

## HUMAN LONGING AND FULFILLMENT: THE GANDHIAN VISION

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*Isaac Padinjarekuttu*

Man's ultimate aim is the realization of God, and all his activities, political, social and religious, have to be guided by the ultimate aim of the vision of God. The immediate service of all human beings becomes a necessary part of the endeavour simply because the only way to find God is to see him in his creation and be one with it. This can only be done by service of all (Mahatma Gandhi).<sup>1</sup>

Human longing and its fulfillment are vital concerns of every culture. They point to the question of the meaning of life, which our old catechism lessons broke up into several questions: why has God created me? Why am I on this earth? What is the main end of human life?, etc. The answers to these questions have been varied. Most Christians will answer that they are on this earth to know, love and to serve God, and in this way to get to heaven. The Hindu strives, through the fulfillment of his/her ethical and religious duties, to attain a happy life and hopes to be reborn to a better one. The Buddhist, by following the middle way between sensual pleasure and ascetic self-mortification and the eight-fold path of the Buddha seeks to know the cause of all suffering and repeated rebirths, and in this way to overcome suffering itself. The Muslim believes in the one God and his one prophet and submits him/herself to God's will throughout his/her life. In addition to confessing his/her faith, he/she has above all the duty to pray daily, give alms, fast and make the pilgrimage to Mecca. The aim of this belief and practice is to reach paradise full of terrestrial delights. The Confucian sees human life in terms of striving for ethical perfection. Such perfection is to be acquired especially through social virtues, governing one's relationship within the family as well as without. The Taoist sees human life in terms of its harmony with nature, urging for simplicity, in some cases even through avoidance of social involvements. Other religious traditions, too, have their ideals for the human person running along similar lines.

1 Kripalani (1960), 81-82.

The secular ideologies have their own answers to the question on the meaning of life. Idealistically expressed, the meaning of life is to be found in self-realization, universal humanization and the greatest possible development of the individual. Surely, critical questions have been asked to the advocates of these ideals, especially by young people, whether these are really adequate aims of human life. Take for example, the Marxist-Leninist answer in its orthodox form: the meaning and fulfillment of life are to be found in work, militant class solidarity, and the abolition of alienation by the socialist society. But what about those areas which have not been touched upon: the reality of guilt, suffering and death, and the personal destiny of the individual. Science, too, has begun asking questions about the meaning of life. Natural scientists are more aware now of the inadequacy of a purely materialistic and positivistic understanding of reality. They are beginning to make relative rather than absolute claims for their own scientific method, and to be more open to other questions beyond the scope of science. Many of them realize that responsible scientific and technical activity necessarily implies ethics, and ethics in turn implies a scale of values, guidelines and the quest for meaning. Psychologists have begun to emphasize the extreme importance of the question of the meaning of life for the human psyche and its well being.<sup>2</sup>

From the above analysis it has become clear that the question of meaning is a fundamental human quest. What answer shall the twenty-first century give to this question? Our age is an age of growing unification and totalization. Science, technology and economics are, for the first time, bringing about the 'one world' and, with it, a 'common world history'. A manifold interdependence is weaving a whole net of political and social interrelationships which encompass the whole earth. There is need for a vision of life that is complementary because no one culture or religion can exhaustively answer the human predicament. A look at the last century will prove this point beyond doubt. In spite of all our religions, secular ideologies, scientific achievements and improvement in living standards, in less than one century we have experienced several destructive wars, the holocaust, 'the bomb', the rise of several destructive systems, the end of colonialism but the neo-colonial creation of a 'third world' of economically dependent and impoverished nations, the successful control of the world economy by capitalism and its inherently unjust consequences, the endangering of the earth's life-systems, the spread of AIDS, and the vast sub-culture and sub-economics of drugs.

The answers given by religions and ideologies are not wrong but are insufficient. There seems to be the need for a broadening of our answers to life's questions, to include not only God and the divine, but also the human; not

2 Küng (1977), 3-9.

only heaven, but also the earth; not only knowing God, loving him and serving him but also concerning ourselves deeply with human beings and his/her development and humanization. All these should form essential dimensions of human fulfillment. In other words, we need to emphasize the social dimension, thus overcoming a false individualism and an individualized eschatology. Secondly, we need to emphasize the historical task here on earth, thus overcoming a false dualism between this world and the other world. And thirdly, we need to emphasize the religious dimension thus overcoming an uncritical naturalism.<sup>3</sup> In the following pages I intend to show that Mahatma Gandhi has offered such a vision of life that we so desperately seek.

### *The Gandhian Synthesis*

There is no need for me to give biographical information about Gandhi. Besides his own autobiography,<sup>4</sup> there are excellent biographies of Gandhi.<sup>5</sup> I would rather start with an investigation into the sources of Gandhi's vision.

