"I lay claim to nothing exclusively divine in me. I do not claim prophetship. I am but a humble seeker after Truth and bent upon finding it. I count no sacrifice too great for the sake of seeing God face to face."

M.K. GANDHI

Harijan, 6-5-1933.
The Indian cultural heritage, extending across centuries, boasts of a large number of sages and seers and leaders. Gandhi stands out among these in a special way. He was a sage and at the same time a man of action. Even during heights of glory he never lost the common touch and the common man felt very close to him always. It is difficult to find another like him. Einstein acclaimed him as "the greatest man in the modern world." ¹

The personality of Gandhi has meant different things to different people. Each one has his own perception, seeing a different meaning in every facet of his personality and in every small or big incident related to him. Rabindranath Tagore has expressed his evaluation of Gandhi's personality in these words:

Great as he is as a politician, as an organizer, as a leader of men, as a moral reformer, he is greater than all these as a man because none of these aspects and activities limits his humanity. This man seems greater than his virtues, great as they are. ²

In the words of C. Rajagopalachari:

If there is any man with whom familiarity does not lessen but continually increases respect and love, it is Gandhiji. It may be true of all truly great men, but in my personal experience, I have found it true of Gandhiji. The more you move and work with him, the more you love and admire him. ³
In order to comprehend the multi-dimensional personality of Gandhi it is essential to take a look at his life as a whole.

Article 1

SHORT BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Seventy nine years (1869-1948) of long, fruitful and active life of Mahatma Gandhi may be conveniently divided into five phases.

1. Childhood

Mohandas Gandhi was born on October 2, 1869, the youngest child of Karamchand Gandhi and Putlibai at Porbandar, a small village in Gujarat. The Gandhis belonged to the Bania caste and to the Vaishnava sect of Hindu religion. Mohandas grew up in a home steeped in Vaishnavism with a strong tinge of Jainism. The family name, Gandhi signified 'grocer' but several members of the family had strayed into politics, some of them serving as high officials. Mohandas's father, Karamchand Gandhi was the Prime Minister of Porbandar. He did not have much in the way of formal education, but he was "known for his truthfulness, candour and loyalty."

Gandhi's mother, Putlibai, who was a simple and religious person, never cared much for jewellery and other worldly goods. She fasted frequently and divided her time between her home and the temple. She appeared to Mohandas as an embodiment of saintliness and religious devotion. He has acknowledged the deep influence of his mother in his moral and religious formation. He was also influenced by his servant
maid Rambha, who told him that the incantation of 'Ramanam' could remove all his fears. The toleration his family showed in visiting not only the Haveli temple of the Vaishnavas, but also the temples of Siva and Rama had impressed him deeply. These early impressions remained with him all through his life, and played an important role in the formation of his personality.

Mohandas spent his childhood at Porbandar. When he was seven his father was appointed Dewan of Rajkot and so the family had to move to Rajkot. This was a blessing for Mohandas as in those days Rajkot was one of the few places with facilities for higher education. Mohandas was a diffident and timid child and his record in the school was on the whole mediocre. But he was a disciplined student and was proud of the fact that he had never told a lie to his teachers or to classmates. There was in him the evident quality of truthfulness and any slight aspersion on his character would make him weep.

At the age of thirteen, Mohandas married Kasturbai Makanji, an illiterate girl of his own age, who was chosen for him by his parents. He lost one year of school because of his marriage but he resumed his studies afterwards. In 1887 he managed to pass the Matriculation examination.

2. Budding barrister

After matriculation Gandhi joined Samaldas College in Bhavanagar. He was not very happy at the college and he made up his mind to go to England to study law and to qualify as a barrister. Before his departure for London, he had to face stiff opposition from the elders.
of his caste. They summoned him before the caste tribunal and declared that the trip to England was violative of the Hindu Religious code. This however, did not worry Gandhi unduly. He mustered courage and was not afraid of even a possible excommunication from the caste.

The main concern of Gandhi, was to get permission from his mother and uncle. His uncle objected that lawyers trained in Europe forsook Indian traditions and dressed "as shamelessly as Englishmen." However, he was ready to sanction the trip if his mother agreed. Gandhi's mother, too, was hesitant about his trip to England but gave him permission after exacting from him a three-fold vow of abstention from women, wine and meat. He set out for England in September, 1888, leaving his wife and son in India.

