $S_1$ will be true but $S_2$ will be false. Edwards observes that $S_1$ refers to the future course of the world while $S_2$ refers to a belief in the person's mind; one is an objective claim and the other is a claim about the subject.

There is another feature of truth as ascribed to persons. This is more of the nature of a presupposition. Truthfulness is a moral quality. Somebody can be truthful only if he has the ability to choose between alternative courses of action. If a child identifies a weighing machine as a clock because of the similarity of its face we would not accuse her being a liar. We can say that the child is ignorant but not untruthful. The child has not learnt to distinguish a clock from a weighing machine and so lacks the capability of discrimination. She is neither truthful nor untruthful. For the same reason, if a drug would make a person permanently unable to say other than what he believed to be true, we would not give credit to the person as

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truthful. When we assess a person to be truthful we do not assess his utterances per se. The agent's performance is an outward manifestation or consequence of his deliberation, decision and intention, which are truly the object of moral assessment. Human actions, for which we are held responsible, are those where we could have chosen to do otherwise. Gandhi recognizes this when he says,

'No action, which is not voluntary, can be called moral. So long as we act like machines, there can be no question of morality. If we want to call an action moral, it should have been done consciously and as a matter of duty. Any action that is dictated by fear or by coercion of any kind ceases to be moral.'

Gandhi's use of the concept of truth has predominantly a moral overtone. Gandhi insisted that morality is the basis of reality and truth is the substance of all morality. Gandhi says, "Truth became my sole objective. It began to grow in magnitude every day and my definition of it also has been ever widening". In the Indian religious traditions, truth is regarded as one of the vows (vratas). Among the vows, which were regarded as essential part of discipline for purification and initiation, truth occupies a foremost place. Buddhism and Jainism also preach five vows which include truth. Gandhi took up this religious and moral idea and used it as the most fundamental idea in his religion. As we noted above, Gandhi admits that his 'definition of truth has been ever widening'.

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In order to understand what is truth as a moral quality, we can proceed by asking what it includes and what it excludes. Truth is an abstract idea. Like other abstract concepts, what the concept includes largely depends on what it excludes. Accusations of forgery, fraud, flattery, hypocrisy, and exaggeration would be accusations of untruthfulness. In such accusations we do not so much assail the consequences as the agent's intention and his manner of performance. A person who sincerely tries to do something and another who pretends to do that thing the difference between the two does not consist in success in the former and failure in the other, because it may so happen that one who pretends, for example, to clean the window, may pretend more successfully by actually clearing the window but an honest window-cleaner may, in the process of cleaning, inadvertently break the window pane.

In our attempt to highlight the different dimensions of truth, we started with the cognitive truth and from this we passed on to truth as a practical notion. There are certain basic differences between the cognitive and practical mode in which a person can be related to the world. In the cognitive mode we try to represent the world as it really is but in the practical mode our objective is that the world should conform to our representations. In knowing we understand the world, in doing we change the world. But, knowing and doing, thought and action, do not occur independently in the subject. The concept of truth employed in both the spheres can also be used to bring about a unitary view of reality in which both the subject and the object are fused together.
In Gandhi's use of the idea of truth, we can thus discern two broad dimensions. In the cognitive dimension we are interested in ascertaining the facts of the case as they are without distorting or modifying the given situation. Here the subject is relatively passive. In the practical, normative mode the subject is not a passive recorder of events but an active agent. In the practical mode the will occupies the centre of place. The second dimension of truth in Gandhi can be characterized as the willing dimension of truth. This dimension of truth can alone do justice to the moral ascriptions of truthfulness or otherwise. When truth is predicated of persons (as willing beings or as agents), it is manifested in various qualities of the mind and body. Within this framework of practical mode such qualities as taking vows and steadfastly keeping them, fearlessness, equipoise, moral earnestness, putting ones ideas into practice and commitment are moral qualities that characterize the person's active side of his being.

