CHAPTER-III
LIFE SKETCH AND GENERAL PHILOSOPHY OF
MAHATMA GANDHI

3.1 LIFE SKETCH OF MAHATMA GANDHI:
3.1.1 BIRTH AND PARENTAGE:

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born at Porbandar, a coastal city in Kathiawad (now a part of the Gujarat State) on the 2nd October 1869. He was the youngest child of his parents, Karamchand and Putlibai. Gandhis belonged to the Modh Bania community. They were originally grocers. However, Uttamchand, Mohan’s grandfather, rose to become Dewan of the Porbandar State. Mohan’s father, Karamchand, also served as the Dewan of Porbandar, Rajkot and Vankaner States. Karamchand had little education, but has shrewdness of judgment and practical knowledge acquired through experience. Putlibai, his fourth wife, was younger to him by 25 years. She was not much educated but was well-informed about practical matters. Ladies at the palace used to value her advice. She was deeply religious and superstitious and had strong will-power. Gandhiji had a great devotion for his father and he often used to be present at the discussions about the State problems. Gandhis had Parsi and Muslim friends and Jain monks used to make regular visits. Gandhiji thus had occasion to hear discussions about religious matters also.

3.1.2 CHILDHOOD:

Gandhiji attended primary school at Porbandar. When he was seven, his family moved to Rajkot. He was a mediocre student, was shy and avoided company. He read little besides the text books and had no love for outdoor games. However, he was truthful, honest, and sensitive and was alert about his character. Plays about Shravana and Harishchandra made a deep impression on him. They taught him to be truthful at any cost and to serve his parents with devotion.

He was married along with his brother and cousin for the sake of economy and convenience. He was only 13 then. Kasturbai, his wife, was of the same age. She was
illiterate but strong-willed. He wanted to teach her but found no time. His experience later made him a strong critic of child-marriages.

Gandhiji joined High School at Rajkot. He was liked by the teachers and often received prizes. He neglected physical training and handwriting, but later on he repents and realized their importance in life. Mohan’s father died when he was 16.

Mohan passed the matriculation examination in 1887. He attended the Samaldas College at Bhavnagar, but left after the first term. At that time, Mavji Dave, a learned Brahman, an old friend and adviser of the family advised him to go to England to study law. He made up his mind and overcame resistance from the family-members. He took vow not to touch wine, women and meat at the instance of his mother to remove her fears and he then sailed from Bombay in September 1888, leaving behind his wife and a son. The caste elders were against his going to England and they excommunicated him from the caste.

3.1.3 GANDHIJI IN ENGLAND:

On September 4, 1888, Gandhi left for England. He was admitted as a student at the Inner Temple on November 6, 1888, and matriculated at London University, in June 1890. He learned French and Latin, physics and Roman law. He read Roman law in Latin and brought many books. He improved his English. During his stay in London, he read various books on different religions that later on helped him to form his religious ideology. Gandhi first read the Gita in Sir Edwin Arnold’s translation while he was in second-year law student. He was very much moved by the spirit of the Gita. Before that, he had not even read the Gita. He also read Edwin Arnold’s ‘The Light of Asia’, Blavatsky’s ‘Key of Theosophy’ and the Bible. Gita and The New Testament made a deep impression on him. The principles of renunciation and non-violence appealed to him greatly. He continued the study of religions throughout his life. He had no difficulty in passing the final examinations. Called to the bar on June 10, 1891, he enrolled in the High Court on June 11, and sailed for India on June 12. He had no wish to spend a single extra day in England.
3.1.4 GANDHIJI IN SOUTH AFRICA:

Gandhiji returned to India as a barrister, but he knew nothing about the Indian law. Lawyers used to pay commissions to touts to get cases. Gandhiji did not like this. Besides he was shy and an occasion to argue in the Court unnerved him. He became a disappointed and dejected ‘briefless barrister’. After this, he started the work of drafting applications and memorials but this job did not suit him. He has a special aptitude for teaching and he used to teach all the children of the family and later on he applied for the post of a teacher in a school but he was denied on the ground that he was not eligible for that post, as he was not a graduate. At that time, a South African firm Dada Abdulla and Co. asked for his assistance in a case. Gandhiji eagerly agreed and sailed for South Africa in April 1893.

