CHAPTER - II
EARLY LIFE AND INFLUENCE ON
MAHATMA GANDHI

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born on 2nd October 1869 as fourth son of Karamchand Gandhi and Puthlibai, married in 1857 (then Puthlibai was 25 and Karamchand was 47). He was born in Porbandar, a small Port of fishermen and sea-traders in modern Gujarat. He was born into the sub-caste of Modh Bania of the Vysya caste order; his family belonged to the class of grocers and vendors. His grandfather, Uttamchand was Chief Minister to the State of Porbandar, his father Karamchand was Dewan to the Thaker Saheb, Princely ruler of Porbandar, in Kathiawad now Saurashtra, also Chief Minister of the Princely State of Vankaner. Born in a feudal Princely State, early upbringing and the Vysya
caste origin created distaste for violence in him. From childhood onwards, Vaishanava Hinduism alongwith Jainism greatly influenced him. His mother Puthlibai had a good deal of influence on him as a child, in his formative years, he imbibed religious and moral values from her, and he had strong emotional attachment with his mother. A deeply religious, God fearing and unlettered lady was Puthlibai; she inculcated the habits of fasting, non-injury, prayer and vegetarianism in him. The Muslim and Parsee friends of his parents left an imprint on him while he was a child. Since his father was the Chief Minister of the Princely State of Porbandar, Mohandas found all kinds of unpleasant things happening around, people coming and going, whisperings, talks of conspiracies etc. Again, his father's assignment as judicial official in the Tribunal meant for settling disputes between Princes of Kathiawar shaped and influenced the conditioning of the idea of justice of Gandhi.
The moral encouragement that he received from his parents especially mother, made Gandhi condition his whole conceptual frame of politics, the non-violent (Ahimsā) way, which can save the oppressor as well as the oppressed. They fully supported him in his development as a spiritualized political leader in the formative years of his character and personality. For violation of caste restriction not to cross the seas he was excommunicated from the Modh Bania sub-order and remained an outcast till his death. Gandhi's marriage was in 1883, both Mohandas Gandhi and Kasturbai were 13 at the time of marriage. He seriously undertook the second stage in the cycle of life, according to the Hindu prescriptions, and associated duties of a householder, but it was not a full success. The private life of Gandhi with wife and four children was not very cordial. He had tremendous difficulties in persuading them to accept and follow his line of thought and action.
Gandhi was a slow, shy and hesitant student at school. The education that he received at the Porbandar and Rajkot Schools was of the Western type. He was originally meant and educated for the world of medicine by his parents. He attended the primary school at Rajkot, then Alfred High School and here his 'acculturation' as a 'Brown Briton' started. As a young student he detested English as medium of instruction. At the age of 18 he matriculated from Allahabad, he went to college at Bhavnagar for one year, and in 1887 proceeded to England for studies in Law. In June 1890 he qualified in Roman and Common Law. His stay in London helped him improve and master the English language and develop a flair for journalistic expertise. Along side he obtained matriculation with Latin, French and English as Languages, and History, Geography and Science as subjects from the University of London. After law he enrolled in the Inner Temple.
Moral and religious influences of early childhood and later years shaped the whole of Gandhian perspectives in a definite way. He was a Hindu by birth and upbringing; this had a great influence on him in championing the Hindu values in his scheme than Western ideals. His family belonged to the Bhakti sect, the Vallabhacharya Sampradaya, devoted to the worship of SriRama and Krishna (incarnations of Lord Vishnu). He belonged to the Vaishnavaite branch and the great classic epic Ramayana had a good deal of influence on him. The influence of Jainism also is very deep in him, especially in his approach to Ahimśa. Jainism flourished in Kathiawad and it was opposed to Brahmnical domination. It was the religion of the Bania community. Another socio-religious reformer from Kathiawad, Swami Dayananda Saraswathi leader of Arya Samaj who opposed orthodoxy and caste domination greatly influenced Gandhi. The 'Suryanarayana' sect that received even the untouchables into their temples was quite popular in
Gujarat, and this sect influenced Gandhi's family too.

'Gītā', 'Ramayana', 'New Testament', Tolstoy's work 'The Kingdom of God is with in You' all helped Gandhi to mould his approaches and ideas. Gandhi gave new thrust and exposition to the metaphysical and political meanings of 'Ahimsā' that he imbibed from Jainism and Buddhism. His root in Hinduism was so deep he says that Bhagavad Gītā and Upanishads mesmerized him. In Young India of August 6, 1925, he wrote "when doubts hunt me when disappointments stare me in the face, and when I see not one ray of light on the horizon I turn to the Bhagavad Gītā and find a verse to comfort me".

