Chapter - II

IMPACT OF HUMANISM ON GANDHI
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Gandhi and South Africa

The racist policy pursued by the White rulers of South Africa is more than a century old. Nearly sixty years ago, they gave it the name of apartheid. Indeed, during the last six decades—that is, since the end of Nazi tyranny in Germany and the atomic outrage at Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan—perhaps nothing has hurt the sensitivities and the conscience of mankind so much (and for so long) as the State policy of apartheid in South Africa.

Apart from being essentially inhuman and abhorrent, this policy becomes more shocking due to the fact that it is pursued or applied by a White minority regime (representing barely 20 per cent of the population) against the Black majority (constituting about 75 per cent of the population) and the ‘coloured’ people of Indian and Asian origin. After India—even before it became fully independent—brought the question of racial discrimination in South Africa before the United Nations in 1946, the global concern about it has grown enormously. Even inside South Africa, the Whites themselves are getting divided over the matter and if the leaders of the opposition Progressive Federal Party in the Republic’s Parliament have expressed the fear that the continued policy of racial discrimination is doomed to failure and a tragic end.

At the international level, two recent events have evoked a great deal of interest and concern to bear on apartheid in South Africa. First, the Ministerial Meeting of the
Coordinating Bureau of the Nonaligned Movement (NAM) held in New Delhi (14-20 April) declared that the Pretoria White minority regime was “the root cause of many crimes (most notoriously the policy of apartheid) which threaten international peace and security”, and that “they stressed that there can be no peace in Southern Africa until apartheid is completely eliminated”. They also grimly warned that South Africa’s policy of apartheid “has its roots in the same racist and bellicose ideology which provoked the Second World War and, caused untold deaths and destruction.”

“Secondly, the South African military raids against the frontline African States of Botswana, Zambia, and Zimbabwe on 19 May and the declaration of a new draconian State of Emergency, throughout. South Africa on 12 June followed by widespread arrests and intensified repression brought forth worldwide condemnation of apartheid and its perpetrators. Meanwhile, the Commonwealth Group of eminent Persons, headed jointly by former Australian Premier Malcolm Fraser and the former Nigerian Head of Government, General Olusegun Obasanjo (and including India’s Sardar Swaran Singh), has submitted the report of its visit and inquiries in South Africa. The report says that South Africa’s White Government functions on the “evident belief that the majority black people can be indefinitely suppressed .... (Hence) the Government was not yet ready to negotiate genuinely the establishment of a non-racial and representative government”.

This reality (of the fundamental importance of internal struggle) was perceived by Mahatma Gandhi during his stay in South Africa over hundred years ago. He therefore pioneered the first internal struggle-or Satyagraha-against racial discrimination
in South Africa. Indeed he discovered (and coined the term ‘satyagraha’ in the course of his struggle against racial discrimination in South Africa.

The State policy of racial discrimination first manifested itself in South Africa in the context of immigrant Indian labour in four colonies-Natal, Transvaal, Orange Free State and the Cape Colony which later constituted the Union of South Africa (now called the Republic of South Africa). In 1851, when the process of making sugar from cane was developed, the European settlers in South Africa set up huge sugarcane farms. But their agricultural operations were handicapped by an acute shortage of field labour. The local Africans spread out in the interior (while the European towns and farms were largely concentrated in the coastal regions) lived in tribal habitations and were content with a life of natural simplicity. And they (the Africans) were “in general disinclined to work for any length of time on the coastal plantations” of the whites.

The Whites were equally disinclined to work due to climatic reasons as also from a sense of superiority and arrogance which characterized European attitudes and behaviour in all their colonies and dependencies. Hence it was decided during 1858-60 through enabling ordinances and laws, both in South Africa and British India, to obtain supplies of cheap Indian labourers.

Gandhi was no crusader for public causes when he landed in South Africa (at Durban), as a lawyer for his client Abdulla Sheth in May 1893. Already, at that time, over 1,50,000 Indian emigrants were settled in various places in South Africa. They had gone to South Africa at a time (1860 and onwards), when according to a leading South
African newspaper, Natal Mercury, “the fate of the colony hung on a thread, and thread was labour”.

Living on a pittance, the immigrant labourers helped generate in South Africa a sugar and agricultural, boom. Yet they were treated like slaves (or worse), and the Statute books and official gazetteers described them as “semi-barbaric Asiatic or persons belonging to the uncivilized races of Asia.” The Englishmen other Europeans called them ‘coolies’. Gandhi himself was called a ‘coolie barrister’, they were insulted and openly discriminated against in fields, farms, in the streets, railway stations and coaches and even in court of law or justice. Gandhi himself was asked to take off his turban when he first visited a Durban court within a week of his arrival in South Africa. The immigrant labourers - the pillars of White economy and prosperity-were mercilessly flogged and deprived of wages, even if they absented from work on grounds of sickness.

Gandhi not only saw these humiliations and cruelties but also soon experienced them himself. As noted earlier, he was called a “coolie barrister” and peremptorily asked to take off his headgear on entering a court, even though he was a professional, British-trained Bar-at-law. A week later, in the course of a coach journey, he was asked (even though he had paid the full coach fare) by ‘the other passengers to sit (on a dirty sack cloth) at the feet of the coach driver. On refusing to do so, he was dragged and badly beaten and' boxed. Gandhi was travelling by train from Durban to Pretoria a day earlier.
He was traveling first class for which he had a valid ticket. But at an intermediate station (Maritzburg), he was pushed out by a White passenger with the help of two railway officials.

This incident is widely regarded as the most crucial experience or ‘turning-point’ for Gandhi’s later role in the South African struggle-and subsequently in his life-long struggle against tyranny and injustice. After being pushed out of the railway compartment-with his luggage thrown out on the platform Gandhi sat in the waiting room. What transpired in Gandhi’s anguished mind on that chilly winter night at the Maritzburg station is graphically described by him in his Autobiography: “It was winter, and winter in the higher regions of South Africa is severely cold. Maritzburg being at high attitude, the cold was extremely bitter. My overcoat was in my luggage [strewn over on the platform], but I did not dare to reach or ask for it lest I should be insulted again. So, I sat and shivered and I began to think of my duty. Should I fight for my rights or go back to India after finishing the case? It would be cowardice to run back to India without fulfilling my obligation. The hardship to which I was subjected was superficial -only a symptom of the deep disease of colour prejudice. I should try, if possible, to root out the disease and suffer hardships in the process. So, decided to take the next available train to Pretoria.”

In 1938, Gandhi told Dr. John R, Matt that this incident changed the course of his life and that his “active nonviolence began from that day”. According to Louis Fischer, “that bitter night [at Maritzburg] the germ of social protest was born in Gandhi”. As it happened, the State policy of racial discrimination in South Africa went from bad to
worse in years to come. Indians were not allowed to walk on the (pavements along the streets, they could not move out of their homes later sunset, and they had to submit themselves to finger printing within the police (as generally required of hardened criminals) and they had its carry an identity card everywhere and an the time. Stirred by these ‘and some other indignities.

Gandhi-and for that matter-the Indians and Asiatics in general-got increasingly agitated, and they intensely groped for a way to save their self-respect and basic rights. Soon there came an ordinance which imposed a tax of £300 per person (annually) on every Indian adult in South Africa—which, among other things, was an impossible impost to bear. This became the proverbial last strand for the Indian settlers in general and Gandhi in particular.

And in 1906, Gandhi launched his ‘passive resistance’ movement (later called Satyagraha). It culminated in the Gandhi- Smuts agreement of January 1914, which largely redressed these wrongs.

From this Gandhian Satyagraha in South Africa, the following deductions or conclusions may be drawn: Gandhi was stirred into action in South Africa, as he has put it in his Autobiography, “by the deep disease of colour prejudice in that country. In his long struggle, thousands of farmer’s field workers miners, housewives and even some Europeans (like Kallenbach and Polak) joined him.
It was the first-ever systematic, determined fight against racism in the modern world—which culminated (on 21 January 1914) in the Gandhi-Smuts agreement and the Indian Relief Bill. “It was”, as I noted by Gandhi’s biographer D.G. Tendulkar, “the first South African legislation calculated to redress the grievances of the Indian settlers.

Surely Gandhi’s movement was confined to the redressal of: Indian grievances in South Africa. It could not be otherwise under the circumstances. For, first, being a non-African. Gandhi could not arrogate for himself the role of leading or guiding a movement for the rights of the local Africans to whom he was a virtual stranger or new-comer, for the interactions (at the stage) between Indians, as a community, and the local Africans were few and far between and were characterized by a measure of mutual suspicion and “fear”. Secondly, at that point of African development, the technique of ‘passive resistance’ and Satyagraha could not be commended to the Africans.

It may not be amiss to say that if problems in India had not beckoned him back home—and if Gandhi had chosen, like thousands of other Indian settlers, to settle permanently in South Africa then (as a naturalized African) he would have extended, over time, the scope of his movements to cover the grievances of the Africans. Indeed it is inherent in the logic of Satyagraha. In Satyagraha no cause or people are alien. But the leader must be a ‘local’ and not like a knight-errant asking to lead a people who know him but little.
In a short span of seven years (1906-13), Gandhi was able to achieve a measure of success in undoing the South African wrongs—the hated three pound poll tax per person was abolished and the humiliating finger printing of Asian settlers was replaced by a plain domicile certificate, and administrative arrangements in tune with the spirit of the Indian Relief Bill were promised.

