AHIMSA:
GAUTAMA TO GANDHI
PREFACE

The spirituality of a nation cannot be judged from the sanctity of a few or from the teachings of a handful of sages. The spirituality of a people has to be judged from the way of life of the people taken as a whole. And spirituality of the Indian people lies in their way of life. Ahimsa, in fact, is essentially the essence of Indian spirituality. Ahimsa literally means non-injury but is often translated as non-violence. But then ahimsa implies a lot more than what simple non-violence indicates. However, the unfortunate equating of the word non-violence has given rise to a lot of misunderstanding about the concept of ahimsa.

Ahimsa inspires the individual and the nation to achieve complete harmony with all the noble impulses of human nature. Ahimsa has been one of the most significant aspects of life in India. I have tried, in this book, to study and evaluate the concept and practice of ahimsa as it evolved in India over the centuries. I have been greatly helped in the preparation of the book, by Prof Indu Bhusan Mazumdar who, while insisting that this was not a field for mathematicians, condescended many a time to discuss some topics and read through a part of the manuscript. I wish to express my debt and gratitude to Prof Mazumdar. I am also grateful to P.C. Roy Chaudhury who went through the entire manuscript before it went to press.

George Kotturan
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Introduction

I have heard it said by many visitors: "India is wonderful!" What is so wonderful about India? Spirituality?

Are we so greatly spiritual as all that? In recent years Hippies have been finding spiritual exhilaration here in the elusive heaven created by *Ganja*, *Charas* and *Bhang*. Beatles and other juvenile idols have also been coming for transcendentlal meditation and the like. Well, all this no doubt are pleasing to our national ego—but should we consider ourselves spiritual?

Our western critics are also sarcastic at times. Are the huge gatherings at the *ghats* signs of Indian spirituality, they ask. They are of course looking for spirituality at the wrong place!

Religion in all lands and ages has been misunderstood by credulous masses as consisting of some superficial observances, at times outrightly ridiculous and superstitious. There is nothing uncommon in old people of pious disposition
trecking long distances and undergoing untold miseries simply to dip into the holy waters to wash off their sins. But to regard the huge gatherings at the ghats as signs of the spiritual greatness of a nation is to miss the point altogether.

This western misunderstanding of Indian spirituality springs, perhaps, from the western way of looking at religion as the sum total of spirituality. Since they identify spirituality with religion, the strength of the Sunday congregation for them is an effective yardstick to measure the spirituality of a people. But in India a man could be a saint without even once going to the temple. Actually Indian spirituality is outside the pale of religion.

Foreign ignorance of the spiritual heritage of India is something colossal. Unfortunately India's own ignorance of it is no less. It must be remembered that the oppressive social evils that Hindu India has come to possess have nothing in common with Indian spirituality. But in many cases the common people have come to regard them as the essence of that spiritual greatness of which they hear a lot and which they have come to be proud of. So they arrogantly stick to these evils in spite of the miseries they cause to themselves and to others.

For one thing few have tried to clear up what really constitutes spirituality. Could one consider a nation spiritual because they are a very ancient people or because they happen to be in possession of some ancient religious texts? No. Neither is it possible to judge the spirituality of a nation from the sanctity of a few or from the teachings of one or two individual sages. The spirituality of a people should be judged from the way of life of the people taken as a whole.

Spirituality of the Indian people lies in their way of life. A serious seeker would not take long to recognize an all pervading ideal that unconsciously guides the life of the Indian people. That ideal is the ideal of ahimsa. One may go to Kashmir or Kanyakumari, Bengal or Bombay, Badrinath or Varanasi, there is no doubt about it—he will not fail to notice its latent hold on the scheme of things all round, guiding the destinies of men. It is a part and parcel of the Indian way of life and living. Ahimsa, in fact, is essentially the essence of Indian spirituality.
WHAT IS AHIMSA?

Ahimsa literally means non-injury, but is often translated as non-violence. However, neither non-violence nor non-injury actually brings forth the correct meaning of the word in all its perspective. Non-violence is the best approximation, but then ahimsa implies a lot more than what simple non-violence indicates.

It is the unfortunate equating of the word as non-violence that has given rise to a lot of misunderstanding about the concept of ahimsa. Some people have come to identify it with pacifism. Pacifism is a movement which outlaws war—participation in war under any circumstances either individually or collectively is declared wrong. It is an extremist anti-war movement which arises as a reaction to the death and suffering caused by wars. But ahimsa is different; it does not stop after calling a halt to war and the use of force. It inspires the individual and the nation to achieve complete harmony with all the noble impulses of human nature.

There is a mistaken notion that a man of ahimsa is an unpractical man, a good-for-nothing recluse who takes life as it comes, even violence and evil in its train. But that is not so. Resistance to evil is a paramount necessity to anybody who has put his faith in this creed. All violence springs from evil, and evil should be resisted. We must not shrink or flinch, we must resist; and resist in peace with the weapon of ahimsa. This is the passive resistance of Mahatma Gandhi of which we will have occasion to see more in detail later. Ahimsa therefore calls for fearless action—both in resisting evil and in doing good.

Ahimsa is again far from being defeatist in its outlook. The apparent complacence of the Indian masses to their economic ills should not be attributed to their tradition of non-violence. In fact the Indian masses are fast awakening to the realization of their social and economic rights. How India would tackle this problem of economic distribution, and social and political adjustment to the needs of a rapidly industrializing society would be the paramount test of its faith in this noble creed of ahimsa.

There is no doubt that Indian civilization has something deeply human about it. Wanton killing and destruction is foreign
to the spirit of humanity of the Indian people. The orgy of communal violence of the recent past is as much foreign to the spirit of Indian humanism as also the aggressive nationalism that has led to these unfortunate orgies. The very concept of nationalism is contrary to the spirit of ahimsa. The bases of nationalism are divisive factors like race, religion, caste or country to which ahimsa attaches no significance.

Non-injury is the most important tenet of ahimsa. Non-injury includes non-injury to all living things whether man, animal or insects. Ahimsa is an altruistic faith, a faith based on the sanctity of all creation. Life is precious and no man shall injure it, because even in the lowest of the low dwells a part of the eternal Parabrahma, the Absolute. Injury even by thought or word is a sin against humanity.

And so is enmity, anger and hatred. How can anybody hate his own self, the self that is in all beings? Anger blinds reason and leads one to himsa, violence. And enmity even in one's own subconscious should be given up. One may be up against evil.

A man of ahimsa should stand up against the spirit of evil, but with ill-will to none. No man is free from evil, then why persecute the evil-doer. One must try to win him over to the right path.

Ahimsa has another role, that of karuna or compassion. It calls forth positive action to alleviate the sufferings of humanity. One should not be satisfied with his own well-being; he should strive for the well-being of all. Lord Buddha is spoken of as the compassionate one, because of his infinite compassion for all beings which manifested itself in his untiring endeavour to lead men to right path—the path of ahimsa. Emperor Asoka was a man of ahimsa, not only because he gave up war and violence but also because he was a man of charity whose unfailing benevolence reached all the distressed and the needy.

Tolerance is another element of ahimsa. Nothing is more dear to Indian life and thought than the spirit of tolerance. It is nowhere so much pronounced as in the thought and philosophy of Hinduism itself, the dominant religion of the sub-continent. Hindu India is eclectic and has welcomed into its fold alien cultures and alien people with tolerance unknown
in other parts of the world. The Indian culture is never dead, because it is ever willing to strike synthesis which leads to perpetual growth and enlargement of vision and sense of values.

Ahimsa is universal. Difference of caste, creed and race are immaterial—all men and women are equal. The boundaries of faith, nation or state are not truly Indian. The true Indian spirit is universal, embracing the whole of humanity.

Ahimsa glorifies tapasya or austerity. One should not be a mere slave to a life of pleasure. Abjure equally pleasure and pain. All religious codes of the Indians extol it, especially the codes of Jainism. However, the Jain ascetics take it to an extreme point and inflict on their bodies painful injuries as a part of their austere life. To this day at the initiation of a Jain monk to their order, his hair is not shaved but pulled out. A Jain monk seldom eats, the greatest virtue according to them, is to die of starvation!

This extreme form of austerities again is not in the spirit of true ahimsa. One should not carry self-mortification to an extent that would imply violence to one’s own self.

Ahimsa implies non-attachment to samsara, the worldly existence. Life should be like a lotus; it may have its roots in the mud of samsara, but should ever rise above it, always shining in truth and purity. Nothing is more dangerous than to be deeply involved in samsara. As Dhammapada says, “Look upon the world as you would on a bubble, look upon it as a mirage: the king of death does not see him who thus looks down upon the world.”

This, however, should not lead one to a life of dejection or disaffection. All life is sacred, a part of the eternal Parabrahma—the Absolute. How could anybody look upon it with repulsion or contempt? There is nothing more divine than service to living things. The non-attachment to worldly life frees one from the bondage of self and selfish interests and should lead him to more service to fellow beings. That is why we see Sri Ramakrishna insisting on his followers to go forth into the world and serve the poor with a sense of dedication.

Love without attachment, strength without malice, non-violence without inaction, tolerance without fear, peace without being cowardly, and a life devoid of all extremes of passions
like anger, enmity, pleasure and pain make up the ideal of ahimsa. It is earthly, and at the same time intensely spiritual. It is a way of life, an Indian way of living.

Ahimsa is a progressive ideology. Life is never static, it is ever changing. And consequently the concept of ahima comes to embrace all aspects of human life. Successive teachers have defined its tenets to suit the requirements of their age. Buddha was faced with problems peculiar to his time and place, and defined its tenets conforming to its needs. Gandhiji had to face problems of a different nature and he developed and renewed the teachings so as to suit modern requirements. To understand ahimsa fully, one should know the tradition, the social and spiritual tradition of the Indian people from Gautama to Gandhi.

AHIMSA IS PRE-BUDDHIST

Indian history for most people begins with Aryan invasion and immigration. Some go further back and talk about Dravidian conquest and colonization! In recent years some historians have begun to take interest in pre-Aryan India, notably after the excavations in Harappa and Mohenjodaro. Even then the life and thought of the pre-Aryan India have not received the attention it deserves from Indian scholars. A lot of religious and philosophical thoughts that we have come to consider as completely Aryan have perhaps a Dravidian or pre-Aryan origin.

The Aryans began their onward march towards India sometime in the second millennium before Christ. They probably wandered into the country in search of fresh pastures, and came in successive waves consisting of different clans and tribes. They met with determined opposition from the aborigines. There was much fighting and confrontation for power and position as the hymns of the Rigveda clearly indicate. In course of time the Aryans came to establish their supremacy in the country.

It is possible that these Aryans were not culturally or spiritually as advanced as the people they had replaced. Were not the Aryans nomads? The ferocious, uncivilized Aryans conquering and subduing a more civilized and cultured people is nothing too difficult to imagine. In recorded history itself
parallels are numerous. Perhaps the Aryans afterwards realized the greatness of the people they had conquered and so incorporated in their thoughts and worship whatsoever they found desirable. Did not the enduring charm of Rome tame the savage Hun and make him a devotee of the Roman gods?

The pre-Aryan contribution to the thought and culture of the Indian people must have been very substantial. More and more evidence is forthcoming to the effect that the Hindu gods and goddesses, at least some of them, are of indigenous origin; perhaps worshipped by the aborigines centuries before the coming of the Aryans. Could the white Aryans have conceived the image of Kali? Perhaps some form of thought and worship underwent changes to suit the mood of the Aryan conquerers. Thus the roots of more popular customs and beliefs must have been pre-Aryan.

Historians are all agreed that Indian history and culture have an unbroken continuity. In the past it has withstood the challenge of Islam, in the middle ages and in recent years the dramatic onslaught of the west. There is something unique in the vitality of Indian culture. If Indian culture and civilization has an unbroken continuity after the coming of the Aryans, why should not this continuity be extended to the pre-Aryan days? We cannot put a date to it. The concept of ahimsa, perfected and publicized by Gautama, is possibly far more ancient than Aryan invasion and immigration.

It is also possible that the concept of ahimsa rose as a reaction against the Vedic practices of the Aryans. Early Aryan thought is based on Vedic practices. The nomadic Aryans after having settled down in the fertile plains of Hindustan and getting rich and affluent must have increased the frequency and contents of the sacrifices. The empty rituals of the sacrifices alone could not have satisfied the religious cravings of the people who had now a settled life and leisure. They started questioning the efficacy of rites and rituals enjoined in the Vedas. A series of metaphysical discussions and philosophical speculations followed and there was something like a chaos in the religious life of the people. Perhaps out of this chaos arose ahimsa as a wholesome ethical doctrine. Or rather the doctrine of ahimsa which was already in existence got renewed and revitalized.
The sixth century before Christ was a remarkable period of Indian history. The Aryan colonization was almost complete and there was comparative peace in the political life. But there was an upsurge in social and spiritual spheres as it usually happens at the times of interaction of cultures. The period of Aryan and non-Aryan tension was over. They had now come together for useful exchange of views and values. New ideas were in the making, and the old ones were being renewed and reshaped.

The result was an increase in the number of religious sects and sub-sects in the country. Many of these pre-Buddha and pre-Jina sects could have had the principle of ahimsa enshrined in their teachings. For instance, we know of the sage Suma, a sixth century moralist belonging to the Vinayavadin sect, whose unbending ethical code seemed to have made a mark on the people of the period. But the literature available on his teachings is very scanty and we cannot say how far they were according to the principle of ahimsa. Also, many of these sects died out at the onslaught of Jainism and Buddhism so that they could make very little impression on the social and religious life of the country.

Historically, the first time that we come across ahimsa teachings is in the religious code of the Jains. The Jain traditions put a very remote origin to their faith and count Mahavira, an elder contemporary of Buddha, as their twenty-fourth and last Tirthankara or religious prophet. They believe that their faith was founded by one Risabhadeva centuries before Mahavira, long before the coming of the Aryans. If so, the beginning of ahimsa is far too remote. But then Risabhadeva is not an historical person and we have no knowledge of his teachings. However, amongst the wandering hermits of the Jain sect and perhaps of other sects too, the concept of ahimsa must have existed as a cardinal virtue before the coming of Mahavira.

Nevertheless, in whatever form the ahimsa teachings existed before Mahavira is more of guess work. Only when we come to the teachings of Mahavira we are on sure grounds. Mahavira, the forerunner of Buddha, is definitely a towering personality and deserves a more detailed study.
MAHAVIRA, THE JINA

Mahavira was born in a suburb of Vaishali in 599 B.C., a few years before the birth of Buddha. He was the second son of Siddhartha, a Kshatriya chieftain of the clan of Jnatrikas. His mother, princess Trishali was the sister of the then ruler of Vaishali. He was named Vardhamana or the prosperous one, because it is said that with his birth the wealth and fame of his family increased. He was also called Mahavira, the great hero. Through his mother, Mahavira was connected with many royal families of the time.

There are legends woven around the birth of this great teacher. One such legend tells us that Mahavira was first conceived in the womb of a Brahmin woman. But it had never happened for a prophet to be born in a Brahmin family. The great god Indra realizing the mistake in time sent one of his generals to the earth and had the embryo removed to the womb of the princess of Trishali. Still preserved in Madura is a sculpture depicting the scene of this transference. The legend is significant; the reaction against the hitherto Brahmin supremacy in religious life had already set in.

Early in life Mahavira must have come in close contact with the teachings of Parsva, according to the Jains, the twenty-third of the Tirthankaras of the Jain church—Mahavira himself being the twenty-fourth and the last. Both his parents were lay-disciples of Parsva and hence he must be considered to have been brought up in the Jain tradition.

Mahavira did not at once leave everything to embrace the life of an ascetic. In his thirteenth year he married one Yosoda and started life as a pious house-holder. A daughter was born of this union who subsequently became the wife of Janali, a great disciple of Mahavira. Nevertheless Mahavira’s mind would not stay in samsara or worldly existence. He was getting tired of it and yearned for spiritual emancipation.

When his parents were dead, he decided that he should not carry on this meaningless worldly existence any longer. At the age of thirty he left his home with the permission of his elder brother Nandivardhana who had by then succeeded his father as the head of the family. He set out to lead the life of a homeless ascetic. Mahavira left his home in early winter,
which shows that from the very outset he was out to practice the most severe mortification of the body. He wandered from place to place begging for his bread; meditating, disputing and subjecting his body to austerities of all kind. That is how he began his search for truth.

