

# **The Image of a Liberated Person: A Gandhian Perspective**

Long before the present day liberation movements and theologies of liberation came into existence Mahatma Gandhi involved himself in a variety of liberation-movements. Although he did not produce a formal treatise on philosophy or theology of liberation yet there was an underlying unity and development in the thought and action of Gandhi concerning liberation. He had a very definite view about what human nature is and what the human persons should become. He clearly envisaged the ultimate outcome of the liberation process. This article is an attempt at a systematic presentation of the "projective" aspect of the liberation movements Gandhi initiated and the presuppositions implied in his understanding of human nature.

Gandhi was a deep thinker. But with a difference. He was never interested in a purely academic discussion of an issue. He never had the time nor taste to put his thoughts in a systematic presentation. He was primarily an activist. However before he took up an action he seriously thought about its implications and impact. His thought was a result of his action just as his action itself was based on his thought. Thus there was dialectics between his thought and action. Hence it is useful, first, to recall to mind the main liberation works of Gandhi (part I) and analyse their salient features (part II). In the light of our discussion in the first two parts, it would be easy for us to discern his presuppositions regarding human nature (part III) and to draw out the image of liberation he projects (part IV). The final part concludes with some remarks about the Gandhian image of a liberated person in contrast to certain ideologies related to liberation.

## Part I. Gandhi : A Liberationist

Gandhi was born a common man, but grew to be a superman. He was a shy and timid type of a person in his boyhood but he became the most fearless man, who could go as a "one-man-battalion" in the riot-torn area Noakali. During his student days he was so anxious about his dress and the over-all appearance of his body that he spent at least ten minutes before a mirror while dressing up. However the same person later became a "half-naked Fakir", expressing his total identification with the underfed and underclothed of the country. In the early years of his married life, he was a lustful, selfish, and assertive type of a husband. However he gradually realised in him a supernatural state of being, enjoyed by persons of purity, unselfishness, detachment and universal love. He was indeed a *Mahatma*, a *Jeevan Mukta*, a truly liberated person already-in-this-world.

The real reason for such a change of life was apparently a simple event and an incidental experience. It happened right at the start of his career in South Africa. Gandhi decided to go to South Africa merely for a worldly motive, to earn his livelihood. As soon as he alighted from ship at Natal, he was supposed to travel in a train to his place of work. A first class seat had already been booked for him by his client. However in the middle of his journey, when an English man boarded the same compartment, he was compelled to go to the van compartment. When Gandhi insisted on his right to travel in the same compartment, he was pushed out by the official and a police constable. The only reason was that he happened to be a coloured man. The train steamed away, leaving him alone in the station at Maritzburg. This young man goes and sits in the waiting room, leaving the luggage where it was. Completely shaken by this blatant injustice, he was drawn to a deep thinking mood. Further, as he was shivering in the extremely bitter

cold, he was compelled to meditate upon the whole series of events that took place then.<sup>1</sup>

The train incident did not appear to him as a stray case of injustice wrought against certain individual Mr. Mohan Karamchand Gandhi. Rather it was a pointer to the general attitude of one race to another. It was the colour prejudice that was rampant in South Africa. It revealed to Gandhi the tragic condition to which the Indian immigrants in South Africa were subjected. He perceived that the root cause of it was structural, because the ruling race of the Whites as a whole was exploiting the ruled-class, in and through the various Acts. Hence he resolved to fight for a structural solution, viz. Repeal of Acts. Gandhi decided to fight against racial discrimination not merely at the personal level, but also at an organisational level. He formed the Natal congress to look after the interests of the Indians and continued to be the brain behind it all through his stay. He had gone there only on a year-long contract. Now, however, he had to prolong his stay there. He had to plunge into active politics. He did it with great hardship, snapping his family ties, sacrificing his career, and foregoing his material well-being. After a long struggle of twenty-one years, he succeeded in getting the structural solution, in the repeal of the laws of discrimination.<sup>2</sup>

On his return to India in 1914, Gandhi involved himself in the Indian politics too. The reason was his conclusion that British rule as a 'system' had done irreparable harm to

1. Cf. M. K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography Or The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, 1927, Part II, Ch. VIII. Numerous reprints have been made. So we mention the chapters instead of the pages.
2. For a detailed study refer to M. K. Gandhi, *Satyagraha in South Africa*, Navajivan, Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1928, Second Edition 1950.

India politically and economically, and that administration of the law was prostituted consciously or unconsciously for the benefit of the *exploiter*. Hence he developed a disaffection for the British Government, which in its totality had done more harm to India than any previous system. He even affirmed that he considered it to be a *sin* to have affection for the *system*. He boldly wrote various articles in his weekly against the Government and thus induced the people to develop a disaffection for the Government. He knew well that foreign power was too big a challenge to the natives of the country. Yet he took the challenge. He awakened the people's power. He finally obtained the political liberation of the land.

