CHAPTER - 1

INTRODUCTION
In the history of human thought and civilization, there are dual views about description of man, which can be under two distinct headings, viz: the secular and the spiritual views. The impenitent scientist looks upon man as a complicated machine. Man stands, in the words of Julian Huxley, "at the cross-roads of evolution".

Evolution at the human level is self-conscious and willed and is not automatic as at the biological level. The determinant section among biologists describe man as

"one that is naturally selected and is not supernaturally elected"

Though man is an evolute of nature, still he is able to overpower her ways and claims self-direction. Though he has simian ancestry, many of his distinguishing traits are not derived from the prior evolutes. In the words of Julian Huxley,

"we are animals with a difference, that we are capable of reasoning and conceptual thought; creative imagination and communication by speech symbols".

The English poet, Shelley described man as

"one who looks before and after pines for what is not".
“To live and let live”
is the golden maxim which he should adopt, while as a spirit he is good, as a brute he is nothing. Man’s true destiny is not the conquest of external nature but the conquest of his own self because ātma-nirgraha or the suppression of the lower self alone indicates the supremacy of the human spirit.

Profound human understanding seems especially attainable in the sphere of valuation because only there does man speak to us in his completeness and entirety. His most secret impulses are revealed there. The reason for this precisely is that values are grounded in the most profound spiritual insights, in the innermost human intentions. Let us remember, that at all times and in all cultures the decisive impulses in human behaviour proceed from basic valuations, that any period is conditioned by the value-aspirations dominant at the time, and that the values involved are rooted in man’s ultimate understanding of Being.

Mahatma Gandhi always stressed the imperative need for raising the moral stature of human beings. He was equally conscious of raising their standards of material well-being. Gandhiji being a selfless soul, a saint, had gone through the problems of multitudes of India at the grass-root level and suggested remedies not only to the political questions but also to the very question of social justice at all levels. He identified and viewed every
question whether national or international at the ambit/purview of truth and non-violence/ahimsa.

One would pick up Gandhiji’s thoughts and precepts and study them each afresh and seek to assess and evaluate each facet with its intrinsic characteristics. Like Moses, Gandhiji put out whole tabernacles of commandments for each individual, obligations to himself as to his fellow beings.

U.N. Dhebar, who was a close associate of Mahatma Gandhi, rightly pointed out that one aspect of Gandhiji’s life has been acclaimed by all and that is his role as the liberator of India, and while his contribution to the cause of peaceful evolution of human society in so far as he gave to mankind a new weapon for achieving social, political and economic justice has also been duly acknowledged, his contribution in two other fields is practically being by-passed even by those who are close followers of his. These two fields are his economic approach and the modalities of his action in the sphere of socio-spiritual re-making of society.

Gandhiji’s approach of mixing religion and mysticism into politics was grilled by different school of thoughts. Gandhiji quite easily negated their doubts and misrepresentation through,
"politics bereft of religion is a death-trap for it kills the soul".

Gandhiji built his ideological base and superstructure of his *ahimsa sidhanta* through the acceptance of spiritual aspect which governs human mind through ages. So

"we cannot separate a person’s psychology from his or her personal history".¹

Kumara Guru, a Travancore’s *Harijan* leader, also used the Gandhian technique and approach towards social as well as religious questions of Travancore. He was also a contemporary of Gandhi. Anyhow, Gandhian approach and experience poured inspiration to him. So

"Gandhiji’s theory of ethicization and spiritualization of politics certainly represents a great land-mark in this direction of political idealism".²

It further more justified various localised socio-religious movements, which added strength to national movement and became a corollary/chapter to nationalist feeling.


Gandhiji was sufficiently a religious being. To him religion is a discipline and he signified the spiritual truth and values through the rituals of fasting and prayers. It was intended to build a new type of human race which would be free of fear, greed, and hatred. No doubt, Kumara Guru’s PRDS, as an emancipation movement signifies this spiritual ethicization of Gandhiji. It was a new scale of action to the depressed/untouchable classes of Kerala. Kerala’s socio-religious condition was rather different from the rest of India and once Swami Vivekananda signified the situation of Kerala as a “mental asylum”. While considering this signification, we can assume the depth and extent of the social question of Kerala and the historical relevance of Kumara Guru.