Right since his arrival, Gandhiji began to feel the pinch of racial discrimination in South Africa as Indian community was ignorant and divided, and therefore unable to fight it. In connection with his case, Gandhiji has to travel to Pretoria. He was traveling in the first class but a White passenger and railway officials asked him to leave the first class compartment. Gandhiji refused, whereupon he was thrown out along with his luggage on the platform of Maritzburg station. It was a severely cold night. Gandhiji spent the night shivering and thinking furiously. He ultimately made up his mind to stay in South Africa, fight the racial discrimination and suffer hardships. It was a historic decision. It transformed Gandhiji. He had also to travel some distance by a stage-coach. During this travel also, he was insulted and beaten. On reaching Pretoria, Gandhiji called a meeting of the local Indians. There he learnt a lot about the condition of Indians. It was there that he made his first public speech and suggested formation of an association. He offered his services for the cause.

Gandhiji later settled the case, for which he has come, through arbitration. He then decided to return home. But at the farewell party, he came to know about a bill to restrict Indian franchise. Gandhi thought that it had grave implications. The people then pressed him to stay for some time and he agreed. Gandhiji’s first major fight had started. He addressed meetings, petitioned to the legislative assembly, and conducted a signature campaign. He also started regular legal practice there, and soon became a
successful and leading lawyer. For sustained agitations, a permanent organization was needed and the Natal Indian Congress was born.

Gandhiji returned to India in 1896 to take away his family and to spread the news of the miseries suffered by his people in South Africa. In December that year, he received a cable to return to Durban at once. Gandhiji went back with his wife, two sons and nephew. Gandhiji continues his work there, organizing the Natal Indian Congress, and helping the labourers. He went to India towards the end of 1901, promising to return to South Africa if he was needed. He traveled widely and worked closely with Gopal Krishan Gokhale, whom he considered his guru. He was about to settle down in Bombay, when he received an urgent telegram from South Africa to rush there. True to his word, he hurried back. This time he was not to see India for 12 years.

Gandhiji again went to South Africa. He found that the condition of Indians has worsened and so he had to devote himself to public work. It was at this time a friend, Madanjit, came to Gandhiji with a proposal to start a journal called Indian Opinion. Gandhiji liked the idea and in 1904, the journal was launched. The Journal, published every week in Gujarati and English, reflected his ideals and gave the Indian readers a liberal education. With absolute frankness, Gandhi pointed out to them their failings and prejudices. India Opinion also gave the Europeans a correct picture of the difficulties faced by the Indians in South Africa.

Another thing that happened that year was that Gandhiji met H.S.L. Polak, then a sub-editor of The Critic. The two soon became friends, as their outlook on life was similar. Polak presented to Gandhiji a copy of a book by John Ruskin called Unto This Last. This book on economics presented many new ideas, and it influenced Gandhiji a great deal. Unto This Last cast a tremendous influence on Gandhiji. He himself has written in his autobiography, ‘Of these books, the one that brought about an instantaneous and practical transformation in my life was Unto This Last. I translated it later it into Gujarati, entitling it ‘Sarvodaya’ (the welfare of all).
3.1.5 THE PHOENIX SETTLEMENT:

He was deeply impressed by Ruskin’s ideas and decided to put them in practice immediately. Gandhiji purchased some land near Phoenix station and established the Phoenix settlement in mid-1904. The settlers have to erect structures to accommodate themselves and the printing press. ‘Indian Opinion’ was transferred to Phoenix. The Phoenix Settlement, which Gandhi started in 1904 in South Africa, became later on a place of great educational importance. It was two and a half miles from Phoenix station and fourteen miles from Durban. It was there, that Gandhi began to translate into practice his philosophy of education. The Phoenix Settlement was originally meant for running the ‘Indian Opinion’, a publication of which Gandhiji was the editor. But gradually a number of Satyagrahis swarmed up to Gandhiji’s cottage with their families to live a life along the ideals of Gandhiji. The children in the settlement numbered about thirty. They received not only literary training but also practical instruction on agriculture and printing. They were expected to live among clean surrounding, spending the whole day on their studies and physical labour-engaging themselves either in cooking, gardening or in some other constructive work. Thus, besides his home, wherein he tried to keep up an ideal atmosphere, the Phoenix Settlement also proved to an ideal school-cum-workshop, wherein both the theory and practice of learning could go hand in hand. It was at this time that Gandhiji prepared the seeds of his future educational reconstruction of India. It was here, where he formed his ideas of education, which were later on to blossom into perfection.

