CHAPTER V

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR'S HUMANISM IN HIS AUTOBIOGRAPHY

5.1. Introduction

Mahatma Gandhi’s life and philosophy exerted a profound influence on the brilliant legacy of Martin Luther King Jr., creating a new tradition in a country based upon physical strength. The country, directed all along by the virtue of physical force and the rule of might was not an easy ground for him. The autobiographical study of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King will be incomplete without a study of the Gandhian ideology and its profound influence. It became his identity.

5.2 Martin Luther King Jr's Autobiography and the Background

Martin Luther King Jr’s autobiography is a distinct type of autobiography which is published posthumously. It is an instance of collected and edited documentation which has become so vivid and original. A professor of history and the noted author and editor of several books on the civil rights struggle, Dr. Clayborne Carlson was selected by the estate of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to edit and publish Dr. Martin Luther King Jr’s papers. Drawing upon an unprecedented archive of king’s onwards-including unpublished letters and diaries, as well as video footage and recordings- Dr. Carlson created an unforgettable self portrait of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in his own vivid, compassionate voice. It is portrayed Martin Luther King Jr. as a student, minister, husband, father and world leader portrayed in the book. Dr. Carlson except from the introduction in his lucid narration literally disappears as a second voice and the reader tunes into the real and original tone and voice of the self-narrator - Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Dr. Carlson a historian at Stanford University was called by Coretta King to edit Dr. Martin Luther King Jr’s autobiography. Carlson states an event of watching Martin Luther King Jr. from a distance in a rally at Lincoln Memorial who adds politely, “The autobiography is a product of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr’s intellectual legacy just as I am a beneficiary of his social justice legacy.” (King, 2001: preface)

Martin Luther King Jr. has planned and started to write an autobiography Stride towards Freedom which unfortunately did not find its finish in his life time. “The
autobiography is therefore, largely religious and political rather than an exploration of a private life.” (King, 2001: preface) The autobiography was the literary work which was completed after Martin Luther King Jr’s death by Carlson. He estimates that Martin Luther King Jr has left enormous document behind him which is enough, to define his character. Though skepticism remains about the role of Dr. Carlson and warranted an explanation of how it was constructed. But as an editor of an autobiography, Carlson can be defended by the fact that many autobiographies are written with some editorial assistance from minor copy editing to extensive rewriting of raw information supplied by the personalities. Carlson provides an example which was that of the very close and contemporary autobiography of Malcolm X and the role of Alex Haley in the production of his autobiography the “value of behind-the-scenes editorial assistance for a subject who lacks the time or the ability to write an autobiographical narrative that is compelling and of literary value.” (P-3)

5.3. Martin Luther King Jr’s Local and Global Humanism

While describing King’s political commitment, Sridharani says,

“My contact with the Western World has led me to think that, contrary to popular belief, Satyagraha, once consciously and deliberately adopted, has more fertile fields in which to grow and flourish in the West than in the Orient. Like war, Satyagraha demands public spirit, self sacrifice, organization, endurance, and discipline or its successful operation, and I have found these qualities displayed in Western communities more than in my own.” (Sridharani, 1939: 13)

To compare two situations in South Africa and America, it is necessary to understand the American conditions before we study the influence of Mahatma Gandhi on Martin Luther King Jr. For Martin Luther King Jr (1929-1968) the conditions were not substantially different from those he fought against racism and injustice in democratic America within a much shorter lifespan than Mahatma Gandhi. Martin Luther King Jr. had religious family background that helped him to adopt the non violence at a tender age. He had the effect of the Holy Bible from his father who was pastor by profession. Martin Luther King Jr. was introduced to non-violence because of his revision of Christianity and the Sermon on the Mount which were his family resources. The conditions that nurtured Martin Luther King Jr. were Black Christian society and
traditions in which he was brought up. He mainly practiced and adopted the fighting strategies mainly in Southern states of America. It was a specific local context that led the young pastor to take up fight against racism and injustice. Like the racist South Africans, the prevalence of legal segregation between Blacks and Whites in Southern American states created circumstances in which his campaign against racism and injustice easily gained acceptance. It could be argued that the local conditions were suitable to adopt Gandhian globally successful strategies for Martin Luther King Jr. It was easier for Mahatma Gandhi to utilize non violence as a tool for mobilizing the Indian community because it had been tested in South Africa with huge success. Martin Luther King Jr's case was relatively different as he linked non-violence with five cardinal principles of the Sermon on the Mount. The underlined qualities of the Sermon were humanity, self criticism, forgiveness and renunciation of material gains. As King admitted in the autobiography,

“I did not have much choice, but to become religious because I grew up in the church. My father is a preacher, my grandfather was a preacher, my great Grandfather was a preacher, my only brother is a preacher.” (King, 2001:1)

Special circumstances in South Africa and the significance of Gandhian ideology matched its practical application as a unique tool. The unscrupulous General Smuts, whose ill attitude and colonial mind set forced Mahatma Gandhi to try every practical weapon in his custody. Like Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr. made it a point that if the truth is dawned upon then the victory in the war will not depend on white violent force but upon "soul force" which was his core belief. Martin Luther King Jr. was aware that the road ahead of him was very tricky and the new method he invented needs tremendous forbearance, sacrifice, and immense patience. Martin Luther King Jr. was intensely moved to see the condition of his Black fellowmen in their own land, humiliations to vast discriminations and humiliations. He decided himself to take up the challenge and lead them like Jesus into a new reasonable order of things. He dedicated it to the cause. The victory in the First World War for America was the reason of the uncontrolled greed. It created the dangerous side effects of bloodshed and exploitation of the losers. Nevertheless, the winners claimed that the war was a noble war and it was fought in the interests of 'equality, justice, fairness and equity against Nazism. The insincerity of this victory and the hypocritical arguments were
exposed when the American white’s policy shamelessly declared that White and black people are opposites, not only in color but also in soul; their political institutions should be different.

He employed Satyagraha and its use was made for the first time. Satyagraha later went down in history to become the most powerful device for reform and liberation. Its unique and novel operation stunned even his strong opponents. Non violence emerged as the final say in the struggle against racism. The society would get success which depends to a great degree of creativity and commitment to its members. The display of the amount of energy by such a black pastor was simply beyond imagination. Mahatma Gandhi showed the way to King with his own devotion that a will formed with the formidable faith can create miracles and take the world on its stride. The world will be always thankful to Gandhi's sacrifice and giving new hope and direction to USA. Mahatma Gandhi’s religious grounding and faithfulness towards his cause and his faith in God seems to be the guiding force for King in his struggle. His religion was a religion of majority in USA and it would have created doubt in the minds of countrymen but he said that, for him, humanitarian service or service of all was religion. The core humanistic aspect was undoubtedly the most valuable factor in Martin Luther King Jr’s entire life. His association with the common man in the lowest strata of the society made him larger than life. Being a disciple of Jesus, he had courage to rise above the closed mindsets of time-barred customs and orthodox rituals. He refused worldly gains and economical gains with the ease of a spiritual sage who had nothing to live for. But at the same time to defend it till the death, the basic human rights and preserving the dignity made him super human. That is why he became a political saint and spiritual politician moreover a politician among the saints.

5.4. Martin Luther King Jr.- A Rationalist Revolutionary

Like Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr. was very critical of machine centric Western Civilization, which had robbed human beings of humanitarian value and ethics. He strongly felt that the outcome of industrialization harmed the natural growth of natural human civilization. Christianity was aimed at the natural development of all humanity and modernity and scientific development had subverted the true religion of
humanity. Neibuhr who led the anti-segregation movement before Martin Luther King Jr. provided the macro perspective to Martin Luther King Jr. by drawing attention to the wider socio-political reference of racism. He interpreted Christian value system to emphasize the importance of fighting against the racism. His college studies made him more skeptical about religion and many facts of science could be questioned with religion and it helped him to remove the ‘shackles of fundamentalism’. As soon as he came into the study of scientific proponents, there was a sure conflict in his mind about the two opposite sides ‘Science’ and ‘Religion’. Though Martin Luther King Jr. was brought up in the church and practiced religion, he feared whether it could serve as a vehicle to modern thinking and intellectually. He was skeptical about the use of religion emotionally. But the conflict was somewhat resolved in the company of two men Dr. Mays, the President of Morehouse College and Gr. George Kelsey, a Professor of Philosophy. These men made Martin Luther King Jr ‘stop and think’ religiously. Their ministership, deeply religious in nature, their knowledge and the study of modern trends and thinking cleared path of Martin Luther King Jr. to be a minister.

Martin Luther King Jr. was the critic of liberalization on the obvious logical grounds that the exponents of exploitation viewed liberalism as a political necessity. Martin Luther King Jr. had tremendous faith in the Bible as a way of life. He was a religious person thoroughly but he always held the constitution as holy as the bible. The constitution of rational, liberal and democratic nation was humiliated by the form of racial segregation and Martin Luther King Jr. thought it as an insult of the holy constitution. USA was the scientifically most developed nation of the entire world. American constitution designers Thomas Paine, Jefferson, George Washington were the rational liberators yet the dream of Abraham Lincoln, remained unaccomplished. Martin Luther King Jr. defended the claims of racial equality by referring to vacuous logic of traditional liberalism. Humanity remained liberated by birth but the difference was created and sustained by the artificial, social, and economical conditions at the cost of the marginalized. Liberalism unless distorted hardly allowed discrimination among human beings on the basis of natural biological factor of skin colour. Inspired with this idea, Martin Luther King Jr. raised his protest against the state that did not
live up to its foundation which was founded on the basis of ideas and values, designed in the Declaration of Independence, the constitution and the 1863 Emancipation Proclamation. Racial discrimination was unacceptable because it was based and justified artificially. Martin Luther King Jr. created a powerful argument by drawing on the basic spirit of those fundamental documents that informed and also guided the republic since its formation. Martin Luther King Jr. succeeded in challenging his opponents by creatively articulating liberalism in its true form. This was welcomed by both his supporters and critics because it evolved in a specific historical context of the nation.