Truth as Consistency

Gandhi used the notion of 'consistency' to stand for this group of qualities of the mind. By 'consistency' Gandhi did not mean consistency of views held at different periods of life. This consistency, he says, is the consistency of a dogmatic. He declared that his aim was not to be consistent with his previous statements on a given question; but to be consistent with truth as it may present itself to him at a given moment. Consistency, for Gandhi, is the consistency of thought, speech and action of a person at any given time. Several Gandhian
scholars have highlighted this sense of truth. If one thinks one thing, but speaks another and does something else instead, one is not truthful. Vasto brings out this sense of truth in his attempt to define it as 'the inside as the outside'. Vasto remarks that "to live and to be in truth means that our appearances and our actions shall correspond to what we have within us".\(^7\) Gandhi's life illustrated this. Having identified himself with the poor, his dress, food habits and life style also reflected this identity.

Inner Voice

Consistency, however, is only one out of the several dimensions of truth. One does not become truthful simply by carrying out one's moral convictions sincerely. It is also necessary that intentions, to be sincerely carried out, should be in conformity with truth. Consistency is only a formal property and does not provide the content of truth. The question then arises: how can we ascertain the content of truth? How can one be sure that the ideal ,one wants to put into practice, is a true ideal? Here Gandhi appeals to his inner voice as his guide to truth. To quote Gandhi, "What is truth? A difficult question; but I have solved it for myself by saying that it is what the voice within tells you".

Whether Gandhi's appeal to inner voice is an appeal to conscience or not, depends upon how we understand by conscience. Traditionally conscience has

\(^7\) See T.K. Mahadevan (ed.) *Truth and Non-violence*, Gandhi Peace Foundation, New Delhi, p. 60.
been construed either as a kind of feeling of approval and disapproval or as a mental faculty that tells what things are good and what are bad. Understood in these senses, conscience simply tells us what to do but not why should we do that. It does not provide any basis for moral justification.

Some philosophers have offered a critical conception of conscience. C.D. Broad lists three conditions that an act must fulfill before we can call it conscientious. These three conditions are (1) the agent must have reflected on the situation, the act, and the alternatives to it in order to discover the right course, (2) the agent must try to learn the relevant facts and to exercise his judgement to the best of his ability and factual information available that it probably is the best or the least wrong of all those alternatives which are open to him; (3) his belief that the action is moral conjoined with his desire to do what is right per se must be either the only motive for his doing the act or a sufficient or necessary motive. Broad's critical conscience has reference to duty, it has a rational element and it is not a faculty that simply makes pronouncements of right and wrong.

We can very well notice that Gandhi's appeal to inner voice is not an appeal to conscience understood in the traditional sense. It is to be understood in the sense of critical conscience. Gandhi's claim to inner voice is a moral claim. The inner voice is different from bodily desires as signified by the qualification 'inner'. The inner voice is not a blind force that in any way compels the person. It is more like a voice of counsel. A person who appeals to his inner voice should be able to offer

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reasons for his actions. If no reason can be advanced, then the appeal to inner voice will be a sham. One who appeals to inner voice should be ready to answer ‘I did so and so because...’ This fact also distinguishes the voice within from any external authority such as the voice of a transcendent God. One, who appeals to the authority of an external God, would not owe any responsibility. On the contrary such a person may turn out to be a fanatic. One who appeals to inner voice or the voice of truth, like a conscientious man, will not make any absolute claim of truth for his views. He will be respectful of other views.