Also the religious piety and cheerful self-discipline of his mother left a deep imprint on him. The idea of a personal God, the notion of austere life occurred to him from Vaishnavaism and Jainism respectively.

1. Gandhi, M.K., Young India, 06-8-1925.
Jainism never treated mind and matter as separate, it projected the intrinsic link between the two, and when Gandhi denounces the 'Satanic' civilization this influence of Jainism is very evident on his thought process. Gandhi adopted the means and methods for communicating with the illiterate masses, living in stupor and superstition from the 'Bhakthi' cult. Bhakthi cult taught that enslavement and consequent despair could be solved by surrender before God. Gandhi channeled this in to the sphere of political activity by direct communication with the masses adopting clues from the 'Bhakthi' movement. For he observes "...we, common people, (should) cling to the essential with a simple faith and live our lives in Bhakthi to God".

"India: what can it Teach us" by Maxmuller influenced him while a lawyer in South Africa, and it

helped him know more about Hinduism and enhanced his quest for truth. Thus, he proclaimed that Hinduism is not a creed, but the response of the whole being to the call of the God; here he drew great inspiration from 'Gītā'. The notion of returning good for evil and that of opposing the evil through non-resistance came to him from the New Testament and the 'Sermon on the Mount'. Bravery and austerity of prophet Mohamed impressed him very much after reading "Heroes and Hero-worship" by Carlyle. Along with this "Life of Mohamet and His successors", and "The sayings of Zorathustra" by Washington Irving greatly attracted his intellectual curiosity. The influences of 'Bhagavad Gītā' was very profound on Gandhi, he found in this celestial poem the ideal for cultivating the soul of the individual and the ideal for cultivating the morals of a society. Besides this, Ramayana, Manusmriti and Upanishads also fascinated Gandhi; the ordeal of Harischandra had a telling influence on him. All
these shaped in him the later attitudes towards socio-political issues.

Untouchability was found to be an inhuman institution by Gandhi even when he was of 12 years of age. He was not allowed to touch his family sweeper and was not allowed to touch his fellow classmates who were of downtrodden status. He regarded 'untouchability' as a greater demon than Ravana or than a 'Satanic' act like that of Dyer's rule (Navajivan, 05-04-1921). This conviction of unHindu content of untouchability is not a result of his contacts with literatures of other religions than that of Hinduism; it was the knowledge that he gathered from a serious study of Hindu scriptures themselves. These he gained by the time he was 12 or 14 years' of age. His contacts with other religions came only when he was 21. Even though, as he admits, he wavered between Christianity and Hinduism, he soon recovered his balance of mind and throughout his life held that salvation was possible only through the
Hindu religion. In short, he regarded himself as a sanatan Hindu; he endorsed the Vedas and Upanishads, believed in incarnations (avatars) and rebirth. Strictly in the Vedic sense Gandhi found Varnashrama - Dharma acceptable, not in the crude sense. In his outlook and programmes he combined the 'Karmayogi' traditions, traditions of action and the traditions of 'Tapascharya', ascetic practices. Gandhi had a Hindu view of time, the world being caught up in a vast cyclical process; he never shared the 19th century western notion of linear view of progress.

Various strands of intellectual inputs went in to the making of the Gandhian approach. His life was a continuous chain of political obedience and disobedience in South Africa and India. He had a jail experience for 10 times, six years of jail life in total, i.e. six years four months and 24 days in various jails in South Africa and India. Affectionately he was given the title 'Mahabhangi' (the Chief
scavenger) by a friend seeing his enthusiasm in hygiene and service mind to clean the lavatories of others. While he was following the profession of an attorney in South Africa he showed great enthusiasm for nursing profession, and he had so much of compassion and concern for human suffering, he, for a longtime, acted as a compounder in a dispensary in South Africa. Out of his compassion and caring for human sufferings he worked in Ambulance Corps during the war in South Africa and was awarded a medal for his service in the Indian Ambulance Corps.