5.5. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Religious Implication in the Struggle Movement

King was religious thoroughly. He says,

“Of course I was religious. I grew up in the church. My father is a preacher, my grandfather was a preacher my great grandfather was a preacher, and my daddy’s brother is a preacher. So I didn’t have much choice” (King, 2001:1)

Martin Luther King Jr. was a man who was closely attached to his family as child and as grown up, his family bonding not only continued in his vocation but also in his cult of thinking and ideologies. His birth year is 1926 the year Mahatma Gandhi had finished his autobiography and was ready for bigger actions and Nelson Mandela was just 8 years old in his early childhood without any knowledge about country and people. The year was amongst the days of great depression and as he remembered, ‘numerous people standing in breadlines’. The poverty surrounded his early childhood and his belonging to quiet ordinary community in terms of social status. Martin Luther King Jr’s attitude towards humanity and world around has ancestral reasons as well as his surrounding which forged the love metal in his personality. He defended that it was quite easy for him to think of a god of love mainly because he grew up in a family where love was central. The word God appears on every page of the autobiography. Like Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr. believed that his action was the manifestation of godly will and god has assigned him something as he started to realize that gradually. The aim of life was, “The height of life is the upward to reach the god” (P-43). As a preacher Martin Luther King Jr’s nature was to worship the smaller acts of life. This fact has gone deeply in his psyche that he believed, he was an
instrument and God was the player. Whenever he faced problem in ordinary or extraordinary size like he faced at his first speech as a Pastor in Montgomery church he felt,

“I said to me ‘keep Martin Luther King Jr. in the background and God in the foreground and everything will be all right. Remember you are a channel of the gospel and not the source.”(King, 2001:43)

Martin Luther King Jr. adhered to his call for duty of social justice for two reasons, first seems his observation and belonging to the black class which was living a slave life amongst the prosperity and second and foremost reason which he himself ascribed to God as,

“Just as the prophets of the eighth century B.C. left their villages and carried their “thus saith the lord” far beyond the boundaries of their hometowns and just as the Apostle Paul left his village of Tarsus and carried the gospel of Jesus Christ to the far corners of Greco-Roman world, so am I compelled to carry the gospel of freedom beyond my own hometown. Like Paul, I must constantly respond to the Macedonian call for aid” (King, 2001: 189)

Martin Luther King Jr’s father played a important role in his life, making him strong and religiously pious. His father was an antithesis of militant and moderate, idealistic and realistic thinking. This reflected in his passive aggression and passive resistance. The value building happened at a personal level before it reached another level as Martin Luther King Jr. narrated his experience that he thought that his strong determination for justice came from the very strong, dynamic personality of his father and gentle aspects comes from a mother. He credited his mother for providing all convenience in childhood but never complacently adjusted herself to the system of segregation; Martin Luther King Jr. added that she instilled a sense of self-respect in all of her children from the very beginning. The very sensitive segregation problem was introduced to Martin Luther King Jr. by his mother in a positive and neutral manner instead of hatred and inferiority. The inferiority complex amongst the Negroes was ancient and prominent. It needed to be tackled very sensitively. In Martin Luther King Jr’s life it happened successfully and he gratified his mother for that. The seeds of self-esteem were sown early. Martin Luther King Jr’s father Martin Luther King Sr was a fighter and keen interest keeper in civil rights. He headed some organization and
led the fight in Atlanta to equalize teacher’s salaries and was instrumental in the elimination of Jim Crow elevators in the courthouse. As a pastor King Sr. had earned a status and command which Martin Luther King Jr. followed as an ancestral prophesy. Martin Luther King Jr’s twenty five years account gets over only in forty pages of total 370 pages in his autobiography and here we find pages missing and gone with the Martin Luther King Jr’s soul. In Mahatma Gandhi’s autobiography childhood memories form a poignant part which reveals the entire mystery of his shaping and coming to become an adult. Psychologically first fifteen years from the base of the personality over which the tower of achievements could be seen. Martin Luther King Jr’s autobiography was written posthumously. His childhood friends, teachers, parents, neighbors have affected his way of thinking and in making him religiously stubborn. The realization of self and responsibility for ‘duty’ is always a point in the study of autobiography. One can understand this in Martin Luther King Jr’s case when one studies his life from religious point of view. In the case of Nelson Mandela also an event appeared at a particular moment when he was arrested in a tram for boarding it despite of being a Negro (kaaffir) who was not permitted. Martin Luther King, Sr. was a role model for younger Martin Luther King Jr. in many ways. Pastor Elizabeth Church perceived that King Sr. was known for his frankness about telling the truth and speak his mind, however cutting it may be. King Sr. was involved in the Negro voter registration drives, participated in National Association for Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and a board member of Morehouse College in which Martin Luther King Jr. enrolled as a student later on. He was an active member of movement against Jim Crow law of racial segregation which King Sr. associated with Christian principles. This was a fundamental pillar of his ideology. Martin Luther King Jr. had learned a lot from his father at dinner table talks in which both the parents discussed and Martin Luther King Jr’s value integration happened out of such dinner table talks. Hatred towards white man according to King Sr. was contradictory to religion and faith in God.
This defining moment had several smaller incidents which accumulated the substance of explosion. A white friend of Martin Luther King Jr at the age of six became his playmate though they were from separate schools but a climax came when one day
white friend’s father demanded that he would play only with whites. From that moment Martin Luther King Jr. asserted that from that moment on, he was determined to hate every white person. The impact over his mind at the tender age was the acid test of segregation. As a child he developed resentment towards the system of segregation and felt that it was grave injustice. At downtown shoe store, with his father where they were offered rear seats in the shop despite empty seats at front which his father denied to take. His father left the shop in anger and could not subjugate the insult. The white police was shocked at a Negro’s word. Martin Luther King Jr. learned from this event and his will became stronger with such events. Negro’s segregation was everywhere but like Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King Jr. also got the angriest moment in an insulting treatment in a public bus. Negro was forced to sit in the back seat which Martin Luther King Jr. felt enormously humiliating. One night Martin Luther King Jr. had boarded a bus to Atlanta when he saw empty seats reserved for the whites and he could not sit on them because he was Negro in addition to that some white passengers cursed them and openly humiliated them. Martin Luther King Jr. called this incident as the most “angry moment” of his childhood life. Martin Luther King Jr. was a close witness to hatred and humiliation with violent aggression towards Negros by white establishment’s laws, courts and organizations like Ku Klux Klan which stands for white supremacy and its violent methods to preserve segregation. The social unjust of brutality, public beatings of Negroes by police, Klan savagely lynching them and the economic unjust with tragic poverty was the integral part of their lives. Martin Luther King Jr’s sentimentality of understanding the segregation issue and confronting it, realizing the poisonous effect on his heart, forged his character and it made him more religious. He even in his youth was not attracted and passionately driven by the money or lust. His moral ground was firmly anchored by his personal as well as religious values. The only issue haunted him throughout his youth was a curtain of separation and segregation. He felt,

“The first time I am seated behind a curtain in a dining car ,I felt as if the curtain had been dropped on my selfhood. I could not adjust to the separate waiting rooms, separate eating rooms, rest rooms, partly because separate was
always unequal and partly because the very idea of separation did something to my sense of dignity and self-respect.” (King, 2001:12)

Though Martin Luther King Jr. served as an assistant to his father in ministry, he never thought it as a career. But he had an inbuilt zeal for the masses and service, his deep urge to “serve humanity” was there already but it was not the reason to enter into the ministry rather he thought he could serve the community by being a lawyer or doctor. Martin Luther King Jr. was fully Christian in his attitude, behavior and thinking. His religious zeal and commitment compelled him to take up the duty to fight against segregation. He decided to fight for the sake of religion which proclaimed that all were the children of same father.

5.6. Martin Luther King Jr’s adaptation and Following of Non Violence.

“Non-violence is as old as hills.” says Mahatma Gandhi. Martin Luther King Jr. was brought up in an environment of hatred and disillusionment as a Negro. Though he belonged to a reputed class of society, he was not an exception for humiliation and torture. But he did not become blind with negative emotions. Martin Luther King Jr. started a new phase of non violence in his life when he went to college. Martin Luther King Jr. moved towards Boston University for his studies which he described as intellectual pilgrimage to non-violence. Martin Luther King Jr’s journey was destined towards his ultimate goal of giving himself to something eternal and absolute and with this prior perception of his motif he said, theory of Non-violence naturally influenced my thinking. He fought against racism and injustice in an independent United States whereas the case of Mahatma Gandhi was opposite to him. Mahatma Gandhi was fighting against British Imperialism and Colonizers which were outsiders in India. Even the case of Nelson Mandela’s struggle was more similar to Martin Luther King Jr. than Mahatma Gandhi because his obvious fight was against insiders who were more vehement than the counterparts of Martin Luther King Jr. in USA and British in India. As a trained pastor in a black Southern church, Martin Luther King Jr. was introduced to non-violence purely as his exposure to the Bible and his family surroundings. But due to his education and meditations he came closer to ‘The Sermon on Mount’ the most critical resource for justifying non-violence as a meaningful and politically affordable device for mobilizing the oppressed ‘savage’ blacks (white
terminology) against organized and modern adversaries. He fought against racism and injustice as practiced by Southern states where Martin Luther King Jr. belonged. It was thus a specific context that led the young preacher and pastor to raise his voice against discrimination of a worse type and he mobilized blacks around him to challenge perpetrators of injustice nonviolently. Martin Luther King Jr. was impressed with the theological insights to understand the non violence as a philosophy as an extension of Christian ethics. Mahatma Gandhi made him realize its instrumental value in sociopolitical movements against injustice of segregation. The non violence and passive resistance was the path that Martin Luther King Jr. chose as he realized its potential in the struggle against racism. He became a follower of Mahatma Gandhi when he heard Mordecai Johnson at the Howard University who had visited India and had met Mahatma Gandhi personally. He became extremely eager to explore Gandhian way in the struggle against racism. He found Mahatma Gandhi’s non-violence massage as profound and electrifying that he immediately read books on Mahatma Gandhi and Gandhism to know more about non violence. He was more attracted towards power of love which was the driving force behind the non violent struggle that Mahatma Gandhi successfully launched against British colonialism. Discussing Gandhian concept of love as an instrument to change, Martin Luther King Jr. admitted his folly of understanding the concept and said,