Gandhi’s chief antagonist, General Smuts, himself characterized the course and culmination of his Satyagraha as “a successful coup”. Concrete success has eluded the struggle in South Africa during the seventy-odd years since Gandhi’s departure for India. And in India, in the next three decades, Gandhi was able to achieve another and greater “successful coup” by dismantling the most powerful imperial structure of all times.

Could it then be that Satyagraha or the technique of avowed nonviolent resistance was a surer and swifter means of undoing wrongs and injustice? May be the African people of South Africa and there to wearing leader Nelson Mandela would like to ask themselves two question as their struggle hopefully enters a new and device phase after the following Nonaligned Summit at Harare. In any case, they will have nothing to lose by opting for Gandhian Satyagraha.

**Influence of Thoreau and Emerson on Gandhi’s Satyagraha**

Indian Opinion, the South African newspaper which was published by Gandhi from 1903 to 1914 contains much new material on his indebtedness to Thoreau and
Emerson—the most prominent New England transcendental writers. The influence of both of these writers upon him as long been known, but the supporting evidence has been incomplete because Indian Opinion was not available. Gandhi, in his 1942 appeal ‘To American Friends’, wrote, you have given me a teacher in Thoreau, who furnished me through his essay. “On the Duty of Civil Disobedience”, scientific confirmation of what I was doing in South Africa.¹

Similarly, Gandhi had written to Franklin Roosevelt in 1942, I have profited greatly by the writings of ‘Thoreau and Emerson’² Roger Baldwin, chairman of the American Civil Liberties Union, rode with Gandhi on a train trip through France in 1931 and noticed that the only visible book was Thoreau’s ‘Civil Disobedience’. Baldwin remarked on the extremeness of Thoreau’s doctrine, and Gandhi replied that the essay ‘contained the essence of his political philosophy, not only as India’s struggle related to the British, but as to his own views of the relation of citizens to government’.³

At the Second Round Table Conference in London that same year, the American reporter Webb Miller a long-time admirer of Thoreau, asked Gandhi did you ever read an American named Henry D. Thoreau’. Gandhi replied:

Why, of course I read Thoreau. I read Walden first in Johannesburg in South Africa in 1906 and his ideas influenced me greatly. I adopted some of them and recommended the study of Thoreau to all my friends who were helping me in the cause of Indian independence. Why, I actually took the name of my movement from Thoreau’s essay, ‘On the Duty of Civil Disobedience had written about eighty years ago. Until I
read that essay I never found a suitable English translation for my Indian word, satyagraha. You remember that Thoreau invented and practiced the idea of civil disobedience in Concord, Massachusetts, by refusing to pay his poll tax as a protest against the United States government. He even went to jail too. There is no doubt that Thoreau’s ideas greatly influenced my movement in India.  

Miller noticed that Gandhi, a ‘Hindu mystic’, adopted from Thoreau the philosophy which was to affect millions of Indians and inspire them to defy the powerful British Empire. ‘It would seem’, Miller concluded, ‘that Gandhi received back from America what was fundamentally the philosophy of India after it had been distilled and crystallized in the mind of Thoreau.  

Because of lack of information, inaccuracies have been perpetuated. Henry Seidel Canby wrote in the March 1931, Yale Review that ‘Civil Disobedience’ came to Gandhi’s attention while he was studying law in London in 1907. The New York Evening Post used this information in an editorial and then received a letter of correction and amplification from Henry S.L. Pollak Gandhi’s co-worker in South Africa.  

Mr. Gandhi was not in 1907 ‘an obscure Hindu student’ nor was he in London. He was already for fourteen years a barrister-at-Law practicing as a solicitor or attorney in South Africa. At the time in question he had already begun to organize his passive resistance movement in the Transvaal against certain anti-Indian laws that had already been passed by the Transvaal legislature.
I cannot recall whether, early in 1907, I first came across the volume of Thoreau’s essays (published, I believe, in Scott’s Library) but we were both of us enormously impressed by the confirmation of the rightness of the principle of passive resistance and civil disobedience that had been started against the objectionable laws, contained in the essay on the Duty of Civil Disobedience’.

After consultation with Mr. Gandhi I reproduced the essay in the columns of Indian Opinion and it was translated into the Gujarati language, in which” as well as in English, the paper was published, and the essay was subsequently circulated in pamphlet form later in the same year. Indian Opinion organized an essay competition on ‘The Ethics of Passive Resistance”, with special reference to Thoreau’s essay and Socrates’ writings that had already come to Mr. Gandhi’s notice’.  

Gandhi’s letter to Henry Salt on Thoreau’s influence contradicts some of Pollak’s statement. Henry S. Salt, one of Thoreau’s earliest biographers, was interested in writing the life of Gandhi and undoubtedly would have studied Gandhi’s indebtedness to Thoreau but was discouraged from writing by G.B. Shaw, who said that there was nothing more to be said about saints after his play on Joan of Arc. Salt, however, did write to Gandhi, whom he had first met in London in the 1895, asking about the influence of Thoreau. Gandhi replied, in a letter which has often been reprinted, that ‘Civil Disobedience’ had ‘left a deep impression upon him and that he had translated a portion for the readers of Indian Opinion in South Africa which I was then editing, and made copious extracts for the English part of the paper. The essay seemed to be so
convincing and truthful that I felt the need of knowing more of Thoreau, and I came across your Life of him his Walden., and Other essays, all of which I read with great pleasure and equal profit.

The whole essay, as Pollak intimated, was not reprinted, but only extracts from it. It is most likely that in consultation with Pollak, Gandhi marked those passages which he wished published. The editor of the extracts in Indian Opinion did not sign the article, but, in his letter to Salt, Ghandhi is positive, that he was responsible. The extracts were made, not from the volume in Scott’s Library, but from Arthur C. Field’s Simple Life edition of the essay, and were presented under the headline ‘For Passive Resisters’.

The extracts began with a quotation from Tolstoy—‘The principle of State necessity can bind only those men who disobey God’s law, who for the sake of worldly advantages try to reconcile the irreconcilable; but a Christian who sincerely believes that the fulfillment - of Jesus ‘teaching that brings him salvation cannot attach any importance to this principle—and then gave a short biographical sketch of David Thoreau who ‘taught nothing he was not prepared to practice in himself’. Thoreau was extolled as one who went to jail ‘for the sake of his principles and suffering humanity’. The five columns of extracts from (Civil Disobedience' present Thoreau's argument forcefully and accurately, emphasizing that the essay’s ‘incisive logic is unanswerable’.

The extracts present in brief the main ideas of Thoreau’s closely argued essay. The following passage, basic to Gandhi’s philosophy of Satyagraha as many other-
sections of ‘Civil Disobedience’ were, well demonstrates Gandhi’s new method of extracting the art of an idea from essays:

Under a government which imprisons any unjustly, the true place for a just man is also prison. If any think that their influence would be lost there, and their voices no longer afflict the ear of the State, that they would not be as an enemy without its walls, they do not know by how much truth is stronger than error, nor how much more eloquently and effectively combat injustice who has experienced a little in his own person.

Cast your whole vote, not a strip of paper merely, but your whole influence. A minority is powerless while it conforms to the majority; it is not even a minority then; but it is irresistible when it clogs by its whole weight.

If the alternative is to keep all just men in prison, or give up war and slavery, the State will not hesitate which to choose. If a thousand men were not to pay their tax-bills this year,’ that would not be a violent and bloody measure as it would be to pay them, and enable the State to commit violence and shed innocent blood.¹¹

There can be no doubt about the appeal of Thoreau’s essay, which Gandhi read at a crucial phase of his life. He was then fighting the ‘Black Act which required all Asiatic over eight years of age residing in the Transvaal to register and, as if they were criminals, give their fingerprints. Failure to register would result in a fine, a prison term,
or deportation. ‘I have never known legislation of this nature’, Gandhi wrote, ‘being directed against free men in any part of the world’.  

Indian Opinion helped awaken the Indians to the danger, and when the protest meeting was called for 1st September, 1907, in Johannesburg, delegates representing all segments of the 13,000 Indians in the Transvaal were present. The Fourth Resolution passed that day declared that Indians would not submit to the, Ordinance and would suffer all the penalties for their disobedience. Seth Haji Habib while seconding the resolution declared that it should be passed with God as witness; Gandhi, sensing the effectiveness of a religious vow, made an impassioned speech of support, ending.  

Gandhi entitled the chapter describing this - meeting ‘The Advent of Satyagraha’. Although this meeting was held five weeks before the extracts from ‘Civil Disobedience’ were published in Indian Opinion, he undoubtedly already knew Thoreau’s philosophy On 7th September 1907, four days before the meeting in the imperial Theatre, Indian Opinion commented on the Archbishop of Canterbury’s request that the clergy should not celebrate marriages with one’s deceased wife’s sister, even though such marriages were permitted by English law. An unsigned article in Indian Opinion stated.  

It is true, then, that Thoreau’s writings were known to Gandhi during the formative period of the first Satyagraha movement. ‘During ten years” he wrote, ‘that is, until 1914 there was hardly an issue of Indian Opinion without an article from me’.  

There is every reason to believe that Gandhi read carefully every article in his publication. Though never a wide reader, he did believe in putting into practice ideas which he had accepted.