Gandhi was first and foremost an Indian, deeply rooted in the cultural and religious traditions of India. The Hindu religious and cultural background of his home was the first influence in his life. "Hinduism as I know it entirely satisfies my soul, fills my whole being,"<sup>6</sup> he said. His belief in God and belief in the oneness of God and of humanity were contributions of Hinduism. In Hinduism Gandhi was influenced the most by the *Bhagavad Gita*. It was for him the best guide to self-realization and the knowledge of truth.<sup>7</sup> He also studied the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata* and the *Manusmriti*. He learned from all these sacred texts the important ideals of renunciation, nonviolence, etc., and that morality is the basis of actions. His parents were deeply religious persons, especially his mother.<sup>8</sup> Another important characteristic of Gandhi was his passion for truth and truthfulness from an early age, which was innate in him.<sup>9</sup> Jainism which was a very important force in his home state Gujarat also exerted a profound influence on him. The Jain belief in *ahimsa* (nonviolence),<sup>10</sup> *anekantavada* or *syadvada* (may be or manyness) or the relativity of

3 Ibid., 8.

4 Gandhi (1968) in 2 vols.

5 For example, Fischer (1957).

6 Nanda (1985), 5.

7 Gandhi (1968), vol. I, 99.

8 Ibid., 5.

9 Ibid., 8-9.

10 Pyarelal, vol. 1, 276.

Truth or Reality,<sup>11</sup> and the institution of the vows<sup>12</sup> influenced Gandhi considerably. Gandhi was attracted to Buddhism because of the Buddha's compassion.<sup>13</sup> Both Jainism and Buddhism also strengthened Gandhi's principle of *ahimsa*. From Gopala Krishna Gokhale he learned the ideal of spiritualized politics. Swami Vivekananda was an important influence on Gandhi. His idea of *daridranarayan* — the God of the poor, his observation that "religion is not for empty stomachs", his concept of religion as service, etc. profoundly influenced him. Also influential in Gandhi's life was the ideal of a rational religion and of the equality of all religions advocated by Vivekananda. As far as patriotism and nationalism were concerned he was influenced by three other important persons, Dadabhai Naoroji, Lokmanya Tilak, and Sir Pherozeshah.<sup>14</sup>

Gandhi was deeply influenced also by the West and a number of Western thinkers and writers. Socrates influenced Gandhi greatly. Gandhi admired his death for the sake of truth and called him a great *Satyagrahi*. The New Testament of the Bible was another influence on Gandhi. He compared the Sermon on the Mount with the Gita. The ideals of nonviolence and renunciation in the Sermon on the Mount delighted him beyond measure. Jesus was for him the "Prince of *Satyagrahis*". Gandhi had a great love and regard for Islam and the prophet Mohammed. Prof. Zaehner says: "Gandhi absorbed the ethical teaching of the Sermon on the Mount and the transcendent monotheism of Islam into his own Hindu life, and through himself he transmitted it to the whole of India."<sup>15</sup> Leo Tolstoy was like a companion to him in his championing of nonviolence and passive resistance. Through Tolstoy, Gandhi says, he began to realize more and more the "infinite possibilities of universal love." Next to Tolstoy was John Ruskin. His book, *Unto This Last* had a profound influence on Gandhi. A great deal of Gandhi's social, political and economic theories were influenced by Ruskin's book. Another influence in Gandhi's life was the American anarchist Henry David Thoreau and his concept of "civil disobedience".<sup>16</sup> Rajchandra Ravjibhai Mehta was his *guru* (teacher) and Gandhi considered him one of the three persons who had influenced him deeply, the others being, Tolstoy and Ruskin. Also influential was the book *Ethical Religion* by William Macintyre Salter, from whom he derived the intimate relationship between morality and religion. Thus we see that Gandhi was the product of a number of influences, both Eastern and Western. With

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid., 278.

13 Gandhi (1968), vol. I, 238.

14 Veeraju (1999), 18–22.

15 Zaehner (1966), 237.

16 Veeraju (1999), 23–31.

the help of these ideals he proposed a holistic vision of reality based on integral personal and societal transformation but which sees the fundamental purpose of human existence in a goal beyond earthly existence. He proposed this vision as an alternative to modern civilization. I will attempt to elaborate this vision under three sections: human longing and the individual: the overcoming of a false individualism; human longing and human history: the overcoming of a false other-worldliness, and human longing and God: the overcoming of a false this-worldliness.

### 1. *Human Longing and the Individual: the Overcoming of a False Individualism*

It is no exaggeration to characterize the birth of the modern spirit, as the birth of the self-conscious, autonomous human being, "conscious about the world, confident in his own judgments, skeptical of orthodoxies, rebellious against authority, responsible for his own beliefs and actions ..." <sup>17</sup> This unprecedented individualization of life has not just positive consequences. The situation of open possibilities of life provokes the question of meaning of life and the more fundamental question, where does one find meaning, in a world which is secularized and demystified, and in which people often feel so alien and homeless. <sup>18</sup> Faced often with rigid religious and social structures individualization gave people the possibility of making independent choices; allowed them to seek their own way to happiness in life and promised them an autonomous, self-determined subjectivity. But the danger is that the quest for self-discovery, self-determination and self-fulfillment can lead to an overestimation of the self and an autistic self-centeredness which is detached from responsibility to the world, for fellow human beings and society, leading to a loss of solidarity, and to isolation. <sup>19</sup> Individualism leads to competition which means that good performers are rewarded and the weak punished. The consequence is a society of climbers in which more and more people get pushed on to the fringe, off the ladder, resulting in the social death of some. There is a certain point beyond which our sense of individuality and self-determination not only becomes inaccurate and prideful but also self-destructive. The solution is to build communities from below, and recognize that human beings can develop their personhood only in communities. We are social beings who desperately need each other not merely for sustenance, not merely for

17 Tarnas (1993), 282.

18 Küng (1995), 763.

19 Ibid., 764.

company, but for any meaning to our lives whatsoever. So we are called both to individuation and interdependence. The ethic of rugged individualism in which we are trapped is ultimately self-defeating. This individualism which ultimately leads to an individualized understanding of salvation or fulfillment, no matter at what level it is realized, is too narrow. The meaning of individual life can only be understood in the context of, not isolated from, the meaning of society, humankind and the cosmos.

