CHAPTER - I: Introduction

1.1 Introduction:

Human nature has been understood in different ways by different thinkers, philosophies or schools of thoughts at different stages of history. Homer who is regarded as the first spiritual father of the western civilization held that man was essentially proud and free, on happy terms with himself, with the world and with Olympus. The gods were his friends and partners, and are very human.\(^1\) The king to Homer was no despot and speech was free. Heraclitus (544 – 484 B.C.) held that human nature is a microcosm of the entire nature and intelligence is common to all men. The individual is responsible for his action; he cannot blame God for the defects of his own character.\(^2\)

The Sophists (5 B.C.), the ancient Greek teachers, who took the life around them as they found it and taught everything by systematising different subjects of knowledge believed in the selfishness and inequality of human nature. Different individuals have different temperaments and capacities.\(^3\) Socrates (469 – 399 B.C.) believed that man has both

---


\(^2\) Ibid., p. 16

\(^3\) Ibid., p. 19
selfishness as well as the urge to promote welfare. While the former is injurious, the latter is useful. The latter nature is the primary of human nature.\(^4\)

Plato (428/27 – 347 B.C.) was the first philosopher who found out the duality in the human nature, the ape and the angel together. According to him human nature is composed of three elements viz. reason, courage and appetite. He adopted this tri-sectional human nature and talked about a society composed of three classes. Reason dominates in the guardians, courage in the military men and appetite in the workers and artisans. Plato held that all men are not equal in mental abilities.

He also believed that environment was of great influence on the behaviour of man. For him, "... man’s behaviour is the outcome of his social system, the system in which he has been born ... An individual’s personality is molded according to the circumstances in which he finds himself or education which is given to him, and his behaviour in his social environment is conditioned by it."\(^5\)

Man according to Aristotle (384 – 322 B.C.), is a political animal. The state is a creation of nature and man is by nature a political man. Being a social animal, it is man’s nature to associate himself with his

---


\(^5\) Ibid., pp.65-66
fellow men and form associations. He also believed that human nature results from two conditions: good and bad. The worst depravities of human nature are rare and to be found chiefly among foreigners, but they can also result from disease, madness, or extreme bad habits. In this category are cannibalism, ritual murder, outrageous cruelty, chewing one’s nails, and effeminate homosexuality. Any extremely developed vice is also a depravity. Although such depravities of human nature are rare, ordinary human vice is all too common.6

Aristotle believed that man would be a brute without social life. What makes man a rational being is his faculty of speech and organized association with his fellow beings. This faculty of speech enables him to distinguish between good and bad, between the just and the unjust and associate himself with his fellow beings in the pursuit of good life.7

The followers of Epicurus (341 – 270 B.C.) called Epicureans thought that the aim of life was the achievement of individual happiness and hence, they advocated the satisfaction of physical and mental desires within certain limits. Epicurus observed that men seek pleasure and avoid pain. But a wise man will reduce his pursuit after pleasure to a minimum.

7 S.K. Sharma and Urmila Sharma, op. cit., p 138
Epicurus identified happiness with virtue and lived on bread and water only.\(^8\)

The Stoic school of thought (founded by Zeno 334 - 260 B.C.) agreed with the Epicureans that the aim of life was to achieve human happiness but differed from the Epicureans regarding the methods of achieving it. While the Epicureans advocated for both physical and mental desires, the stoics were deadly against physical satisfaction and were for promotion of mental pleasure based on reason. Bhandari explains the stoic notion of human happiness thus: “Sensual desires must be suppressed because true happiness lay in virtue, and true virtue consisted in following the law of nature. One must find happiness in satisfying those emotions and impulses which lie most deep in human nature. Real happiness, according to stoics, consisted in doing not what was pleasant but what was virtuous. A man, therefore, should follow his intellect or reason and not his feelings.”\(^9\)

Sabine has also said: “There is, then, a fundamental moral fitness between human nature and nature at large. This the Stoic expressed by saying that man is rational and that God is rational . . . The animals are given instincts and impulses and powers needed for life according to their

---

9 D.R. Bhandari, op. cit., p.86
several kinds, but men have reason; they have speech and the sense of right and wrong; hence they alone of all beings are fitted for a social life and for them such a life is necessary."

Then there was the Christian political thought during the medieval period. The Church fathers inherited the Jewish theory of divine kingship. The Christian thought of the membership of the city of God is based on the notion of the duality of human nature. S.K. Sharma and Urmila Sharma have talked about the ‘dual human nature’ thus: “Rendering unto Caesar things that are Caesar’s and unto God things that are God’s implies that man has a dual nature and is subject to two authorities. As body belongs to the civil society, his material or temporal interests are bound up with his membership of the secular state. Therefore, obedience to it becomes a mundane necessity. As spirit man has different interests and a different destiny. He becomes a member of the kingdom of ends which is within him. His spiritual interests are in keeping of the church and not the concern of the civic society. The spiritual interests are more important than physical interests. In the case of conflict between loyalty

---

of the state and loyalty to God the latter should always take precedence over the former.\(^{11}\)

Thomas Aquinas (1227 – 1274 A.D.) agreed with Aristotle that man is a social animal and that without society he cannot exist. He also thought that the state is natural to man. Much like Aristotle, he found it quite natural for human beings to have the desire to know. He was against the Christian notion that the state was the result of the fall of man and that was a kind of punishment of human beings. He was also against the Augustinian tradition of condemning the vice of curiosity. For him, the ultimate end of human being is to know God. The ultimate end of human beings and of every intellectual substance is called happiness or beatitude. Hence the happiness of any intellectual substance is to know God.\(^{12}\)

Dante (1263 – 1321 A.D.), a great poet and scholar of Italy conceives man as dual in nature, his two essential parts being soul and body. Since man is dual in nature, he has two ends, blessedness of earthly life and the blessedness of heavenly paradise. The two ends of man being different, the means to their attainment must also be different. Therefore, man needs two guides to enable him to accomplish the two ends in life.