Even in 1907 he attempted to follow the injunction of the Gita that ends and means should be the same’ that a sincere man’s words and actions should not be at variance. Gandhi may well have read Walden as early as 1906; before the first Satyagraha movement he had dispensed with servants, acted as his own scavenger, and was striving to be independent of machinery. His views were seemingly greatly influenced by Walden, but since he was using The Times as a pattern for Indian Opinion, his journalistic endeavors did not reflect his personal interests as his later papers in India did, and his reactions to Walden were not discussed in the paper. Rather, it was the Thoreau who went to jail ‘for the sake of his principles and suffering humanity’ who was emphasized in Indian Opinion because of the confirmation found there of the non-cooperation campaign.

Readers of Indian Opinion were not allowed to forget Thoreau’s essay on civil disobedience. Thoreau had opposed the enslavement of man; Indians, being enslaved themselves, needed encouragement in their struggle. The Indian community was openly defying the registration act and the, resistance of Thoreau, Tolstoy, Jesus, and Socrates seemed vital confirmation to Gandhi. Indian ‘Opinion announced an essay contest on ‘The Ethics of Passive Resistance’, on 9 November, 1907:
The terms of the competition stated that the essay should contain an examination of Thoreau’s classic “On the Duty of Civil Disobedience”. Tolstoy’s works—more especially The Kingdom of Heaven is Within You... and also the application of the “Apology of Socrates, that question”.\(^\text{16}\) Those who entered the essay competition had access to Civil Disobedience, as it had been reprinted in pamphlet form for sale and issued in time to be used by contestants not familiar with the essay.\(^\text{17}\) Essayists also had access to an article on Socrates almost beyond question written by Gandhi. Pollak’s letter to the New York Evening Post mentioned that ‘Socrates’ writings’ had come to the attention of Gandhi before the contest had been announced; Gandhi was reading Socrates during his jail term in January 1908, and his paraphrase of the Defense and Death of Socrates, entitled The Story of a Satyagrahi, seemingly published only in Gujarati, was banned in India in 1919.\(^\text{18}\)

Socrates is interpreted as a man of principle following his conscience and making no attempt to escape the consequences of his civil disobedience. The essay, entitled ‘Socrates as Passive Resister’, in addition to the direct reference to Thoreau, is permeated with Thoreauvian views on the rights of minorities and the divinity of the conscience.

For (Socrates) when there was to be a choice between his conscience - what he knew to be good-and what the government of the day had ordered, and what he knew to be wrong, there was no hesitation even though it might have cost him his life. Indeed, his trial was a brilliant example of passive resistance. He had been preaching
virtue to the Athenian youth. This tended to subvert the established order of thought and, therefore, established authority. Socrates was, therefore, charged, among other things, with having corrupted the Athenians. The penalty was death. Socrates preferred the poison-bowl and his independence to a life of servile and superstitious obedience to human authority, even when it went under the name of government. ‘O Athenian’, says our sage, honour and loves you; but I shall obey God rather than you’.

At the same memorable defense, Socrates says of his most virulent and self-seeking traducers, ‘Neither win Melitus nor Anytus harm me; nor have they the power; for I do not think that it is possible for a better man to be injured by a worse. He may perhaps have me condemned to death, or banished or deprived to civil right; and he or others may perhaps consider these as mighty evils. I, however, do not consider them so: Not-many days after he uttered the memorable words, he died a peaceful death, discoursing on the immortality of the soul.

The world knows today Melitus and his companions as murderers of a man-almost divine, and Socrates lives for eternity. This passive resister, just after the sentence was pronounced upon him, delivered in his dungeon a discourse on the duties of a good citizen, and rejected the overtures of his friends to escape death by stealing out of the prison. Then, he was as bad as adamant and all respect for law and order. In Socrates, therefore, we have one of the greatest breakers as also respecters of law. The essence of his teaching and practice was that it is lawful to disregard a law or order when it is, against one’s conscience, i.e., a higher law, but it is not lawful the punishment that the law imposes for such disregard.
There are nine hundred and ninety-nine patrons of patrons of virtue to one virtuous man. But it is easier to deal with the real possessor of a thing than" with the temporary guardian of it. And passive resisters are, beyond doubt, the real possessors of ‘the thing’; when they have lost all, they have gained everything.  

The essay on ‘The Ethics of Passive Resistance’ was to be judged by the Reverend Dr. J. Landau, who announced that he in no way entered into ‘the merits of the political application of the principle of passive resistance’. The entry deadline was extended from 30 November to 31 December, possibly because of a limited number of entries. Only four essays were eventually to be entered in the contest, and before the essays were judged, Gandhi, who had refused to register, was arrested. He was sentenced on 10 January, 1908 to two months’ simple imprisonment. Gandhi remembered that there was a ‘slight feeling of awkwardness due to the fact that I was standing an accused in the very Court where I had often appeared as counsel’. He then added a Thoreauvian comment; ‘But I well remember that considered the former role as far more honourable than the latter, and did not feel the slightest hesitation in entering the prisoner’s box’.  

During this first incarceration Gandhi read Tolstoy, Ruskin, Socrates, Huxley, Bacon, and the Gita - the work which greatly influenced him, as it did Thoreau, as Arthur C. Christy in The Orient in American Transcendentalism has shown. Since his days in London when he had first studied the Gita Gandhi had rejected the fundamentalist interpretation that this Hindu Bible was an historical work justifying violence. Gandhi felt
that ‘under the guise of physical warfare, it described the duel that perpetually went on in the hearts of mankind and that physical warfare was brought in merely to make the description of the internal duel more alluring’. Thoreau in his criticism of the Gita in A week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers, had protested the seeming justification of violence; Gandhi undoubtedly knew of Thoreau’s, interest in oriental literature through his reading of Walden and Salt’s Life of Henry David Thoreau, although he seemingly never saw a week with its extended comments on the Gita.

A settlement calling for voluntary rather than compulsory registration for Indians war arrived at and Gandhi’s days of reading were cut short. Gandhi did not forget Thoreau’s essay on civil disobedience; Indian Opinion, on 18 April, 1908, printed the prize-essay ‘The Ethics of Passive Resistance’. As Dr. Landau had withdrawn from judging the contest because of political implications, Reverend Duke lead the first four essays submitted and awarded the first prize to M.S. Maurice. Indian Opinion carefully pointed out that the essay which won did not reach the level which it had hoped for; it was indeed a pedestrian production, the section on Thoreau was largely a reproduction of the extracts which Indian Opinion had printed, and the sections on Tolstoy, Ruskin and Jesus were uninspired.

The continued interest in civil disobedience was justified,’ as General Smuts refused to keep his bargain to repeal the compulsory registration act after the Indians had voluntarily registered. Gandhi was unwilling to tolerate Smuts’s breach of faith; an Indian ultimatum was sent stating that if the Asiatic Act were not repealed the
registration certificates of the Indians would be burned. Gandhi’s inspiration may well have come from reading Salt’s biography of Thoreau; Thoreau’s essay on ‘Slavery in Massachusetts’, Salt noted, ‘... was delivered as an address at the anti-slavery celebration at Framingham in 1854 on which occasion the Constitution of the United States was publicly burned by Lloyd Garrison, an incident which may explain the passionate tone of Thoreau’s paper’.  

The certificates were burned on 16 August, 1908, and Gandhi was arrested and sentenced to the Volksrust prison on 10 October, 1908. He worked all during the day, but in the mornings and evenings on Sundays he read. He read ‘the two famous books of Ruskin, Essays of Thoreau’, and parts of the Bible, the Essays of Bacon, - and several books in Gujarati. ‘From Thoreau and Ruskin’, he wrote, ‘I could find out arguments in favour of our fight’.  

Gandhi wrote that many people wondered who one should go to jail where one had to submit to personal restraints, wear the course, ugly garb of, and share quarters with, felons, live upon a "non-nutritious and semi-starvation diet", and be maltreated by jail officials separated from friends and relatives and even prohibited from writing to them. ‘Such thoughts’, Gandhi wrote, in describing his second jail experiences, ‘make one really a coward, and being in constant dread of a jail life, deter him from undertaking to perform services in the interests of his country which might otherwise prove very valuable’.
Gandhi believed that it was the ‘height of one’s good fortune to be in jail in the interests and good name of one’s country and religion’. In jail the necessities of life were provided and the soul was left free; the body was restrained, but not the soul. A malevolent warden merely taught self-control to the prisoner. Gandhi trusted that the readers of this, my second experience of life in the Transvaal jail, will be convinced that the real road to ultimate happiness lies in going to jail and undergoing sufferings and privations there in the interest of one’s country and religion’.  

He ended his account of his second jailing by adding: ‘Placed in a similar position for refusing his poll-tax, the American citizen, Thoreau, expressed similar thoughts in 1849. Seeing the walls of the cell in which he was confined, made of solid stone two or three feet-thick and the door of wood and iron a foot thick, he said to himself thus:’

Gandhi’s transformation from a respectable lawyer to a radical political leader was complete.

Thoreau was not ignored during the years after satyagraha was first tried; for several years after 1908 passive resistance was offered on a small scale and Gandhi himself did not court arrest. Two years after Indian Opinion had printed extracts from ‘Civil Disobedience’, it printed selections from Mazzini with the comment: ‘we believe that” when the first stage of passive resistance was at its height, the extracts we gave from Thoreau’s essay “on the Duty of Civil Disobedience’ were very greatly appreciated by Indian passive resisters’. And Gandhi himself was still reading Thoreau. By 1909
he considered that ‘railways, machineries and the corresponding increase of indulgent habits are the true hedge of slavery of the Indian people, as they are of Europeans’.  