3.1.6 BIRTH OF SATYAGRAHA:

The White rulers were bent on keeping South Africa under their domination. They wanted a few Indians there as possible, and that too as slave-labourers. In Transvaal, Indians were required to register themselves. The procedure was humiliating. The registration was proposed to make stricter in 1906. Gandhiji realized that it was a matter of life or death for the Indians. A mammoth meeting was held in September 1906 to oppose the bill. People took oath in the name of God not to submit to the bill at any cost. A new principle has come into being – the principle of Satyagraha.
The bill about registration was however passed. Picketing against registration was organized. A wave of courage and enthusiasm swept the Indian community. The Indian community rose as one man for the sake of its survival and dignity.

The agitation was first called ‘Passive resistance’. Gandhi, however, did not like that term. It did not convey the true nature of the struggle. It implied that it was the weapon of the weak and the disarmed. It did not denote complete faith in non-violence. Moreover, Gandhi did not like that the Indian struggle should be known by an English name. The term ‘Sadagraha’ was suggested. Gandhi changed it to ‘Satyagraha’ to make it represent fully, the whole idea. Satyagraha means asserting truth through non-violence. It aims at converting the opponents through self-suffering.

Gandhiji was ordered to leave the colony. He disobeyed and was jailed for two months. Indians filled the jails. Repression failed to yield the results. General Smuts called Gandhi and promised that the law would be withdrawn if the Indians agreed to voluntary registration. Gandhiji agreed. He and his co-workers were set free. Gandhi exhorted Indians to register voluntarily. Smuts, however, betrayed Gandhi. The agitation was again resumed. The voluntary registrations certificated were publicly burnt. Meanwhile, Transvaal passed Immigration Restriction Act. This too was opposed by the Indians. They crossed Transvaal border illegally, and were jailed. Gandhi too was arrested and convicted. The fight continued in spite of the repression.

3.1.7 TOLSTOY FARM:

In 1911, Gandhiji started an ashram in Transvaal with the help and guidance of Hermann Kallenbach, a German co-worker and called it ‘Tolstoy Farm’ after the Russian saint, Count Leo Tolstoy. Here, people belonging to various religions lived together as corporate body. There were among these, Hindu, Mussalman, Parsi and Christian boys and some Hindu girls also. As the Tolstoy Farm grew in course of time, Gandhi found it necessary to make provision for the education of its boys and girls. But somehow or other, he did not feel inclined to continue the then existing system of education, in which he had little faith. Prompted by an inner urge, he wanted to embark on a voyage of exploration and discovery in the field of education and find out by experiment the true system of education. At Tolstoy Farm, Gandhiji
assumed the place of pater familias of those children. The Tolstoy Farm had its own peculiar features, which entitled it to great renown. In fact, it proved to be an ideal laboratory for his educational experiments. Here, he attached as always, the greatest importance to culture of the heart, character building in education. Gandhiji appreciated the necessity of literary training in the education of the children of the children of the Tolstoy Farm and therefore, he started some classes with the help of Mr. Kallenbach and others. He did not underrate the importance of physical culture of the children. This, they automatically got in the course of their daily routine. Thus at Tolstoy Farm the boys got physical, mental and spiritual training.

3.1.8 THE LAST PHASE OF SATYAGRAHA:

Satyagraha continued for four years. Gandhi discontinued his legal practice in 1910. After many ups and downs, the last phase of Satyagraha began in September 1913. A black law imposing three pounds tax on Indians provided occasion for it. Satyagrahis crossed Transvaal border defying the law. Even the women were invited to join. Indian workers in the Natal coal-mines struck work and joined the struggle. Gandhi led a large contingent of these workers. They were about 2200 in numbers. It was an epic march. It aroused sympathy for Satyagraha and indignation for the South African government throughout England and India. Indian National Congress supported the Satyagraha. Gandhiji was arrested. The Satyagrahis marched to Natal without their leader. There, they were arrested and jailed. Thousands of labourers struck work in sympathy. The public outcry in India forced the Indian government to express sympathy for the Indian cause. The repression having failed, General Smuts had to bow ultimately. Indian demands were accepted. The fight was over. Gandhi now could return to India where a great work awaited him.

