CHAPTER - III: Non-violence

3.1 Introduction:

Non-violence according to Gandhi is the essence of humanity and it is therefore, indispensable for the existence of human society. It is the root of peace and the fruit of love without which law and order cannot be maintained in human society. Maintenance of law and order by using force is against the principle of Gandhi's non-violence as it is counter productive and will lead to destruction of the society in the long run. If we believe in force or violence as the law of life of man our world will become a world of struggle and in such a state of nature there can never be peace and if there is no peace, there can never be happiness in human life. In the absence of peace positive development of human society also paralyses. If every human being, therefore, believes in non-violence and love and practise its laws, our world would become a world of peace and heaven. As Gandhi said, the "end of violence is surest defeat"\(^1\) but the "ultimate end of non-violence is surest victory."\(^2\)

\(^2\) ibid.
Gandhi said: "Non-violence is the law of our species as violence is the law of the brute. The spirit is dormant in the brute and he knows no law but that of the physical force. The dignity of man requires obedience to a higher law—the struggle of the spirit... Non-violence is a perfect state. It is the goal towards which all mankind moves naturally, though unconsciously."³

In a non-violent struggle success can be achieved only by truthful means. Truth exists while untruth does not. He says: "If untruth does not so mush as exist, its victory is out of the question. And truth being that can never be destroyed."⁴ According to Gandhi, "Ahimsa is a science. The word failure has no place in the vocabulary of science."⁵ Therefore, "There is no such thing as defeat or despair in the dictionary of a man who bases his life on truth and non-violence."⁶

3.2 **Meaning and concept of non-violence:**

Gandhi adopted the English word non-violence for Sankrit word 'Ahimsa' which he originally used as a moral weapon in his early fight

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5. *Harifan*, 6.5. 1939, p.113
against social evils. The literal translation of the Sankrit word ‘Ahimsa’ in English would be ‘non-injury’ or ‘non-killing’. But instead, Gandhi adopted the word ‘non-violence’ which means refraining from use of physical force capable of causing injury or death to the opponent. The meaning of ‘Ahimsa’ includes non-violence in thought, word and deed. Gandhi explained the meaning of non-violence thus: “Non-violence is not doing, voluntarily, any injury to person or property. Thus, I would not punished or procure punishment even of general Dy'er for his massacre, but I would not call it voluntarily doing injury to him to refuse to give him pension, or to condemn his action in fitting language. It is no part of my duty to protect a murderer even though he may be my son or father. I hold it to be my duty to withdraw my support from him. I will not kill a snake, neither may I harbour it.” 7 M. P. Christianand Pillai has observed that: “Ahimsa was the central doctrine of Gandhi’s life and teaching. The concept, which was native to the Indian soil and tradition, was made richer by an infusion of a wealth of meanings given to it by Gandhi. A single traditional concept was transformed into a truine concept, that is, three concepts united into one. Ahimsa, for Gandhi, meant three things: love (agape), self-suffering

7 The collected works of Mahatma Gandhi, (New Delhi: Publications Division Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Govt. of India), Vol.23, p. 5 (To be referred hereinafter as CWMG)
(tapasya), and service (seva). Agape, tapasya and seva are three different concepts but all are unified into one and is called Ahimsa by Gandhi.”

Non-violence, as perceived by Gandhi is of two types: Negative and positive. Non-violence is literally negative in meaning, that is, non-killing and non-injury. According to Gandhi, the negative aspect of non-violence consists in refraining from causing pain or killing and life out of anger or from selfish purpose or with the intention of injuring it. Thus: “Non-violence means avoiding injury to anything on earth in thought, word or deed.” In its negative sense non-violence does not mean merely non-killing other, and more insidious form of non-violence, but it includes harsh words, ill-will, anger, spite, cruelty, the torture of men and animals, the starvation and exploitation, the wanton humiliation and oppression of the weak and killing of their self-respect, etc.

In its positive sense, non-violence means the largest love, the greatest charity. A follower of non-violence must love his energy. This active non-violence necessarily includes truth and fearlessness. It is no non-violence if

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9 Harijan, 7.9.1935, p.234
10 M.K. Gandhi, Young India, III, p. 860
11 N.K. Bose, op. cit., p.17
one merely loves those that love him but it is non-violence only when one loves those that hate him. For Gandhi: “Ahimsa is not merely a negative state of harmlessness but it is a positive state of love, of doing good even to the evil-doer. One should not help the evil doer in continuing his act of wrong doing but resisting the wrong doer by dissociating from him even if it offends him or injure him physically.”