After ten days of his arrival in England, Gandhi joined the Inner Temple, one of the four London Law colleges. For the nineteen-year old Gandhi, the transition from the semi-rural atmosphere of Rajkot to the cosmopolitan life of London was a painful process. He spent the first part of his stay, in typical English style, trying to be an English gentleman dressed in well-tailored suits and he even went to the extent of taking dancing lessons. Vegetarianism, which he wanted to practise at all costs, seemed to condemn him to semi-starvation and public ridicule but he remained true to the vows he had made to his mother. After sometime the young Mohandas reassessed his life style. He took his studies more seriously and tried to brush up his English and Latin.

During the three years in London, Gandhi confronted for the first time the social and revolutionary theories prevalent in Europe. He was also exposed to an impressive body of Western literature on Indian
religious traditions. He read the 'Bhagavad Gita' in English (The 'Song Celestial' by Sir Edwin Arnold) the 'Bible' and the 'Light of Asia'. He moved mostly with the vegetarians, reformers and clergymen and led a very plain and simple life. He met socialists and humanitarians like Edward Carpenter and theosophists like Annie Besant. He was elected to the executive committee of the London Vegetarian Society and he attended several of its meetings. This helped Gandhi in coming out of the shell of his native shyness and in acquiring a new poise. He was called to the bar on June 10, 1891 and on June 12 he sailed back to India.

On his return to India, painful surprises were in store for him. His mother had died during his absence. Gandhi wrote: "My grief was even greater than that at my father's death, most of my cherished hopes were shattered." 19

When he started his practice as a lawyer, in Bombay he cut a sorry figure, as he was not acquainted with the native law. So he shifted to Rajkot but without much success. Faced with a bleak future, he accepted an offer in Natal, South Africa.

3. Political activist

In 1893 Gandhi landed at Durban. South Africa was to present Gandhi with challenges and opportunities that he could hardly have foreseen. His brief stay at Durban made him deeply aware of colour prejudice and of the many legal disabilities suffered by Indians.

He was shocked to see the degrading condition of the Indian settlers in South Africa facing blatant racial discrimination.
Indians in South Africa were known among the Europeans as "Coolies", whatever their occupation, race or religion. Soon Gandhi himself began to experience the colour prejudice of South African whites. He was asked to put away his turban in the court, but he refused to do so. This incident received a good deal of publicity. On his way from Natal to Pretoria by train he suffered severe humiliation and physical assault. These humiliations, he learnt, were the daily lot of Indian traders and labourers in Natal.

Gandhi began to think how he could effectively resist racial segregation. Instead of seeking the prosecution of his assailants, he contemplated the basic issues, and their solutions. "It was not so much a question of redeeming his own self-respect as that of his community, his country, even of humanity." This commitment became the mainspring of all his political and public activities. The next step he took was to enrol himself as an attorney in the Transvaal Supreme Court. He settled down in Johannesburg. Mohandas blossomed into an efficient political campaigner around the age of twenty five.

The political activities of Gandhi in South Africa fall into two phases. The first consisted of campaigns, speeches, manifestos and conferences. He formed an Indian Ambulance Corps to help the British in the Boer war. 1902 marks the second phase of his political life. A new technique to remedy the political disabilities of the oppressed Indians germinated in Gandhi's mind. His dedication to public service was given dramatic expression when he nursed the plague-stricken patients shunned by others in Johannesburg. This service gained international attention for young Mohandas. In 1904 he founded a weekly journal, 'Indian Opinion' in which he poured out his thoughts and
feelings on all subjects of interest to the Indian community.\(^{25}\) Gandhi wrote in his Autobiography that the changes in his personal life were reflected in the journal as in a mirror. Gandhi's pamphlets and his ceaseless writings won the Indians many friends and active sympathisers. He presented to the South African Indians a definite line of action. By 1905 there were deep changes in the personal life of Gandhi and in his perceptions. Justice, humanity and integrity of India were the broad motives of Gandhi and he had begun to perceive the significance of the aims and methods of the struggle for realising these.

