CHAPTER II

PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATION OF MAHATMA GANDHI

Philosophy is the comprehensive study of life and the universe as a whole. Man is the central problem of philosophy whose life is a mixture of good and evil. Mahatma Gandhi occupies a unique place as a leader of the people in the history of India. The concept of man occupies an important position in Mahatma Gandhi’s thought.

Mahatma Gandhi was not an academic philosopher, because he never claimed to be a philosopher and an original thinker. His idea cannot be classed with any of the well-known schools of Indian philosophy. He did not formulate any philosophical principle of his own. “I do not claim to have originated any new principle. I have simply tried in my own way to apply the eternal truths of our daily life and problems.”

Though Gandhi has not propounded any philosophical system in the academic sense, yet in the depth of his writings and speeches, beliefs and actions, we find a consistent world view or philosophy of life. If “philosophy” means a comprehensive study of life, understanding of the deepest problems, aims and purposes of life, the evaluation of the essential principles that govern life and their organization and practical application in both individual and social

1. Harijan, 28-3-1936
spheres, then Gandhi was undoubtedly an authentic philosopher in the
best of Indian tradition. Gandhi occupies a unique position among the
philosophers. His philosophy is mainly concerned with the individual
who will live and die for the ideal and with the non-violent way that
will lead him to it. Like any other philosopher of civilization and
culture, Gandhi tried to understand the nature of man, society,
civilization, religion and host of other important concepts. Gandhi was
alone who made sincere attempts to make a fruitful combination of
theory and practice. He was not only a thinker but a devoted worker.
He tried to practise whatever he preached.

Gandhi’s thought was based on Indian religious tradition. He was intensely religious from childhood. His outlook was moulded mainly by the Hindu religion, though he was influenced by the ethical ideals of Jainism, Christianity and Islam. Sometimes, he called himself an orthodox Hindu (Sanatana Hindu) because: (a) He believes in the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Puranas and all that goes by the name of Hindu scriptures, avatars and rebirth. (b) He believes in the Varnashrama Dharma in a sense in his opinion. (c) He believes in the protection of the cow (d) He believes in idol worship.

Gandhi’s philosophy could be called a kind of monism. His philosophy was primarily truth centred. Truth was the first and foremost principle in Gandhian philosophy. Gandhi’s life was a continuous series of experiments with truth. He applied his philosophy to his own life and to practical social and political service. In this sense he was an applied philosopher. His mission was to dedicate himself in
permit of Truth, and to bring about spiritual upliftment of mankind wagging against evils and injustice.

Indian philosophy is generally known as darsana or vision which is called the vision of reality or truth and the philosopher is one who aspires for truth. Gandhi starts from the vision of reality as one. His life was a living symbol of poverty and simplicity, dedicated for the pursuit of Truth with a view to attainment of spiritual regeneration of mankind.

As a great human being Gandhi has great contribution in social, political, economical, educational, ethical and religious field of life,

Gandhi’s Concept of Religion:

Gandhi’s philosophy is largely based on morality and religion and his philosophy and political technique were only corollaries of his religious and moral principles. Gandhi describes religion as a mighty tree that absorbs its sap “from the moral height of those who profess that religion.”

2. “Life without religion is life without principle, and life without principle is like a ship without a rudder.”

3. Ibid. Vol 13, p.127
Gandhi had a great respect for his own religion which he had learnt from his parents. For Gandhi, every religion aims at the same goal – that is truth.

The word “Religion” has no one generally accepted definition. Different thinkers have defined religion in their own ways and for their own purpose. Literally speaking religion is a principle of unification and harmonisation. It is a growing and dynamic subject. It aims at complete unification of life. Religion is a system of lived experiences. It is an art of living, through right action, how to live our daily life in harmony, within ourselves and with other persons and which would lead to a life of peace and happiness. It communicates our feelings, thoughts and acts to an object of devotion and commitment. If some one asks: when did religion begin? history would be forced to reply, “Religion began when man began.”

Gandhi’s view of religion is highly practical. According to Gandhi man cannot live without dharma or religion, because it is a sustaining force which gives us the principle of brotherhood. Gandhi believes in the essential unity of all religions. For him every religion teaches moral and non-violent life. Religion is a principle of unification and God harmonisation. According to Gandhi service to man is the service to God only. The true religion of man is to serve humanity. By religion Gandhi means self-realisation.

Though Gandhi was deeply religious, yet he was strongly opposed to the concept or practice of state religion. His view was that
there should be a secular institution. It was under his inspiration, India went in for a secular constitution guaranteeing religious freedom to all and keeping the state away from the realm of religion.

Gandhi’s philosophy of morals, society and politics would seem to be only an application of his philosophy of God, nature and man.