Gandhiji, Kumara Guru and the Greek philosopher Aristotle, identified man as a metaphysical animal. Anyhow religion is a universal subject and it was recognized by various societies of all the ages. Swami Vivekananda justifies this ontological position of man in the society, that

"the blessed punya bhūmi as the land from where came
the founders of religions from the ancient times, deluging
the earth again and again with the pure and perennial
waters of spiritual truth".4

3. T.S. Devasdoss, The Dynamics on Gandhian Thought, University of Madras, 1983

Upanisads justifies that the Brahman is truth, knowledge, and infinitude. Ātman which is Brahman is free from desire and aversion is blissful consciousness and is absolute.⁵

Spirituality has formed the backbone of India and it is the subject and object of Indian living. So the great philosophers and saints of India have shown that the central conception of religion is that of Eternal.⁶ In an age which lost/reduced the relevance of Karl Marx, after half a century of Mahatma’s martyrdom/demise, day by day Gandhian paradigms, whether in fight against social injustice, or domestic and international economic and political questions are (getting an important reference) becoming relevant. So the Indian cultural contributions as well as the social formations are real replica of this spiritualism.

Gandhiji traced meanings to his approach to various problems in Gīta and he traced solutions from it.⁷ Gandhiji was a strong critic of western philosophy and systems and found remedial measures in Gīta.

“Gandhi was, in religion, a man of action without attachment and, therefore, his entire philosophy of life was derived

⁵. Mandukya Upanisad, 1 - 7.
⁶. T.S. Devadoss; op. cit, p. 3.
ultimately from the Gītā on which he relied for his strength”.

Gandhiji found the truth in Gītā that all human beings are the creation of God and are equal before God. This universal truth was the basic element of Kumara Guru’s theology. The conventional theologies are negative to the socio-economic and political realities of the Indian scenario. The Christianity, which is practiced in Kerala, is very much influenced by the Varnā system and the western theology so the conventional Kerala (Syrian) theology failed miserably to read the socio-economic and political realities and also the liberative function of God/religion in history. Equality before God never reflected in the traditional religions of Kerala. That is why Kumara Guru was in search of a God, who is present among the suffering millions.

“Gandhian thought is considered as a creative blend of all humanistic and altruistic tendencies of the age. It refuses to be satisfied with the progress and well-being only of a class or nation”.

Gandhiji finds meaning to this question of unequal progress in the pages of Gītā, that is sarvabhūtahite or well being of all. Eventhough

8. T.S. Devadoss; op. cit, p. 4.
10. T.S. Devadoss; op. cit, p. 5.
Kumara Guru's space was untouchable exclusive but he never functioned as an anti-touchable in his course of action. Thus we can correlate both of them as the two sides of a paradigm. This justifies the concept that, man is a simultaneous subject and object of knowledge and spiritual dynamism. To Gandhi, Čūra was not a religious text but a path of progress and perfection.

"The brotherhood of man is no longer a sentimental dream, but is proving an inevitable condition of life security, which ensures the endurance of peace; for this an alert conscience is demanded of the man with a deep conviction that the pursuit of a safe and true policy should transcend the romanticism of nationalistic doctrine". 11

The notion of western material culture was criticised by Gandhiji and he believed that it was not a longstanding one. It ultimately lead to the spiritual darkness and socio-political breakdown. Material culture, however it is lofty, without considering the spiritual and ethical welfare of individual, society and nation, will lead to negative inputs. State as preserver and augmenter of the general welfare of the society should cater the spiritual needs of the individuals. To Gandhi, true religion and true morality are inseparable, irreducible and complimentary.

11. Ibid., p. 6.
“......... if one man gains spiritually, the whole world

gains with him, and if one man fails, the whole world
fails to that extent”.  

To Gandhi love is life, hatred is death, service is expansion of the
inner man and exploitation is contraction. Therefore Gandhiji visualized
Swami Vivekananda’s conceptual paradigm of ‘Daridranārayanaḥ’ through
his Harijan upliftment efforts. The long standing savarṇa avarṇa dichotomy
was defused by Gandhi through his task of creating identity to the
Daridranārayanaḥ at all levels of the contemporary society. The progressive
negation of social disparity based on birth was incorporated in the national
movement, was truly the victory of Gandhian spiritualistic notion.

As everywhere in India, the untouchables of Kerala was at the
periphery of social organization. They were here only the social constituents
without right, recognition and protection. The insecurity at all levels through
the ages destroyed their ego and creativity. The early decades of this century,
India as a whole, particularly Kerala listened to the message of love and
ahīṃsa, both which are inseparable and irreducible notions, through Gandhiji
and it cultivated an atmosphere of social change in Kerala. The story of the
untouchable sections of Kerala in the twentieth century is the assertion at
various levels through the self identification and incorporated the path of

love and *ahiṃsa* which was cultivated by various leaders within and out of their realm. Among the most noticeable in the Kerala scenario was Kumara Guru, who maintained close similarities with Gandhiji in action, sanction, and notion. To Gandhiji,

"we could not command any other sanction but that of love".  