Gandhi's work for liberation was not restricted to the racial and political realms. It was extended to economic and social realms as well. The Champaran and Kheda Satyagrahas<sup>3</sup> were the best illustrations of his work for economic liberation. Besides such individual satyagrahas, he proposed an overall revolution in the Indian economics. In opposition to the mechanised, highly concentrated and exploitative economy of the western model, he revived the village-oriented, decentralised, economic structures, that were not exploitative in nature. In this way he proposed an over-all revolution in the Indian Economy.<sup>4</sup> This was indeed an expression of his sincere desire to establish justice at all levels and by all possible means. Many saw his approach as outmoded and reactionary, traditionalist and conservative. However in the context of today's energy crisis and environmental pollution the relevance of Gandhi's views is too evident to elaborate.

3. Cf. M. K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography*, Part V, Chs. XII — XIX and XXV.

4. Cf. A. Pushparajan, "A Just and Equitable Economic Order for India: The Gandhian Alternative", *Khadi Gramodyog*, Feb. 1990, Vol. XXXVI, No. 5, 207-224.

Gandhi's commitment to the cause of liberation was indeed very comprehensive so much so that he plunged himself into a struggle even with the people of his own religion, though he knew that it was an area of exploitation coloured with a deeply emotional tinge.<sup>5</sup> He rightly perceived that there was general belief among the caste Hindus that the institution of untouchability had a religious sanction. As against it, he argued that it was 'morbid growth', a 'hideous thing', a 'curse' and a 'device of satan', 'abcesses to be removed'. He unambiguously declared that untouchability was a 'crime against God and man'. Gandhi made it clear that it was repugnant to the fundamental principles of not only Hinduism but also of humanity, equity and justice. Gandhi's liberation work was not only directed 'against' caste Hindus, but also it was directed 'towards' the untouchables. It consisted in educating them to grow in self-respect and forming an Association (Harijan Seva Sangh) for them to serve their interests.

Gandhi's commitment to liberation was so total that it urged him to plunge into the question of women's liberation too.<sup>6</sup> His contributions to this field were of no mean significance. Particular mention may be made about the comprehensive approach he took to their liberation. The question of economic disability, enforced widowhood, the traditional practice of early marriage, *Purdah* wearing, *devadasi* system—all these issues were considered by Gandhi.

5. Cf. A. Pushparajan, "Liberation of Untouchables: A Comparative Study of the Gandhian Techniques with Ambedkar's", K. Arunachalam and S. Jeyapragasam Eds., *The Gandhian Techniques for the Liberation of Weaker Sections*: Sarvodaya Ilakkiya Pannai, Madurai, 1987, 184-216.
6. Cf. A. Pushparajan, "Gandhi's Approach to Women's Liberation", *Journal of Dharma*, Jan-Mar, 1988, Vol. 13, No. 1, 39-63.

## Part II. Specificity of Gandhi's Liberation Work

It is not merely the variety of liberation struggles initiated by Gandhi that makes him a great liberationist. It is rather the spiritualist approach that makes him stand out as a unique liberationist as well as a theologian. It is necessary, therefore, to understand the spiritual aspects of Gandhi's approach to dig out his presuppositions regarding the nature of human person. Let me in this part, try to explain some of the striking features of his spiritualist approach to the liberation struggle.

First it is important to remember that Gandhi had a spiritual goal of life. He himself describes it in his Autobiography :

I count no sacrifice too great for the sake of seeing God face to face : What I want to achieve, and what I have been striving and pinning to achieve these thirty years is self-realisation, to see God face to face, to attain *Moksha*.<sup>7</sup>

In the process of his spiritual pursuit he discovered that he could not find God unless he served the suffering neighbour. That explains his ardent desire to serve the weaker sections of society.

And as I know that God is found more often in the lowliest of his creatures than in the high and the mighty, I am struggling to reach the status of these. I cannot do without their service. Hence my passion for the service of the suppressed class.<sup>8</sup>

No true service of the suppressed classes can be done by offering them mere relief-services. It is also necessary to fight for the abolition of the exploitative structures that

7. M. K. Gandhi, *op. cit.*, 1927, "Introduction".

keep them in bondage. The main reason for Gandhi to enter into politics was precisely to remove their structural bondage. That is why he could say: "I could not be leading a religious life unless I identified myself with the whole of mankind and that I could not do so unless I took part in politics"<sup>9</sup>. In a word, then, Gandhi's involvement in politics, and his struggles for liberation of the weaker sections of society was indeed part of his pursuit of spiritual goal of Self-Realisation.