Gandhi’s Concept of God:

Gandhi was essentially a man of religion. His ultimate aim of religion is self-realisation, which presumes faith in God and constant pursuit of truth. The concept of God is the most important, most universal concept of religion. The Hindu conception of God is so subtle and comprehensive that it is not easy to specify it. Though infinity perfection, absoluteness are constantly predicated of Him, but at the same time it is clear that God is beyond all predications. Therefore, God as a supreme person with three fold aspects as creator, preserver, destroyer of Hindu’s popular view cannot be ruled out as unrooted in tradition. With his theistic conviction, Gandhi expressed his deep faith in the reality of God. God occupies the supreme place in Gandhi’s philosophy. His deeper thought moves around God. God is the basis of his religion and a key to his entire thought and activities. As Gandhi belonged to an orthodox Vaisnava family, he is greatly influenced by the Vaisnava theists in the formation of the concept of
God. Gandhi conceives his God to be Eternal, the Unborn, the One without a second. “God is certainly one. He has no second”.4

God is the highest reality, the highest value and the highest end. The very earliest historical records that we possess indicate that man has always sought to explain the existence of the universe and his existence on the earth. And when he inquires he gets a solution in the concept of God. God is the creator; infinite designer, man’s beginning and end. He is the creator; preserver and destroyer of the universe. God is Omnipotent, Omniscient, all in all. God is the indescribable entity which is unknowable but can be experienced. God is truth and love; God is ethics and morality; god is fearless; He is the source of light and life; but transcends all. God is conscience; the atheism of the atheist, and transcends speech and thought. For those who need his presence, He is a personal God. He is Omnipresent, Omniscient, Omnipotent and a great democrat, since He gives us freedom to choose between good and evil.5 Different thinkers give different conceptions about God.

According to Radhakrishnan when the Supreme Reality is viewed in relation to cosmos, we call it God. God is the absolute from the cosmic point of view and the Absolute is the pre-cosmic nature of God. God is conceived by him as a creator of the world, an Omnipotent, an Omnipresent. God as person is deeply concerned in the affairs of the world. He is the friend, the Holy judge and good and the

5. The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. 32, p-162
loving redeemer of mankind. God is both transcendent and immanent. Radhakriashnan’s concept of God as Omnipotent, Omnipresent, good and love is similar to Samkara’s Isvara who is the Creator, Governor and Judge of the universe.

Robindranath Tagore conceives of the ultimate reality as the personal God, the infinite Being, who includes all finite souls and the world of matter. According to him God is Superperson who is in the innermost shrine of our own heart. The goal of the individual soul is to get united with the infinite Person of God.

Swami Vivekananda urges that if there is God, that God must be both the efficient and the material cause of the Universe; both the creator and created. There is only one Existence, the infinite in which we dream all these dreams. Atman is the only Reality. This Atman or self is the eternal God.

Gandhi believed in the absolute one-ness of God. For Gandhi God is the only Reality and is all that exists. Gandhi declared, “He has no second. He is unfathomable, unknowable and unknown to the vast majority of mankind.” God is that indefinable something which we all feel but which we do not know.......... To me God is truth and love ............ God is fearlessness. God is the source of light and life and yet he is above and beyond all these .......... He is

6. T.M.P. Mahadevan and G.V. Saroja, Contemporary Indian Philosophy, p.111
the purest essence. He simply is to those who have faith.\(^8\) "God alone is and nothing else exists."\(^9\) Gandhi's idea of God is largely the product of the Hindu conception of God. God is the first principle of the universe. God is that indefinable something which all feel but which we do not know.\(^{10}\) A living, unshakable faith in God, an insistence on the primacy of spirit, is the core of his philosophy. So immovable in his faith that he feels that he may live without air and water but not without God;\(^{11}\) and that even if he were cut to pieces, God would give him the strength not to deny Him.\(^{12}\) As Gandhi says "I am surer of His (God's) existence than of the fact that you and I are sitting in the room. Then I can also be testing that I may live without air and water but not without Him. You may pluck out my eyes but that cannot kill me, You may chop off my nose, but that will not kill me. But blast my belief in God, and I am dead. You may call this a superstitions that I hug."\(^{13}\)

Realisation of God:

Man is composed of both body and spirit. As body represents physical power, it may sometimes be tempted to do himsa; but man's true nature consists in his spiritual aspects. Man is not born to explore avenues to amass, worldly riches. His ultimate goal is no less than the realisation of God. Man is born with brute nature but he is born to realise God who is seated in him; that particular privilege has

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8. Young India, 5-3-1925
9. Ibid, 31-12-1931
10. N.K. Bose, Selections from Gandhi, p.3
11. Harijan, 14-5-1938, p.109
12. Young India, III, p.504
13. Harijan 14-5-38, p.109
made him man distinguishing him from other lower creatures. The ultimate goal of man is also realisation of the divinity and for this realisation, man need constant Śādhanā both external and internal. Radhakrishnan says, “there is an insistent need in the human so to come to terms with the unseen reality.”