Mahavira wandered about speaking but little and eating just enough to keep his body and soul together. He led a solitary life, shunned the company of women and carefully avoided injuring even the meanest form of life. It is said that for a number of years he went without using cold water. In winter he meditated in the open and in summer exposed himself to heat and thirst. For days and weeks he remained in the same posture without the slightest motion, steeped in mental concentration. After thirteen years of ascetic life, he found full enlightenment. Mahavira became Jina, the victor.

Mahavira, now recognized as the twenty-fourth Tirthankara of the Jain church, came forth with a system of thought predominantly ethical in character. He faced the religious problems of the day from a rational point of view. He had no use of rites and rituals sanctioned in the Vedas; he condemned them as unethical and violent. He based his teachings on abhimsa, abstinence from all injury to life.

During the lifetime of the master, Jain teachings came to be very popular in the country. The people confused as they were with the prevalent instability and religious chaos were only too willing to follow in his footsteps. His intensity of belief and strength of conviction impressed people and many followed his path. His connections with the royal families of the time must have greatly helped to get him converts from the Kshatriya aristocracy. Jains claim that the king Ajatasatru, the son and successor of Bimbisara of Magadha was an adherent of Jainism.

Mahavira organized his followers into a religious community consisting of four main divisions, monks and nuns, lay brothers and lay sisters. The monks and nuns naturally formed the corner-stone of the movement. In Mahavira's own lifetime he had some fifty thousand monks of both sexes as his followers. Eleven of them he chose as his principal disciples, called Ganadharas, and established his religious community on a firm foundation. The foundation was so
strong and the organization so well-knit that it could effectively withstand the storms of successive invasions and persecutions. The strict observances and beliefs of the Jain church to this day remain very much the same as at the time of Mahavira.

For thirty years Mahavira preached his doctrine to the people. At the age of seventy-two he ‘decided’ to forsake the world and attain nirvana. He was then living in the house of King Hastipala and is said to have died of self-starvation, the ideal form of death that he himself preached to his followers. The place of his death, Pavapuri, in the district of Patna in Bihar is still visited every year by thousands of Jain pilgrims.

**AHIMSA IN JAINISM**

Jainism is the first religious faith in the world which incorporated within it the principles of ahimsa as a part of its teachings. Since ahimsa occurs as a cardinal precept in Jainism we can infer that this teaching was there as a part of the faith before the coming of Mahavira. In Mahavira’s religious philosophy no place is given to the Supreme Being. He disputed all the efforts of the philosophers of the day to prove the existence of God. He contended that man’s emancipation did not depend upon the mercy of any such Super-Being. Man is the architect of his own destiny, one has to strive for his salvation. In his onward march for liberation he could find inspiration by meditating on the already liberated souls, the Jinas. This is how Jains have come to worship their Tirthankaras, their prophets who serve as ideals for ordinary men.

Jains believe in *karma* and transmigration. It is *karma* that keeps the soul in bondage. *karma* is desire or craving that is accumulated in the individual by the sum total of his past deeds in this birth and previous births. There are two natures in man, the spiritual and the material. *Karma* is responsible for the material nature to stick to the soul for keeping it in bondage. After death the soul does not become free, rather it transmigrates and comes to inhabit different bodies according to its *karma*. The soul is perfect but is driven by the blind force of *karma* to seek rebirth.

*Nirvana* or salvation lies in the deliverance of the soul from the bondage of *karma*. The path of deliverance lies through right knowledge, right faith, and right conduct. These
are what the Jains call the three gems, *triratnas*, that should brighten the life of a good man. They lead to the destruction of *karma* and the attainment of *nirvana*. Thus the soul becomes liberated from continual birth and rebirth and attains spiritual bliss.

Right knowledge is the knowledge of reality without doubt or error. To acquire this knowledge one should study the teachings of the Tirthankaras who have attained liberation and are therefore fit to lead others. Right faith is an essential preliminary for right knowledge. It consists in an insight into the truths as proclaimed by the prophets of Jainism. Right knowledge in itself is not enough, if it is not followed by right conduct. Right conduct consists in controlling the passions, the senses, the thoughts, the speech and action so as to cultivate an attitude of "neutrality without desire or aversion towards the objects of the external world."

The right conduct is based on the fivefold moral code which Jains call *panchamahavrata* which tenets of ahimsa. This fivefold moral code names killing as the biggest sin. Killing includes harming or hurting not only humans or animals but also insects and plants, because Jains believe that even plants are in possession of souls. Pious Jains do not take to agriculture as it involves killing worms and insects. The Jain divines even breathe through a piece of cloth tied over their mouth, lest they inhale and destroy the life of any organism floating in the air! It is this morbid fear of injuring life that governs the life of orthodox Jains.

The other rules of the moral code are actually contributory regulations to the main rule of ahimsa. The second stresses truthfulness, *satyam*, in one’s dealings with others. *Astyam* or abstinence from stealing is the third rule. The fourth is *brahmacharya* or celibacy and fifth is *aparigraha* or renunciation of all worldly interests.

Jainism attaches great importance to universal tolerance, again an active ingredient of the principle of ahimsa. Mahavira never said that there was no salvation outside his path. Jainism proclaims, "no matter whether he is Svetambara, or Digambara, a Buddhist or follower of any other creed, one who looks on all creatures as his own self, attains salvation."

So too the recognition of the equality of all men and
women—nay the equality of all beings. This stands in great contrast to the prevalent practice of casteism which was then becoming more and more pronounced in Indian social order. "The essence of the wisdom of a wiseman," says the Jain scripture Uttaradhyayana Sutra, "lies in this that he hurts no creature: to be equal-minded to all creatures and regard them as one's own self is ahimsa. Learn this noble truth."

After the death of Mahavira Jainism flourished in India. It came under royal patronage. It is said that Chandragupta Mauriya in his old age became a disciple of a Jain monk Bhadrabahnu and went with him to South India to preach the doctrine. Anyway, it is definite that Jainism did spread to the Deccan especially to Tamilnadu. The teachings and life of Mahavira and his disciples greatly influenced the people of the South. Jain monasteries developed into centres of learning and culture, and spread the expansion of ahimsa to all corners of India.

In the fourth century A.D. there was a split in the Jain community. The Digambaras, that is skyclads, insisted on a strict interpretation of the teachings of the masters. They wandered about in naked groups completely cut off from the world, only interested in performing austerities to attain salvation. The Svetambaras or the whiteclads stood for a more liberal interpretation of the teachings of the masters and were less austere than the Digambaras. The two sects exist to this day.

The influence of Jainism on the thought and culture of India has been considerable. The prevalent practice of vegetarianism should be attributed more to Jainism than to Buddhism. However, in the study of ahimsa, Jainism deserves only a secondary place because of its extremism which is not in the spirit of true ahimsa. Again, the form of asceticism which it encourages including physical torture and starvation is repugnant to the passive idealism of ahimsa.
In a study of ahimsa the life and teachings of Gautama, the Buddha, take first place. Though the concept of ahimsa perhaps existed in one form or the other before him, it was only after him that it began to exert a lasting influence on the life and thought of the Indian people.

Gautama was born at an important juncture of history. The Aryans had now already settled down in different parts of India, in and around the Gangetic plains and the lowlands of the Himalayas. They were beginning to conceive a new sense of values far removed from those of a wandering tribe. They were no longer satisfied with the simple devotional hymns of the Rigveda. They wanted to have something higher and more intellectual to satisfy their religious cravings. The forest sages began to speculate about the problems of reality, of the individual soul and the world soul, which gave the rise to speculative philosophy that is built up in the Upanishads.
The old simple Vedic religion started developing into a mere ritualistic institution. The Brahmin priestly class built up the edifice of casteism which had fast deteriorated into a religious oligarchy of Aryans. There was a reaction, against this rise of Brahminism, especially amongst the warrior caste. Men of critical disposition could not have kept quiet in the face of this ridiculous position of getting Brahmin priests to intercede between God and men.

The uncertainty in the religious life of the time can be understood from the large number of religious sects and sub-sects that this age produced. As many as one hundred or more sects existed in the country at the time. Amongst them were the Jains, the Ajivikas and others. They were at loggerheads with one another, each trying to establish supremacy in the country. The endless wrangling of religious sects could not have conduced to maintain a sense of spiritual peace in men.

Politically there was absolutely no threat to the supremacy of the Aryans. They, or rather the many clans of the Aryans had established themselves in different regions of Northern India which they called Aryavarta and there was peace and stability in the country. The country had been divided into small kingdoms and small principalities of self-governing communities. Magadha with its capital at Rajagriha was the chief of the kingdoms, everyday gaining in power and strength over all the others. Then there was Kosala with its capital at Sravasti in close rivalry with Magadha in power and prestige. The clan of the Licchavis was the most established and powerful self-governing community. Then there were the Sakyas, in which community Gautama was born.

The period was critical from a social point of view. The political stability had been achieved to a great extent by the division of society into different strata of a rigid caste system with varying degrees of rights and privileges. The Aryans themselves were divided into the higher castes; Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaisya. The aborigines who were willing to serve the Aryan conquerors were made Sudras and the others were thrown out of the pale of society as outcasts and untouchables. The people were struggling under the grip of an
oppressive social order. The times were ripe for an emancipator who would lead them to the right path.

That emancipator was Gautama who became Buddha and preached his code of ahimsa as the foundation for social progress and communal harmony.

**THE LIFE OF GAUTAMA**

Gautama, his own name was Siddhartha, was born at Lumbini gardens, four miles inside the present Indo-Nepal border, in the year 566 B.C. There, in Lumbini, an inscribed pillar, erected by the emperor Asoka, still records that the venerable monk Upagupta pointed to Buddha’s birth place, saying, “Here, great King, the Venerable One was born. Here was the first memorial consecrated to the Enlightened One.”

Gautama was the son of Sudhdodana, the chief of the Sakya clan and was heir to the Sakya principality of Kapilavastu. His birth and life are steeped in legends and miraculous events and it is hard to get to the truth of his early life. The legendary Buddha is beautifully poetized by Edwin Arnold in his immortal work on the life of Buddha, *The Light of Asia*.

Unfortunately seven days after Siddhartha’s birth his mother, queen Mahamaya died and the boy was brought up by Prajapati Gautami, Mahamaya’s sister and Sudhdodana’s second queen. Siddhartha—Gautama was his family name—right through his life had a deep-rooted affection for his foster mother Gautami who had brought him up as her own son.

As a boy he must have been clever and intelligent. His education was looked after by wise and learned Brahmmins. He must have been instructed in the Vedas and other scriptures of contemporary Hinduism. Buddhist chroniclers say that he was so good at his lessons that he gained the admiration of his own teachers. His superior intelligence is said to have aroused jealousy in his companion and cousin Devadatta. And he was a boy of contemplative disposition.

Young Siddhartha learned archery, fencing and other princely callings. As was the wont with the sons of the nobility in those days he must have lived a life of ease and luxury in the palace befitting his status as the son of Sudhdodana, the Sakya chieftain. However, his father noticed
that prince Siddhartha was different from other princes. He found out that prince Siddhartha was much too sensitive to suffering, whether it be suffering of man or animal. King Suddhodana apprehended that his only son might come to forsake the world, if he should see too much suffering. So he arranged that only the young and happy ever came to his sight. All sorrow, disease and misery were scrupulously kept away from him.

In course of time Siddhartha settled down as a householder after marrying his cousin Yasodhara, the sister of Devadatta. Young Siddhartha who was then only sixteen was naturally very fond of his beautiful wife. Soon a son, Rahula, was born to him. He was becoming a man of the world with a wife and son to claim his love and affection. These entanglements further helped to upset Siddhartha's peace of mind. The endless suffering which began to unfold to his search, and the supreme uncertainty of life and death weighed heavily on his sensitive mind. His own life of ease and luxury in the midst of all these sufferings depressed him, and he longed to escape from \textit{samsara}, worldly existence.

The legend is that Gautama came to renounce the world after meeting with four signs. One day while driving along the road in the company of his faithful charioteer Channa, he saw an aged man, weak and withering. Siddhartha enquired of his charioteer who that being was, and was told that old age and weakness were the common lot of mankind. This was the first sign; the second came in the form of a sick man scorched by fever and disease. Some days later Gautama saw the corpse of a man being carried to the burning ghat for cremation. He was told by Channa that all life ended in death.

These signs of suffering weighed heavily on Gautama's imagination and he remained in a state of mental unrest, in a sort of spiritual obsession. But the fourth sign gave him the much-needed hope. In a few days while he was again driving with Channa, he met an ascetic in an orange coloured robe. The serenity and peacefulness of his face impressed the troubled Gautama, who decided to follow his example and renounce the world to become an ascetic.

Gautama was twenty-nine when he made up his mind to renounce the world. He chose one night to run away from
the palace. Before he left he wished to have a last look at his beloved wife Yasodhara and his child Rahula. At the dead of night he stole into his wife’s bed-chamber. He saw Yasodhara fast asleep with one of her hands resting on her baby’s head. The affectionate father that he was, he longed to take the child into his arms for a last embrace. But he was afraid, it might awake his wife and he would be again chained to the life of the palace. He did not dare even a second look; he hurried to escape.

Gautama went forth to the forest. He cast off his princely dignity and put on yellow robes. Gautama, the prince became Sakyamuni, the sage of the Sakyas. He first tried to find spiritual peace in the study of philosophy. He went to Rajagriha, the Magadha capital, and stayed there for some time in the hermitage of sage Arda Kalama. There he is said to have come into contact with the intricacies of the Sankhya system of philosophy. But it could not satisfy him. Neither could he find truth in the different systems of philosophies of the age.

Then in the hope of wearing out karma and obtaining final bliss Gautama withdrew to the forest and there together with five disciples began to practise severe penance. He fasted and put his body to all sort of mortification. He nearly killed himself, but still he could not attain his goal. One day he was so much worn out by penance and hunger that he fainted. His five disciples took him for dead. But after a while he recovered his consciousness and realized that his fast and mortification had been fruitless. He came to the conclusion that extreme austerities did not lead the way to enlightenment. And he began to take solid food. At this his disciples left him in disgust; they could not have followed an unbeliever.

Undaunted, Gautama continued his search. He was now free from the world, and equally so from old beliefs and outdated practices. He decided that prolonged meditation was the only hope to attain ultimate wisdom. He chose a charming spot on the outskirts of Gaya as venue of his meditation. Sujata, the daughter of a nearby farmer, brought him a large bowl of rice boiled in milk. After eating it, he bathed, and in the evening sat under a peepal tree. He sat facing East on a bed of grass and made a solemn vow, “Never from this seat
will I stir until I have attained the supreme and absolute wisdom.'"

Legendary accounts speak of the tempting by god Mara, the evil spirit, at this juncture of his search for truth. Mara first held out before him visions of Kapilavastu; his home, his beautiful wife Yasodhara and his comely son Rahula. Mara urged him to return home. But Gautama sat unmoved. Mara then called his demon hosts and attacked him with whirlwinds, tempests, floods and earthquakes. He then tried gentler means; he called his three daughters, Desire, Pleasure, and Passion, to dance and sing before him. They tried all their diabolical means of seduction to pull him out of his meditation. Their wiles, however, proved ineffectual on the determined Gautama. At last the demon host gave up his struggle and Gautama was left alone. He sank deeper and deeper into his meditation.

Then came sambudhi (enlightenment) at the dawn of the fortieth day. Gautama knew the truth. Light came to him like a flash, and he awoke fully conscious of a new wisdom. He had found the way, he had understood why the world was unhappy and why was there so much suffering. Prince Siddhartha became Buddha, the enlightened one.

THE SERMON AT SARNATH

For weeks Gautama remained in blissful contemplation of his newly acquired wisdom. The enlightened Gautama felt charged with a mission to preach and save the struggling humanity. But then on second thoughts he realized that what he had experienced was beyond speech; at any rate he felt that ordinary mortals could not possibly grasp the full import of the truth that he had come to realize. He was sorry for the world, but then he thought it prudent to keep quiet. We are told by Buddhist chroniclers that only after the intervention of the supreme God Brahma, Buddha at last agreed to teach the world his noble path.

Now, the question arose as to where to begin his preaching. Buddha thought that his first duty was to enlighten his five former disciples who were then residing at Sarnath near Varanasi continuing their penances. So to Sarnath noble Buddha turned his steps in search of his five disciples. It is
said that at first the disciples when they met their old Guru, teacher, were unwilling to listen to him or even respect him as a Guru. But the great teacher prevailed upon them and to these five Buddha preached his first sermon setting in motion what the Buddhists call, 'the wheel of righteousness.'

