CHAPTER III  
MAHATMA GANDHI’S HUMANISM IN HIS AUTOBIOGRAPHY

3.1. Introduction
The present chapter tries to elaborate the philosophy of Humanism in Mahatma Gandhi’s An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiments with Truth (1927). The autobiography is a reflection of his idea of humanism which is parallel to nationalism. At the same time it is an embodiment of his concern and longing for the poorest person. This particular chapter is divided into different segments in order to organize Mahatma Gandhi’s views on humanism. The first section tries to find and establish the relevance of examining this text in this study particularly in the radiance of Mahatma Gandhi’s understanding of the term "humanism" which is inextricably linked with his idea of the nation and humanity.

3.2. Mahatma Gandhi and Humanism: Local and Global
Mahatma Gandhi has been praised by many leaders, philosophers, Nobel laureates and scholars all over the world. Will Durant, the great philosopher and historian, said about Mahatma Gandhi that,

“Not since Buddha has India so revered any man. Not since St. Francis of Assissi has any life known to history been so marked by gentleness, disinterestedness, simplicity of soul and forgiveness of enemies. We have the astonishing phenomenon of a revolution led by a saint.”

Mahatma Gandhi has written his experiences from his childhood. His childhood upbringing has made him sensitive about the ill human practices in his society that might have helped him understand people on the humanitarian grounds. The idea of local political state gram rajya according to Mahatma Gandhi was an institution necessary for the realization of humanism and it would be politically designated for the welfare of all human beings. If we recall Mahatma Gandhi’s vision of local self-government in the post independent India, Ramrajya was an original form of democracy. Ramrajya included the entire nation. He could not find a better alternative that would convey to the millions of Hindus what Christians meant by the Kingdom of God and the Muslims meant by the phrase, Khudai Raj. What the three traditions, the
Hindu, the Christian and the Muslim were trying to portray was the ideal of perfect justice. Under these circumstances, not to use the term for fear of political incorrectness would have been self suppression and hypocrisy. Theologically then the term stood for the reign of perfect justice within the human heart. That is why both the secularists and theocrats have suspicions of the Gandhian concept of Ramrajya.

The modern nation is constituted on some fundamental issues. Mahatma Gandhi’s dream of decentralization of power and participation of common men in power was his goal which needs to be fulfilled by us. His ideal state had gone beyond the identification of basic functions of the state propagated by Aarya Chanakya. For Chanakya the main function of the state was external expansion through war and internal stability through force and state power. Mahatma Gandhi emphasized on peace against war and protection of the rights through rights to individuals. His freedom movement echoed the American Declaration of Independence and French Revolution. Mahatma Gandhi preferred to follow democratic ideology of Abraham Lincoln with liberty, fraternity rather than following violent and aggressive ideology of Chanakya. Plato’s (c 427-348 BC) ideal republic state and its Utopia discussed the ideal state which was founded on perfect forms of goodness, truth, beauty and justice. Mahatma Gandhi echoed his ideals practically.

Mahatma Gandhi has clearly mentioned his policy and ideology in the following words in Hind Swaraj,

“The British Government in India has not only deprived the Indians their freedom but has based itself on the exploitation of the masses and has ruined India economically, politically, culturally, and spiritually. We believe, therefore that India must sever the British connection and attain Purna Swarajya or complete independence.” (Gandhi, 1909:278)

The local political system Mahatma Gandhi defended was the limited liberal state – limited by the constitutional fundamental rights that were protected by the political system. The assumption was that the very fundamental rights would be free from state abuse and there would be people’s pressure to resist such abuses. Mahatma Gandhi invented one of the most famous technique of responding to such abuses viz, Satyagraha, was the novel way of defending rights in non violent way. Satyagraha was comprised of three basic elements; non-violence, civic disobedience and the
continuous improvements of the quality of justice that would result from the implementation of Satyagraha.

The autobiography constantly follows his ideals about Satyagraha which he considered as the best weapon against violence. The autobiography is an embodiment of his quest for truth which is a combination of his principles and its implementation. *Hind Swaraj* published in 1909 left a strong impact on his autobiography. *Hind Swaraj* was written in 1909 when he was in South Africa and experimenting with his non-violence and Satyagraha concepts when he came across the extremist who were from India and wanted to take on the British with violence. Gandhi held the view that non-violence was the only way towards freedom. To convince his thoughts to those extremists Mahatma Gandhi proposed an autobiography that could be,

> “Put into the hands of a child. It teaches the gospel of love in place of hate. It replaces violence with self sacrifice. It puts soul force against brute force.”
> (Gandhi, 1909:16)

**3.2.1. Local Experiments of Mahatma Gandhi**

Mahatma Gandhi found that local power of the common people is enough to fight global imperialism. There was a strong streak of idealism running underneath Mahatma Gandhi’s attempts to create the actual historic state in independent India. He often expressed his idealism by the term Ram-Rajya. It represents ‘the reign of Rama’ the mythological hero of the epic Ramayana. The state Ram-Rajya was the reign of self imposed law of moral restraint. Mahatma Gandhi sometimes is misunderstood with the connotation of Ram-Rajya as a Hindu religious term and Muslims and others accused Mahatma Gandhi as Hindu nationalist in disguise. He was troubled with it and denied that he had attached it with Hinduism. By Ram Rajya he meant “Divine Raj”. ‘The kingdom of God is within’ like the Tolstoyan term he meant that the term Ram meant justice, equality, perfect democracy and moral righteousness.

The fact that Mahatma Gandhi wrote an autobiography originally in Gujrathi, a local language of his state and that it was translated into English the global language in the 1930s, helps one to recognize the fact that the text served as a document of resistance to British imperialism and generated discourses of struggles which is an integral contribution to universal Humanism. Moreover this analysis is also based on the
insights derived from his other important work viz., *Hind Swaraj*. Mahatma Gandhi’s autobiography was the most important autobiography to study his concept of general humanism and particularly its local and global aspects.

The autobiography is a deeply meditative thought on various discourses and counter discourses that has local as well as global importance. The arguments he made in the book have stood as an historical evidences of his time in India as he was the most important personality in and after his times in the world. He is one of those personalities who personified the Indian freedom struggle and history in himself.

3.2.2. Global Impetus of Mahatma Gandhi

Mahatma Gandhi’s global impact is so wide and profound that it has left its impact on many discourses crossing the cultural, political, national and religious boundaries. Mahatma Gandhi changed the concept of power politics of state as politics solely as a struggle for power. Such conceptions of politics favour the principle that ‘end justifies the means’. Mahatma Gandhi’s theory of local state had subverted the Machiavellian politics of state power and absolute power. United States of America owe a lot to Mahatma Gandhi as his peace movement influenced America from 1920’s. John Haynes Holmes, an important and influential Union Minister and prominent Unitarian minister of America, reformist and outspoken pacifist in First World War was the effective exponent of Mahatma Gandhi. He first propagated Mahatma Gandhi’s principles in a sermon called *The Christ of Today* which became very popular in those days. In another sermon, *Who is the greatest man in the world today?* thrilled the Americans and they started looking respectfully towards Mahatma Gandhi. Mahatma Gandhi’s autobiography was first printed in America in the magazine *Unity*, which was edited by Holmes. Romain Rolland book published his book on Gandhi in 1924 followed by three books by C.F. Andrews in 1930 and 1931. Richard B Gregg published *The Power of Non violence* (1934) which made nonviolence popular in America.

Reinhold Niebuhr, a significant image in Christian groups and social movements for justice, stated that Mahatma Gandhi’s Satyagraha was a symbol of social and political force, and not the clear instance of social optimism to the extent believed either by
1. **Attitude:**- Mahatma Gandhi gave new set of attitude which was free from hate, aggression and violence. Win the hearts of your enemy was the loveliest attitude that Mahatma Gandhi propagated.

2. **The Action Plan:**- Mahatma Gandhi was the man of action. What he preached was followed with active implementation. He was peacemaker. Mahatma Gandhi has been a relentless reminder of the importance of “right action” in politics.

3. **Novel Leadership:**- Simple, transparent yet very effective leadership was the Gandhian gift to the post world war world. The highest moral order was seen in his leadership.

4. **Self-Discipline:**- Mahatma Gandhi’s discipline was different from military discipline. It was intended for right behavior and harmonious social and personal way of life.

5. **Constructive Plan:**- People should lead the movements and make them successful. No movement would be successful if the common man was away from it. Constructive programme was the involvement of common folks.