Gandhi lays emphasis more and more on the effort of the individual than on his attainment. He attaches more importance to the inward gains than to outward attainments which do not touch the Soul.

Man is religious by nature. Belief in one God is the cornerstone of almost all religions. The only one reality which is God is nothing else but truth and non-violence is the means of realising Him.

According to Gandhi God can never be realised by one who is not of the pure at heart. Identification with God is impossible without self-purification. Moral life is necessary for spiritual purification. Gandhi believed in the inherent goodness of human nature. Man can lead a moral life by controlling his desires and impulses with the guidance of conscience and reason. Without moral basis and development there cannot be any spiritual growth. God realisation is the highest good of man and that is only possible by truth, for, God is truth and truth is god.

God is Truth:

Man’s ultimate aim is the realisation of God. All his activities social, political, religious, have to be guided by the ultimate aim of the vision of God. A firm living faith in God is the basis of religion and runs through Gandhi’s entire philosophy. To Gandhi, God is life, goodness is God, Man tries to become good because he wants to reach and realise God. Even a living faith in non-violence is impossible without a living faith in God. God is that indefinable something, which we all feel, but do not know. According to Gandhi, God is Truth. “To me God is truth and love, God is ethics and morality. God is fearlessness, God is the source of light and life and yet He is above and beyond us”15 God is thus for him all pervasive reality, immanent in man as well as in the cosmos. At the same time, God is transcendent, for He is in us and yet above and beyond us.16 According to Gandhi God is truth. Like the Hindu religious leaders, Gandhi conceived God in terms of “Satchidananda”. Like them, he felt that God is the very personification of Sat, Chit and Ananda or Truth, Knowledge and Bliss. His argument is that where there is truth, there is knowledge and where there were true knowledge, there would always be bliss. Sorrow would have no place where there is bliss. Hence we call God as Sat-Chit-Ananda denoting that God combines in Him, truth, knowledge and bliss. The Upanisadic seers declared Brahman to be Sat-Chit and Ananda and identified truth with reality. In saying that God is Truth it does not mean “is truthful”. Truth is not mere attribute of God but it

15. Autobiography, p. 615
16. Young India, 5-3-1925, Hindu Dharma, p. 61
simply means “being” or “is”. Nothing “is” or exists in reality except truth. Therefore the more truthful we are the nearer we are to God.

Truth is God:

A study of the Gita made a deep impression on Gandhi's mind which was the beginning of his active involvement with religion or his quest for truth. He deeply studied the classics of Hindu religion and at the same time he read Tolstoy's “Kingdom of God is within you” and the Bible. His religion was synonymous with truth and rightness which is equally stressed by all the known religion of the world. According to Gandhi, God is the source of Light and Life, and yet he is above and beyond us. Gandhi in his early musing believed god to be Truth, since the word “satya” is derived from Sanskrit word “sat”, which means “is” or “exist”. By asserting God to be truth, he implied that God alone is real or “God is Truth”. “Gandhi is conscious that God is, strictly speaking, not a person, but Truth, His own law.”

Because the concept of God is, deeply problematic, different people put forward diverse theories regarding God. But in case of Truth there is no ambiguity. There are no two ways of looking at truth. Truth is always to be found in everyone of us, in one form or the others; only that we do not recognise it. “I never found a double meaning in connection with truth, .......... Hence the definition “Truth is God” gives me greatest satisfaction.”

Everyone interprets it in the same manner. The meaning of truth is clear and obvious, it is universal.

17. Harijan, 23-3-1940, p.55
18. Young India, 31-12-1931
Many people, for instance, the Atheists deny the existence of God, but they cannot possibly deny the existence to Truth. Even the Sceptics, who doubt everything, cannot doubt the notion of Truth. There is none who doubts the notion of Truth. Thus Gandhi emphasised on Truth rather than God. He emphatically declared, “I don’t care for God if he is anything but Truth”. Truth is God because truth is always to be found in everyone of us.

Gandhi not only considered Satya or Truth as “the most important name of God” or “the only correct and fully significant name of God”; he treated Truth itself as God. Hence he has written : “In fact it is more correct to say that Truth is God than to say God is Truth.”19 And the tool for achieving this Truth as God is only through the path of Satyagraha which means insistence on Truth.