Christian and Quaker friends introduced Gandhi to the Western literature of non-violence. Thoreau's 'Civil Disobedience', 'The Sermon on the Mount' from the New Testament, Leo Tolstoy's 'The Kingdom of God is Within You', John Ruskin's 'Unto This Last' etc. made a profound impact on him.

If Tolstoy became a guide to Gandhi in developing the theory he later called satyagraha, it was Ruskin who led him to the conclusion that an unequal order, divorced from the realities of labour, is likely to make non-violence impossible.\(^{26}\)

Inspired by the ideas, he put them into practice by starting the Phoenix Settlement\(^{27}\) and later the Tolstoy Farm near Johannesburg. Satyagraha, the new weapon was staged against the repressive measures and the "Black Act"\(^{29}\) of the South African Government. The continuous struggle organised by Gandhi in the non-violent fashion were fruitful and he left South Africa for India towards the end of 1914.

By the time Gandhi returned to India he had developed into an able leader and a skilled fighter for human rights. His life and work in South Africa had in fact prepared and formed Gandhi for the greater struggle in India. "...South Africa furnished the rehearsal for the
real drama in India."  

4. **Emergence as a leader**

Gandhi understood that the urge of the Indian people for independence had reached a high point. He decided to commit himself heart and soul to the social welfare and political freedom of the country. He did not, however, plunge into action straightaway.

When he chose to enter the political arena he intentionally kept himself on the periphery declining to join any political agitation. At the same time he supported the British efforts in World War I. He started two Weeklies, 'Young India' and 'Harijan' to teach the masses his ideals of Satyagraha and non-violence. Gandhi's programme of non-violence and non-co-operation was first tested in the context of the British Government's failure to redeem its promise to the Muslims. On April 6, 1919, a nation-wide civil disobedience campaign was launched by Gandhi to protest against the "Rowlette Act."  

By the autumn of 1920, Gandhi had become the dominant figure on the Indian political scene. He refashioned the thirty-five-year old Indian National Congress into an effective political instrument of Indian Nationalism. He was arrested on March 10, 1922. In his absence, the 'Congress Party' split into two, one under Chitta Ranjan Das and Motilal Nehru and the other under C. Rajagopalachari and Vallabhai Patel. There was also disunity between Muslims and Hindus. In November, the Khilafat Conference was held and it brought Hindus and Muslims closer. In 1928 Gandhi expanded the scope of Charkha-spinning in order to foster Hindu-Muslim unity by asking all of them to ply the Charkha. He took
up the leadership of the Congress in 1929, in preparation of the struggle for 'Swaraj' envisaged by the Calcutta Congress session. The two main techniques of his new policy were encouragement of the use of Khadi and other Swadeshi (Indian made) goods and boycott of foreign cloth, especially those manufactured in the United Kingdom. On 26th January, 1930 he made the momentous declaration of the Congress goal for the attainment of 'Purna Swaraj' or complete independence. 

In March 1930 he launched the Satyagraha against tax on salt which had adversely affected the poorest in the community. He undertook the famous 'Dandi March' to defy the government's salt monopoly. In 1936, Gandhi settled in Segaon village so as to live among the poor and the downtrodden and show them by precept and practice how to live with dignity. He wanted to act rather than talk about service to the poor. Rejecting the need of the denominational religious conversion in principle, he stressed the need for purity of means in any religious conversion. The openness of Gandhi's mind and the earnestness of his search are clear from the religious correspondence he had carried on with Hindus in India and Christians in England.

In the programme of reform and reconstruction, Gandhi gave top priority to education and prohibition. He wrote a series of articles on education exposing the hollowness of the prevailing system and spelling out his own ideas of a village-oriented education. In 1937 he presided over the Education Conference at Wardha where his scheme of Basic Education was outlined.
5. **The last phase**

The National Struggle for Independence in India entered its last and crucial phase with the outbreak of World War II. During the war, Gandhi was ready to give his full cooperation to Great Britain if full freedom to India was assured. The British were not willing. So in 1942 Gandhi started the 'Quit India Movement.' The possibility of complete independence for India emerged when the Labour Party came to power in Britain but prior to this in 1947, fires of communal frenzy had spread in India. At the advanced age of seventy-seven, Gandhi risked his life tramping barefoot from village to village with his message of peace and unity. On 15th August, 1947, India became independent, but not without the partition of India into two nations, which was much against the wish of Gandhiji.