The traditional concept of non-violence is negative in character which as stated earlier, means non-killing or non-injuring or non-harming of any living beings including the lower animals or insects. But Gandhi revolutionized the traditional concept of non-violence by giving an unlimited positive meaning to it. He included many positive and ethical elements like love, charity, humanism, altruism, dignity of labour, dignity of mankind, pursuit of truth, moral life, moral religion, moral economics, moral politics, and observance of spiritual unity. Explaining the genesis of the word, ‘Non-violence’ Gandhi said that he had to coin to bring out the root meaning of Ahimsa. Inspite of the negative particle ‘non’ it is no negative. Ahimsa means ‘love’ in the Pauline sense and yet something more than love, defined by St. Paul, although he knew St. Paul’s beautiful definition is good enough

12 Young India, 25.8.1920, p.2
for all practical purposes. Although ‘love’ in the English language has a negative connotation too but it does not express a negative force but a force superior to all the forces put together. One person who can express Ahimsa in life exercises a force superior to all the forces of brutality.\textsuperscript{13} For Gandhi, Ahimsa meant something more than love as defined by St. Paul who said: “Love is patient; love is kind; love knows no envy; love is no braggart; it is not inflated with its own importance; it does not behave gracelessly; it does not insist on its rights; it never flies into a temper; it does not store up the memory of any wrong it has received; it finds no pleasure in evil-doing; it rejoices with the truth; it can endure anything; it is completely trusting; it never ceases to hope; it bears everything with triumphant fortitude.” (1 Corinthians 13:4-7)

Non-violence for Gandhi “is an active force of the highest order. It is soul-force or the power of God -head within us.”\textsuperscript{14} Prof. Stuart Nelson has observed that: “For Mahatma Gandhi non-violence is not a simple virtue or a simple quality of life; it is a congeries of qualities or virtues; it is a spirit, a way of life, a religion or, as he would say, the law of one’s being. In Gandhi’s moral structure, there are two basic pillars – truth and Ahimsa that

\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Harijan}, 14.3.1936, p. 39
\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Ibid.}, 12.11.1938, p.326
is, non-violence or, as he called at, love. Truth is the end; non-violence is the means. But the end and the means are bound irrevocably to each other, for a vision of truth is dependent upon the realization of non-violence. As truth is God, so also love is God. Love surely, is not a single virtue; it, too, is a way of life.”

Non-violence involves opposition to evil, not by another evil but by good. It means overcoming evil by good. One must not be confused non-violence with cowardice or weakness; it is a weapon of the strong. He said: “Non-violence and cowardice are contradictory terms. Non-violence is the greatest virtue, cowardice the greatest vice. Non-violence springs from love, cowardice from hate. Non-violence always suffers, cowardice would always inflict suffering. Perfect non-violence is the highest bravery.” Non-violence is not a helpless submission to the evil-doer out of weakness. To oppose the tyrant with soul force without indulging in violence of any kind, undergoing supreme suffering is greater bravery than that of swordsmanship. V.P. Gaur has explained Gandhi’s concept of non-violence as follows: “Ahimsa implies sacrifice, love and kindness of the highest order. If Ahimsa

is to be successfully used, there should be faith in God and abundance of love towards others. Gandhi was sure that the governing force for the whole universe is love because despite destruction, life continues. Hatred is the greatest factor responsible for destruction."

Non-violence in its dynamic condition also means conscious suffering. Ajay Shanker Rai observed: "It does not mean submission to the will of the evil doer, but it means putting one’s whole soul against the will of the evil doer. Being a potent force, non-violence begins with mind. Non-violence of the mere body without co-operation of the mind is non-violence of the weak without any potency. It is in fact not in any shape or form of a passive or inactive method, but essentially an active movement, much active than the use of sanguinary weapons." Cowardice is therefore, wholly incompatible with non-violence. Between violence and cowardice, Gandhi preferred the former to the latter. For to him, a cowardly man is worse than a violent man.