The sermon at Sarnath starts with a definition of the middle path which the Tathagata that is the Buddha followed for gaining enlightenment. Buddha exhorts his disciples that a life of extreme penance and mortification is as much to be avoided as a life of ease and luxury. "These two extremes, monks, are not to be practised by one who has gone forth from the world. What are the two? That conjoined with the passions and luxury, low, vulgar, common, ignoble and useless. Avoiding these two extremes the Tathagata has gained the enlightenment of the middle path, which produces insight and knowledge, and tends to calm, to higher knowledge, enlightenment, nirvana."

Then the sermon continues to explain the path of dharma or righteousness. The Buddha proclaims that what is needed is a correct understanding of truth. One should realize that there is suffering (dukha), that it has a cause (samudya), that it can be destroyed (nirodha), and that there is a path for its destruction (marga). These are what are known as the four noble truths of Buddhism, Aryasatya, expounded by the Buddha in his first sermon at Sarnath.

The first truth is that there is great suffering in the world. From birth to death the very life is steeped in misery. Is not the birth itself painful? So is death. Old age is miserable, sickness is miserable and so are dejection, despair and defeat. One does not have to look far to realize the universality of this truth. Everywhere there is suffering. One is troubled by loneliness, disappointment or separation from the near and dear ones. Another is sorry because he had a close friend or relative. Yet another is unhappy because he does not get what he wants and so on.

What is the cause of all these sufferings? Trishna or craving is the root cause of all sufferings. It is the craving for pleasure, the craving for happiness, the craving for existence that create passion for rebirth. The craving of the individual leads to his karma and because of his karma the individual is
born again and again in continuous transmigrations.

The third noble truth is that worldly existence, and hence its accompanied suffering, can be ended by the destruction of *karma*. The best escape therefore is to annihilate *karma* keeping aloof from all cravings. Once the craving ceases, the *karma* begins to wean and the individual is released from birth and rebirth. To be born according to *karma* is to take up the burden of existence; and to lay it down is to attain the supreme bliss of *nirvana*.

The fourth noble truth shows the way of deliverance. The way is the wellknown eightfold path, *astanga*, of the Buddhist faith. They are right view, right resolution, right speech, right action, right means of livelihood, right effort, right mindedness, and right concentration. This eightfold path ensures a life of virtue and leads one to enlightened detachment from the world. Each step in this noble path leads to the ideal of righteousness that Buddhism aims at.

Right view is the right understanding of life. One must get rid of all superstitions and believe only in things that can be perceived by reasoning and meditation. Truth must be perceived instead of dallying with untruth. There is no greater impediment which hinders progress of mankind than the impediment of ignorance. Set aside falsehood and come face to face with truth. Understand life with its many manifestations. Only such an understanding would lead one to right resolutions. Right resolution implies the intention to act according to the truths based on right view. Life should be viewed as a whole and the equality of all creation must be accepted. If one should believe in social and racial differences, one's resolutions are also bound to be baneful to the world. It is essential that each individual should come to the right knowledge of truth and resolve to base his life on it.

Right view and right resolution should naturally lead one to right speech, right action, and right means of livelihood. Unblemished action devoid of selfishness, cruelty and violence is what one should strive for. There is no room for enmity, hatred or anger in righteous action. One should look upon all living things with compassion and should cultivate charity, benevolence and a spirit of service. And control the tongue, because a loose tongue can bring about great harm and un-
thinkable violence. In one’s speech one must practise austerity and it is necessary to be on guard against uncharitable remarks. Choose the words carefully, they should be free from lies, anger, abuse, calumny, and slander of all sorts. And it is necessary for one to earn his own livelihood. It is wrong to depend for one’s livelihood on the sufferings of others. In the process of getting one’s livelihood he should be above all non-violent in thought and action. Cheating, bribing, corruption and other anti-social activities are condemned. Governed by right speech, right action and right means of livelihood one becomes a man of virtue socially and morally and thus becomes an asset to society.

The last three; namely right effort, right mindedness and right concentration, are intended to lead one towards the goal of nirvana or salvation. Right effort consists in strenuous endeavour for one’s mental and moral elevation. He should first give up bad habits that he might possess and cultivate good habits. One, of course, has to acquire the necessary will-power to work for salvation. Right mindedness is keeping the mind always alert to steer the activities of the body and mind on the right path. Mind must be made unattached; it should be indifferent to pleasure and pain. It is no good to get entangled in the affairs of the world. One should be completely free from evil and selfish cravings of all sort before one can prepare one’s mind for right concentration.

The right concentration is essential to get rid of attachment to the world of senses. By concentrating rightly one reaches the goal of meditation. The spirituality of Buddha is based on meditation. Meditate on life, meditate on suffering, on desire which is the cause of suffering, and meditate on the right path, the eightfold noble path which would relieve all desire and save the world from suffering. Right concentration would lead one to the full realization of truth and ultimately to salvation.

The sermon at Sarnath does not define the precepts of ahimsa. But it sets down concrete principles which should govern life. The sermon glorifies the middle path which is recognized as the Buddhist way of life. The avoidance of extremes is in itself an ahimsa virtue and is the basis of compromise and co-operation between individuals and nations.
One must be unattached to the external world; but that should not lead him to complete renunciation. Buddha rejects the Jain approach of extreme asceticism as a sort of intemperance like lust or unruly desire. What Buddha preaches is the passive idealism of the golden mean.

Throughout the sermon one is faced with a line of refreshing reasoning. Life must be lived on the basis of truth and truth is that there is suffering in the world and it has a cause and the cause can be removed by the right moral conduct envisaged in the eightfold noble path. Hearing the sermon the five former disciples once again became followers of the Buddha. That was the beginning of the Buddhist sangha or order that was soon to gain immense strength as an instrument for the propagation of the teachings of the Buddha.

The sermon at Sarnath heralds the beginning of a movement based on ahimsa. It is not meant as an intellectual exercise in metaphysics or philosophical elucidation of existence. It actually deals with sorrow which is universal and suggests a remedy by ahimsa means. The remedy is primarily ethical which is meant to heal the moral disease of mankind. The sermon sets in motion the wheel of righteousness to preach to the whole humanity a religion of love, peace, harmony and understanding.

**PREACHING OF THE RIGHT PATH**

From Sarnath, Gautama went to Gaya where he gave his famous fire sermon. In this sermon, Gautama enlarged his idea of craving which is at the root of all evil. It is craving that is aflame in the life of man. He says:

“All things, O mendicants, are aflame, the eye is aflame; and all sensations that arise from these impressions received through the eye are aflame. And what is the flame? It is the flame of lust, of anger, and of infatuation; birth, old age, death, mourning, and despair; all are set on fire with this flame.”

Once started, Gautama did not rest. He went out to many places preaching and converting people to his path. He was a great preacher and could easily move the people with compassion. He met in his wanderings many ascetics, refuted their false doctrines and converted them. The conversion of ascen-
tics, especially Brahmins to the path, must have given to his movement extra prestige in the eyes of the world.

Another convert was the fire-worshipping Brahmin priest Kassapa, afterwards the venerable Mahakassapa who was to succeed Buddha as the leader of the Sangha. He became the foremost disciple of the master, well versed in all his teachings and endowed with great wisdom and acute mystical insight. Then there was the rich young man, Yasa who left all his worldly possessions, to follow the master. There were many others who saw the greatness of the Gautama’s teachings and became his disciples to follow his Dharma.

It was not only these Brahmin intellectuals who were attracted to the teachings of Buddha. He had many adherents from the rich and influential sections of society. Bimbisara, the king of Magadha, received him, listened to his discourses and is said to have been converted. It is said that the great king allotted him a garden to build a monastery for the Sangha. Then there was Anandapidika a rich merchant of Sravasti, who after being converted to the path purchased Jetavana for the use of the master. Jetavana was a favourite resort of the Buddha and many of his religious discourses took place here.

Buddha went to his birthplace Kapilavastu only to welcome to the fold his father and his foster mother, as also his wife and son. His son, Rahula, whom he had left as a baby, met him at the gate of the palace. It is said that Yasodhara made the boy ask his father—now the glorious figure in yellow robes—for his inheritance. Buddha thereupon turned to his disciple Sariputra and said; “Receive him into the order.”

To grasp the full import of the teachings of Gautama, it is necessary to know the life of the master and study the utterances he made on different occasions. It should not be forgotten that after Gautama received enlightenment he lived for many years with people, advising them and guiding them in all spheres of life. It is from these utterances and also from the life of the master himself that one can really grasp the spirit of his true ahimsa dharma.

Violence is not to be met by violence, violence is to be met by love and forgiveness. There was once a foolish young man who came to Gautama and abused him for nothing. The master remained calm and unoffended and the young man was
surprised. How could anybody remain so calm in the face of such wanton provocation? That is the way of the Buddha. To his anxious enquiry Gautama replied:

"My son, thou hast railed at me, but I decline to accept thy abuse and request thee to keep it thyself. Will it not be a source of misery to thee? As the echo belongs to the sound, and the shadow to the substance, so misery will overtake the evil-doer without fail."

On another occasion we see the compassionate Gautama accepting the invitation of the courtesan Ambapali. It happened that on the same day the powerful Licchavi nobles wanted to be host to the now renowned teacher. But Gautama refused to accept their invitation so that the humble sinner Ambapali would have the pleasure of welcoming him. At this it is said that the Licchavi nobles got furious, but Gautama stuck to his path, he was as much a friend of the poor and the lonely as of the rich and the powerful.

In fact Gautama's greatest concern was the poor and the humble. He exhorted his disciples to scatter in all directions to teach the new path to all people—high and low, dasas and kiratas—irrespective of race, tribe or caste. He did not believe in preaching the doctrine to the rich and educated only. In order to have greater contact with the common man he preached his dharma in the popular tongue of the time, Pali, instead of the scholarly Sanskrit. The early Buddhist scriptures are all written in Pali and to this day scholars have to learn Pali before starting any serious study of the doctrines of the Buddha.

Buddha had from all accounts of his disciples a captivating personality full of love and compassion. One touch of his majestic sweetness was enough to convert the most dissipated individual. He took the country as if by storm and won the hearts of men by his deep-rooted humanism. He did not claim any divinity for himself, he was one amongst the mortals, but he spoke the words of wisdom and became the emancipator of the world by showing the path of ahimsa, the path of righteousness. His success was profound and his influence on the moral consciousness of the Indian people has been most abiding.

Gautama preached for forty years, and the end came at
the age of eighty outside Kusinagha, some hundred miles from Varanasi. There he told his favourite disciple Ananda, who for many years was his personal attendant, that his body was now like a worn out cart. Till the last moment Gautama was alert and keen to clear the doubts of his disciples on the right path. Finally he turned to them:

"You may think that word ends when the teacher goes; but it is not so. The law and the rules of the order which I have laid will be your teacher."

In infinite contentment, watched and nursed by his favourite disciples Gautama, the Buddha, attained *parinirvana*. It is said that Gautama was cremated with royal honours. But after the cremation a dispute arose amongst his followers about the possession of his relics. A point was reached when they were willing to come to blows on this issue. A bloody battle for the possession of the mortal remains of the great teacher of non-violence just after his death was averted only by the division of the relics. Strange indeed are the ways of the world!

**THE BUDDHIST SANGHA**

The compassionate Buddha wanted all men to see truth and be saved. Burning with an intensive zeal for the happiness of humanity he bid his followers:

"Go forth on a journey that shall be for the good of many and for their happiness. Go forth in compassion towards the world for the welfare of gods and men. Go forth in pairs, but to each his own work. Teach the beneficent law; reveal the holy life of men blinded with the dust of desire. They perish for lack of knowledge. Teach them the law."

To realize the goal of converting the whole of mankind steeped in desire, hatred, and violence to the path of peace and universal benevolence was not easy. Buddha, of course, had many followers everyday gaining in strength and popularity. He found that these followers should be organized so as to make it an effective instrument for the propagation of the faith. It was necessary to build up an administrative machinery and a tradition to hold his followers together and guide them in their work of mercy. Gautama constituted the Buddhist
church under two wings—the monks and the lay-disciples. The wandering monks he organized into the Sangha, order. It was to be the duty and responsibility of the Sangha to lead the people in the right path, and watch and guide their everyday life and activity.

The Sangha was an organization in an ahimsa setting. Its aim was moral and spiritual regeneration of mankind by raising an army of ahimsa soldiers to live in the word but detached from worldliness and ever ready to apply a spiritual remedy to heal all suffering. The monks of the Sangha were not to be mere sanyasins in the old sense of the world, but were to be torch-bearers of a new order; an order destined to lead humanity to the path of peace and spiritual blessedness. They were to uphold the middle-path, the path of the Buddha.

Rigorous indeed was to be the training of the monks. No man could lead the path who had not the requisite moral and spiritual strength. Buddha himself watched their training and laid down elaborate schedules to make his men stern and faultless. The young people who in their first flush of enthusiasm followed the Buddha, had to be trained in a life of denial and self-sacrifice. It was not always easy to discipline them bodily and mentally to be the instructors of the dharma to the millions.

In the Sangha discipline naturally took the first place. The greatest care was taken for the discipline of the senses. It was the will that was to be supreme and all bodily functions should be made subordinate to the will. One must fully realize the transitory nature of the body by meditating on the purity of the soul. We see once Buddha advising a young monk-trainee who found it difficult to concentrate on the purity of the soul to meditate upon a snow-white napkin as a symbol of purity. At any rate the effort to subjugate the senses should be continued relentlessly. He says:

"May muscle, skin, and sinews, may bones, flesh, blood shrivel and dry up rather than I should abandon my efforts while as yet I have not attained to all that is attainable by human perseverance, energy and effort."

It is self-control that Buddha puts forth as the greatest acquisition for the monks of the Sangha. The Sangha built up an intensive system of meditation and mind-culture for the
monks. The path of monkhood was difficult and many had to leave before they could attain the highest perfection.

As the training was rigorous, so the life of the ordained monks was to be very simple, chaste and austere free from attachment to senses and fully oriented for spiritual quest. Buddha himself framed the rules of the Sangha. Detailed procedures were laid down for the ordination of the new monks, and the place of the newly ordained monks in the Sangha was defined. Buddha left instructions even on the choice of the place where the monasteries were to be situated, how the monasteries were to be constructed and maintained, and so on. Though Buddha did not favour extreme austerity in the life of the monks, rules were laid down so that they would live a life of absolute chastity and temperance. Monks were to live on the alms given by the faithful. Even the dress that monks were to wear prescribed. They were to put on a uniform garment dyed yellow.

The constitution of the Sangha, as laid down by Buddha, was democratic. The Buddhist Sangha was perhaps the first democratic religious institution in the world. The monks of the Sangha were to elect their own office-bearers. Buddha himself did not nominate a successor, he enjoined his disciples living within a definite boundary to form a Sangha and to elect their own leaders. There were provisions in the constitution of the Sangha for fortnightly meetings of the monks of a locality when discourses were to be held on religious questions and decisions were to be taken.

Consistent with the ideal of the equality of all men Gautama allowed no distinction of caste, class, or race in the Sangha. Because of the social set-up of the time perhaps a greater part of the monks of the Sangha were drawn from the Brahmin caste. But men of the other castes and even untouchables had equal chance of entering into the Sangha and rising to positions of responsibility and leadership in the organization. Sunita, a renowned monk of the order, was an untouchable road-scavenger in the city of Rajagriha and he was ordained a monk by the master himself.

Buddha established a special order of nuns too. Though he recognized the equality of men and women he was at first very reluctant to allow women taking to holy orders because
of the complications that it would produce in the disciplinary code of the Sangha. But Prajapati Gautami, his foster mother, was insistent and through the intercession of his favourite disciple Ananda, he at last agreed.

The nuns came to play an important part in the propagation of Buddhist Dharma. There were amongst them venerable leaders who attained the highest level of spirituality as the psalm of the sisters testify. Punika, a slave girl of the lay-disciple Anandapindika, is said to have been wiser than the wisest and Canda, the daughter of a Brahmin was equal to any monk in saintliness. By their example to renunciation and purity of life they made the Sangha venerated throughout the country.

As the Sangha grew up in strength and popularity its solidarity suffered. In the life time of the master itself internal dissension raised its ugly head in the Sangha. In the city of Kosambi a quarrel arose between two monks which soon developed into faction fight. Naturally, Buddha had to mediate in the dispute and the way he handled it was truely characteristic of his ahimsa approach. He was not interested in pronouncing a verdict on anybody’s guilt. He asked them to abjure hatred and anger and patch up their differences with a spirit of compromise and understanding.