The continuous course of education in England left a mark of Western identity on Gandhi for long, say till about 1905/1906. During the periods in London he came into contact with the ideas of Leo Tolstoy (1829-1910), Russian aristocrat, novelist, moralist and John Ruskin (1819-1900), English moralist, social thinker, art historian and critic. Contacts with Madame Blavatsky and Annie Besant of Theosophical Society made Gandhi aware of the
high esteem some Europeans had for Hindu religion and philosophy. The book by Leo Tolstoy "Kingdom of God is Within You" made him know more about non-violence and love the values that he had already imbibed from his Indian family environs. Tolstoy's attack on modern society helped Gandhi develop his distrust of the 'law and order' state and also the 'welfare' state and also his critique of urbanism. The work of John Ruskin, "UnTo This Last" published in 1862, was read by Gandhi in 1904. He translated this book into Gujarathi, under the title 'Sarvodaya' meaning the welfare of all. Ruskin's book was a severe critique of the 'laissez-faire' utilitarian values of 19th century liberalism. He learnt the aspect of redemptive quality of labour from this work of Ruskin. "Civilization: Its Cause and Cure" by Edward Carpenter published in 1891, impressed Gandhi very much. This work denounced the Victorian civilization and searched for new values. It also stressed the need for harmonizing the divergent aspects of private
and public lives of the individual. Both Gandhi (in 'Hind Swaraj') and Carpenter subscribed to this view.

His perceptions of refuting the claims of modernization, and persistent attempt to keep out of the maelstrom of power politics, developing the moral blocks of politics all had the start while he was in South Africa. He read H.D. Thoreau, 'On The Duty of Civil Disobedience' in South Africa. It was the narration of the stand of a citizen in the United States of America (in July 1846) refusing to pay tax to a state that supported slavery, and he came willing to undergo imprisonment opposing the practice of slavery. This was the period (in 1907) when Gandhi was struggling against 'Apartheid' in South Africa. Gandhi came across the essay of Thoreau while in jail in 1907/1908 for violating the Immigrants Registration Act of 1907, known as Black Act, which required every Indian in the Transvaal province to register before authorities. In this essay what Thoreau called passive resistance was coined
as 'Satyagraha' by Gandhi. The tenets of Hinduism conditioned his moral and ethical percepts. A reading of "UnTo This Last" by John Ruskin impressed him very much for in it he found a lot of Indian values and Indian thought. He admits that he drew three lessons from the book by Ruskin,

(a) the good of the individual is contained in the good of all,
(b) the lawyer's work had the same value as the barber's,
(c) the life of a labour, the life of a tiller of soil and the handicrafts man is the life worth living.

He borrowed from Ruskin that non-violence couldn't prosper in an unequal social order. Also like Ruskin, he believed that tools and wealth should be restricted and placed in the hands of those who could use them. It is from the ideas of Ruskin that he developed the notion of bread labour, also he borrowed the idea of minimum wages from the
notions of Ruskin, Ruskin's ideas on political economy was the basis for Gandhi's 'Ashram' organization.

The work of Leo Tolstoy, "the Kingdom of God is With in You" instilled the qualities of love for truth, non-violence, passive resistance, spirit of suffering and love in him. Along with this Gandhi found the acceptance of his idea of opposing the Western civilization in Tolstoy, and it suggested the reinvigorating of traditional indigenous culture based on traditional foundations. Also Tolstoy's assertion that progress can come only with the aid of spiritual force influenced Gandhi. It made him believe in non-violence, Ahimsā. About Tolstoy's book he wrote in Young India of 30th September 1928, "I was at that time a believer in violence its reading cured me of my scepticism and made me a firm believer in Ahimsā" (p-159). Gandhi himself speaks about the influences on him "But one thing took deep root in me. the conviction that morality is the basis of
things, and truth is the substance of all morality. Truth became my sole objective. It began to grow in magnitude every day and my definition of it also has been ever widening. A common link between Ruskin and Tolstoy was perceived by Gandhi, he admired both because they condemned the "Pseudo Science" of political economy. He appreciated them because they believed that there existed a true science, which concerned itself not with wealth but with the welfare of men. Economic progress and moral progress were different for Gandhi; the former will never lead to the latter. So he was a critic of Western civilization that measures everything in terms of money alone. Both at home and in his journeys (life) in London and South Africa he (Gandhi) came to know about the real face of

industrialization and capitalism. He saw traditional hands at sea, in cottage industry, in rural artifacts, being rendered jobless, also he witnessed the rude face of capitalist trade and activities in soulless money, and he got himself alienated from both. Antoney Copley observes, "For Gandhi, increasingly alienated from modern capitalism, there was not, after all, so much to choose between British and Boer values". While in Johannesburg, South Africa, Gandhi obtained a first hand knowledge of the socio-cultural setting of the society in which he was living and working. It was a male dominated society, both of Whites and Blacks, the profuse use of alcohol to control the unstable work force and all other organized vices made Gandhi think about the cause and consequences for the individual and society. In 1896, 100% of all white women above 15 years of age were prostitutes, Indian landlords of