The earthly life of India's illustrious son was brought to a shocking end on the evening of 30th January, 1948, with an assassin's bullet. While going to his daily prayer meeting he was fatally shot from close range by Nathuram Vinayak Godse, a 35-year-old Brahmin fanatic. Gandhi had said earlier, "to die at the hands of one's brother is a privilege, provided you die bravely." He breathed his last with the name of 'Ram' on his lips.

Jawaharlal Nehru described the gloom of the nation in these words, "the light has gone out of our lives". Then Nehru continued:

I was wrong, for the light that shines in this country was no ordinary light. For the light that has illuminated this country for these many years will illumine this country for many more years, and a thousand years later that light will be seen in this country, and the world will see it and it will give solace to innumerable hearts.
PERSONALITY OF GANDHI : SALIENT FEATURES

Gandhi was a multi-faceted personality. A brief appraisal of the different dimensions of his rich personality is relevant here.

1. Charismatic leader and Visionary

Charisma literally means "a divinely inspired gift or talent. It also means a special quality of leadership that inspires great popular allegiance." It is commonly defined as "a certain quality of an individual by virtue of which he is considered extra-ordinary and treated as endowed with super-natural, super-human powers or atleast specific exceptional powers or qualities."

Undoubtedly Mahatma Gandhi has been a great charismatic leader of modern India. What exactly made him, with no exceptional outward talents to begin with, into a charismatic leader without parallel? Gandhi was not endowed with any super-natural or super-human qualities. His charisma consisted in his magnetic personality and utter dedication which attracted people from all walks of life. Dr. Rajendra Prasad describes his experience with Gandhi in his book, 'At the Feet of Mahatma Gandhi'. His veneration of Gandhi leads him to the imaginative feeling that "Mahatma is a modern replica in human form of the sacred Ganga." The author establishes from his own encounters with Gandhi that at the first meeting itself he felt so attached to him that he voluntarily did what Gandhi had asked him to. Against the backdrop of his own experience he shows how Gandhi had influenced the masses of India.
John D.K. Sundersingh, points out that "the greatest quality that Gandhiji displayed was his sense of identity with the Indian people." This sense of identity was realised in his life by thinking, feeling and living with the poor, neglected, exploited, illiterate and downtrodden people in India. He writes: "My humble occupation has been to show people how they can solve their own difficulties." This identification with the masses, as much as was humanly possible, generated considerable love and devotion in his followers who came under his spell, marked him out as a great charismatic leader.

Max Weber is of the view that charismatic leaders emerge in history to break the existing structure and give a new life and orientation to society. According to him charisma is often anti-institutional and re-creative. With the power of this charisma such leaders shatter the existing norms and lay the foundation for new norms envisaged by themselves.

Weber's view of charismatic leadership fits Gandhi perfectly. He emerged as the leader of the Indian freedom movement in the 1920's, throwing up serious challenges to the existing colonial system. Gandhi with no army at his command, was able to successfully challenge the might of the British Empire. Horace Alexander in his book, "Gandhi Through Western Eyes", portrays Gandhi as the first man in Afro-Asia who stood up against the white colonial overlords and built up a new political culture based on Indian values.

Gandhi who led his people out of captivity into the promised land of political freedom, was a visionary, too. A visionary is farsighted and creative and has a comprehensive outlook. Gandhi was
prophetic in laying emphasis on the spiritual regeneration of this ancient land as a prelude to and as a necessary precondition for the achievement of political freedom and the recovery of national greatness. He was sharp enough to see that a tight compartmentalisation of life into religion and politics, sacred and secular will not galvanize the people of India in their struggle for freedom.

In the words of K.L. Seshagiri Rao, religion for Gandhi meant not a religion of preaching but a religion of action. The tool for such an involvement, for tireless action, was politics. The core of Gandhi's ideals consists in his belief that "politics today encircles us like the coils of a snake from which one cannot get out, no matter how one tries." The only way of wrestling with the snake is to introduce religion into politics. His struggles which were outwardly political, were spiritual for him. The breaking of 'Salt law', 'Quit India Movement' and everything else was undertaken in a spirit of dedication. His far-sightedness also helped him to note that conventional weapons would not be effective in attaining political freedom for India.