It is important here to note that for Gandhi cowardice is the enemy of non-violence. He said: "I do believe that, where there is only a choice

17 V.P. Gour, “Gandhian Concept of Non-violence” in J.S Mathur & P.C. Sharma, op. cit., p. 132
between cowardice and violence, I would advise violence . . . But I believe that non-violence is infinitely superior to violence, forgiveness is more manly than punishment. Forgiveness adorns a soldier. But abstinence is forgiveness only when there is the power to punish. It is meaningless when it pretends to proceed from a helpless creature."  

Gandhi also always emphasized fearlessness as a pre-requisite for a votary of non-violence. Fearlessness is a prerequisite for a votary on non-violence. He also insisted that a person who stands for non-violence must possess humility. If one has pride and egoism, there is no non-violence. "Non-violence is impossible without humility. My own experience is that whenever I have acted non-violently I have been led to it and been sustained in it by the higher promptings of an unseen power. Through my own will I should have miserably failed."  

Gandhi further stated: "The spirit of non-violence necessarily leads to humility. Non-violence means reliance on God, the Rock of Ages. If we would seek His aid, we must approach Him with a humble and a contrite heart . . . We must act, even as the mango tree which drops as it bears fruit. Its grandeur lies in its majestic lowliness."  

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19 Young India, 11.8.1920, p. 3  
20 Harijan, 28.1.1939, p.442  
21 Young India, 12.1.1921, p.13
violence' for Gandhi "is like radium in its action. An infinitesimal quantity of it embedded in a malignant growth acts continuously, silently, and ceaselessly till it has transformed the whole mass of the diseased tissue into a healthy one. Similarly, even a little of true non-violence acts in a silent, subtle, unseen way and leavens the whole society." 22

3.3 Sources of the concept of non-violence:

Gandhi was not the originator of the doctrine of non-violence. He inherited it from the different religious philosophies of the world. Indeed, he himself admitted that the idea of non-violence as a religious tenet is found in all human religions. Non-violence is found as a basic doctrine in the teachings of Lao-tzu of China in the sixth century B.C. He said: "Requite injury with kindness. To the good I would be good, to the evil also I would be good in order to make them good. With the faithful I would also keep faith, in order that they may become faithful. He who has no faith in others will find no faith in them." 23 In the evolution of Ahimsa three stages of the progress made in human societies can be noted: "In the progress of

22 *Harijan*, 12.11.1938, p.327

societies three stages are marked. The first where the law of the jungle
prevails, where we have the operations of selfishness and violence; the
second where we have the rule of law with courts, police and prisons; the
third where we have non-violence and unselfishness, where love and low are
one - the rule of the jungle, the rule of law and the rule of love - these mark
three stages of progress. The last is the goal of civilized humanity."24

Jesus Christ, the founder of Christianity was also one of the greatest
champions of non-violence. He said: "But say unto you that ye resist not
evil; but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other
also ... Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that
hate you, and pray for them who despitefully use you, and persecute you."25

In Islam also the idea of non-violence is found as an integral part of its
teachings. It advocates forgiveness and benevolence and returning of good
for evil. The teachings of Islam in this regard are summed up thus: “Seek
again him who drives you away, give to him who takes away from you,
pardon him who injures you.”26

24 Gandhi Vigyan,125th Gandhi Jayanthi Year, A Quaterly Journal of the Gandhi Vigyan Trust,
(Bangalore: Gandhi Vigyan Trust), Vol. 4, No.3, Jan. 1995, pp. 16-17
25 The bible, Mathew 5:39
26 S.B. Mookherji, op. cit., p. 248
Apart from these popular world religions, the religious philosophies of India are found to be having the most profound influence on Mahatma Gandhi regarding his acceptance of non-violence. It is well known that India is a land which has a rich religious philosophical heritage. Among her popular traditional religions are the Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. To all these religions, non-violence is a common doctrine. But non-violence has found the highest expression in Hinduism. “The Hindu creed is search for Truth through non-violent means. The essence of Hinduism does not consist in observing rules of eating and non-eating, it consists in right conduct, in correct observation of truth and non-violence. Non-violence is the essence of Hinduism, the Hinduism of the Gita, of the Upanishads, the Yoga Sastra.”