The cause of discord in the Sangha was often the philosophical wrangling amongst the monks with which the age was ripe. Buddha advised them not to get entangled into metaphysical speculations. He insisted that it was unnecessary and foolish to go after philosophy when the facts of life were clear. He said:

Whether the world be without ending or not without ending, still there is birth, decay, sorrow, lamentations, despair and death, and it is the way to the transcending of these things that a truth-finder teaches.

**GAUTAMA’S CONCEPT OF AHIMSA**

What Gautama preached was not actually a religious creed but a way of life. He glorified life well-lived according to the dictates of the right law which was equated with righteous living. He declared:

To pervade the world with kindness, pity, sympathy,
and equable feeling—that is the way to union with Brahma.

Buddha did not call for supernatural revelations or mystical dogmas in support of his simple teachings. The path he preached was well within the bounds of pure reason. His creed was in fact independent of dogma and priesthood, sacrifice and sacraments. Like Mahavira, Buddha too did not even take God into consideration. Controversies regarding God—whether He exists or not, whether He gives salvation or not, according to Buddha are beside the point. It is interesting to note that the great prophet of ahimsa, the greatest product of Indian spirituality was not a man of God, but a man of reason.

As a social philosopher Gautama was quick to realize that peace could reign only in a society based firmly on the equality of the individual. There could only be strife and struggle in a society based on the caste system. The Aryans, belonging as they did to the three higher castes were the privileged class. Then there were the Sudras who were the underprivileged and the Chandalas or the untouchables who were beyond the pale of society. This state of affairs revolted the sense of fairplay of Buddha who upheld the right of every individual in society, whether he be an Aryan, a Dravidian, a Chandala, or a Kirata, or a man of any race or creed.

Gautama rejected the division of society into four castes and showed that nobility was not a matter of birth but of conduct. He said that the Brahmin’s claim to social and spiritual superiority was untenable in the light of reason. He ridiculed the popular notion which maintained that Brahmans were born of Brahma’s mouth and others were born of other parts of Brahma’s body. All are born out of womb and so are all equal. Buddha would call anybody a Brahmin if he was a votary of ahimsa. He said:

Him I call a Brahmin who is free from anger, who gladly endures reproach, and even stripes and bonds inflicted upon him without cause. Him I call a Brahmin who slays no living creatures, who does not kill or cause to be killed any living thing. He indeed is born of Brahma, a Brahma-farer, living the God-life.

In Gautama the Sudras and the untouchables found an
emancipator. The hitherto oppressed aspirations of the Dravidians and other conquered races found in him a revolu-
tionary who brought about social reforms in a new way. 
Gautama introduced new dimensions in social thinking and 
perfected the ahimsa approach for social and communal 
harmony. He wanted to do away with forces like race and 
colour which tend to divide humanity.

Based on the equality of the individual the good society 
should be built on a basis of peace and non-violence. The 
dealings between individuals and groups; Gautama contended 
should be governed by a code of conduct which is contained 
in the famous five principles or Panchsheel. The five principles 
are—not to kill, not to steal, not to tell lies, not to commit 
adultery, and not to use intoxicants. These five principles are 
the cardinal tenets of Buddhist ahimsa. It does not matter 
what you are, a peasant or a prince, what matters is your 
honesty and righteousness. Peace and prosperity would come 
to dwell in a society based on these moral precepts.

To Buddha, life is sacred. To kill is a sin, be it done by 
a priest or a king. Bloody sacrifices to please supposed 
deities are declared wrong and condemned in no uncertain 
terms. We have already seen how as a boy his compassion 
was aroused at the sight of an injured bird. This compassion 
in his mature years manifested itself into a universal altruistic 
love. He exhorts:

"Just as a mother as long as she lives cares for her only 
child, so should man feel an all-embracing love to all 
living beings."

However, even in his advocacy of non-killing we see the 
strain of sweet reasonableness in Gautama's approach. He did 
not share the extremism of the Jains who considered any kill-
ning no matter where or in what circumstances as sin. Gautama 
argued that in that case no one would be saved since everyone 
would have killed something some time or the other. He 
declared that it was enough to be fully awake to be evil inherent 
in the slaying of any creature. What should be considered as 
of paramount importance is the loving kindness, the universal 
compassion that one should feel for all beings.

Gautama visualizes a society based on love, compassion 
and forbearance. He contends that violence is unnatural to
man. Violence would only induce more violence. Violence is not to be met by violence, neither is hatred to be met by hatred, because, "Never in this world hatred ceases by hatred, hatred ceases by love."

One must cultivate the habit of loving his enemy. Social harmony is maintained only if individuals can forget and forgive the wrongs done by others. One must have only good will for all. "He abused me, he beat me, he defeated me, he robbed me"—one should not harbour such feelings against others. The parable of the saw gives a unique exposition of this spirit of forgiveness that should guide the life of individuals. Supposing a band of highway robbers catch you, and with a saw dismember you, limb by limb, what would be your reaction? Gautama says:

Unsullied shall our mind remain, neither shall evil word escape our lips. Kind and compassionate ever, we will abide loving of heart nor harbour secret hate. And those robbers will be permeated with stream of loving thought unfailing; and forth from them proceeding, enfold and permeate the whole wide world with constant thoughts of loving kindness, ample expanding, measureless; free from enmity, free from all ill will.

Gautama calls himself the teacher of annihilation. He says:

I teach annihilation—the annihilation namely, of greed, the annihilation of anger, the annihilation of delusion, as well as the annihilation of the manifold evil, unwholesome conditions of the mind.

Gautama sought to abolish all evil from the affairs of men. Violence is evil, so are hatred, enmity, anger and envy which ultimately lead to violence. Men must see truth and lead a virtuous life fully in tune with existence.

One who has given up violence and has replaced hatred by love is at peace with the world and with himself. Bitterness, anger and envy would never sully his thought and all unfriendly feelings would remain foreign to his spirit of universal benevolence. He is a true follower of ahimsa and will ever remain happy.

In international affairs Buddha points the way for peaceful co-existence and co-operation. Tolerance is a virtue in
individuals as well as in nations. Nations might differ in social systems, religious faiths, and racial traits, but then they should learn to live in a spirit of give and take. The alternative is war, and war is an offence against humanity. It is the duty and responsibility of every individual to promote peace and understanding between nations. That is how one can be a true follower of ahimsa. It is no wonder that we often see the great teacher in his life-time in the role of a peacemaker.

Gautama maintained that the progress of mankind must be evenly balanced between material and spiritual values. While man must live, plough, cultivate, and trade, it is essential that he does not forget the spiritual values of life. To the Brahmin householder Kasibharadvaja who accosted Gautama once with the plea that everyone should ‘sow’ if he wanted to eat, Gautama said that he too grew food—food of another kind. This spiritual food, he insisted, was as necessary for the growth of man as any other food that is grown in the field. Material progress without a corresponding spiritual attainment will lead to only disharmony and misery.

Gautama was not faced with an economic problem of the present-day magnitude. But he fully endorsed that riches should not be considered as the exclusive possession of their owner. The owner must feel happy that he has been blessed with those riches so that he could use them for the good of all. Gandhi asked the rich to consider themselves the trustees of their wealth. Gautama said:

The one who uses his riches rightly and gives his wealth away is like a clear pellucid lake near a village where folk may bathe, or draw water for drinking.

At the time of Gautama’s death, Buddhism was already a growing force in the country. With its simple and straight-forward approach to the problems of life it attracted many people to its teachings. Because it left its doors open to all—to the ascetics and householders, to the high castes and untouchables, to the rich and the poor—its popularity must have been tremendous. Already there must have been great public awareness of the moral values that Buddha preached. Ahimsa, as exemplified by the life and teachings of the great prophet, had slowly begun to enter into the everyday life of the land.
Emperor Asoka and Ahimsa

Buddhism and especially its tenet of ahimsa got universal recognition and worldwide sympathy under the pious and powerful patronage of emperor Asoka. The glorious era that Asoka represents in Indian history is unique in its grandeur. It was a golden age of spiritual and secular consolidation following the awakening brought about by Gautama and Mahavira. The peace and prosperity of his able reign led to glorious achievements and paved way for a great epoch.

It is significant that independent India has chosen as its emblem the Asoka pillar capitol and is drawing inspiration from this immortal emperor. Asoka reigned in the third century before Christ, but today he lives with us in his wheel of dharma. It stands out as a symbol of our faith in the future, as a link with our past and as a sign of great resolve to follow the path of ahimsa, of truth and righteousness that this great philosopher king of India had demonstrated to the world centuries ago.
From Gautama to Asoka is a span of about three hundred years. The popularity of Buddha’s teachings and to some extent those of Mahavira had brought to an end the age of uncertainty and disbelief. The barriers of caste and untouchability that the Aryan overlords had imposed on the people were crumbling down at the spread of equalitarian ideals preached by these two teachers. The consciousness of the general masses pointed towards a secular outlook.

Politically, India was then ripe for a golden age of that character. Alexander, the Greek, in his historical career of world conquest had attacked north-western India and established a Greek province there. At the death of Alexander his generals divided amongst themselves his vast dominion. The Indian provinces fell to the lot of Seleukos Nikatar. But it was not left to him to establish his authority there because by that time a movement was already on foot to get the Greeks out of the Indian soil. The leader of this nationalist movement against the foreigners was Chandragupta Maurya, the grandfather of Asoka.

Chandragupata Maurya, after the defeat of the Greeks, was able through conquest and diplomacy to establish an extensive empire, the first of its kind in India. At the time of Buddha, India was a patchwork of small kingdoms and minor principalities. Though for some time the Nandas of Magadha could bring a great part of the country under their rule, it was left to Chandragupta Maurya and his successors to realize the unity of the subcontinent under a strong central administration.

In this connection one should not forget the name of Kautilya, also called Chanakya, the astute Brahmin statesman who according to some historians, was the real author of the Mauryan empire. They say that Chandragupta was only a willing tool in the hands of this cunning, crafty Brahmin whose sole object was the vengeance on the last king of the Nanda dynasty who had unjustly humiliated him. At any rate as the prime minister of Chandragupta he politically organized the country and established military and administrative control over the whole realm.

However, Kautilya is remembered not so much for his practical exploits as for his monumental work Arthasastra, the science of wealth. It was probably written after the defeat
of the Nandas for the benefit and guidance of Chandragupta. It is very elaborate in its treatment of the different aspects of kingship and is intensely practical in its approach to political and social problems. *Arthasastra* is far from being a book of ahimsa; on the contrary it deals with all the methods which rulers should practise to ensure law and order. It does not shrink even at advocating violence. It envisages an elaborate system of judicial and police administration. The application of these methods in the Mauryan administration must have led to a period of peace and prosperity in the realm.

Chandragupta’s was perhaps the most extensive empire in Indian history. It was militarily strong with a central government paramount in all matters, with the emperor himself in power in almost everything. It was such an edifice that Asoka inherited on which he attempted to introduce a new dharma—the creed of non-violence. It was Asoka who finally organized the Mauryan empire into what Dr Radhakamal Mukherjee rightly names, “the world’s first secular welfare state” in India.

Asoka himself has left us a record of his activities and beliefs in what has come to be called the edicts of Asoka. On natural rocks and monolithic pillars situated at important places and road-junctions where large number of people were expected to pass, Asoka inscribed his edicts. They are distributed widely in all parts of India where his Mauryan empire held sway. From these edicts it is possible to draw a fairly accurate picture of Asoka’s life and his ideal of Dharma.

**THE LIFE OF ASOKA**

Very little is known about the early life of Asoka. He was one of the several sons of Bindusara, the son and successor of Chandragupta, the founder of Mauryan empire. One Buddhist account mentions that Asoka’s mother was Subhadraji, the daughter of a Brahmin.

It is said that as a youth he was fond of hunting, fighting and other princely pastimes. He must have shown remarkable ability as a soldier and statesman, a fact which made his father Bindusara send him as viceroy to Taxila where the local chiefs had revolted. Asoka was equally clever in war and diplomacy and was able to restore the authority of the emperor in that
distant frontier region. He soon established law and order; he was an efficient and perhaps a ruthless administrator. He proved a great success in that mission and was then sent to Ujjain as the viceroy of that province.

In Ujjain Asoka married Devi, the beautiful daughter of a wealthy merchant. Devi was a Buddhist and perhaps it was she who first introduced Asoka to the teachings of Buddha. But the young prince was not yet ripe to take up the teachings of Buddha seriously. Devi gave him a son, Mahendra and a daughter Sanghamitra who were to become famous in Buddhist literature. Devi seems not to have accompanied Asoka to Pataliputra when he eventually came to succeed to the Mauryan throne. It was during Asoka’s viceroyalty of Ujjain that his father Bindusara died.

Buddhist chronicles give an account of a war of succession between Asoka and his elder brother Susima. It is said that in the course of this fratricidal war Asoka slew all his ninety-nine brothers. This story does not sound credible and there is no concrete evidence to prove it either. He succeeded to the throne probably in the year 273 B.C.

The Mauryan empire of which Asoka thus came to be the sole sovereign was a realm extending from Persia to Assam. It extended to the North up to the Hindu Kush containing the whole of Afghanistan, Baluchistan, Kashmir and Nepal. It included the whole of Northern India from the mouth of the Ganges in Bengal to Kathiawar on the Arabian coast, and the whole of the Deccan except far south.

Chandragupta Maurya, the grandfather of Asoka, under the guidance of his able adviser Kautilya had already consolidated the empire on the basis of a large administrative machinery so well enunciated in Arthasastra. By the time of Asoka that machinery had attained its pinnacle of efficiency. Asoka had nothing to worry on that score. A few years after his coronation his sway was well established in every corner of his vast realm.

It was a highly centralized form of government with its headquarters at Pataliputra, the imperial capital. The royal army was very large and well organized, and was always able to safeguard the authority of the emperor anywhere. The outlying provinces, namely, Taxila and Ujjain gave occasional
trouble. Asoka, having been the viceroy of both these places had first-hand knowledge of the conditions there and could quell any disturbance easily.

In the early years of his reign, Asoka perhaps behaved much as was expected of rulers in those days. He kept a splendid court and ruled his mighty empire as he pleased. He often went out hunting and took part in other sports as was the fashion of the monarchs of those days. He lived in luxury spending most of his time in the ladies apartments in quest of pleasure. According to Buddhist chronicles he was cruel and despotic before he embraced Buddhism.

Then came the fateful Kalinga campaign. Here Asoka was following the established imperial policy of territorial expansion. He undertook this campaign with a view of bringing the whole of India under his regime. So in the ninth year after his coronation he invaded the Kalinga kingdom, a country comprising roughly modern Orissa and northern districts of Andhra.

The people of Kalinga put up a heroic resistance. They fell to the superior might of the Mauryan imperialism, but only after terrible bloodshed. It is said that in this war one hundred thousand people were slain apart from those who were wounded and made prisoners. Finally, Kalinga was conquered. But the horrible slaughter and suffering that his conquest brought about made an impression on Asoka which proved to be a turning point in his life.

In one of his rock edicts Asoka expressed genuine remorse for having caused so much suffering by waging this war. In this campaign he realized the full extent of the suffering caused by war. Apart from the huge number of people killed and wounded and taken prisoners, there were so many pious men and women to whom war brought, “personal violence, death, or separation from the beloved ones.”

Thus Asoka at such a victorious moment of his life turned away from war and conquest and embraced the teachings of Buddha. Herein lies the greatness of Asoka. Asoka was attracted to Buddhism by its absolute insistence on ahimsa, its condemnation of inflicting any harm on any living creature. After his horrible experience in the Kalinga war, Asoka had come to abhor any kind of injury to living beings. Shortly
after the Kalinga war he was converted to Buddhism by noble Upagupta, one of the disciples of Lord Buddha.

Asoka's conversion was complete and unreserved. He followed the path of the great Buddha. He became a Dharma-raja eager to advance the welfare of his people and zealous to spread the teachings of the great prophet. He no longer attempted any conquest by the force of arms; he had no further territorial ambition. He was no longer the fierce Asoka who was ever after pleasure and personal gratification. He beamed with infinite compassion for all living things. He became patient and tolerant, ever ready to sacrifice anything for the enlightenment and happiness of his fellowmen.