Another unique point about Gandhi's approach is that while he tried to achieve liberation of the suffering masses, the poor, and the oppressed, he was also keen on liberating the exploiter and the oppressor as well. This did not mean that his aim was to compromise with the oppressor or to yield to his unjust stand. It implied a perceptive analysis of this fact that even the oppressor shares in the same essence of the specifically human. So it implied a distinction between the evil doer and his evil deed. It meant that our struggle for liberation must be directed against an evil-system, created by the evil-doer but not against the evil-doer himself. It meant an application of the religious maxim that "one should love one's enemy"<sup>10</sup> in the social realm. It meant also application of another religious principle: "Do good to evil man." Even while resisting evil man's creation like the exploitative structures and oppressive systems one ought "not take revenge on someone who wrongs one".<sup>11</sup>

The expectation of such an approach is that this will create a change of heart in the evil-doer, and enable him to

8. Nirmal Kumar Bose, *Selections from Gandhi*: Navajivan, Ahmedabad, 1948, Reprint, 1972, 45.
9. R. K. Prabhu and U. R. Rao, Eds., *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*, Oxford University Press, London 1945, 71.
10. Mt. 5:43.
11. Mt. 5:38-39.

remove the oppressive structures he had created either deliberately or unknowingly. The net result will be winning not only justice but also of the heart of the oppressor. In other words, there will be an all round liberation of both the oppressed and the oppressor. Here one may be inclined to ask : "why should the distinction be made between evil-doer and the evil system?" The following is Gandhi's answer :

It is quite proper to resist and attack a system (which is evil and exploitative) but to resist and attack its author is tantamount to resist and attacking oneself. For, we are all tarred with the same brush, and are children of the same Creator, and as such the divine powers within us are infinite. To slight a single human being (even if he is the oppressor) is to slight those divine powers, and thus to harm not only that being but with him the whole world.<sup>12</sup>

Gandhi's answer here brings out his conviction regarding the unity of human nature. And his explanation is deeply religious. Further, the technique Gandhi suggests for an all-round liberation is also religious. It is none other than self-suffering. The non-violent methods of direct action like Civil Disobedience, Non-Co-operation are deeply spiritual techniques. For they are based on "soul force". The agitators are supposed to non-cooperate with the exploitative designs and structure of the oppressor and thereby thwart them. At the same time they are not supposed to harbour any hatred against the oppressor. This is why they were to show their firm determination to resist evil and yet love the evil-doer. This approach besides being spiritual, is certainly expedient also, because it enables the oppressed to convert the enemy into a friend and thus assimilate his strength to themselves.

12. M.K. Gandhi, *op. cit.* Part IV, Ch. IX, last para.

The outcome of the Gandhian non-violent technique is also deeply spiritual. While rising against the most powerful imperialistic system of the world Gandhi rejected sword and bomb. The reason was not only expediency but a clear understanding of human nature. Resistance to oppression by brute force would create in the oppressor a greater determination to carry on oppression much more. This is opposed to the desired spiritual outcome. On the contrary his non-violent techniques galvanised the latent heroism of the ordinary people into challenging the oppressor's brutality. This proved to be both an effective weapon and a deeply spiritual effect. Had the masses been aroused to use their brutal powers against the oppressor, it would only augment the exploitative activities of the oppressor. The oppressor who has already the money-power and man-power with him, when aroused, would make use of them to the maximum to destroy the people's movement however good and well intentioned their resistance may be. This is exactly what has been and is happening in Sri Lanka. Confusion worse confounded is the net-result of the whole effort of the Tigers, instead of the desired liberation. This is precisely the thing that would not happen when we adopt the Gandhian technique of self-suffering. The conquest of the adversary will be the actual consequence of the suffering that the agitator puts on in his self during his resistance movement.

The spiritualist features of Gandhi's approach are discernible in all the liberation struggles of Gandhi. It may serve a useful purpose to analyse a couple of liberation struggles Gandhi initiated and find out how far the spiritualist features are present. First let us take his liberation struggle in South Africa. When he started it, he did not have a blue-print of the method. At first he called his struggle as "Passive Resistance," because it implied readiness to die rather than submit to the unjust, oppressive and exploitative structure. The real aim of Passive Resistance

was not so much to resist evil passively as to actively do good in return to evil and thereby change the heart of the evil-doer. This method of doing good to the evil-doer and yet of not yielding to his evil system was not to be merely a technique to be adopted externally and temporarily. It was to be the principle and basis of the entire life of the liberationists. That is why Gandhi was inclined to name it later as "*Sadagraha*" (reliance or adherence to good conduct). Still later he modified it into "*Satyagraha*" because the whole method was to be based on a firm 'adherence' to Truth. Born of truth, it was to be a force for a *Dharma Yuddha* in which there was no place for untruth, selfish ends or gains. Thus the liberation method of Gandhi was truly a spiritual method, a method free from violence and all untruth, aimed at changing the heart of the exploited as well as the exploiter. The *Satyagraha* Movement, as distinct from "Passive Resistance" took its genesis in 1906. It took eight more years for Gandhi to bring it to a happy ending of the whole struggle. Yet the fact was that his struggle resulted in a deeply spiritual as well as social change. He won the peace that the Indian immigrants in South Africa longed for. At the same time, he got it with full peace with the oppressive rulers.