It was South Africa which made Gandhiji. He has gone there as a young, shy, brief less barrister. He returned as an extra-ordinary leader who has mobilized masses to an unprecedented extent for a novel fight. In South Africa, Gandhi’s ideas were shaped. He was influenced by Ruskin, Tolstoy and Thoreau. He made a deep study of religion there, and became a staunch believer in non-violence. The principle of Satyagraha was born in South Africa.
3.1.9 GANDHIJI IN INDIA: RISE OF LEADERSHIP:

Gandhi left South Africa forever and returned to India in July 1914. Initially he stayed at Shantivan Ashram of Noble Laureate Rabindranath Tagore. By 1917, he established Satyagraha ashram on the banks of Sabarmati River.

In 1917, Gandhi led a successful Satyagraha campaign fighting for the rights of the indigo planters at Champaran. Champaran was a turning point in India’s freedom struggle. For the first time with peaceful means, Gandhi declared that the British could not order me about in my country’. Simultaneously, he tapped the power of the present masses and awoke their spirit of dignity and self-reliance.

In 1918, Gandhi fought for the rights of the textile mill workers of Ahmedabad. Here for the first time he introduced a method of arbitration-fasting. Gandhi felt this method eliminated violence and the compulsion, which may present even peaceful struggles. ‘I fasted to reform those who love,’ stated Gandhi. After considerable arbitration and negotiation, the mill owners agreed to the demands.

In March 1918, Gandhi led a Satyagraha for peasants of Kheda. While in April, he appealed for a nationwide hartal protecting the enactment of the barbarous Rowlatt Act. However, violence broke out and for the first time Gandhi had to suspend the Satyagraha calling it a Himalayan miscalculation. Gandhi realized that a peaceful agitation could only be led by trained Satyagrahis (non-violent soldiers).

In 1920, Gandhi was elected the president of the All India Home Rule League. With no freedom in sight, he urged a resolution for Satyagraha campaign of Non co-operation. Gandhi decided upon an experiment of mass civil disobedience at Bardoli in 1922. He had to suspend the campaign owing to the outbreak of violence at Chauri Chaura. Subsequently, he was arrested for seditious articles in ‘Young India’. Gandhi was sentenced to six years in jail at the ‘great trial’ in Ahmedabad under Judge Broomfield.

In 1929, he was arrested for burning foreign cloth under the non-co-operation movement. In December, the Congress session at Lahore voted for complete
independence. January 26 was proposed as Independence Day and Gandhiji launched
the third all-India ‘Satyagraha campaign’.

On March 12 1930, Gandhi, 61, set off from Sabarmati with 79 Satyagrahis on
the historic Salt March to Dandi. Gandhiji and his followers covered 100 miles in 24
days to defy the ‘nefarious’ Salt Act. Such publicized defiance required imagination
and dignity. Technically, legally nothing had changed, except that British imperialism
suffered a moral defeat. Gandhiji was arrested and sent to jail without trial.

By 1931 January, he was released unconditionally and my March he signed
the historic Gandhi-Irwin pact, which also ended civil disobedience or non-co-
operation on a mass scale. By August, he sailed for London to attend the second
round table conference. After returning from England, Gandhiji renewed the
Satyagraha campaign, the fourth nation-wide effort.

In 1932, against widespread opposition, Gandhiji began his ‘fast onto death’
protesting the British action of giving separate electorate to the untouchables. The fast
ended after the British accepted the ‘Yerwada Pact’.

By 1933, Gandhiji disbanded Satyagraha Ashram and converted it into a
centre for removal of untouchability. Then he toured India to help end untouchability.
He also founded the All India Village Industries Association.

In 1940, Gandhiji protested against Britain’s refusal to allow Indians to
express their opinions regarding World War II by launching an individual civil
disobedience campaign 23,000 people were arrested in connection.