It is a necessary observance for spiritual elevation and self-realization as mentioned in the Upanishads and the Gita. It is the highest duty of the Hinduism.

Non-violence can be regarded to be the essence of Jainism and Buddhism also. In Jainism non-violence is the highest law. Buddha said that hatred can not be wiped out by hatred, nor can anger be soothed by counter anger. Non-violence can neutralize hatred and it is by non-anger that one can

conquer anger in others. According to the teachings of Buddha, violence leads to destruction or failure, whereas non-violence is the means of construction and success.

The Mahabharata, the national epic of India, is a huge store-house of thought on ancient Indian religion, ethics, philosophy, sociology and legendary love. It presents us a good account of ancient Indian ideas on non-violence. The thoughts on non-violence found in the Mahabharata may be classified under four heads. There are the thoughts which appear as a sort of reaction against the killing of animals during the sacrificial ritual. In a number of passages we find kings, priests and ascetics expressing a feeling of revolt and horror at the ruthless slaughter of animals in sacrifices.28

One also finds thoughts on non-violence which provided an escape from the sense of dread that the world is under the perpetual shadow of death, a vanity of vanities signifying nothing. It is also found that non-violence is motivated by a mystical sense that all life is sacred. It enjoins that everybody should carry on his normal avocation with no injury to life. Yet further, it is also found in it that there is no higher gift to give away than the

28 Ibid.
gift of security or safety to all creatures; there is no higher truth or religion than non-violence.

The thoughts on non-violence in the epic also underscores a faint awareness of the dignity of the human being, that a man, be he the worst criminal, hides in himself a soul of goodness and should therefore not be given capital punishment. Even a bad man, in course of time, becomes good. Under these circumstances human life, which is the basis of human personality should not be destroyed.

Non-violence is thus a basic doctrine of Indian religious traditions, and the concept is not discovered by Gandhi. He himself admitted this fact by saying thus: “I have nothing new to teach the world ... non-violence is as old as the hills.” Gandhi just invested the concept of non-violence with a new significance and meaning and fashioned it as a potent instrument of a great political and social awakening and as a means to realise Truth which is God to him.

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3.4 Practice of non-violence:

Gandhi made it clear that non-violence is not meant only for the rishis and saints, but it is meant for the common people as well. It is a power which can be wielded equally by children, young men and women or grown up people provided they love all equally. Gandhi has said: “Non-violence must first be practised in one’s person and his relation with others. Non-violence like charity must begin at home. Non-violence must be practised against persons who act violently towards you. It is only when you meet resistance that non-violence is put on trial. Our greatest field for practice is our own home in all our relations with parents, wife, children, servants, etc.”

Gandhi himself pointed out ‘how difficult it is to practise ahimsa’ thus: “The way of non-violence and Truth is sharp as the razor’s edge. Its practice is more than our daily food. Rightly taken, food sustains the body; rightly practiced, non-violence sustains the soul … food we can only take in measured quantities and at stated intervals; non-violence, which is the spiritual food, we have to take in continually. I have to be conscious every

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moment that I am pursuing the goal, and have to examine myself in terms of that goal.”

Amiya Chakravarthy has also said: “Non-violence is the law of our nature, and hence meant for the common man. Truth and ahimsa can be practised by all. It requires a new kind of persuasion, a method that goes deeper than logic or reasoning or words, something that alters the opponent’s desires and purposes and will. Like war it requires training and discipline. The training for non-violence should consist of a programme of deeds which will promote good citizenship, through discipline and their unselfish devotion to the welfare of all community and commonwealth to which they belong.” For Gandhi faith in a God is the first prerequisite to practise ahimsa. He said: “Practice of non-violence also requires a lot of training and faith... If the method of violence takes plenty of training the method of non-violence takes even more training, and the training is must more difficult than the training for violence. The first essential of that training is a living faith in God. He who has a living faith in God will not do

31 Harijan, 2.4.1938, p. 65
evil deeds with the name of God on his lips. He will not rely on the sword, but will solely on God."

Gandhi has also laid down the following prerequisites for the practice of non-violence as a way of life:

1. One must believe in truth and non-violence as one's creed.
2. One must have faith in the inherent goodness of human nature which he expects to evoke by his truth and love expressed through his suffering.
3. One must lead a chaste life and be ready and willing for the sake of his cause to give up his life and his possessions.
4. One must be a habitual khadi-wearer and spinner. This is essential for Indians.
5. One must be a teetotaler and be free from the use of other intoxicants in order that his reason may be always unclouded and his mind constant.