Thoreau and Tolstoy had said the same thing, and their influence is particularly strong in Gandhi’s Hind Swaraj (Indian Home Rule), a severe castigation of the evils of western imperialism which enslaved colonial peoples and brought material prosperity to the governing nations. Works by Tolstoy, Ruskin, and Edward Carpenter, and Thoreau’s ‘On the Duty of Civil Disobedience’ and ‘Life Without Principle’ were among the sources listed in the bibliography; and in a Preface to Hind Swaraj printed in Indian Opinion, Gandhi started: ‘Whilst the views expressed in Hind Swaraj, are held by me, I have but endeavored humbly to follow Tolstoy, Ruskin, Thoreau, Emerson and other writers, besides the masters of Indian philosophy’. Hind Swaraj, banned in India was a call for individual, Thoreauvian regeneration and shows that in 1909, six years before he was to leave South Africa, Gandhi was beginning to think of Indian affairs. One year after the publication of Hind Swaraj, Indian Opinion published excerpts from “Life without Principle, under the title ‘Thoughts from Thoreau’. 

These extracts, condemning commerce, government and intellectual stagnation, must have delighted Gandhi: The middle-class lawyer Gandhi suffered a conversion in South Africa which made him discard almost all aspects of his old life and beliefs and turn to writers who probed the meaning of civilization. Once Gandhi adopted and modified Thoreauvian- Tolstoyan-Ruskinian principles. He acted without hesitation and with determination.
The man who was to become a saint to millions of Indians, echoing Thoreau, chided Mrs. Millie Pollak when she wanted to spend money for curtains. Gandhi’s protest that she would only shut out the view of the beautiful mountains was met with the argument that pictures and curtains would disguise the cheapness of the houses, Gandhi was adamant; pointing to the beautiful scenery, he asked, ‘who do you want to cumber yourself with things that will only need more time to be spent upon them? You say you want beauty. You have it around you, God has given you the reality; why, they worry about the things made by man?  

Thoreau’s influence upon Gandhi, F.I. Carpenter has written, partly be credited to Emerson’s teaching, even if indirectly’. Although Thoreau’s influence upon Gandhi was far greater. Emerson directly influenced the Mahatma Gandhi was reading Emerson during his second imprisonment in South Africa and he wrote to his son on 25 March, 1909 that Emerson, Ruskin and Mazzini ‘confirm the view that education does not mean a knowledge of letters but it means character building’.  

Later in the same latter he wrote, ‘please tell Maganlalbhai that I would advise him to read Emerson’s essays. There is a cheap reprint out. These essays are worth studying. He should read them, mark the important passages and then finally copy them out in a note-book. The essays to my mind contain the teaching of Indian wisdom in a western guru. It is interesting to see our own sometimes thus differently fashioned.'
Four years earlier Indian Opinion had printed the following extract from Emerson’s ‘The Over-Soul, an extract which Gandhi undoubtedly saw:

The supreme critic on the errors of the past and the present, and the only prophet of that which must be is that great Nature in which we rest, as the earth lies in the soft arms of the atmosphere: that Unity. that Over-Soul, within which every man’s particular being is contained and made one with all others; that common heart, of which a sincere conversation is the worship; to which a right action in submission: that overpowering reality which confuses our tricks and talents and I constraints everyone to pass for what he is, and to speak from his tongue, and which ever-more tends to become wisdom, and virtue, and power, and beauty.

From which or from behind, a light shines through us upon things, and makes us aware that we are nothing the light is all. Arnan is the facade of a temple wherein all wisdom and all good abide. What we commonly call man, the eating, drinking, planning man, does not, as we know him, represent himself. Him we do not respect, but the soul, whose organ he is, would he let it appear of through his action, would make our knees bend. When it breathes through his intellect, it is genius: when it breathes through his what it is virtue: when it follows through his affection, it is love. Emerson.

Gandhi, although influenced by Emerson the guru, felt as many others have felt that Emerson was too much the inactive intellectual. In commenting scriptures and non-violence, he wrote: ‘But the fact remains that religious books have a hold upon mankind which other books have not. They have made a greater impression on me than Mark
Twain, or, to take a more-appropriate instance, Emerson. Emerson was a thinker, Mahomed and Jesus were through and through men of action in a sense Emerson would never be.

Thoreau undoubtedly had a greater influence upon Gandhi than did Emerson because the Walden philosopher was a practical man willing to practice his beliefs. Both writers did, however, offer confirmation of Gandhi’s own ideas, and the Mahatma was especially indebted to the Thoreau who defied society and government to follow his conscience.

**INFLUENCES ON GANDHI**

Gandhi was very much influenced by John Ruskin’s Un To The Last book. He determined to change his life style according to the ideals of this book. He read the book in a journey from Johannesburg to Durban and he could not get sleep that night. He translated it later into Gujarati, entitling it, Sarvodaya. He said, “The book was impossible to lay aside once I had begun it. It gripped me. I could not get sleep that night. I determined to change my life in accordance with the ideals of the book”.

John Ruskin, upholding the dignity of man, stressed that whatever hurts it must be relentlessly rejected. He thought that political economy took no account of the spirit of man and it concentrated on the material aspect of human welfare. He, therefore, attacked the mammon worship in society. He thought that riches were a power like that of electricity, acting through inequalities or negations of itself. That country, he
emphasized, was the richest which nourished the great number of noble and happy
human beings; that man was the richest, who, having perfected the functions of his own
life to the utmost, had also the widest helpful influence, both personal and by means of
his possessions, over the lives of the others; there was no wealth but life. He had no
hesitation in coming to the irrefutable conclusion that true economics was the
economics of justice. He believed in the eternal superiority of some men to others,
sometimes even of one man to all others and approved the advisability of appointing
such person or persons to guide, to lead, or on occasions even to compel and subdue
their inferiors according to their own letter, knowledge and wiser will. He did not accept
Ruskin’s advocacy of the rule of the wisest.

Gandhiji reduced the teachings of Un To The Last into three principles:

1. That the good of the individual is contained in the good of all
2. That a lawyer’s work has the same value as the barber’s inasmuch as all
   have same right of earning their livelihood from their work.
3. That a life of labour, i.e., the life of the tiller of the soil and the
   handicraftsman is the life worth living.

Gandhiji resembles Ruskin in several respects. Both preach the supremacy of
the spirit and trust in the nobleness of human nature; to both character is more
important than intelligence; both seek to moralise politics and economics; both
emphasise the priority of social regeneration to mere political freedom; both greatly
distrust machinery’ and plead that if employed at all. It should be so used as to free and
not enslave men; both insist that the capitalist should adopt a wise paternal attitude in relation to his employees.

However, there are significant points of difference, and even contrast between both. Unlike Gandhiji, Ruskin did not believe in non-violence, democracy and equality. Gandhiji differed from Ruskin in his distrust of the people and in his belief in the rule of the wisest. Both disagreed in their views regarding the nature and functions of the State.

Gandhiji has drawn inspiration on education from Ruskin. For, both of them attach primary importance to education in their constructive programmes. According to them, education is the discipline of the inherent instinct of man. Both took into consideration the child’s essential nature and emphasised that education must begin with the child. Both of them laid much stress on home. Ruskin regarded individual taste, national character and all those things which arose from national character as reflections of home life. Gandhiji also stressed the home education. Both attached equal importance to the education of boys as well as of girls. Both were of the opinion that spirit was higher than matter, both of them tried to spiritualise the political, economic and social spheres of human life.

The writings of Ruskin made Gandhiji to realise the dignity of labour and the ideal that action for the good of all is the most virtuous principle. Ruskin’s Un to The Last left such an abiding impact on Gandhiji’s life and thought that he started experimenting the philosophy contained therein, in his own life renounced property and privileges, established socialist colonies thereafter, thought in terms of Sarvodaya and
gave to the translation of the book, the title of Sarvodaya. Under the impact of Ruskin’s book, Gandhiji equally believed that differential wage should not be paid for intellectual work in preference to manual work since intellectual labour should not be treated as superior to manual labour.

Gandhiji was influenced by the ideas and activities of Henri David Thoreau, the well known American anarchist who refused to pay taxes as a protest against slavery in America. Thoreau’s plea for the supremacy of conscience under all circumstances appealed to Gandhiji so much that he admitted that his technique of passive resistance found scientific confirmation in the farmer’s essay on ‘Civil Disobedience’. The core of Thoreau’s politics was his belief in a natural or higher law: He rejected the idea that the highest responsibility of the individual must be to the State. He refused to recognise a government, which failed to establish justice in the land.

The anarchist view of Gandhiji was fully supported by Thoreau’s declaration that ‘that government is best which governs the least’. Gandhiji believed that a free and enlightened State could be established on this planet if its inhabitants could be truthful and non-violent in thought, word and deed.

Thoreau was the first to use the term, ‘Civil Disobedience’ in one of his speeches in 1849. Gandhiji, however, did not derive his idea from the writings of Thoreau. He wrote, ‘The statement that I had derived my idea of Civil Disobedience from the writings of Thoreau is wrong. The resistance to authority in South Africa was well advanced before I got the essay of Thoreau on Civil Disobedience. I began the use
of his phrase to explain our struggle to the English readers. But, I found that even Civil Disobedience failed to convey the full meaning of the struggle. I, therefore, adopted the phrase of 'Civil Disobedience'. Thoreau believed in man’s natural impulses to goodness, argued for the supremacy under all conditions of conscience and held up the ideal of a future society without any government”.

