



CHAPTER II

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Gandhiji was influenced by various aspects. His life was full of experiences, which went in a large measure in moulding his political thought and personality. A reference may be made to the various influences which moulded the political thought of Gandhiji. The most important influence was that of the Gita which he read in 1889 and which remained his constant companion for the rest of his life. Mahatmaji was also influenced by the Jain monk Becharji Swami, who helped him to go to England for his studies. Before Gandhiji left for London the Swami administered to him an oath and he took three vows not to touch wine, women and meat. Buddhism also had its influence on Gandhiji. John Ruskin's book entitled "Unto This Last" had also an enormous influence on the life of Gandhiji. This book was given to him by S.L. Polak. After the study of that book, Gandhiji decided to change his own life in accordance with the ideals of that book. To quote Gandhiji, "That book marked a turning point in my life." Gandhiji learnt three lessons from that book. That economy was good which was conducive to the good of all. The work of lawyer had the same value

as that of a barber. The life of a labour was the life worth living.

There was a creative experience in Gandhi's life in South Africa. Gandhi was travelling with train. The train reached Mariotzburg at 9 p.m. It was the capital of Natal. A European entered the compartment in which Gandhi was sitting. He saw that Gandhi was a coloured man and felt that his presence was an outrage on his civility and culture. Going out, he brought in two officials. One of them asked Gandhi to move to the van compartment. Gandhi coolly protested :
" I have a first class ticket. " They persisted to which Gandhi refused. They called a police constable who pitched Gandhi out with his luggage. Yet he refused to go to the van compartment. The train steamed off without him.

Keeping his hand bag with him and leaving the other luggage where it was lying. Gandhi sat in a waiting room. The railway authorities took charge of his luggage. It was an extremely cold night. His overcoat was in his suit case, but for fear of being insulted again, he sat shivering in the dark room. At midnight a passenger entered the room and wanted to talk him. But he was in no mood to talk. In the bitter cold



night, he sat quivering with fear and regret. Again it was a man in authority that insulted him !

According to Gandhi, this was the most creative experience in his life. He was afraid for his very life. He said to himself ; " What is my duty ? should I go back to India or should I go forward with God as my helper and face whatever was in store for me ? ", Out of the darkness, light came to him in the dark continent. He decided to stay and suffer rather than be a coward and run back to India. He therefore, made an unflinching resolve to suffer hardships and therefore, made an unflinching resolve to suffer hardships and brave the situation himself and to take the train to Pretoria.

Gandhi's lifelong obsession for travelling third class probably originated in this incident. It must have perhaps awakened him to the reality of the scorching rigours of untouchability . 1

Gandhiji was in prison in 1908, and then he read Thoreau's " Essay on Civil Disobedience ". It is pointed that Gandhiji got his idea of the Satyagraha from Thoreau and admitted that the study of the writings of Thoreau left a deep impression on him.

The political philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi is to be found in the large number of books written by him, in the articles contributed by him to various journals like the Young India, the Harijan and the reported speeches delivered by him from time to time. Mahatma Gandhi put too much emphasis on non-violence and Satyagraha. His philosophy of Satyagraha was essentially practical and not theoretical. He was a 'Karmayogi', a practical idealist, and his philosophy grew out of his own experience and experiments with truth and non-violence. He taught only what he himself practised and what he considered to be practicable for every body making the necessary effort. Gandhiji laid stress on the individual as the starting point of social progress. The problem of the group was essentially the problem of the individual. Man is above all the soul and the progress of society depends on the soul force of the average individual. Whatever wealth that is with us, it all belongs to God. It was made available by almighty God. God has created wealth for the welfare of the world. The excess wealth should be distributed among the deserving people, those who are sufferers. Everyman has to become a trustee for such services. God is all powerful. He does not hoard anything. So every man has to try to earn only to the extent of his needs. Once this

truth is accepted by all, we may call everyone a trustee. Then there will be no occasion for exploitation.

Everything belongs to God and everything comes from God. Therefore everything is for all. Therefore no body has any authority on wealth. If one gets more than his needs, one should become a trustee of his excess wealth for the sake of God's creation.

God is all powerful. He does not hoard. Everyday he creates something for his people. Therefore everyman try not to hoard. He should live his life day after day without acquisition. If all people follow this concept it will become a law, and Trusteeship will desire to become a public institution, Mahatmaji desire's India should follow this way to guide world. This may be a kind of gift to the world.

It is difficult to have the path, for others to follow it is easier. Mahatmaji agrees that man has a tendency to sublime but he disagrees with Darwin's theory of evolution. It is not suggested by anyone, any time that extreme poverty causes a moral fall.