\(^{11}\) S.K. Sharma & Urmila Sharma op. cit., pp.222-223

The first is the Pope to lead mankind to eternal life. The second is the Emperor to guide mankind to happiness in the world in accordance with the teachings of philosophy.\textsuperscript{13}

The science of human nature was taken up in the 17\textsuperscript{th} and 18\textsuperscript{th} centuries in Western Europe. George H. Sabine observed: "Never again from the death of Socrates down to the seventeenth century, was the study of external nature for its own sake, irrespective of its relation to human affairs and interests, a matter of primary concern to the great mass of thinker."\textsuperscript{14} David Hume (1741-1778) in the introduction to his *Treatise of Human Nature* said: "All the sciences have a relation, greater or less, to human nature, and however wide any of them may seem to run from it, they still return back by one passage or another. Even Mathematics, Natural philosophy and Natural Religion . . . since they lie under the cognizance of men, and are judged of by their powers and faculties. 'Tis impossible to tell what changes and improvements we might make in these sciences were we thoroughly acquainted with the extent and force of human understanding."\textsuperscript{15}


\textsuperscript{14} George H. Sabine, op. cit., p.40

There is also a controversy which rages as to whether human nature is rooted in biologically and genetically determined "instinct" operative in all human beings, or whether it is essentially a set of learned needs which derive from basic socialization processes in the culture in which the person grows up. Cultural anthropologists have provided overwhelming evidence of the plasticity of human nature. Some cultures consider aggression and competitiveness completely natural and instinctive, while others view cooperation and altruism as completely natural and instinctive.

According to Freud's (1856 – 1939) life instincts theory, every human being has both a set of life instincts which lead to the constructive drives of growth, love, personality expansion and the integration of the person with the surrounding world, and a set of death instincts which lead to the destructive drives of aggression, hate, contraction of the personality, alienation from the surrounding world, and ultimately death. The broad sets of 'instincts' can be moulded and channeled into many kinds of specific motives by a given culture and set of life experiences.16

Human nature has been looked upon with suspicion, with fear, with enthusiasm and these were placed in contrast with its actualities. It has

---

appeared to be so evilly disposed that the business of morality is to prune and curb it. It would be thought better of if it could be replaced by something else. It has been supposed that morality would be quite superfluous were it not for the inherent weakness, bordering on depravity, of human nature.\textsuperscript{17}

Our science of human nature in comparison with physical sciences is rudimentary, and morals which are concerned with the health, efficiency and happiness of a development of human nature are correspondingly elementary.\textsuperscript{18}

The war instinct theory of Trotter, Shand, Thorndike, Watson and Mc Dongall hold that the instinct of pugnacity is inherent in human nature. L.L. Bernard also gave some insights to human nature when he wrote about two kinds of attitudes in men which cause war or aggressiveness. He classified them as (a) General emotional attitude, and (b) Specific attitudes. Under the first group - fear, suspicion, disgust, pugnacity, anger, greed and national superiority fall and in the second, there are some which are the products of the first extended to the other

\textsuperscript{18} I bid., p. 3
groups and nations.\textsuperscript{19} However, there are also views against such innateness of pugnacity and war instinct. Warfare is alien to many social scientists. They hold that aggressiveness is not inherent to human nature, but the motives like food, shelter, glory and greed might lead one to fight. John Dewey has pointed out many factors which might cause for war. They are: “Pugnacity, rivalry, vainglory, love of booty, fear, suspicion, anger, desire for freedom from conventions and restrictions of peace, love of power and hatred of oppression, opportunity for novel displays, love of home and soil, attachment of one’s people and to the altar and the hearth, courage, loyalty, opportunity to make a name, money or a career, affection, piety to ancestors and ancestral gods.”\textsuperscript{20}

The behaviour approach which was advanced in the 1900s by John B. Watson observes that man is a perfect machine ready to run and be molded according to will and rejects the concept of heredity. He has pointed out that psychology being a science its data must be observable and measurable. “Watson believes in environmentalism or complete determination of the individual by environment. He asserts that he can make any healthy, well-formed child into a scholar, a lawyer, an engineer, a poet, or a philosopher by putting him in the proper


\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., p. 112
environment. The behaviour of the child can be moulded into any form by the appropriate environment.\textsuperscript{21}

Psychoanalytical psychology as developed by Sigmund Freud holds that man’s behaviour is determined by innate instincts that are largely unconscious. According to Freud, unconscious thoughts, fears and wishes also influence his behaviour. The unconscious impulses find expression in dreams, slips of speech, mannerisms, and symptoms of neurotic illness, as well as through such socially approved behaviour as artistic, literary or scientific activity.\textsuperscript{22} For Freud sex instinct plays a big role with conscious and unconscious state in social as well as in individual life. For him ego, id and super-ego were the three main forces controlling the human personality and ‘libido’ was the main force working in man’s life.