Thoreau's primary contribution to the realm of thought is his plea for defiance of a state based on injustice. A champion of the dignity of man and liberty of the individual, he would sweep aside, the obstacles, preventing fulfillment of their personality. He advocated a just, social and political order devoid of exploitation in form of slavery. He viewed that the poverty of the poor was the direct consequence of the luxury of the rich. He said, “Perhaps it will be found that just in proportion as some have been placed in outward circumstances above the savage, others have been degraded below him. The luxury of one class is counter balanced by the indigence of another. On the one side is the palace on the other are the alms house and ‘Silent Poor’. The myriads who built the pyramids to be the tombs of the Pharaohs were fed on garlic, and it may be were not decently buried. The mason who finishes the cornice of the palace returns at night perchance to a hut not as good as a wingman. It is a mistake to suppose that in country where the usual evidence of civilisation exists, the condition of the very large body of the inhabitants may not be as degraded as that of savages”.

Thoreau's message is contained in his saying if they hand has plenty, be liberal as the date tree; but if it affords nothing to give away, be an azad or freeman like the Cyprus’. He advocated service to fellow beings which may lead to renunciation. He was
convinced that everyone should earn his bread by his own labour. His very thesis that one can produce his own food for the year only by working for six weeks is a hint that earning one’s bread by physical labour is a philosophy that covers even intellectual.

Tolstoy lifted Christianity from the traditional ruts and gave it a spiritual meaning. Gandhiji said, “It was forty years back when I was passing through a severe crisis of skepticism and doubt that I came across ‘The Kingdom of God is within You’, and was deeply impressed by it. I was at that time a believer in non-violence. Its reading cured me of my skepticism and made me a first believer in Ahimsa. What has appealed to me in Tolstoy’s life is that he practised what he preached and reckoned to cost too great in his pursuit of truth”. Again, “He was the greatest apostle of non-violence that the present age has written and spoken on non-violence so fully or so insistently and with such penetrations and insight as he. I would even go further and say that his remarkable development of this doctrine puts to shame the present· day narrow and lop-sided interpretation put upon it by the votaries of Ahimsa in this land’ of ours”.

The book The Kingdom of God is Within You captivated Gandhiji very much: Tolstoy appreciated the non-violent struggle led by Gandhiji. Gandhiji accepts the influence of Tolstoy.

Gandhiji agreed with Tolstoy’s reminder to the mass of humanity, in the language of Christ, that “We are all sons of one father, no matter where we live or what language we speak; we are all brothers and are subject only to the law of love, which the common father has implanted in our hearts”. Tolstoy pointed to the division of men
into castes: one labouring, oppressed, needy and suffering; the other idle oppressing and living in luxury and pleasure. Gandhiji upheld the Tolstoy and dictum that an ideal state would be an ordered anarchy, in which everyone would rule himself in such a manner that he would never be a hindrance to his neighbours.

Love is the basis of Tolstoy’s principles of non-resistance and non-cooperation. He asserts, in his ‘Three Parables’, that; ‘Evil must not be driven out within evil, that all, instance by violence merely increases the evil’. Tolstoy’s philosophy of Christian anarchism repudiates the authority of the state and private property, for they are based on physical balance. His philosophy is the application of the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount. To Tolstoy, the Sermon on the Mount which contains the essence of Christianity, teaches us to live in peace with all men, to harbour anger towards none, and to love all men alike without distinction of nationality.

Gandhiji’s conception of non-violence is slightly different from that of Tolstoy. To Tolstoy, non-violence means avoidance of the force in all its forms and in all circumstances. But for Gandhiji in certain circumstances, even killing may be called ahimsa, as life involves some amount of violence. He follows the Gita’s ideal of action and resists evils with the detachment of spirit. Gandhiji excels Tolstoy in working out the non-violent technique and in devising ways to remove social evils.

Tolstoy was the great apostle of ahimsa. His penetration into the efficacy of this weapon was deep. None in the West has so fully read and understood about ahimsa as Tolstoy. J.J. Duke is of the opinion that the miscellaneous writings of Tolstoy especially
on ethical, religious and allied problems were traced out, read and digested by Gandhiji. He calls him a disciple of Tolstoy. Gandhiji wrote his first letter to Tolstoy in October, 1909. In his letter he described the passive resistance which was going on in Transvaal for three years. Tolstoy replied to this letter of Gandhiji, addressing Transvaal Satyagraha as ‘dear brothers and co-workers’. In 1910, Gandhiji laid the foundation of Tolstoy farm which was to become a laboratory for experiments on the philosophy and teachings of passive resistance.

Tolstoy condemns the State and its machinery, law courts, police and military, private property and capitalism,’ even the schools, as all these offend against the law of love. He is opposed to the use of force, payment of taxes, and compulsory military service. He lays great stress on the moral regeneration of the individual.

There are some facts which differentiate Gandhiji from Tolstoy. Gandhiji is more practical than Tolstoy. He used ‘to make compromises on matters relating to principles. Gandhiji’s idea of non-violence is slightly different from that of Tolstoy. Gandhiji defined Ahimsa in the sense of avoidance of injury to any creature out of anger, Tolstoy took Ahimsa in the sense of avoidance of force in all forms. As life involves violence, Tolstoy turns away from it; Gandhiji, on the other hand, followed the Gita ideal of action which preaches action without attachment. Gandhiji did not accept Tolstoy so far as the question of reincarnation is concerned. Gandhiji wrote to Tolstoy, “Reincarnation or transmigration is a cherished belief with millions in India, indeed, in China also. With many, one might almost say it is a matter of experience, no longer a matter of academic acceptance. It explains reasonably the many mysteries of life”. Gandhiji did not find
anything new in Tolstoy. Therefore, he said. “There is no doubt that there is nothing new in what Tolstoy preaches. But his presentation of the old truth is refreshingly forceful. His logic is unassailable. And, above all he endeavours to practice what he preaches. He preaches to convince. He is sincere and earnest. He commands attention”.

Tolstoy had renounced the happy and go-lucky life addicted to luxury, lived the life of a poor peasant, swept and cleaned his own room, his clothes and shoes, worked with peasants in his own estate Yasnaya Polyanna, ploughed and furrowed the land, worked for peasant families who were running short of labour, and sometimes performed all the farm operations for a poor widow, who could hardly afford to engage hired labourers. This life of renunciation and dedication to the service of the poor and the oppressed had such a great appeal for Gandhiji that he refashioned his life accordingly. He renounced his property and embraced voluntary poverty, clothed himself like a poor peasant, made ample use of his limbs to earn his bread and traveled in third class railway compartments after he opted for a life of renunciation. To quote’ Pyarelal, “It was not Tolstoy’s writings alone, but the example of his life, his passion for truth and ceaseless striving after perfection that enthroned him in Gandhi’s hearts. In him he found kindred spirit, a single minded seeker after truth, an aristocrat turned peasant and shoe maker in pursuit of the meaning of life who dedicated his wealth and talent and genius to the service of humanity, while he himself strove to the live by his body labour”.

Tolstoy believed in the efficacy of manual labour for earning one’s bread. He advocated performance of manual labour by everybody. He made a plea for manual
labour in the interest of the poor and so also in the interest of the rich. His life was
dedicated to the purpose of promoting the objective of an egalitarian society. His
philosophy breathed in a large measure the message of extinguishment of socio-
economic disparities, privileges, exploitation and creation of a society, whose
cornerstones are equality, fraternity, fellowship, renunciation, non-exploitation and
bread labour were enriched by Tolstoy’s influence.

Gandhiji has unhesitatingly acknowledged his debt to the past. Hinduism, the
oldest religion of India is well known for its non-violent and pacifist traditions. Its famous
doctrine of Advaita and aphorisms like *Soham and Tattvamasi* stand for spiritual
immanence and emphasis the unity of all creations. It is true that there is no reference
of non-violence in Rig-Veda; nevertheless, it affirms the doctrine of unity or all mankind.
In the *Aranya Parvam* of the Mahabharatha Bhishma, while lying on death-bed,
describes Ahimsa as the noblest religion in his discourse to Yudhistara.

Non-violence and peace are ancient beliefs in India. The excavations at
Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa have revealed that the Indus Valley people were
predominantly peace-loving. In fact, their pacifist attitude is considered to have been,
partly responsible for the eventual extinction of their civilisation, which might have
followed their defeat at the hands of the first wave of the more spirited and war like
Aryans. In 1936, Gandhiji wrote, “There is no such thing as Gandhism I do not claim to
have originated any new principle or doctrine I have nothing new to teach the world.
Truth and non-violence are as old’ as the hills”.

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The Vaishnava ideal impressed Gandhiji very much. Narasingh Mehta, a saint poet of Gujarat described the Vaisnava ideal in the poem which formed part of the daily prayers at the Ashram. The poem reads as:

A true Vaisnava is he who is moved by other’s sufferings; who helps people in distress, and feels no pride for having done so.

Respectful to everyone in the world, he speaks ill of none;

Is self controlled in action, speech and thought. Twice-blessed the mother who bore, such a one.