33 *Harajan*, 14.5.1938, p. 110
6. Self-purification or selflessness is another essential requisite condition for the practice of non-violence.

7. Fearlessness is also another integral qualification of a votary of non-violence.

8. One who is to practise non-violence should not be a coward, because cowardice is the enemy of non-violence.

9. One must carry out with a willing heart all the rules of discipline as may be laid down from time to time.\(^{34}\)

### 3.5 Method of non-violence:

Gandhi advocated the method of non-violence for solving all human problems - social, religious, economic and political. Being a true follower of Truth, God, the law of love, non-violence and above all humanism, Gandhi believed that the method of non-violence could lead to the establishment of a world without hatred, war and all kinds of exploitations. He strongly rejected the violent techniques like bomb explosion, political murder, guerilla warfare or armed uprising and asserted that as long as organised violence

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\(^{34}\) K.S. Bharathi, op. cit., p.16
and arms race persist there could be no humanism and consequently no permanent peace.  

During his active participation in the freedom movement of India Gandhi pursued non-violent non-cooperation and non-violent civil disobedience methods. He declared that India should abandon violence altogether to achieve her freedom from the foreign yoke. Non-violence should be the way of Indian life and should be guiding principle for the whole world. He said: “You need not be afraid that the method of non-violence is a slow long-drawn-out process. It is the swiftest the world has seen, for it is surest. You will see that it will overtake the revolutionaries... I am devoting so much space to them because I want their exhaustless energy to be directed in the right channel.” For him, non-violence is also to be practised in one’s daily life. In 1932, describing how to observe ahimsa, he wrote: “If we do not observe ahimsa spontaneously in such daily acts, we shall never learn to observe it in other fields and, if at all we seem to observe

36 CWMG, Vol.31, p. 224
it, our ahimsa will be of little, or no value. It is felt in our action and thought.”

Conflict, according to Gandhi, can be solved through non-violence. Violence cannot resolve conflict because it suppresses differences instead of integrating them. It ignores even the just claims of the opponent and thus results in injustice and leads to counter violence. In such a situation the freedom of the individual, which is essential for his moral development becomes endangered and the individual becomes enslaved. Hence the method of non-violence is bound to bring freedom of individual as it does not suppress conflict and disputes; rather it integrates the legitimate differences through love and avoids any type of counter violence. Gandhi was against the use of violent method of punishment to the anti-social elements like the thieves, dacoits and murderers and preferred to use peaceful method even while dealing with them so that they may realize their wrongdoings and become good citizens. He said: “My creed of non-violence does not favour the punishment of thieves and dacoits and even murderers. I

37 CWMG, Vol. 56, p. 52
cannot in all conscience agree to anyone being sent to the gallows." Thus, Non-violence as advocated by Gandhi means conversion and not coercion. He said: "My creed is non-violence under all circumstances. My method is conversion not coercion. It is self suffering, not the suffering of the tyrant. I know that the method to be infallible. I know that a whole people can adopt it without accepting it as its creed and without understanding its philosophy." Although Gandhi was against capitalism, he was not against the capitalists, that is, the rich people. He said: "By non-violent method we seek not to destroy the capitalists, we seek to destroy capitalism. We invite the capitalist to regard himself as trustee for those on whom he depends for the making, the retention and the increase of his capital."  

Non-violence as advocated by Gandhi is the only means by which the aim of human life can be achieved. Gandhi believed that it is impossible to win a noble ideal like swaraj by the application of violent method just as it is impossible to get a rose by planting some other plant. He said: "If I want to cross the ocean, I can do so by means of a vessel; if I were to use cart for

38 CWMG, Vol. 51, p. 231
39 CWMG, Vol. 41, p. 106
40 CWMG, Vol. 51, p. 296
that purpose both the cart and I would soon find the bottom.”41 He wanted
the Indians to be strong and not shrink away from death under any
circumstances. He also expected them to be ready to lay down their lives and
give up all thoughts of killing others. At the same time, he also pointed out
that making sacrifices should never make one proud. He said: “Our sacrifice
should never make us proud. We should not be critical of the lesser
sacrifices of others.”42

Gandhi further said: “The path of non-violence is neither for the coward
nor for the stupid. It is for those who are ever vigilant.”43 He also believed
that through non-violence one can arouse religious consciousness among the
people,44 which also means faith in God or truth as he believed religion to be
irrevocably concerned with God or truth.

