CHAPTER IV

BAHUBALAM: GANDHIAN FOOD, BODY AND NATURE CURE

Food can be divided into three categories: vegetarian, flesh and mixed. Strictly vegetarian or herbivorous diet avoids all kinds of animal products, including eggs and milk. Non-vegetarian or carnivorous diet includes meat, fish, eggs and dairy products. A mixed diet or omnivorous includes both vegetarian and non-vegetarian items of food. Gandhiji considered various aspects of the quality of food and took a negative attitude towards carnivorous diet. His disapproval of non-vegetarian diet has been primarily based on his ethical principle of Ahimsa or non-violence. He didn’t consider sterile or unfertilized egg as a flesh food, because he thinks eating sterile eggs involves no killing.

A layman does not consider milk to be animal food. On the other hand eggs are regarded by the layman as a flesh food. In reality they are not. Now a days sterile eggs are also produced.... A sterile egg never develops into a chick. Therefore he who can take milk should have no objection to taking sterile eggs.
Gandhiji always preferred strictly vegetarian diet and as a proponent of Satyagraha or steadfastness to truth he was very much adament to stick on to it even at times of severe, life threatening tests. But in case of milk he had to retreat from his original stance and break in his many years of abstention from milk. Gandhiji admits:

I have always been in favour of pure vegetarian diet. But experience has taught me that in order to keep perfectly fit, vegetarian diet must include milk and milk products such as curds, butter, ghee etc. This is a significant departure from my original idea.2

In 1917 Gandhiji was acutely inflicted with dysentery and could be revived to health only after he resorted to take goat’s milk. Earlier he had given up milk since he learnt that in many cases even the last drop of milk is extracted from the mother cow denying even a little of it to its natural claimants, the poor little calves. But Gandhiji is convinced of another fact. He said: “...In the vast vegetable kingdom there must be some kind, which, while supplying those necessary substances which we derived from milk and meat, is free from their drawbacks, ethical and other.”3 Over and above moral question, Gandhiji was apprehensive about hygienic drawbacks and health risk of milk and
meat. Those products from infected animals disseminate an array of
diseases like tuberculosis, hook worm infection and also indigestion
and constipation. In Nature living one need not worry about similar
health hazards.

From the perspective of Nature living Gandhiji wrote
elaborately on what he experimented and practised in dietetics, or what
he considered to be the most apt diet regimen for the vast majority of
eighty percentage of the rural and urban unprivileged population of
India: “His experiments were conducted with a view to finding out the
most wholesome food and the wisest way of preparing it, all the time
keeping in mind the poverty of our people and their slender
resources.” Food should be natural, balanced in nutrients and
affordable to the masses and readily available.

His experiments with food and drink were not only important
but unique in their scope and nature. These experiments had a
number of objectives, almost all of which were unusual in India.
One of his experiments was to discover a balanced vegetarian
diet that could serve as an all-India diet. Another experiment
was to replace cooked diet by natural diet as far possible. A
third experiment was to do, not only without meat but also,
without animal products, more specially, milk... A fourth experiment was to treat food as medicine for health and vigour of the body .... And all these experiments were conducted in the most scientific way, for the solution of the most practical but neglected problems."

This systematic approach was based on vigilant observations and practice which are characteristic of Nature-living.