Thus Gandhi has given a new definition of religion as devotion to Truth, as according to him Truth, being the highest principle, is God. In fact Truth and God are one and the same. Truth is the only Reality that is called by the name of God, and religion consists in devotion to truth. There is no religion higher than truth and righteousness. Gandhi’s view that Truth is God is a “revolutionary idea in the field of Theology”. As Diwakar remarks, “The term God is interpreted by different religions and thinkers in different ways, to the extent that they go to wars of destruction of each other. Moreover, for one to have faith in God, one has to be convinced that God is Truth. So Truth has priority and unless Truth gives a green signal, God cannot

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have entry. By declaring Truth is God (Supreme Power) Gandhi has thrown every individual seeker on his own natural faculties and power to seek the Truth of his own finding rather than any readymade conception of God in currency.\textsuperscript{20} Thus Gandhi transferred the responsibility of establishing a basic concept from external authority of the highest significance and tradition to one’s own internal conviction arrived at by an honest effort of all the instruments of cognition. This invests every human being with an inherent dignity alone with the necessity of finding out one’s own truth, so that he may live by it and if necessary, die for the same. “For Gandhi, God had no form nor was God a person. In other words, he believed in a spiritual presence everywhere and all the time behind and beyond all phenomenal existence – that presence alone was the eternal reality. For Gandhi, God was truth, God was love, God was law, God was life and God was everything that existed in the past, that exists in the present and that will ever exist in the future.”\textsuperscript{21}

Truth for Gandhi is incomprehensible. No absolute definition of it is possible. As Gandhi says, “If you would swim on the bosom of the ocean of Truth, you must reduce yourself to a zero.”\textsuperscript{22} Is Gandhi an advaitin? According to D. M. Datta, Gandhi, being born in a Vaisnava family, took Rama as an incarnation of God. This is theism prevalent in Vaisnavism. Without God’s grace, human freedom and perfection cannot be attained. Again, Gandhi assumed this world as

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\textsuperscript{22} The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. 48, p.405
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perfection cannot be attained. Again, Gandhi assumed this world as real. He said that he could support dualism. He had no objection to anekāntavāda or syādvāda. He did not accept absolute identity between man and God. Advaita advocates absolute identity. All this resembles the theism of Vaisnavism. T.M.P. Mahadevan contradicts D.M. Datta’s view and support Gandhi’s stand as an advaitin on the following grounds: (1) For being born in a Vaisnava family, to presume Gandhi as a Vaisnavite would not be correct. He did not accept the strict principle of Vaisnavism followed by his father, (2) Again the teaching of the Gita, which shaped Gandhi’s life, is nothing other than that of Advaita. Identification of the individual self with the Universal Self or Brahman is the ultimate aim of Gandhi. This is nothing but the teaching of the Advaita. (3) Moreover the Vaisnava faith is not incompatible with Advaita. There is a sect of Advaita which affirms that the ultimate reality is non-dual and prefers the Visnu-form as the personal deity to other forms. So even though Gandhi is considered as a Vaisnava, he can be an advaitin. (4) Gandhi’s Rama is the eternal, unborn one. (5) Devotion implies dualism between the devotee and the deity. This destination is not brushed aside in advaita. For the purpose of devotion, dualism is more appropriate. (6) God for Gandhi is existence-knowledge-bliss which is the nature of Brahman in advaita (7) To Gandhi, the world is the product of māyā. But the dream, the world and Brahman are real from their own respective planes. This is the true explanation of advaita adopted by Gandhi. (8) Gandhi was vehemently against Gandhism or sectarianism. Advaita stands for the unity of all religions, of all living and non-living things.

23. D.M. Datta, The Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi, pp 22-33
and of all sects. Therefore T.M.P. Mahadevan concludes that in substituting Gandhism for Samkaraism, the whole teaching of advaita will remain as it is.24

In conclusion it may be said that D.M. Datta’s stand is not devoid of reason. But, considering Gandhi’s metaphysical position discussed in this chapter, T.M.P. Mahadevan’s support for Gandhi’s non-dualism in this connection is more appropriate, more practical and more reasonable. To Gandhi, God is a mysterious power, which defies sense-perception and rational proof but makes itself felt by a seeker. As he said, “There is an Indefinable mysterious power that pervades everything. I feel it, though I do not see it. It is this unseen power which makes itself felt and yet defies all proof, because it is so unlike all that I perceive through my senses. It transcends the senses.”25 He also observed, "The divine music is incessantly going on within ourselves, but the loud senses drown the delicate music, which is unlike and infinitely superior to anything we can perceive or hear with our senses.”26 Thus Gandhi was not a dualist but a monist who believed in one all-pervasive reality. Bhikhu Parekh aptly remarks, “Like most Indian thinkers Gandhi subscribed to both the impersonal and personal conceptions of God. His language, however, was all his own. Although he sometimes used the term Brahman, he was somewhat uneasy with its historical associations and preferred to use such terms as eternal principle, supreme consciousness or intelligence,
mysterious force and cosmic power, spirit or shakti. Later in life he preferred to call it Satya or Truth and thought that this was its “only correct and fully significant” description.”

Gandhi’s Concept of World:

All the religions of the world, except Buddhism and Jainism, believe that God is the only creator of the world. They also generally believe that God brings the world to an end at his own sweet will.

According to Gandhi the world is a reality and God is its creator. To him, the world, the Nature is the expression of God. It is an evidence of the all-pervasive reality.