Out of his creative genius he fashioned a totally new weapon - a weapon the world had never dreamed of, namely 'Satyagraha'. Satyagraha literally means "holding to truth" or "insistence on truth." R.R. Diwakar in his book "My Encounter with Gandhi" recalls Gandhi's role "not merely as the architect of India's freedom but also as an inventor of a new weapon of resistance - Satyagraha, which relies entirely for its sharpening and use on inner resources, our soul, the very spirit of all human beings." Gandhi unleashed a new force into the social dynamics of power and its control. Satyagraha is an
effective weapon, if self-control is used as a moral force. It presupposes that the end does not justify the means. The concept of Satyagraha establishes a close moral nexus between means and ends.

From the fashioning of a new weapon in Satyagraha we find Gandhi the visionary taking a quantum leap with his concept of 'Sarvodaya'. Sarvodaya is a compound Sanskrit word derived from 'Sarva' meaning "all" and 'Udaya' meaning "uplift or progress". Sarvodaya thus means total welfare or welfare of all. The principle that underlies this is that the good of the individual is contained in the good of all. It means not only economic equality but also equal opportunities for all individuals and for all societies. It is a clarion call to mankind as a whole to develop the physical, economic, social, mental and moral potentialities. It means a non-violent revolution, a revolution in the thoughts and morals of mankind, a concept of sharing, a concept of laying emphasis on giving instead of getting.

Through his varied experiences, Gandhi had proved himself to be a man of practical thinking and prophetic vision. Although deeply involved in the present, he could meaningfully connect his past experiences with his present and foresee his future as linked to the present. He looked forward without forgetting the past.

2. **Profile of courage and Streak of humour**

   Courage and determination can be described as two sides of the same coin; both are mutually dependent. If courage gives the vital energy to take upon oneself hard and difficult tasks, determination enables one to persevere and see them through.
Gandhi was exceptionally gifted with both these qualities. He had the mental stamina to do what he believed to be right even when the risk was very high. A man of steel, Gandhi never yielded to any kind of physical or mental intimidation. These qualities shine through his bold defiance of illegitimate laws and his readiness to face the consequences. His fearless courage is clearly manifested in the indefinite fasts unto death, which he used to undergo in order to uphold the causes he firmly held. Gandhi had the inner strength to face the British officials as well as his other opponents with calmness and gentleness. He believes that "when we cease to be master's and reduce ourselves to the rank of servants, humbler than the very dust under our feet, all fears will roll away like mist; we shall attain ineffable peace." 54

The source of Gandhi's courage was his firm commitment to the practice of truth and his readiness to obey the voice of his conscience. He told the Magistrate of Champaran, "I have disregarded the order served upon me, not for want of respect for lawful authority, but in obedience to the higher law of our being, the voice of conscience." 55 Naturally, he had no hesitation in challenging evil, injustice or any form of untruth. He challenged the legitimacy of the British Government, because an alien government has no moral basis and it cannot understand the problems of the native population; it can therefore be only evil and unjust.

Gandhi's courage emanated from his conscience and it was never characterised by rashness, bitterness, revenge or any such 'negative' traits often found in ordinary mortals. His own words bear this out: "I am not anti-English, I am not anti-British; I am not anti-any.
government: but I am anti-untruth; anti-humbug, and anti-injustice. So long as the government spells injustice it may regard me as its enemy, an unplacable enemy." 56  His iron-will and strong determination were mostly couched in mild and polite words. His adversaries could never understand this. General Smuts's Secretary put his bewilderment in these words: "I do not like your people and do not care to assist them at all, but how can we lay hands on you? and this is what reduces us to sheer helplessness." 57

This man of extraordinary courage and determination had a redeeming streak of humour. Gandhi with his gap-toothed puckish smile possessed a ready and mischievous sense of humour. A sense of the joy of living seemed to bubble inside him. His sense of humour sprang from his simplicity and from his serenity. His empathy with all people irrespective of caste, creed or colour, his geniality, his tolerance of the frailities of those around him - all these made his humour very gentle and benign.