**ASOKA'S DHAMMA**

The Sanskrit word *dharma* of which the Pali equivalent is *dhamma*, is a word which may denote a culture, a way of life, or a code of conduct. It implies law, justice, and righteousness. The meaning of the term can be understood only by a study of the context in which the word is used. Hindu *dharma* is not the same as the *dhamma* that Buddha preached. Neither was Asoka's concept of *dhamma* identical with Buddhist *dhamma*.

Asoka's *dhamma* was primarily a 'law of piety'. But Asoka did not conceive piety as a narrow sectarian virtue. Rather, he conceived it as a universal attitude which should govern the life and activity of all men of goodwill. Though Asoka himself was a convinced Buddhist, his *dhamma* was wholly secular. He never quotes Buddhist or Hindu scriptures in support of his simple teachings. Like that of Buddha, Asoka's approach to morality was refreshingly rational. Asoka's *dhamma* was essentially a framework of ethical principles and practical philosophy.

To give utmost publicity to his teachings and injunctions, Asoka caused his edicts to be inscribed on rocks and pillars in different parts of the country, many of which are still preserved. In these edicts the King speaks straight to his people exhorting them to follow *dhamma*, the law of piety. They are at times in the nature of official announcement of policy.

Buddhism by the time of Asoka had become a religious
creed anxious to gain converts like all religious sects. Asoka, having had become an ardent Buddhist, did not forget his responsibility as the head of a state. He was the emperor of the whole Indian people, not of Buddhists only. In spite of the popularity of the Sangha probably only a minority of his subjects were practising Buddhists. Hinduism was perhaps the dominant religion of the people, and Jainism and Ajivikas were flourishing religious communities in different parts of the country. Asoka saw clearly that for his dhamma to be effective, it should be secular and rational. What he promised to men of piety was not a religious nirvana, in the Buddhist or Hindu sense, but equality with the gods in the practice of virtue.

Consistent with his secular approach Asoka disregards the theological and dogmatic basis of the problems of good and evil. He insisted on the practice of moral virtues for the welfare and happiness of all humanity. The essence of virtue he formulated in his rock edict was:

Father and mother must be obeyed, similarly respect for living creatures must be enforced; truth must be spoken. These are virtues of the law of piety which must be practised.

The highest good in Asoka’s dhamma is declared to be ahimsa or non-violence. He insists on the recognition of the sanctity of all life and prohibits the slaughter of men and animals in sacrifice or in war. In conformity with his teachings on killing we read in one of his edicts:

Formerly in the kitchen of his majesty king Priyadarsin each day many thousands of living creatures were slain to make curries. At present moment when this pious edict is being written, only three living creatures, namely two peacocks and one deer, are killed daily, and the deer not invariably. Even these creatures shall not be slaughtered in future.

As for Buddha, so too for Asoka life in every form was precious. That was why we see the victorious emperor after the Kalinga war turning against war and all killings. Hereafter it was the principle of non-violence that governed his policy in international affairs. War, Asoka proclaimed, was an unmitigated evil. He did it some two thousand years ago when
waging wars was the pastime of mighty rulers. Two thousand years ago an emperor of India accepted the principle of ahimsa in his relations with other countries; Asoka wanted to abolish wars from the affairs of nations and succeeded in it as far as it was possible for that age.

In his policy with the nations bordering his vast and mighty empire we see the principle of co-existence at work. He casts aside the imperial expansionist policy of his predecessors and substitutes in its place a policy of peaceful co-existence based on mutual respect, cultural intercourse and economic co-operation. Asoka's beneficence was not confined to the borders of his own realm; we hear of him constructing hospitals and welfare centres in other kingdoms which were not economically so prosperous as his own. Even his *dhamma* teachings he did not confine to his empire, he sent emissaries carrying his *dhamma* to other nations where they were welcome.

Asoka recognized home and family as the pillars of all social and moral well-being of the people. Proper management of family relations and the cultivation of domestic virtues he considered as of great importance for the healthy development of society and individual. Asoka insists on "proper behaviour towards Brahmins and ascetics, obedience to mother and father."

Another important aspect of Asoka's *dhamma* consistent with his faith in ahimsa is the spirit of tolerance and compromise which is evident in all his utterances. Though a pious Buddhist himself he was keen to bring other faiths to a spirit of comradeship with his *dhamma*. He did not confine his benefactions to the Buddhist community. It is well known that he dedicated Barbara hill caves to the sect of Ajivikas who were amongst the chief rivals of the Buddhists. "His sacred and gracious majesty", so we read in one of his edicts devoted to the subject of tolerance, "does reverence to men of all sects, whether ascetics or householders, by gifts and various forms of reverence."

Asoka had realized the harm that a division of society into communal groups could bring about. Though there may exist many sects in a society, it is necessary for social progress that these groups should come together and develop a spirit of
understanding and fellowship. It is necessary that they should respect one another and co-operate with each other. What Asoka insists on is not passive co-existence but co-operation and effective good-will between the different communities. Asoka declares:

The sects of other people deserve reverence for one reason or other.

Asoka’s concept of dhamma bears remarkable humanist traits. He exhorts his people to treat servants and slaves with kindness and understanding. As a ruler he appointed officers specially to look after the interests of servants and slaves. Similarly there were officers in his administration who were to attend to the welfare of prisoners: in his fifth rock edict Asoka speaks about the function of these officials:

They are busy promoting the welfare of prisoners, should they have behaved irresponsibly, or releasing those that have children, are afflicted or are aged.

So too were his philanthropic activities. In the second rock edict we read about his activities designed to promote social welfare. For the welfare of his people Asoka constructed roads and highways connecting different places of his vast empire. He planted shady Banyan and Neem trees on either side of the road so that travellers could feel comfortable and easy. He established rest houses at frequent intervals and dug wells at many places for the use of men and beasts. Again for men and beasts he opened separate hospitals. He made special arrangements for the cultivation and distribution of healing herbs. Such activities were not even confined to his own realm. Asoka, it is said, sent charity missions to other countries especially to the border states to establish such public welfare institutions.

In the lifetime of Asoka through constant practice and propaganda dhamma became a household word in the empire. The people found in it a practical ideology and a moral code which ensured virtue, compassion, liberality, truthfulness, and purity in human relations. Asoka was happy that his dhamma was fast becoming popular with his people thereby increasing peace and happiness in his realm. He was enthusiastic as ever for its propagation and we read in one of his pillar edicts:

For this is my principle: to protect through
dhamma, to administer affairs according to dhamma, to please the people with dhamma, to guard the empire with dhamma."

ASOKA AND BUDDHISM

As a ruler we have seen that Asoka followed a secular policy. That was only to be expected of one who was convinced of the greatness of the path of goodwill and tolerance preached by Buddha. It would not have been in the spirit of Buddha's teachings if Asoka had tried to impose Buddhism on his people. However, he himself was a pious Buddhist, a follower of Buddha dhamma, and sangha as the Bahra inscription testifies:

The king of Magadha, Priyadarsi, greets the order and wishes it prosperity and freedom from care. You know, sirs, how deep is my respect for and faith in the Buddha, the dhamma and the sangha. Sirs, whatever was spoken by Lord Buddha was well spoken."

With the conversion of Asoka, Buddhist faith received royal patronage. During the later days of his reign the monarch's Buddhist fervour appears to have increased. His eagerness to propagate the teachings of Buddha was the biggest factor in the spread of Buddhist ahimsa to the world beyond the frontiers of India. It is even said that towards the end of his reign Asoka became a Buddhist monk. But there is little evidence to substantiate this claim.

As a sequel to the conversion of Asoka to the Buddhist faith we see the very outlook of the emperor changing. From a fierce tyrant he turns into a benevolent monarch. Again with his conversion he orders his own life to suit the ideals of Buddhism. In his own palace he introduced austerity and discipline. There was to be no killing in the palace and unchecked luxury and indulgence disappeared. The many queens were encouraged to be pious Buddhists, some of the members of the royal family even took holy orders and joined the Buddhist Sangha.

Asoka discontinued hunting expeditions which he was very fond of. In place of hunting Asoka introduced the custom of state pilgrimages to holy places connected with the life and work of the great teacher. As we have seen, he also went on tour to the different parts of his empire for the
propagation of his *dhamma*.

At the end of twenty years of his reign he visited Lumbini gardens in the company of the great monk Upagupta. Upagupta came from his forest retreat with eighteen thousand members of his Buddhist *sangha* to lead the mighty monarch to the birthplace of Buddha. There at Lumbini still stands a pillar erected by the pious monarch bearing the inscription which says that he visited the place to pay homage to the birthplace of the great teacher. He distributed alms to beggars and ascetics and made the village free of taxes to commemorate his visit.

Similarly, he paid visits to Kapilavastu, the scene of the great renunciation, and Bodh Gaya where the Sakya prince attained enlightenment. At Bodh Gaya Asoka built a shrine and lavished alms upon mendicants and beggars. Then he went to Sarnath where Buddha had given his first sermon. He also visited Sravasti, the monastery there where Buddha lived and taught, and Kusinagara where Buddha attained *parinirvana*.

More than three centuries had elapsed after the death of the Buddha and Buddhism was already an organized force in the country. At the death of the Buddha the mantle of the master fell on the venerable Mahakassapa, acclaimed as his greatest disciple. The venerable Mahakassapa realized that now the master being no more, there was an urgent need to enunciate the teachings in clear and definite terms. He first called a conference of all the monks; the first council in Buddhist history. The great gathering took place soon after the death of Buddha in Rajagriha during the reign of king Ajatasatru. Mahakassapa himself presided over the proceedings of this council. Compared to other councils that were to follow in subsequent years this council of the Buddhist church was marked by an overwhelming unity of purpose. The monks, near as they were to the memory of the master, were not inclined to philosophical wrangling or internecine quarrels. Thanks to the greatness of the venerable Mahakassapa, the first council successfully laid the foundation of Buddhist faith.

The universal success that Buddha and his trusted disciples achieved must have attracted to its fold many undesirable elements. Some may have joined the *sangha* from motives
of private gain and personal success. As could be expected, there may have been some kind of rivalry amongst the monks for power and prestige in the sangha. Perhaps some others came into the sangha because of their great reverence for the name of the master. The mischief played by this type of entrants must have been equally damaging to the purity of Buddha's teachings. Soon after Buddha's death, against all teachings of the master, a movement was already set on foot to deify Buddha. In the first council itself we see the venerable monks behaving as if Buddha had been a God amongst men! This movement must have gained momentum with the passage of years and the coming of new entrants into the sangha. Buddha's teaching was thus slowly losing its simplicity and rationality.

All these things came to a pass in the second council held a century after the death of Buddha at Vaishali. Already dissension was in the air, and perhaps the second council met to discuss and define anew the tenets of the faith. This council, however, only helped to further divide the already divided house. The division primarily was due to the efforts of some monks to get relaxed some of the stringent rules of the sangha. These monks wanted to interpret the Vinaya text, that is the code discipline for the monks, liberally and they were called Mahasanghikas. The orthodox monks, however, stuck to the old rules and refused any relaxation of the code of conduct of the sangha and were called Theravadins. The second council ended with these two schools of thought firmly poised for mastery inside the sangha.

But it did not end there; once it started it was difficult to stop. These two main schools were further divided into subsects leading to the formation of some eighteen sub-sects in all—seven from the Mahasanghikas and eleven from the Theravadins. Regional loyalties also came to play an important part in the formation of these sects inside the sangha. The advance of Buddhism to the remote parts of the country only helped to enlarge the scope of these divisive forces.

Asoka again, as a staunch follower of Buddha, had donated large assets to monastic establishments of the Buddhists. This had attracted many undesirables to the sangha who lived in luxury at the expense of the emperor
while not in the least interested in the teachings of the master. Naturally religion suffered, and the great sangha became corrupt. Asoka called a council, known as the third council, for a discussion on the teachings of the master and also for a general purification of the sangha itself.

This third council assembled at Pataliputra under the auspices of the emperor to establish the purity of the Buddhist canon which had been in peril, following the rise of different sects in the sangha. In this council all the heretic nuns and monks were expelled. The council also redefined the teachings of the master and issued fresh instructions for the guidance of the faithful. But the most momentous outcome of this council was the despatch of missions to different countries of the world for the propagation of Buddhist dhamma.

The most important of these missions was the one that carried the Buddhist faith to the large southern island kingdom of Ceylon. There Asoka sent his own son, Mahendra to preach the teachings of the Lord. He was followed by his daughter Sanghamitra, the friend of the sangha. She took with her to Ceylon a branch of the sacred Bodhi tree under which the master attained enlightenment. It is said that it was planted at Anuradhapuram, the ancient capital of Ceylon. Ceylon was converted to the Buddhist faith.

Asoka’s emmissaries preached Buddhist dhamma as far afield as Syria, Egypt and Greece. Buddhism penetrated into Nepal and later reached Tibet and China. Eventually the whole of East came to take refuge in Buddhism. And to this day the world echoes the sacred hymn:

“Buddham Saranam Gacchami,
Dhammam Saranam Gacchami,
Sangham Saranam Gacchami.”

which in English reads,

I take refuge in Buddha.
I take refuge in the doctrine,
I take refuge in the order.
The Progress of Buddhist Ahimsa

After Asoka, the empire that he had firmly established on the principle of ahimsa began to decline. Ahimsa was too far advanced a creed for the age. After the removal of the monarch the vast Mauryan empire could not have stood its ground without a big army; and Asoka's great experiment did not long survive him. His grandson Dasaratha who succeeded him appears to have followed his policies. But definitely none of his successors had the personality to make the principle of ahimsa a successful instrument of state policy.

The death of Asoka did not see the immediate collapse of the empire. But it made the empire less powerful and it appears that after his death there was some contention on succession issue and this further weakened the central authority. The outlying areas of the empire began to break away one after the other. The province of Taxila in the north-west declared independence, and Kalinga in the east broke off. The Andhras in the south were becoming a powerful force and were trying
to expand their influence to the north. However, the successors of Asoka could hold on to the remnants of his empire for about fifty years.

The Brahmin priestly class who had been ousted from their privileges at the ascendency of Buddhism could not have been sitting idle. They must have been on the look out to foment trouble and re-establish their influence in the country. They got a partisan in Pushyamitra, the commander-in-chief of the Mauryan army, who revolted, killed the last Mauryan successor of Asoka and founded a dynasty of his own called the Sunga dynasty in 185 B.C. Pushyamitra had no sympathy for the Buddhists and he soon restored the influence of the Brahmins in the country.

The Brahmin tradition is never unduly intolerant towards any creed. But then we could expect that the Buddhist faith got no great encouragement during the sway of the Sunga monarchs. However, the Buddhist faith had already got so well established in the land that there was no stopping its growth. Even beyond the shores of India it expanded rapidly and gained a mass-following. Buddhism had become a world force.

This attainment of the world status naturally led to a weakening of the central authority of the sangha. Out in the distant countries the local sanghas came to interpret the teachings of the Buddha in their own light and the all-important cohesion was lost. It developed in different regions very impressive philosophies and theologies. Much of these developments were of a sectarian character. In Tibet, in particular, Buddhism got mixed up with the local sorcery and Tantras and took the form of Lamaism. With these developments the simple creed of ahimsa that was nearest to Gautama’s heart came to be thrust to the background.

Nevertheless in India itself Buddhism became a tremendous force influencing the social and moral life of the people. The number of Buddhist monks and nuns alone ran to thousands. The Buddhist tradition counts them in lakhs, but then it is definite that India had never seen in her history such a large number of monks and nuns. With the increase in monks and nuns the number of monasteries became large and the people looked upon them for guidance in all matters.
These monks and nuns took the message of the master to every nook and corner of the country cultivating in the people the virtues of compassion, kindness and non-violence. In the whole country a common culture was being developed which had the stamp of ahimsa.

Again these monasteries became centres of learning very much like the monasteries of Europe in the middle ages. The first big name in the history of these monasteries is Nagasena who is said to have converted the Greek king Menander to the Buddhist faith. At the decline of the Mauryan power in the first century before Christ the Bactrian Greeks in the north-west could carve out small kingdoms for themselves. The greatest of the Greek monarchs was Menander who in Pali is called Milinda. He had his capital at Sagala, modern Sialkot in the Punjab. He is said to have been particularly fond of religious and philosophical arguments. His capital always welcomed well-known philosophers and theologians of all creeds.