“Prior to reading Gandhi, I had almost concluded that the ethics of Jesus were only effective in an individual relationship. The turn of the other cheek philosophy and love your enemy’s philosophies were, I felt when individuals were in conflict with other individuals; when groups and nations were in conflict a more realistic approach seemed necessary. But after reading Gandhi, I saw how utterly I was mistaken.” (King, 2001: 23-24)

Martin Luther King Jr. wanted to mobilize the Blacks in America in a non-violent way. On the contrary, his fellow countryman, Malcolm X became a violently aggressive and venerable leader of the Black moment. Martin Luther King Jr. disagreed with Malcolm X and commented on his fellow college of black segregation moment,

“I feel that Malcolm has done himself and our people a great disservice. Fiery, dogmatic oratory in the black ghettos, urging Negroes to arm them and
prepare to engage in violence as he has done, can reap nothing but grief.”
(King, 2001: 266)

The violent means and methods for Martin Luther King Jr. were not only immoral but
utterly prohibited by all means. The grief stricken and oppressed Negro naturally
would get attracted towards easiest and cheapest means of retaliations. They were
presumably calculated as savage or brute. The choice of violence naturally appeared
first and easy but it is very temporary effect in changing the situations. But once it was
over, the Negro would face the same unchanged conditions, the same grime and
depivation – the only difference Martin Luther King Jr. felt was more bitterness with
deep intensity and disillusionment, even more dismal. Thus in purely practical as well
as morals terms, the American Negro had no rational alternative to non-violence. His
obvious choice of adopting non-violent tactics was not only feasible to the situation
but it could have been the last choice as well. The mighty and violent enemy cannot be
opposed and persuaded directly and openly. In this case the defeat was certain and
blame would come to him. He despite eggs being thrown on him at New-York in
public appearance, he remained calm. He realized that it was due to the ill efforts of
Black Nationalist Groups who were trying to oppose his non violent tactics. His soft
attitude mixed with love and peace fuelled anger in them who wanted hate and anger
to be displayed. They started feeling disillusionment in his peaceful efforts and his
love towards oppressive villainy to the white. The blacks were opposing Martin Luther
King Jr. initially for this reason. Malcolm X was the product of that empty space, the
vacuum created in the absence of retaliating violent action. Martin Luther King Jr.
regretted the philosophy of violence and he convinced them that there was a great
difference between non-resistance to evil and non-violent resistance. The common
analogical criticism of the non-violence theory was that it compels to sit down and
patiently accepts injustice. It lacked the strong force like standing against the evil
force and retaliation it in the same manner. It operated to prove that you are not a
coward. Martin Luther King Jr. lamented the ghastly nightmare of violence and
counter violence. It was one of the tragic blots on the historiography of Negro
emancipation. The unfortunate misplacement of aggression was accumulated
throughout the frustrated circumstances of Negro existence. Malcolm X appeared on
the scene and became a public figure particularly after a TV documentary titled as *The Hate that Produced Hate*. That experience displayed Malcolm’s hate for non violence and fascination for violence. He was the product of hate and violence which was a historical burden of investment of Negro’s despair and defeat. The youths were particularly attracted towards Malcolm’s communist ‘Garvey Movement’ which targeted Negro intellectuals and labour with negative intelligence which demanded outlet and means of expression. His turning towards underworld and taking help of criminals was very objectionable according to Martin Luther King Jr. Youths were fascinated by Malcolm’s aggression. Martin Luther King Jr. held religion to synthesize the harmony of the principles of living, ‘live and let live’. He tried to bridge the gap between the victim and the victimizer. Malcolm X did the opposite. He terminated religion from the sphere of people’s life. Malcolm was becoming very popular yet Martin Luther King Jr. was sure of his means and methods and the success of his designed plan in achieving his destined goal of emancipation. He was very clear and tactical in choosing the policies and people. He always believed in the long term sets of attainments. Malcolm X seemed to be taking away Martin Luther King Jr’s entire campaign by his violent and louder methods. Martin Luther King Jr’s firm belief in his own philosophy was antithetical to the philosophy of Malcolm X, whom he regarded as ‘immature and bitterly violent’. Malcolm X was the product of injustice, the rape of his grandmother and murder of his father under the same social conditions of present social order. Martin Luther King Jr. condemned the injustice that had happened. He consoled the way his life came to a sudden and unfortunate assassination, “Malcolm was forced to live and die as an outsider, a victim of the violence that spawned him and which he courted through his brief but promising life.” (King, 2001:268) Malcolm X’s death in Martin Luther King Jr’s view was the tragic nightmare that violence and hate brooded. The preaching of Jesus, he acknowledged as “put up thy sword” means give away violence. Martin Luther King Jr. was the ultimate follower of this non violence philosophy and realized that violence was impractical and unaffordable for Black Nationalism. But violence was symptomatic of the deeper unrest, discontent and frustration of Negro community deeply rooted in the historical past.
5.7. Martin Luther King's Conceptualization of Ethics and Morality

Martin Luther King Jr realized that truth was the ultimate choice of humanity because he intended a cultured society to live with peace and harmony. Mahatma Gandhi did miracle with this word- ‘non-violence’ and connected it with truth and morality. He made it an instrument of struggle against those who had faith in violence. The word became an identical benchmark for Gandhi. Martin Luther King Jr. adhered to non-violence as an ethical choice. His ethical temperament was forged by various ideologies and philosophies that he studied later. Before getting admitted to his Morehouse College as a student and as a freshman in 1944, Martin Luther King Jr. admitted, “My concern for racial and economic justice was already substantial.” (King, 2001:14) Henry David Thoreau’s *On Civil Disobedience* marked its impact on him who admired the work as “my first contact with Non-Violence resistance and fascinated by the idea of refusing to co-operate with an evil system.” (King, 2001:14) He was deeply moved by the ethical ideology of Thoreau. Thoreau’s theoretical justification for civil disobedience was against the unjust laws that a majority inflicted on a minority that is not binding itself. He added further that segregation was an existential philosophy of man’s tragic separation, an expression of his awful estrangements his terrible sinfulness. Martin Luther King Jr. endorsed Thoreau on the ground that the right to refuse allegiance and to resist the Government when its tyranny or its inefficiency were great and unendurable. If the state failed to protect the rights of the common individual then its members had a natural right to challenge it and to fight with it. Thoreau argued that he did not lend him to the wrong which he condemned. Another humanitarian principle that Martin Luther King Jr. absorbed from Thoreau was ‘liberalism’. It was the manifestation of individual worship.

“There will never be a really free and enlightened state until the state comes to recognize the individual as a higher and Independent power from which all its own power and authority are derived.” (Thoreau, 1993:7)

The omnipotent god was an inspiration to mould his ethical stance and the concept of his sermons and the morality certainly had been influenced by the Negro’s idea of God grew out the social situation in which he found himself. Becoming Minister was
natural and easy for him because he had a tradition of ministers in his family. Yet it happened after the deep process of thinking. His blocked urge and accumulated doubts were washed away in his ‘an inescapable drive.’ Martin Luther King Jr’s base of ideology was always moral and ethical which had been real and precious to him and it rooted deeply even in the theological faiths. He became a Minister in church at the tender age of nineteen. A serious intellectual quest to combat social evil began with him when he entered into Crozer Theological Seminary, Chester. Naturally like Mahatma Gandhi, he came across theories of great philosophers but some books created,

“Indelible impact” than other books and he counts Walter Rauschenbusch’s *Christianity and the Social Crisis* which left an, “indelible imprint on my thinking by giving me a theological basis for my social concern” (King, 2001:18)

Walter Rauschenbusch (1861-1918) was a German preacher who was Minister at the ‘Rochester Theological Seminary’. The fundamental aim of Rauschenbusch was to spread the idea of the kingdom of god, based on ethics and morality, not through aggression or regressive command of summoning but by leading a pure Christ like life. The idealism could be achieved through the kingdom of God which is an ideal concept which accommodates all who aspire to establish well-being for all. In Martin Luther King Jr’s own words Walter Rauschenbusch’s concept gave him theological basis for the social concerns which had already grown up in him as a result of his early experiences. Despite having disagreed on many points with the writer, he found that Walter Rauschenbusch had done a great service for the Christian church by insisting that the Gospel deals with the whole man not only his soul, his body, not only his spiritual wellbeing but his material well-being.