Gandhi sometimes calls himself a follower of Advaita, but he cannot be regarded as follower of Advaita of Śaṅkara, because the world is not a mere appearance to him. He never conceived the world to be an illusory and unreal Maya. The Upanisads deny the independent status of the world, which cannot exist apart from Brahman. In the Upanisads, Brahman stands for the whole reality including the world, without which, the world remains unexplained. So to explain the world, Brahman is necessary.

The concept of dissolution of the world in the Upanisads indicates the impermanency of the world. Because it is true that the

27. Bhikhu Parekh, Gandhi’s Political Philosophy: A Critical Examination, p.70
world which is changing is not eternal, it is said that the world is unreal. It means that it is not eternally real; but its temporal reality is not nullified.

The theory of Creation:

There is no definite theory regarding the creation of the world. Though it is not clear whether the world is an act of creation or not, there is at least one Hindu system of thought - the Samkhya system which believes that the world is a product of an evolution of Prakṛti, the primordial matter, with the help of Purusa, the non-changing primordial consciousness. There are various mystical stories about the creation in the various texts of the Hindus, but for the most part creation seems to be a mystery and it not very clear when and how it was exactly done.

There are mythical narratives regarding the creation of the world in the Visnu Purāna, the Manusmriti and such other texts of Hinduism. The details of the creation myth as contained in Rg Veda and the Manusmriti very much agree with each other. In one of the hymns of the Rg Veda (X.121) Brahma, as Hiranyagarbha, appears to be the seed of all creation. This golden seed of all creation comes from Viṣṇu himself, who is lying in the fathomless, water. The hymn says, “In the beginning was the Golden seed: once born he was the on Lord of all that is”. The golden seed is Prajāpati the Lord of creation, who is both the transcendent God and immanent spirit of everything. There are other myths also (as in Viṣṇu Purana) which relate that the world
come out of an egg which was cut by God himself. From this presentation of the stories of creation in Hindu religious texts, one thing is clear that, God had not created the world ex nihilo. He has created it either out of certain elements existing eternally (as the Nyaya – Vaisesika system believes that God has created the world in space and time out of eternal material atoms in according with the pervious karmas of people) or out of the materials of his own being (as Bhagavadgita and the system of Ramanuja have it). In all these theistic systems the world is taken as totally dependent upon God. In favour of world’s absolute dependence upon God the idea of Trinity of Brahma, Viṣṇu and Maheswara is well contained in Hindu belief. It signifies that God is responsible for creating, sustaining and dissolving or destroying the world.

The Nature and status of the World:

The general Hindu belief as to nature and status of the world is that, although the world is dependent upon God, it is nevertheless real. The world is a real creation of God and is a ground for human action by which his future life will be determined. Gandhi’s conception of the world also follows from his conception of God. Though he does not formulate it systematically in one place, from some of his remarks in different contexts we can have an idea of his philosophy.

In Indian thought the word Samsāra or jagat indicates dynamic characteristic of the universe. Continuity and change are the
two characteristic features of the material or physical world. According to Radhakrishnan, there is one underlying, dynamic and creative reality out of which gradually, body, life, consciousness and self-consciousness emerge. He says the universe is a process. It is a movement with a definite goal in view. The world has passed through the different phases of evolution, namely matter, life and mind.

Samkara Vedanta takes the world as māyā or illusion. Samkara himself quite unambiguously says that although on the ultimate level, the world is not real and what is real is Brahman and Brahman alone, on the practical level the world is fully real and all its activities have a real significance.

Vivekananda says: “according to the Advaitins, the follower of Samkara, the whole universe is the apparent evolution of God. God is the material cause of this universe, but not really, only apparently. The celebrated illustration used is that of the rope and the snake, where the rope appeared to be the snake but was not really so. The rope did not really change into the snake. Even, so, this whole universe as its exists is that Being. It is unchanged, and all the change, we see in it are only apparent.”

The question why the world at all came about, the general Hindu answer is that the world is the lila or play of God. Sometimes, as in the Nyāya Vaisesika, the world is regarded as the product of God’s

desire (Ichha). But the word “desire” does not imply here that God has created this world to fulfil some of his needs. God has no need to accomplish. He creates the world only in accordance with the requirements of the Law of Karma.

The world is māyā and is like a rotating wheel. It is changing every moment, hence it is unreal. But it has something that persists. Though Gandhi was an Advaitin, at the same time he called himself an anekantavādi or syādvādi. His doctrine of love embraces the whole world and his anekāntavāda is the outcome of his doctrine of satya and ahimsa. As Gandhi observes, “The world is changing every moment, and is therefore unreal, it has no permanent existence. But, though it is constantly changing, it has something about it which persists and it is therefore to that extent real. I have therefore no objection to calling it real or unreal, and thus being called an anekantavadi or a syadvadi. But my syadvada is not the syadvada of the learned, it is peculiarly my own.... this doctrine has taught me to judge a Mussalman from his own standpoint and a Christian from his.... I want to take the whole world in the embrace of my love. My anekantavada is the result of the twin doctrine of Satya and Ahimsa.”