The Buddhist accounts say that king Menander himself was such a good philosopher that the learned Brahmins and Buddhist monks were no match to him. The venerable monk Nagasena visited the city with his disciples. In the debate which followed king Menander is said to have found the ‘way’ and was converted. The questions that the king asked regarding the ultimate truth and the answers that the venerable Nagasena gave form the subject-matter of the book Milinda-Panha or questions of Milinda. Milinda-Panha is a great book for the Buddhists and is very comprehensive in its expositions of Buddha’s dhamma.

King Menander issued coins bearing the Buddhist wheel, Dharmachakra, which is proof of the fact that he had made Buddha’s dhamma an instrument of his state policy. A little later we come across the name of the Kushan emperor Kanishka who is far more famous in the line of monarchs wedded to ahimsa.

EMPEROR KANISHKA

In the beginning of the Christian era the Yuch-Chi, a Chinese Turkestan tribe which had established itself in the North-Western frontiers of India began to extend its influence
to the Punjab and further down to the Gangetic plains. The tribe later came to be known as the Kushans and occupied a greater part of northern India and in course of time established an empire which extended its borders beyond India to Afghanistan and Central Asia. The greatest name amongst the Kushan rulers was Kanishka who in Buddhist account is spoken of as the second Asoka.

About the early life of Kanishka very little is known. He was not a son of Kadphises II whom he succeeded to the Kushan throne. He was probably a chieftain who wrested power at the death of Kadphises. He must have come to power in the last quarter of the first century after Christ. As for his history we have to depend largely on scanty epigraphic and numismatic evidences and Buddhist records.

In the story of Kanishka the Buddhist accounts try to find a parallel with Asoka. They say that Kanishka was at first a powerful monarch bent on bloody conquest and the subjugation of the neighbouring states. The bloodshed, however, did not last long because he soon came under the influence of Buddhism, possibly under the guidance of the venerable Asvagosha from Ayodhya who was himself a Brahmin convert to Buddhism. However, Buddhism could not have been an unknown creed to the foreign Kushan emperor because at least one of his predecessors to the Kushan throne is known to have been a Buddhist.

Kanishka had his capital at Peshawar and seems to have been a capable ruler. Following the footsteps of Asoka he too busied himself in philanthropic activities in conformity with the teachings of Buddha. He constructed houses for the poor and built hospitals for men and animals. He created an atmosphere of peace and brotherhood amongst his people, and his reign produced an upsurge of religious and artistic activity in the country.

And like Asoka, Kaniskha took up the cause of propagation of the Buddhist dhamma. He completed the work started by Asoka and helped the triumphant spread of Buddhism throughout Asia. Kaniskha gave generous donations to the Buddhist sangha. He founded many monasteries in the country and thus helped to carry Buddha’s message to remote areas. The Chinese pilgrims Fa-hein and Yuan Chang speak
of the magnificent Mahavihara which he had built in Peshawar for the Buddhist order. Though himself a staunch Buddhist, Kanishka respected all other faiths. He did not confine his beneficence to Buddhists only. Even his coins bear images of gods worshipped by other faiths. In the matter of toleration Buddhism has been very consistent down the centuries.

However, the greatest service that Kanishka did to the Buddhist church was the convening of the fourth council sometime in 100 A.D. Kanishka was perplexed by the contradictory teachings put up by different sects that claimed to be the inheritors of Buddhist tradition. On the advice of Parsva, he convened a council, probably in Kashmir, in which the various sects were represented. A grand assembly of the Buddhists took place which came to be called the fourth council—the last on the Indian soil.

Five hundred monks are said to have participated in the proceedings of the council which was presided over by Vasumitra. Asvagosha was the vice-president of the council. This council did produce a semblance of unity in the Buddhist church. However, it looks as if some of the Buddhists did not take part in the deliberations of the council. The Southern Buddhists, that is the Buddhists of Ceylon and other parts of the south do not even recognize this council as authentic. Buddhism was to get divided further; but then this council did make an honest attempt to patch up the differences. They mainly stressed those points with the largest measure of agreement between the contending sects. At any rate there appears to have been no great differences among the many delegates that actually attended the fourth council.

The council decided that to avoid confusion in the interpretations of the Buddhist scriptures elaborate commentaries on them should be made. They at once got down to the task and emperor Kanishka made all the arrangements. Thus the fourth council came to compile three commentaries known as Vibhasa-Sastras. The three commentaries, one each on the three Pitikas or baskets of Buddhist scriptures came to some ten thousand verses each. These treatises prepared at the council were copied on copper plates which were closed in stone boxes and safely deposited in the stupa which emperor Kanishka had built specially for the purpose. Again, following the example
of Asoka, the emperor is said to have donated the entire kingdom of Kashmir to the Buddhist Sangha at the conclusion of the council.

The proceedings of this council were probably held in Sanskrit, the language of the Hindus. If so it heralds a break from the earlier practice of Buddhism when Pali was the recognized language for religious discourses. What we notice is that the Hindu element in Buddhist culture was becoming predominant with perhaps a group of purists represented by the Hinayana sect not willing to bow down to the popular trend. Parsva, Asvagosha and Vasumitra are all famous names of the fourth council. They were all converts from Brahminism and it was in the fourth council that they tried to find a synthesis of Hindu and Buddhist doctrines which gave rise later to the evolution of the Mahayana school of Buddhism.

One name that stands out from Kanishka’s time is that of Asvagosha. He was both a poet and a philosopher. In Sanskrit literature he occupies a unique position as a poet and dramatist. But his poetry and plays were all on Buddha and his teachings and thus contributed greatly to the expansion of Buddhist influence in Hinduism especially in philosophy and literature.

Asvagosha’s famous Buddhacharita or the story of Buddha is written in an epic style and is often compared to the Hindu epic Ramayana. In the same style is written Saumdarananda which describes in details the conversion of Buddha’s half-brother Nanda. Asvagosha is the author of two other famous poems, Mahayanasraddhopada or awakening of the faith in the Mahayana which discusses the early Mahayana concepts, and Vajrasuchti which is a vehement attack on the caste system. Asvagosha is equally famous as a dramatist. His most acclaimed play is Sariputra Prakarana which again has Buddhism as its theme. The play is based on the conversion of Maudgalyayana and Sariputra, the two foremost disciples of Buddha.

Kanishka’s empire, extending as it did beyond the frontiers of India, led to greater foreign contact between India and her neighbours. The relations between India and China and the countries of central Asia were never as close as at the time of Kanishka. More than ever Indian thought, especially
Buddhist thought, began to influence the cultures of various countries. The growth of Buddhism in these countries was now assured. But then as it turned out, before long the Buddhist church itself came to be irrevocably divided into Hinayana and Mahayana sects.

**THE TWO VEHICLES**

Buddhism in later days developed into two schools, Hinayana and Mahayana, called the two vehicles indicating two separate approaches to the question of nirvana, salvation. The teachings of Buddha in their original purity and simplicity are the main canons of the Hinayana school. They refused all compromise and held themselves high above the creeds with which later Buddhism came into contact. The Mahayanists, on the other hand, were willing to make adjustments to suit the needs of synthesis with Hindu and other beliefs.

Nevertheless, it should not be understood that the Mahayana and Hinayana schools are antagonistic to each other. Mahayana is also derived from the same source as Hinayana. But while Mahayana accepts all the teachings of the Hinayana it adds to them new ideas and new principles to enlarge and enrich its intellectual base. It does not deny the ethical teachings of the Buddha, but contends that they were only expedients resorted to by the master in order to attract the uninitiated to the real truth. When these ethical teachings have served their purpose they should be disregarded. Everything in the material world including these ethical teachings is a mirage or dream. It is due to avidya or ignorance that the material things exist; in reality nothing exists, there is only shunyata, or nothingness. This again points to the doctrine of Maya of Sankara.

Mahayana means great vehicle. But it does not indicate any depreciation of the Hinayana which means lesser vehicle. It only says that Mahayana works for the salvation of all beings and hence constitutes a bigger ideal. Hinayana followers work out their own salvation by following the path preached by the master, whereas Mahayanists attain great sanctity or enlightenment and become Bodhisattvas. Bodhisattvas attain enlightenment like the Buddha under the Bodhi tree, but they still remain on earth to help other beings to attain
enlightenment. Bodhisattvas want to make every being an enlightened Buddha and hence refuse to escape from the recurrence of birth and rebirth till such time as all the creatures are saved.

While Hinayana stuck to its grim and austere code of salvation by renunciation, the Mahayana showed great worldly wisdom by insisting on performance of one’s duty first. It promised salvation to everybody. Anyone staying in his own vocation and performing his duties selflessly can attain salvation; in fact everybody, even the lowest of the low, is on the road to Buddhahood. However, after the attainment of Buddhahood they would not leave this world but remain to help others on the path. The great liberated Bodhisattvas are all working for the salvation of the world in manifold ways. There is no individual salvation but only collective redemption. Self is unimportant because all ultimately form part of a single divine, Buddha Absolute or Dharmakaya.

Mahayanists are more altruistic and idealistic. The first condition that a Mahayanist has to fulfil is to take the vow of dedicating one’s self for the service of others, both spiritual and temporal. Apart from its idea of salvation for the whole of humanity it insists on a noble code of conduct for all. The aspirants to Bodhisattvahood resolve to practise six paramitas or virtues of perfection which are the preliminary steps for the attainment of complete enlightenment. For a man of ahimsa these six paramitas would form the highest ideal of ethics.

The first of these paramitas is dana or generosity which includes not only charity in the material sense of the world but also spiritual charity. One must be willing to give away all his acquired spiritual merits for the salvation of others. The second paramita is sila or good conduct. One should keep evil passions under control and concentrate on positive virtues. The third paramita is shanti or patience. Anger, excitement and impatience should not be allowed to disturb the placid life of an aspirant to Bodhisattvahood. The fourth paramita is virya or courage. It is necessary to be strong and energetic to strive for the attainment of enlightenment. One who has not the courage to face the difficulties of worldly existence would never do well. The fifth paramita is dhyana or contemplation and the sixth is prajna or wisdom. The fifth is an
unavoidable Buddhist virtue and the sixth in its complete possession is equivalent to enlightenment itself.

In Mahayana ideal compassion is the noblest virtue. Love and compassion rule the life and activity of the enlightened Bodhisattvas. He is ever on the look out to extinguish all pain and suffering from the surface of the earth and establish all creatures in peace and contentment. He gets no greater happiness than in seeing to the emancipation of all creatures caught in the vicious circle of *karma* and transmigration. He himself has attained liberation from the bondage of *karma*, but is willing to be born again and again to work for the salvation of all.

The greatest name in Mahayana philosophy is Nagarjuna. He seems to have lived sometime in the second century after Christ. In the whole Buddhist history, philosophically he is the most towering personality. Some scholars think that Mahayana school of Buddhism started only with him. Like many other philosophers of Buddhism he was also a Brahmin convert to the Buddhist faith and is said to have been born in south India. Naturally, he knew Hindu philosophy before he came into contact with Buddha’s teachings. He must have used these ideas in formulating his philosophy of *shunyata* for explaining the divinity of Buddha as we have already seen.

Buddhism reaches its greatest philosophical heights in Mahayana school. It has produced the greatest names in Buddhist history like Asanga, Vashubandhu, and Aryadeva. The famous university of Nalanda which was the greatest seat of learning in ancient Asia was mainly a school for the teaching of the Mahayana system. Almost all the Indian Buddhists followed Mahayanism. But then all this activity of the Mahayana Buddhists in India proved only a stepping stone for Indian Buddhists to be finally absorbed in Hinduism.

**BUDDHIST LITERATURE**

The literature on Buddha and his teachings is enormous. It should be admitted, however, that all of it does not faithfully reflect the ahimsa creed of the master. Some obscure philosophical doctrines with which Buddha could not have had any truck also found a place in this literature. Many of the texts are lost for ever. Some exist only in translations
in Tibet, China and other countries. It is calculated that in Tibet alone the translations of Indian Buddhist texts number more than four thousand and five hundred. This gives an idea of the volume of Buddhist literature.

Buddhist literary activity began soon after the parinirvana of the Buddha. In the first council itself the fond disciples in conference piously compiled each and every word uttered by the teacher. Ananda, the favourite of the master and his constant companion for many years, was deputed by the council to compile the teachings of the master on dhamma, the doctrine. Sutta-pitaka was compiled accordingly—a book which was to form the principal text of the Buddhist faith. Similarly Upali, another distinguished disciple of Buddha was put in charge of arranging the instructions of the master on matters of Vinaya—discipline. The recitations of Upali took the form of Vinaya-pitaka which governs the conduct of monks and nuns of the Buddhist sangha.

The Buddhist canonical literature belongs to three branches; the Vinaya-pitaka or the books of discipline, the Sutta-pitaka, the book of discourses, and the Abhidhamma-pitaka, the books containing the metaphysical expositions of the doctrines which originated perhaps some years after the first council. Subsequently, in the course of centuries, many incidents and teachings must have got incorporated into these collections. The exact part that Gautama contributed to it is difficult to determine. All the three collections are written in Pali, which was then the language of the common people.

The Buddhists themselves place Vinaya-pitaka or the book on discipline at the top of their scriptures. The foremost text in this collection is Patimokkha and is perhaps the earliest composition forming a nucleus of the disciplinary code of the Buddhist sangha. It is a manual of rules compiled for the guidance of the monks and nuns of the order. The other books in this collection mainly give explanatory notes and historical details on the formation and progress of the sangha. A good Buddhist monk is said to be controlled by the restraints of Patimokkha. It enlists some 227 rules for the observation of the monks. The rules are designed to make the monks lead a saintly life free from passions and desires and directed to meditation and enlightenment. Every fortnight the monks
are to meet at one place when these rules are to be recited and
the monks are asked to ensure that they have not trespassed
any of the regulations.

_Sutta-pitaka_ contains Buddha's teachings in all their purity
and originality. It consists of five collections called _Nikayas_
and forms the most important part of the scriptures. They
contain long and short discourses of Buddha and his immediate
disciples. They deal with all aspects of Buddha's teachings.
Some are dialogues between Gautama and some unbelievers
that he accosted during his preaching life. These dialogues
are wonderful and include debates with leaders of other creeds
and beliefs. They throw light on the essential rationalistic
approach of the great teacher. The topics discussed in these
books relate to the origin of the universe, birth, rebirth, moral
values, social questions and so on.

However, in the _Sutta-pitaka_ collections one little book
stands out prominently as a great text for the believers in
ahimsa, and that is _Dhammapada_. Whoe'er might have been
the author, this great book is of great practical wisdom.
It consists of selected utterances of Buddha which are worded
with beauty and precision. It has come to hold a position of
great importance in the scriptures of world religions and is
very popular all over the Buddhist world. Young Buddhist
monks memorize every word of it and for the lay Buddhists it
stands on the same plane as the sermon on the mount to the
Christians.

_Dhammapada_ literally means lessons on _dhamma_ or
doctrine. The verses contain all the ahimsa teachings of
Buddha. It points to a ahimsa way of life, the way of life
that Buddha preached. This way of life is included in the
code of conduct that _Dhammapada_ gives in a nutshell:

Abstain from all evil; accumulate what is good
and purify your mind.

_Dhammapada_ glorifies an earnest and thoughtful life.
Wisdom lies not in slothfulness, indolence or idleness, but in
a continuous and strenuous effort to conquer the self. Self-
conquest is the biggest of all conquests. Once the self is
conquered the man becomes the lord and he can direct his
life on the path of virtue and goodness, for:

By one's self the evil is done, by one's self one
suffers; by one’s self evil is left undone, by one’s self one is purified. The pure and the impure stand and fall by themselves, no one can purify another. (Dhammapada XII-9)

The world is full of cares and pains. But then a man who is attached to the world, who is vain and foolish, who is immersed in pleasure and lust, will only sink more and more down to suffering and wretchedness. But if one is detached he is unaffected by the ups and downs of life:

Look upon the world as you would on a bubble, look upon it as you would on a mirage: the king of death does not see him who thus looks down upon the world. (Dhammapada XIII-4).

One should be free from extremes of passions and desires. Anger, envy, impatience, hatred, pride—all are evil and should be given up:

There is no fire like passions; there is no evil like hatred; there is no pain like this bodily existence; there is no happiness higher than peace. (Dhammapada XV-6)

Dhammapada exhorts:

Let a man overcome anger by love, let him overcome evil by good; let him overcome the greedy by liberality, the liar by truth. (Dhammapada XVII-3).

It is difficult to pick up passages from this little book for quotation because the whole book contains nothing but wisdom and truth. One passage declares that there is actually no happiness in victory.