He has an equal-seeing eye, and is free from all craving,

Another’s wife is to him a mother; His tongue utters no untruth,

And never his hand touches another’s wealth. *Moha* and *Maya* have no power over him,

In his mind reigns abiding detachment;

He dances with rapture to Rama’s name-

No centre of pilgrimage but is present in his person. A man he is without greed and cunning,

And bulged of anger and desire;

“Offering reverence to such a one, says Narasingha,

Will bring release to seventy-one generations of one’s forbears

Gandhiji said, “Narasingh, the best among the Vaisnavas, has given pride of place to non-violence”. This means that a man who has no love in him is no Vaisnava. One who does not follow truth and has not acquired control over all his senses is not a Vaisnava. One does not become a Vaisnava simply by following the rituals. “Non-
violence in Vaisnava is not only concerned with human beings, but it also includes all living creatures”.

Gandhiji had faith in Vaisnava Dharma, but he was least interested in attending the temples.” He said, ‘Being born in the Vaisnava faith, I had often to go to the Haveli. But it never appealed to me did not like its glitter and pomp. Also I heard rumours of immorality practiced there, and lost all interest in it. Hence, I could gain nothing from the Haveli”.

IMPACT OF BUDDHA ON GANDHI

India has been the birthplace and nursery of various religions and doctrines. The philosophy of ahimsa (non-violence) preached by various religions was synthesized by Mahatma Gandhi. The strong religious atmosphere of his home made a lasting impression on his, mind and character. He learned the first lesson of truth at home, which became the leading principle of his life. From his mother he; imbibed piety and goodness of heart and from his father to be’ independent minded.

There is a background behind Gandhi’s attraction to Buddha’s, teachings. Towards the end of Gandhi’s second year in England while studying law, he came across two theosophist brothers. They discussed with him about the Bhagavad Gita. At that time they were going through Sir Edwin Arnold’s translation ‘the Song Celestial,’ and they invite him to read the original with them. Thus, he began reading the Gita, with them. Gandhi admitted that the verses in the second chapter of the book made a deep impression on his mind and it struck him as, one of priceless worth. He further added
that it provided him, invaluable help in his moments of gloom. He had read almost all
the English translations of it, and he regarded Sir Edwin Arnold’s as the best. The two
brothers also recommended reading The Light of Asia by the same author.

In his autobiography Gandhi wrote that once he had begun reading. The Light
of Asia, he could not leave it off. He took keen interest in the; book and he was very
much impressed by the description of the philosophy of the Buddha, especially
regarding non-violence. The Buddha went in search of nirvana (salvation) and made an
attempt to find the way to its realization.

To cause pain or wish ill to or to take the life of any living being out of anger or a
selfish intent is violence (ahimsa). On the other hand, after a calm and clear judgment to
kill or cause pain to a living being, with a view to its spiritual or physical benefit from a
pure selfless intent may be the purest form of ahimsa. Each case must be judged
individually and on its own merits. The final test of violence or non-violence is, after all,
the intent underlying the act.

The Buddhists, however, apply ahimsa in their life as a matter of faith, but
Gandhi regarded it as a universal virtue. Truth and ahimsa are not merely for the
chosen few, but for the whole of humanity, to be practiced in daily life. Gandhi
expressed that he had known in early youth that non-violence was not a cloistered
virtue to be practiced by the individual for peace and final salvation, but it had to be a
rule of conduct for society.
Buddhism does not distinguish between a foe and a friend. It allays emphasis on like treatment towards an enemy and a friend. It, always, culture is a spirit of fellowship towards all. This had a deep impact on Gandhi’s mind and Gandhi always considered a foe a friend. A span of about two thousand and five hundred years divided Gandhi from Buddha. Buddha led a revolutionary reform movement, ‘which brought about far reaching changes in the country and stirred ‘society to a new sense of brotherhood on the organizing principle of ahimsa.

But, Buddhism, as an organization for the furtherance of the virtue of ahimsa had long ceased to be a power in India. However, its influence is felt in the affairs of Indian people. New movements came into being, replace the old ones and many seers, great and small, appeared on the scene to lead the people through the right path. Gandhi appeared in our time to fulfill their great work, to consolidate their spiritual and social gains. Gandhi acknowledged his debt to Buddha. He emphasized three prominent points of Buddha’s life and teachings, “which had impressed him a lot. The first is the belief in all pervading providence called God.

Buddha virtually reinstated God in the right place, emphasized, and re-declared the eternal and unalterable existence of the moral, government of this universe. He unhesitatingly asserted,” The law was God himself.” The second is the concept of Nirvana, which meant utter extinction of all base elements in men, the vicious, corrupt and corruptible in men. And the third is the sanctity of all life, which in Gandhi’s opinion, was the greatest contribution of Buddha to humanity. Gandhi’s whole life, thinking and outlook were influenced by these principles. He firmly refuted the charge that India's
downfall dates from her acceptance of Buddha’s teaching. It was his unalterable belief that India has fallen not accepting Buddha’s teaching but because: it had failed to live up to it. He bemoaned that the information that Buddha attempted had not yet received a fair trial. He taught us to trust in the finality of truth and love; his matchless gift to the world.

In fact, Buddha’s teaching begins with purity of means and ends with love. In his teachings, he emphasizes mostly on non-violence in personal relations. Returning love for hatred, a major principle taught by Jesus, is the same doctrine of ahimsa preached by Buddha. It means avoiding all violence and cultivating compassion for all life. People failed to notice this love for all living beings in the lives of both Buddha and Jesus, according to Gandhi.

So, Gandhi’s humanism, like that of the Buddha, crossed racial and national barriers because of this loving kindness and goodwill as Maitribhava (friendliness). Thus the spirit Buddha molded the great mind of modern India. Gandhi’s role was more in the nature of enlarging the scope of ahimsa to fit mode environments. He maintained, “Ahimsa is a science, the word ‘failure has no place in the vocabulary of science. A failure to obtain the expected result is often precursor to further discoveries”.

The world has changed a lot from the time Lord Buddha preached his Four-Fold Noble Path. A gigantic problem of social and political adjustment arose when many races and tribes came into intimate contact with each other on the surface of the globe. The magnitude of the problem only increased with the march of science and technology.
The Buddha considered suffering as an inevitable consequence of worldly existence, which is the unending chain of birth and rebirth. Gandhi, on the other hand, raised suffering, that is self-suffering, to a high pedestal and considered it as a means of salvation. Here, he seems to be more in line with Jainism. The many fasts he undertook for self-purification and self-mortification could be viewed from the vicious cycle of birth and death.

Gandhi considered war a great evil. The killing and bloodshed; that the Second World War brought about filled Gandhi with dismay: and pain; the devastation caused by the atom bomb shocked his conscience. He believed that permanent peace could be established in, the world on the basis of ahimsa only. He therefore located himself in the tradition began by the Buddha.

Gandhi was influenced to a great extent by the Light of Asia.

For the first time, he came in contact with Buddha’s philosophy during his stay in England. He wrote, ‘The brothers (Theosophists) also recommended the Light of Asia by Sir Edwin Arnold, whom I knew will then as the author .only of the Song Celestial, and I read it with even greater interest than I did the Bhagavad-Gita. Once I had begun it I could not leave off. Buddha retained the ethical ideas of the orthodox religion, but repudiated the authority of the Vedas and the priests. He rejected rituals, caste system and sacrifice. He was much more interested in providing a remedy for the ills of life than in discussing metaphysical subtleties. His teaching was confined to the four Truths and eightfold path. The four Truths are that there is suffering in the world, that there are
causes of suffering, that there is cessation of suffering or a condition of Nirvana, and that there is a way to the realisation of Nirvana. The eight-fold path enunciated by Buddha as his first sermon at Sarnath for the realisation of Nirvana consist in right belief, right aim, right speech, right action, right living, right effort, right mindfulness, and right contemplation. The practice of these principles leads to Nirvana.

Buddha founded an ethical religion and Gandhiji adopts similar approach. Righteous living alone brings salvation. Gandhiji laid more emphasis on means than the ends because he feels that if pure means is rightly pursued and adopted, the desired goals can never bear off. He also prefers cosmic salvation and pains of births and re-births till the entire mankind are liberated. Gandhiji says~ “Look at Gautama’s compassion; said. It was not confined to mankind; it was extended to all living beings. Does not one’s heart overflow with love to think of the lamb joyously perch on his shoulders?” Gandhiji is opposed to segregation of man of one class from another as based on caste distinctions, sacraments, dogmas and rites. Buddha also demolished them and tried to evolve new social values in their place.

Non-violence is the essence of Buddhism. Buddha did not advocate a literal application of violence to the punishment of criminals and to war. Buddha teaches Ahimsa both as love and avoidance of injury to self and others. Positively Ahimsa finds expression in love, pity, tenderness and impartiality. The love that the Buddha teaches is the deliberately radiated well-wishing love towards all living things whatever. The Buddhist doctrine of violence is more practical and it steers clear of extremes. The path of the Buddha has been called the ‘Middle way’.
The Buddha, although born as a man, is as Tathagata innumerable, ‘beyond all ways of telling’. He is the Dhamma, the Eternal law, the truth. The Buddha’s teaching may be pointed out that the objective of the Bodhisattva in his search for Enlightenment was essentially ethical, that is, to put an end to suffering.