Mahatma Gandhi’s impact will continue to be felt, probably in ways one cannot foresee. He drew upon the traditions and ideas deep within the soil and soul of India, integrating them into an unforgettable life. Nonviolence finds expression it draws upon the traditions, experiences and patterns of thought of the culture in which it is working. So it will be in America, for the enduring legacy of Mahatma Gandhi belongs not only to India but to the whole world and to all times. Mahatma Gandhi’s impact in India was obvious yet profoundly found in areas like culture, social, educational, religious and political. Gandhian leaders became a metaphor for those who followed nonviolence, moral standards, passive resistance and peaceful agitations. Vinobha Bhave, a sarvodayi and ardent Gandhian started Bhudan Movement which was unique in its nature and practice. Baba Amte who was honored with Mahatma Gandhi Award was one of the greatest philanthropists and a social worker of Maharashtra always looked to Mahatma Gandhi as his inspiration. Anna Hazare, the Padma-Vibhushan followed Gandhian way of Satyagraha against the political and administrative corruptions. Megha Patkar, the leader of ‘Save Narmada Andolan’ was an iconic figure in the social reformation and human rights. So many
International personalities like Dalai Lama, Aan Saan Si Ki, Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King Jr., Barrack Obama have considered Mahatma Gandhi as their role model and Guru. In this way Mahatma Gandhi left an unprecedented legacy as local and Global leader.

“The intellectual and moral satisfaction that I failed to gain from the Unitarianism of Bentham and Mill, the revolutionary methods of Marx and Lenin, the social contracts theory of Hobbes, the ‘back to nature’ optimism of Rousseau, the superman philosophy of Nietzsche, I found in the non-violent resistance philosophy of Gandhi.” (King, 2001: p-24.)

In his tribute, Martin Luther King Jr paid his gratefulness towards his moral and political guru Mahatma Gandhi.

3.3. A Role of Science and Reason: Gandhian Rationalism

The greatest scientist Albert Einstein who always looked Mahatma Gandhi as greatest human being, paid his heartiest tribute and said,

“The admiration for Mahatma Gandhi in all countries of the world rests on recognition, mostly sub-conscious, recognition of the fact that in our time of utter moral decadence, he was the only statesman to stand for a higher level of human relationship in political sphere. This level we must, with all our forces, attempt to reach. We must learn the difficult lesson that an endurable future of humanity will be possible only if, also in international relations, decisions are based on law and justice and not on self-righteous power, as they have been upto now.” (http://mkgandhi.org/tribute/25.4.16)

To see Mahatma Gandhi’s views on Science and its use, it seems poles apart. Initially one can see that he was against science because he felt that machines would snatch the jobs of uneducated and poor folks. Mahatma Gandhi certainly was not against science as it was said about him. But he had shown that his life defined a space for an alternative science for civil society that would operate with different methods. His focus on the non-physical resources in organizing for science, the satyagrihi scientist, for instance, is a radical departure from the policy or science policy as expressed by Nehru in his famous Scientific Policy Resolution of 1956 and followed in India since independence. He also had a universal message by providing a new cosmology of man-nature and fact-value relations that he articulated and put in place through his various experiments.
The word experiment in the title of his autobiography itself relates Mahatma Gandhi as a genuine scientist who always tried to do experiments in his personal and professional life. For instance, his ideology of vegetarianism, naturopathy, anti-alcoholism, family planning and such other scientific and rational practices has become a center of attraction. His experiments were without laboratory but very innovative and applicable in the long run for the betterment of the society.

Mahatma Gandhi’s uses the expressions of science to narrate the spirit of his quest:

“A scientist, who though he conducts his experiments with the utmost accuracy, forethought and minuteness, never claims any finality about his conclusions, but keeps an open mind regarding them. I have gone through deep self-introspection, searched myself through and through, and examined and analyzed every psychological situation. Yet I am far from claiming any finality or infallibility about my conclusions. One claim I do indeed make and it is this. For me they appear to be absolutely correct, and seem for the time being to be final.” (Gandhi, 1927: x-xi)

Mahatma Gandhi’s experiments were done in open society that was the witness for its success or failure as he said,

“My experiments have not been conducted in the closet, but in the open; and I do not think that this fact detracts from their spiritual value. Far be it from me to claim any degree of perfection for these experiments. I claim for them nothing more than does a scientist, who, though he conducts his experiments with the utmost accuracy, forethought and minuteness, never claims any finality about his conclusions, but keeps an open mind regarding them. In experiments I come to conclusions which, if partly right, are sure to be in part wrong; if I correct by other experiments, I advance a step, my old error is in part diminished, but is always left with a tinge of humanity, evidenced by its imperfection.”(Gandhi, 1927: xii- xiii)

3.3.1. Mahatma Gandhi and Modernity

Mahatma Gandhi’s attitude towards modern technology evolved over the decades. In his South Africa days 1893- 1914 under the influence of Ruskinian, Tolstoyan ideas, he remained highly skeptical of the benefits of rapid industrialization. The Phoenix settlement and the Tolstoy Farm were laboratories for conducting experiments to test the virtues of life that were not dependent on modern technology. The terminology that he used for technology belonged to the 19th century- “Machinery”. Hind Swaraj
devoted a whole chapter to machinery. It was the symbol of modern civilization. It was an evil, a sin and despite its initial success was bound to harm humanity. The metaphors that he used spoke for themselves. It was a snake hole containing hundreds of snakes. It was the poisonous tree that killed all the vegetation nearby.

3.3.2. Mahatma Gandhi's Modern Approach

Mahatma Gandhi opposed superstitions as a social evil. In his Ashrams he practiced healthy attitude towards science. For him science without humanity was the greatest evil. Science should not become the tool of luxury for those who could afford it but it should serve as a servant to the poor and needy. He took British as proponents of science which helped them to establish colonies all over the world. He realized that those powerful in science could rule the world. So science became a weapon of the mightiest which resulted in the exploitation of the poor. Even in England he was not astonished with scientific progress of the Western establishment but he felt it was the blood and sweat of poor nations that these powers relished. His opposition to non vegetarian diet came out of his religious belief of Hinduism which banned non vegetarian food. As a school going boy Mahatma Gandhi had developed fascination towards beef eating and had tasted it with his friend. Later on he repented his sin and confessed of committing a sin. He also had given a promise to his own mother that in England he would not touch woman, wine and non vegetarian food. At times he starved but did not break any of his vows. His affection towards vegetarian food grew gradually and it came out of the combination of religious and moral callings. ‘Live and let live’ was the significant mode in his theory. The following statement summarized his thoughts on vegetarianism,

“Ethically they have arrived at the conclusions that man’s supremacy over the lower animals meant not that the former should prey upon the later, but that the higher should protect the lower and that there should be mutual aid between the two as between man and man.” (Gandhi, 1927: 48)

3.4. Mahatma Gandhi and Religious Implications

According to Mahatma Gandhi, ‘being religious’ is a means of achieving the supreme humanism. It destroys a division between the spirituality and morality without being fully identified with either. The inner movement that originates the religion tries to
establish the soul’s equitable relationship with God. A key to understand his religious perspective, here is his distinction between religion as ideas as timeless and religion as an institution which is time bound. Hinduism was interpreted as a promoter of caste and untouchability as its scriptures supported the Varnaashram. Religious pluralism was questioned because of its unending conflict with Muslims. Mahatma Gandhi reiterated his stand very clearly that a state should be neutral in religious matters. Secularism and religion could co-exist and they were meant to co-exist in his philosophy. Prayer being a religious activity surrounded his philosophy with par excellence. Some look upon secularism as a sign of progress, he adhered to the view that even secular progress that is truly beneficial to human being needed the spiritual benefits derived from the habit of prayer.

The Gandhian philosophy manifested religion in five ways: 1) Religion makes a person human in attitude 2) It is the manifestation of truth 3) Religion purifies our soul 4) It corresponds between ‘I’ and almighty 5) It unites people with moral harmony.

Religion changes our perspectives about life and ways of living according to Mahatma Gandhi who found that there was an eternal battle between our ego and the self. The ego is the guardian of our material possessions and the self is the protector of our ‘self’. If one is ignorant about this struggle, ego would take charge of the person. The victory of ego would mislead the life and would make slave out of human. The idea of religion helps us to resolve the struggle in favor of the self. Religion helps us to control the ego and its material hunger and harmonize with the self and its goal. According to Mahatma Gandhi one should try for the ultimate goal of life i.e. Moksha, salvation. The harmonization is made possible through various spiritual self-disciplines particularly the virtues. Religion can bring the self realization.
The second use of religion is that it binds the individual with truth. The truth in Mahatma Gandhi’s word,

“I think it is wrong to expect certainties in this world, where all else but God that is truth is an uncertainty. All that appears and happens about and around us is uncertain, transient. But there is Supreme Being hidden therein as certainty and one would be blessed if one could catch a glimpse of that certainty and hitch one’s wagon to it. The quest for truth is the summon bonum of life.” (Gandhi, 1927: 210)

Mahatma Gandhi’s God is not different from truth. The claim is that the self in us has the innate capacity to know the truth. Religion therefore has always to be alternative to the question of truth: it can in that way spare us from superstitions, delusions, and all manner of self deceptions that otherwise go under the name of religion. In his view the idea of the religion cannot be properly satisfied with any idea of the divine. The right idea of religion and of the truth is within the reach of the seeker. The search for truth is difficult and experimental. It is not surprising that he had entitled his autobiography as The Story of My Experiments with Truth (1927).