Gandhi had a very balanced understanding of human life and its meaning. Writing an Afterword in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-four* he said: "The question is a philosophical, anthropological and psychological one, and perhaps also a religious one. It is: Can human nature be changed in such a way that man will forget his longing for freedom, for dignity, for integrity, for love — that is to say, can man forget that he is human?" The question of meaning of life, for him, was a fundamental one, comprising the philosophical, anthropological, psychological, and religious dimensions. He identified the fundamental longing of human beings as a longing for freedom, dignity, integrity and love. This is the essence of human nature. To be deprived of these is the violation of the very nature of human beings, and therefore, it must be the endeavour of everyone to change such situations where these basic rights are violated. But Gandhi also said that human being's ultimate aim is the realization of God, and all his activities, political, social and religious, have to be guided by the ultimate aim of the vision of God. But there is no way to achieve this except through the immediate service of all human beings simply because the only way to find God is to see him in his creation and be one with it.<sup>20</sup>

Thus Gandhi had an understanding of human destiny comprising the individual, the society and God. He was convinced of the unique place of the individual human person. "The individual is the one supreme consideration".<sup>21</sup> Any power that does not give respect and freedom to the individual should be treated with utmost caution. He believed that individuality is at the root of all progress. The human being is above all and far superior to all human institutions because of the divine powers in him which are infinite. "To slight a single human being is to slight those divine powers and thus to harm not only that being but with him the whole world."<sup>22</sup> He had confidence in human nature. "I refuse to suspect human nature. It will, is bound, to respond to any noble and friendly action."<sup>23</sup>

20 See above, note 1.

21 Bose (1948), 26.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

From this trust in human beings, it follows for Gandhi that they are called to live a life of peace, freedom and dignity. Gandhi was the champion of human dignity. It can be considered one of his lasting contributions. His struggle for the equality of all human beings, his fight against all discrimination, fragmentation, colonization, inequalities based on colour, gender, religion, caste, and class, his constant struggle for the upliftment of the untouchables and women, his plea for communal harmony, his compassion for the poor and the hungry — the so-called common masses, were all guided by this singular concern.

The doctrine of equality of human beings is perhaps one of the most important concepts of Gandhi which has much relevance today. Starting from his Hindu, *advaitic* background, he said that his faith excludes totally any idea of superiority whatsoever. For him, assumption of superiority by any person over any other is a sin against God and man. He interpreted and defended the *varnashramadharma* (caste system) in his own way<sup>24</sup> but he always rejected what he called the hideous travesty of it as practised in India with its untouchability which he called a drag upon Hindu progress. "It was a weedy growth fit only to be weeded out, as we weed out the weeds that we see growing in wheat fields or rice fields."<sup>25</sup> He called untouchability a sin and the greatest blot on Hinduism: "I feel more than ever that if untouchability lives, Hinduism dies."<sup>26</sup> And true to his nature Gandhi practised what he preached. He admitted untouchables into his *ashram*.

Equally important was his struggle for the upliftment of women. In spite of all our civil freedoms, human rights, the freedom of conscience, etc., contemporary society still retains male superiority in many forms. Gandhi was a champion of the improvement of the status of women in India. He studied the position of women in society, their struggles, and their roles in the social structure. He evolved new methods for their social upliftment based on the values of morality, equality and social justice. He said: "I am firmly of the opinion that India's salvation depends on the sacrifice and enlightenment of her women."<sup>27</sup> He stood for the fundamental equality of man and woman. He saw no reason for any subjugation of woman by man. "Of all the evils for which man has made himself responsible, none is so degrading, so shocking or so brutal as his abuse of the better half of humanity."<sup>28</sup> To call woman the

24 See Mukherjee (1993), 207–212 and Kavungal (2000), 143–46. Gandhi saw it merely as a system whereby each one fulfils his/her duty for the good of society. He said that *varnashramadharma* defines man's mission on earth and not superiority or inferiority. But forgetting its enormous implications for society was surely a great omission by Gandhi.

25 Mukherjee (1993), 211.

26 Ibid., 223.

27 Kripalani (1960), 204.

28 Ibid., 206.

weaker sex "is a libel, it is man's injustice to woman."<sup>29</sup> Woman has as much right as man in the matter of shaping her own destiny. In fact, Gandhi considered woman superior to man in many respects: in moral power, in self-sacrifice, in intuition, in courage, and in endurance. "If nonviolence is the law of our being, the future is with woman... who can make a more effective appeal to the heart than woman?"<sup>30</sup> Gandhi believed in the absolute necessity of education for women. He asked people to remove the blemishes in the *shastras* about women.<sup>31</sup> There was no justification for men to deprive women of their equal rights on the ground of their illiteracy. Education is essential for enabling women to assert their rights.<sup>32</sup> He said that woman should labour under no legal inequality not suffered by man. He attacked such evil practices like refusal to allow widows to remarry, the practice of dowry, etc.

From this concern for the individual human person, Gandhi now proceeds to the society. According to Gandhi, the human being has a social vocation and destiny. "I value individual freedom but you must not forget that man is essentially a social being. He has risen to his present status by learning to adjust his individualism to the requirement of social progress. Unrestricted individualism is the law of the beast of the jungle."<sup>33</sup> Human nature reveals itself in service. A person who does not serve is unworthy to be called human. "Man becomes great exactly in the degree in which he works for the welfare of his fellowmen."<sup>34</sup> He believed in the total interdependence of human beings. There is no existence for individual human beings apart from humanity. There is no gaining progress materially or spiritually without the other. "Therefore I believe that if one man gains spiritually, the whole world gains with him and, if one man falls, the whole world falls to that extent."<sup>35</sup> Hence whether an individual is good or bad is not merely his own concern, but the concern of the whole community, of the whole world. He believed that the quality of life depends on social relationships. One cannot be happy in isolation. Technology, knowledge, social institutions, political systems etc. are important but they cannot make human beings happy if they do not serve the function of serving the human community.