Gandhiji was really an extremist in his field of action. But he never found any space for *hiṃsa* in his *karmamārga*. No doubt, he never deviated from the extreme paths, whether in agitation or constructive programme, and gave new meaning and dimension to the concept of extremism in Indian scenario.

Gandhiji’s sphere of action was filled with self control, *swadēśi* and love force/soul force. Gandhiji made it clear from the very beginning of his action programmes in South Africa and in India. In his first book *Hind Swarāj*, he objectified the basic principles of love force, which is *swarāj* or self rule/self-control, and the way to it justifies passive resistance/soul force/love force. To the discharge of soul force/love force, *swadēśi* is the necessary condition, which is irreducible and constant/everlasting.  

Gandhiji’s social objective is not

"merely the brotherhood of Hindus, but that of man, be he a Parsi, a Muslim, a Christian or any one else, because in


14. M.K. Gandhi; *Hind Swarāj*. 

Prepared by BeeHive Digital Concepts Cochin for Mahatma Gandhi University Kottayam
such a situation there will be no kind of exploitation, and co-operation will be the order of the day".\textsuperscript{15}

In this term "co-operation" there was no question of exploitation of any order, whether it is spiritual or material. For example the question of Harijans. He urged for the integration of these Harijan lots within the main stream of the society.\textsuperscript{16}

In the midst of dissent, protest, and conflicts between man and man, the ultimate resort is the love force which acts in the midst of tension and confusion and sustains the world of all ages, of past, present, and future. Gandhiji believed that,

"man’s nature is not essentially evil or brute, nature has been known to yield to the influence of love. You must never despair of human nature".\textsuperscript{17}

Being the servant and champion of Harijans, he took up the question of untouchability through a positive way and correlated it with the love force. Gandhiji had a good understanding of the Indian social scenario. On the basis of this social understanding he contemplated the untouchability and declared it was out of religious faith and

\textsuperscript{15} S.C. Malik; (Ed) Dissent, Protest and Reform in Indian Civilization, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Simla, 1977, p. 77.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., p. 76.

\textsuperscript{17} M.K. Gandhi; Harijan, 12/11/1938.
“caste and untouchability had no place in religion.”

In short Gandhiji’s goal was the attainment of the unity of people and nation through the removal of untouchability.

Gandhiji believed that truth is the source of all values. It is an ontological and epistemological structure of social living. Truth in its various forms such as the existential, the transcendental, the spiritual reality, the moral order and in all forms are realities of high order. Gandhiji believed in an ethical religion. So he translated the eternal values of religion into relative truths of ethical principles. The fundamental principles of Gandhian ideology is satyam and ahimsa and he objectified these through satyagraha. This signifies his pragmatic approach. So he was a practical idealist. His practical approach negated the idealistic determinism. Hence the core of Gandhian philosophy is satyam and ahimsa and it is irreducible and it reduces God to Truth. He visualized the spirit of truth through swadesi, bread labour and equality. His concern about ahimsa and satyam forced him to opt the karmamarga which justifying the purity of means. As a moral genius, Gandhi insisted on the purity of both means and end.

19. T.S. Devadoss; op. cit, p. 17.
Gandhiji was a great humanist for the future generations to come. There are no parallels to Gandhi so far in the history of the world. His concern about Harijans, whom the society had been reducing as accused stepsons, who lost every thing in the deluge of time, lives without self respect, and without the basic necessities of life, testifies his quality of humanism. That is why he wished to wipe out untouchability and social disabilities experienced by the Harijans before the achievement of swaraj.

“Liquidation of untouchability was the foremost aspect of his constructive programme - the way for attaining swaraj”.  

The present study seeks to explore the method, and objective of Kumara Guru’s mission of delivering the untouchable multitude of Kerala from their servitude. For it he used the strategy of deslaving in various spaces of their life. By deslaving process we mean the complex process of socio-cultural transformation of the Harijans from the age old neglect of the establishments. The effort to transform the Harijans from their age old slave conditions, both physical and mental, Kumara Guru used certain pragmatic approach which can be designated as deslaving. This socio-cultural transformation of Harijans through deslaving. Kumara Guru used certain paradigms, which are identical to that of Gandhiji’s social service. This transformation was

21. T.S. Devadoss; op. cit, p. 22.
neither smooth and spontaneous nor a natural one. But it attained through the introduction of multiple strategies of truth and *ahimsa*. We seek to illustrate in the study that how Kumara Guru attained the goal and to examine the relevance of Kumara Guru under the Gandhian perspective.