Gandhi advocated a mixed diet containing vegetables, sterile eggs and milk. He was very particular about a balanced diet containing all essential nutrient factors. Man needs food which supplies tissue building substance to provide the daily wear and tear of the body. Man requires energy, fat, certain salts and roughage. These items help the excretion of internal wastes. Proteins promote the building of the tissues. One gets them from milk, eggs, pulses and nuts. For vegetarians milk may be recommended for the source of animal protein which should be a very important component of food. Raw eggs supply the most easily digestible protein. Skimmed milk is also valuable and safe because skimming eliminates the fat which causes cardio-vascular ailments.
Gandhiji states that after milk the second most essential nutrient the body needs is cereals — wheat, rice, jowar and bajra. He advises against taking different kinds of cereals together. This is unnatural and imparts difficult times for the digestive system. Cereals provide the energy supplying substance called starch. Wheat is a very popular cereal food for followers of Nature living. It is described as the king among the cereals. Wheat contains the following ingredients:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Water</th>
<th>Nitrogenous Matter</th>
<th>Fat</th>
<th>Starch &amp; Sugar</th>
<th>Cellulose</th>
<th>Mineral matter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14.5%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cereals should be processed carefully, so that the minerals and vitamin rich bran is maintained. The bran also works as roughage, encouraging easy bowel movement. Gandhiji is wary about mill polishing and pounding of grains, which removes the nutrient rich bran from the product. Starch is a common component of diet. People usually mix starch preparations of cereals with various curries or gravy which tempt them to swallow the morsel without proper mastication. Preliminary digestion of starch is to be undergone in the mouth for
which it should be eaten almost raw. Consequently there stimulates
greater flow of saliva through mastication. In strictly vegetarian diet,
pulses have a prime position because they are the major suppliers of
proteins. Gandhiji advocated pulses only for people engaged in manual
jobs. Those who do sedentary works pulses may be avoided.

Gandhiji's charitable vegetarianism was implemented in his
own home. Once when Kasturba Gandhi was inflicted with chronic
haemorrhage, Gandhiji advised her to give up pulses. In order to
encourage the reluctant lady, he himself took the vow to abstain from
pulses, which he continued for many years. For compensation he
recommended vegetables and fruits which hold position three in his list
of essential items. In his time, in many remote villages, vegetables and
fruits were a rare commodity. Gandhiji considered this shortage of
greens and fruits as slur on the administration of India. A fair quantity
of leafy vegetables must be taken every day. Cooking should be
avoided wherever possible; varieties like cucumber, tomatoes, mustard,
cress and tender leaves may be eaten raw after proper washing.

Man is supposed to be a frugivorous animal like his phylogenic
predecessors, the apes. Considering the truth Gandhiji advised to
include seasonally available fruits viz. mangoes, guavas, jambolan,
grapes, oranges, papaya and lime. The best time proposed for taking fruits is early morning. Gandhiji proposes a breakfast of fruits and milk to be an ideal recipe. Banana and milk are proved a perfect meal, since banana is abundant in starch, sugar and minerals. For the fat requirement he proposes ghee or any edible vegetable oil. He proposes 1 1/2 ounces of ghee as an ideal amount of fat requirement for the body. As a substitute for ghee he proposes hand processed edible oils such as ground nut oil or coconut oil.

Adulteration is a major threat in selection of natural food items. Gandhiji laments that as long as honesty has not become an integral part of business morals, the individual will have to procure the pure articles with patience. One should never be satisfied to take whatever one gets, irrespective of quality. He advises that it is far better to do without an item than to take the adulterated one, which adds to toxemia and internal pollution. Gandhiji was accommodative in his suggestions. He advised: If one cannot get plenty of fruits, extra sugar may be taken preferably raw sugar or gur. He warns against the predominantly urban habit of taking too much sugar, the white poison in the unnatural way – along with puddings, sweet confectionaries and all sorts of drinks. He considered white sugar extremely harmful.
The concept of the quantity of food for Nature living influenced Gandhi's ethical perspective. He became a vehement critic of the extravagant eating of the privileged. "All the delicacies of the world cannot equal the relish that hunger gives to food. A hungry man will eat a dry piece of bread with the greatest relish, whereas one who is not hungry will refuse the best of sweet meats." He advocated moderate eating for simple life and lofty survival. Regarding the question of how often and how much food one must eat, Gandhi's answer is clear:

Food should be taken as a matter of duty—even as a medicine—to sustaining the body, never for satisfaction of the palate. Thus pleasurable feeling comes from satisfaction of real hunger. Therefore, we can say that relish is dependant upon hunger and not outside it. Because of our wrong habits and artificial way of living, very few people know what their system requires. Our parents who bring us into this world do not, as a rule, cultivate self control. Their habits and their way of living influence the children to a certain extent. The mother's food during pregnancy is bound to affect the child.  