4 Copley, Antoney, "Gandhi Against the Tide", Calcutta, Oxford University Press, 1993, p-17.
Durban too profited from organized vice. Cheap labour attracted Indians to South Africa and they formed sizeable minority there. Also a good number came to work in the sugar plantations there. Since the agro- industries in South Africa demanded a lot of labour the low castes and tribal people from India were recruited. Their plight was awesome; poverty, prostitution and venereal diseases among them moved Gandhi very much. Alongside there was a conscious attempt to break up village agriculture and liberate labour force there to be absorbed in to booming industries, Gandhi realized this fully and he organized resistance, against this by venting a new value system both in India and earlier abroad too. Indian labour in South Africa was the most underprivileged, poor and deprived and young Gandhi fought for their cause. In South Africa Gandhi practiced as a successful lawyer mainly for his merchant clients and earned his living. He fought against the Natal Government in 1894, for denying Indians the right to vote; disenfranchisement on the
basis of race and discrimination was the point of dissent for Gandhi. In May 1894 he launched the Natal Indian Congress to fight for the cause of the Indians.

The English Social milieu of 1880's and 1890's supplied Gandhi with enough of in-depth knowledge about socio-political intricacies, for these were periods of great unrest and political transformation in England. Liberal political strand was being increasingly overshadowed by conservative trend, trade union movements, socialists, communists, anarchists all were showing their faces, Gandhi had a chance to witness all these from close quarters. Gandhi met Madame Blavatsky of Theosophical Society, and her new recruit Dr. Annie Besant, an Irish Socialist turned Theosophist, and he joined the Theosophical Society. He also joined the London Vegetarian Society, under the influence of the book "A plea for Vegetarianism" by Henry Salt. This association influenced him very much. He remained
a vegetarian due to the vow or promise given to his mother so far, now he was fully convinced of the need of vegetarianism as part of a greater scheme of things, not just for the reasons of health alone.

Gandhi was so fully wedded to love and compassion and longed to serve suffering human beings. In 1906 the Zulu uprising (in South Africa) found Gandhi organizing medical camps. He sympathized with the Zulu and nursed the wounded from both sides, the Zulu as well as the whites. It was during this period that he decided to become a full time social worker, kicking his job and the life of an ordinary householder. Also he decided to lead a life of celibacy, here he was influenced by the idea that individual physical conduct would have metaphysical consequences, and he followed celibacy thereafter till death. His abiding faith in truth, non-violence and celibacy was carried by him to the levels of politics, thereby developing innovative techniques of political mobilization. He
was of the view that, "If any injunction in a Shastra is opposed to truth, non-violence and Brahmacharya, it is unauthentic, whichever the Shastra in which it is found... the essence of Hinduism is truth and non-violence".

The two books by Sir Edwin Arnold, "The Song Celestial" (translation of Bhagavad Gīṭā into English) and "The Light of Asia" attracted Gandhi very much and the latter helped him to know Buddhist doctrines closely. Also he learnt more about the fundamentals of religious principles from Madame Blavatsky's Book "Key to Theosophy". But all these were influence on him only, the base was made up of his childhood experiences at home and in the Indian cultural environment. Actually, Tolstoy, Ruskin, Blavatsky, Thoureau did not Europeanize Gandhi, a reading of

them made him develop clear approaches for re-knowing his own society and country better. Gandhi did not absorb any foreign doctrine from them, rather they helped him to re-discover the traditions of his own people. In the opinion of H.N. Brailsford, "He was not, as so many of the leaders of the past generation had been, a Europeanized Indian. He, had, indeed, learned much from Ruskin and Tolstoy, but it was not from such sources that Indians had hitherto drawn the wisdom of the West; these teachers in revolt against all its accepted values. Nor was it a foreign doctrine that Gandhi absorbed from them. Rather had they helped him to discover the traditions of his own people." To be precise, we can see that Gandhi had to make a pick and choose between the East and West in terms of

ideas and values and he was called upon by the circumstances to impart some identity of his own to ideas. And here he searched for and established modernity with in the traditional ethics of India. Equally the influence of Western expositions of truth and Ahimsa along with the traditional Hindu values can be traced in him.