The year was 1942 and ‘Poorna Swaraj’ (complete independence’ was still
not in sight. The Congress passed the ‘Quit India’ resolution’- the final nation-wide
‘Satyagraha campaign’ with Gandhiji as the leader. Before the campaign was
launched, all the congress leaders including Gandhiji were arrested. They were
imprisoned at Aga Khan Palace where Gandhiji began his fast to end deadlock
between viceroy and Indian leaders. On Feb 22, his wife Kasturba, 74, died in prison.
By May, Gandhiji was released unconditionally from the prison owing to decline in
health. This was his last imprisonment. Gandhiji had already spent 2,338 days in jail during his lifetime.

In 1946, at the age of 77, Gandhiji began his four-month tour of 49 villages in East Bengal to quell communal rioting over Muslim representation in provincial government. In the subsequent year, he also traveled in Bihar to lessen Hindu-Muslim tensions.

Although Gandhiji participated in talks with Lord Mountbatten and Jinnah, he opposed the division of the country in India and Pakistan. However, the country was partitioned and India granted independence. Riots broke out. Gandhiji prayed, fasted and traveled extensively to stop people from rioting.

After 1946, Gandhiji’s efforts were devoted to Hindu-Muslim unity. Jinnah proclaimed August 16, 1946 as Direct Action Day. It was never clarified what it involved. However, the Muslims responded to this call with vengeance. The great Calcutta killings followed. Gandhiji visited Noakhali and other areas to restore peace.

In 1948, Gandhiji undertook a fast for 5 days to bring communal peace in the country. On January 30, 1948, while holding a prayer meeting in Delhi, Gandhiji was shot dead by a Hindu fanatic Vinayak Nathuram Godse. Thus ended the eventful life of the greatest apostle of peace that the world had ever seen.

3.2 GENERAL PHILOSOPHY OF MAHATMA GANDHI:

3.2.1 INFLUENCES ON GANDHIJI:

Different factors, occasions and personalities have influenced Gandhiji’s life immensely. Piousness and morality of his mother in early days influenced him a good deal. In his childhood days, when he saw Harischandra drama he was deeply influenced to adhere truth in life whatever come on his way. Seed of Ramanama sown by his nurse, an old servant of the family named Rambha has greatly influenced his personality. When Gandhiji was thirteen, reading of the Ramayana by Ladha Maharaj before his father left a deep impression on him. After that, he regarded the Ramayana of Tulsidas as the greatest book in all devotional literature. He was influenced by the
essence of teaching and preaching of Buddha and Mahavir, which emphasized the idea of non-violence.

During his stay in London, on the advice of his two theosophist friends he read Sir Edwin Arnold’s translation of Gita named ‘The Song Celestial’. After going through the book Gandhiji remarked in his own words, “The book struck me as one of priceless worth. The impression has ever since been growing on me with the result that I regard it today as the book par excellence for the knowledge of truth. It has afforded me invaluable help in my moments of gloom.” At the same time he also read, ‘The Light of Asia’ by Sir Edwin Arnold, Madame Blavatsky’s ‘Key to Theosophy’. Bible’s New Testament especially the Sermon on the Mount, Bhagavadgita, Koran and other books on Hinduism deeply influenced his philosophy of life and religion.

Apart from the books, other eminent personalities also have a indelible effect on his philosophy of life. Gandhiji himself has told us that three great moderns have a deep impression on his life and captivated him. Raychandbhai by his living contact; Tolstoy by his book, ‘The Kingdom of God Is Within You’ and Ruskin by his ‘Unto This Last’. They exerted a formative influence on his philosophy of life and education. When Gandhiji got disillusioned with his legal practice he was introduced by his friend, Dr. P.J. Mehta, to the Gujarati poet and philosopher, Raychandbhai or Rajachandra, who was “a man of great character and learning”. Raychandbhai was real seeker after truth. Gandhiji has occasions to meet the heads of various faiths later on, but to quote his own words, “No one else has ever made on me the impression that Raychandbhai did. His intellect compelled as great a regard from me as his moral earnestness, and deep down in me was the conviction that he would never willingly lead me astray and would always confide to me his innermost thoughts. In my moments of spiritual crisis, therefore, he was my refuge.” In spite of this regard for Raychand bhai, Gandhiji could not enthroned him in his heart as his guru, but all the same the latter was on many occasions his guide and helper. He was an apostle of truth and non-violence and we can say that he played no small role in moulding Gandhiji’s philosophy of truth and non-violence, which influenced his life and
teachings later on. These two principles have also influenced his educational theory, which “springs out of non-violence”.