Victory breeds hatred, for the conquered is unhappy. He who has given up both victory and defeat, he, the contented is happy. (Dhammapada XV-4)

Another glorifies non-attachment in the proverbial Indian way:

Let a man leave anger, let him forsake pride, let him overcome all bondage: no sufferings fall on a man who is not attached to the world and who calls nothing his own. (Dhammapada XVII-1)

The third collection Abhidhamma-pitaka contains comparatively later compositions. Though its name indicates metaphysical treatise, the collection actually deals with the same subjects as Sutta-pitaka. Even the subject matter is mostly taken from Sutta-pitaka. Only Abhidhamma Pitaka is written
in the form of questions and answers. However, they contain hardly anything of great value from the ahimsa point of view.

The life of Buddha itself has inspired many to write biographies of the teacher. There are five famous biographies of Buddha of which Lalitavistara is the best and most systematic. It is written in mixed Sanskrit and is full of details meant to raise the faith and devotion of the reader for the great teacher. The famous Sanskrit work Buddhacharita of Asvagosha is an epic poem comparable to the great Hindu epic Ramayana. Another biography, Mahavastu is very extensive, covering more than a thousand pages in print and is also written in mixed Sanskrit. Though sprayed with facts and fiction this work, nevertheless, gives us an insight into the personality of the great prophet of ahimsa.

The volumes of commentaries that have been written on Buddhist texts are numerous. Buddhagosha, Buddhadutta, Nagarjuna and Aryadeva are all Buddhist authors of great reputation not only in India, but also outside India wherever Buddhism is known. But then most of these commentaries are of a sectarian nature. Some of them like those of Nagarjuna and Aryadeva are so highly philosophical that they got little popularity amongst the masses and could not directly influence the life of the Indian people to any appreciable extent.

Of the non-canonical works the most important is Milinda-panha. It is formed out of the questions of King Milinda to the venerable monk Nagasena and Nagasena's answers to them. The book contains a whole series of similes which clearly explain the teachings of Buddha. Here below Nagasena explains the importance of the body to recluses thus:

"Is the body dear to you recluses?" the king asks.
"No, it is not."
"But then why do you look after it, and cherish it so?"

"Has your majesty somewhere and at some time in the course of a battle been wounded by an arrow?"
"Yes, that has happened."
"In such cases, is not the wound anointed with salve, smeared with oil, and bandaged with fine linen?"
"Yes, so it is."
“Is then this treatment a sign that the wound is
dear to your majesty?”

“No, it is not dear to me, but all this is done to it
so that the flesh may grow again.”

“Just so the body is not dear to the recluses. With-
out being attached to the body they take care of it for the
purpose of making a holy life possible. The Lord has
compared the body to a wound, and so the recluses take
care of the body as of the wound, without being attached
to it.”

Look at the sweet reasonableness of the whole
approach!

In the length and breadth of the subcontinent, literature
and art on the life and teachings of Buddha and his disciples
came to flourish. At every nook and corner the story of
Buddha and the greatness of his ahimsa teachings began to
inspire the masses to a life of non-violence and non-attachment.
The social and moral values were formed in which ahimsa was
the predominant principle and the compassionate Buddha, the
highest ideal. Social customs were remodelled and institutions
reformed to be in conformity with the ahimsa way of life
preached by the Sakya Sage.

JATAKA TALES

The scriptures of any religion ordinarily remain the exclu-
sive domain of the priests. The educated may go through
them and may read the commentaries to understand the correct
import of the teachings of their religion. But the common
mass of people have neither the education nor the spiritual
inclination to study the scriptures. They do not usually have
the time or intellectual capacity to understand religion straight
from canonical texts. What they need are popular tales to
grasp the import of religion. Jataka tales form the educative
stories by which Buddhism influenced the masses.

The common people understand the ahimsa teachings of
the Buddha from these Jataka tales. In the heyday of
Buddhism these stories must have been as popular in India as
the stories of Rama and Krishna and must have immensely
helped the evolution of the Indian way of life or the ahimsa
way of living. Many Jataka tales have found their way in a
disguised form into the Puranas of the Hindus and are still popular. They mostly stress one or the other teaching of Buddha and are of great ethical values. The ahimsa teachings of Buddha got to the masses through these tales.

The background to these stories is provided by the Bodhisattva concept. As we have seen in a previous section, when a being acquires enlightenment he does not at once seek salvation. Driven by the compassion for the sufferings of men and animals he is born again and again in this world to help other beings attain salvation. Such beings are called Bodhisattvas or Buddha elects.

The Buddhists believe in a continuous span of births and rebirths for every soul. The soul after death would be born again according to its karma. Now the question arises as to what was Gautama Buddha before he was born as the Sakya prince. He could not have attained Buddhahood in one life. He became enlightened as a result of good deeds done in numerous births reaching back to countless ages. The doctrine of karma and rebirths leads to the belief that he was gradually preparing for his Buddhahood in his previous births. In fact, he was a Bodhisattva accumulating merits by practising compassion, charity and generosity. The stories of these births are given in the Jataka tales.

The whole thing started in the remote past, altogether in a different age, when the future Buddha was born as a learned Brahmin, Sumedha. In this birth he came across the enlightened Lord Dipankara who was Buddha of that age. Sumedha was impressed by the greatness and nobility of Dipankara Buddha and decided to become a Buddha himself. He prayed:

Ah! May I too at some future period become a Tathagata, with all the attributes of a perfect Buddha, as this Lord Dipankara is just now! May I too turn the wheel of the highest dharma, as this Lord Dipankara does just now! Having crossed, may I lead others across; set free, may I free others; comforted, may I comfort others—as does this Lord Dipankara! May I become like him, for the weal and happiness of many, out of compassion for the world, for the sake of a great multitude of living beings, for their weal and happiness, be they gods or men!"
Dipankara Buddha with his supreme knowledge of the future, past and the present, predicted that the young Brahmin Sumedha would in a future age become a Buddha, and would be born in Kapilavastu as Gautama Sakyamuni. Now started the onward march of the Brahmin towards Buddhahood. He was born again and again and each birth gave rise to a Jataka tale. There are some five hundred and fifty Jataka stories in all. Many of them are of no value from the ahimsa point of view. Some are just humorous fairy tales probably borrowed from the folklore of the period. But some contain great and noble moral teachings and are excellent examples of the spirit of compassion that rules the life of all Bodhisattvas.

We will take up a story which speaks of a great sacrifice of the Bodhisattva when he was born as a prince.

Once upon a time there lived a king named Maharatha who had three sons; Mahapranada, Mahadeva, and Mahasattva—the Bodhisattva. One day while strolling in a solitary forest the princes came across a hungry tigress surrounded by five cubs. On seeing the tigress Mahapranada exclaimed:

"The poor animal suffers from having given birth to the five cubs only a week ago: If she finds nothing to eat, she will either eat her own young ones, or die from hunger;"

Mahasattva replied: "How can this poor exhausted creature find food?"

"Tigers live on fresh meat and warm blood," said Mahapranada.

"She is quite exhausted, overcome by hunger and thirst, scarcely alive and very weak. In this state she cannot possibly catch any prey. And who would sacrifice himself to preserve her life", said Mahadeva.

"Yes, self-sacrifice is so difficult" : said Mahapranada.

At this Mahasattva replied:

"It is difficult for people like us, who are so fond of our lives and bodies, and who have so little intelligence. It is not at all difficult, however, for others, who are true men, intent on benefitting their fellow-creatures, and who long to sacrifice themselves. Holy men are born of pity and compassion. Whatever bodies they get, in heaven or on
earth, a hundred times will they do them, joyful in their heart, so that the lives of others may be saved."

Driven by boundless compassion Mahasattva had decided to sacrifice his life to save the tigress and the little cubs. He asked his brothers to leave him alone and threw himself down in front of the tigress as food for her and for her cubs. But the tigress was too weak to move, and the Bodhisattva at this cut his own throat to make it easy for the tigress!
Ahimsa is so much spoken of as a Buddhist virtue that the contribution of Hinduism to its teachings and popularity are at times forgotten. Hinduism is the predominant religion of India and ahimsa is an Indian way of life. If we consider Jainism and Buddhism as reform movements only, then the creed of ahimsa should be considered as having been mainly nurtured and nourished in the Hindu fold. The scriptures of Hinduism contain in many places unmistakable impress of the ahimsa creed.

Who is a Hindu? It is difficult to define in exact terms. There is no Baptism nor confirmation nor circumcision in Hinduism. Of course the Hindus are not devoid of religious observances. From birth to death the everyday life of a pious Hindu is packed with religious codes. But then non-conformity with such codes would not make a born Hindu a non-Hindu, nor a bad Hindu—he cannot be accused of even impiety. The essence of Hinduism cannot be said to consist in such codes.
Hindus do not worship the same god or gods. The number of deities that the Hindus in many parts of the country worship is so enormous that it is impossible to make a survey. These deities are not equally prominent everywhere. Some are only of local importance enjoining devotion from only a handful. Some Hindus recognize a supreme godhead. Even here there exists wide diversity. The Shaivas worship Shiva as the supreme. The Vaishnavas give this place to Vishnu. Also in some isolated pockets certain local deities have been raised to the status of the Supreme. In the matter of worship Hinduism is very fluid. A Hindu need not even believe in God to be in conformity with his faith. One of the six systems of Hindu philosophy, namely Charvaka, is actually atheistic materialism which does not recognize the existence of God.

As in the case of worship so too in philosophy and theology, Hinduism presents a surprising variety and diversity. From the huge mass of materials available on Hindu philosophy it is possible to prove almost anything under the sun as in full conformity with its tenets. It is impossible to build up a unified system of theology from such a mass of basic materials. We have the Mimansakas who believe in rituals and sacrifices, the Vedantins who believe in no personal God different from the universe, the Charvakas who believe in no God, and many others besides, all claiming recognition as Hindu philosophy.

Hinduism is more of a composite culture rather than a religion in the actual sense of the word. This culture can be largely identified as Indian culture. Anyone who would own this cultural heritage could be named a Hindu. It allows great variations in its form and practices, only everything should conform to a general norm which we may call the essence of Hindu India. Variety and diversity are actually characteristics of this culture.

Before we go on to discuss the ahimsa teachings in the great books of the Hindus it is perhaps advisable to explain certain terms that we often find used in the explanations of Hindu doctrines. First, let us take dharma, the crucial word which in Hinduism, as in Buddhism, stands for many things at the same time. Some authorities refer to Hinduism as sanatana dharma, the eternal dharma. Here the meaning
of the word is to be understood as the eternal law which includes moral law, natural law, and supernatural law. In certain circumstances dharma may mean justice and righteousness as in the case of Buddhist dhamma. Dharma in Hinduism might mean caste duties of the individuals as laid down by the law books, the dharmasasstras. It might also stand for religious dictates or even religion itself.

Then there are the twin words karma and transmigration. Almost all the philosophies that India has given rise to take this doctrine of karma and transmigration as unquestionable truth. Transmigration is the belief that the soul of men and animals after death is born again and again in this world according to its individual karma. Karma is fate or destiny which is decided by the sum-total of the activities of the individual in his births. Not to be born again in a succession of births and rebirths is to attain the supreme bliss of nirvana —yet another word which comes often in Hindu thought.

Samsara is worldliness of the individual which makes him crave for the pleasures of this world and so makes him take birth again and again in various forms. Hinduism is never tired of stressing the impermanence of worldly life. A life of samsara has been an object of contempt of poets and philosophers alike. To be liberated from samsara is to attain moksha, that is, liberation.

THE ETHICS OF THE VEDAS

Vedas are the earliest scriptures of the Hindus. Thinkers and reformers, both ancient and modern base their tenets on the Vedas. The Vedas give them a divine origin because they are considered to be direct revelations from God.

The Vedas mean supreme knowledge and are considered to have been revealed by God to the sages. As they were revealed they consisted of one hundred thousand verses and had four divisions. The Puranas say that in course of time the division got mixed up and some verses fell into disuse. The sage Veda-vyasa, the classifier of the Vedas, seeing the sorry state in which these divine revelations had fallen collected the verses and in order to perpetuate them in the proper form taught the four divisions to four of his disciples. The Hindus believe that the four Vedas have come to us in that form.
The four Vedas are *Rigveda*, *Samaveda*, *Yajurveda* and *Atharvaveda*. Out of these the oldest and the most important is the *Rigveda*. It is actually a collection of sacred hymns in verses of different metres addressed to the many gods and goddesses of the Aryans. The second *Samaveda* contains mainly musical hymns meant for chanting during the sacrifices. There is hardly anything new in *Samaveda* which does not appear in *Rigveda*. *Yajurveda* again is a ritual Veda which gives guidance to the priests in the conduct of the sacrifice. Lastly, the *Atharvaveda* is a collection of incantations and popular charms based on black magic and superstition.

Each Veda consists of three parts; the *Samhita* or the collection of hymns, the *Brahmanas* or liturgical discussions and *Aranyakas* or forest treatises of which the *Upanishads* form a part. The four *Samhitas* are used for recitation during the performance of sacrifices. The *Brahmanas* which come immediately after the *Samhitas* discuss the efficacy of sacrificial worship and give detailed instructions about the conduct of the sacrifices. The *Brahmanas* are mostly written in prose. *Aranyakas* belong to a class different from the other two, they are meant as topics for contemplation of the people who have escaped from the world of pleasure and pain to the forest retreats. The *Upanishads* deal with philosophy and is also called *Vedanta* or the end of the Vedas. The *Upanishads* contain the earliest gems of Indian thought.

At least part of the Vedas is of foreign import which the conquering Aryans brought with them to the Indian soil. To begin with, the slokas were the exclusive possession of certain tribes or perhaps of certain families. In course of time while the Aryan people got integrated amongst themselves and with the aborigines these sacred texts came to be considered as the greatest religious possession of the whole community venerated by all. Still they kept the handling of the Vedas an exclusive right of the Aryans while they evolved the caste system to perpetuate Aryan supremacy.

The Vedic hymns give us an idea of the concept of life of the early Aryan settlers apart from giving us an insight into the religion of Hinduism. A careful study unfolds to us the panoramic stages through which the Aryans passed before they came to be absorbed into the larger humanity of Hinduism.
The Vedic culture as we could conclude from the texts of the Vedas is predominantly ritualistic based on sacrifices. For one and everything the early Aryans performed sacrifices, and the Vedas were there for the successful performance of such sacrifices. The Aryans believed that the Vedas held the key to success in life since only with its help they could perform sacrifices.

This Aryan concept of life can be understood from the numerous gods and goddesses that they worshipped. The Rigveda, the oldest of the Vedas which is some two thousand five hundred years old contains some 1028 hymns sung in praise of these gods and goddesses. The nature of a people can be partly understood from the the nature of the gods they worship, because it is on the gods they worship that they bestow all the attributes that they consider great. Their sense of values is nowhere better mirrored than in the concept of their gods and goddesses. What sort of gods were these early Aryan gods?

The most prominent Vedic god was Indra, the god of thunder, and lightning, of victory and wealth. Closely followed in importance is the god-pair Varuna and Mitra, the gods of the sky who are the guardians of the world order. They are followed by many lesser gods among whom are Surya, the sun-god; Agni, the god of fire; Yama, the Lord of death; Rudra, and many others.

The Aryan sense of ethical values is mirrored in the concept of their god Varuna. The Aryans believed in a universal order which they called rita or ordered course of things. They conceived god Varuna as the sole maintainer of this cosmic order. This cosmic order is conceived as not only the law that governs the universe, but also as the law that governs rituals and sacrifices as also the moral law. Thus the Vedic people in their conception of their god Varuna upheld the moral order as an essential constituent of the universal order.

The concept of rita is remarkable because it conceives the world as one, all individual creations being part of it. Each constituent part has to perform its allotted functions in the natural way, all as parts of a machine. If everything goes well rita is said to be maintained. The sun, the moon and the stars have all to function in their proper courses to maintain this order. So too the human beings who are nothing but a part
of the universe. *Rita* when applied to human beings is moral law, and the individual action should be governed by moral law. When the individual goes against the moral law he goes against the universal *rita* and commits sin. Man has to maintain the *rita* just as much as in later days man’s responsibility came to be recognized as the maintenance of *dharma*. *Rita* thus is something like *Dharma*, rather it is a forerunner of *dharma* in the evolution of Hindu thought.