Social life however, needs discipline. In a culture of unbridled desires and instant gratification, this message of Gandhi is of fundamental impor-

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid., 207.

31 Gandhi (1942), 4.

32 Ibid., 5.

33 Kripalani (1960), 183.

34 Bose (1948), 25.

35 Ibid.



tance. Civilization in the real sense of the term, consists not in multiplication but in the deliberate and voluntary restriction of wants because ultimately multiplication of wants hinders human beings from service.<sup>36</sup> Gandhi called for the control of both physical and intellectual needs; otherwise, at some time or other, it degenerates into physical and intellectual voluptuousness. He called for the control of one's passions too. "You wish to know what the marks of a man are who wants to realize truth which is God? He must be completely free from anger, and lust, greed and attachment, pride and fear. He must reduce himself to zero and must have perfect control over his senses..."<sup>37</sup> For Gandhi, this perfect control over the self was genuine freedom. So he said that the government over self is the truest *swaraj*.<sup>38</sup> Another important concept of Gandhi was the concept of duty rather than rights. According to Gandhi, one must begin with duties rather than rights because one has no rights. But when one begins to do one's duties, one begins to discover the rights too.

Gandhi summarized all the principles of personal life and interpersonal relationships into the five vows of moral life: *satya* (truth), *ahimsa* (nonviolence), *brahmacharya* (celibacy), *asteya* (non-stealing), and *aparigraha* (non-possession), and conscience as the final criterion of moral action.<sup>39</sup> In his own *ashram* he had other principles too which wanted to be observed: *asvada* (control of the palate), *sarirasrama* (physical labour), *swadeshi* (using goods made in one's own country), *bhayavarjana* (fearlessness), *sparsabhavana* (abolition of untouchability), and *sarvadharmasamanatva* (reverence for all religions).<sup>40</sup> But both individual and social life attain their final meaning in the vision of God. For him the two, God and the human are so interconnected that he would say: "My creed is service of God and therefore of humanity."<sup>41</sup> Gandhi's vision was essentially a spiritual vision. Gandhi was a humanist but a theistic humanist.

## 2. *Human Longing and Human History: the Overcoming of a False Dualism*

This is Gandhi's answer to the false dualism which separates human history and its concerns from the question of ultimate human fulfillment, and to the

36 Ibid., 39.

37 Pyarelal, vol. 2, 233.

38 Mukherjee (1993), 66.

39 Kavungal (2000), 305-373.

40 Ibid., 304.

culture of domination and depredation of nature practised by the West for centuries. The first has led, on the one hand, to the phenomenon of apocalyptic expectations which envision salvation as liberation from the world which is basically evil, and on the other, to a religious attitude which degrades religion to ritualism, having little or no concern for human beings and the life that they live. But in the contemporary context, talking meaningfully about God means, speaking about the world and its liberation. The culture of domination of nature has led to the mindless neglect of nature and the destruction of the foundations of our natural life: air, water, forests, flora and fauna. All are today in agreement that instead of an exploitative and destructive domination of nature, a partnership with nature is urgently needed. Gandhi formulated neither a philosophy nor a theology of history. But he was convinced that a well regulated and balanced human development is essential for the fulfillment of human longing. This down to earth attitude has found expression in one of his famous sayings that to a hungry person God appears in the form of bread. Gandhi took human history seriously and was convinced that there is no heaven without earth. I will highlight two important aspects of it in the following pages.

Throughout history, the two greatest quests of human beings have been for freedom and equality. The great utopias that the human mind has devised have all dealt with these quests, whether it is Marxian Socialism, the American Revolution, the French Revolution or the great 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. They all set out to protect the freedom and equality of all men and women. Some represent the hopes of the humiliated and the hurt, the others represent the hopes of the weary and the heavy-laden. Gandhi too envisioned a society of free and equal human beings and in that sense his was another utopian vision.

But after the banal collapse of Socialism in the former communist countries, there emerged the weird suggestion that it was the end of utopias and the end of history. In 1989 Francis Fukuyama in his famous article "The End of History",<sup>42</sup> proposed a political and economic apocalyptic saying that in the collapse of communism, the triumph of the West was evident and that all great alternatives to liberal democracy and global marketing are exhausted. So we are at the end of history. In 1991 Joachim Fest, the editor of the famous German newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, in his book, *A dream Destroyed. The End of the Utopian Era*, said that with the end of socialism not only this utopia, but all utopias have died and that in the future people had to live a life without utopias.<sup>43</sup> Who wants the end of utopias? People who

41 Gandhi (1924a), 350.

42 Fukuyama (1989), 3-18.

43 See Moltmann (1994), 134-36.

want to prolong their present status and power. And who wants utopias? The oppressed and the hungry masses. As long as these exist, there will be utopian projects for overcoming them. Those who dominate and enjoy the present want to extend their present into the future and are afraid of any alternative future. So they declare that their system, capitalist democracy, is the end of history, and that there are no alternatives.<sup>44</sup>

But the collapse of the communist states has not been followed by the success of the capitalist system. Rather there has been a deep crisis in the welfare states within the liberal democracies. Neither communism no longer effective, nor social democracy internally weakened can any longer provide the justification and guiding ideological underpinning for the economic policies of the present time. With globalization, which is one of the defining characteristics of the world today one would have hoped for the dawn of a new model of economic policy. But there is still no sign of any global alternative lightening the horizon. On the contrary, the capitalist model is tightening its grip through a return to pre-Keynesian laissez-faire liberalism. There is widespread unemployment and under employment. The adverse impact on the environment is growing. Poverty and malnutrition have remained unconquered scourges. Gandhi had realized the fundamental weakness of this system. He said that this style of human life is unsustainable. What was sustainable was a life according to the rhythm of nature and in harmony with what nature offers and a political system that is based on values. Let us discuss the Gandhian concept of development and his understanding of political activity.