Truth in Religion

Gandhi held the view that God is Truth. Different religions also declare that God is Truth. To appreciate Gandhi’s assertion let us see what possible interpretations can be given to the assertion that God is Truth. In theological terms truth is a relation between the thing itself, as it exists, and the idea of it, as conceived by God. Every existing thing is true, in that it is the expression of an idea which exists in the mind of God. An idea in God’s mind is the archetype according to which the thing has been created or fashioned. Just as human creations conform to and embody the ideas of their authors, so also, God’s creation conform to and embody the ideas of Him only in a more perfect way. God is actus purus. There is no gap between God’s ideas and His creation, between His

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10 Thomas Aquinas, Summa 1:16:1
intention and action. God needs no medium, no instruments for His creation. Similarly, there can be no gap between God’s knowledge and the world since it is His creation. This is what is implied when it is said that God is truth. Religions preach that the creation of the universe by one who, in creating it, has expressed therein His own ideas very much as an architect or an author, expresses his ideas in the things that he creates except that creation in the latter case supposes already existent material. The religious concept of truth supposes that the universe is built according to definite and rational plan, and that everything within the universe expresses or embodies an essential and integral part of that plan. This implies that in God there is no distinction between His intention and perception, between His knowledge and action. In God all knowledge would be self-knowledge. The assertion that ‘God is Truth’ is to be understood in a theistic framework that believes in a personal God as the creator of the world.

Gandhi makes a transition from ‘God is Truth’ to ‘Truth is God’. This marks a transition from theism to pantheism. Theism is the belief that there is personal God, a supreme intelligent being, which in some sense transcends the world. Such a God listens to and responds to prayer and worship. The theistic God is totally other than the world. In Gandhi’s assertion that ‘Truth is God’, ‘Truth’ is to be understood in the sense of ‘the sum total of all that exists’. Understood in this sense it is an assertion to the effect that Reality is divine and sacred. God is immanent in the world and is present in everything. Pantheistic metaphysics provides a rational ground for the principle of non-violence as a moral standard.

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11 Walker, op. cit.
Since every thing and being is a part of divine unity, the good of the individual is to be understood in terms of its relation to the unity or the whole. Gandhi vacillates between theism and pantheism. He seems to embrace panentheism, which is a combination of theism and pantheism. God, according to him, is the all-pervasive Reality, immanent in the world and is also transcendent. God is in the world and beyond it. The following passage brings out Gandhi’s comprehensive description of the nature of God.

God is that indefinable something which we all feel but which we do not know. ... 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. God is conscience. He is even the atheism of the atheist... He is personal God to those who need his touch... He is the purest essence... He simply is to those who have faith.12

**Ontological Truth**

Metaphysics is the study of the nature of ultimate reality. In metaphysics truth characterizes the nature of ultimate reality as distinguished from appearance. This, we can call, is ontological truth. In the Idealist systems, both reality and truth are essentially one, essentially an organic whole. Truth, in fact, is but reality qua

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12 *Young India*, 5. 3. 1925 p. 80.
thought. It is an intelligent act in which the universe is thought as a whole of infinite parts or differences, all organically inter-related and somehow brought to unity. And because truth is thus organic, each element within it, each partial truth, is so modified by the others through and through that apart from them it is not truth at all. For the idealists, truth is an ideal. In some places Gandhi identifies truth with God and on other occasions he identifies truth with ultimate reality. If truth, God and ultimate reality are identified, then this identification excludes from his scheme of thought any idea of God as a person. By 'God' Gandhi meant 'the ultimate reality'. This is evident when we look into the genealogy of the concept. When Gandhi spoke of truth he had its Sanskrit synonym 'satya' before his mind. Gandhi remarks that the word 'satya' is derived from 'sat' which literally means 'real' or 'existent'. Thus truth is etymologically connected with reality. Gandhi, who greatly admired Vedanta, regarded ultimate reality as one and addressed it as Brahman. Brahman is present everywhere. All are Brahman. *Sarvam khalu idam Brahman.* If all were integral parts of one ultimate reality, then by injuring another, you would be injuring yourself. By serving others you realize your real self. Self-realization is not possible without identifying oneself with the whole of reality. This identification provides the basis for a philosophy of universal brotherhood for Gandhi.