Every man has right to live and therefore it is his right to fulfil his basic needs. For this no law or an economist is necessary.

"Do not worry about tomorrow" is the dictum almost all world's religious books. The criterion for a well managed nation is not the number millionaires, but absence of stravation.

Every element in society should use its moral and mental strength for the welfare of people. Of course we do not intend to establish the equality of the grave which makes man very weak and unable for his creative work. And such society will ultimately perish. That is why rich people must earn in crores but for others welfare and that is the best way.

We can earn wealth without causing injustice to anybody. For example when one may find a gold mine in one's field, Gandhiji is of the opinion that it is preferable not to have wealth. This better than earning wealth and then become a trustee. Three moderns have left a deep impression my life and captivated me. Rachandbhai by his living contact ; Tolstoy by his book, ' The Kingdom of God is within you ' and Ruskin

by his ' Unto This Last '. He made his first contact with Tolstoy's writings in 1893-94 and with those of Ruskin in 1904. Not only did the profound morality and truthfulness of Tolstoy's ' The Kingdom of God is within you ' leaves an indelible impress on him; it overwhelmed him too and along with Tolstoy's other works, made him realise the infinite possibilities of universal love. Because of Ruskin's ' Unto This Last ', which, reflected some of the deepest convictions of Gandhi and brought about ' an instantaneous and practical transformation in his life '.²

ON RELIGION :

Religion was the central core of the both, of Tolstoy and Gandhi. They both argued that science cannot replace religion, Tolstoy asserts³ - - - no human society and no rational man has existed or a can exist without a religion - - Only religion gives a rational man the guidance he needs, telling him what he should do and what first and what next. "

As a vedantist by conviction and so was Tolstoy who maintains⁴ " I felt God clearly for the first time - - I know that he existed and that I existed in him that outside that

there is nothing. ~~I was~~ In him a limited being in the illimitable, he in me the illimitable within the limited. Expressing this sentiment, Gandhi observed,⁵ " I subscribe to the belief or the philosophy that all life in its essence is one that the humans are working consciously or unconsciously towards the realisation of that identity. This belief requires a living faith in a living God who is the ultimate arbiter of our fate." For Gandhi Truth and God are interchangeable terms and truth manifests itself in the form of concord and complete consistency between thought word and deed. How deep was Tolstoy's attachment to truth is evident from his remark :

" The heroine of my writings, she whom I love with all the forces of my being, she who always was, is and will be beautiful is Truth." "

Tolstoy was prepared to excuse ignorance of truth in people but not their hypocrisy which according to him promotes corruption and embitterment. Stressing the importance of inner concord as against external achievements he succinctly remarks,⁶ " Let all those external alternations be realised and the position of humanity will not be bettered. But let each man

according to the strength that is in him profess the truth he knows and practice it in his own life - or at least cease to excuse the falsehood he supports by representing it as truth - and at once, in this very year 1893, such changes would be accomplished towards man's liberation and the establishment of truth on earth, as we dare not hope for in hundred years. ■

Tolstoy and Gandhi attached great importance to self-continnence. ■ Chastity is one of the greatest disciplines without which the mind can not attain requisite firmness. A man who is unchaste loses stamina, becomes emasculated and cowardly,⁷ ■ writes Gandhi. We renounced all desires but exhorted all those who want to devote themselves to the service of the community to do so convinced that it is impossible for a man living in luxury to lead a righteous life, Tolstoy also put forward a fervent plea for control of passions. Maintaining that the attainment of goodness must begin with self-control, he argues,⁸ ■ There is a scale of virtues, and if one would mount the higher steps it is necessary to begin with the lowest ; and the first virtue a man must acquire if he wishes to acquire the others is ■ self control or moderation. ■

He did not even favour marriage which was looked upon by him as domestic prostitution, because it encourages man and woman to look upon each other as instruments for the satisfaction of sensual pleasures. Gluttony a common characteristic of the majority of men also is to be avoided and condemned like self-indulgence.

Both believed that fasting is an indispensable condition of good life. Many were the occasions on which Gandhi took resort to this weapon for seeking peace within and without. Another virtue that is given an exalted place among those essential to be cultivated is non-possession or non-accumulation and non stealing . Gandhi was hence much influenced by Tolstoy.

CIVILISATION :

Gandhi equated civilisation not with multiplication of wants but with deliberate reduction of wants. Because both he and Tolstoy adopted a moral approach towards civilisation and regarded it as pathway to ethical and spiritual progress; they condemn modern civilisation because in their opinion, it laid greater premium on material than on

moral progress and promotes a craze for accumulation of outward comforts, and useless commodities, goads men towards the fulfilment of their animal inclination and makes them servile in soul.