Buddhism takes a more realistic view of life. The Buddha was not content with the practice of good morals for reaching the ultimate goal of life. Nirvana, he said, was beyond good and evil, both of which bind the individual. He urged for the eradication of the notion of self; the individual must rise above name and aspect and he must see clearly the causal origination of all things and plunge into immortal. The Buddha’s call of violence, according to the Metta Sutta is, “Let goodwill without measure prevails in the world, above, below, around, unstinted, and unmixed with any feeling of differing or opposing interests. If a man remains steadfastly in this state of mind all the while he is awake, whether he be standing, walking, sitting or lying down, there is come to pass the sayings: Even in this world holiness has been found”.

Buddhism laid considerable stress on non-violence, celibacy, non-possession and non-stealing. Buddha, by virtue of his strong moral sense, tried to achieve salvation. Gandhiji being a true disciple of Buddha adopted and practiced the same code of morality for achieving salvation.

Light of Asia not only preaches the spirit of renunciation of Buddha; it also preaches his philosophy of non-exploitation because Buddha’s compassion for all living beings not only led him to be an advocate of non-injury, it also implies non-deprivation
of anybody of his rightful dues. The philosophy of universal love, non-injury to living beings, sacrifice and renunciation for the sake of promoting the welfare of the universe and the principle of non-stealing as preached by Buddha and driven home to him through the Light of Asia had such deeper appeal for Gandhiji. The Buddhist compassion for suffering humanity, love for the entire universe, sacrifice and renunciation for the sake of the welfare of the entire creation and concern for the liberation of all from suffering and unhappiness drove home to Gandhiji the passion of serving the cause of humanity, a sense of sacrifice and renunciation for bettering their lot and a desire for service instead of exploitation. This passion and compassion stimulated his sense of non-exploitation and egalitarianism and prepared the foundation of his philosophy of Sarvodaya.

Jainism has its strong roots in Gujarat. The Jain traditions were very much in evidence in Gandhiji’s Vaisnava family and his early acquaintance with Raichandbhai, a Jain devout, who emphasized the principle of austerities and the doctrine of suffering in religious life. Though Jainism stands as an opposition to Vedic orthodoxy, Gandhiji was deeply impressed by its philosophy of non-violence and righteousness.

The founder of Jainism, Mahavir, was born in 547B.C. He rejects Vedic sacrifices and the texts and enjoins them but he retains morals of the Upanishads. “According to Jainism the way to Nirvana is a three-fold path. It consists of right faith, right knowledge, and right conduct. These three are called the ratnatraya, the three jewels of Dharma. The right conduct consists of the observance of nonviolence, truthfulness, non-stealing, chastity, and nonattachment to worldly things. Jainism
stretches the practice of non-violence to such an ‘extremity as to forbid one to take the life of even an insect. This extreme form of non-violence, Gandhiji felt was not workable for the ordinary rung of mankind; he therefore, spoke of relative non-violence; the concrete situation afford the criterion of judgment for the subtle application of non-violence as an accepted principle.

In the Ayaravgasuta a Jain text dating probably from third or fourth century B.C. Ahimsa is preached in the following words:

“All saints and lords in the past, in the present and in the future, they all say thus, speak thus, announce thus and declare

The Jain poet Hemachandra praised non-killing in the following verses:

“Ahimsa is like a loving mother of all beings, Ahimsa is like a stream of nectar in the desert Samsara, and Ahimsa is a course of rain-clouds to the forest fire of sufferings. The best herb of healing for the beings that are tormented by the disease, called the perpetual return of existence is Ahimsa.”

Gandhiji refuses to identify his Ahimsa with mere mechanical non-killing. To him, the extreme application of non-violence by the Jains is based on the misleading assumption that the pain and suffering of death are more terrible than that of life. The Jains distort meaning of Ahimsa by emphasizing the sacredness of subhuman life. Gandhiji, on the other hand, is not altogether opposed to the killing of snakes, monkeys, mosquitoes and small insects, if they cannot, otherwise, be put out of harm’s way.
Jainism had been a greater living force in Gujarat than in any other part of India. Gandhiji read with great interest not only the life of Mahavir and the ethical teachings of the Jainas but also Saddarsana Samuuccya, the philosophical texts of Haribhadra Suri. Jainism laid great stress on non-violence, celibacy, non-possession and non-stealing. Gandhiji's family contact with the Jains and the Jain philosophy of non-violence accentuated his ethical outlook in favour of communitarians. Jainism as a religious faith arose as an offshoot in Hinduism, as an attempt at reforming Hinduism in order to make it less violent and more humane, compassionate and a selfless faith, infusing a greater sense of sociability into the doctrine.

The Vaisnavic family influence of self-sacrifice, self-surrender, identification with God's creation and renunciation of worldly possessions, on Gandhiji, had its manifestation in form of compassion for the suffering humanity, and egalitarian philosophy.

Islam is a religion of peace and brotherhood. The very word 'Islam' means peace, safety or salvation. The Prophet himself was extremely gentle, humane and more modest than a virgin in her veil. To his disciples, he was always indulgent: he rebuked none. However, the Quran favours war against the aggressor. The Prophet himself waged defensive wars, although at the end forgave his defeated enemies. Yet, the Prophet preferred non-violence to violence.

Islam has become associated in the common mind with violence and coercion. But, Gandhiji regards Islam as a religion of peace in the same sense in which
Christianity, Buddhism and Hinduism are. The followers of Islam have occasionally been too free with the sword, but that is not in terms of the Koran, but the environment in which Islam was born. According to Gandhiji, the chief contribution of Islam is the brotherhood of man. The message of Prophet was essentially a message of kindness and consideration, i.e., peace and love, non-violence as a means of conquering evil than violence. Nevertheless Koran permits defensive war and war against the wrongdoer.

Islam basically does not provide for forcible conversion. Prophet said, “Let there be no compulsion in religion, the right way is in itself distinct from the wrong”. ‘The Muslim salutation as Salam Alaikum means ‘lives in peace and prosperity’. Islam also preaches “religious toleration and universal brotherhood. Gandhiji, likely, strive for the Hindu-Muslim unity during his political career and urged for toleration and due rejected towards all faiths to maintain the communal harmony.

Islam played an important role in shaping Gandhiji’s views in regard to religion. He very often a quoted passage from Koran in is prayer meetings. In South Africa, he studied Islam under the “influence of some Muslim friends. His friend, Seth Abdulla was well versed in Islamic literature. He said: “Contact with him gave me a fair amount of practical knowledge of Islam. When we came closer to each other, we had long discussions on religious topics”. A friend recommended Carlyle’s Heroes and Hero-worship. He read the chapter on the Hero as a prophet and learnt of the prophet’s greatness and bravery and austere living. He also studied Washington Irving’s Life of Mohamed and His Successors, and said these books raised Mohamed in his
estimation. He also purchased Sale’s translation of the Koran and read it with great interest.

Gandhiji read the Bible during his studies in ‘England and the New Testament impressed him very much, especially the Sermon on the Mount. He visited churches and participated in their religious performances. His deep interest and passionate devotion to Christianity made him realise its truths. If any religion other than Hinduism had touched and pervaded the very being of Gandhiji, it was Christianity. He said, “I has not been able to see any difference between the Sermon on the Mount and the Bhagavad-Gita. What the Sermon describes in a graphic manner, the Bhagavad-Gita reduces to a scientific formula. It may not be a scientific book in the accepted sense of the term, but it has argued out the law of love-the law of abandon as I call it-in a scientific manner. The Sermon on the Mount gives the same law in wonderful language. Today, supposing, I was deprived of the Gita and forget all its contents but had a copy of the Sermons, I should derive the same joy from it as I do from the Gita”.

Christianity has got its origin in Judaism as Jesus pronounced, his doctrine was nothing but the teaching of the Old Testament Prophets, i.e., the law of love. Jesus, however, makes the law revolutionary and transforming by raising it from the level of reciprocity to that of non-retaliation and creative purpose. Christ and his teachings occupy a unique place in the history of nonviolence and pacifism. Gandhiji said, “Christianity’s peculiar contribution is that of active love. No other religion says so firmly that God is love. Christians, however, as a whole have denied the principles with their wars”. Some incidents, recorded in the Gospels show that Jesus asked the physical
force. But, there are numerous instances where the Jesus condemned the use of physical force and preached the principle of love. His life is the story of intense suffering for the love of humanity.

Jesus was primarily concerned with the creation of a better world, where love, fellowship, and fraternity shall prevail. Regarding Jesus, Gandhiji said, ‘He was certainly the highest example of one who wished to give everything asking nothing in return- and not caring what creed might happen to be professed by the recipient’. The spirit of love for and service to all, and non-acquisitiveness and renunciation preached by Jesus, must have helped Gandhiji to properly understand equality, fraternity and fellowship. To quote Joseph Duke,

“Naturally his imagination is profoundly stirred by the Sermon on the Mount and the idea of the self-renunciation pictured there as well as in the Bhagavad-Gita and the Light of Asia with his complete assent. Self-mastery, self-denial and self-surrender, under the guidance of the spirit of God, are in his conception of life, stepping stones to the goal of all the goal of Buddha, the goal as he interprets it of John the Evangelist - absolute absorption of redeemed Man in God”.

The New Testament not only emphasizes’ on work or ‘efforts of the individual for one’s existence and prosperity; it lays equal stress on bodily labour, since sacrifice of body for the sake of real development of the individual forms the core’ of such emphasis. The sacrifice of the body does not mean committing suicide but sacrifice of bodily efforts, or luxuries, laziness, idleness or pampering of the body. It implies labour
with the body, sacrifice of bodily comfort that arises as a corollary of idleness and enjoyment of real worth of life, the intellectual excellences and spiritual bliss by way of work. Jesus did not claim freedom from work for his own sustenance.