The ontological dimension of truth enables us to see the intimate relation between truth and non-violence. The identification of Truth, God and Reality enabled Gandhi to comprehend that divinity is present in everything, that exists. If God permeates everything, it follows that the universe is an interconnected
Each individual is an integral part of the total reality, and has an intrinsic worth. Thus none should be treated merely as a means for others' gratification. Realization of God is same as realization of this truth. It consists in the realization that each one of us is an inseparable part of an all-pervasive reality. A person who realizes this truth will give up his ego-sense, stop identifying himself with his body and mind and widen his self by breaking the barrier between his narrow self and the rest of the Universe. He will strive to live in harmony with nature. Such a person cannot but be non-violent. This transition from self-seeking nature to the realization of ideal of universal brotherhood is a moral transition. Morality based on truth and manifested in non-violence is the morality in the true sense of the term.

Gandhi's morality transcends the human-centred morality. It is true that all men are brothers and this brotherhood of mankind can be founded on the realization of essential unity of mankind. This human-centred morality does not, however, recognize the intrinsic worth of non-human beings. Value of the rest of the creatures are calculated in terms of their worth or utility to mankind. Protection of animal and plants is then argued on the ground that their survival is necessary for human well being. We forget that non-human beings have a right to exist in accordance with their own nature provided they do not disturb the overall harmony. The whole of terrestrial biosphere constitutes an inter-connected community in which the same ultimate reality or divinity is present. Gandhi, thus, took the whole world in the embrace of his love. Gandhi, however, does not endorse the rigid standard of non-violence preached by the Jainas. For Gandhi,
God is manifested more clearly in the living than in the non-living, in man more than in other beings. Pests are to be controlled, rabid dogs are to be killed, and a mad man who kills any one who comes in his way should be restrained. He also advocated mercy killing.

We have noticed that the concept of truth in Gandhi's thought has these three dimensions -- cognitive, practical and ontological. Truth in these perspectives have certain specific features of their own. In the cognitive perspective, truth is objective, our goal is to keep the knowing subject from distorting or modifying the given. In the practical perspective, the subject as agent occupies the centre of place and truth is properly predicated of the self. But in the ontological perspective, the subject and the object, thought and reality, become one and identical. In the words of T.R.V. Murti, "The only way to be sure of absolute truth is to get into the skin of the thing, as it were, by becoming identical with it. Here knowledge and its object coincide. This is intuition par excellence. There is no possibility of discrepancy or falsity here, because we are not looking at the thing externally, mediately, from a distance or through the mediation of categories, or in a biased or prejudiced way. We know the thing not by representation, but by being it, as it were".

We notice that Gandhi's observations and comments on the nature of truth incorporate all these dimensions of truth. Gandhi treated truth as a supreme value in ethics, religion and politics. It is the source of all values in human life. His ideal was to establish a non-violent, non-exploitative socio-politico-economic order. According to him, this is not possible unless we are prepared to recognize and
commit ourselves to some supreme value. Gandhi used truth and dharma interchangeably. Gandhi understood the term dharma as an eternal moral law which is otherwise called as Sanatana Dharma. Ordinarily, the word 'dharma' is used to stand for sectarian religions like Christianity, Islam etc. Gandhi was well aware of use of the term and perhaps to avoid being misunderstood, he preferred to use the term ‘truth’ for it and said, “sanatana dharma means imperishable truth”. Thus truth is the principle of moral life. This brings Gandhi closer to Buddhism where dharma is treated as a principle of moral life. Dharma or truth turns out to be regulative principle which regulates all other values of life. Theoretically speaking truth stands for the eternal moral law, but from practical point of view, it implies performance of specific duties in accordance to the eternal moral law. For him morality is the basis of everything and truth is the substance of morality. Truth, as the highest principle, is to be discovered through life only and thus it cannot consist in any fixed codified rules and regulations which is to be followed mechanically.