#### a. Gandhian Concept of Development

Gandhi proceeded from the foundational belief that "every human being has a right to live, and therefore to find the wherewithal to feed himself and where necessary, to clothe and house himself."<sup>45</sup> So the Gandhian ideal is *sarvodaya*, universal upliftment or welfare of all men and women. So development is always growth with justice. This Gandhi broke up into other important principles: moral and human values must reign supreme in our economic and social reconstruction; it should always have a healthy relationship to nature; the *sarvodaya* society is a small face-to-face community structured on cooperation and collective endeavour; the central focus of *sarvodaya* is the educated, morally upright, nonviolent individual; its goal is a simple, self-restrained life-style.<sup>46</sup> Connected with this was the concept of *antyyodaya*. Here

44 Ibid., 135.

45 Bose (1948), 38.

46 Gandhi (1919).

Gandhi took up the cause of the weakest as his highest priority. *Antya* means the weakest in society. Only the development of the weakest leads to *sarvodaya*. So *sarvodaya* through *antyodaya* was the maxim of Gandhian theory of development. The moral principles mentioned above played an important role in the Gandhian theory of development, especially, the principle of *aparigraha* (non-possession). The goal of economic life is not the maximization of wants, mindless acquisition and consumption. So each individual should adhere to *aparigraha* at some reasonable point and make way for others to get his maximum share. So Gandhi as an economist was an economist of the masses, of the common people. He was not against human progress but advocated progress with a human face.

His concept of trusteeship said that everything belonged to God and was from God. Therefore, it was for His people as a whole, not for a particular individual or group of individuals. When an individual had more than his proportionate portion he became a trustee of that portion for God's people.<sup>47</sup> In other words, property belonged to all and the holder was merely a manager, a socially responsible trustee. So Gandhi envisaged an economic system based neither on private property nor on the state but on trusteeship.

Regarding technology he said that it should be human-centered and not opposed to nature. "God forbid that India should ever take to industrialism after the manner of the West. The economic imperialism of a single tiny island (England) is keeping the world in chains. If an entire nation of three hundred million took to similar exploitation, it would strip the world like locusts."<sup>48</sup> Gandhi was not against science or modern knowledge. He only wanted that its benefits should be for all. "That use of machinery is lawful which subserves the interest of all."<sup>49</sup> It is not to be seen as the test case for the upper limit of progress. Its aim is not to lead man from one level of sophistication to another. He was against wide use of machinery because its benefits were not available for all as, we see in India today. He was aware of the situation of India where labour was in abundance, and therefore, mass production with the help of machine would not serve the cause of the people. So he pleaded for labour intensive technologies. Man should be the producer. Otherwise it was exploitation of the weak by the strong. Gandhi emphasized a decentralized socio-economic and political system based on village development because he believed that the future of India lay in her villages. Once these small units were developed, the nation would automatically develop. The Gandhian model of development is unparalleled in its universal, humane and moral values. He

47 Bose (1948), 102.

48 Bawa (1999), 3.

49 Bose (1948), 65.

is indeed the forerunner of the idea of growth with social justice, and a human touch.<sup>50</sup> Gandhi named the six facets of the present day crisis as materialism, poverty, unemployment, inequality, exploitation and environmental imbalance and characterized them as the exhibits of a death dance. He warned that the world was going in the wrong direction and was destroying itself like the proverbial moth which burnt itself in the fire around which it dances. Biological and social sustainability were absolutely essential if progress is to be genuine.<sup>51</sup>

The modern industrial state is based on enormous rise in economic productivity, exchange, and consumption, tremendous increase in trade and commerce, high economic growth in terms of higher income and higher standards of living, scientific and technological progress and cultural advancement through increased education, publications, and communication. These achievements have been made possible through massive industrialization, high technologization, vast colonization — domestic and foreign, expensive governmentalization, large bureaucratization, pervasive indoctrination, widespread ecological mismanagement, heavy militarization and frequent resort to violence for intra and interstate conflicts.

According to Gandhi the negative consequences of the modern system are inherent in the system and are unavoidable. Mass industrialization needs mass production; this needs heavy technology, and this needs resources and this in turn needs colonies; this leads to consumption and this needs indoctrination which is supported by militarization and monopolies. To avoid all these Gandhi advocated small sized, self-sufficient cottage or village industries, with appropriate small technologies. The resources needed would be limited and indigenous; there is no need for huge corporations nor a scheme of consumer indoctrination. The standards of living will be lower but not the standards of life. Gandhi envisioned an economically self-sufficient, politically self-governing, and culturally non-violent village republic. Gandhism is antithetical to the modern industrial military state.<sup>52</sup> He envisaged a powerful economic revolution, rooted in a universal, cost-reduced mode of living, shedding all unwarranted luxuries and paving the way for a decent survival and living for all.