Nature living checks the wrong habits of the parents and save the progeny from a disease stricken existence. In grown-ups wrong habits
are difficult to be got rid of. Habits of hygiene and carefully regulated diet are components of Nature living.

For a general purpose Gandhiji provides a list of food varieties including cow's milk, cereals, vegetables, ghee/butter and sugar.

Table showing quantity of major food varieties recommended by Gandhiji:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Varieties</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cow's Milk</td>
<td>2 lbs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cereals (wheat, rice, bajra, jowar etc)</td>
<td>60z</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vegetables:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leafy</td>
<td>3 oz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>5 oz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raw</td>
<td>1 oz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fat:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghee or Butter</td>
<td>1 ½ oz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sugar:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gur (raw sugar) or</td>
<td>1 ½ oz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Sugar</td>
<td>1 ½ oz</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Gandhiji considers human body as a temple of the divine spirit, it should be kept in the most sound and pure form. The sanctity of the
body can be maintained only through regulated supply of the correct food. He is of the opinion that there is no fixed dietetic regimen suitable for all. Man should acquire a workable knowledge and preferably choose the ideal food for him. Regarding how often one must eat, Gandhiji held a comparatively liberal attitude. He recommends three meals a day, the generally held view – the breakfast, noon meal and supper. More than three meals is deleterious to health. He criticises the urban habit of intermittent nibbling. He is against eating the last meal, supper in the night. Gandhiji doesn’t advise the use of additives. He permits limited use of table salt. Regarding spices he has his own view. He says: “All condiments, even salt, destroy the natural flavour of vegetables and cereals etc.”

Gandhiji believed in physical exercise which keeps the working of the different body system of man in perfect harmony. The human body requires exercise for physical and mental relaxation. Daily regimen of extra exercise is especially required for the sedentary modern life of man. He complained that there are many people who do not know even
the technique of proper breathing. He is anxious about those who do not know how to breathe. He advises them to take breathing exercise:

The air comes into close contact with the blood in the lungs and purifies it. Many people do not know the art of breathing. This defect prevents an adequate purification of their blood... Any comfortable posture that ensures breathing through the nose and free chest expansion is enough for our purpose.”12

The yoga in Nature living teaches the control of the body to reach the goal of spiritual development. He believed that no matter what amount of work one has, one should always find some time for exercise, just as one does for one’s meals. In his ashram life Gandhiji’s daily schedule included time for regular yoga exercise and pranayam — breathing exercise.

Gandhiji had a legacy of his mother observing fasting penance as a religious ritual. He eventually realized the value of occasional fasting, which is a natural requisite for the modern man since, he overburdens and pollutes the body by over eating and malicious eating. Fasting gives rest to the body systems and cleanse the physical and mental impurities. While in Tolstoy Farm in South Africa, Gandhiji found occasions of religious observances of fasting by all communities —
Gandhiji, Hindu, Christian, Muslim, Parsi irrespective of their faith. However, Gandhi warns against physical fasting without mental fasting which is bound to bring about hypocrisy and disaster. He says: “Fasting is useful, when mind co-operates with starving body, that is to say when it cultivates a distaste for the objects that are denied to the body.”

Eventually Gandhi employed fasting as a weapon, of self penance and satyagraha which aims at purifying the observer and the environment and the target minds.

Gandhiji considered cleanliness near to godliness. On many occasions he accused his countrymen of being indifferent to personal hygiene and sanitation. While in South Africa, Gandhi was very much pained about the charge levelled against Indians in South Africa for not keeping their body and home clean. He was disappointed to see the Indian community’s indifference to take their own hygienic measures. Gandhi says: “I saw that I could not so easily count on the help of the community in getting it to do its own duty, as I could in claiming for its rights.” In India also he reacted critically on the unhygienic practices. He was surprised to see how the priests were unhygienic and the sanctum sanctorum was kept unclean. He remarks: “It pained me to see so much uncleanness about a place of worship.
One would expect a careful observance of the rules of sanitation and hygiene in a place which is regarded as holy. The authors of Smritis, as I knew even then, have laid the greatest emphasis on cleanliness both inward and outward.\textsuperscript{15} When contagious diseases like plague and cholera broke out in India and abroad, Gandhiji ventured to offer his voluntary service and educate the people about the relevance of personal hygiene and sanitation in basic promotion of health and prevention of disease. He stressed the possibilities of promotion of sanitation through Nature living.