An analysis of the political struggle for India's Independence will also show a twofold spiritual dimension. First the whole movement for the political liberation was truthful. There was nothing to be hidden from the very rulers whom the movement was directed against. That is why Gandhi, before launching the Civil Disobedience Campaign, communicated all his plans to the Viceroy through a long letter. Furthermore, the purpose of the struggle was not at all to hurt the rulers, but only to change their heart through a non-violent process.

I cannot intentionally hurt anything that lives, much less fellow human beings even if they may do the

greatest wrong to me and mine. Whilst therefore I hold British rule to be a curse, I do not intend to harm a single English man or any legitimate interest he may have in India... my ambition is no less than to convert the British people through non-violence and thus make them see the wrong they have done to India.<sup>13</sup>

It is important to keep in mind that this method of resisting the oppressor without retaliation, offering non-co-operation without hatred became the central point of all the political struggles of Gandhi. That is why, whenever violence occurred in his satyagraha struggles, Gandhi took upon himself voluntary suffering through fasting. Thus the sole aim as well as the result, of Gandhi's struggles was to win the heart of the oppressor through his spiritual technique of non-violence or love.

### **Part III. Gandhi's Presuppositions Regarding Human Nature**

The reason for Gandhi to start his liberation struggles, the manner in which he conducted them, and the ways he trained his *Satyagrahis* and his method of dealing with his opponents are all firmly rooted in his assumptions regarding human nature and its perfectibility. It is by considering those assumptions that one can really appreciate the specific features of Gandhi's liberation movements. Therefore in this section let us make an effort to uncover some of those presuppositions on human nature and present them in a coherent form.

#### *1. The humans set in the context of God-centered World-view*

Gandhiji's whole approach to life is rather spiritualist and ethical while his world-view is a God-centred one.

13. Quoted by B. R. Nanda, *Mahatma Gandhi, A Biography*, George Allen & Unwin, Bombay, Reprint 1971, 26.

It is no wonder, therefore, that Gandhi understands human person only as a part of the God-postulated world-view. A mysterious Power pervades the whole universe, according to Gandhi. While everything around us is ever changing and ever-dying "there is underlying all that change a Living Power that is changeless, that holds altogether, that creates, dissolves and recreates."<sup>14</sup> That Infinite Power or Spirit is what Gandhi calls God. This Power, as he sees it, is purely benevolent. For in the midst of death life persists, in the midst of untruth truth persists, in the midst of darkness light persists. Hence he concludes that "God is Life, Truth and Light." He is Love. He is the supreme God. It is very striking that Gandhi's statement of God's attributes is very similar to the "transcendental categories" of the One (Life), True and Good of the scholastic philosophers of the West.

Gandhi sees human being as the only creature with the spark of the Divine because he or she is the only creature who is independent and autonomous, and who has reason and free will. With such a God-centred World-view, then, it is no wonder that Gandhi stressed that the ultimate aim of a human being is realisation of God and that it was his ultimate aim in life namely the vision of God guided all his activities social, political, religious.

## 2. *Evolution is equally accepted and yet the Human is distinct*

Even as a God-intoxicated man, Gandhi was realistic enough to accept an element of Darwinian view. Even as he considered everything against the background of a God-centred World-view, he conceded the possibility of evolution of the human species from animals. "We were perhaps, all originally brutes" said he. "I am prepared to believe that we have become men by a slow process of evolution from the brutes".<sup>15</sup>

14. R. K. Prabhu and U. R. Rao (Eds.), op. cit., 21.

15. *Harijan*, April 2, 1938, 65.

Today people accept evolution of human being from animal species as a matter of fact. However there is something that is very striking only with regard to the human species. It is what is called the self-reflective power of human person who alone is self-conscious and self-determining. This is precisely what philosophers call the rational faculty of man. So it is customary among philosophers to define human person in terms of "animality" plus "rationality". By animality is meant the brute force, originally got from the earlier evolutes, and by rationality, a special mark that distinguishes this species from the other animals.