It was in 1889 Gandhiji come across two Theosophists brother. They talked to him about the Gita. They were reading Sir Edwin. Gita is-the most revered scripture for Gandhiji. He said, “The impression has ever since been growing on me with the result that I regard it today as the book par excellence for the knowledge of Truth”. The Gita exhorts men to fight like a Karma yogi. The great sages fight in all ages in the spirit of detachment and surrender to God. Renunciation in action is the message of the Gita. Gandhiji said, “But -after forty years unremitting endeavour fully to enforce the teaching of the Gita in my own life, I have, in all humility, felt that perfect renunciation is impossible without perfect observance of ahimsa in every shape and form”. For Gandhiji, Gita is a book of spiritual reference. He learnt from the Gita that religion is not opposed to material good. It is a misconception to hold that in business, vocation and day-to-day work, religion has no place and that religion is only for attaining spiritual salvation. The Gita dispels all such erroneous views.

The Gita inspires us to do our duties, neglecting the suffering and torture that we receive in course of our action. Again, renunciation of reward does not mean that we should ignore the result or remain ignorant of it. Everyone must know the effect of his actions, his capacity for doing a particular work and the means that he employs. But one should not be engrossed too much over his success. He should curb his passions and develop a sense of renunciation towards worldly ambitions and gains.
To quote Gandhiji, “this is the unmistakable teaching of the Gita that He who gives up action falls, he who gives up only, the reward rises. But renunciation of fruit in no way means indifference to the result.

The teachings of the Gita, especially the verses 62 and 63 of chapter 2, impressed him most and the book proved for him to be of priceless worth. Gandhiji wrote, “The verses in the second chapter made a deep impression on my mind and they still ring in my ears. The book struck me as one of priceless worth. The impression has ever since been growing on me with the result that I regard it today as the book par excellence for the knowledge of Truth. It has afforded me invaluable help in my moments of gloom”. Sri Mahadev Desai held the view that every moment of Gandhiji’s life is a conscious effort to live the message of the Gita. No other book influenced him as deeply as the study of the Gita. He learnt a good deal about aparigraha and sambhava from this book only. The teachings of the Gita became an infallible guide of conduct to him.

The secret of Gita which Gandhiji discovered which is deduced into a commentary on the Gita’s Anasakti Yoga. Anasakti means the cultivation of the habit of doing one’s duty with zeal and efficiency remaining of the same time indifferent to its utility to oneself. Gandhiji pointed out that renunciation of fruit in no way means indifference to the result. He has treated Gita as a work on religion, ethics and philosophy all combined into one. Here religion is Karma yoga, ethics is Anasakti and Bhakti and philosophy is Jnana as also self-realisation after absolute submission of the self to God. The whole stress of Gita is for strictly following the Karma or Karma yoga
and Gandhiji lays greater stress on *Anasaktiyoga* of Gita for self-realisation which is eternal peace. To Gandhiji, Jnana and Bhakti are both subsidiary to Karma and all the three are subsidiary to Anasakti. And *Bhakta, Jnani, Karmayogi, Sthitaprajna, Trigunatita*, all are more or less one, almost identical and all perform actions constantly in a spirit of detachment. And once a man cultivates this spirit of detachment, Truth and Ahimsa lead him to self-realisation. He agreed that Gita do not preach the doctrine of Ahimsa, but it is an earlier doctrine that the Gita takes for granted.

To quote Gandhiji, Today the Gita is not only my Bible, or my Quran; it is more than that it is my mother. .. “She has never changed, she has never failed me. When I am in difficulty or distress, I seek refuge in her bosom’. Later on, he said that the Gita had been his *Kamadhenu*, his guide, his open sesame on hundreds of moments of doubt and difficulty. He cannot recall a single occasion when it has failed him.

The technique of renunciation that forms the cornerstone of the message of self-realisation as preached by the Gita profoundly influenced Gandhiji, and it converted him inch by inch to the doctrine of egalitarianism. He derived inspiration for his thought from the philosophy of self-realisation, complete identification with the community, renunciation for the sake of the community, and welfare of all preached in the Gita. His idea of Sarvodaya also derived its primary inspiration from the Gita. The idea of Bread Labour equally derived its inspiration from the *Karmayoga* of the Gita inspired him.

Gandhiji was also influenced by the Upanishads. The Upanishads gave us first the message of non-violence. The *Chandogya* declared that non-violence was an
ethical quality of man. Patanjali held out non-violence as one of the five cardinal disciplines of man’s life; he did not believe that it was merely a negative doctrine of avoidance of violence but stressed that it manifested good will towards all.

Hindu ethics since the time of the Upanishads had always laid stress on the virtue of ahimsa to all living beings, human or otherwise. According to Rhys Davis, ahimsa is expressly mentioned for the first time in the Chandogya Upanishad “where five ethical qualities, one being ahimsa, are said to be equivalent to a part of sacrifice of which the whole life of man is made an epitome”. The Gita is the quintessence of the Upanishads.

Ramayana left an indelible impression on Gandhiji’s spiritual thought. He went through the sacred book, Ramayana. The influence of the Ramayana of Tulsidas in Gandhi is next to that of the Gita. He said, “what, however, left a deep impression on me was the reading of the Ramayana before my father. During part of his illness my father was in Porubander. There every evening he used to listen to the Ramayana. The reader was a great devotee of Rama. He had a melodious voice ....I must have been thirteen at that time, but I quite remember being enraptured by his reading, that is the foundation of my deep devotion to the Ramayana”.

Gandhiji was also influenced by Mahabharata. He learnt very much from it. To quote Dr. Radhakrishnan, “the great Mahabharata exposes the futility of war by pointing out the victory of the Pandavas was but a mockery, as only seven persons survived out of the millions who were engaged in that colossal conflict”. Gandhiji said, “I have
maintained in the teeth of orthodox Hindu opposition that the Mahabharata is a book written to establish the futility of war and violence”. This shows that war and violence come to an end only through non-violence and peace’, Insistence on war and violence brings to an end all peace and tranquility. So, Gandhiji adopted non-violence as the .key to the solution of all the problems of life. The reading of Mahabharata book confirmed his faith in truth and non-violence.

Ramayana and Mahabharata beckon us to practice non-violence for our civilized existence. Ramayana portrays the magnificence of morality. The message of Mahabharata is no less certain about it. Vyasa, concluding his great epic, cries with uplifted hands: “Wealth and pleasure accrue to men through morality. Why do men follow this truth”. It proclaims that war annihilates all. Bhishma extols non-violence as the highest religion and the highest penance; it is also the highest truth from which all duty proceeds. Kapila extols nonviolence as one of the sure ways to attain divine knowledge. Gandhiji wanted to spiritualize politics. In so doing, he was merely rehearsing the ancient Indian dream which he found in Ramayana.

Gandhiji was influenced by Harischandra’s story. After getting permission from his father, he once witnessed a play on Satyavadi Harischandra which captivated him. He remarked that Harischandra captured his heart. He said, “Why should not all be truthful like Harischandra was the question I asked myself day and night. To follow truth and to go through all the ordeals Harischandra went through was the one ideal it inspired in me”. His religion was impressed by Harischandra’s story. Like Harischandra, he also suffered for preaching and practicing truthfulness.
Gandhiji was also deeply influenced by the story of Shravana’s devotion to his parents. He read the play Shravana Pitribhakti with intense interest which left an indelible impression on his mind. He learnt the lesson of selfless service and devotion from the pictures depicting Shravana carrying, by means of slings fitted for his shoulders, his blind parents on pilgrimage. Shravana became his model.

Other Influences on Gandhi

It was however Ruskin’s Unto This Last, which he read during a train journey from Johannesburg to Durban and which he was later to paraphrase in Gujarati under the title of Sarvodaya (Welfare of All), that had the most profound influence on Gandhi. (An English Translation of his Gujarati paraphrase has been published by the Navajivan Trust). ‘That’ book marked the turning point in my life. We must do even unto this last, as we would have the world do by us’, said he to Mr. Andrew Freeman’ of the “New York Post many decades afterwards. ‘All must have equal opportunity. Given the opportunity, every human being has the same possibility for spiritual growth. That is what the spinning wheel symbolizes’.

While Unto This Last played an important part in moulding his ideas, he has himself acknowledged that Thoreau’s essay on ‘The Duty of Civil Disobedience’ gave him scientific confirmation of what he had been doing in South Africa and that Leo Tolstoy furnished a reasoned basis for his non-violence.
It was Gandhi’s view that critics and poets are obliged to exaggerate the proportions of their figures with a view to putting them in perspective. He once referred to the poetic license in ‘It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven’, and pointed out how Janaka did indeed enter the Kingdom of Heaven despite his being a king.

Naturally he also discouraged needless probing into the mind of the author of the Bhagavad Gita, on the ground that when a poet puts forward a particular truth he might not have worked out all its consequences and he might not have even expressed himself fully. This may perhaps even account for the greatness of the poem and the poet. A poet’s warning is also limitless and Gandhi stressed that the author of the Gita is himself known to have extended the meaning of some words current in his time.

Gandhi had read the histories of Gibbon and Macaulay but considered them to be inferior editions of the Mahabharata. Our ancestors were great, he said, because they ignored history as it is understood today. They were, however, able to build their philosophical structure on slight events.
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