1.2 Human nature in the philosophical traditions of the Hindus:

According to the Vedas, the whole world is the divine display of the creative power. The complete picture of the creative cosmic being as found in the Rg Vedic hymn is presented through the four castes, namely,


the Brahmin, born from the universal God’s mouth, the kshatriya, born from his two arms, the Vaisya, born from his thighs and the Sudra, born from his feet. These four castes perform their duties as per the Vedic Virtue. A man is born to play his role and fulfill the wish of the divine planner. To intrude upon another’s duties disturbs the sacred order of the world. The *Upanishads* view man as a combination of body, mind and self. The spirit or self stands for the real nature of man. The supreme self or Brahma, associated with the individual ignorance is called Jiva or individual self. The *Chandogya Upanishad* gives a good definition of the self, the nature of man thus: “The Atman which is freed from evil, free from old age, free from death, free from sorrow, free from hunger and thirst, whose desire is of the truth, whose resolve is of the truth, he should be sought, him one should desire to understand.”

The *Gita* views the psychology of man as having three gunas- Sattva (goodness), Rajas (emotions) and Tamas (darkness or ignorance or illusion). Man’s nature is determined by the dominance of one guna. These gunas in practice are inter-dependent. While persons dominated by Tamas and Rajas lead an animistic and egoistic life respectively, the persons dominated by Sattva pursues the way of truth and virtue.

Both Jainism and Buddhism arose as a reaction to Vedic authority. Both preached the message of liberation from bondage and sufferings.
According to Jainism, the passions like anger, pride, infatuation and greed, which are present in the soul, cause bondage. These passions spring from our ignorance. The right knowledge of reality leads to liberation. According to Buddhism, man is a product of ignorance and Karma. Like Jainism, Buddhism too believes that ignorance is the cause of suffering. Hence man must work tirelessly for the attainment of his nirvana, the state of non-suffering.\textsuperscript{23}

Overall, the ancient Indian thinkers believed in the spiritual nature of men and unity and oneness of mankind. For them the ultimate goal of life is liberation from the bondage of Karma and suffering, and self realization through selfless service to ones fellow beings, etc.

1.3 Gandhi's views on human nature:

Gandhi did not believe that man is a mere biological entity or a mere physico-chemical combination. For him man is a spiritual entity. What is important is not 'being' but 'becoming' to Gandhi. Raghavan Iyer has explained thus: "He started with a very definite conviction about what man is in his essential nature and of what he becomes through a false view of himself, of what he should be and can become and of his

place in a law governed cosmos." Gandhi also believed the presence of God in man. As such, man is divine by nature. For him, "God is neither in heaven nor down below, but in everyone." This makes man a spiritual being. The presence of divinity, according to Gandhi varies from person to person. That is why he refuses to worship any person or thing. He said: "God being immanent in the entire universe as well as animate, the question of deifying any person or thing does not arise. Every person has something of the Divine in him." The only thing is that some has more of it while others have less.

(MAN) according to Gandhi, is conscious of his divine nature which is the most important feature of human nature. He asserted that if the Divine elements present in everyman are used in the right manner, man can bring heaven or paradise on the earth. Man as an animal is violent, but as spiritual he is non-violent. It is the consciousness of his divine nature that motivates him to have compassion for all living beings and to refrain from the use of violence in thought, word and deed. And to


25 Quoted by K. Munirathnam Chetty, op. cit., p. 118


acquire spiritual strength, Gandhi suggested that one should subjugate his physical strength. He said: "The strength of the soul grows in proportion as you subdue the flesh." After a certain stage the flesh diminishes in proportion to the growth of the soul.

__(Man)__, according to Gandhi, is also combination of body, mind and soul. He considers the spirit as non-dual, eternal, omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent. The body of man is ephemeral, a temporary instrument which is the temple of God. Gandhi also discovered that though man is consciously divine, in his day-to-day life man takes in vice far more than virtue. Man is often selfish, untrustworthy, and capable of self-deception, listless, lustful and power-hungry. Gandhi saw enough of the darker side of man’s nature. In this connection he observed: "I have had bitter experiences, and have sometimes burnt my fingers badly. Persons whom I took to be thoroughly innocent have turned out to be corrupt. I have observed that the roots of evil deep down in our own nature." These bitter experiences made him to say that man is imperfect and that man is a fallible being. He held that there is no man who is wholly good or wholly

28 Young India, 4.8.1927, p. 107
bad. The difference between human beings is only of a degree, and not of a kind, "Every one of us is a mixture of good and evil . . . The difference that there is between human beings is the difference of degree."  

Gandhi also believed in the essential unity of God and man. He declared: "I believe in advaita I believe in the essential unity of God and man and for that matter of all that lives."  

As he believed in the metaphysical unity between God and men, he also described the relationship between man and man as divine. He subscribed to the brotherhood of God and said: "All life in its essence is one." He further said: "We are all children of the same God and ... therefore, potentially human nature is the same everywhere." Using the metaphor of a tree to describe the divine equality of human beings, he said: "We are all leaves of a majestic tree whose trunk can never be taken off its roots which are deep down the bowels of the earth. The mightiest wind can not move it." Then using the metaphor of an ocean, he said: "We are drops in that limitless ocean of mercy." It was the belief of divine equality of man

---

31 Harijan, 10.6.1937, pp. 158-159
34 Harijan, 13.4.1940, p. 92
35 ibid., 28.7.1946, p. 236
36 ibid., 12.10.1947, p. 368
that enabled him to declare Truth as a social phenomenon and said: "Vox Populi Vox Dei," voice of the people is the voice of God.

Yet Gandhi had never lost faith in human nature. He had profound faith in the basic goodness of human nature. The critics of Gandhi have accused that he expected too much from man and did not see the limitations of human nature. But Gandhi, on many occasions said that he was a close student of human nature and a practical idealist. Indeed, he had a deep knowledge of human nature and refused to believe that the tendency of human nature was always downward. Human nature was bound to respond to any noble and friendly action. According to him, if one approaches people with trust and affection, he would have ten thousand fold affection returned to him." Indeed he always believed in the infinite goodness of man. In fact he commented once: "Never lose faith in humanity. A few dirty drops can't spoil the ocean which humanity is." All these meant that Gandhi had profound faith in human nature. He also said in 1926: "I refuse to believe that the tendency of

37 Ibid., 17.5.1942, p. 156
human nature is always downward." Again in 1927 he said: "Men like me cling to their faith in human nature .... all appearances to the contrary notwithstanding."