Gandhiji believed in perfect health which would be almost impossible without Brahmacarya and conservation of sexual vital fluid. Brahmacarya literally means to live with God, and observation of celibacy is fundamental to it. He says: “the knowledge that a perfect observance of brahmacarya means realization of Brahm, I did not owe to a study of the sasthas. It slowly grew upon me with experience.”\textsuperscript{16} He held the extreme view that if man assimilates the fact that conservation of vital energy has been fundamental for attaining perfect health, brahmacarya could be observed by intelligent couples: “A firm grasp of the fact that semen is meant to be used only for procreation and not for self indulgence, leaves no room
what so ever for indulging in animal passion." Gandhiji asserts: “Marriage ought to signify a union of hearts between the two partners. A married couple is worthy of being considered brahmacharis if they never think of sexual intercourse except for the purposes of procreation." He argued against believing that the sexual action is an independent function inevitable as sleeping or eating. On the other hand Brahmacharya enhances one's physical, mental and spiritual zest. It gives great potentiality to perform social duty efficiently.

Gandhiji was against the use of any form of contraceptives. He considers that it would prevent man from exercising self-restraint and license him to over indulgence. He advised people to avoid contraceptive as poisons. He declared: "...Contraceptives are an evil in that they emphasize the virtue, not the vice of an evil. At least at present none eulogizes sexual gratification as a necessity, but the advocates of contraceptives have begun to advertise an evil." Gandhiji was indebted to brahmacharya, which he took as a vow in 1906. It gave him great potentiality to perform his social duties efficiently. Moreover his discovery of Satyagraha had been a gift of brahmacharya. He recommended a strict vegetarian food containing fruits and nuts, simple limited spiceless and preferably uncooked to be
ideal for *brahmacharya*. He said: "*Brahmacharya* needed no effort on my part in South Africa when I lived on fruits and nuts alone. It has been a matter of very great effort ever since I began to take milk."²⁰ He fused dietetic experiments and Nature living not only from the vegetarian's but also from the *brahmachari*’s point of view. In that perspective his views on strict body discipline through *brahmacharya* may be justified.

Nature living was the greatest source of inspiration on Gandhiji’s holy mission of serving the poor and the destitute. He viewed human life as the truest manifestation of Nature if it is practised and evolved through acceptable principles of health and hygiene. Gandhiji experimented and analyzed the relevance of a style of living which is free from the intervention of disease or *vaidyas*. He says:

The Nature Cure man does not ‘sell a cure’ to the patient. He teaches him the right way of living in his home, which would not only cure him of his particular ailment but also save him falling ill in future. The ordinary doctor or *vaidya* is interested mostly in the study of disease. The *Nature Curist* is interested more in the study of health. His real interest begins where that
of the ordinary doctor ends; the eradication of the patient's ailment under Nature Cure marks only the beginning of a way of life in which there is no room for illness or disease. Nature Cure is thus a way of life, not a course of 'treatment'. It is not claimed that Nature Cure can cure all disease. No system of medicine can do that or else we should all be immortals.\(^2\)

His greatest source of influence in Nature cure was the German expert Dr. Louis Kuhne, who advocated a systematic and simple life for maintaining health. Gandhiji had a firm conviction in life natural or Nature living which helps to build a healthy body, sound mind and spirit. His concept of Nature cure was popularised on the fact that the Daridranarayanas who could not afford expensive treatment may benefit by resorting to the former and save their health. They might be benefitted by the much experimented and established principles of Nature living. His services in the Urlikanchan Nature cure clinic near Pune were "in pursuance of the belief that the poor could not afford costly medicines and remedies and that he owed it to let them have the benefit of his life long experiments in Health and Hygiene."\(^2\) The most powerful streams of Gandhiji's profound thought can be found in his broad concept of Nature cure. He established how any disorder in
the human body can be rectified by the body itself. The only requirement for the same is to allow the body to set itself right by eliminating the biotoxins crept into it through the unhygienic habits of the individual concerned. Fasting, sleep, relaxation, bath, water cure methods, non violent enema, sunbath and gentle massage are some of the aspects of Nature cure which Gandhiji followed. To him Nature cure has the same laws of God. Gandhiji realized how the commercialized drugs could only harm the body which is a perfectly automatic machine. It requires simple diet, fresh air, natural exercise, hygienic surroundings and above all a strong will and pure heart.