Gandhi was opposed to the religious prejudices and dogmas. Any thing that is detrimental to human growth and development in physical, psychic and spiritual is to be given up. Truth, being the upholding principle of the Universe, living a life in consonance with truth must be in full – one and all. Spirituality is always life-affirming, not life-negating. Spirituality is the essence of religion and truth is the cornerstone of spirituality. The real significance of religious life consists in living a

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life devoted to love and service. No morality can be conceived independently of the individual and social life.

Gandhi takes truth both as the most fundamental ethical virtue and as the ultimate metaphysical principle. He believes in the essential unity of all existence, mobile or immobile, living or non-living. To this extent he goes along with the Advaitins. One does not find personalistic undertones in the Gandhian concept of Absolute. For him God is truth and Truth is God. The Gandhian God is not a God of religion who is amenable to eulogies, offerings and prayers. It is the eternal and the impersonal principle. Confirming to this means virtue and non-conformity means evil. But he made a fundamental departure from the Advaitins in considering the world to be real. The world is nothing other than the different expressions of the supreme reality. The finite is to be treated as nothing but the infinite appearing as finite. This makes truth a corner stone of practical morality. Thus one gets pragmatic justification of following the life of truth and righteousness. The natural laws are the expressions of truth as well as moral laws which are constitutive of morality. Since the same reality lies hidden in everything all particulars are to be treated as sacred. To the extent he cognizes the reality of the multiplicity, he is a supporter of dualism. The apparent ambivalence is explained away by Gandhi. He remarks,

I am an advaitist and yet I can support dvaitism (dualism). The world is changing every moment and is therefore unreal, it has no permanent existence. But though it is constantly changing, it has
something about it which is persisting, and it is, therefore, to that extent real.\textsuperscript{15}

According to Gandhi, the moral laws are universal. On this basis moral tenets hold good for individuals in all places and at all times. It is this basic moral law that constitute the very essence of social, political and religious ethics. In other words, Gandhi takes truth as the foundation of practical morality.

In Gandhian framework morality gets precedence over religion. Though Gandhi uses truth and God as synonymous, he would describe his religion as religion of truth. He would prefer to be an atheist following the ways of truth rather that following a religious scripture at the cost of living a life devoted to truth.

In the Gandhian conceptual scheme, a coherent interpretation of human existence in all its dimensions is possible only if we allow centrality to the concept of truth. Gandhi’s view of Truth is closer to the Indian tradition than to the west. The principle that holds everything together is named by Gandhi as the principle of truth. This view of Gandhi closely resembles what is said in the \textit{Srimad Bhagavat} about truth. Absolute truth is the \textit{summum bonum of life}, the \textit{Param satyam}. In \textit{Mundaka Upanisad} also it is stated as ‘Truth alone triumphs, not falsehood’ (111.16). The divine path to liberation has been laid with truth, which seers who have overcome desire tread, and wherein also is that supreme treasure to be gained by truth. The monism of Lotze is different from Gandhi’s concept of truth as the ultimate reality. Lotze made the world process immanent in one single unity. The

\textsuperscript{15} M.K. Gandhi, \textit{Young India}, 21.1.1926.
world-ground seems to be a causal law which possess the potency of explaining all. Thus he brought everything under one single system. On the other hand, Gandhi viewed the ultimate as a moral law, which pervades world as a moral order. But its all-pervading nature by itself does not make the world moral. The world has to be transformed by human efforts in accordance with the moral law.

Gandhi also frequently asserted that Truth is God. Of course initially, he believed that God is Truth and consequently had put his faith in the benevolence of God. Gradually he changed his emphasis from God to Truth and preferred the expression “Truth is God” to “God is Truth”. By doing so, he maintained that Truth is also central to the understanding of religion. He said:

I often describe my religion as Religion of Truth. Of late, instead of saying God is Truth, I have been saying Truth is God, …16

This change in emphasis provides a sound basis to Gandhi’s theory. Theoretically, for Gandhi’s system of thought, it was not necessary to assume the existence of God either personal or impersonal, rather it was a must to assume truth. Truth, as he defined, is the eternal moral law. God, in the sense of Ishvara, cannot be taken to be superior to the moral law. This kind of argument has the theoretical advantage. Even if some people do not believe in God, they cannot find an escape from obeying the Moral Law. Human society, as Gandhi saw, was divided among theists, atheists, and agnostics. It led him to search for a common basis for uniting various sections. To an atheist, he said that sum-total of all

16 M.K. Gandhi, All Men are Brothers, p. 95.
existence is absolute truth. It is intended here to assert that without such an assumption we would not be able to explain the world of experience.