It is evident that though there is change in the world, the world, in Gandhi’s view, is real from its own plane. He saw one in many. Moreover, as he was a man of action, he too these mundane affairs as the field of practising his principle of Truth and Non-violence. Therefore he said “There is no such thing as the other world. All

worlds are one. There is no “here” and no “there”.\textsuperscript{30} Gandhi deified the universe. So he said, “From the Imperishable unmanifest down to the perishable atoms everything in the universe is the supreme and an expression of the supreme.”\textsuperscript{31}

According to Gandhi, the world as the expression of God is an evidence of the all-pervasive reality. God is the beginning of the world and also its end. He says, “God manifests himself in innumerable forms in this universe and every such manifestation commands my reverence”.\textsuperscript{32} The emphasis on the reality of the world has two implications: one in metaphysical and the other is practical –

Metaphysically speaking the world is an expression of God and as such is both real and finite. The world is real because it is God’s creation and it is finite because it is not itself God. From the different studies and researches of different sciences Gandhi comes to find out the reality of the Universe. According to Gandhi there is a Law governing every moment and every development in every part of the universe. “All things in the universe including the sun and the moon and the stars obey certain laws. Without the restraining influence of these laws the world would not go on for a single moment.”\textsuperscript{33} “Gandhi perceives in the inexorable laws of nature nothing but the force or the will which maintains the world in harmony and order and saves it from destruction. This force for him is nothing but God, and

\textsuperscript{30} M.K. Gandhi, My Non-Violence, p.182
\textsuperscript{31} The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. 41, pp. 120-21
\textsuperscript{32} Young India, 26-9-1929
\textsuperscript{33} Young India, 23-1-1930
Nature is progressing towards God Himself who is the perfect and the ultimate ideal of everything. Thus God is the beginning as well as the end of the world.

The emphasis on the reality of the world has a practical implication also. Gandhi was quite sensitive to the charms of Nature and with full conviction, he recommends a return to Nature. Nature does not merely appear to him as full of poetic charms, he also perceives in it a field for action. Gandhi feels that Nature provides to man a “Karma – Sthala” – a field of action, where man can discipline his soul by leading a religious and moral life. Gandhi’s deep love for Naturopathy, his recommendations to take plenty of air, water and walk barefooted are some of the evidences of his love for Nature. Gandhi’s physical habit seemed to declare: nearer to nature, nearer to health; when the body is sick, go back to nature. One of his great hobbies throughout his life was to experiment with diet to find out “the natural diet of man.”

God, World and Man:

In Gandhi’s philosophy man occupies an important position. In 1924 Gandhi declared that “the individual is the one supreme consideration.” He views man in his wholeness. Man is a complex being. His body is a part product of Nature, where it grows

34. D.M. Datta, The Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi, p.60
35. Ibid, p.56
36. Young India, November 1924
and decays according to the laws of Nature. Gandhi has a firm belief in
the evolution of man from the lower grades of animal to higher levels
of humanity, guided by love, peace and harmony etc. He remarks, “that
we have become man by a slow process of evolution from the brute.
We were thus born with brute strength, but we were born men in order
to realize God who dwells in us. That indeed is the privilege of man,
and it distinguishes him from the brute creation.”  

As an Advaitin, Gandhi finds no contradiction between
man and God and between man and lower order of creation. He is
highly influenced by the Upanisadic philosophy, thus he believes in the
essential unity of man and also in the rest of the whole creation. “I
believe in advaita, believe in the essential unity of man and for that
matter of all that lives.”  
Man’s self or soul is nothing but Brahman;
so man is a part of the Ultimate Reality. There is an inherent
relationship between man and God.......“That Thou Art”. Here “That”
stands for God and “Thou” stands for God in the form of man. Man has
no independent existence apart from God. Man is identical with
Brahman. Gandhi recognises the spiritual unity of mankind and all
individuals are manifestations of the ultimate reality.

Man is not only a creation of God but a seat of the divine.
True to the Indian thought Gandhi affirms a non-Darwinian view of
man. Gandhi laid stress on the spiritual nature of man and the essence
of the spirit of soul is freedom. It is above and beyond both matter and

37. M.K. Gandhi, My Philosophy of Life, p. 65
38. N.K. Bose : Selections from Gandhi, p.25
mind. The body might be destroyed, the spirit will proclaim its freedom. Man is more than matter. He is a vibrant, living spirit, a spark of divine fire. Thus for Gandhi man is no weakling but a perpetual reservoir of strength. The strength of man is an efflorescence of the spirit which is the permanent element in human nature. Gandhi believes in the inherent goodness of man by which man can distinguishes from other animals. Every one of us is a mixture of good and evil, but it is possible for a man to change the mixture so that he has more of good and less of evil.