An examination of the pamphlets, periodicals, publications by Gandhi, along with the institutional arrangements effected by him, will throw considerable light on the factors and forces that went in to the making of the personality and perceptions of Gandhi. In 1896, in the context of the Satyagraha Movement in South Africa he brought out a pamphlet, known as the 'Green Pamphlet' its full title was 'the Grievances of the British Indians in South Africa - An Appeal to the Indian Public'. He edited and sponsored three English weeklies 'Indian Opinion', in 1903 from Durban, from Phoenix in 1904. Another English weekly 'Young India' was published from Ahmedabad
in 1919. 'Harijan' the English weekly was published in 1933 from Poona, later on from Madras, later again from Poona and finally from Ahmedabad. When he was travelling back to Capetown in 1909 from India, on voyage, he wrote 'Hind Swaraj' ('Indian Home Rule') repudiating the rhetoric of the Empire and Western Civilization, the Empire was shown as offering slavery, not partnership. On the same voyage he wrote an introduction to "Letter to a Hindu" by Leo Tolstoy. The "Phoenix farm" was set up in Durban, South Africa in 1904; this farm was an experimental one, of the ideas of bread labour enunciated by John Ruskin in his book, 'UnTo This Last'. In 1910, May, Tolstoy Farm was set up in Johannesburg as a refuge for families whose lives had been disrupted by the campaigns against the 'Black Act'; protracted campaigns made the 'Black Act' unenforceable, (Immigrants Restriction Act of 1907, in South Africa). Experiences of the campaigns in South Africa stood him in good stead in his political campaigns in India. In 1915 he
established the Sabarmati Ashram, 5 kilometers away from Ahmedabad, and Sabarmati was the center of operations till 1933. Another second Ashram was set up in 1936 at Sevagram, Wardha, near Nagpur. While in South Africa in 1906 he established The South African British Indian Committee. Satyagraha Sabha was another political association established by him in 1919 to oppose the Rowlatt Act. Gandhi had to confront five major political problems like colour prejudice, war, racial discrimination, untouchability and communal dissension. During 1907-1913 Gandhi tested out and shaped the essential elements of his technique of passive non-violent resistance - Satyagraha - (in Transvaal province) during the civil rights campaign there. One important aspect of Satyagraha was born out of his experiments or experiences in South Africa, i.e. the readiness to respond to an opponent's proposal of compromise. He had to suffer much humiliation in South Africa from the hands of the white ruling class. He thought this to be a nemesis for the 'savarnas'
ill-treating the 'avarnas', their own brethren in India. In South Africa he was called a 'coolie barrister'. South African whites held that contact with the 'coolies' (Indians) would pollute or defile them; Gandhi thought this attitude of the whites as a retribution, for the Indians holding that touching or living near to the untouchables will pollute (defile) them. Gandhi had started his fight in South Africa and when he came to India and witnessed the social, economic, political and religious scenario he had to open many war fronts.

The trend of political struggle without abandoning saintly approach is represented by Gandhi. He was a man involved in reform and revolution, providing destination to a vast majority drifting aimlessly for a prolonged period. Gandhi (like Bankim, Dayanand, Vivekananda, Aurobindo and Tilak) liked Indian society for all its glories and defects as well and wanted to remove the defects not by referring to western rationalism but with in the
frame of India’s own past cultural and philosophical heritage. Gandhi was both an idealist, and a practical man, indigenous traditions and heritage formed a part both of his idealism and practical mind. He was a reformer, a freedom fighter, a mass leader, and a religious saint all in one with definite economic, social and political programmes of his own. Gandhi had tremendous faith in the past and in the heritage, but he was no revivalist. He had a dynamic approach to issues, but he was no system breaker or innovator, he was a system maintainer attacking only what was wrong in the order. Morality and truth were held to be the base as well as the judging stone for every thing and every action right from childhood by Gandhi and *Ahimsā* or non-violence is a derivative of truth. He drew his intellectual staple from these and transcended all petty restraints to identify humanity as a single whole. He always possessed a good deal of rationality and also was ready to accept good views
from all sides. In that sense, Gandhi was a transmitter and synthesizer of humanitarianism, an ardent lover of mankind as well. Aptly it can be said that Gandhi was a rebel child of Hinduism.