Martin Luther King Jr’s objection against Carl Marx was his materialistic interpretation of history. Martin Luther King Jr. interpreted communism as secularist and materialistic and had left no place for ethical God which was not acceptable for him as Christian. Martin Luther King Jr. held the view against Marx that a power could not be explained in terms of materials. The history was ultimately guided by spirit not matter. Communism as a way of life failed on ethical relativism because in
community where there was no place for individuality, there could not be a moral order, immutable principles but only force, murder, violence, lying justifiable for communal end. He discarded communism for its political totalitarianism where individual was accounted as a subject to state. His democratic values such as freedom of expression, liberties, rights of equality and religious freedom had no room in communism. Individuality should not be deplored or depreciated at the cost of state. He admitted that he was convinced, as he was then that man was an end because he was a child of god. Man was not made for state; the state is made for man. In Martin Luther King Jr’s opinion Marxism was a negative force and basically unethical but it certainly raised some fundamental questions in his mind. As a political thinker he realized that there was a huge breach between superfluous wealth and abject poverty. Being a citizen of highest capital state of America, the need for better distribution of wealth was badly needed. The capitalist economy which was profit driven and unethical economy crippled American Negro who was forced to live in dirty slums and hence cut off from life and God. Martin Luther King Jr. understood his role as,

“We are prone to judge success by the index of our salaries or the size of our automobile rather than by the quality of our service and relationship to humanity.” (King, 2001: 21)

Reinhold Niebuhr, in Martin Luther King Jr’s last years of study at college influenced him passionately and profoundly. His writings seemed to have reassessed his faith of natural goodness of man and natural power of human reason. Martin Luther King Jr. was brought to the ground of reality. The realization of basic human nature helped Martin Luther King Jr. in understanding the roots of segregation. It was a symbol of “sinful nature” of human as species or a living being. As per his calculations the ‘Selfishness and self-centeredness’ was a great and limitless challenge in the way of Kingdom of God. Niebuhr was instrumental in washing away the extraordinary hope and faith of Martin Luther King Jr. in the Constitution of USA which was founded on the base of liberalism. Niebuhr’s thoughts convinced him that though there were schools built for black students by white authorities but the efforts were not enough to achieve its goal of liberalization. The system was controlled by the “unjust morality” of the whites. Their interest was in the protection of the establishments’ profits and
Martin Luther King Jr’s unprecedented faith in non-violence was shaken by Niebuhr as he admitted,

“Non-violence can be successful, if the groups against whom resistance was taking place had some degree of moral conscience as was the case in Gandhi’s struggle against the British.” (King, 2001: 26)

In his famous letter from ‘Birmingham jail’ of 1963 he came down heavily on white moderate Christians who were his fellow preachers. He condemned them for masking themselves under the “good attitudes towards” blacks passively but opposing the campaign against racial segregation actively. In Martin Luther King Jr’s view Christianity and American constitution have equal holiness for him and he considered himself as a citizen of America equally as a Preacher of Gospel. In his stern letter to the clergymen he wrote,

“I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate. I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negroes’s great stumbling block in his stride towards freedom is not the White Citizen’s Council or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to “order” than “justice” who prefer negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice …the white moderates fail to understand that law and order exist for the purpose of establishing justice and that when they fail to do this they become dangerously structured dams that block the flow of social progress.” (King, 2001:54)

Martin Luther King Jr’s interpretation of the Gospel was based in ethical social perspective. The readings of Rauschenbusch and Niebuhr made Martin Luther King Jr. to achieve the reinterpretation of gospel with the articulation of moral values of Christianity as love, brotherhood and peace. The passive religion, Martin Luther King Jr. found as manipulated by the political and economic structure of power. Martin Luther King Jr. convincingly understood that the social duties of Christianity should be relocated not just as a doctrine of morality but the instruments of emancipation and humanity.

5.8. Martin Luther King Jr’s Socially Harmonious Perspectives

Jim Crow was the racial segregation law established by the legal system in America. It was established through the elaborate process that physically separated the races based on social custom and stringent legal stipulations. The Jim Crow system of racial
segregation that was introduced in America from mid nineteenth century continued to remain effective as long as it benefitted the white who controlled country’s wealth and ruled to exploit Negro. The racial segregation was challenged by the civil rights campaign demanding the banning of discrimination on the basis of skin colour. Jim Crow flourished subjecting the disinherited Negroes to innumerable constraints and also inhuman torture. Even in the past before Jim Crow the blacks especially in the Southern states were subject to various kinds of racial constraints. There was the infamous ‘grandfather clause’ which meant that a person was not eligible to vote unless his grandfather had been a voter. The legal validity of slavery before 1863 Emancipation Proclamation, this piece of legislation effectively oppressed the entire black community. Another brutal evidence of the racist device was the poll tax which many black people could not afford to pay and remained outside the circle of decision making. Segregation slowly encircled every aspect of the Southern culture and racial difference had not only become compulsory but also dominated the power structure of America. The political hegemony contributed to the other forms of economic, cultural, sociological even religious oppressions. Jim Crow became a social reality and nightmare for underprivileged blacks who had come to the United States as slaves. The law perpetually promoted slavery in different forms which was sustained by creating complementary codes of conducts for blacks. The arrangement was so artistically organized that it entrenched the Negro from his birth to death. Racial segregation was easily maintained because of the colour prejudices of the dominant whites who for their margin and selfishness maintained the status quo. One of the common expressions of humiliation was the word ‘nigger’ which was adopted in the dictionary of Americans. The peace was maintained at the social cost of Negroes who were forced to accept injustice without any utterance. It was a threat to American constitution yet it continued with respect to democracy. The value of constitution remained unrealized and the claim that the United States was a paragon of civil liberty and democratically ideal was absolutely futile as long as it adhered to stick to the outdated principle of racial hatred. Jim Crow law was demolished with the powerful Civil Right Movement of 1964 and voting rights of 1965.
5.9. Martin Luther King’s Fight for Justice against Segregation Policy

Martin Luther King Jr. was known as a political activist for the rights of the Blacks all over the world. The history began at Montgomery.

“Right here in Montgomery, when the history books are written in the future somebody will have to say, “there lived a race of people, a black people, ‘fleecy locks and black complexions’ a people who had the moral courage to stand up for their rights. And thereby they injected a new meaning into the veins of civilization.” (King, 2001: 61)

The most exemplary strike in the History of USA took place was the episode of Montgomery bust strike which was an example of non violence. The Montgomery bus strike (1955) was the most vital and symbolic moment in the history of civil right movements in America. The opposition and anger came out against the Government due to the racial segregation and humiliations. The Montgomery ordinance which was in force since 1900 affirmed the segregation between blacks and whites in public transportation. The incident steered the entire America crossed the national sphere and it became global. The attention of the world was drawn towards the racial hostility. The harassment of the non-violent protestors and their sincerity of opposition drew the international attention and the movement received a world stage. It was the path breaking moment in the entire struggle against the oppressive law of segregation by Jim Crow.

Rosa Park who refused to give up her seat in a bus for a white passenger was physically assaulted before being arrested legally. In the bus out of thirty six seats, ten seats at front and at the back of the buses were purposely kept for blacks passengers. If there were white passengers to occupy them, the blacks needed to vacate them for whites. Rosa Park was a NAACP activist and she had witnessed many humiliations in buses over the years. In November she boarded the bus and occupied the front seat which she was asked to leave at the insistence of one white passenger which she refused. This irritated the bus conductor so much that he held Rosa Park’s dress sleeve and literally pushed her physically out of the bus. Her arrest later on provided a proper reason for the struggle. The bus strike began on 1st December 1955. The protest gathered momentum and the entire country and the world also were amazed by the numbers and the new method of the protestors. Three resolutions were passed in the
procession between thousands of blacks. The first stated that ‘the courteous treatment
by the bus operators was guaranteed. The second resolution said that the passengers
were seated on the first come first serve. Negroes seating from the back of the bus
towards the front, whites from the front towards the back and the last one was that
negro bus operator were employed on predominately Negro routes. The Montgomery
bus strike (1955) was one of the opportunities which Martin Luther King Jr.
successfully captured and mobilized the blacks who were victims of racism and
segregations. It was an open war against the visible form of domination. The core and
guiding principle of the movement was a basic philosophy that the movement would
follow the Gandhian path of passive resistance, non-cooperation and non-violence. In
the early phase of the movement no one heard the words like Christen love,
Satyagraha or passive resistance except ‘a sermon on the Mount’. Martin Luther King
Jr. had already digested Gandhism and understood that it was the only way of protest
as he wrote,

"About a week after the protest started, a white woman who understood and
sympathized with the movement wrote a letter to the editor of Montgomery
advertiser comparing the bus protest with the Gandhian movement in India. In
1957 the name of Mahatma Gandhi was well known in Montgomery. People
who had never heard of the little brown saint of India were now saying his
name with an air of familiarity. Nonviolence resistance had emerged as the
 technique of the movement, while love stood as the regulating ideal. In other
words, Christ furnished the spirit and motivation while Gandhi furnished the
method.” (King, 2001: 67)

The first action of the protest was to prohibit the public transport by boycotting till the
demands were heard. The pamphlets were distributed in slums, Negro areas in a very
organizing style. For the first few days the boycotting was extremely successful with
people banning to ride the buses and they were running empty. This astonished the
white authorities. The image of Negro over the years was disorganized and
undisciplined. The blacks showed their military precision. As Mahatma Gandhi
reiterated that the success of any movement depends on the common men’s
participation, it came true with Martin Luther King Jr. People made it their movement.
With the success of the movement the whites authorities started lashing out against
Martin Luther King Jr. The protest committee members were bribed to change the
leadership and isolate Martin Luther King Jr. The “get tough” operation was initiated by the authorities and eventually Martin Luther King Jr. was arrested for speeding thirty miles an hour in a twenty five mile zone.