Gandhi did not accept the traditional view of man as passive and fatalistic creature. For him, man is a dynamic being who tries to lift himself up higher and higher. That is why he always tried to "appeal to the good in the human beings and expect response." He also said: "My belief in the capacity of non-violence rejects the theory of permanent inelasticity of human nature." As he believed human nature as dynamic, he also believed in progressive evolution of man from man's animal origin. He said: "We were perhaps all originally brutes, and I am prepared to believe that we have become men by a slow process of evolution from the brute." Though he accepted a brutish aspect in human nature, he also believed in man's ability to change himself consciously for the better. He said: "Man must choose either of the two courses, the upward or the downward, but as he has brute in him, he will more easily choose

---

41 Ibid.
42 Quoted by K. Munirathnam Chetty, op. cit., p. 117
43 Harijan, 7.6.1942, p.177
44 Harijan, 2.4. 1939, p. 65
the downward course than the upward, especially when the downward course is presented to him in a beautiful garb.\textsuperscript{45}

Yet man tries to control this tendency in him. He wrote: “We were born with brute strength but we were born to realise God who dwells in us. That is the privilege of man and it distinguishes him from the brute creation.”\textsuperscript{46} Although Gandhi admitted ancestry of man he declared that “Man’s nature is not essentially evil. Brute nature has been known to yield to the influence of love. You must never despair of human nature.”\textsuperscript{47} For him, man is good because he is divine, and is capable of realizing his kinship with the whole of creation especially the rest of humanity.

It must however be remembered that Gandhi also accepted all men, even the man of God, as imperfect. He remarked: “There is no one without faults, not even men of God. They are men of God not because they are faultless but because they know their faults … and are ever ready to correct themselves.”\textsuperscript{48} Man must try to overcome his brutal force by love, self-sacrifice, self-renunciation and thereby realize the true man, the

\textsuperscript{46} \textit{Harijan}, 2.4.1938, p. 65
\textsuperscript{48} Quoted by K. Munirathnam Chetty, op. cit., p. 118
divinity that dwells in him. Yet the change of human nature from brutish to moral is not an easy task. Man must give his strenuous efforts to do it. Anil Dutta Mishra has explained thus: “Gandhi feels that change of human from brutish to moral and spiritual is not an easy task. It takes a fairly strenuous course of training to attain a mental state of non-violence. He prefers to have a number of lives for achieving spiritual perfection. Though he recommends control of human nature, he feels that there should not be forced repressions. This will lead to harmful effect. Every man must progress through his voluntary efforts. However depraved a man may be, he can reform himself through practicing truth and non-violence. No human being is so bad as to be beyond redemption.”

Gandhi is optimistic in the possibility of reforming human nature. He wrote: “I am an irrepressible optimist ... My optimism rests on my belief, in the infinite possibilities of the individual to develop non-violence.”

Gandhi has pointed out that man has steadily progressed from cannibalism to civilized life by diminishing himsa or violence and progressing towards ahimsa. All these bear ample testimony to the fact that for Gandhi human nature is not static but dynamic. For him,

---

“Nothing in this world is static, everything is kinetic. If there is no progression, then there is inevitable retrogression.”

Gandhi believed that man is not only fallible, not only can make mistakes, but man has the capacity for the correction of his mistakes, "The soul is one in all. Its possibilities are therefore the same for everyone." Gandhi wrote in Young India thus: "The ideals that regulate my life are presented for acceptance by mankind in general. ...... I have not the shadow of a doubt that any man or woman can achieve what I have, if he or she would make the same effort and cultivate the same hope and faith." He further said: "And I claim that what I practise is capable of being practised by all, because I am a very ordinary mortal open to the same temptation and liable to the same weakness as the least among us." Again, "I have been taught from my childhood, and I have tasted the truth by experience, that primary virtues of mankind are possible of cultivation by the meanest of human species. It is this undoubted universal possibility that distinguishes the human from the rest of God’s creation." All these further prove his belief in the dynamic nature of

51 Harijan, 11.8.1940, p. 245
52 Harijan, 18.5.1940,p.254
53 Young India, Vol. II, p.204
54 Young India, Vol. II, p.517
55 Harijan, 16.5.1936, p. 109
man. Therefore, he said: "Human nature is not rigidly fixed and that human behaviour has undergone and is capable of undergoing immense changes."

Gandhi agrees with the American psychologist, John B. Watson who studied human behaviour in the early 1900s and asserted that environment plays a big role in moulding the behaviour of man. Gandhi admits the influence of environment in the building of man’s character. He said: "Environment does play an important part." According to him, however hard man tries to change the effect of his environment, no man can altogether undo it. As man is conditioned by the environment, Gandhi laid great stress on the exercise of will. Therefore, he said: "While admitting that man actually lives by habit, I hold that it is better for him to live by the exercise of the will." For him, man is capable of self-help and self-direction. As he said in Harijan, June, 1936, those who understand the doctrine of self help blame themselves for their failure. He said: "Man has begun to say, 'This is wrong, that is wrong'. Whereas

58 D.G. Tendulkar, Mahatma, op.cit., p. 13
previously he justified his conduct, he now no longer justifies his own or his neighbour’s. He wanted to set right the wrong.