Life for him was a series of experiments with truth when properly conducted would lead to the realization of the truth. This takes us to the third function of religion- its capacity to purify the ego. The purification of the ego is both a psychological and spiritual process. Psychologically it calls for the proper management of the passions that are at work in the human psyche- greed, anger, lust, envy, vanity and the like. Spiritually helps the ego to function in harmony with the inner self. Not that the ego would be transformed into the self, that would be impossible, given our constitution – but that the ego would no longer pose as an obstacle to our spiritual development. We cannot live without the ego yet too much of it causes conflicts and sufferings. The process of purification can refine the passions of the ego and make them the positive elements of an integrated life. For example, the love for money when left it can convert into passion and greed but when, purified can become means of establishing the appropriate material conditions of human life. And so on with the other passions of the ego.

The removal of such claims results in the awareness of the true nature of the self in us. It enables the ego to integrate its interests with those of the self. Such integration does
not result in emptiness but in fulfillment or the realization of religion. To become aware of the true inner self is to become aware of God too and of the truth.

The important aspect of religion as idea is the establishment of the true correspondence between the self and its creator. The use of the term creator indicates the theistic orientation of Mahatma Gandhi’s religious thoughts and the use of the term correspondence refers to the mode of the self retains and its identity. The awareness that there is a correspondence between the self and its maker is the most profound spiritual experience that religion can provide. It is an experience that transcends sectarian boundaries and one that cannot be conceptualized or verbalized.

The final attribute of religion as idea is that it transcends all historical institutional religions. This claim is not in order to disparage institutional religion. Rather it is made in order to provide a criterion for evaluating institutional religions. His description of religion as idea is remarkably free from any sectarian bias. Institutional religions are necessary for socio logical and cultural reasons without them the idea of religion would not find actual expressions in time and place. But without the idea of religion animating them institutional religions would lack the specifically religious elements in them. The juxtaposition of the idea and the institutions of religion raise an interesting methodological question. It would seem to understand the phenomenon of religion fully. We have to understand both the idea and the institution. The one without the other would give only distorted picture of the reality.

Mahatma Gandhi’s philosophy of religion and its implementation for the masses was the reflection and outcome of his fight for country’s independence and the service of the masses of India.

“I had made the religion a service of my own, as I felt that God could be realized only through service. And service for me was the service of India.” (Gandhi, 1927 :132)

Mahatma Gandhi’s pursuit for self discovery through different religious texts continues with his interaction with acquiring knowledge and interpreting them with each other.

Washington Irving’s ‘Life of Mahomet and his Successors’, Tolstoy’s books and ‘The Gospel in Brief, What to Do?’ made “deep a impression on me. I began to realize more and more the infinite possibilities of universal love.” (Gandhi, 1927:133)

Mahatma Gandhi was very curious to understand other religions and their philosophies. He does not spare an opportunity to know more about the religion and toils through the people and texts to fulfill his curiosity. He was an intellectual as well as spiritual. Meeting different people and understating their standpoint was his continuous habit and hobby. His temperament was characterized by synthesizing opposite ideologies and counter thoughts with his own beliefs. Religion for him was not just a philosophical bookish passive knowledge but an active way of self discovery. Mahatma Gandhi was an independent thinker but he checked his belief with other religions and proposed a golden mean of respecting all religions equally.

3.5. A Concept of Ethics and Morality in Mahatma Gandhi’s Perspective

Mahatma Gandhi’s name is universally associated with ethics and morality. Non violence was the manifestation of the same virtue. In itself non violence is a virtue that opposes infliction of harm to any living creature. Plato’s Apology had exerted an early influence on him. The Socratic virtue says that it was better to suffer harm than to inflict injury to others. Before writing an autobiography he had written and published a paragraph in 1908 on Apology under the title Story of a Soldier of Truth. It was a prelude to his autobiography. Gandhi admitted the extensive influence of Leo Tolstoy and John Ruskin on his philosophy. The Kingdom of God is Within You (1893) by Leo Tolstoy overwhelmed him. It was his guide in his South African days. He made it mandatory for the Phoenix settlement and Tolstoy Farm for followers. He was so impressed with the book that he translated it in Gujrathi. The book was ferocious criticism of European powers at the concluding years of 19th century. The condemnation of power was based on the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount. The idea of non violence was clearly written in the book,

“How to settle the conflicts between people who now consider a thing evil that others consider good and vice versa. To say that evil is what I consider evil although my adversaries consider it good, is not a solution to the difficulty. There can be but two solutions: either to find an absolute and indubitable criterion of evil or not to resist evil by violence. The first course has been tried
since the beginning of history and as we all know, has so far led to no satisfactory results. The second course— not to resist with violence what we consider evil, until we have found some universal criterion—is the solution proposed by Christ.” (Tolstoy, 1935:58)

Mahatma Gandhi’s self awakening came gradually maturing from one experience to another. He did not attain the sudden enlightenment as some enlightened personalities did in the past. His family background played a significant role in turning his direction towards being ethical and morally stubborn. The first part and second part of the autobiography portray Mahatma Gandhi’s early years, his childhood and adolescence which marks his ethical and moral journey from childhood to adulthood. Mahatma Gandhi describes his ancestors from three generations and proudly adds that his grandparents were ministers in Kathiawar state. While describing his father Mahatma Gandhi uses most generous expressions mixed with telling his drawbacks as he says, “My father was a lover of his clan, truthful, brave and generous but short tempered. To a certain extent he might have been even given to carnal pleasures.” (Gandhi, 1927: 3) Mahatma Gandhi’s father had no ambition to be rich which reflected in Mahatma Gandhi’s behavior. But the person who left a profound influence on Mahatma Gandhi was his mother Putalabai who in his words, “(The mother) left on my memory the image that is of saintliness. She was deeply religious.” (P-4) The formative experiences moulded his views to be more spiritual. The fasting of his mother and her adherence to truth are the early memories. The stories of Shravana Pitrubhakti Nataka (Shravana’s devotion to his father) left deep impact on his life. The picture of Shravana carrying his blind old mother and father to the holy pilgrimage by the means of slings fitted to his shoulders left deep impressions on his mind and he told himself “here is an example for you to copy” (P-6) In a similar incident he narrated the haunting effect of the play Harishchandra on his mind and he spoke to himself, “Why should not all be truthful like Harishchandra?” These two plays and the characters were living realities to Gandhi as he says, “I am sure I should be moved as before if I were to read those plays again today.” (P-6) Through these two symbolic tales Mahatma Gandhi propagated two principles for life one is the service of the helpless and the other is truthfulness. As a school going boy Mahatma Gandhi admitted that he was not the brightest student. Other school students used to keep
names for their teachers and in the same chapter he confessed that a teacher forced him to copy from a neighbor’s book to impress the supervisor. But Mahatma Gandhi never mastered the art of copying because copying was immoral for him. The formative years and the spiritual conflicts carved a way of spiritual living. The eternal battle between flesh and spirit has its beginning since he was a child. Here Mahatma Gandhi seemed to be adopting a Christian style of confessions which was a narrative pattern found commonly in autobiographies. The individual principles and experiments with them lead to the societal interests. The encounters of inner and outer expressions were narrated with the flair of humor subverting the ego. The wave of reforms that was on its high in Rajkot in those times involved him through a friend who persuaded him to consume ‘meat and wine’ with the explanation that “we are weak (compared to Englishmen) because we do not eat meat. The English are able to rule over us because they are meat eaters.” (P-17)

Mahatma Gandhi depicted ‘honesty’ in his experiments and it became the form of truth. The sense of guilt was replaced with the higher sense of confession. The contrasting pictures of the black and the white had been yoked together. Mahatma Gandhi admitted the ‘sins’ he made in his childhood frankly and shared it openly. As a traditional family member Mahatma Gandhi was very sensitive towards his mother and father that is why the incident of meat eating was the biggest moral challenge for him. There was an eternal battle between flesh and spirit in his mind which admitted in his ‘lustful love’ towards his wife in his formative years. He seemed to be torn between his fleshy lust and duties towards his parents.

“I was devoted to my parents. But no less was I devoted to the passions that flesh is heir to. I had yet to learn that all happiness and pleasure should be sacrificed in devoted service to my parents 'Renunciation of objects, without the renunciation of desires, is short lived, however hard you may try.' Whenever I sing this song or hear it sung, this bitter untoward incident rushes to my memory and fill me with shame.” (Gandhi, 1927: 8-9)

There were numbers of incidents to vindicate Mahatma Gandhi’s tormented mind in dealing with his guilt. The battle between vice and virtue, holy and evil was unfolded here. His meat eating was associated on the one side with his holiness of religion and on the hand it was related with his love for his country as he wanted to make himself and the nation strong by eating meat. He worked on spirituality to gain strength and to
attain moral fearlessness. He believed that the reformative journey must go to make a person internally strong instead of physically strong.

The two episodes ‘Stealing and Atonement’ (Chapter-VIII) and ‘My Father’s Death and Double Shame’ marked a denouement in his experiments. The thing that haunted Mahatma Gandhi the most was unfolded in this chapter. In the ‘Tragedy’ episode he said about his visit to brothel, into the jaws of sin but ‘almost stuck blind and dumb in this den of vice’. Here he illustrated his defeat as his ‘manhood had been injured’. In three more similar instances he felt the same kind of horror and remorseful feelings.