50 Rani (1998), 211–18.

51 See Chowdhry (1997), 389–400.

52 Naidu (1992), 253–59.

## b. Gandhian Concept of Politics

Another aspect of our historical situation about which Gandhi spoke was the area of politics. Here, too, Gandhi had original contributions to make. He believed that political power is for regulating national life. But it should in no way be a hindrance to self-development. He agreed with Thoreau who said that the government is best that governs the least.<sup>53</sup> Only the educated, self developed individual is fit for democracy in the true sense of the word. Freedom is a fundamental longing of the human person and it is the same with communities and nations. Independence is, therefore, independence of the individual. But Gandhi understood it in a very radical sense. It refers first and foremost to the inner freedom of the individual. Self rule is self rule of the individual and only from this the self rule of the nation can proceed. "The outward freedom that we shall attain will only be in exact proportion to the inward freedom to which we may have grown at a given moment."<sup>54</sup>

Freedom is for all. It has to be shared by all, including the starving, toiling millions.<sup>55</sup> True independence and true nationalism do not endanger other nations. "Our nationalism can be no peril to other nations inasmuch as we will exploit none just as we will allow none to exploit us. Through *Swaraj* we would serve the whole world... I would like to see India free and strong so that she may offer herself as a willing and pure sacrifice for the betterment of the world."<sup>56</sup> This was Gandhi's ideal of international peace and cooperation. So he said that his ultimate ideal was universal interdependence than independence. Nationalism cannot be inconsistent with progressive internationalism. This he advocated because he believed in the unity of humankind. "The conception of my patriotism is nothing if it is not always, in every case without exception, consistent with the broadest good of humanity at large."<sup>57</sup> The golden rule was to be friends with the world and to regard the whole human race as one. My idea of nationalism, he said, "is that my country may become free, that if need be, the whole country may die, so that the human race may live."<sup>58</sup> This is the basis of permanent peace. He believed in the possibility of permanent peace because as he said, not to believe in it would be "to disbelieve in the godliness of human nature."<sup>59</sup> It is not realized because of the methods that we have adopted. In order to achieve universal peace one has

53 Bose (1948), 40.

54 Kripalani (1960), 187.

55 Bose (1948), 116.

56 *Ibid.*, 119.

57 Kripalani (1960), 153.

58 *Ibid.*, 156.

59 *Ibid.*, 158.

to denounce imperialistic designs, violence, soul-destroying competition, multiplication of wants, and the insatiable need for material possessions.

Gandhi believed in nonviolence and disarmament. As he said, "if the mad race for armaments continues, it is bound to result in a slaughter such as has never been occurred in history... there is no escape from the impending doom save through a bold and unconditional acceptance of the non-violent method with all its glorious implications."<sup>60</sup> Gandhi wanted to live in a disarmed world. *Satyagraha*, absolute adherence to truth and practice of love and self-suffering were the substitutes for war. Political conflicts should be resolved through peaceful means. The influence of this message on Martin Luther King, the South African struggle, the Polish resistance, the Green Parties of the West, etc. is well known.

Here again Gandhi's message is a spiritual message. Gandhi was perhaps the first great leader who used religion in politics to such great extent. Like all the values of the Gandhian philosophy and thought, his politics, too, emanate from religion. Politics is part of religion. He made no distinction between the two. There is no politics which is devoid of religion. "My politics and all other activities of mine are derived from my religion... For me politics bereft of religion is absolute dirt, ever to be shunned. Politics concern nations and that which concerns the welfare of nations must be one of the concerns of a man who is religiously inclined."<sup>61</sup> The dichotomy between religious values and political norms, ethical principles and political expediency does not exist in his thinking.

### 3. *Human Longing and God: The Overcoming of a False Naturalism*

As I have mentioned at various places in this essay, Gandhi's vision of reality was essentially a spiritual vision. One reason why he called modern civilization a "nine day wonder" was because of its absolute confidence in reason and science and its lack of faith. He was convinced that the "reasoning faculty will raise a thousand issues. Only one thing will save us from these and that is faith."<sup>62</sup> According to Gandhi, the modern civilization "takes note neither of morality nor of religion... This civilization is irreligion... This civilization is such, that one has only to be patient and it will be self-destroyed."<sup>63</sup> These are harsh words.

60 Ibid., 159.

61 Ibid., 90.

62 Mukherjee (1993), xiii.

63 Ibid., 17-18.

Gandhi's critique of science and reason was not without foundations. The modern worldview is based on a severing of relationship between faith and reason. Conceptions involving a transcendent reality are increasingly regarded as beyond the competence of human knowledge, "as useful palliative for man's emotional nature; as aesthetically satisfying imaginative creations; as potentially valuable heuristic assumptions; as necessary bulwark for morality or social cohesion; as political-economic propaganda; as psychologically irrelevant, or meaningless."<sup>64</sup> The triumph of secularism proclaimed that God was "an unnecessary hypothesis."<sup>65</sup> But the triumph of science and reason has not lasted very long. The tentative nature of science and its untoward consequences are apparent.

Gandhi had predicted long ago that modern civilization would turn around and accept the reality of God sooner or later because he strongly believed that man's ultimate aim is the realization of God. "My own experience has led me to the knowledge that the fullest life is impossible without an immovable belief in a Living Law, in obedience of which the whole universe moves."<sup>66</sup> Again, "Man was supposed to be the maker of his own destiny. It is partly true. He can make his destiny only in so far as he is allowed by the Great Power which overrides our intentions, all our plans, and carries out His own plans."<sup>67</sup> He was convinced of the need for God and active morality. He knew that people are not saved by their military leaders or industrial magnates; by their priests or their politicians, but by their saints. Religion is the discipline by which we are helped to overcome the discord and disquiet in our nature and integrate our personality. Religion will produce a new type of human being, fearless, greedless, and hateless.