Truth means existence; the existence of that we know and of that we do not know. The sum total of all existence is absolute truth or the Truth... The concepts of truth may differ. But all admit and respect truth. That truth I call God.17

Again, the phrase “Truth is God” implies that, the concept of God is not and cannot be outside the purview of Truth i.e. the eternal moral law. Understanding of God in this sense implies that God and Truth are interchangeable.

Gandhi repeatedly asserted that God is not a person; it is only the eternal moral law of nature, which in his terminology is known as the Truth. In the year 1940 he said:

I do not regard God as a person. Truth for me is God, and God’s Law and God are not different things or facts, in the sense that an earthly king and his law are different. Because God is an Idea, Law Himself.18

Gandhi made a clear distinction between absolute and relative truth on the basis of theoretical as well as practical considerations. Theoretically, absolute truth

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is an objective, impersonal and transcendental reality that, in essence, is moral and it exists independently of anything. However, its knowledge is bound to be always incomplete. It may seem that Gandhi was advocating a dualistic concept of truth. It was rather derived from his metaphysical presuppositions, which were actually a part of ancient Indian tradition. In his opinion, it is impossible to know the truth in its entirety as long as we are in this mortal frame. The absolute truth could be visualized only in imagination. Truth, in its absolute sense, forms a uniform basis of all apparent and diverse multiplicity. Only by using this principle one can bring out an inter-connection of diverse things and reconcile seeming contradictions. Only theoretical assertion of truth is not enough for Gandhi. Such an ever-existent principle should be our object of inquiry and given its moral character, it has to be treated as the highest moral end. The moral growth of human beings depends upon the degree of knowledge they have of truth. Since the total comprehensive knowledge of truth is impossible, one has to strive after it and acquire as much as possible. The argument about the impossibility of total knowledge of truth is based on the fact that truth, in its absolute sense, is infinite and we, the seekers after truth, bound or limited by this mortal frame, are finite. So we are bound to have a finite view of truth. Even this finite view of truth may vary from person to person depending on the mental and moral abilities of individuals. "Truth was for him the ideal to be strived after; it was always to be approached but it would be ever receding, being infinite". 19 Gandhi rather thought that it is the duty of every man to seek truth, however little knowledge of truth one may succeed in obtaining. The

19 R.R. Diwakar, op. cit., p. 77.
fact that absolute truth is unattainable should not dissuade anyone from pursuing it.

He said:

I am but a seeker after Truth. I claim to have found a way to it. I claim to be making ceaseless effort to find it. But I admit that I have not yet found it. To find truth completely is to realize oneself and one's destiny i.e. to become perfect. I am painfully conscious of my imperfections, and therein lies all the strength I possess, because it is a rare thing for a man to know his limitations.²⁰

Gandhi maintains that the voice of Truth or the voice of God is to be heard within. But his claim is difficult to prove. Hence he calls it as his faith. In his writings he has used the words like the voice of God, of conscience, of Truth or the inner voice 'interchangeably'. However, I shall use the term 'conscience' for discussion here because 'conscience', has a wide currency in philosophical literature. It was held by philosophers like Butler and Kant in the west. In the east, the notion of vidhi or the Moral Imperative as held by Prabhakaras closely resemble the concept of conscience. Gandhi says:

... there are times when you have to obey a call which is the highest of all, i.e., the voice of conscience, even though such obedience may cost many a bitter tear, and even more separation from friends, from family, from the State to which you may belong, from all that