A man with a ready wit, Gandhi was once asked why he always travelled in a third class compartment. With a glint of mischief in his eyes Gandhi said, "Because there is no fourth class." 58  He greatly enjoyed the thrust and parry of verbal duels. On his birthday Gandhi with a vermillion mark on his forehead was sauntering around. Sarojini Naidu, ever ready to make a joke at Gandhi's cost said: "Gandhiji, you look like a bridegroom." 59  Immediately came the repartee "Yes, with you as my bride." 60

On his birth anniversary in 1947, Gandhi was to be presented with a bag of money collected for the occasion. Before presenting it
Sarojini Naidu teasingly said, "Supposing I do not present you the purse but walk away with it, what will you do?" Gandhi's retort was "I know you are capable of doing that." Gandhi liked all genuinely humorous persons who could laugh at themselves. He was a man of indomitable courage and strength, shouldering heavy burdens, but he was also a gentle and generous soul with a delightful sense of humour.

3. **Upholder of human dignity and Practical idealist**

The dignity of man and the meaning of man are linked to the essential nature of man. Human entity is complex, with an immortal soul and a perishable body. "Man in the flesh is essentially imperfect. He may be described as being made in the image of God, but far from being God." So every man has the capacity for the highest development because of his soul and its powers. This seems to be Gandhi's view of man. Man has the capacity for higher development. It is the universal desire to realise God who dwells within human hearts that distinguishes the humans from animals. This yearning of man to attain fulfilment should be channelized and attuned to the whole of creation. "The moment we have restored real living equality between man and man, we shall be able to establish equality between man and the whole creation." Gandhi gave topmost priority to individual dignity. A man has perforce to be the part of society, but not at the cost of his human dignity. A society whose members lose their individuality and dignity becomes a faceless machine. Gandhi wanted a social order in which "the prince and peasant, the wealthy and the poor, the employer and employee are all at the same level." He further explains: "My ideal is equal distribution, but so far as I can see, it is not to be realized. I therefore work for equitable
distribution." Horace Alexander applies to Gandhi the words about Jesus in the New Testament, "the common people heard him gladly," not the graduates of Athens or Rome. So it was and still is with Gandhi." Gandhi's appeal was universal, but it touched the common people in a special way because he upheld the respect and dignity of every man.

This is evidenced by the fact that thousands of Indians followed him and obeyed him without demur; they threw themselves into the struggle undergoing sufferings and humiliations at the call of Gandhi. His aim to make his "happiness dependent upon that of the poorest" was nothing but a reaffirmation of his belief in human dignity.

Gandhi who gave prime importance to human dignity was also cast in the mould of a practical idealist, who conceives what is possible in an existing situation and then translates them into action. Thus he practised what he preached, for what he preached was eminently practicable.

Gandhi had the genius to embody his idealism in concrete programmes of action. Hence Gandhian idealism and realism did not mean a dichotomy of contrasting traits but a fascinating combination of high thinking and application, a wonderful harmony of theory and practice, of action and reflection.

Indian villages had presented a picture of neglect and degradation and the people were wanting in zeal and enterprise for their own welfare. Gandhi says, "If the village perishes India will perish too, India will be no more India. Her own mission in the world
will get lost."  

So, for Gandhi, to serve the villages was to serve India. He did not keep this merely as an ideal but put it into practice. It was primarily for the poor village folk that he formulated the plan for introducing the charka and establishing Gramodyog Sangha. Gandhi writes in Young India, "I would make the spinning wheel the foundation on which to build a sound village life; I would make the wheel the centre round which all other activities will revolve."  

According to Gandhi "the law governing every villager is that he will suffer death in the defence of his and his village's honour."  

Manmohan Choudari in his book, 'Exploring Gandhi' portrays Gandhi as one who straddled the world with a philosophy of thought and action that cut across old categories and sought to provide a more satisfactory way of dealing with life. This can be discerned in Gandhi's reaction to the system of untouchability. Gandhi had clear views regarding untouchability from the very early days: He recalls in his Autobiography, "I told my mother that she was entirely wrong in considering physical contact with Uka (an 'untouchable') as sinful."  