Tuesday November 13, 1956 would be marked as glorious day in the segregation struggle as an important and ironic date. On this day the United States Supreme Court affirmed the decision of a special three judge US district court in declaring Alabama’s state and local laws requiring segregation on buses unconstitutional. The court acted without listening on any argument it simply said that the motion to affirm was granted and the judgment was affirmed. It was a victorious moment for all Negros who were meaninglessly living their life and for Martin Luther King Jr. it was the first step of success for his long journey towards complete victory.

Montgomery was strategically important. Seventy five percentage bus drivers were blacks in Montgomery yet they faced conditions that caused a great deal of embarrassment (including) the very humiliating experience of being arrested for refusing to give up seats to a white passenger. Secondly the victory of Montgomery translated Martin Luther King Jr’s conceptualization of non-violent civil resistance into reality. The 381 days boycott and its success created people’s faith in the nonviolence struggle as well as confirmed Martin Luther King Jr’s position as undisputed leader of the future movements.

5.10. The Struggle for Humanitarian Truth

King’s vision is expressed in the following words,

“I have a dream that one day my four children will live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character.” (King, 2001: 67)

The March on Washington in 1963, had a glorious history of Montgomery, was a historic occasion in the civil rights movement in the United States for more than one reasons. Firstly like the first march of 1941 was withdrawn with the acceptance of some of the demands and the 1963 march attained the goals that it had set out to accomplish. Two major acts the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the 1965 Voting Rights Acts were approved, challenging the segregation directly and outlawing discrimination based on the race in education, public accommodations, employment, and any
federally funded programs. Secondly the march is known for a historic moment for Martin Luther King Jr. who directed and motivated the pace of the struggle through his historic speech, *I have a dream* (1963). *I Have a Dream* speech evolved an ideological, persuasive and morally politicized to challenge racism particularly and all source of oppression generally.

The story of second March on Washington followed the similar trajectory as Randolph suggested Martin Luther King Jr. to organize similar march. The second March of 1963 was different from the Montgomery march, the second 1963 March on Washington was the coalition of different and various Civil Rights Organizations. All of them had different agendas, approaches and different issues. But the march provided them a common platform and a reason to come together.

The six big organizations which came together were:-

1) James Farmer's Congress of Racial Equality (CORE)
2) Martin Luther King Jr.'s Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC)
3) John Lewis' Student Non-violent Coordination Committee (SNCC)
4) Philip Randolph's Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (BSCP)
5) Roy Wilkins' National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)
6) Whitney Young Jr.'s National Urban League (NUL).

Though several organizations of different perspectives came together for a common cause, the differences of opinions were visible as their leaders spoke in front of the crowd of 2 lakhs. The tone was neither of Gandhian nonviolence nor of patience and love. The crowd as well as the leaders was carried away with the aggression. Martin Luther King Jr. came lastly to speak and Randolph introduced him as the 'moral leader of the nation'. For the other leaders Martin Luther King Jr. was the face of the civil rights movement.

Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous speech *I Have a Dream* (1963) became the signatory mark of the march. His approach in the speech was different from other speakers. He avoided the attacks on the authorities but criticized them for undermining the constitution of America. Martin Luther King Jr. utilized the opportunity by comparing the present historical moment with the glorious historical moment of the past by
remembering Abraham Lincoln’s 1863 Emancipation Proclamation which came as a great beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves who had been scarred in the flames of withering injustice.

Jim Crow was also a threat to the values enshrined in the Declaration of Independence and trust in the constitution. The March was organized to demonstrate that, the Negro was still languishing in the corners of American society and found himself in exile in his own land. The second point in the speech relates to the growing resentments of the Negroes in response to centuries of oppression. Martin Luther King Jr. argued about the rights that the magnificent words of the constitution and the declaration of Independence, they were singing a promissory note ‘granting’ to all men, inalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Speaking metaphorically he compared these promises to “a bad cheque” that the American authority should now respect by honoring the vision that the founding fathers of this great nation had espoused and nurtured. Now was the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to sunlit path of racial justice (and also to) lift our nation from the quicksand of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood. According to the Martin Luther King Jr., the demands were legitimate because the Negroes as much as their white counterparts, remain historically integral to American Society. The victims of racist’s discrimination seem to have run out of patience. As Martin Luther King Jr. articulated that they could not be satisfied as long as the Negro basic mobility was from a smaller ghetto to a larger one. They could never be satisfied as long as Negro in Mississippi could not vote and a Negro in New York believed she had nothing for which to vote. They would not be satisfied until justice would run down like water and righteousness like a mighty stream. There would be neither rest not tranquility in America, warned Martin Luther King Jr., until the Negro was granted his citizenship rights, and unless this was considered the whirlwind of revolt would continue to shake the foundations of our nation. In the end Martin Luther King Jr. created the impression on the listeners that the revolt was a natural outcome of centuries old Negro hatred. But he resided his true commitment to the Sermon on the Mount and Gandhian Non-violence. He was against endorsement of violence or any deviation from his Gandhian principles. Opposing the violence in any form, he remained firm on conducting the
movement, “on high plane of dignity and discipline” in order to fulfill this goal in concrete steps, he asked those involved in struggle against not, “to allow our creative protest degenerate into physical violence and also to rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force.” (P-221) The commitment to nonviolence was the only viable option left to Martin Luther King Jr. because as a wise politician he was aware that violence was likely to create a void amongst the whites who actively supported in the august march. As a strategy it would have been a blunder if the Negroes could not command honesty and respect from their “white brothers”. Martin Luther King Jr. had realized that (whites) destiny was tied up with their destiny and their freedom was inextricable bound to our freedom.

The Washington March was a great reflective of his optimism and it became an exceptional example of the liberal union of black protest in public. It not only contributed to a unified active march but also certainly showed the strength and unity of black protest which ultimately endorsed the legal demands. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed by the American Congress, a year later the other Southern Civil Rights Act of 1965 also came into force as a law. The political goals of the march on Washington were successful. As an ideological point of view Martin Luther King Jr. was accepted as a new leader of success. The commitment to non-violence and peaceful agitations and the unity of different black organizations was the real output of the March. The Civil Rights Organization, the White Churches seemed to have strengthened the movement beyond recognition, as Martin Luther King Jr. argued by saying that,

“No single factor gave so much momentum as the decision of the religious leaders of this country to defy tradition and become an integral part of the quest of the Negro for his rights.” (King, 2001: 222)

5.11. Leadership in the Struggle and Black Power

Martin Luther King Jr’s role in the integration and development of Black nationalism is significantly important as he became the face of Civil Movement against segregation. The Black Power, the word gained more strength after 1960’s Movement propagated for Black Nationalism. It advocated economic self-sufficiency, race pride and overall development for African-American. Martin Luther King Jr. was criticized
by the Black Nationalist because he was using non violent inter-racial activism instead of using more aggressive, violent and quick methods. Southern Christian Leadership Conference and other organizations sought to reform American Society through soft and slow tactics of passive resistance. In 1963 in his famous ‘Letter from Birmingham Jail’, Martin Luther King Jr. described himself, “standing between the forces of complacency and the hatred and despair of the black nationalist.” (King, 2001:90)

Martin Luther King Jr. emerged as a leader when he first decided to take up against the racial injustice in Montgomery Bus Strike and got arrested for the same. His popularity went to his height after his brave stance against the white authorities. He also became the talk of the people when he organized ‘The Civil Right Movement’ and the method of operation particularly non violence and peaceful protest received setbacks in Albany and Georgia. And the question came into Martin Luther King Jr’s mind whether blacks were mature enough to operate the non violent strategies? It was difficult to believe that the violent Whites could be down by the strategies of non-violence. People were skeptical about the sensitive issue like segregation could not be countered by the passive tools like non violence. The differences amongst the civil rights movements widened as SNCC and SCLC took different stands on the issues.

Martin Luther King Jr. as a mature politician understood the situation and he attempted to accommodate the views of opponents without compromising the philosophy of non violence. Though the SNCC activist had respect for Martin Luther King Jr., they argued that the rage and the anger of the blacks, the disillusionment and disappointment could not be leveled by the philosophical arguments of non violence and peaceful protests. The crucial phase as leader was approaching fast in Martin Luther King Jr’s life. He acknowledged the need of another campaign to boost the morale of the followers and to vindicate that he had chosen a right path. His belief in Gandhism had come under an acid test and he needed to prove that mass hysteria could be controlled by moderate philosophy.