According to Radomir Lukic, there are certain conditions under which
Gandhi’s method of non-violence can be successfully applied. Radomir
Lukic admitted that reading Nehru’s *Discovery of India* he developed the
idea for successful application of non-violence method in two ways. The

41 Cited in Mazhar Kibriya, op. cit., p. 113
42 CWMG, op. cit., Vol. 31, p. 473
43 CWMG, Vol. 38, p. 417
44 Ibid.
first condition is the functional unity of a social system by which is meant that the two basic elements of society viz., governors and governed in confrontation with the latter seeking to overthrow the former. Between them is the social system which one seeks to preserve and the other to destroy. The basic element of the social system in Gandhian struggle was the alien political rule, which he wanted to overthrow and thus liberate India. In order to preserve their political power the British necessarily had to secure the cooperation of relatively broad strata of Indian society, above all, economically powerful class. The British were too much of a minority and had too small a force to govern India without the co-operation of Indians. The second very important component was the need to develop capitalism in India thus bringing it under the dominion of British capital and thereby strengthening its political hold on the country. It seems that Gandhi had rightly understood this policy and therefore directed his struggle in two directions: first of breaking up the Indo-Anglia co-operation in one way or the other and secondly of arresting the development in capitalism in India. Under two-fold attack the British were unable to hold their political domination and economic hegemony. From this it can be said that the Gandhian method will
not succeed in historical situation where there is a liaison of the government with the masses; and where there are no visible signs of oppression.

Another equally important element required for the success of the method of non-violence is the respect for the enemy and refusal to hate him and even present willingness to compromise, if the situation so demands. Such an attitude disarms the enemy and offers the guarantee of an honorable retreat, and at the same time, gives to the people the feeling of highly moral dignity and belief in the moral rightness of its struggle.\footnote{See Radomir Lukic, "Importance of Gandhi's theory of Non-violence" in Verinder Grover (ed.), \textit{Gandhi & Politics in India}, (New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publications, 1996), pp. 102-105} Non-violence method as advocated by Gandhi can be successfully applicable in every walk of life-individual, institutional, political and economic. Josen Jaseph has asserted: "The efficacy of non-violence was demonstrated by Gandhi in many a battle against racial discrimination in South Africa, oppression of peasants in Champaran, Kheda, Bardoli, etc., exploitation of labourers in Ahmedabad, untouchability, Rowlat Bill, Salt Satyagraha and last but not the least against foreign dominion of India from the Britishers. Had he been
alive during the post-independent era, he might have carried these experiments further.\textsuperscript{46}

3.6 Non-violence and human nature:

Gandhi’s deep understanding of human nature has helped him to formulate a science of Ahimsa, non-violence. It is based on the assumption that human nature in its essence is one and unfailingly and responds to the advance of love.\textsuperscript{47} He admitted that some people might have doubted his understanding of human nature and raised question on the issue, but he vehemently claimed that he understood human nature. He himself once remarked: “Some of my friends would, I know, accuse me of ignorance of human nature. If I believed the charge, I would plead guilty and retire from human assemblies and return after acquiring knowledge of human nature.”\textsuperscript{48}

It was his firm belief that non-violence is the law of human species as violence is law of the brute. It is the law of human nature. Man is higher


\textsuperscript{47} Gandhi Vigyan, Vol.1, No. 3, April 1978, p. 7

\textsuperscript{48} CWMG, Vol. 25, p. 131
than the brute. If everyone starts believing in violence as the law of life, then the world shall become a strange world of struggle. Man will always be at war with his fellow beings and with nature. He will not be able to live unless he is brutal and cruel and aggressive, and war and aggression will become an inevitable feature of human existence.