The Western concept of carnal pleasures had been undermined and challenged by his timid and cowardly action. Mahatma Gandhi named this fear as ‘God’ and he credited God for retreating him from committing a sin and he thanked him for it and said “Ever since given my thanks to God for having me saved.”(Gandhi, 1927 : p-20) Mahatma Gandhi’s god was a mysterious moral force which saved his followers from sins. He said,

“As we know that a man often succumbs to temptation however much he may resist it, we also know that Providence often intercedes and saves him...all this is a mystery and will remain a mystery.” (Gandhi, 1927:21)

In this way he treated him as guide and providence to a moral way of life. In the same episode he narrated his jealous nature towards his wife. He realized the hardships of women under the mastery of her own husband. The Indian cultural norm of being the master of wife has been ridiculed and criticized with self experience. His view about woman in general could be illustrated by his thoughts on this sensitive issue. He says, “A (Hindu) wife, if she suspects her husband ,will keep quiet but if her husband suspects her, she is ruined.” (P-21) The hypocrisy and the exploitation of women were exposed here with self experience. Then he went on to unfold his wrong deed in ‘Stealing and Atonement’ chapter of his smoking and stealing money from his father’s pocket and stealing gold from his house to pay friend’s debt. But his inner voice could not keep the guilt for long and he confessed it to his father. The tears from his father’s eyes were the greatest punishment for him. His father did not utter a single word to punish Mahatma Gandhi. He quoted a hymn, “only he, who is smitten with the power of love, knows its power.” (P-24) Even later in following Satyagraha as a political
way, Mahatma Gandhi utilized the power of love. Forgiveness and love without any expectation are the lessons of the Gita and the Bible which Mahatma Gandhi practiced in life. Later in the next chapter ‘My father’s Death and My Double Shame’ he narrated very boldly and courageously one of the greatest guilt that haunted him throughout his life.

“Shame of carnal desire even at the critical hour of my father’s death demanded wakeful service. It was a blot I have never been able to efface or forget.” (Gandhi, 1927:26)

This incident and guilt certainly must have compelled Mahatma Gandhi to stay away from carnal pleasures and later on he took the oath of celibacy as the final stop of carnal pleasures. His religious temperament made his entire life journey moral and ethical.

3.6. Spirituality: Mahatma Gandhi’s Action Oriented Path

The aim of Moksha to say supplied the force unifying all of Mahatma Gandhi’s different endeavors. It was also the aim of his practical philosophy. What he had been striving and pining to achieve in the introduction to his autobiography, he wrote, was self realization or Moksha. He lived and had his being in the pursuit of his goal i.e. ‘self knowledge’. His approach towards Moksha was not an abstract or hypothetical goal but a self realized in his life in and through action in time. He did not go into ‘sannyasa’, the fourth and final Ashram of Hindu tradition but he criticized those who run away from their duties. He condemned them that those who believe in indulgence of sannyasa deceive themselves and society. Two contemporaries of his time, Shri Aurobindo and Ramana Maharshi were thought by many to have achieved the status of liberated souls. Liberated by religious parameters but they had withdrawn themselves from taking any active part in social or national sphere. Raman Maharshi was recorded saying on Mahatma Gandhi’s quest for freedom struggle that Mahatma Gandhi though a good person, was sacrificing his spiritual development by taking great burden upon himself. Raichandbhai to whom Mahatma Gandhi admired as his religious guide also advised him not to get involved in the politics of Natal and South Africa. Even Shri Aurobindo was deeply involved in the spirituality that he thought of giving guidance to Mahatma Gandhi on his unwarranted distractions. Mahatma
Gandhi replied with a letter asking time for an interview which never happened for want of time to Shri Aurobindo. But Mahatma Gandhi mentioned his unequivocal faith and respect for both Shri Aurobindo and Raman Maharshi.

Mahatma Gandhi was deeply influenced by the Bhagwat Gita and derived his own philosophy of life from the ancient scripture. He considered religion not as a passive set of rituals but a powerful tool to mobilize people and unify them for the freedom struggle. His autobiography which is a direct talk with the people reiterates the importance of Karma Yoga. Different philosophers and thinkers interpreted Bhagwat Gita in their own way. Mahatma Gandhi put his entire emphasis on Karma Yoga which means action with detachment. The work must be done for work’s sake and the doer must not think of the outcome or profit of his karma. The active inaction always yokes the \textit{karma} with \textit{god}. In this regard one can easily find Mahatma Gandhi’s humanist zeal as the path of his spiritual quest in his narration. Spirituality cannot be done in isolation. He made it a point that spirituality is an active domain which can be performed for the betterment and welfare of the society. So his autobiography as a text can be interpreted in the light of spirituality and its implementation as a Karma Yoga. This message has been imbibed into the language and style of the narration and is a vital factor in analyzing the text in the light of humanism. The parallel between Science and spirituality is elevated in the autobiography as he narrates,

“I hope and pray that no one will regard the advice interspersed in the following chapters as authoritative. The experiments narrated should be regarded as illustrations, in the light of which everyone may carry on his own inclination and capacity.”(Gandhi, 1927 : p- xii).

The phrase ‘experiments with truth’ at one hand disregard the principles of science and on the other hand cancel the metaphysical identity of God. The title is neither scientific nor theological. Truth cannot be experimented with because it is an outcome of the experiment. We arrive at truth after the experiment. Ironically Mahatma Gandhi experimented with the ‘truth’ to check the validity of his experiments. His autobiography is a golden threshold that combines scientific temperament which dismantles the science/religion dichotomy. Truth for Mahatma Gandhi is God that manifests itself in human beings through acts of virtue. The passage also anticipates
the conversional effects of his experiments on the reader. His autobiography portrays his political and spiritual journey and the incident selection also shows his dual path as he writes,

“Only those matters of religion that can be comprehended as much by children as by older people will be included in this story. If I can narrate them in a dispassionate and humble spirit, many other experimenters will find in them provision for their onward march.” (Gandhi, 1927: x)

In another chapter on ‘European Contacts’, Mahatma Gandhi expressed his concerns of selecting the incidents of his own life and accord them in the narration. His stress on truth is expressed time and again as he says, “If things that are relevant are omitted, truth will be dimmed.” (Gandhi, 1927: 234)

The Bhagawat Gita as a theological scripture has played an important role in the lives of many people all over the world and particularly Indians had worshipped it as Christians worship the Bible. The Bhagavat Gita is a part of Mahabharata, an episode in the large dramatic ancient epic. It is a relatively small poetic part of 700 verses. William von Humboldt praised that it was the most beautiful, perhaps the only true philosophical song existing in any known language. The composition date goes back to pre-Buddhist age and its effect is too wide and intense throughout the world. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru interpreted the significance of Gita as,

“The Gita deals essentially with the spiritual background of human existence. And it is in this context that the practical problems of everyday life appear. It is a call of action to meet the obligations and duties of life, but always keeping in view that spiritual background and the larger purpose of the universe. Inaction is condemned and action and life have to be in accordance with the highest ideals of the age.” (Nehru, 1956: 108)

The troubled conscious of Arjuna was elevated for right action by Lord Krishna who from his personal conversation took step by step to higher and more impersonal regions of individual duty and social behavior of the application of ethics to human life. There was dual message that goes from the Gita, one is the justification of violence and the other is detached action without any expectations. Nehru puts it in the easiest way,
“Even the leaders of thought and action of the present day – Tilak, Aurobindo, Ghose, Gandhi- have written on it, each giving his own interpretation. Gandhiji bases his firm belief in non violence on it, others justify violence and warfare for a righteous cause.” (Nehru, 1956:108)

Because India in Mahatma Gandhi’s time was in the state of frustration and was suffering from exploitation which resulted in quietism, the call for action made a special appeal and impact. The action in that era was the manifestation of the social, political, religious awakening and directed towards social betterment, social service, practical and scientific approaches, patriotic and humanitarian implementations. The action is instigated and desired according to the Gita in the spiritual way. The action with the detachment and without any desire or credit is the righteous way. Mahatma Gandhi developed his active interest in the Gita in 1889 when he was studying law in London. He came across Sir Edwin Arnold’s translation of the Gita, The Song Celestial and from then he followed the last nineteenth verses of the second chapter as part of his daily prayers. His feeble mind began to unify the teaching of the Gita. By 1903 he mastered Sanskrit and read the original Gita. Gandhi translated the book into Gujrathi in 1930 titled Anasakti Yoga and significantly published it on 12th March 1930, the historically important day, the commencement of Dandi salt march. The timing underlined the political implication of the message of the Gita. His first twist with the Gita and his translation came after forty years signified that he himself implemented the message of the Gita in his own life before he translated it. He transformed the self before preaching which symbolically true in the entire journey of life.