3. *'Spirit' is the distinguishing mark of the human*

While the philosophers emphasise the role of reason in the human species, Gandhi postulates a third principle 'soul' besides both animality and rationality. If body and mind are taken to be concrete expressions of the principles of animality and rationality respectively, soul is taken by Gandhi as the expression of God's indwelling in the human. All human persons, according to Gandhi, share in the absolute oneness of God. "The rays of the sun are many through refraction. But they have the same source".<sup>16</sup> He agrees that human being is not God. But he emphatically affirms also "neither is he different from the light (or spark) of God". This is precisely what distinguishes the human species from the rest of Creation. To quote Gandhi's own words :

We were thus born with brute strength, but we were born men to realise God who dwells in us. That indeed is the privilege of man and it distinguishes him from the brute creation.<sup>17</sup>

16. *Young India*, Sep. 1924.

17. *Harijan*, April 2, 1938.

4. *A harmonious development of all the three required*

If the spirit is the really distinguishing mark of human species, then it follows that it must be the governing principle of an individual. If only the other two components (animality and rationality) are subservient to soul, Gandhi said, there will be a harmonious development of the human person. This does not mean that the other components can be neglected. Body representing animal force and intellect the power of reason need to be taken care of and be developed in due proportions. None of them is to be over-stressed as against any other.

Man is neither mere intellect nor the gross animal body, nor the heart or soul alone. A proper and harmonious combination of all three is required for the making of the whole man.<sup>18</sup>

5. *To Respond to the Call of the Spirit is the most important thing for the human being*

Granted that the spirit is the distinguishing mark of the human person and that the other two principles must be made subservient to soul, it follows that a human person is person only in so far as he or she responds to the call of the spirit in respect of both animality and rationality.

The training of animal aspects of human nature is necessary because that alone would distinguish human being from animal kingdom. Gandhi did agree with the view that human being, after countless births in brute creation has already risen to a higher state of evolution. He is able to stand; he is not to walk on all fours, or to crawl. But, he insists, this alone does not make him superior to animal species. For, even as an erect animal he is very similar to all other animals in his performance of such physical func-

18. *Harijan*, May 8, 1937, 104.

tions like eating, sleeping, sex, etc. What makes him superior to animals, is, therefore, his effort to control the physical strength he derived from his animal ancestry and channel it to the call of the Spirit in him. That is why Gandhi says :

The brute nature knows no self-restraint. Man is man because he is capable of, and only in so far as he exercises self-restraint.<sup>19</sup>

The rational power in human being, also must be made subservient to the spirit, according to Gandhi. For, if the reasoning power is unrestrained by the spirit it easily twists its arguments in such a way as to support the animal instincts and thus gives greater scope for fulfilling brute instincts in an ingenious way. With the result, there is likelihood of the human becoming worse than the animal. So there is a need for the reasoning power also to be subservient to the divine spark in human being.

Man must choose either of the two courses, the upward or the downward, but as he has the brute in him he will more easily choose the downward course than the upward, especially when the downward course is presented to him in a beautiful garb.<sup>20</sup>

The human person is bestial in origin. However one is human precisely because one possesses the spark of divinity and because one is essentially divine. This does not mean that Gandhi had a simple dualistic view of the human person. For he clearly affirmed that the human is neither brute nor divine. One is human in so far as one uniquely possesses both the components of brutality and divinity, and yet exercises the powers of divinity. The human has the power to increase either 'brutalization' or 'divinization,

19. M. K. Gandhi, *op. cit.* 1927, Reprint 1976, 238.

20. *Harijan*, August 1940.

of nature. If one chooses the first course, then he or she would not only rely on instinctual violence but would also reinforce it by a cunning in getting what one wants. Thus one would become worse than animal. On the contrary if one chooses the other alternative of increasing one's awareness and realisation of one's innate divinity by a regular restraint of the animal powers, then one will manifest the divine spark with greater effulgence.

In other words, the faculty of Reason, by itself, cannot differentiate the human from the animal kingdom unless it is made subordinate to the principle of Soul. While animals' behaviour is determined by only their instinctive drives, the human alone possesses intellect and will, the powers of discrimination and of choice. With the help of these powers, one may try to control the brute force and redirect it towards progress. Or, one may also decide to make use of one's intelligence to fulfil one's animal desires in unrestrained and indulgent ways. With the result there will be only an increase of violence and more immorality, leading to chaos and confusion, if not complete destruction of humankind itself. That means, Gandhi argues, the brute force cannot be allowed to be simply left under custody of Reason. On the contrary, Reason itself should be guided and governed by the higher power of Soul.