Birmingham was the new venue of struggle and it was destined to be a new fight with the same instruments. A minister in Birmingham Rev. Fred Shuttles (1922 to 2011) was a human right activist of Alabama Christian Movement. He was fighting for the rights of blacks particularly against the segregation and all forms of discriminations
with Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights (ACMHR). He was founder of Southern Christian Leadership Conference who in association with Martin Luther King Jr architected the Birmingham campaign in 1963. Birmingham was the largest city in the South and it was known for its violent nature and history of bloodshed. The oppression of the laborers was in its peak and it was the Industrial powerhouse of South as well as North America. The place was unsuitable for non-violence and passive resistant as Martin Luther King Jr. himself felt, “the challenge to non violent, direct action could not have been staged in a more appropriate arena.” (King, 2001: 170)

The city was trapped in a deep slumber of ignorance and the people were completely ignorant about their rights even about their oppressions. The blacks were ignorant about Lincoln, Jefferson, bill of rights, the humanitarian aspects of the constitution, and the 1954 decision of the Supreme Court making segregation in public schools illegal. The schools were Jim Craw schools, there were colour parks, and there were Negro churches, Negro restaurants. The Negroes were unemployed or working on very negligible pay scales without any prospects of future and growth. The infamous Commissioner Eugene Corner was a racist and who had immense pride in handling Negroes and putting them on their place. Local racists would easily attack, rob, rape or even kill Negroes. Seventeen bombings on Negro community were unsolved. Martin Luther King Jr. says, “Birmingham was the silent password for fear.” (King, 2001: 172) The Negroes was brutalized and there was no hope for blacks. “The ultimate tragedy of the poor blacks of Birmingham was not the brutality of the bad people but the silence of the good people.” (King, 2001:173) The largest police state city Birmingham was ruled by the racist governor George Wallace who had taken a pledge that the situation would remain segregated ‘yesterday, today, tomorrow and forever’. Fred Shuttleworth was the most courageous freedom fighter in the South and participated in Montgomery bus boycott. Shuttleworth had gone through various attacks as his home had been bombed in Christmas 1956. His wife had been looted, stabbed and beaten by the Whites several times. He had been in jail eight times and four times during the movement. Martin Luther King Jr. decided to join hands with this hardcore fighter for common goal and believed that if the movement was
successful in Birmingham it would send a right message to the country. They prepared a secret plan called “project C” – C for Confrontation and fight for justice and morality. Martin Luther King Jr. as a clever politician like his guru Mahatma Gandhi realized that the voice of the poor majority could not be heard unless they realize and see their power as a consumer against the established capitalist. He added,

“We therefore decided to center the Birmingham struggle on the business community the Negro community had sufficient buying power so that its withdrawal could make the difference between profit and loss for many businesses.” (King 2001: p-174)

The bombing of 11th May was an instrumental turn to pressurize merchants who were reluctant to participate. The Mayor Election which was approaching fast included the racist Bull Connor and the agenda of the protestors was to see him defeated. Connor made it a point to assemble whites and to figure himself as the white’s survivor.

Martin Luther King Jr. called the meeting of volunteers in New York City to start the campaign and decided that whoever wins the election we would go with our plan. On April 3 the news of Connor’s defeat Headlined as, “the new day Dawns for Birmingham”, but the agitators were doubtful as they felt that in Fred Shuttleworth’s phrase that new Mayor Albert Boutwell was just a dignified Bull Connor. The first step and slow start happened with the first move of ‘sit-in’ in the hotels where Negroes were banned. Martin Luther King Jr. emphasized that the movement must go on the path of Gandhian Non violence. The new spirit was added to the movement in the form of new songs which became an anthem for the struggle, “We shall overcome, black and white together, we shall overcome someday. Oh...deep in my heart, I still believe that we shall overcome one day.” (King, 2001: 178) The hope was in God and its praise through songs. Martin Luther King Jr. felt that the Negro was deeply down with his pessimism and frustrations and it (the song) would heal him with new kind of hope and optimism and a ray of light. Mahatma Gandhi also used his evening and morning prayers in his ashrams as well as in jails to boost the morale of the people.

The economic boycott was not appreciated by the group of some Negroes particularly black businessmen and ministers. In the first three days ‘the lunch counter sit-ins’ had thirty five arrests. The intensity of the protest grew with the time. The sphere of the
movement was widening with its intensity and number of participants. The first phase went on with mild resistance from the authorities. The thirty five arrests were recorded in the first three days. A march on City Hall was the curtain raiser which steered the effect. A march on the country building was intended to register the protest to open voter registration. The Negroes stopped buying from the downtown shops and the volunteers increased in large numbers. The jails started swelling up with the agitators. The police was watching it passively and had no option but to push the demonstrators behind bar with segregation laws. On April 10, the city government and the police obtained a court injection to stop agitations until the court argued their rights. The police obtained an order from the court to stop all activities until permitted by court. Martin Luther King Jr. remembered Mahatma Gandhi very heartily and decided to adopt civil dis-obedience as Mahatma Gandhi had done in South Africa and India. Martin Luther King Jr. ideologically was abided with Gandhian principles morally as well as constitutionally. Martin Luther King Jr. wanted to set an example by giving his own arrest but he felt it impractical as it would lose the battle of Birmingham. Like Mahatma Gandhi Martin Luther King Jr’s inner voice told him to go ahead and let the demonstrators be guided by their own faiths. And ultimately Martin Luther King Jr. with Ralph was arrested.

As a Gandhian follower Martin Luther King Jr. always reiterated that the movement must morally and principally be accorded to counter the authority’s violation of moral principles and constitutional values. The processions and gatherings and mass meetings were featured with freedom songs. The music, Martin Luther King Jr. realized had potential to bring people together in unity. Mahatma Gandhi was using evening prayers to gather people and used to create unity amongst strugglers who were from different strata of society. Martin Luther King Jr. felt it necessary to inculcate the same spirit amongst the agitators. He as a leader strategically employed its significance in incarnating the rhetoric designed to revitalize a protest. It had a long historical significance with the history of Negro. And the birth of famous song which became the anthem of the segregation struggle happened in the Birmingham and the song was. “We shall overcome, blacks and whites together, we shall overcome someday.”(King, 2001:178) Martin Luther King Jr. reiterated his stance that he had
intended to be one of the first to set the example of civil disobedience. His arrest changed the proportion of the campaign and it entered into a critical phase. White moderator numbers increased when school students started to participate in the resistance movement. The success of any campaign depended on the emotional attachment of all the sections of the society. The scholars, intellectuals, doctors, workers, housewives as well as students made the campaign as people’s campaign. According to Mahatma Gandhi, a campaign could not be called as successful until all the social sections did not participate in it for which it was run.

Despite the non-violent ways of protest and openness to dialogue with the authority, the local white regime and police commissioner Bull Corner spared no efforts to crush the movement. The local businessmen preferred to bear losses rather than accepting the demands of the protestors. The protestors also failed to mobilize media in their favour as they successfully did in Montgomery. The pressure on White House mounted to interfere in the matter and resolve it. On 4th May 1963 the Attorney General commissioned two members committee to sort out the truth and restore peace. On 10th May after the discussions the agreement with accord was announced and it contained the following pledges:-

1. The desegregation of lunch counters, rest rooms, fitting rooms and drinking fountains in planned stages within ninety days after signing.
2. Dismantling the discriminatory basis pattern of employment for Negroes in all business avenues in Birmingham.
3. Cancellation of legal charges against the movement’s legal representatives and releasing them without any delay without any conditions.
4. Formation of the bi racial committee to carry out a period to implement desegregation policy in all avenues of Birmingham.

With this the movement concluded with the great victory for demonstrators. Martin Luther King Jr. put the victory in his own words,

“The signing of the agreement was the climax of a long struggle for justice, freedom and human dignity. The millennium still had not come, but Birmingham had made a fresh, a bold step towards equality.... I like to believe that Birmingham will one day become a model in Southern Race
relations....the sins of a dark yesterday will be redeemed in the achievements of a bright tomorrow. I have this hope because, once on a summer day, a dream came true. The city of Birmingham discovered a conscience”.(King, 2001 : 2)


The bridge between Negroes and Whites was economically, socially and culturally so wide that it seemed impossible to cross. Whites were historically superior and reluctant to give equal status to Negro community. Martin Luther King Jr. decided to demand certain rights for the segregated. He decided to adopt non violent tactics so that the foundation of nationalism remains intact. He knew that hatred could not be overcome with hatred. Martin Luther King Jr. demonstrated against the segregation policy. The effect of demonstrations and protest was so profound on Negro community that ‘compromise’ and ‘retreat’ words became profane and pernicious. The conditions in America were so intolerable and unendurable that it became a factory for revolutionaries. The Negro felt the urgency to liberate him. Non violence and direct action were the best way to raise the problems of Negro community and fight for injustice and discriminations. Martin Luther King Jr. was full of such opportunities around him for new movements and new challenges. The incident in movement occurred at St. Augustine, Florida, which was a stronghold of Ku Klux Klan. Klansmen abducted four Negroes and beat them to unconsciousness. SCLC waged a fierce campaign of 3700 Negro citizens. The severe counterattacks were launched by Klansmen resulting three hundred demonstrator’s arrest and hundreds of injured. After requesting the State Governor for a bi lateral committee to address racial problems, the agitations were called off. The bill was finally passed two days before 4th July. Both the Congress approved a monumental and historic affirmation to Thomas Jefferson’s truth that all men are equal. Martin Luther King Jr. felt that the bill was born “out of the blood, sweat, toil and tears of countless congressmen of both the major parties.” (King, 2001:242) The accomplishments of 1963-64 Civil Rights Movements was more important beyond its far reaching provisions as it was an outcome of massive whites and blacks coalition. The legislation was not a product of the charitable gift by the whites to the blacks but it was an epic thrust of the millions of Negroes who demonstrated in a number of cities and the spirit of coalition consciousness which
drove the Congress to pass the bill. The new law drove the focus on economic needs and poverty came on the top list of priority.