The above understanding of human nature means that Gandhi did not accept the traditional Indian concept of fate or kismet and believed that man can remould himself and thus determine his destiny. This dynamic element of man enabled him to say: “It is man’s privilege to overcome adverse circumstances.”

Gandhi also acknowledged that man is a prey to temptations. Man must use his reasoning power to resist and fight against temptations. “He is no warrior who fights outside foes of his imagination, and is powerless to lift a finger against the innumerable foes within, or what is worse, mistakes them as friends.” Yet, once again, he believed in the capacity of man to resist these temptations through conscious efforts of the self.

Thus, overall, Gandhi believed in the spiritual nature of man; that man has the potential to realize their spiritual self; that human nature is dynamic and not static; that even though man is influenced by the environment he has the capacity to change the environment through self will and self directed activity; that man has not only the potential to know

59 Verinder Grover op. cit., p. 215
60 D.G. Tendulkar, Mahatma, op.cit., p. 267
what is good and bad but also the capacity to shun the bad and accept the
good; and that he can change himself consciously for the better. All these
notions of human nature as understood by Gandhi mean that there is one
more final and basic attribute of human nature, i.e., his consciousness.

It may further be noted that according to Gandhi, man is by nature
vegetarian, in fact, frutitarian and not a non-vegetarian or a meat – eating
animal as nature did not give him big and sharp jaws and claws like those
of lion and does not intend us to kill the lower animals and eat them up.
Nature made man qualitatively and culturally superior to other animals.
Man’s supremacy over the lower animals requires him to protect the
lower animals and to have compassion for all living beings, and that is the
essence of Gandhi’s concept of Jivadaya (i.e., compassion for all living
beings). On medical grounds, Gandhi asked for the rejection of non-
vegetarian diet, assuming it to be highly spicy. Non-vegetarian food is
relatively hotter than the vegetarian food. Excessive use of spices
generates a variety of health problems. As such all condiments and spices
must be rejected as far as possible. This at length will help in the rejection
of non-vegetarian diet. Vegetarianism, in contradiction to non-
vegetarianism is also considered a cure for drunkenness. In comparison to
vegetarian animals, our body structure resembles not a buffalo, a cow, a
horse, a camel or an elephant, but essentially it resembles an ape whose
staple diet is fruits. Vegetarian, especially fruiterian diet is richer than the non-vegetarian diet. On these grounds Gandhi, the vegetarian, became a fruiterian by choice and recommended fruits, dry fruits, milk and milk products as a diet which people could profitably adopt.\textsuperscript{62}

It must also be remembered that Gandhi was more concerned with the brutalization of human nature than with preventing the sufferings of his own people. His concern for this is evident when he wrote this: "I know that people who voluntary undergo a course of suffering raise themselves and the whole community, but I also know that people who become brutalized in their desperate efforts to get victory over their opponents or to exploit weaker nations or weaker men, not only drag down themselves but mankind also. And it cannot be a matter of pleasure to me or anyone else to see human nature dragged in the mire. If we are all sons of the same God, and partake of the same divine essence, we must partake of the sin of every person whether he belongs to us or to another race. You can understand how repugnant it must be to invoke the beast in any human being."\textsuperscript{63}

\textsuperscript{62} Verinder Grover, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 201
\textsuperscript{63} Quoted by S. Mukherjee \& S. Ramaswamy, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 8
1.4 Ultimate purpose of human existence according to Gandhi:

Gandhi believed that human existence has got certain purposes. Man's existence cannot be taken for granted. Man's existence is not a mere coincidence. This is because of the fact that he attributes men with consciousness. This consciousness enables men to think what is right or wrong and what is good or bad. This also enables him to understand what he actually is and what he could be. This consciousness further entails a moral responsibility on the part of man to aspire for the good or the truth. He wrote: "Man's ultimate aim is the realization of God, and all his activities, social, political, religious have to be guided by the ultimate aim of the vision of God."\(^{64}\)

Gandhi, however, equated service to mankind with service to God and that the former will lead one to the path towards the realization of God. As he observed: "... the immediate service of all human beings becomes a necessary part of the endeavors simply because the only way to find God is to see Him in His creations and be one with it. This can only be done by service of all. I am a part and parcel of the whole and I cannot find Him apart from rest of humanity."\(^{65}\) He further said that in seeing God one cannot ignore his countrymen who are his neighbors for

---


65 I bid.
God cannot be found apart from humanity. He said: “My countrymen are my nearest neighbours. They have become so helpless, so resource less, so inert that I must concentrate on serving them. If I could persuade myself that I should find Him in a Himalayan cave, I would proceed there immediately. But I know that I cannot find Him apart from humanity.”

Gandhi opines that God dwells among the poor, underprivileged and downtrodden. Hence, the service to the poor is service to God. He wrote: “There is no worship purer or more pleasing to God than selfless service of the poor. The rich in their arrogance and intellectual pride, often forget God and even question His existence. But God dwells among the poor, as they cling to Him as their sole refuge and shelter. To serve the poor is, therefore, to serve Him.” Thus service to the poor, downtrodden and the underprivileged becomes a most important purpose of human existence.