#### 6. *Moral goal the distinguishing mark of the human species*

Animals will go on with their passions and violence as determined by Nature in the restricted and instinctive level. The human alone can respond to the call of the Spirit in him or her. In this way the human alone can rise superior to animals by training and taming the brute passions, selfishness, violence, etc. which are there as a result of animal component. It is in this *striving to rise above the animal nature on the moral plane* that Gandhi sees the distinct mark of the human person. "What distinguishes man from

the brute is his ceaseless striving to rise above the brute on the moral plane". Since human being is a free agent it follows that he or she knows the distinction between virtue and vice, good and evil. It is only when he or she follows his or her higher nature that he or she shows himself or herself higher than the brute :

Man is higher than the brute in his moral instincts and moral institutions. The law of nature as applied to the one is different from the law of nature as applied to the other. Man has reason, discrimination, and free will such as it is. The brute has no such things. It is not a free agent, and knows no distinction between virtue and vice, good and evil. Man, being a free agent, knows these distinctions, and when he follows his higher nature shows himself far superior to the brute, but when he follows his baser nature can show himself lower than the brute.<sup>21</sup>

That is why, for Gandhi, human history is to be determined more by moral laws than by material forces of production (as Marx would have said it) or by the destructive forces of the monarchs.

7. *Non-violence or Love is the determining law of human history*

As Gandhi emphasises the role of morality in human history, he also stresses human freedom, essential to morality. Anything that takes away or diminishes individual freedom of human being is immoral to that extent. Thus anger and violence are immoral in so far as they take away freedom of thought and action. It is in this connection that Gandhi proposes non-violence as the touch-stone of moral pursuit of human being.

21. *Young India*, June 3 1926, 204.

Non-violence, according to him, is the law of human species while violence is the law of the brute. Tracing human history Gandhi shows that human being has been steadily progressing towards *Ahimsa*. Our remote ancestors were cannibals. Then they began to live by chase; and next, came a stage when human beings were ashamed of leading the life of a wandering hunter. Therefore they took to agriculture and settled down to a civilised stable life.

All these stages, according to Gandhi, are signs of progressive *Ahimsa*, diminishing *Himsa*. Had it been otherwise, human species should have been extinct by now even as many of the lower species have disappeared.<sup>22</sup> Following the same line of Gandhi's argument, Acharya Kripalani, a close associate of Gandhi also once said:

Humanity survived because it discovered some other law than that of war and violence. This force of cohesion that united men and women in families, class, groups and nations, negatively put is non-violence, and positively is the law of love, leading to peace and co-operation. All human institutions have progressively passed from the stage of violence and war to that of co-operation and non-violence.<sup>23</sup>

#### 8. *The Human Goal formulated as a religious Goal*

From the way Gandhi places the law of non-violence in human history, it is clear that his understanding of moral pursuit comes closer to the formulation of the religious goal of seeing God face to face and of attaining *Moksha*. This explains why Gandhi very often understands the nature of the

22. M. K. Gandhi *Voice of Truth*, Sriman Narayan Ed., Navajivan, Ahmedabad, 1969, 161.

23. Madhu Dandavate, *Marx and Gandhi*, Popular Prakasham, Bombay, 1977, 44.

human person in terms of God-realisation, a goal, achieved only by restraining of the brute impulses in us. It is with reference to this that Gandhi distinguishes the human species from the rest of creation.

We were perhaps all originally brutes, and I am prepared to believe that we have become men by a slow process of evolution from the brute. We were thus born with brute strength but we were born men in order to realise God who indwells in us. That indeed is the privilege of man and it distinguishes him from the brute creation.<sup>24</sup>

Not only the animal aspects of human beings are to be restrained but also all that is physical must be controlled in such a way that it enables them to go nearer to God every day.

Of all the animal creations of God, man is the only animal who has been created in order that he may know his maker. Man's aim in life is not therefore to add from day to day to his material prospects and to his material possessions but his predominant calling is from day to day to come nearer his own Maker.<sup>25</sup>

It is not sufficient for human beings to be aware of the goal of life. Rather what is more important for one is to strive after the religious goal with due deliberation, restraint and renunciation. To quote Gandhi's own words :

Man has discrimination and reason. Man does not live by bread alone, as the brute does. He uses his reason to worship God and to know Him, and regards the attainment of that knowledge as the *Summum Bonum* of life. The brute, if he can be said to worship God,

24. *Harijan*, April 2, 1938, 65.