He admitted that not only the ‘Gita’ but ‘Sermons on the Mount’ were the ‘highest form of religion’. The study of different religions was undertaken by him to reinforce his deep interests in the ‘religious orders’ which drive the culture and humanity. His religious curiosity took him to Carlyle’s Heroes and Hero Worship and learnt more on the prophet and his greatness. This consolidated his stubborn faith in theology and religion and his reading of Atheist books were far from making any impression on him. He ridiculed those atheist books as ‘Sahara of Atheism’. The funeral of Bradlaugh, an atheist and the incident in the funeral is narrated in the autobiography
with humor and ridicule. The clergymen's insult strengthened his faith and he admits, "(such) talks further increased my prejudice against atheism." (Gandhi, 1927: 59)

In the second visit to London after his India visit, Mahatma Gandhi seemed to be deeply involved in religious endeavors. His meeting with Raichandbhai whom he gratified as *shatavadhani* was a man of wisdom and spirituality. He was passionate to see God face to face. Mahatma Gandhi was deeply influenced with his knowledge and faith yet he did not see a Guru in him. He acknowledged the role of Guru in the self realization but admitted that "and yet in spite of this regard for him I could not enthrone him in my heart as my Guru. The throne has remained vacant and my search still continues." (Gandhi, 1927: 75) He clearly vindicates that he did not have any guru and may not have in future. Here he subverted the orthodox tradition to have a spiritual Guru in life. Hindu religion firmly believes that only the Guru can lead to better life and ultimately towards salvation. Mahatma Gandhi refuted the claim and clarified that "for one gets Guru that one deserves. Infinite strivings after perfection is one's right." (P-75) Although Mahatma Gandhi could not put Raychandbhai "on the throne of (his) heart as guru", but as a mentor and as a guide, he remained a fine source of motivation in his spiritual quest of humanism. His quest for ultimate truth led him to learn everything about Christianity in England and also in his stay in South Africa. In the abstracts like 'First Day in Pretoria', 'Christian Contacts', 'Religious Ferment' and 'Comparative Study of Religions' categorically asserted that Mahatma Gandhi as an open minded learner and seeker, who had gone through various aspects of Christianity by virtue of interest and comparison.

Mahatma Gandhi understood the plan of Christian assemblies and found no reason to change his religion'. He refuted the claim of going into heaven to attain salvation only after becoming 'Christian'. He also directly asked the logic behind the claim of Jesus the only incarnate son of God and only believing in him would guarantee everlasting life. He questioned the illogical myths such as the only son of God is Jesus and others are not. His reasons did not allow him to believe that Jesus by his death and pains with his blood redeemed the sins of the world. The Christianity's belief that only humans have souls and animals do not have souls is ridiculed. He points out the contradiction in Christian beliefs and admits that, "I could accept Jesus as a martyr, an
embodiment of sacrifice and a divine teacher but not as the most perfect man ever born.” (P-113) He also narrates the incident at the Wesleyan Church which he attended for a few Sundays. He unhesitatingly admits that

“The church did not make a favorable impression on me. The congregation did not strike me as being particularly religious. They were not an assembly of devoted souls; they appeared rather to be worldly minded people, going to church for recreation and in the conformity of custom.” (Gandhi, 1927: 133)

He felt that the people in all religions are similar and have the same sort of blind faiths. In the same friendly spirit he discussed a far stretched comparison between Jesus and Buddha which he discussed with his woman host. “Gautama’s compassion was not confined to mankind, it was extended to all living beings. One fails to notice this love for all living beings in the life of Jesus.” (P-133) His comments were eventually disliked by the host and ended in Mahatma Gandhi stopping the visits to the family. At the same time he also admitted that Hinduism is also not a perfect religion. The defects in Hinduism were also visible to him which he accepted honestly. According to him untouchability was a ‘rotten part’ of Hinduism and caste and sects were unreasonable. The Vedas is as a work of God as the Bible or the Koran. His imbalanced mind and thoughts are pacified with Raichandbhai’s letter in which he said, “No other religion has the subtle and profound thought of Hinduism, its vision of the soul or its charity.” (P-114) The religious quests lead Mahatma Gandhi towards a perfect awakening and respectful towards all religions.

His religious journey went through various ideologies and philosophies and he realized his own religion better in England and South Africa when he was surrounded by Christians. His outer struggle was going on with unjust laws and unfavorable situations. He realized his ultimate goal in South Africa as he says, “God laid the foundation of my life in South Africa and sowed the seed of the fight for national self respect.” (P-117) He eventually realized his inner zeal for the poor and downtrodden. In Natal he devoted himself to the cause of the poor. “Service of the poor has been my heart’s desire and enabled me to identify with them.” (P-127) His quest to understand the purpose of religion and the search of God, he speaks about it in ‘Comparative Study of Religions’ chapter, “God could be realized only through service.” (P-132)
3.7. Mahatma Gandhi’s Social Aspect of Humanism:

Mahatma Gandhi’s autobiography is interpreted as the religious and cultural orientation of his development but his social attainment has received little or no attention by thinkers and writers. Almost every account on Mahatma Gandhi’s life in the South African years was very significant to his afterward growth. The novel aspect tries to seek and to add to our understanding of the making of a social reformer related to his autobiography. Many writers focused on the extension of ‘Indian Tradition’ in South Africa which he carried from India. Pyarelal Nayar, Mahatma Gandhi’s secretary turned biographer contributed many volumes which put him as the significant political and socio religious leader of the Nineteenth century carrying the religious legacy of Ramkrishna Paramhansa and Swami Vivekanand in the form of ‘Swadeshi self reliant’ patriotism. M.G. Ranade, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, and Gopal K Gokhale’s legacy of social and political opposition to the Britishers was found in Mahatma Gandhi at South Africa. Bhiku Parekh, D.G. Tendulkar were also some of the recent examples of the same theory. Mahatma Gandhi’s role in South Africa was of a loyal lawyer to his clients who were merchants, traders, and middleclass businessmen who followed Mahatma Gandhi for their economic interests. He was a perfect and affordable lawyer as he was fluent in English, Hindi and Gujrathi. Swan criticized his role as selectively reformist and considered Mahatma Gandhi as ignorant towards African Black Negros whose condition was more critical than Indians. Swan’s attitude was biased because she was Marxist and Anti- apartheid concerned only with the African blacks. After 1990 India’s role in South African reconciliation was very vital and diplomatic ties were re established after the fall of apartheid. Mahatma Gandhi became the bridging symbol for both the countries. In August 1996, the second high commissioner in South Africa who was descendant of Mahatma Gandhi paid homage to the Gandhian legacy with South Africa, ‘the roles of Mahatma and Madiba’ in creating ‘transcontinental mutuality’. Nelson Mandela in turn gratefully called the Mahatma as, ‘the founder of modern liberation movement.’ E.S. Reddy’s *Gandhiji’s Vision of a Free South Africa* (1998) appreciated Nelson Mandela’s role in the peaceful transition of power from white minority to Black majority. Rajmohan Gandhi also continued the same thread in his chapter on Mahatma Gandhi’s role in

### 3.8. Mahatma Gandhi as a Social Reformer:

Dr. V.P. Verma, a renowned Gandhian scholar discusses thoroughly about the social philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi and he says,

> “Gandhi never sanctioned the doctrine of caste war, class struggle and fight between races. The very survival of mankind amidst all adverse challenges and antithetical impediments is a testimony to the significance of non-violence. Gandhi wanted to solve problems of social tension, social disharmony and social disequilibrium by resorting to the techniques of collaboration, sympathetic accommodation and genuine brotherly solidarity.” (Verma, 1978:176)

Untouchability was not only a social problem but also a religious menace. It needed to be addressed at political level and at social level. As a follower of Holy Gita, he realized the eternal spirit in the downtrodden class of the society. V.P.Verma Says ,

> “Gandhiji’s unremitting crusade against social inequality and the humiliating conditions to which the backward sections and the so called untouchables were exposed in Indian society and this has been epoch-making. No other social prophet in the long span of India’s history has been so Catholic, so universal and as humane in his attitude to the untouchables as Gandhi.”(Verma, 1978:235)

He wanted to solve the social problems without disturbing his religious discourse. He had the challenge of Hindu-Muslim divide in the country. For him it was not easy to unite two opposite forces of society. He first wiped away the discrimination on the basis of caste system. He introduced a bill to fight against untouchability from Congress platform. It was a radical move. Congress that time was dominated by Hindu upper caste leaders and naturally they were embarrassed with Mahatma Gandhi’s radical decision. His way of fighting required unity and support of common people. He was a stern follower of communal harmony. His philosophy was the cardinal
philosophy which was in favour of majority. He realized that India was the country of variety. People of various caste, creed, religion and class were the part of unified society and if one became successful in combining these groups then it would be a success of a nation and humanity. India has always proved a nation of variety of class and creed. Mahatma Gandhi realized the strength of the country as he travelled throughout the country through third class by railway.


Mahatma Gandhi’s image is universally associated with the philosophy of non-violence. He conceived of non-violence in two distinct ways as in itself and as a derivative of the truth. In itself it is one of the eleven moral virtues listed in his moral philosophy. As a derivative of truth it is foundational to the other moral virtues. Ahimsa (Non-violence) may be deduced from truth or may be paired with truth but Truth and ahimsa (non-violence) are one and the same thing. Truth is the ultimate goal and ahimsa (non-violence) is the means thereto. Truth is the ultimate criterion of judging whether non violence is the right ethic for a given context. Not paying attention to this distinction has led many commentators to make exaggerated claims on behalf of non-violence. In itself non-violence is a virtue that opposes inflicting harm on others.