The influence exerted by Tolstoy and his teachings on the plastic mind of Gandhiji while he was young is of inestimable value. He acknowledged his debt of gratitude to the Russian sage when he said: “Tolstoy’s The Kingdom of God Is Within You overwhelmed me. It left an abiding impression on me.” All the books read by Gandhiji seemed to pale into insignificance before the independent thinking, profound morality and the truthfulness of Tolstoy’s book. Besides, he read Tolstoy’s The Gospels in Brief, What Then Shall We Do? And other books which “made a deep impression on me. I began to realize more and more the infinite possibilities of universal love.”

If we say that Gandhiji learnt his first lessons in ahimsa from Raychandbhai we can as well assert that the roots of his Gospel of Love lay in the teachings of Tolstoy. His philosophy of passive resistance is not negative in character; it is the use of love in its positive form. To Gandhiji’s mind, ahimsa is the same as love. Gandhiji believed that, “when non-violence is accepted as the law of life it must pervade the whole being and not be applied to isolated acts.” It was, therefore, quite natural that he incorporated the Gospel of Love, which is nothing but the positive aspect of non-violence in his theory of education and assigned to it a place of honour in it.

The gist of Gandhiji’s thesis that education should be imparted through handicraft or industry can also be perceived in the teaching of Tolstoy, as he himself admitted in his inaugural speech at the Wardha Conference on 22 October 1937.

Thus, Raychandbhai and Tolstoy set Gandhiji’s mind to vigourous thinking and prepared the ground for the formulation of his philosophy. They whetted his thirst for knowledge based on experience and experiment and awakened his critical faculty, which enabled him, ‘to read and hear not to believe and take for granted, but to weigh and consider’. They strengthened his belief in the eternal values of life and set him definitely on the path of a life of love and service that would lead him from darkness to light, from selfishness to service, from hate to love, from ignorance to right knowledge and ultimately to Truth which is God.
The third person who exercised the greatest influence on the life and philosophy of Gandhiji was Ruskin. His book, Unto This Last, gripped his mind so much so that he found it impossible to lay it aside, once he had begun it during his twenty-four hours’ journey from Johannesburg to Durban in 1904. He could not get any sleep that night and determined to change his life in accordance with the ideals of the book. It brought about an instantaneous and practical transformation in his life. Referring to the contribution it made to the moulding of his thoughts, Gandhiji says, “I believe that I discovered some of my deepest convictions reflected in this book of Ruskin and that is why it so captured me and made me transform my life. The teaching of Unto This Last I understand to be:

1. That the good of the individual is contained in the good of all.
2. That a lawyer’s work has the same value as the barber’s, inasmuch as all have the same right of earning their livelihood from their work.
3. That a life of labour, i.e., the life of the tiller of soil and the handicraftsman is the life worth living.

“The first of these I knew. The second I had dimly realized. The third had never occurred to me. Unto This Last made it as clear as daylight for me that the second and third were contained in the first. I arose with the dawn, ready to reduce these principles to practice.” The philosophy materialized with the establishment of Phoenix Settlement, near Durban.

From American philosopher anarchist Henry David Thoreau, Gandhiji learnt ‘Civil Disobedience’. From Marx he learnt socialism but he did not believe in violence for attaining socialism.

3.3 PHILOSOPHICAL DOCTRINES OF MAHATMA GANDHI:

The educational principles that Gandhiji propounded emanated from his general and social philosophy. The aims of education, the curriculum, the technique of teaching, the financial aspect of education and educational planning for the whole country, all these were directed by his philosophy of life. Therefore, a prior discussion of his philosophy of life is necessary to have a better perspective of his
educational principles. Gandhiji, the great thinker and educational reformer, had his own philosophy of life. The crux of all greatness of Mahatma Gandhi is his philosophy of life, deep and profound, saturated with idealistic and spiritualistic doctrines. He was a practical philosopher who believed not in theorizing but in putting into action in the practical fields all the idealistic principles, he advocated. Although Gandhi formulated manifold views on every aspect of life- God, Truth, Non-violence, dignity of labor, moral society are most important. Some of his prominent philosophical doctrines are as under:

3.3.1 VIEWS ON GOD:

According to Gandhiji, God is ultimate reality and man, world and nature-all are His manifestations. Man is both body and soul, and a part of God. Therefore, he has all the divine qualities in possibility, which he can realize by his own efforts and will. Like a true idealist, he believed in God. God is the indefinable, mysterious power that pervades everything. His will is supreme. Everyone should have a living faith in a living God. He says that we have come from one God by whatever name we worship Him. The ultimate aim of life is to attain God or realize ‘self’. To him God was “Life, Truth, Light and Love.” Thus, Gandhiji’s view on the nature of Reality is monistic. He says, “I believe in the absolute oneness of God and therefore also of humanity.” He again says, “I believe in the essential unity of man and for that matter of all that lives.” He further says, “I subscribe to the belief that all life in its essence is one.” He had a profound faith in one God and believed in the unity of men. God is the ultimate reality and all realities are subordinate to Him and subject to change. God is the changeless that holds all together, that creates, dissolves and recreates.

3.3.2 VIEWS ABOUT TRUTH:

Mahatma Gandhi used the term ‘truth’ to mean reality. To him, truth or satya is the ‘real existent’, and so, synonymous with God. God transcends the senses and the intellect. Faith “acts like sixth sense to unravel that which is beyond the purview of reason”. He looked upon a life of active social service as the true way to know God, and in this life of service, gave a prominent place to manual labour. Gandhiji held that God is made known in His works and truth is to be found in action. He
testified to an incarnate notion of truth and the Biblical view of reality as both transcendent and immanent. Gandhi ji considered that God is Satyam, Sivam, Sundaram, i.e., truth, good and beautiful. Truth, beauty and goodness are, thus, objective values recognized but not constituted by human mind, and they have to be realized actively by living a true, beautiful and good life.

Acc. to Gandhi ji, the ultimate reality in the world is Truth. Truth is the only means to realize God. He makes no difference between Truth and God. “Truth is God and God is Truth.” Truth is an inner voice. It is the call of conscience. His advice was to realize “Truth in life.” Devotion to truth at all costs was a passion with him throughout his life. “Truth which is the end and which is all pervading can be realized only through truth- through a way of living, characterized by strict discipline, poverty, non-possession, non-violence, sense of humility, discipline of mind, body and spirit.” Thus, realization of truth is the main aim of human life. Therefore, he says, “I have no God to serve but truth in all our personal and social dealing.”

3.3.3 VIEWS REGARDING NON- VIOLENCE:

Truth and Non-violence are the cardinal principles of Gandhian theory and practice. Both the principles are interdependent on each other that one can hardly distinguish one from another. Truth is the ultimate goal and the means to attain the goal is non-violence or Ahimsa. They are the two sides of a coin. It was, therefore, advised “Truth being our goal, Ahimsa should be our supreme duty to achieve the goal.” Ahimsa is the means, Truth is the end. Thus, Non-violence or ahimsa is the second main tenet of Gandhi ji’s philosophy of life. To him, “ahimsa is complete absence of ill-will against all that lives. In its dynamic condition, it means conscious suffering. Non-violence is, in its active form, good will towards all life. It is pure love.” Ahimsa is not a negative attitude; it is a positive attitude of tolerance, patience, perseverance, self-sacrifice and self-suffering. It entails power of the spirit, the power of truth and the power of love. Non-violence is a spiritual quality rooted in the power of reality, the inward creativeness of the soul. The seeker after truth should be disciplined in non-violent values as truth can be discerned only through non-violence- a pure heart, devoid of all cobwebs of ignorance, alone can hear the voice of God within and live up to it. Ahimsa being the means to truth, education should be directed
towards cultivating the non-violent spirit and education in truth will follow from it as its natural end. Gandhiji believed that when non-violence is accepted as the law of life it must pervade the whole being and not be applied to isolated acts. It was, therefore, quite natural that he incorporated the Gospel of Love, which is nothing but the positive aspect of non-violence in his theory of education and assigned to it a place of honour in it.