According to Gandhi, religion should have implications for practical life. A truly religious person cannot but act on behalf of his fellow human beings. Gandhi did this. For him religion was service. For Gandhi, spirituality that has no bearing on and produces no effect on everyday life was an airy 'nothing'. Religion and morality were intimately connected. "Religion is to morality what water is to the seed that is sown in the soil."<sup>68</sup> As I have already pointed out, Gandhi was the first great modern leader who gave religion such a pre-eminent place in all his activities. It is because of this fundamental thrust that

64 Tarnas (1993), 286.

65 Ibid., 308. It was the celebrated reply of the French astronomer and mathematician Pierre Simon Laplace to Napoleon, when questioned about the absence of God in his new theory of the solar system.

66 Bose (1948), 3.

67 Ibid., 6.

68 Bose (1948), 225.



he always emphasized spiritual values, like purity of means, character, duty, lack of the tiniest gap between words and deeds, simplicity, love, compassion, nonviolence, *satyagraha* etc.

What did Gandhi understand by religion? "By religion I do not mean formal religion, or customary religion, but that religion which underlies all religions, which brings us face to face with our Maker... It is not the Hindu religion which I certainly prize above all other religions, but the religion which transcends Hinduism, which changes one's very nature, which binds one indissolubly to the truth within and which ever purifies."<sup>69</sup> It is recognition of an all pervading, unifying, provident principle. "To me God is Truth and Love; God is ethics and morality; God is fearlessness. God is the source of Light and Life... He is conscience. He is even the atheism of the atheist."<sup>70</sup> To reach God service was the only means. "I am endeavouring to see God through humanity, for I know that God is neither in heaven, nor down below, but in everyone."<sup>71</sup> Gandhi said that without religion his whole life, his whole programme would crumble like a pack of cards. "I could not live for a single second without religion. Many of my political friends despair of me because they say that even my politics are derived from religion. And they are right. My politics and all other activities of mine are derived from my religion"<sup>72</sup> because "I could not be leading a religious life unless I identified myself with the whole of mankind... I do not know any religion apart from human activity. It provides a moral basis to all other activities which they would otherwise lack, reducing life to a maze of 'sound and fury signifying nothing.'"<sup>73</sup>

But Gandhi relativized religions. In the context of increasing conflicts (not the grand 'clash of civilizations'<sup>74</sup>), Gandhi's view on religions is worth considering. He believed in religious pluralism. "Religions are different roads converging to the same point. What does it matter that we take different roads, so long as we reach the same goal? In reality, there are as many religions as there are individuals. If a man reaches the heart of his own religion, he has reached the heart of others too."<sup>75</sup> In interreligious relationships, too, the two principles of truth and nonviolence were supreme considerations for him. Therefore, Gandhi always advocated tolerance between religions. In fact mere tolerance is still less than *ahimsa*. Tolerance may still imply a gratuitous as-

69 Kripalani (1960), 73.

70 Ibid., 76.

71 Ibid., 77.

72 Ibid., 90.

73 Ibid.

74 Huntington (1997).

75 Bose (1948), 256.

sumption of the inferiority of other faiths to one's own, but *ahimsa* teaches us positive respect for other religions. This is the sign of a seeker of Truth and all religions are seeking. "The need of the moment is not one religion, but mutual respect and tolerance of the devotees of the different religions. We want to reach not the dead level, but unity and diversity. Any attempt to root out traditions, effects of heredity, climate and other surroundings is not only bound to fail, but is a sacrilege."<sup>76</sup>

He said that one should study other religions. It "will give one a grasp of the rock bottom unity of all religions and afford a glimpse also of the universal and absolute truth which lies beyond the dust of creeds and faith."<sup>77</sup> After careful study of other religions, Gandhi came to the conclusion that, all religions are true, all religions have some error in them, and all religions were almost as dear to him as his own religion, Hinduism.<sup>78</sup> "I believe in the fundamental truth of all great religions of the world. I believe that they are all God-given, and I believe that they were necessary for the people to whom these religions were revealed... I believe that all the great religions of the world are true more or less. I say 'more or less' because I believe that everything the human hand touches by reason of the very fact that human beings are imperfect, becomes imperfect. Perfection is the exclusive attribute of God and it is indescribable, untranslatable."<sup>79</sup>

Gandhi was against conversions. He was influenced by the Jainist theory of *Syadvada* which means that all judgments are relative, conditional, and limited. Gandhi applied this principle to his theory of religion. "I very much like this doctrine of manyness of reality. It is this doctrine that has taught me to judge a Musalman from his own standpoint and a Christian from his own."<sup>80</sup> So Christian mission was particularly opposed by Gandhi because he felt it was unnecessary and moreover every conversion was also an act of alienation. "Your work will be all the richer if you accept as settled fact the faiths of the people you come to serve — faiths which, however crude, are valuable to them. I want you to complement the faith of the people instead of undermining it."<sup>81</sup> Religions would do well to propagate their message through deeds rather than words. "It is better to allow our lives to speak for us than our words."<sup>82</sup> One's preaching should be like that of the rose. "A rose

76 Gandhi (1924b), 317-18.

77 Gandhi (1926), 308.

78 Bose (1948), 258.

79 Kripalani (1960), 79-80.

80 Gandhi (1924), 225.

81 Bose (1948), 259.

82 Gandhi (1927), 251.

does not need to preach. It simply spreads its fragrance. The fragrance is its own sermon."<sup>83</sup> Gandhi also was against all things irrational and oppressive in religion. "I reject any religious doctrine that does not appeal to reason"<sup>84</sup> and again, "I know of no greater sin than to oppress the innocent in the name of God."<sup>85</sup>

Thus regarding religion Gandhi said that it is a fundamental concern of human and societal life. In Gandhism there is a total fusion of the manifold concerns of human beings within the framework of the vision of the universal and all-pervading spirit of truth. The world cannot avoid the recognition of this ultimate spirit of truth. The future of the world will be founded on the extension and expansion of this spirit bringing about harmony among religions.