3.9.1. Sources of Mahatma Gandhi’s Non violence

Gandhian Non violence had its roots in his family background where his belonging to pure Vaishnava tradition naturally developed his attraction towards it. Gujarat is a state which was dominated by Jain religion which is against any form of non violence. The religious atmosphere in the house developed his attraction towards the ideas. Mahabharata was certainly one of those which proclaimed ‘there is no dharma higher than the duty of non violence’. ‘Ahimsa paramo Dharma’ comes from Shanti Parva, (CLXXII: 24) Hinduism is difficult to define but it is also referred as Sanatan Dharma which means ancient religion applied to faith. It involves many practices, rituals, beliefs that contradict with each other.
Mahatma Gandhi attempted to define it, quoted in *Discovery of India* as,

“If I were asked to define the Hindu creed, I should simply say: search after truth through non violent means. A man may not believe in God and still call himself a Hindu.” (Nehru, 1956:75)

One of the quotes of the Mahabharata is ‘thou shalt not do to others what is disagreeable to thyself’ reiterates the non violent philosophy. Pantanjali’s *Yoga Sutra* was a significant ancient source of non violence. In book II of this text it says, ‘when one is well grounded in non violence, there is abandonment of violence in one’s presence’ which Mahatma Gandhi liked the most. He acknowledged that perfect non violence is ‘self action’. The influence of the *Bhagavad Gita* on Mahatma Gandhi’s thinking is well known. The criticism is that the Gita for some people is a philosophy of war but it is about the ethic of right action and following the dharma of righteousness. The fruit of action which is impossible to put into practice without the exercise of the virtue of non violence. Plato’s *Apologia* had exerted an early influence on him. Socrates, Tolstoy’s *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, Ruskin John’s *Unto the last*, William Salter’s *Ethical Religion* (1889) were Western writers who left their impressions of non-violence on Mahatma Gandhi. The authentic ethics of Christianity, according to Tolstoy, was non-violence. Christ’s non-violence was humanitarian and non-passive. It was not only to abstain from harming others but also equally necessary to resist violence by non violent means. To return good for evil, to turn the other cheek when hit on one, forgiving the sinner, love thy neighbor, love one’s adversaries are the principles of the Bible which Mahatma Gandhi have adopted from Christianity.

Person’s attitude towards one another must come from his consciousness that all are children of God. The Sermon on Mount advocated the rejection of unethical political system and motivated the political society to live in small self governing communes. Another of Tolstoy’s writings, *Letter to a Hindu* (1908) impressed him a lot towards non violence. It compelled to change his view on the historical role that violence had played in Indian society. It said that the British were holding India on the basis of violence power and they should be retaliated in the same manner. Indians accepted the violence of Raja and Maharajas and accepted that violence was inevitable part of
living. That is why the same violence was inflicted on Dalit and other powerless communities. He rejected the theory and to end the violence in the society he not only translated the letter into Gujrathi but also published it with English translations in Indian Opinion. Ahimsa or non violence also constituted the universal brotherhood. It was the founding principle considering the fact that we all were the children of God. Mahatma Gandhi’s broadened vision made him to see,

"(I see) no distinction between relatives and strangers, countrymen and foreigners, white and colored, Hindus and Jews. I may say that my heart has been incapable of making any distinction." (Gandhi, 1927:231)

3.10. Mahatma Gandhi’s Unique Leadership

Mahatma Gandhi went to South Africa in 1893 merely for the financial security as he found himself ‘brief less lawyer’ in India. As a lawyer he became a savior for the local Indians who were being abused as ‘coolies’ by the Whites. He raised his voice of protest through satyagraha and the gradual success in South Africa earned him reputation of a leader who understood the pulse of the people and the antagonist establishment. He mobilized religiously, socially and geographically rootless Indians who included Muslims, converted Christians, Hindus and the locals. It was a unique kind of struggle and victory never happened in the history. Within a short period of time Mahatma Gandhi united people who were from different beliefs and traditions. Within a week of his arrival in May 1883, he was thrown out of the first class compartment in spite of having a genuine first class ticket. But this incident created courage in him and he decided to change the situation with fighting against it. In 1884 Mahatma Gandhi found that the Natal Government was not acting on the demands of voting right to the Indians on the racial grounds. He argued that denial of voting right to Indians was illegal and thus non acceptable. The voting right was demanded to those who at least had a property of 75 pounds and annual income of 50 pounds. After denial he sent a petition to the colonial secretary in London with the signatures of 10000 people almost the entire population. Several copies were also sent to the British parliament and the event was brought in front of the media. The matter was noticed by the Queen of England. With this success the Natal Congress was established in 1894. The reduction of annual poll tax was reduced from 25 pounds to 3 pounds. It was
the first biggest victory of Mahatma Gandhi and his followers. On his return from a brief visit to India in 1896, Mahatma Gandhi experienced another fatal attack on him in Durban when he narrowly escaped death. The 1885 Boer Legislation that set up to give ‘thumb impression’ to all Indians to obtain the right of residence. In 1906 the Ordinance was proclaimed which insisted on finger printing of all ten fingers and the failure to register would lead to fine and imprisonment. It was humiliating for Indians who started a protest under Mahatma Gandhi’s leadership. On 11th September 1906 Indians gathered at English Theater in Johannesburg and it was the first use of Satyagraha and Mahatma Gandhi welcomed imprisonment for his protest against Immigration Restriction Act of 1907. The act was called as Black act and a protest was launched against it. In 1908 Mahatma Gandhi led a group to burn thousands of registration certificates in Johannesburg. On November 1913 more than two thousand protestors began their journey from Charleston to reach Tolstoy Farm and civil resistant’s were arrested for opposing the Black Act. The protest was a huge success as women took the leadership for the first time in Satyagraha. Gandhian Satyagraha eventually jolted the racist South African Government into passing the Indian Relief Act of 1914 which cancelled registration certificates. Mahatma Gandhi’s attempts bore sweet fruits of his Satyagraha and peaceful protest.

Mahatma Gandhi came to India after his marvelous victory in South Africa. Congress party in India was going through a critical phase and was badly in need of a leader who could lead with new vigor-and spirit. India, a country of half a billion people, a country which had a history of five thousand years, was in search of a leader. Mahatma Gandhi came as a powerful current of fresh air that brought new wave in the country. His entry was at the most crucial phase in country’s history. He did not descend from the top but he seemed to appear from the millions of Indians, walking and talking their language, wearing clothes like them and was aware of their conditions and agonies. He developed a close connection with peasants, workers, slum dwellers, middle class people and intellectuals of the nation. Political movement took new current and hope with his entry. He was not trusted unanimously and there was skepticism about his methods yet the nation saw a new leader in front of them. The essence of his philosophy was fearlessness and truth and the action applied to it was
directed for the welfare of the masses. The Indian ancient tradition from its birth was reiterating the virtue of fearlessness not merely bodily courage but the absence of fear from the mind. Lord Krishna, Rama, the mythological heroes had said at the dawn of civilization that it was a duty of a leader to make them fearless. But the dominance of British imperialism, the fear was inculcated in the veins of the country. Fear of oppression, fear of violence, fear of technology, fear of laws, fear of suppression in jails, fear of starvation which were there on the minds of millions. It was against this all-pervading fear that a thin, bony, armless and powerless middle aged Mahatma Gandhi raised his determined voice and told the people: leave your fear for me. It was an act of highest bravery and courage.

This resulted into lifting of fear from people’s shoulder. The Gandhian way was very simple to follow. It was not the complicated theory of class struggle or political theory of some textual pattern. Yet a change was visible amongst the people and fear started giving the place for hope. The truthful way became Gandhian way and people liked his transparency and directness of behavior. Mahatma Gandhi influenced millions of Indians in different perspectives. Some adopted his simple living, some started spinning wheels, and some followed fasting and non violent ways of protest.