²⁰ M.K. Gandhi, *Young India*, 1921.
you have held as dear as life itself. For this obedience is the law of our being.\(^{21}\)

Thus understood, conscience could be distinguished from the law of majority, which is at the root of democratic polity. To act in accordance with conscience is to act, in accordance to ‘the law of our being’ and to act contrary to it would mean going for a self-destruction. “The only tyrant”, Gandhi said, “I accept in this world is the still small voice within”.\(^{22}\) Hence the extent of knowledge of Truth is dependent on the extent the developed conscience one possesses. No doubt, the idea of conscience is integral to the concept of individual. However, thereby everyone cannot make a claim to be acting in accordance with his conscience.

Willfulness is not conscience. A child has no conscience. The correspondent’s cat does not go for the mouse in obedience to its conscience. It does so in obedience to its nature. Conscience is the ripe fruit of strictest discipline. Irresponsible youngsters, therefore, who have never obeyed anything or anybody save their animal instinct, have no conscience, nor, therefore, have all grown-up people. The savages, for instance, have to all intents and purposes\(^{21}\) \(\text{Ibid., March, 1919.}\)\(^{22}\) \(\text{Ibid., March, 1921.}\)
no conscience. Conscience can reside only in a delicately tuned breast. 23

Thus the moral growth of an individual consists in making continuous effort to hear the inner voice or the voice of conscience through a strict discipline. One’s knowledge of Truth is directly proportionate to one’s capacity to hear the inner voice. It tantamounts to saying that different persons on different occasions at different times may have a different prompting from conscience. One could say that their perception of Truth varies. The knowledge of Truth acquired by different persons may sometime appear to be conflicting. But in essence, there can be no real conflict in the knowledge of Truth. Conflict may appear to be there due to the fact that different people have the knowledge of different aspects of Truth. In essence, it amounts to saying that each individual possessing the knowledge of Truth has actually a selective knowledge. For actual life it would mean that a Truth-seeker has to be an open-minded person and consequently ready to respect and honour other’s point of view. So a truth seeker with conscience has to exhibit the virtue of tolerance in his character.

Gandhi was very clear that his highly exalted Truth or even relative Truth could be comprehended and practiced by very few. The first lesson one has to take and practice in order to even get a glimpse of Truth is the vow of truth. The vow of truth does not merely consist in verbal truthfulness but it should be increasingly observed in thought, speech and action. The practice may be difficult but in the last

23 Ibid., Aug. 1921.
analysis for a seeker after truth there is no other means. "He believed, like Mark Twain, that all truth is safe and nothing else is safe, and he who keeps back the truth or withholds it from motives of expediency is either a coward or a criminal or both." Gandhi strongly believed that the conscience couldn't be heard unless one purifies oneself. He says, "God can never be realized by one who is not pure of heart. Self-purification, therefore, must mean purification in all the walks of life.

Truth has infinite possibilities and openings. It is not possible for a finite individual to be absolute truth. The absolute truth is revealed through non-violence, the law of love. As non-violence is the expression of truth, so it enjoys a metaphysical position. For Gandhi, truth and non-violence presuppose each other.

The relation between truth and non-violence may be understood in this manner. Firstly, truth is the principle and non-violence is the consequence. Secondly, non-violence is the refusal to take part in, or to be associated with any attempt to forcibly impose anything as truth. Violence is the supreme sin against truth. To resist this by an opposing violence is to commit the same sin. Both aspects reveal the instrumental character of 'non-violence' as compared to the absolute character of truth.

So he says:

Ahimsa is not the goal. Truth is the goal. But we have no means of realizing truth in human relationships except through the practice of ahimsa.25

Truth plays an important role in Gandhian philosophy. It includes non-violence. “To me religion means truth and ahimsa or rather truth alone, because truth includes ahimsa, ahimsa being the necessary and indispensable means for its discovery.”26