25. *Young India*, October 20, 1927.

does so involuntarily. The desire to worship God is inconceivable in the brute, while man can voluntarily worship even Satan. It must therefore, be and is, man's nature to know and find God. When he worships Satan, he acts contrary to his nature. Of course I will not carry conviction to one who makes no distinction between man and the brute. To him virtue and vice are convertible terms. While to the man whose end and aim is realisation of God, even the functions of eating and drinking can be natural only within certain limits. For having knowledge of God as his end, he will not eat or drink for the sake of enjoyment, but solely for sustaining the body. Restraint and renunciation will therefore always be his watch-words even in respect of these functions.<sup>26</sup>

9. *Moral pursuit and Religious pursuit complementary and integral*

It is instructive to observe that what Gandhi states either as moral goal or as religious goal is one and the same thing. What Gandhi advocates is that the principles of animality and rationality in human beings must both be subservient to the higher principle of spirituality. In fact Gandhi always considered religion and morality not as two separate endeavours of human species, but as integral and inseparable aspects of human life.

For me morals, ethics and religion are convertible terms. A moral life without reference to religion is like a house built upon sand. And religion divorced from morality is like 'sounding brass' good only for making a noise and breaking heads. Morality includes truth, ahimsa and continence. Every virtue that mankind has practised is referable to and derived from

26. *Young India*, June 24, 1926, 229-230.

these three fundamental virtues. Non-violence and continence are again derivable from Truth, which for me is God.<sup>27</sup>

It is clear from the above that Gandhi is keen on distinguishing human being from animals only in terms of the one goal of constantly rising above the animal impulses of the human nature, thus making the divine spark more effulgent.

#### 10. *To sum up*

Gandhi considers human nature not only as it is but also what it is capable of becoming. He agrees that all human beings so long as they participate in the animal ancestry and continue to function within that frame are imperfect. He insists that the true self of human being consists in the spiritual element. It is this self-conscious principle that distinguishes the humans from the brute creation and gives immense potentiality for goodness. In other words, although empirically human beings are imperfect and have evil elements, yet they have a divine potentiality in their inmost nature. Therefore they should advance in the path of self-conquest. They should live not merely by habit, by physical behaviour, but also by self-direction, effort of will, a process of prolonged *tapasya* or purification. It is in this connection that Gandhi emphasises the necessary endeavours for the realisation of human perfectibility.

Some people may consider this ceaseless striving a moral goal. However, Gandhi would prefer to call it a religious goal. What he meant by religion was that "which changes one's very nature, which binds one indissoluble to the truth within and which even purifies". It is a permanent element in human nature. It counts no cost too great to find full expression. It leaves the soul utterly restless until

27. *Harijan*, October 3, 1936, 268-269.

it has found its Maker and appreciated the true correspondence between the Maker and itself.

#### **Part IV. Some Implications for Praxis**

Gandhi explicated his presuppositions about human nature not out of academic interests but out of his praxis. He arrived at those insights into human nature only during his actual involvement in the liberation struggle. Those insights themselves had a far reaching consequence upon his commitment to liberation. Hence it is important for us to draw out their implications.

One of the principal presuppositions of Gandhi is that the humans alone are endowed with the image of God. Consequently he held that "we were born men to realise God who dwells in us". However, it is obvious that not every one of humankind exhibits the image of God in his or her person. Gandhi thinks that his position is not at all affected by this fact. He argues that it is enough to show that one individual at least has done so :

That some of us do not recognize that status of ours, makes no difference except that then we do not get the benefit of the status, even as a lion brought up in the company of sheep may not know his own status and therefore does not receive its benefits; but it belongs to him nevertheless, and, the moment he realizes it, he begins to exercise his dominion over the sheep. But no sheep masquerading as a lion can ever attain the leonine status.<sup>28</sup>

What the great religious teachers of humanity have done is nothing but to exhibit the image of God in their persons. That is enough for Gandhi to prove that human being is made in the image of God. Further he argues that even if

28. *Young India*, July 1926.

one human being gains spiritually, the whole world gains with him and if one individual falls the whole world falls to that extent.<sup>29</sup> There is no single virtue that perfects the individual alone. Conversely there is not a single moral offence that does not affect many others, directly or indirectly.

Gandhi's conviction regarding the perfectibility of human nature is not merely a moral conviction but is really based upon metaphysical views, theistic as well as advaitic. His theistic argument runs as follows :

If we are all sons of the same God, and partake of the same divine essence, we must partake of the sin of every person whether he belongs to us or to another race.<sup>30</sup>

In its advaitic formulation Gandhi's argument is this : "The soul is one in all. Its possibilities are therefore the same for every one". There is no "individual liberation" at all for Gandhi. This explains why Gandhi soon realized that the only way to get self-realization was service of humankind. This also explains why he exalted the ideals and aspirations of all those weaker sections that he came across during the different phases of his life : the Indian indentured labourers in South Africa, the Untouchables, the peasants, the weavers, the workers and the teeming millions of the poor and needy in the country, the sick and the leper in his *ashram*. Gandhi's love for the suffering sections of humanity was so profound that he expressed it not merely sentimentally but also through the immediate service, done as a necessary part of his own religious pursuit.