Commenting on the occasions when he had differed from his wife, he wrote later:

I was wedded to the work for the extinction of 'untouchability' long before I was wedded to my wife. There were two occasions in our joint life when there was a choice between working for the untouchables and remaining with my wife and I could have preferred the first. But thanks to my good wife, the crisis was averted.  

He took a decisive step when he brought an untouchable into his ashram.
Gandhi was a classic example of the precept, 'Practise what you preach'. He translated into action all that he preached and practised what he professed. When he was approached for a message during communal riots in 1947 he said, "My life is my message." Thus, respect for human dignity and the commitment to practise what he preached became the woof and warp of the personality of Gandhi.

4. **Yogi in action and Ascetic**

Yoga, essentially is the quintessence of the thoughts and perceptions of thousands of years of Indian culture. The word is derived from the Sanskrit root 'Yuj' to join, to come together. Today many intellectuals find Yoga as the Science and Art of making a human being fully aware holistically of all the energies - physical, vital, mental, moral, aesthetic and spiritual, inherent and dormant in him or her. It enables one to develop them harmoniously and to gain mastery over all of them, so that one may reach higher levels of existence. It clearly shows that when the body, mind and senses of a person come under the full control of the Atman or Soul, he is said to be a Yogi.

As a Yogi Gandhi was guided by the Bhagavad Gita which enshrines the concept of Nishkama Karma. It means that Karma (action) should be Nishkama (without attachment). Action is unavoidable, but renunciation of the fruits of action is possible. This desireless action is called nishkama karma or in Gandhi's words anasaktiyoga. According to Gandhi, renunciation of the fruits of action is the basic theme of the Gita. He states: "This is the centre around which the Gita is woven. This renunciation is the central sun, round which devotion, knowledge and the rest revolve like planets." Gandhi made
it the corner stone of his life, with astonishing simplicity.

The relentless practice of nishkama karma made Gandhi a yogi of action free from petty jealousies, free from ego and the traps of self-aggrandizement. Free from anxiety, worry and tension, he was surprisingly confident of his action - a man at peace with his Lord. He brought spirituality out from the cloisters of mutts and sanctuaries of vedic scholars to bear on the action of common man in the market place. He says, "I am not built for academic writings; Action is my domain.... the world does not hunger for Shastras. What it craves and will always crave for is sincere action."84

Detachment from action even while being immersed in it, is the hallmark of a true yogi. Gandhi was a true yogi wedded to the concept of karma as service to the people based on the precept of nishkama karma. He writes in Young India:

And as I know that God is found more often in the lowliest of His creatures than in the high and mighty, I am struggling to reach the status of these. I cannot do so without their service. Hence my passion for the service of the supressed classes.85

In order to become a true yogi one has to practise continuously self-mortification which is an important characteristic of an ascetic. An ascetic is “One who leads a very austere and self-denying life practising rigid abstinence and devotion.”86 Gandhi held that the "renunciation of the flesh is essential for realizing Truth."87 The ideas of renunciation and mortification of flesh were around in this country from very early days. With such a cultural and religious backdrop Gandhi's acceptance of asceticism as a way of life is not surprising.
The practice of fasting, prayer and penance made the ascetic path less
difficult. Kathopanishad says: "Man is surrounded by the good and
the pleasant; both involve him in the manifold activities of the world.
He who seeks the good is ennobled and he who chooses the pleasant
declines."\(^\text{88}\)

When Gandhi's struggles were intense he resorted to fasting and
penance, like the Jain monks who observe stricter penance and
mortification of the flesh when confronted with intractable questions.
Gandhi practised asceticism during periods of intense mental crisis.

A votary of self-discipline, Gandhi believed in the continuing
process of self-purification. In 1920 he wrote to G.A. Natesan
"....fasting then is a crucifixion of the flesh with a corresponding
freedom of the spirit..."\(^\text{89}\) His long fasts brought him considerable
physical suffering, but he was ever willing to pay the price. He
believed that confession was a means to self-purification and wrote:
"I believe in confessing one's mistakes and correcting, such confession
strengthens and purifies the soul...."\(^\text{90}\)

Gandhi believed that diet had much to do with the control of
passions and spiritual growth. He abstained from all condiments and
intoxicants. He took only what he considered necessary nourishment
for good health. He advised the Congress members to "hold all you
can on the big things but do some little thing yourself, show that
you are a real revolutionary not just by risking your life and going
to jail but by giving up tobacco especially British tobacco and
alcohol. Learn Hindustani, your national tongue. Sit down to table with
an untouchable. Above all, spin, spin until your hands become as nationalist.
as your heart or your mind."{superscript}91 Gandhi was the first one to practise all these he had prescribed.