5.12.1. The Mississippi Challenge-1964

As the Negro revolution was in the sight of millions of Negroes, the country was shocked with series of events compelling the grim realization that Negro emancipation could not be the reality until the total slavery would be replaced with total freedom. Several riots broke out particularly in Northern cities. Goldwater was the candidate of Republican Party who was narrow nationalist, isolationist and unrealistic conservative. His philosophy was aiding and comforting the raciest. The Negro of Mississippi was passing through tremendous economic exploitations. Martin Luther King Jr. travelled to Mississippi on the behalf of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party which was formed by the Negroes who survived through the concentration camps. They had no money, no power yet they were highest in numbers. The church burning, harassment and murders prevented the Blacks from the elections and political participations. With the need of forming one party for the delegation Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party was formed as the official delegation. With the victory of Goldwater and Democrats the movement suffered a setback. Martin Luther King Jr. felt that,

“The progress of our nation (USA) was in as grave a danger as the election of Senator Goldwater might have produced. The battle was far from won. It had only begun.” (King, 2001: 254)

5.12.2. The Nobel Award Declaration

Amidst the hectic schedule Marin Luther King Jr. received a good news from his wife on telephone that he had been selected for the Nobel Prize for Peace for 1964. Martin Luther King Jr. quoted the news and his happiness as, “it was a testimony to the magnificent drama of the civil rights movement and the thousands of actors who had played their roles extremely well. In truth it is these Nobel people who had won this Nobel Prize.” (King, 2001 : p-256). Martin Luther King Jr. became very humble after the Nobel award declaration. He compared the victory to the efforts of crew members of the plane who remain on the ground but help the plane to fly high. Martin Luther King Jr’s concern for layman and ordinary men was always evident from his gratitude towards masses. In the final analysis Martin Luther King Jr. reiterated that this Nobel
Prize was won by a moment of great people. Their devotion, their sacrifice, their majestic courage had led the non-violent course in establishing the reign of justice and love.

The Nobel Prize for Peace placed Martin Luther King Jr. into new dimensions in the civil rights struggle. The tide of world opinion had turned in favour of the struggle. Though the victory of marginalized Blacks in America had got the thumping support there were billions of Blacks who had shown a ray of hope from America. Martin Luther King Jr. confidently added, “Colour is no obstacles or burden in the modern world.” (King, 2001: 258) In his speech he seized the opportunity to speak against the tyranny of the whites in South Africa where the Blacks were the subjects of oppression and brutality.

“Today great leaders – Nelson Mandela is among the thousands wasting away in Robben Island prison against the massively armed and ruthless state. Our responsibility presents us with a unique opportunity. We can join in the one form of non-violence action that could bring freedom and justice to South Africa.” (King, 2001: 259)

But as Martin Luther King Jr. was celebrating the victory of his Nobel Prize in Oslo, Norway the news hit the movement that the U.S. commissioner in Mississippi dismissed charges against the nineteen men arrested by FBI for murdering the three civil right strugglers. The injustice prevailed as the Negro population was denied a voting right in Mississippi. The Congress overlooked the demands of the Negroes for more than fifty years.

5.12.3. The Selma to Montgomery March-1965

From the mountaintop of Oslo, Norway, Martin Luther King Jr. landed in the valleys of Selma. President Jonson told Martin Luther King Jr. that it was impossible to pass the voting right bill. And Martin Luther King Jr. started another movement which would be marked in the history as the Selma movement. The pattern of denying the voting rights in Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi and other Southern countries was followed in Selma too. The fear was established in the Negro community with the brutality 345 years of slavery. It was a fear rooted in the feeling of inferiority. The city ordinance controlled the movements of Negroes who were banned to move in
concerts. Surveillance and harassment by public officers kept the Negroes at bay. The system was made too slow deliberately as out of 15000 blacks only 350 had registered as voters. The barriers were laid purposely to prevent voter registration like literacy test. The state machinery disenfranchised Negroes by finding loopholes in the registration process. The reformatory measures of the laws of 1957, 1960, and 1964 had helped but it was too small to bring any substantial change. The Negro was demanding the 1965 legislation to be passed by the Congress. The direct action department came into force and planned to attack the very heart of political structure in Southland. The March was planned from Brown Chapel to the court house. More than three thousand arrests were reported in Selma and Marion. Just after the sixty days after the Nobel award Martin Luther King Jr. found himself in jail this showed, “the persisting ugliness of segregation to the nation and the world.” (King, 2001:273)

Being a Negro in Selma and USA in particular was a difficult and humiliating state. The Negro paid a heavy debt for their demand to vote. They were beaten up, fired from their jobs, jailed in thousands and victimized by the brutality of the Chief Justice Warren. Martin Luther King Jr. met Vice President Hubert Humphrey and Attorney General in Washington as soon as he came out from jail. He showed a conviction that the citizens must exercise their right of voting without delays, economic intimidation, brutality of police and harassment. The slow snail’s pace was an evil in the voter registrations as President Jonson also stated his concern and helplessness. With this pace Martin Luther King Jr. felt that, “it would take another hundred years before all Negros voters were registered.” (King, 2001: 276). Martin Luther King Jr’s intentions were doubted with the reports that there was a secret and delicate understanding between officials and Martin Luther King Jr. wanted to thrash down the white pastors and Negroes too. But Martin Luther King Jr. affirmed a clear goal of his movement that the demonstrations were to display the existence of injustice and to bring the justice with non violence. This goal was clarified with four tactics:-

1) The method will be purely non violent throughout the demonstrations.
2) Racists will unleash violence against them
3) Good Americans are on their side
4) The administration after pressure will succumb to accept their demands.
It was a challenge to adopt non-violent strategies against the military and brutal force which was deploying harassment, intimidation and force. Martin Luther King Jr. relied on the conscience of the nation to support the cause of the Negroes. There was a sense of fear of violence and brutality. The demonstrators were cautious about the direct action program to keep it out of provocation or invitation to violence. The strategy was decided to enhance the tempo of the movement with some grand action. And the result was the ‘Selma to Montgomery’ march.

5.13. Martin Luther King Jr’s Spirituality in Modern America.

“Colonialism was an ideology that dispossessed native people not only of their material belonging but also of their moral and spiritual self.” (King, 2001: 30)

Martin Luther King Jr. always adhered to God as a moral force to do good things for humanity. God and religion were the things of action and practice for him. Being a pastor by profession and family tradition, he had no option to be a religious person. Yet he studied all subjects to come to the conclusion that the service of the poor is the service of the god. He never feared death because he was thoroughly spiritual and this led him to take Gandhian way of struggle. According to Martin Luther King Jr., God would never likes anybody to be passive and hopeless that is why he felt to fight for the betterment of the people who were living in animal status. The march began on the backdrop of the fear of Martin Luther King Jr’s assassination. The threats had been received from various opposite organizations but he decided to lead the march. Governor Wallace issued a ban on the March and tried to break down the march with violent and brutal methods on 7th March, Sunday. In addition to this Judge Frank Johnson ordered to ban the march. The massive police force was collected to meet the crises and the threat of collective arrest was hovering on the movement. Martin Luther King Jr. was urged not to march and repeat the previous Sunday tragedy which he refuted saying,

“I think instead of urging us not to march, you should urge the state troopers not to be brutal towards us if we do march because we have got to march.” (King, 2001 : 281)
Martin Luther King Jr. urged the protestors to follow their conscience and the principle of non violence to accept the blows without retaliations and leave those state troopers with their barbarities. He was sure that this sacrifice and devotion would change the mindset of the people. He symbolized the march with black unity and power hence he rejected all the settlements and reiterated that he would go with the march. He felt that they should continue the march at least to the point where the police had brutalized them. Martin Luther King Jr. was devastated with news of Reverend James Reeb’s death by the brutality of police beatings. He spoke,

“We must all confess that Reverend Reeb was murdered by a morally inclement climate- a climate filled with torrents of hatred and jostling winds of violence.” (King, 2001 : 282)

Martin Luther King Jr. compared his march with Mahatma Gandhi’s Dandi March in India against the injustice as he said, “I think the march will go down in the American history on the same level as the march to the sea in Indian History.” (King, 2001:283) The March started on 21st March and fifty thousand people marched with discipline and courage with the aim of drowning the racist attitude into the ocean forever. The voting right bill was a week ahead and the march reached Montgomery on 25th March. President Johnson declared the passing of voting rights to more than millions of Negroes in Alabama. It was a victory to Martin Luther King Jr. and his brigade. It was a victory of humanism over racism. It was a victory of unity of those who were right and defeat of those who stood for hatred. Martin Luther King Jr. gratified the President Johnson’s efforts in following words,

“Johnson honored not only our embattled Negroes but the overwhelming majority of the nation, Negro and Whites. Before long, more than a million Negroes will be new voters- and psychologically new people. Selma is a shining moment in conscience of Selma people.” (King, 2001: 289.)

As soon as the victory in the South was being celebrated, the shock and horror of Northern riots exploded in Los Angeles, California killing more than 30 people. Martin Luther King Jr. was invited by the locals to hear talks of non-violence. Martin Luther King Jr. witnessed one of the most responsive and enthusiastic gatherings. Martin Luther King Jr. reiterated President Johnson’s commitment to right the wrong
from which such violence and disorder spring. The racial violence of Los Angeles was a black chapter in the history of America and Martin Luther King Jr. urged the people, “I therefore humbly suggest that all of us accept our share of responsibility for these past days of anguish.” (King, 2001:291) Martin Luther King Jr. meditated the problem deeply and reached to the roots of the problems. The Negroes were disillusioned and frustrated because of the lack of leadership. The Negroes problems were deeply rooted in their poverty in affluent society which was surrounding them. Police brutality was a hanging sword over them and they had lost their dignity in society. The slightest incident or a word between two racial counterparts would ignite a riot abruptly. The image of a Negro was of a criminal and a violent rioter. The problems of their housing, employment and healthcare were at its peak. Economic reasons were at the bottom of all evils. The mob looting in Watts was in Martin Luther King Jr’s opinion, “A social protest very common through the ages as dramatic and destructive gestures of the poor towards the symbol of their needs.” (King, 2001:293) California had passed a law forbidding racial discrimination in the housing which had snatched all the gains Negroes had received at other places particularly in the South. The basic problem was lying in the economic conditions of the Negro society. Martin Luther King Jr. still hoped that his visit and thoughts would inculcate the non-violent thoughts in the people of Watts. “It is reasonable to believe that if the problems of Chicago, the nation’s second largest city are solved, they can be solved everywhere.” (King, 2001: 297)