It involves not only the use of earth, water, air, sunlight, fast and such like to cure disease, but even more a transformation of one’s entire life – physical, mental, moral and social - through Ramanama or faith in God, Alias His Law. Ramanama is not, therefore, for him mere magic which when uttered through the lips will work wonders of itself. It signifies, as already said, a complete change in the heart and mode of life of the individual, whereby the individual comes to be in tune with the infinite and so obtains never-failing disease-conquering life and strength from the Source of all life.23
At such a stage the body enjoys sound health and the bliss of Nature living.

Gandhi recommended Nature cure only for anybody who evolved or who could be evolved to be a creature possessing, in addition to his body, both mind and soul. For such a being Ramanama is the truest Nature cure treatment. It is an unfailing remedy. The expression Rama or infallible cure is derived from it. Nature, too, indicates that for man it is a worthy remedy. No matter what the ailment from which a man may be suffering, recitation of Ramanama from the heart is the sure cure. To Gandhi Rama never meant a personal God. He declared:

I myself have been a devotee of Tulsidas from my childhood and have, therefore, always worshipped God as Rama. But I know that if, beginning with Omkar, one goes through the entire gamut of God's names current in all climes, all countries and all languages, the result is the same. He and His Law are one.24

God has many names:

Each person can choose the name that appeals most to him. Ishwara, Allah, Khuda, God mean the same. But the recitation must not be parrot-like; it must be born of faith of which
endeavour will be some evidence...If in spite of this, death supervenes, we may not mind. On the contrary, it should be welcomed. Science has not so far discovered any recipe for making the body immortal. Immortality is an attribute of the soul.\textsuperscript{25}

Gandhiji’s ideas about Nature living and Nature cure spring from the innocent wisdom of vedic India. He has assimilated the spirit of Ashtangahriddaya – Ayurveda – saying:

\begin{quote}
"Acharya Sarva cheshtasu loka eva heey dheematha
Anukaryathamevatha loupikardhe pareekshaka."
\end{quote}

It proclaims the message that whatever we require is there in Nature. We may choose the good or the bad through careful observation. This belief served as a prominent guideline in his life natural. His researches on Nature cure are centered on imparting message to the millions of ‘have-nots’. Even before his acquaintance with Kuhne system of life, Gandhiji developed a total dislike for all medicines. While in South Africa he was constantly troubled by constipation and head ache. He heard about a ‘No Breakfast Association’ in Manchester and was attracted by their arguments. Their argument was the most of the ailments of the Englishmen were due to over eating and they should at
least give up break-fast, if they wanted to improve their health. Gandhiji found how the same allegation is applicable to him as well. “I was never a spare eater and enjoyed as many delicacies as could be had with a vegetarian and spiceless diet. I scarcely ever got up before six or seven.” Gandhiji tried the experiment and skipped his morning food. His headache entirely disappeared. He also rejoices in his habit of going out for long walks. He applied wet earth pack treatment at his abdomen and got rid of his chronic constipation. “Since then I have tried the treatment on myself and my friends and never had reason to regret it.” He had great faith in similar Nature cure methods which he recommended for the simple village people.

Gandhiji holds the view that man has little need to drug himself. Nine hundred and ninety-nine cases out of a thousand can be brought round by means of a well regulated diet, water and earth treatment and similar house hold remedies. He who runs to the doctor, vaidya or hakim for every little ailment, and swallows all kinds of vegetable and mineral drugs, not only curtails his life, but, by becoming the slave of his body instead of remaining its master, loses self-control, and ceases to be a man.”
Even in his sick bed Gandhiji did not lose confidence in Nature therapy: “In fact I have thanked God for them as lessons and successfully resisted the temptation of taking numerous drugs.”