### *Conclusion*

For many, Gandhi and his ideas are atavistic, a strange and curious quirk of history, a hopelessly romantic nostalgia, an idea whose time has long since past. In the political and economic field, there is scarcely a thought given to the ideals he cherished, the causes he defended, the battles he fought, the techniques he evolved, and the examples he set in word and deed. Outside the political field his very name evokes a doleful indifference. Now and again someone might poke fun at his eccentricities and contradictions. There is little serious attention paid to what he achieved, to what he has come to symbolize for peoples and nations across the world. A quick look at the world in the past 50 years apparently proves them right. Values antithetical to Gandhi define contemporary reality: aggressive materialism, maximization of consumption, a high priority on technological development and industrialization, a glorification of egoism and individualism, and an easy recourse to and often romanticization of violence. Refusal to adopt these values is considered to be dysfunctional and historically irrelevant. Even Gandhi's own country, India, is no exception to this. But has the adoption of these ideals led to enhancement of life or has it led to its debasement? There are very tangible signs which show that the latter is in fact more correct.<sup>86</sup> And that is why I claim that Gandhi is more relevant today than ever.

83 Gandhi (1935), 50.

84 Kripalani (1960), 98.

85 Ibid., 104.

86 Take for example, the number one economic and political power in the world today, USA, which has perfected the Western model. Economically, it is a superpower, but there is a remarkable concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a relatively few, an increasing

I am aware of the fact that there are people who had and have serious reservations about Gandhi's method of human liberation, his resistance to violence, (Ambedkar, for example), and his ambivalence to many issues. It may even seem that this essay holds the view that the contemporary critique of Gandhi should not be taken too seriously. The fact is that in spite of all limitations, Gandhi still remains one of the greatest heroes of humanity. He is one of the best discussed and best documented public figures of all times. While naming the most influential persons of the past century, hardly any respectable survey bypassed him. Identifying Gandhi was as natural as naming the tallest peak, the longest river, and the brightest star in the heavens.<sup>87</sup> What accounts for this commanding popularity? The answer surely lies in his appeal as a quintessentially moral force. Deep down in our inner recesses we all know that he preached and practised values that have stood the test of time in all cultures and civilizations. Few in the world have brought together so many vital themes which are important for humanity today: God, truth, compassion, nonviolence, tolerance, multiculturalism, inclusivism, welfare of all, respect for the earth, unity of all beings and many more. Few in history strove as hard as he did to ensure that there was not the tiniest gap between his beliefs and his actions. Few have fought against the deception of our being through a numbing of our spiritual dimension through violence, injustice,

gap between rich and poor, a significant part of the population that forms a permanent underclass with no hope for the future, widespread poverty, homelessness, lack of health care, etc. Politically, an increasingly meaningless political process in which money power, advertising and manipulation of the media determine outcomes, a shockingly low percentage of voters who even bother to vote, and a widespread cynicism towards politics and politicians in which citizens do not feel that they are an empowered part of a democratic process. Racially, a widening gap between whites and blacks, a significant decrease in the buying power and standard of living of blacks in the past two decades, shocking statistics in which, for example, black males have a lower life expectancy than people in Bangladesh, have more youth in prison than in college, and have a generation of youth living in total despair with no hope ever of acquiring a decent job, and a white backlash against earlier gains resulting in an alarming rise in incidents of racism. Environmentally, the people in power continue to regard nature as little more than something to commodify, dominate, and exploit. On a social and personal level, half of the marriages result in divorce, with the fastest growing family unit being single-headed (overwhelmingly female-headed) and impoverished; there is widespread domestic abuse, alcoholism, and many forms of violence, and a pervasive sense of alienation in which people are separated from meaningful relations with work, nature, family, and community and often try to fill the emptiness in their lives with destructive, illusory forms of hedonistic sexual and materialistic gratification. See Allen, (1994), 133-160. To put it differently, in the United States population has increased by 41% since 1960, violent crimes have increased by 560%, single mothers by 419%, divorces by 300%, children growing up in one-parent families by 300%, and shootings are the second most frequent cause of death after accidents. See Küng, (1995), 786. How do other Western societies fare?

87 Padgaonkar (2000), 2000, 11.

hatred, greed, and the mindless indulgence of the senses. At the beginning of this century, only a few anticipated, like Gandhi, that a social, economic, political and spiritual ruin could emerge from modern civilization. Therefore, Gandhi is not a person whose time has long since past; on the contrary, as Philip Noel-Baker, British delegate to the United Nations remarked at the announcement of the death of Gandhi, one whose greatest achievements are yet to come. That is why we can confidently look up to him for guidance in our great quest for meaning and fulfillment in the midst of the momentous but threatening transformations that are taking place in our world today.

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