Mahatma Gandhi for the first time appeared on Congress platform and immediately brought about a change in the functioning. Congress became more democratic though it had been so previously but after Mahatma Gandhi the limited franchise of rich and higher class was replaced with peasants, poor labours and women. It no longer remained a place only for the intellectuals and higher classes; the agrarian character of Congress was widened with strong support from middleclass and industrial workers. Action was the basis of the objective and the organization became more people oriented and democratic. The talking and just passing resolution or terroristic activities were replaced with more active and dynamically effective methods. A novel technique of action was enforced which was peaceful yet implied non submissive, willing acceptance of pain and being stubborn in suffering. Mahatma Gandhi was at ardent pacifist for he was an actively dynamic leader with full energy and there was no submission to fate or God which he considered as evil. His method was non violent and peaceful yet it was determinant and aggressively loaded.
3.11. Mahatma Gandhi’s Nationalism: Religious Plurality
Mahatma Gandhi whole heartedly embraced the idea of modern nation which would be founded on the foundation of non violence. In this way he was modern and humanitarian. When he arrived in India in 1914 from South Africa, India was dominated with regional monarchs and Kings. The Indian community had inherited the ancient notion of dynasty and monopoly in the political system. India found itself in the process of evolving from monarchy to nation en route colonialism. He was impressed with the Italian National movement led by Giuseppe Mazzini. He mentioned this in Hind Swaraj that without national identity, India would be ‘bastards of humanity’. He regarded individual as the ultimate unit of nationality. The nation dutifully protects the fundamental right of an individual. He acknowledged British rule’s efforts to make India a political whole from Dibrugarh to Karachi and Kanyakumari to Kashmir. But he affirmatively said that the nation India existed from ancient times and India was one nation before the arrival of the English. The Hindu priests and Acharyas established pilgrim places in the four quadrants of the country, Badrinath in the North, Sringery in the South, Puri in the East and Dwaraka in the West. The notion was not just religious but it constituted as a whole nation into one element. He claimed that Indian nationalism was there before the arrival of British and the idea of nationalism that flourished in Europe in Eighteenth century. Indian culture was then and still today is open and assimilative. It started as Hindu culture and then it assimilated Buddhism, Jainism, Greek and Romanism and then Islamic, Christian, Sikh, Parsi and then Western culture after colonialism. One of the most significant contributions Mahatma Gandhi made to the Indian nationalism was to transform the Indian National Congress into a medium of civic nationalism. Congress was a symbol of secularism and known for its religious impartiality. He maintained its status and suggested some fundamental changes in its constitution. He decided that the future movement against the Government would go by non violent ways. He settled the dispute between moderates and extremist sections of Congress. Article four of the new constitution recognized twelve linguistic unite which constituted linguistic solidarity in India. The civic nationalism took into account the view that linguistic identity was the primary human need for its national identity. Article 29 of the new constitution
met religious nationalism saying that no issue affecting the interests of Hindu and Muslim would be raised without the prior agreement of both religious members. In another revision of the constitution, fundamental rights and social policy were given more importance. It stamped an ideological concept in civic nationalism.

Gandhian civic nationalism was based on the belief that it was possible to be loyal to one’s own religion and at the same time be respectful of the religion of others. There should be the same regard for others faith as they have for their faiths. Mahatma Gandhi advocated religious pluralism by giving religious and linguistic liberty and freedom to nurture civic nationalism. As far as Indian notion was concerned all religions should merge into one feeling of nationalism. He was an idealistic dreamer but he was aware of challenges. Nationalism is not a concrete concept and it gets on changing with time and situation. His metaphor of ‘the clay pot’ that he used for Indian civic nationalism was apt, he said,

“A clay pot would break through impact, if not with one stone , then with another. The way to save the pot is not to keep it away from the danger point but to bake it so that no stone would break it. We have to make our hearts of perfectly baked clay.” (Gandhi, 1909:57)

The civic nationalism had its challenges and it was the rift between the Hindu extremists and the Muslim separatists who had their own and opposite variety of nationalism. The ideology of state is based on the unity and unanimity of the citizens of the nation. A nation is considered of a single identity of their differences from other people’s similarity constitutes. What gave a nation a sense of identity is based on the sense of shared history, culture, sense of justice, rights and duties. By the third quarter of the nineteenth century, a significant number of Hindus felt attracted to ethnic nationalism. Muslim League was founded in 1905 to protect the minority Muslim’s rights from majority Hindus. British provided their aid to Muslim League to counter the powerful Congress. Hindu Mahasabha was established in 1919 and V.D. Sawarkar, a radical Hindu nationalist gave new identity to Hindu nationalism. Rashtriya Swayansevak Sangh was founded in 1925 by Keshav Baliram Hegdewar, gave Hindu ethnic nationalism new and significant articulation. Both the nationalism were posed against each other as their heritage, history and culture was against each other. The rift
got widened from then and it reached the stage where both the nationalists became separate nations. Mahatma Gandhi realized the reality and admitted in his speech in Lahore that Hindu and Muslim belonged to separate cultures, religions and nations.

“We maintain and hold that the Muslims and the Hindus are two major nations by any definition or test of a nation, we are a nation with our own distinctive cultures and civilization, language, and literature, art and architecture, names and nomenclature, history and traditions, aptitudes and ambitions, in short we have our own distinctive outlook on life and of life... I am convinced that true welfare not only of the Muslims but the rest of India lies in the division of India as proposed by Lahore Declaration.” (Philips, 1962:354)

Mahatma Gandhi’s civic nationalism is a key to harmonious and peaceful relationship with other nations of the world. Today India is a nuclear power and the largest democracy of the world. The peaceful role of India has been appreciated throughout the world. India is seen as the most trustworthy, consistent policy holder and humanitarian country in the world. Mahatma Gandhi’s contribution is the highest in this regard.

3.12. Mahatma Gandhi’s Concept of Satyagraha: A Practical Truth

The original definition of Satyagraha came in terms of individual rights. It was a way of attempting human rights through soul force not and not brute force. The term satyagraha appears in the autobiography when Mahatma Gandhi narrates his experiment with it.

“The principle called Satyagraha came into being before that name was invented. Indeed when it was born, I myself could not say what it was. In Gujarathi also we used the English phrase ‘passive resistance’ to describe it, I found the term ‘passive resistance’ was too narrowly constructed, that it could be characterized by heart, and that it could finally manifest violence, I had to demure to all these statements and explain the real nature of the Indian movement.” (Gandhi, 1927:266)

He wanted to use typical Indian word that would constitute real meaning of the word. The word must represent the pure and transparent action and still remain a forceful symbolic term. Through Indian Opinion Mahatma Gandhi declared a nominal prize for suggesting a suitable word. As a result Maganlal Gandhi coined the word ‘Satyagraha’ (Sat: truth, Agraha: firm insistence) and the Gujarathi word became the designation and title for the struggle.
The word as a concept had its notion from Western source; Thomas Hobbes had said that humans were possessive individualists in conflict with each other. The ultimate duty of a state was to protect human life from external insecurity. The conflicts should be settled violently if the rights of human were threatened. The Gandhian philosophy of rights started with moral duty of a state and the conflicts would be settled through non violent way, however the duty of a citizen was to be non violent and to be truthful in order to claim his rights. In the Western domain the rights did not begin with the idea of duty. The rights gained from the French Revolution, the American War of Independence or the Glorious Revolution in Great Brittan was preceded by violence. Mahatma Gandhi always favored that duty and rights could not be working in tandem. His response to the United Nations Human Rights Declaration of Human Rights (1948) expressed similar response, “all rights to be deserved and preserved came from a duty well done.” (Gandhi, 1909: 346)

The Black Act contributed to Mahatma Gandhi’s conceptualization of Satyagraha during the Transvaal Civil Rights Campaign (1907-1913). He got the opportunity to test and define the unique protest movement which had already gained momentum. He trusted the Government and asked the Indians to register voluntarily but he was fooled. His famous response came after that as he led a group to Haminia Mosque in Johannesburg on 16th August 1908 and burnt the registration certificates. The second implementation of Satyagraha took place in 1906 when Government derecognized Indian marriages since they were not registered as they were in South Africa. Justice Malcolm Searle’s judgment that Indian marriages in South Africa were made null and void since they were outside the legal marriage system of South Africa. This judgment created moral outrage and Gandhi started his protest and on 6th November 1913 more than two thousands of protestors marched from Transvaal to Tolstoy Farm. There were a number of arrests and women took the charge of Satyagraha. The success came with the Government passing the Indian Relief Act 1914 abolishing the registration and identity passes. The success in South Africa catapulted Mahatma Gandhi as a leader of the future India.

The Satyagraha at Champaran in 1917, Kheda Satyagraha in 1918, the Ahmadabad textile mill strike in February –March 1918 attracted the world attention for its unique
and novel methods. The British sub divisional officer wrote in his report to his authorities after Mahatma Gandhi’s arrival in Bettiah, Champaran region in 1917,

“We may look on Mr. Gandhi as an idealist, a fanatic or a revolutionary according to our particular opinions. But to the raiyats, he is their liberator, and they credit him with extraordinary powers. He moves about in the villages, asking them to relate their grievances before him and he is daily transfiguring the imagination of masses of ignorant men with visions of an early millennium.” (Gandhi, 1927:34)

Mahatma Gandhi’s principle regarding the non violence as a policy is described in his own words on the occasion of Mill workers strike at Ahmadabad, he advised the workers and explained the conditions, the conditions of a successful strike:

1) Never to restore to violence
2) Never to molest blacklegs
3) Never to depend upon alms and
4) To remain firm, no matter how long the strike continued and to earn bread, during the strike, by any other honest labour.

Satyagraha was not only demanding the rights respectfully but also commanding self esteem. Satyagraha was the practical implementation of the truthful ways and means. It tasted the patience, forbearance and perseverance, the qualities of humanism. Satyagraha was a twofold weapon, it was a tool to demand one’s right at the same time it preserved the dignity for the opponent.