For Gandhi the service to untouchables or the poor is the prayer of the heart. As he once said: “A prayer, therefore, may be done by name. A prayerful heart is the vehicle and service makes the heart prayerful. Those Hindus who in this age serve the untouchables from a full heart truly

---

66 Ibid.
67 Harijan, 29.8. 1936, p. 226
pray; the Hindus and those others who spin prayerfully for the poor and the indigent truly pray.\textsuperscript{68}

Gandhi believed that human being is spiritual in nature. Every man is divine by nature as the God or the spirit dwells in man. "Every person has something of the Divine in him."\textsuperscript{69} To Gandhi, God is neither in heaven nor down below but in everyone. Hence he stresses for the necessity of ceaseless effort for the growth of human soul. Gandhi was once asked by a god-fearing man his purpose behind writing his Autobiography or The Story of My Experiments with Truth which he replied thus: "What I want to achieve —what I have been striving or pining to achieve these thirty years — is self realization, to see God face to face, to attain moksha. I live and move and have my being in pursuit of this goal. All that I do by way of speaking and writing, and all my ventures in the political field are directed to this same end. But as I have all along believed that what is possible for one is possible for all, my experiments have not been conducted in the closet, but in the open; and I do not think that this fact detracts from their spiritual value."\textsuperscript{70}

\textsuperscript{68} Arun Shourie, "Gandhi-minus Truth" in Gandhi Marg, Vol. 21, No. 2, April 1977, p. 89
\textsuperscript{70} CWMG, Vol. 44, p. 90
The aim of human life, Gandhi further said, is to get salvation or moksha. He said: "The aim of human life is moksha. As a Hindu, I believe that moksha is freedom from birth, by breaking the bonds of the flesh, by becoming one with God."\textsuperscript{71} For Gandhi, spiritual realization and service to mankind are integrally connected. Hence, he wants to attain his spiritual salvation, moksha through the service of mankind. This becomes an integral part of the understanding of the purpose of human existence as understood by Gandhi. As he observed: "I am a humble seeker after truth. I am impatient to realize myself, to attain moksha in this very existence. My national service is part of my training for freeing my soul from the bondage of the flesh . . . for the road to salvation lies through incessant toil in the service of my country and therethrough of the humanity..."\textsuperscript{72} In other words, for him salvation of the self is the essence of the purpose of human existence and the means to achieve is selfless service to one's fellow beings in general, and to the poor, downtrodden and underprivileged in particular. It is not to be achieved by merely renouncing the world. And this salvation has to be achieved in this life and not in the life after death. As he once said: "For me the road to

\textsuperscript{71} CWMG, Vol. 29, p. 267
\textsuperscript{72} Arun Shourie, op. cit., p. 89
salvation is through incessant toil in the service of my country and of humanity. I want to identify myself with everything that lives.”

Development of our moral self was another fundamental purpose of human existence. For Gandhi the foundation of life is built upon the morality of man. Religion and morality are inseparable to Gandhi. Morality stresses the relation of the individual to society and religion stresses the relation of the individual to God. For him morality is a means for the realization of the truth which is God according to Gandhi. Gandhi’s approach of morality is practical rather than just what morality is. He had a pragmatic outlook of morality so as to introduce moral values into practical life. He said: “Mere knowledge is not enough, it should be followed by appropriate action. An ethical data is like an architect’s plan. The plan shows how the building should be constructed; but it becomes useless if the building is not raised accordingly. Similarly, an ethical idea is useless so long as it is not followed by suitable action.”

Gandhi further said that for him the highest form of morality is altruism; say love, affection, self-sacrifice, etc. He said: “It is the duty of a man to bear this truth in mind and practice altruism, which is the

---

73 M.K. Gandhi, ‘My Mission’ in Young India, 3.4 1924, p. 112
highest form of morality.” \(^{75}\) Gandhi agrees with Aristotle who views that good habits play an important role in man’s life. Gandhi said: “Freedom from bad habits forms other elements of morality.”\(^{76}\) All these meant that Gandhi also gave primary emphasis on the moral development of man. This, for him, once again was to be achieved through good deeds, consciously done, and in a selfless manner, for the benefit of mankind at large.

1.5 Comparison of Gandhi’s understanding of human nature with that of other’s:

Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527) who lived in Italy in the 16\(^{th}\) century did not believed in the essential goodness of man and had a low idea of human nature. Whereas for Gandhi, man was essentially good and had never lost in the infinite goodness of man which he said, “never lose faith in humanity. A few drops can’t spoil the ocean which humanity is.” Machiavelli held that men were generally irrational and led to actions by their emotions. He equated human with that of animal nature. Man for him was wicked and selfish by nature.

\(^{75}\) M.K. Gandhi, Ethical Religion, op. cit., p. 23

\(^{76}\) ibid.
Thomas Hobbes (1581-1679) did not believe in the inherent goodness or badness in man. Goodness or evil of a thing depends upon human feelings towards it and is subjective. Men pursue what is good for them. Hobbes holds that man is an isolated individual. He described the individual as a completely self-centred and power-seeking animal. He has an endless need for power of every sort, riches, position, reputation, honour, etc. Man is egocentric. Reason of man is calculated egoism. Man is sentient and selfish. Man is moved to action by appetites and aversions, passions and desires. The object of man’s appetite is good, and the object of his aversion evil. Hobbes did not realize that man had depended on the mutual co-operation rather than mutual distrust in his struggle of life. He had a dark picture of human nature. Although Gandhi too saw enough of the darker side of man in his day, man is often selfish, untrustworthy, capable of self-deception, listless, lustful and power-hungry, he discovered that man is consciously-divine.

John Locke (1632-1704) holds that man is rational, social and wants to live in peace and harmony with his fellow beings. He is not selfish, competitive or aggressive. He was sympathetic attitudes, altruistic motives and sense of justice towards his fellow beings. Like Hobbes, Locke also says that all men are born equal. To him, desire is the spring of all human action. The aim of all action is to substitute pleasure for
pain. Hobbes takes man as a brute and a creature of nature. For him man is a member of a moral order and is subject to natural law. According to Locke, the state of nature was neither too good nor one of constant warfare. It was not convenient and comfortable due to the absence of an authority to enforce the rights of man in the state of nature. Unlike Hobbes who believes that in the state of nature men were nasty, selfish and brutish, Locke believes that in the state of nature men were selfless, loving and good.