According to Gandhi, man is not a mere bundle of flesh and bone but rather constituted with a more vital force 'Soul' (atman). Our body, the material objects and all other empirical things must exist within time and space, but soul transcends time and space and is unborn, eternal, indivisible, all-pervading and self-conscious. The atman “on every destruction of the body.... weaves for itself another.”

We have different bodies but the soul which resides within us is one and the same. That is why Gandhi did not believe in the spiritual gain of an individual only while others around him suffer. The spiritual gain of one means the spiritual gain of all and one’s fall means the fall of the whole humanity.

Gandhi shares the Vedāntic belief in the identity of man within his innermost being with transcendent reality. 'You and I' are chained in the same ring. Names and forms are not real but transitory. In the state of ignorance we see many but when

40. N.K. Bose, Selections from Gandhi, p. 25
Gandhi believes in the Law of Karma. Hindu thought has given tremendous importance to the doctrine of Karma. A belief in rebirth goes side by side with a belief in Karma. The doctrine of Karma is taken to be both a metaphysical and moral law. Metaphysically speaking, the law explains births and formation of bodies. Our present life and body are on account of our past karmas. The Law of Karma is also conceived as a moral law. The ancient Indian seers have suggested that man’s bondage and suffering are due to his own wrong actions done in the past and that right and good deeds performed in this life will bear fruit in future and will enable man to make himself free and liberated.

Gandhi accepted this Law of Karma according to which, human actions are responsible not only for virtues and vices, but also for the physical conditions in which man is born. He says that man becomes victim of physical calamities only because of his own sins. Referring to the Bihar earthquake of 1934, Gandhi says, “You may call

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41. T.M.P. Mahadevan and G.V. Saroja, Contemporary Indian Philosophy, p. 133
42. G. Dhawan, The Political Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi, p. 49
me superstitious, if you like, but a man like me cannot but believe that
this earthquake is a divine chastisement sent by God for our sins."

The Law of Karma presupposes the existence of Soul and
the concept of rebirth. Gandhi therefore said, “I believe in rebirth as
much as I believe in the existence of my present body. I therefore,
know that even a little effort is not wasted.” Birth and death are the
two forms of transformation of human body. But this process of
change does not affect the soul. Death is inevitable if there is birth.
Birth is the beginning of death. The existence of the present body or
birth is self-evident. Just like that, rebirth, according to Gandhi, does
not require any further proof. Man is always chained in the cycle of
death and rebirth. No one can escape from this cycle until moksha
(salvation) is attained. Here we may mention Gandhi’s concept of
incarnation (avatara). In common parlance, incarnation means the
descent of God to human flesh and blood. But Gandhi did not take the
meaning of incarnation in this way. God is already in each and every
body. In some persons, the spirit of God remains in dormant state,
while it, in others, is developed. In Krsna, Rama, Buddha, Jesus etc.,
the spirit was fully awake. In Gandhi’s opinion, “God never incarnates
himself as a human being, but is, ever the same. It is human nature to
call the person who has some special excellence in him an avatara."

A belief in the divinity of all results in having a non-
violent; attitude to all. Man as spirit is essentially non-violent; violence

43. M.K. Gandhi, The Supreme Power, p. 11
44. G. Dhawan, op. cit. p. 54
45. Ibid, p. 132
is alien to man’s nature. Gandhi uses the word ‘non-violence’ in order to bring out the true meaning of ahimsa. Literally ahimsa means non-killing. Non-violence is the greatest and the most active force in the world to him. He practiced non-violence in every walk of life. According to Gandhi violence is the law of brutes which non-violence is the rule of human beings. Here Gandhi absolutely differs, with Darwinian principles of “struggle for existence” and “survival of the fittest.” Because in his books “The Origin of Species” and “The Descent of Man”, Charles Robert Darwin formulated the evolutionary hypothesis that man evolved for his animal ancestors by “natural selection” in the “Struggle for existence” and deduced the law of “survival of the fittest.”

Gandhi said, “Non-violence is the Law of our species as violence is the law of the brutes.” Anyone who objected to non-violence as the creed of the coward was reproached by Gandhi. He clarified, “Ahimsa is not the way of the timid and cowardly. It is the way of the brave to face death. He who perishes with sword in hand is no doubt brave but he who faces death without raising his little finger and without flinching is brave.”

Violent man is self-alienated man who does injury to his own being. Thus Gandhi gives a new individuality to man, an authenticity hitherto unknown to the earlier prophets of Society.