Gandhiji rose from a hesitant faltering youth to the heights of total detachment through sheer determination, self-discipline, prayer, fasting and intensive self-training in the spirit of asceticism.

5. **Integrated personality**

An integrated personality is one who is at peace with himself, his society and his God. The aims and ambitions of such a person are in accord with his capacities and goals. For Gandhiji, life is one, an integrated whole. Manmohan Chaudari in his volume, 'Exploring Gandhi', uncovers all aspects of Gandhi's great and rich life of growing and changing thought and teachings with a visible expression of the grand synthesis of his integrated personality.{superscript}92 Gandhi states: "What I want to achieve... is self-realization, to see God face to face, to attain moksha."{superscript}93 I live and move and have my being in pursuit of this goal."{superscript}94 Gandhi's whole life is synthesised to this ultimate goal through his various activities in the different fields of life, tending towards unity and integrity.

According to J.B. Kripalani, a close associate of Gandhi, the vision of life to Gandhi was an integral whole, not divided into separate watertight compartments, political, economic, social, individual and collective.{superscript}95 These different facets were guided and regulated by purusharthas, the traditionally recognized basic values in Indian culture - Dharma (righteousness), Artha (material goods), Kama (love) and Moksha (final emancipation or perfection of the self) which will be discussed later.
Since Gandhi viewed life as an integrated whole based on the basic values of Indian culture, a set of moral laws - truth and non-violence - should guide and regulate equally to all departments of life. This integrated approach to life based on truth and love will help in the formation of strong character emphasising the co-ordination of thought, speech and action.

Gandhi's integrated personality, according to G. Ramachandran, exhibits a new dimension of synthesis of the West and the East. Reason is a friend up to a point from the West and faith is the guide that leads to truth, from the East moulding the character in the formation of the whole personality. Gandhi fearlessly lived the truth through his love, in action. This 'love in action' for Gandhi, is service rendered to humanity. He wrote:

The only way to find God is to see Him in His creation and be one with it. This can only be done by service of all. I am part and parcel of the whole, and I cannot find Him apart from the rest of humanity.

The integrated personality of Gandhi manifests a harmonious co-ordination of thought, speech and action as well as of body, mind and spirit. The overwhelming image of Gandhi imprinted on the minds of his generation was that of a liberator with humane and charismatic leadership. He was not endowed with any native super-human gifts or qualities, but he was able to maximize his potential and attain great heights. This created considerable awe and devotion among his followers. At the same time they felt that he was one who had identified himself completely with them.

The traits of prophetic vision, sense of realism, far-sightedness
and creativity were evident in the new weapon he had devised - the weapon of satyagraha - with which he led the masses of India to the promised land of political freedom. Courage and determination, the dominant quality of Gandhi's personality provided the vital energy for doing what he believed to be right, even at the risk of his life. The source of his courage was truth and firm commitment to the practice of truth. In discerning truth he was guided by the voice of his conscience. His steely qualities of rare courage and determination were balanced with a refined human sensitivity and a natural sense of humour.

Gandhi's life was lived in harmony with the whole of creation, but he gave top priority to humanity, to individual dignity and self-respect. He practised what he preached in politics and in human relations. This made him long for a social order in which the prince and the pauper, the employer and the employee would enjoy equal status. Thus the personality of Gandhi was an intermix of idealism and concrete action.

With astonishing simplicity he made 'yoga in action' and asceticism, the basis of his ascent towards perfection. He was a true yogi wedded to the concept of karma as service to the people, based on the precept of nishkama karma. Thus detachment from action even while immersed in it, marks out the yogi in Gandhi. In order to achieve his ultimate goal, he subjected himself to rigorous self-discipline through prayer, fasting, confession and non-violence in thought and action.
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