Quoting Ruskin who boldly asserts that there is no wealth but life with all its power of love and joy. Tolstoy declares. " There is no doubt that ironclads, railroads, printing presses, funnels, photographs, Rontgen-rays and so forth, are very good. They are all very good, but what are also good - good, as Ruskin says, beyond comparison with anything else are human lives, such as those of which millions are now mercilessly ruined for the acquisition of ironclads, railways and tunnels which instead of beautifying life disfigure it." They not merely show how the present day civilisation based on brute force is a negation of humanity but also suggest a sovereign remedy for man to realise his manhood and for civilisation to become stable, viz, substitution of brute force by soul-force, of hatred by love. This remedy is bound to lead to greater tolerance and understanding. Perhaps, this is why Gandhi's antagonism against western civilisation was mellowed down in later years and he pleaded for a cultural synthesis or ' a beautiful blend of all cultures ' .

ON ECONOMIC THOUGHT :

Gandhi read Ruskin - especially his "Unto This Last" and found an echo of his convictions in it. He began to mould his life accordingly. Giving an ethical orientation to economics Ruskin clearly distinguishes between cost and value, and observes,¹⁰ "Value is the life giving power of anything, cost, the quantity of labour required to produce it." Arguing in a similar vein and pleading for the sub-stitution of non-human by human economics, Gandhi writes.¹¹ "I do not draw a sharp line or any distinction of an individual or a nation are immoral and therefore, sinful, Thus the economics that permit one country to prey upon another are immoral."

Again, there is a close affinity in Ruskin's interest in having a "full breated bright eyed and happy hearted human creatures" and his exhortation to the employer to adopt a human approach and trying to make his work pleasant and beneficial and cheerful and Gandhi's concern for the unemployed and the underemployed and his attempt to find work for them through Khadi and village-industries. Both stress that the prosperity of a nation is not be judged by its external

achievements or commercial wealth which may be based on exploitation and forceful extracting of work from the straved and the underfed but only by the human happiness engendered by it.

Ruskin expresses this beautifully when argues.¹² "Any given accumulation of commercial wealth may be indicative, on the one hand of faithful industries, progressive energies and productive ingenuities, or the other it may be indicative, of moral luxury, merciless tyranny, ruinous chicane. Soem treasures are heavy with human tears, as an ill-stored harvest with untimely rain; and some gold is brighter in sunshine than in substance." Ruskin wants to do away with the ugliness of machine civilisation and regards ' the robbing of the poor because he is poor ' resorted to by most of the heartless capitalists as a form of theft.

Following the teaching of Hindu ethics, Gandhi too is of the opinion that accumulation of more possessions than the barest minimum required for maintainance is a kind of theft. Pleading for the right to public support, Ruskin argues¹³

"a labourer serves his country with his spade, just as man in the middle rank of life serves it with his sword, pen or lancet." Gandhi interprets this as meaning that a lawyer's work has the same value as the barber's.

Some critics like Fischer doubt the validity of this interpretation in as much as Ruskin stresses the impossibility of equality between men. It is however, to be noted that to say that the work of all has the same value is not the same as saying that all men are equal.

Similarly, Gandhi's deduction that according to Ruskin's life of labour i.e., the life of the tiller of the soil is a life worth-living also seems to be justified from his hope that some day our ploughmen will be paid little more and our lawyers and parliamentarians who do nothing else but talk, a little less.

Tolstoy popularised the ideal of 'bread-labour' which was originally sponsored by Bondareft. Gandhi put this idea into practice at the Tolstoy farm in South Africa where labour became a tonic for all. He was convinced that this principle, if sincerely followed will lead to social justice and equality. Very much as he practised Tolstoy's principle of 'bread labour,' he extended Ruskin's concept of the 'best labour being paid by an invariable standard' by advocating equal wages for persons belonging to different professions like lawyers and doctors on the one hand and labourers and scavengers on the other.

Gandhi on the whole was much influenced by Ruskin's 'Unto This Last' and he actually became a convert to the idea of equal wages for all kinds of socially useful labour. His constructive programme included an item called working for economic equality. At a meeting as late as 1946 held in Madras he pointed, 'The contrast between the rich and poor today is a painful sight. The poor villagers are exploited by the foreign government and also by their own country men the city dwellers. They produce the food and go hungry. They produce milk and their children have to go without it. It is disgraceful. Everyone must have a balanced diet; a decent house to live, facilities for the education of one's children and adequate medical relief. ■ 14

This shows how much he was perturbed regarding the economic aspects. He considered village economy to become the centre of any planned economic development in India. For this he advocated his own economic ideas; which we shall try to examine in the perceeding chapters.

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