It is true that Gandhi also believed man to be a mixture of the good and the evil. But in spite of this fact the qualities of morality, spirituality, goodness, love and non-violence preponderate over evil in human nature. Gandhi was not ready to accept the law of brute as law of human beings simply on the ground that we are descendants of animals. It is not man’s destiny to live and die a brute. For him, the moment man awakes to the spirit within himself, he cannot remain violent. Indeed, for Gandhi, “If man has a mission to fulfill, a mission that becomes him, it is ahimsa. Standing as he does in the midst of himsa, he can retire into the innermost depths of his heart and declare to the world around him that his mission in this world of himsa is ahimsa, and only to the extend that he practises it does he adorn his
kind."⁴⁹ That is why the prophets and avatars have taught the lessons of truth, harmony, brotherhood, justice, etc. all attributes of ahimsa.⁵⁰

Gandhi also accepted the progressive evolution of human nature. For him, human race has gone through an evolution spiritually and non-violently since its appearance in the form of human beings and achieved greatness and excellence in countless virtues of life - non-violence being one of them. Thus the gulf between the man and the brute went an increasing with the passage of time. To quote Gandhi: "If we turn our eyes to the time of which history has any record down to our own time, we shall find that man has been steadily progressing towards ahimsa. Our remote ancestors were cannibals. Then came a time when they were fed up with cannibalism and they began to live on chase. Next came a stage when man was ashamed of leading the life of a wandering hunter. He therefore took to agriculture and depended principally on mother earth for her food. Thus from being a nomad he settled down to civilized stable life, founded villages and towns and from member of a family he became member of a community and a nation. All these are signs of progressive ahimsa and diminishing himsa. Had it been

⁵⁰ Horiyan, 11.8.1940, p.25
otherwise, the human species should have been extinct by now, even as many of the lower species have disappeared.”

Man is the only religious and moral being whose ultimate aim, according to Gandhi, is the realization of God. All his activities, social, political, religious have to be guided by the ultimate aim of the vision of God. This, according to Gandhi; won’t be possible if we shun the path of Ahimsa or non-violence. Herein again we find another co-relation between Gandhi’s understanding of human nature and his advocacy of non-violence. It is the only means by which the realization of man’s ultimate aim and his moral development can be achieved.

Gandhi was a staunch supporter of optimism having an unflinching faith in the godliness, goodness and excellence of human nature. He believed that in human beings virtues of love truthfulness, co-operation brotherhood, altruism, charity, faith, hope, justice, moderation, tolerance, self-control, patience, self-sacrifice, spiritualism, compression, general welfare and generosity predominate over hatred, enmity, falsehood, competition, egoism, cruelty, despondency, injustice, materialism rudeness, selfishness, violence

51 I bid., 11.8.1940, p.48
and greed.\(^{52}\) It is because of his faith that he believed in the ability of man to practise non-violence and his being concerned with it.

Human nature, as conceived by Gandhi, is not essentially evil. He always believed that brute nature has been known to yield to the influence of love. In his letter to Bhai Bhawanji, dated September 7, 1934 Gandhi wrote the principle of Ahimsa: “The principle of ahimsa is founded on the assumption that every human being is capable of reform.”\(^{53}\) It was also his firm belief that man has the capacity to overcome his evil nature if he becomes or is made aware of his potentialities. He can not remain violent when he awakes to the beauty of goodness and the ugliness of evil. Gandhi was of the opinion that evil is very often not an inherent, but an acquired characteristic. Particular situations and circumstances force a man to become criminal and violent. But even criminals observe the law of love in dealing with themselves. He supported this fact by citing example of Hitler. The dictator was also not devoid the sense of law and affection for his family members and his own people. If criminals respond to the law of love, then they can be reformed through love, non-violence and patience.

\(^{52}\) Mazhar Kibriya, op. cit., p. 20
\(^{53}\) CWMG, Vol. 64, p. 414
All the above considerations mean that Gandhi had faith in human nature. His understanding that human beings are conscious and moral beings, that the moral development is the purpose of human existence, that by nature man respond to the overtures of love and truth, that man has the capacity to change himself consciously and that too for the better, progressive evolution of man towards a higher morality, etc. have led to his advocacy of non-violence. He also believed non-violence to be the mission of human nature and that man possess the qualities essential for successfully insisting on the path of non-violence. Had it been otherwise, it would not have been possible for him to advocate non-violence as the natural creed for human beings.