Like Plato and Gandhi, Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) holds that human nature is essentially good. Rousseau says that nature has endowed two primal instincts: (i) self love or self preservation. He remarked that man’s first “preference always is to attend to his own presentation, his first cares are those which he owes to himself” and (ii) sympathy, gregariousness or mutual help. Rousseau believed that these instincts will make our struggle for existence easier and do us more good than harm. Reason and conscience enable man to establish harmony between his self-regarding and other-regarding instincts. A man is good as long as he follows his natural instincts. To Rousseau, man by birth had no evil tendencies. It was the result of wrong social actions which made him evil. And also he becomes bad.
Graham Wallas (1856-1932) in his book, *The Human Nature in Politics* (1908) holds that man is a creature of emotions, impulses and instincts and acts on the basis of them though his actions are not devoid of reason. Human instincts as noted by him are those of love, fear, desire for property, pugnacity, desire to excel, curiosity and suspicion. Human nature is essentially unalterable or his impulses and instincts do not change. Man does not control his impulses and instincts as he is not fully aware of them. Wallas has pointed out that the success and failure of democracy are not of political institutions, franchise etc. but also of human nature. Politics must be with, not the abstract man, but a real man’s compact of emotions, impulses and instincts, as well as conscious reason. The art of politics is to exploit subconscious non-rational instincts and impulses. Whereas Gandhi believed in the dynamic nature of man. For him, human nature has undergone and is capable of undergoing changes. He had a deep faith in human nature.

Let us sum up the view given above: According to Aristotle, human nature has both the biological appetites and rational demand. The psychologists hold human nature as the organization of instincts, impulses and emotions. Freud’s sex instincts and Adler’s ‘ego’ explain the way of life. Philosophers like Hobbes take human nature as inherently selfish. Sociologists take man as a social being and study the social nature
of man. Apart from society, men cannot be conceived. To Gandhi, man is essentially divine and spiritual. Man is a part of God. Therefore, the understanding of the philosophers, psychologists, sociologists of human nature is superficial, based on external behaviour.

Lala Gopal Prasad says: “Gandhiji firstly begins philosophy with the individuals. In the history of philosophy, there have been a number of philosophers and thinkers who have given different ideas, thoughts and attentions to the questions regarding the nature of man as individual. Some of these are influenced by psychology whereas some of them are expressions of metaphysical insight. There are thinkers like Hobbess who sought to determine man in terms of a social drive of self-centred nature. There are certain sociologists who tried to explain the nature of man entirely in terms of social conditions. There are some metaphysical like Aristotle who describe man as a rational or social animals suggesting that this description represents the characters that every man necessarily shares with every other man. The humanists and existentialists describe man not in terms of his class characters. According to them every individual man is unique in his own way and such possess certain characters that are peculiar to him alone.”

77 Lala Gopal Prasad, op. cit., p. 2
But Gandhi was a thinker who did not accept the ideas and views of the thinkers narrated above. He says that these pictures of man are superficial and partial as these do not emphasize the basic truth about man. These pictures of man are in fact, pictures of the apparent man only. These are concerned with man’s external behaviour and conduct. Gandhi although does not ignore the bodily aspects of man. He does not call the apparent man unreal or false. He is quite aware of the importance and value of this aspect of man. But he believes that there is another aspect of man which is more basic even to the bodily aspect of man. He says that this has been more or less neglected by all psychological, psychoanalytical and sociological theories. For him, “Human nature is certainly not a static immutable substance but is a plastic organism and is amenable to changes by processes of conditioning.”

1.6 Influences on Gandhi regarding his views on human nature:

It is worthwhile to remember here some of the influences on Gandhi regarding his understanding of human nature. Putlibai, the mother of Gandhi was a saintly lady who had taught him the tenets of truth and non-violence. She was a deeply religious lady who would not take food

78 Lala Gopal Prasad, op. cit., p. 3
without saying and offering daily prayers. Her example led to his idealized perception of Indian womanhood as her strong character and sacrificing nature instilled certain moral values in Gandhi. This disciplinary observance of his mother so much influenced him that while he was in London he would boldly stood in the face of many temptations and said: "A vow is 'a vow. It can not be broken." Kasturba Gandhi followed her husband’s footsteps like a shadow at his back. From her he learnt the religious nature of man and endurance. Kasturba’s humility directly or indirectly influenced Gandhi to a great extent. Once in Ambar, Gandhi forced her to clean the pots of a Christian clerk which was resented by Kasturba. The irritated husband ‘caught her by the hand, dragged the helpless woman to the gate’. But he felt ashamed when he was entreated in the name of God to behave himself properly. He wrote in his Autobiography: “The wife, with her matchless powers of endurance, has always been the victor.” Rambha, an old servant of the Gandhi family had influenced Gandhi when he was a young boy. Like most children, Gandhi as a boy was also scared of Ghosts and spirits. So the old servant of the family, Rambha suggested, as a remedy for fear, the repetition of Ramanama. Gandhi’s contact with this good woman was

80 Ibid., p. 205
short but her influence to him lived throughout his life and the virtues of 
truth and fearlessness owe directly to Rambha. Raychandbhai influenced 
Gandhi the deep religious nature of man. Another person who deeply 
influenced Gandhi was Raychandbhai, a poet – jeweller, and also a 
distinguished Jain reformer of Bombay. Gandhi had come into close 
contact with him when he returned from England. He influenced Gandhi 
by his moral earnestness and deep religious nature. Gandhi wrote in his 
Autobiography: "Three moderns have left a deep impress on my life and 
captivated me: Raychandbhai by his living contact; Tolstoy by his book, 
The Kingdom of God Is Within You; and Ruskin by his Unto This Last."81

Of the three men who have had a very great influence on his life, Gandhi 
places Raychandra first, Tolstoy second and Ruskin third. He said: 
"Among them I give the first place to the poet Raychandra, the second to 
Tolstoy and the third to Ruskin."82 Gandhi’s cardinal virtues of courage 
and fearlessness were directly borrowed from Thomas Carlyle’s (1795- 
1881) preaching for the people of his time to enjoy the dignity of their 
work. Gandhi quotes Carlyle’s maxim thus: "There is practically nothing 
impossible for those who would preserve in the face of the bravest odds.