Kumara Guru, who rose from a very humble position to the level of an undisputed leader of the *Harijans* of Travancore and how far he was able to remould the socio-cultural parameters is the core of the study. The upper caste approach towards the *Harijans* before and after the unfurling of the PRDS movement by Kumara Guru are the main concerns here. The upper caste hegemony in the religion, economy, society, culture, education etc. are the object of the study in relation to Kumara Guru’s mission. Gandhiji and his missionary influences on the life and work of Kumara Guru are the main concerns of the researcher. This horizon of *Harijan* movement headed by the de-facto *Harijan* leader and his mediation with *savarna* society and *Harijan* society is an interesting aspect of enquiry. His attempt to establish schools, exclusive colonies, and industrial training centres effected socio-cultural transformations in the *Harijan* rank and file. We would argue that such transformation was accelerated because of the fast growing acceptance to Gandhian concepts and philosophy among the *savarna* sections of Kerala.
Institutionalization of Kumara Guru's movement facilitated the functioning of his ideologies in the proceeding generations of Kerala. It helped Guru's disciples to perpetuate and visualize his aims and objectives in systematic manner and fit it for future generations. The transformation of the unorganised multitudes under the banner of PRDS and how far it induced progressive mentality into the rank and file of the Harijan lots of Kerala in general and in Travancore in particular is a matter of enquiry. How Kumara Guru's movement facilitated the smooth transformations of the Harijans/untouchables into a respectable constituents of the Kerala society is also a study endeavoured to capture.

The problem is primarily a historical one. Availability of adequate historical data naturally becomes indispensable for a project like this. The centre of this study is Kumara Guru, who shared his views and ideas orally to a section of illiterate, caused the scarcity of the data and it makes the venture a bit ambitious. But Governmental enactments, hegemonic role of Kumara Guru in the legislative councils, the social impulses generated by Kumara Guru, and the organizational tempo have helped this study.

In the Gandhian space of Indian history, the relevance of Harijan movement by Kumara Guru has some importance in the process of socio-cultural transformation of Harijans of Kerala was conceived broadly within
the hypothetical framework delineated above. Different methods have been employed to collect the required data pertaining to the study. For collecting primary and secondary data the researcher visited a number of places and libraries like Centre for Development Studies, Trivandrum; Gandhi Peace Foundation, New Delhi; State Archives at Trivandrum and Ernakulam; Kerala University Library, Trivandrum; M.G. University Library, Kottayam; School of Gandhian Thought and Development Studies Department Library, M.G. University, Kottayam; PRDS, HQ Office at Eraviperoor; Malayala Manorama Library, Kottayam; Rashtra Deepika Library, Kottayam; Pondicherry University Library, Pondicherry; JNU Library, New Delhi; Benjamin Bailey Research Centre, C.M.S. College, Kottayam; Kottayam Public Library, Kottayam; Collins Library, C.M.S. College, Kottayam and Old Seminary Archives, Chungom, Kottayam. Informations and suggestions were also gathered from various seminars/conferences conducted by various universities and similar organizations in India.

The data has been collected by both formal and non-formal technique of interviews, observations and recall while examining the life and thought of both Gandhiji and Kumara Guru in various spheres. The researcher has personally contacted the PRDS leaders to get first hand information about Kumara Guru's modus operandi. In addition to it, the researcher has interviewed senior individuals, with rich living experiences, of Central Travancore.
About the chapterization, in Chapter - I, an attempt has been made to give a panoramic view of two great souls of India, i.e; Gandhiji and Kumara Guru. The second chapter is purely a historical analysis of social, political, religious, and economic scenario of Kerala on the eve of Kumara Guru’s movement. The various aspects which determined the socio-economic relation is the theme of this chapter. In the third chapter, the evolution of Gandhian modus and its impact on the Harijan as well as the savarna sections was incorporated. In addition to it, the emergence of Kumara Guru as a leader of Harijans and the social situation which led to the formation of PRDS as a socio-religious movement is substantiated. Kumara Guru’s approach to Gandhian strategies and towards colonial wars also mentioned in this chapter. In the last chapter an attempt is made to analyse Gandhiji’s and Kumara Guru’s ideological similarities on the basis of the findings in the early chapters. Thus the method adopted in this study is that of explanatory narrative based on the socio-economic and religious cause and effect reasoning in the Gandhian perspective. As noted earlier in this chapter, the central conceptual tools are borrowed from Gandhian paradigms.