29. M. K. Gandhi, *Ethical Religion*, Ed. Ganesan, Madras, 1922.

30. *Young India*, October 1931.

Gandhi's service to the weaker sections of humanity was not to be restricted to merely relief-services. Rather, it was to extend itself as a struggle for liberation of people from unjust structures. Gandhi's political career itself is an illustration of his liberation-work directed against the two greatest organized institutions of his times—the government of the Union of South Africa and the Imperialistic empire of Britain.

A unique feature of Gandhi's liberation work was that it was not aimed at making some external changes in organizations. Surely there were to be structural changes. But they were to be caused by conquering the oppressors, by enabling their moral faculties, and eliminating the desire of domination and oppression. The fundamental and ultimate solutions of the economic and political changes were to be sought through a moral and psychological approach. It was to consist in a religious "re-making" of human being.

Gandhi believed in touching the heart of the oppressor, and in converting the opponent into a colleague and helper, because he realized the immanent presence of God even in oppressors. Gandhi sincerely believed in at least the dormant presence of the divine element even in the Nazis. He felt that the active non-violence of the Jews could melt their stoniest hearts. Hence he wanted the German Jews to have practised organized, prayerful, non-violent resistance against the Nazis, instead of being passively killed.

All aspects of the human person—the physical, social, political, economic and intellectual—do not exhaust the human confines and possibilities. Human being is basically a spirit, which provides unity to the different phases of his existence. Hence according to Gandhi, a comprehensive psycho-spiritual solution is needed. It is possible to get it only by energizing moral sensibilities and moving the heart

of the oppressor. Hence it is that he laid great stress on the moral and spiritual rather than on the intellectual and institutional aspects of his approach.

It is in this context the adoption of voluntary suffering, by the Satyagrahi takes on a great significance in Gandhian praxis.

Suffering is the law of human beings, war is the law of the jungle. But suffering is infinitely more powerful than the law of the jungle for converting the opponent and opening his ears, which are otherwise shut to the voice of reason. The appeal of reason is more to the head, but the penetration of the heart comes from suffering. It opens up the inner understanding of man. Suffering is the badge of the human race, not the sword.<sup>31</sup>

Gandhi believed in the inherent goodness of human nature, in spite of its admixture of evil tendencies, arising out of the flesh. It is more natural for human beings to be good than to be evil. Although apparently descent may seem easier than ascent, Gandhi firmly believed that humankind by nature is going higher. The rise and growth of social organizations in human societies show clearly that there is at least a partial improvement of morals in human nature. In primitive societies it was customary to kill whomsoever was not a member of that society. But today cannibalism is a rarity. There is greater stability in human family system. This only shows triumph of love and affection. Even in other realms of social, economic and political life, both nationally and internationally, there is a gradual lessening of areas of conflicts. Instead, one finds more and more dialogue, co-operation, mutual aid as operative

31. As quoted by Raghavan N. Iyer, *The Moral and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1973, 287.

forces of human life. All this is a clear indication of the gradual acceptance of moral qualities and social virtues, love, co-operation, mutual aid etc. as preponderant over violence, selfishness, deceit and conquest. In this context Gandhi's firm faith in the steady progress of humankind towards '*ahimsa*' becomes substantiated. His stress on the technique of cultivation of altruistic virtues and feelings so as to bring about a change in human nature becomes more meaningful. It is only in this way human progress can be realized.

### **Conclusion**

From what has been said above it is possible for us to visualise the image of the liberated person according to Gandhi. The human person in the existing conditions is indeed an admixture. There are in us evil tendencies and inherent inclination for goodness, a rare combination of imperfect body and self-conscious spirit. A truly liberated person is one who succeeds in bringing about an organic, integral and harmonious development of all his parts, by making the animal aspects and rational faculties subservient to the spirit or divine element. This development is itself not to be aimed at as an individual liberation or one's own perfection at merely the subjective level, but it ought to be a means for involving in liberation struggles of the weaker sections of society. However care must be taken that the efforts at liberation of the weaker sections are not restricted to the merely organisational or structural transformation. Rather the changes of social structures must be accomplished by a heart-change of the oppressor and also of the oppressed. While the oppressed fight against the oppressor, if they are keen on changing their own psycho-moral conditions, through adoption of voluntary suffering, then it will have lasting effects on the human progress as a whole.

In fine, the image of a liberated person as envisaged by Gandhi comprehends an integral development of the

human person; it goes beyond mere individual perfection for its own sake; it involves the self in struggles of liberation so as to bring about structural changes in society as well. This is achieved through means of voluntary suffering which leads not only to the libetation of the oppressed but also the regeneration and conversion of the oppressor who then truly becomes an associate in the process of liberation.

**Dr. A. Pushparajan**