81 Ibid., p. 83
82 The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, (New Delhi: The Publications Divisions, Ministry of 
Information and Broadcasting, Govt. of India), Vol. 43, p. 5 (To be referred hereinafter as 
CWMG)
Nothing is possible for those who would rag, bluster and merely make a brave show... Every noble work is at first impossible.  

Gandhi was influenced by Tolstoy’s (1828-1910) view of the essential goodness of man. According to Tolstoy, the Russian prolific writer and thinker, the only way to make the world happy is to bring about a condition of the world wherein all beings could love others more than they love themselves. He wrote to Romain Rolland on 4 Oct. 1887: “I love others more than I love my own self.”  As said above, Gandhi mentioned Tolstoy as one of the ‘three moderns’ who had influenced him by his books, particularly *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*, Gandhi has said in his Autobiography of Tolstoy: “The profound morality, truthfulness and independent thinking of which overwhelmed him and left an abiding impression on his mind.” Tolstoy advocated non-violence, non-killing, non-resistance and non-cooperation. He prescribed for the moral regeneration of the individual and also for the dignity of manual labour or bread labour and for non-possession. While Gandhi was in South Africa, he believed in violence and had a moral crisis of scepticism, but reading Tolstoy’s *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, Gandhi admitted: “Its reading cured me of my scepticism and made me a

83 *Young India*, 8.3.1928, p. 75
firm believer in ahimsa.”\textsuperscript{86} Gandhi was influenced by John Ruskin’s (1819-1900) view of the nobility of Human Nature. The book, \textit{Unto This Last} had given a magic spell on him and he had decided to change his life in accordance with the prescription of the book, “The book was impossible to lay aside, once I had began it. It gripped me. I determined to change my life in accordance with the ideals of the book. I believe that I discovered some of my deepest convictions reflected in this great book of Ruskin, and that is why it is so captured me and made me transform my life.”\textsuperscript{87}

Gandhi was also influenced by Thoreau’s (1817-1862) view of the inherent goodness of human nature. Gandhi read Thoreau’s easy, “Civil Disobedience” in South Africa and found in it a great support to his belief in the inherent goodness of human nature. Henry Thoreau was the first person to use the phrase ‘Civil Disobedience’ in one of his speeches in 1849. Thoreau refused to pay tax as a protest against slavery in America. Acknowledging the influence of Thoreau’s essay ‘Civil Disobedience’ on him, Gandhi wrote to Henry S. Salt thus: “The essay seemed to be so convincing and truthful that I felt the need of knowing more of Thoreau, and I came across your life of him, his Walden, and other essays, all of

\textsuperscript{86} Quoted by Mahadev Desai in \textit{Young India}, Vol. III, p. 830  
\textsuperscript{87} M.K. Gandhi, \textit{An Autobiography}, op. cit., pp. 274-275
which I read with great pleasure, and profit." In a letter to President Roosevelt acknowledging Thoreau Gandhi writes: "I have profited greatly by the writings of Thoreau and Emerson."

We have mentioned above some of the people who had directly or indirectly influenced Gandhi in understanding human nature. And there were a score of people who had contributed in shaping the mind of Gandhi. But the man who first taught him how to read human nature was an Englishman, Mr. Frederick Pincutt by name whom Gandhi seek his advice as soon as he finished his law studies. He told Gandhi: "A Vakil should know human nature. He should be able to read a man’s character from his face. And every Indian ought to know Indian history. This has no connection with the practice of law, but you ought to have that knowledge. I see that you have not even read Kaye, and Malleson’s history of the Mutiny of 1857. Get hold of that at once and also read two more books to understand human nature. These were Lavator’s and Shemmelpennick’s books on physiognomy."

Another man who advised Gandhi to study the Indian people and the man was Gokhale, his political guru when Gandhi returned to India after staying in South Africa for two decades. Gandhi made intensive

89 D.G. Tendulkar, op. cit., Vol. 6, p. 116
tours of India and had intimate contact with the people. These tours helped him to understand the nature of Indian people not only it was but as it could be trained and moulded. While he was studying law in England, a good friend of Gandhi from Manchester introduced him the Bible. Gandhi began to read it with great interest. The portion which interested him most was the Sermon on the Mount, which really awakened him to the rightness and value of satyagraha. Jesus has a never-failing faith in the goodness of human nature. That’s why Gandhi calls Jesus the prince of Satyagraha and says that he would not hesitate to call himself a Christian if he had to face only the Sermon on the Mount and his own interpretation of it.  

In his understanding of human nature, Gandhi was influenced by the teachings of Gita. The Gita talked about the dual nature of man. One aspect of man’s nature turns him towards the good virtues while the other drags him towards vices. In such a situation, a person’s endeavor should be to subordinate his baser impulses of man to the higher impulses. This is a moral duty of man. Such views of the Gita on human nature were also finally understood by Gandhi.

---