Gandhiji’s wife and children were also guided to follow Nature cure and Nature living techniques. Once when his ten year old son, Manilal was laid stricken with acute infection of typhoid and pneumonia, Gandhiji laid aside his doctors advice and administered his son with Kuhne’s hydrotherapy, hip bath and wet sheet pack treatment and the child was relieved of high temperature. The fever got better but took forty days for complete cure and all these days the child was fed diluted milk and fruit juice only.

Gandhiji has described the incidents of how his wife Kasturbai was cured by naturopathic treatment from severe ailments. On one occasion while in South Africa, his wife was laid to bed due to acute illness after a surgical operation. The doctor prescribed urgent feeding of beef tea. But Gandhiji got her discharged from the Nursing home, and cared her in the Naturopathic way. On another occasion she was affected with obstinate haemorrhage. Gandhiji advised her to avoid salt and pulses. She followed it and had a complete cure. In South Africa Gandhiji and his team of volunteers offered nursing services to the
victims of Pneumonia and Plague. Gandhiji applied wet-earth-package to three of the affected. It was wonderful that the victims treated with allopathic medicines passed away. Two of the three persons whom Gandhiji treated with mud pack were saved. Gandhiji observes: "It is impossible to say how the two patients were saved and how we remained immune, but the experience enhanced my faith in earth treatment..." Consequently he tried the same treatment when ever occasions demanded.

The science of natural therapeutics is based on the use of the same five elements earth, water, fire, air and ether or space which constitute the human body. Earth is used as mud poultice and pack to relieve fever, constipation and putrefaction. Earth in sterile, powder is also given internally for constipation and acidity. Both cold and hot water are used in hydrotherapy as hipbath and wet-cloth-pack in high fever and dyspepsia. Gandhiji followed the German hydropathic expert Kuhne in water treatment. Steam bath is most useful in rheumatism and arthritis. Herbs like neem leaf and Mentha leaf, are also, sometimes used in steam bath. Sun bath in the morning is rejuvenating. It is most useful in natural production of Vitamin-D in the body. Heliotherapy is also found to relieve mental ailments like depression.
Exposure to pure and enriched natural air is most vital to human health. Retreat to forests and sea beach are rejuvenating and hematinic. The internal and external space or volume of the body should be kept unpolluted and less dense. Elimination of body wastes by enema, and steam bath, lessens body grossness and gravity and keeps the body relaxed. Gandhiji advises every one to sleep in the open, covering the body against cold and dew. One who establishes contact with the stars as living witness to all his thoughts will never allow any evil or impurity to enter his mind and will enjoy peaceful, refreshing sleep. "To get fresh air, one must sleep in the open."32 Such a sleep, in harmony with Nature promotes the positive attitude to Nature.

Gandhiji is critical of the attitude of modern medicos. Although they have taken something from Nature cure methods, on the whole they are indifferent to anything that lies outside their groove. The medical profession has got into the habit of confining themselves to whatever is included in their own curriculum. He celebrates the glory of his concept: “Where there is absolute purity, inner and outer illness
becomes impossible." He was immensely enthusiastic to carry his message of Nature living across the lengths and breadths of India to shed a flood of light to the eclipsed sanitary scenario of the Nation.
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Gandhiji's staunch belief in Nature living had an effective influence on his psychic evolution. The simple style of life had a gentle touch of absolute pantheism. Though from a different perspective he showed that Nature never betrayed the heart that loved her. His lofty attitude towards life expanded Gandhiji’s armoury for the relentless struggle for the internal and external liberation of his fellow beings. He is uniquely indebted to Nature for one of her superb gifts namely self control. It is only through self-control one may attain the supreme blessing of flawless memory. To Gandhiji self control did mean more than the control of the mind as practised by a brahmachari or a sanyasi. He assimilated the vast sense of the term to suit the divergent situations of life wherever psychic check was required. Truth, satyagraha, non-violence and community service – his weapons and tools for liberating his country and the minds of her millions of dwellers – were melted in the furnace of Nature and beaten into shape