3.3.4 VIEWS ABOUT LOVE:

He strongly advocated love as epitome of life. Enemies should not be hated; rather they should be conquered through the weapon of love. One should love the entire creation of the universe. Hence, his concept of love is universal in nature. His entire social and political revolution is a replica of his love for mankind. Gandhiji’s religion was religion of love. He possessed insatiable love for mankind. Hence, he preached that only the law of love should guide all life. It is through love that we can attain truth. To see the universal and all prevailing spirit of truth face to face, one must be able to love the nearest of creation as oneself. One must rise above hatred, fear and vanity. Just as God is truth, God is love. This belief that God is life, truth, light and love is in fact, in accordance with Upanishadic philosophy. In his meetings with the peasants in the villages, Gandhiji was, in fact, face to face with God, love and truth.

3.3.5 VIEWS ON SATYAGRAHA:

Satyagraha is the practical application of Ahimsa. Gandhiji imbibed this idea from the Upanishads, from the teachings of Buddha, Mahavira, from the New Testament; Tolstoy’s The Kingdom of God is Within You and Ruskin’s Unto the Last. To Gandhiji, Satyagraha is a method of securing a right by personal suffering, and not by inflicting injury on others. A Satyagrahi could have reached the level of non-violence and self-control being aware of spiritual reality, would live a life of simplicity, renunciation and social service. Such Satyagrahis are to form the members of an ideal state.
The principle of non-violence put to work as a positive force against untruth, evil and destruction, Gandhi called Satyagraha. It is the opposition of physical force with soul-force. Satya means Truth. Agraha means holding fast. “It is misnomer to call it passive resistance, because it is not mere passive refusal to do thing but an active and aggressive effort to secure redress of wrong. It is really a moral equivalent of war without all its horrors and evils. It is a method of securing a right without inflicting injury on others”. It presupposes that the Satyagrahi (one who performs Satyagraha) has a living faith in God and has faith in the efficiency of non-violence; that although he holds his Truth conditionally he is prepared to die on its behalf until it is either vindicated or proved false; that he believes in the ultimate victory of Truth through its own witness. Satyagraha as a soul-force or spiritual force requires non-co-operation with evil in any form and co-operation with good even in the opponent. It requires hard discipline. In the application of Satyagraha “it is never the intention of Satyagrahi to embarrass the wrongdoer. He should avoid artificiality in all his doings. He acts naturally and from inward conviction.” As his object is to convert the other, the Satyagrahi should never resort to Satyagraha until he has exhausted every other possible means to arrive at a peaceful solution of the problem requiring Satyagraha, but once he has launched the programme of Satyagraha there is no turning back, no compromise. His bridges are burnt behind him.”

3.3.6 SOCIAL IDEAS OF MAHATMA GANDHI:

Gandhiji wanted to create a moral society based on truth, non-violence, justice, equality and universal brotherhood. To attain moral society, he wanted democracy and socialism but not socialism of Marxian type. He advocated decentralization and higher values of life. His mission was to build a classless society where there would be no exploitation and accumulation of wealth by unfair means. The wretched condition of the poor millions deeply pained him. So, he wanted that with political and social equality India should strive for economic equality.

He gave emphasis on service and cooperation rather than competition. Gandhiji believed that only in a classless society the Absolute (God) can be realized. Moral force and moral sanction would be the guiding factors of such a society. Gandhiji was of the conviction that the decentralization would encourage village and
village industries and equitable distribution of wealth. Villages were being exploited by the cities. Village upliftment was his mission of life. Therefore, he wanted to put an end to exploitation. He pleaded equal rights for women. He says, “Women will enjoy the same rights as men.”

In the moral society as envisaged by Gandhiji, service to God and community was the greatest creed. Acc. to him, “man’s ultimate aim is realization of God.” All the activities-social, religious, political-of man, therefore, should be motivated by this one aim. Service of all, therefore, should be the first fundamental of every human being. God, said Gandhiji, instead of being in temple, church and mosque, is to be found in the temple of humanity. Thus, Gandhiji wanted to create a new social order based on truth and non-violence. In such a non-violent society, individual freedom will be reconciled with social restraint through truth and non-violence.

Gandhiji was a ‘Karam Yogi’. He believed in deeds but not in words. He laid stress on physical labour, which was looked down by the then so-called sophisticated society. Thus, for physical labour, he introduced craft in his scheme of Basic Education.