In July Martin Luther King Jr. was invited by Negro leaders of Chicago to fight for the rights of integrated education and against the racial discriminations prevailing in the system. The main concentration was a fight for good education which was integrated which was not there for five years. The School issue was merely symbolic of the system which had disregard for Negroes. Martin Luther King Jr. always saw the roots of the problems and came to the conclusions after a deep meditation on the problem. Chicago was one of the worst racially affected and segregated cities of America. Martin Luther King Jr. had lived in the slums of the city and realized that the movement still had remained in the middle class section of the society. A movement was not called successful till the last oppressed person did not join it with the feeling
that it was his movement. Martin Luther King Jr. went to the ghettos and identified himself with the black people. The poverty of Chicago and the sufferings of the slum dwellers had affected the psychological balance of the Negro. It was a psychological symbol that generated anxiety and annoyance and self-destructive aggression amongst Negroes. Alike his guide Martin Luther King Jr. also connected himself with the poor and downtrodden people. It was vital to understand the real culprit and also to realize our mistakes which as a leader Martin Luther King Jr. contemplated in his autobiography. "Genuine peace is not the absence of tension but the presence of justice." (King, 2001: 303) Justice was absent in Chicago. The riots in Chicago put a question mark on the philosophy of non-violence. The newspaper headlines proclaimed the doubts in the minds of the people. The responsibility of the riot was placed upon the Non-violent movement and particularly on Martin Luther King Jr. In middle of 1966 the violence spread across the city and the open housing campaign was retaliated with massive violence. The peaceful demonstrators were pelted with stones and bricks. Martin Luther King Jr. was blamed for spreading hatred and horror in white community and indirectly developing a white backlash. The situation in Chicago was the biggest challenge when Martin Luther King Jr. left the city. Martin Luther King Jr. summarized the movement of Chicago as,

"While we were under no illusions about Chicago, in all frankness we found the job greater than even imagined. And yet on balance we believed that the combination of our organization and the world wide ranging forces of goodwill in Chicago produced the basis for changes." (King, 2001: 312)

Martin Luther King Jr lived for non-violence and succeeded with non-violence but ironically he himself became the victim of violence like his guide Mahatma Gandhi, he ended his journey of life on 4th April 1969. He went at par with Jesus Christ in the history of mankind. Martin Luther King’s sacrifice did not go in vain. His last words were,

"If I can help somebody as I pass along, if I can cheer somebody with a word or song, if I can show somebody he is travelling a wrong, then my living will not in vain. If I can do my duty as a Christian ought, if I can bring salvation to a world once wrought, if I can spread the message as the master taught, then my living will not be in vain." (King, 2001: 366)
A movement began in Montgomery with a small incident of refusal to vacate a seat reserved for a white passenger ended in a victory in favour of blacks. It was a moral victory and brought down the justice with unique method of non violence. A bad era of discrimination over civil rights issues was defeated with the acceptance of the 1965 Voting Rights Act. Birmingham and Selma two cities were symbolized with movement, which wrote a new page in the history. 1963 Birmingham campaign created the 1964 Civil Rights Act and it was a new dawn for the deprived blacks in America. The Selma triumph resulted into the burning of discriminatory voting laws with regard to humanism of which Negroes of the South were ignorant. It was a moral victory for the blacks as it ushered in a new hope and respect where in racial segregation was, at least legally, cast off. With public support Martin Luther King Jr. forced the state to kneel down to universal humanism. The non-violent movements that Martin Luther King Jr. and various civil rights organizations enforced to realize American constitutionalism and humanitarian principles which were the glorious outcome of the Independence struggle, the formation of Constitution, and the Emancipation Proclamation of Abraham Lincoln. The various acts passed to outlaw the Jim Crow system and people’s acceptance of racial desegregation was a new chapter in the history. Martin Luther King Jr’s debt to America was that he gave a sense of pride to the blacks what they deserve and what they were deprived of. The tide of agony was already created as a result of humiliation reaching its boiling point. Martin Luther King Jr. stood high as a responsible crusader and created a sense of justice and honour for the racially deprived humanity. These movements restored the basic affirmation of legislative rights from which the African Americans had been deprived with Jim Crow law.
These legislative rights initiated a change in the mindsets adequately instead of radically to protest against the endorsement of discriminations. Martin Luther King Jr’s contribution to the struggle was that he with the common people undertook to create a structure of power where the blacks would have their share of power and responsibility. Thomas Jefferson’s dictum, “all should be treated equally” was the backbone of their philosophy. Martin Luther King Jr. reiterated the fact that it was a
responsibility of a state to create conducive environment to create a free and equal society. The whites in America took it as an exaggeration to accept that the favorable opposition towards the campaign seeking for voting rights for the blacks in 1965. Apparently the attitude started swinging in the favor of the strugglers of the civil right movement creating a challenge for the authorities. Media publicity at home and abroad threatened the democracy and America’s image at international level. The Jim Crow started dismantling gradually with the enforcement of Civil Rights act but the changed context of global capitalism. The Africans all over the world who were living underprivileged conditions were continually facing the racial segregations with inferior housing, public schools and health issues. The 1963 March on Washington was a blow to the desegregation but the outcome of the 1965 movement was the acceptance of Civil Rights Act in 1965 a successful end to the struggle. The March was a significant victory in many ways as it drove away a century old Jim Crow law and finally freed Americans from the stain on the democracy. The Fourteenth Amendment was the climax of the struggle in removing the prejudiced mindset. The March inspired the Black to fight united and the support of liberal whites took it. It was a historical milestone in the establishment of constitutional rights of the blacks at least legally if not socially. The campaign had a face of Martin Luther King Jr. who personalized the moment with his colleagues Philip Randolph, Bayard Rustin and many others. The Washington March was a vital point in the desegregation struggle which upheld the victim’s cause as well as the constitutional rights. Martin Luther King Jr’s message was loud and clear which echoed the humanism of the ancestors who had legalized the struggle for their rights.

5.15. Martin Luther King’s Concept of ‘New Human Being’

His autobiography reveals his commitment for his struggle and his love for his own people. The famous speech, ‘I Have a Dream’ is an example of this. The idea of Satyagraha and holding a mass rally came to him from Mahatma Gandhi. He had successfully mobilized and led the famous 1930 ‘Dandi March’ with the aim to oppose to the salt tax. The demonstrations had the critical significance of mass rallies in political mobilization. Mahatma Gandhi believed with his long experiences that the benefit of such a tactic was obvious. The Dandi March or any other march is like a
powerfully flooded river which not only fertilizes the soil for struggle but also creates a current of positivity and pressure on the opposition. While passing through several Indian remote villages which were out of the emotional involvement in the struggle were joined together. In the journey of 240 miles, the illiterate villagers acquainted with the nationalist cause as well as with the unjust political oppression of the English government. In this way Mahatma Gandhi always formulated an emotional chord with the people. This people power was a tool Mahatma Gandhi used very effectively. Martin Luther King Jr. acknowledged Mahatma Gandhi’s philosophy; he adopted the philosophy entirely and did not bother about its success or failure. The first strike of Montgomery bus struggle was a micro experiment of Satyagraha which reached its climax in the 1963 March on Washington. There was a parallel between the Martin Luther King Jr’s transport boycott and later struggle in Montgomery and Mahatma Gandhi’s nonviolent movement in Champaran, Kheda, and Ahmedabad. Mahatma Gandhi led these movements at the local level before applying his lesson at the pan-Indian level in the context of 1920-22’s Non Co-operation Movement.

5.16. Conclusion

The movements were very similar not only on its external style of operation but also internal chord of common philosophy. The March on Washington was similar to those of the 240-mile Dandi March in 1930 on the ideological grounds. The mobilization and integration of black oppressors and white moderates in tune with the issue of racism, the March on Washington was a disciplined example of creating pressure on the Federal government to reshape its policies toward almost one-tenth of the American populace. Mahatma Gandhi exhibited a political victory in the Dandi March as it forced the British government to cancel the salt tax and accept the defeat which was more symbolic. Though it had a very negligible effect on the economical health of the powerful regime as the tax’s contribution to the annual budget was meager. The withdrawal of salt tax was a defeat to British imperialism in the wake of the nationalist challenge. A strategic victory for Mahatma Gandhi and his colleagues was a stepping stone of the struggle. The place of Dandi had a strategic significance and aimed to gain maximum political mileage. The conceptual integrity in Martin Luther King Jr’s struggle was the synchronization of the themes of struggles. The
Montgomery bus strike was an act of omissions as it was against ‘coming together in bus’ however the Selma to Montgomery march was the act of ‘joining hand’. Non cooperation movement of Mahatma Gandhi was also an omission act as it was to ‘stop co operation’. Dandi March was very reminiscence of Washington march. The acts of omissions were the acts where the people refuse to perform the daily or routine actions whereas the involvement in the actions which were prohibited was called as acts of commissions. It could be analyzed that Martin Luther King Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi’s modus-operandi was similar and their movements were copy of the previous. The movements Martin Luther King Jr. led in USA had different background from the movements that Mahatma Gandhi led in India. Though the non-violence and Satyagraha were the guiding principles and their end was intended to be just. The struggle was different and difficult at both venues. Both Martin Luther King Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi fall a prey to the deadly bullets of the oppositions. Mahatma Gandhi was seventy eight when he died as King was not lucky to live so long, he was only thirty nine when he died. The irony is that they were killed by the bullets when both were propagating non-violence.