Gandhi does not consider non-violence as a mere philosophical principle. It has a great practical value to him. As he puts it, “the rule and the breath of my life....... It is a matter not of the

46. D.D. Runes (ed), The Dictionary of Philosophy, 1956, pp. 73, 203-7, 302
47. Young India, 9-3-1920
48. Young India, 11-8-1928
it, “the rule and the breath of my life……. It is a matter not of the intellect but of the heart.”49 The practice of non-violence requires fearlessness and patience of the highest order. There is no such thing as defeat in non-violence. Ahimsa protects man’s self-respect and honour. This law can be practised by all, children, adults, and even old people, in social, political and economic side also. Gandhi was only the first man who brought about change of heart by means of non-violence from the individual to the social and political plane. He affirms non-violence as a weapon for Satyagraha and says that the remedy by non-violence and love for Truth is more effective than the remedy by the use of weapons.

Since Gandhi believes in the presence of God in man, he refuses to suspect human nature. It will and is bound to respond to any noble and friendly action. So Gandhi rejects the theory of permanent inelasticity of human nature. If we only know how to strike the right chord, we bring out the music. Soul-power can prove effective only if it is sincerely given a chance. Gandhi never advocated the idea of closed Society, where human love perishes and man is isolated and frustrated. According to him man requires a society where everybody will feel drawn to every body because all are essentially spiritual. Man is a social being who is in search of peace, justice, harmony and happiness throughout the ages. He cannot live without society. Gandhi wanted a classless society, wherein every individual got equal opportunity for his or her all round development. Gandhi’s conception of this ideal society can be summed up in one word, ‘Sarvodaya’ means

49. M.K. Gandhi, Non-Violence in Peace and War, Vol. 1, pp. 74-75
Gandhi was interested in the reformation of society. He wanted a samaj called 'Sarvodaya Samaj' in place of the state which is an instrument of oppression. The structure of his samaj built upon moral principles, humanitarianism and equality. He tried to eradicate the evils that crept into society in the name of religion. To remove the exploitation of one class by another, he stressed on the theory of trusteeship and looked for the change of heart in the rich for using their wealth in the interest of the poor. His dream was to build an ideal society where every individual should have a feeling of freedom means 'Swaraj' and tooks particular care to emphasis this. He says, “The Swaraj of my dream is the poor man’s swaraj. The necessities of life should be enjoyed by you in common with those enjoyed by princes and monied men.”

Gandhi choose the BhagavadGita’s path of Karmayoga (path of action) as a means to the ultimate goal of realization of Truth and set as the ultimate goal in this life the achievement of a Sarvodaya society wherein each individual will be free from want, free from exploitation, free from envy and selfishness, free from pride or the ridicule of others, free from command problems and free from external control.

50. Young India, 26-3-1931
51. Ibid, 3-9-1925
Man for Gandhi is not a compartmental being. He is a harmonious combination of all the elements which constitute his wholeness. So he cannot do right in one department of life while he is occupied in doing wrong in another department. According to Gandhi, social betterment depends upon individual efforts for self-purification. He always emphasises personal purification and says that it is possible to conquer evil by prolonged Sādhana. Gandhi was influenced by Tolstoy and Thoreau who gave importance to individual and his capability of changing society. The influence of the Bible and the Gita also led him to believe in the importance of the individual. Gandhi was a great fighter, for social reforms would become effective only when the individual reforms himself. The potential Sattva has to be actualized. Gandhi's philosophy of Satyagraha as the way of non-violence, is based on the absolute freedom of the Soul to follow and abide by the truth one perceives and experiences.

According to Gandhi, God is both immanent and transcendent. God is within us but also outside us as the life of the universe. He says, "God is the Creator, Ruler and the Lord of the universe and not a blade of grass moves but by His will"\(^5\) In spite of his faith in God, Gandhi rejected any religious doctrine that does not appeal to reason and that conflicts with morality and social practice. So he did not accept the Hindu Dharma Sastras in toto. He rejected all the illogical and immoral practices in Hinduism which did not appeal to his reason. His attitudes to other religions was also very liberal and he accepted all the important religions of the world as equally true. For

\(^5\) Harijan, 14-11-1936
him, religions are meant to suppress the beastly qualities in men and to enshrine their spiritual and moral characters. He always talked of ethical religion.” For me morals, ethics and religion are convertible terms. A moral life without reference to religion is like a house built upon sand. And religion divorced from morality is like 'sounding brass' good only for making a noise and breaking heads.”53 Thus in his view true religion and true morality are inseparably bound up with each other. Gandhi’s ethical religion has an inseparable bearing on social life. Liberation did not signify isolation from the society and leading the life of a recluse. Self-realisation, according to Gandhi, is impossible without a complete identification and merging of one self with the whole humanity. He repeatedly asserted that for him there could be no realisation of God apart from the service of mankind. As Joan Bondurant aptly observed, “..... despite the ever present overtones of religion in Gandhian thought, concern for human needs lies at the core of Gandhian teaching.”54

53. Quoted from V.P. Verma, The Political Philosophy of Gandhi and Sarvodaya, p.60
54. J.Bondurant, Conquest of Violence, p. 193