“He (Mahatma Gandhi) is modest and unassuming...he makes no compromise and never tries to hide his mistakes...nor he is afraid to admit having been wrong. Diplomacy is not known to him; he shuns oratorical effect or , rather never thinks about it, he can listen to the “still small voice” within. This is the man who has stirred three hundred million people to revolt, who has shaken the foundation of the British Empire, and who has introduced into human politics the strongest religious impetus of the last two thousand years.” (Rolland, 2002: 3)

The very attempt of writing an autobiography is an act of fearlessness because Mahatma Gandhi was not an ordinary man when he attempted to write down his very
personal story. He already had been honored with the title ‘Mahatma’ before he started to write an autobiography. It was indeed a great challenge for Mahatma Gandhi to attempt true story of his own life. Image of a person is a very sensitive issue in the Indian culture. Mahatma Gandhi accepted the challenge because he was a man of fortitude and courage. He credited his courage to the spirituality from where he said “I derived such power.” (Gandhi, 1927: x)

The sources of his fearlessness could be found in the autobiography itself. His intentions of writing an autobiography were seen in the introduction itself as he said, “Truth is not only truthfulness in word but truthfulness in thoughts...not relative truth of our conception but Absolute truth, the eternal principle that is God.” (P-xi) His autobiography is deep and personal confessions of his ‘sins’ which he committed consciously or unconsciously but he narrated them without any fear. His sexual experiences, his lustful and wild aggression, his domination over his wife, his unsuccessful visits to brothel, his meat eating, stealing money from father’s pocket, and smoking cigarettes were narrated so directly that it astonished readers all over the world.

The autobiography also portrays Mahatma Gandhi’s gradual growth from immature and fearful adolescence, from a speechlessly shy advocate in Mumbai court to a fearless, tactful leader when he arrived in India in 1913. Gandhi said that fear was the quality that protected him from various evils in life at the earlier stage. He was a coward and used to be haunted by the fear of thieves, ghosts, serpents and darkness was a terror to him. Fear of coping in the exam, fear of inferior jealous husband, fear of adultery, fear of public speaking and fear of failure in life had been narrated to establish a fact that he was coward in the beginning. From this lows, Mahatma Gandhi took himself to the height of fearlessness and became the symbol of abhaya i.e. fearlessness. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru praised Mahatma Gandhi as, “The essence of his teaching was fearlessness not merely bodily courage but the absence of fear from the mind.” (Nehru, 1956: 358)

In South Africa, a terror place for Indians taught Mahatma Gandhi many lessons of countering fear. He was ‘pushed and kicked’ for walking on the footpath. Verbal insults, abuses and harassments were a part of life. But he did not react to it
aggressively. ‘Religious force within me’ made his stay in South Africa filled with confidence. He always felt the presence of some secret spiritual power near him which protected him from all adversities. The Bhagwat Gita was a source of inspiration in the entire course of his life. In difficulties and in danger he received the power from that source. The sense of patriotism was another source of inspiration as he had voluntarily submitted his life to the cause of the country.

The humiliating incident at Pietermaritzburg railway station in the former days of South Africa was the most significant experience in his life. The White passengers were furious to see a ‘colored’ coolie was travelling with them in the first class birth. Mahatma Gandhi was beaten and thrown out of the train. Mahatma Gandhi pocketed the insult and decided to carry on with his duties.

There was a fetal attack on him when he returned to South Africa from his brief visit to India at Durban port. The Whites agitators were so aggressive that Mahatma Gandhi felt his life was in danger. He was saved by Mr. Laughton still Mahatma Gandhi was beaten brutally by the violent crowd. But in the court Mahatma Gandhi forgave them and decided not to prosecute the assailants. His life was constantly in the shadow of danger yet he performed his duties fearlessly. South Africa was the most violent country and to battle against the White supremacy was challenging the death itself. He was unafraid of imprisonment. He went to jail many a time in his life. In India too he constantly walked in the shadow of death. He refused police protection and remained free in the public like an ordinary person.

The Bhagwat Gita which Mahatma Gandhi called as his mother stated the message which he personified, ‘the soul is immortal and it keeps changing bodies like external attire.’ The religious faith and the stubborn belief in truth as God made Mahatma Gandhi fearless and venerable for any injustice around him.
3.14. Mahatma Gandhi’s Holistic Approach towards Life

“What is the relevance of nonviolence and compassion to the future of humanity? As Mahatma Gandhi showed by his own example, nonviolence can be implemented not only in politics but also in day-to-day life. That was his great achievement. He showed that nonviolence should be active in helping others. Nonviolence means that if you can help and serve others you should do so. If you cannot, you must at least restrain yourself from harming others.”

Dalai Lama (http://mkgandhi.org/tributes)

Mahatma Gandhi inspired millions across the world with his unique ability to win the opponent with love and forgiveness. The message of love and brotherhood was found in every religious or every Holy Scripture which accounts for the paramount human welfare and morality. Mahatma Gandhi did not speak of a new idea but he implemented the old saying in his own life and set an example through his own life. “My life is my message” was the simple inscription written on his memorial at Sabarmati Ashram which has become the most igniting and inspirational message for the humanity. Mahatma Gandhi considered human as a unit of universality. Like the philosopher Descartes, Mahatma Gandhi felt ‘man is the major of all things.’ Gandhism is an inclusion of all isms that propagates humanism. Holistic approach is an inclusive of the aspects that leads to the overall development of human being as a unit of Universe and humanity. The development must cover all the aspects that constitute humanity such as art, music, literature, culture, traditions, folk arts, sports, language, regional identity and education. A society cannot be called developed unless it has all the facets available to each social member without any hierarchy. Mahatma Gandhi’s concept of values grounded in truth became significant aspect of his holistic approach. Conflicts between values of course exist and Mahatma Gandhi readily admits it. For him life is a continuous process of finding the truth. This provides a search for humanity and the common welfare. Gandhian paradigm was concerned with relevance to the emergence of India as a major political and economic power in the world today.
3.15. The Gandhian Concept of New Human Being

Gandhian Humanism is an ideology that keeps its highest faith in poor and downtrodden human than the power of the state. For Mahatma Gandhi the center of concern was always a human being. He believed in the harmonious and peaceful society. He trusted people’s ability and responsibility to create meaningful and ethical society based on humanitarian values. In the study of Humanism of Mahatma Gandhi a true Humanist or an ideal human has following qualities:

1. New human would be ethically and morally stubborn in challenging circumstances and his struggle should be regardless of the self.
2. New Human believes in the self supported because a person can only bring the change what he or she desires.
3. He or she must keep faith in the moral system and believe that we shall reap what we have sown.
4. Truth is the ultimate God and the forgiveness is the weapon of the strong.
5. Non violence is not the cowardly act but the power of the innocent.
6. Democracy of the majority is greater than the monopoly of a few.
7. The society must be free from hate and abuse and a place that accommodates all.
8. He or she must be the advocate of equality for all.
9. He or she must acknowledge that the service of the poor is the service of God.
10. He or she must consider human welfare at the center of all concerns.

The new human being will be led with the force of humanity, compassion and love for all humanity. He will be free from all the shekels of religion, caste and regionalism. The democratic powers and establishments of democratic systems would make new ground for the emergence of new man. The People’s Republic would be constituted on the basis of conscience, understanding and human values. In the era of globalization and materialization, the new man would create hope for himself and others. The new man will have faith in religious order for moral awakening but he would follow the scientific point of view to solve his day to day problems. The guiding principles of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity are the everlasting virtues of humanity and the humanity has to sort all efforts in preserving the dignity in these values. The message
of Christ, Kabir, Buddha, Nanak, Mahaveer and Ram is the culmination of same values for which Mahatma Gandhi sacrificed his life.

3.16. Conclusion

Mahatma Gandhi is the moral, ethical and humanist icon in the world today and his impact is profoundly felt in the world. His teaching and philosophy has come from his own life behavior which he displayed during his life time. The humanitarian values and the struggle for the oppressed made him the leader of the masses. His inclusive attitude and human treatment made him acceptable to all the humanity. Non-violence, passive resistance, caste eradication, moral forbearance and universal brotherhood are his values which appealed not only to his followers but to also his enemies. He propagated new kind of struggle and methods of opposition which were new to the human society. The mighty colonizers in South Africa and India were stunned by his peaceful yet mutely aggressive methods of Satyagraha and were compelled to accept the lawful and moral demands. Mahatma Gandhi drove his campaign with self respect and created respect for the enemies also. His unique and impressive methods were adopted later on by various humanitarian movements across the globe. In South Africa Nelson Mandela always held Gandhi as his political guide and his principles were adopted by South African leadership as his legacy. In United States of America Martin Luther King Jr was impressed with Gandhian philosophy and the Anti segregation movement was launched by him against the Jim Crow law. Martin Luther King Jr. found Gandhian method more acceptable and humanitarian and thus he achieved success in civil rights movement by following Mahatma Gandhi and his philosophy. In the post modern world Mahatma Gandhi’s Humanism is getting more and more acceptance and respect and this philosophy has proved to be respectful and dignified.