The guardian of *rita* is god Varuna, the god of sky who envelops the whole universe. The god Varuna is the noble ethical creation of a people who had clearly understood the values of human conduct and morality. Varuna is a friend of the righteous and the just but an enemy of the evil-minded and the wicked. The worshipper is afraid when he comes near this all-knowing god of virtue and goodness.

The sin results from the violation of the moral order. When one commits adultery or theft or violence one goes against the moral order and thus violates the divine law that is *rita*. In places the Vedas sound distinctly humanistic. In one hymn we read:

> If we have sinned against the man who loves us, have ever wronged a brother, friend, or comrade,
> The neighbour ever with us, or a stranger, O Varuna remove from us the trespass.

(*Rig. Book V, Hymn 85*)

Benevolence and virtue get praised as much as malice and wickedness are despised and condemned. The virtuous man is one who is full of charity and compassion to his fellow beings and gets his due share of praise in the Vedas. There are many glorious passages in the *Rigveda* in praise of charity. I quote from book X, hymn 117:

> Let the wealthier person be generous to the applicant,
> Let him take a longer view;
> For life rolls on like the wheels of a chariot,
> Wealth comes now to one, now to another.

However, these high ideals and lofty principles get eclipsed by the more numerous hymns addressed to the god Indra. The personality of the god Indra who in the Vedas generally speaking holds the position of a god-head, is diametrically opposed to that of Varuna. Indra becomes in fact
a kind of Indian' Zeus. He is the god of victory, of power, of violence and thunder—in fact a worldly god. The eminently practical-minded Aryans who apparently liked all the good things of life, including the mildly inebriating Soma, must have seen in him a god nearer to their heart than the strictly virtuous god Varuna. Again, their immediate objective was the subjugation of the dasas, the Dravidians and the aborigines whose resistance to the rapidly advancing Aryan invaders must have been getting formidable. So they quietly by-passed Varuna and praised the glory of violence, death and destiny that is idealized by god Indra.

In later periods the ethical contents in the Vedas become even more remote. There is, however, a famous passage in the Atharvaveda which deserves special mention. The hymn is addressed to god Varuna and recalls the omniscience of the great god. The sinner will be tracked down, no matter where,

The mighty Lord on high, our deeds, as if at hand, espies:
The gods know all men do, though men would fain their deeds disguise.
Whoever stands, whoever moves, or steals from place to place,
Or hides him in his secret cell—the gods his movements trace.
Whenever two together plot, and deem they are alone
King Varuna is there, a third and all their schemes are known.

When everything is said about the ethical contents of the Vedas it, however, has to be admitted that ahimsa teachings come in here in this great book of Hinduism only indirectly. The Vedas contain possibly the earliest known thoughts of mankind, and the fact that even in this we do come across some signs of the great creed of ahimsa speaks well. In the later days of the Vedas what we notice is a turn to excessive ritualism. This excessive ritualism however found its reaction in the Upanishads. In the Upanishads we come across lively reasoning and healthy philosophical speculation.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE UPANISHADS

Next to the Vedas there is no other book that the Indian
people venerate more than the Upanishads, also called Vedanta from its position at the end of the Vedas. Especially for the Indian intellectuals the Upanishads have an undying fascination because it is here that they have to search for the intellectual stimulation necessary to meet their western counterparts on an equal footing. The speculative philosophy built up in the Upanishads fills the mind of scholars, both eastern and western, with awe and reverence. The Upanishads have exercised and still do exercise a great influence on the life and thought of the Indian people.

The Upanishads preach a philosophy which would combine the entire humanity into a unique brotherhood, nay the whole world into a harmonious entity. It works out a system of humanism which is altruistic and distinctive. It fathoms deep into spirituality to find a firm basis for the practice of ahimsa. It lays the foundation to a moral code which in the words of Professor Deussen, a German philosopher: “is the strongest support of pure morality, is the greatest consolation in the sufferings of life and death.”

The Upanishads are the books on the Indian quest of truth, or the experiments with truth of the Indian people. It brings freshness to the thoughts and beliefs of the Aryans. We notice in it a healthy and genuine faith in rationalism. It does not stick to anyone ideal or principle, it is ever ready to discuss and dispute, to debate and argue. It fully recognizes the limitations of human intellect and the elusiveness of truth. The ideal of the Upanishadic thought is tersely expressed in a passage in Brihadaranyaka Upanishads:

From the unreal lead me to real,
From darkness lead me to light,
From death lead me to immortality.

The number of Upanishads is very large; more than one hundred. Out of these eleven should be considered as the oldest and the most important on which the great Sankaracharya has commented. They are Isa, Kena, Katha, Prasna, Mundaka, Mundukya, Taitiriya, Aitareya, Chandogya, Brihadaranyaka, and Nrisimhapurvatapani Upanishads. The time when these books were composed must be sometime between the Vedas and the rise of Buddhism; round about the time of Plato and Aristotle of ancient Greece. It is also possible that
some of the *Upanishads* were composed later after the rise of Buddhism. The life of these Upanishadic thinkers must have been very revealing as much as the life of Plato and Aristotle are revealing in the study of the philosophies they have authored. But then we know absolutely nothing about the life of these Vedantic thinkers and so have to depend entirely on the texts of the *Upanishads* to understand the ideals they preached.

The *Upanishads* are mostly written in the form of dialogues. We see here kings and chieftains searching for truth, going to the abode of renowned sages to be initiated into the mysteries of spiritual knowledge. With firewood in hand, symbolic in those days of the humble status of a student, even sages go to search the eternal truth from more renowned sages. In this quest of truth there is no difference between castes and outcastes, male and female, or young and old. Some of the Upanishadic thinkers are non-Brahmins. Nobody ever questions the caste of an inquirer, what is asked for is the greatness of spiritual powers to understand the mysteries properly.

The concept of gods of the Vedic Aryans undergoes a remarkable transformation in the *Upanishads*. In place of the primitive warring gods of the *Vedas*, we have in the *Upanishads* the imperishable, immanent, Almighty Brahman. Yajnavalkya who can be considered to be the greatest philosopher of the *Upanishads* says:

> Imperishable is the unseen seer, the unheard hearer, the unthought thinker, the ununderstood understander. Other than It there is naught that sees. Other than It there is naught that hears. Other than It there is naught that thinks. Other than It there is naught that understands. Across this imperishable, O Gargi, is this space woven, warp and woof. (Brihadaranyaka 3-8-11)

All beings originate from Brahman. The whole world is Brahman. You are Brahman, your neighbour is also Brahman, your friend, your enemy, the stranger, the weak, the strong, the victor, the defeated, the high caste and the untouchable—all are Brahman. There is nothing but Brahman. And this Almighty Brahman is the same as Self. Individual soul is nothing but the immortal Brahman and the ultimate aim of
all beings is finally to attain oneness with Brahman. It is attained by the realization of one’s own self:

Containing all works, containing all desires, containing all tastes, encompassing the whole world, the unspeakable, the unconcerned—this is the soul of mine within the heart, this Brahman into him I shall enter on departing hence. (Chandogya 3-14-4)

You and I are the same. As the origin is the same, the goal is also the same. All begin from Brahman, all end in Brahman. The differences like you, I, friend, enemy, stranger, weak, strong, black, white, all are accidental illusions. Once this reality is realized all violence, hatred, enmity, envy—all become ridiculous. The Upamishads thus establish the oneness of all beings, it builds up a great philosophy which would naturally lead to the concept of a one world.

Upamishads build up a religion of love. As Deussen says what is in the Upamishads is much more than “Love thy neighbour as thyself”, because in the Upamishads it is “Thy neighbour is thyself”. It is an ignorant man who would dwell on the ephemeral distinctions between one’s self and other ‘self’. Moksha actually means the knowledge of this supreme reality, the reality of non-distinction between thy neighbour and thyself. And then realize self, that is, find your own self in your neighbour. One has to realize one’s own self by loving one’s neighbour.

There is no religious philosophy in the world which gives so much dignity to the individual as the Upamishads. The self, that is the individual self is nothing but Self—the Brahman, that is the world self. The Upamishads put the knowledge of self as Brahman as the most effective guarantee for the continued good behaviour of man. Based on love, the ethical teachings of the Upamishads get an added significance. It is not for the love of the neighbour that the neighbour is important, but for the love of the self that neighbour is important. It is not a question of doing good or wrong to one’s neighbour, it is the question of doing good or wrong to one’s own self.

If the slayer thinks he slays
If the slain thinks himself slain
Both these understand not.
This one slays not, nor is slain. (Katha 2-19)
In spite of the highly philosophical approach, the Upanishads give great importance to a life of virtue and goodness. There is a famous passage in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishads which gives a threefold moral code. It refers to the threefold descendants of Prajapati; gods, men and demons, who were once pupils at the feet of their father. At the end of their studentship the gods asked Prajapati to give them his last advice and Prajapati replied, "Da!" which the gods understood as "Be self-controlled". Then the men asked him the same thing and Prajapati replied, "Da;" which men understood as "Give." For the same request from the demons Prajapati again gave the same reply, "Da!" which the demons took to mean as, "Be compassionate". And the Upanishads concludes, And the same thing does the divine voice here thunder, repeat : Da! Da! Da! that is be self-controlled, give and be compassionate. One should practise this same triad, self-restrain, giving, and compassion.

(Brihadaranyaka 5-2-3)

Those who would go astray are not saved easily. Should one go against the moral and natural order and commit sins the Upanishads would condemn him to a life of death and rebirth. The belief in karma and transmigration which may be called the common doctrine of all Indian systems of thought, an Indian comes to hold as unquestionable truth. This belief is part and parcel of Indian way of life. The punishment through; karma and transmigration is the basis on which the moral code of the Hindus is built up. One should lead a pure life, a virtuous life to get rid of karma and attain salvation.

The rebirth that is transmigration from a previous to a new body is decided by the accumulated deeds of his previous existence. Should a man lead a virtuous life free from sin and violence, he would be born in pleasant circumstances, if he is born at all, before attaining the eternal bliss. A sinner attached to the world and immersed in pleasures of all kind will be born again and again in stinking circumstances as a dog or a swine or as some other lower animal!

Desire, it is stated, is the primary cause for the involvement of self in karma and transmigration. One should bring all his senses and desires under control before he can realize his self. There is unique parable in Katha-Upanishad where the
life of an individual is compared to the riding of the soul in a chariot. The body is the chariot, the intellect is the charioteer, the mind is the reins and senses are the horses. The senses search for objects of the world, and an individual who has knowledge and understanding of truth will control his senses and his senses will behave, “like the good horses of a charioteer.”

All attachment to the world should cease before one can realize the Self. The world is full of allurements and one should know that they are all transitory. One should strive for renunciation and detachment. He cannot of course run away from social responsibilities, that would be uncharitable, unethical. While remaining in the world one should cultivate virtue and goodness with a spirit of non-attachment. That is the surest way to happiness and eternal salvation.

It is clear that the *Upanishads* contain unmistakable imprints of the ahimsa creed. The philosophy of the *Upanishads* is directly the basic intellectual culture for the proper appreciation of this creed. It builds up a unique culture for the individual where all the world is self, but attached to none, and free from all desires, sorrows, anger, enmity, and hatred. Apart from the glorification of virtue and non-attachment that the *Upanishads* propagate and the ethics that they stress, they unite the whole of humanity under a common bond of brotherhood. Therein lies the greatness of the message that the *Upanishads* give to the world.

**THE SUTRAS AND THE SASTRAS**

While the *Upanishads* contain the development of Hindu thought in the direction of philosophy and metaphysics; the *Sutras* and later the *Sastras* show its development in the direction of social and political organization. The Hindu moral code, as well as their laws and jurisprudence, as also their social and political institutions are based on the dictates of the *Sutras* and *Sastras*. Hindus believe them as divinely inspired, and great is their hold on the masses. Though not entirely based on ahimsa ideals these books are important for us to understand the Hindu way of life.

In continuation of the *dharma* propounded in the *Sutras*, the *Sastras* came into being during the period of the *Upanishads*
to give added authority to the dictates of dharma. The Sutras are important books which present a picture of the institutions, usages, manners and intellectual conditions of the Hindus at a remote period of history. Like the Sutras, the Sastras are also many in number, attributed to different authors, but mostly containing the same laws based on Brahmin’s social and spiritual superiority. However, we will take for our discussion the famous Manava-dharmasastra, also called Manu-smriti, not only because it is very famous but also because it is very exhaustive in its treatment of the laws, and to this day Hindus consider it obligatory on their part to abide by it.

Dharma in the Sutras and the Sastras has a peculiar meaning; it signifies Varna-dharma or caste dharma. It takes for granted the division of castes as of divine origin. The well-known legend of the Brahmin coming from the mouth, the Kshatriya from the chest, the Vaisa from the thigh and the Sudra from the foot of the Brahman is taken as a divine truth, and the law-givers only go on to enunciate the laws from this assumption. Naturally the laws and moral codes, in fact the dharma that they preach is not based on the equality of the individual before the law, and hence take away from the essence of ahimsa ideal.

In the narrow sense of the Sutras and the Sastras, dharma means the conduct of life according to the laws and customs enjoined in the law books. Accordingly a Brahmin’s dharma is to teach, a Kshatriya’s to rule, a Vaisa’s to cultivate, and a Sudra’s to serve all the superior classes. When the individuals do not stick to these caste obligations then occur what they called dharmasamgraha or the confusion of dharma which all the ancient law-givers warn against. According to them no greater calamity could befall on humanity!

This outlook on dharma must be viewed from a historical setting. The Aryan preoccupation with war and violence that we notice in the Vedic period is over. The aborigines are fully subdued and now it was a question of consolidating their position, and the ingenuity of the Aryan mind invented the structure of the caste-system to subjugate the conquered races for all times. It is no longer a question of armed strength but social and political manoeuvres to sustain Aryan supremacy. For the caste-system to be effective the dharma has to be
twisted to conform to its needs and that is what we see in the Sutras and the Sastras.

Before we go further let us take note of the presence of the caste-system and untouchability which have been present in Hindu society from the dawn of its history to this day. There is no doubt that this practice is against ahimsa, and still the glaring unethical practice goes on. Mahavira, Gautama, and scores of other teachers and thinkers in spite of their best efforts could not yet fully eradicate this evil from Hindu society.

How did this casteism and untouchability come to have such a stranglehold on Hinduism? Sociologists have put forth many explanations; some have tried to show that originally it was nothing but a social arrangement for the division of labour which in course of time came to degenerate into the rigid caste-system of later days; some think that it was an arrangement evolved by the crafty Brahmans to perpetuate their supremacy, and some diehards take it as an arrangement made by Almighty Brahma: The real reasons however are more political and racial than purely religious or social.

In the beginning of Aryan settlements in India, some sort of economic division of labour may have been in existence amongst the Aryans. This must have been a loose arrangement with no religious sanctions. It was when the question of admitting the aborigines and Dravidians into the Aryan-fold arose that this division of labour had to be made more rigid. The aborigines who were admitted in the Aryan-fold were made to serve as Sudras, the lowest caste in the caste hierarchy. The Aryans could not have readily given them the twice-born status of the higher castes! This arrangement eminently suited the needs of the Aryan conquerors. And those of the conquered people who did not agree to serve as Sudras were thrown out of the pale of the Aryan-fold or caste-system and were made untouchables. Casteism and untouchability were political weapons which the Aryans devised to keep the conquered people in check and perpetuate their rule. The help of religion and theology were called in only perhaps when the military strength of the conquerors began to wane away.

It is a tragedy that this move of the Aryans giving religious sanction to a purely political arrangement has gone unchallenged
to this day. There is no hiding the fact that the majority of the people of India are not Aryans, neither in the North nor in the South. Nor is the South predominantly Dravidian as some Dravidian enthusiasts would have us believe. The majority of the people of India are fortunately Indians, neither Aryans nor Dravidians. And to think that the Aryan invaders still are imposing on the Indian people a system to perpetuate their authority after all these years is really tragic. The ahimsa creed of the Indian people has still to remove the twin evils of casteism and untouchability from the face of India.

The Sutras and Sastras were composed by the Brahmins to promote and preserve their superiority in the caste-system. They form rather a treatise on Brahminism which was predominant in this period against which as we have seen Mahavira and Gautama revolted. These law books only tend to perpetuate an order which is cruel, unjust and unfair; exactly the opposite of all that ahimsa stands for. In spite of the many things that these books contain we cannot but disapprove the main trends of teachings here because they are in fact the moral and social laws framed by the conquerors to subdue and humiliate a conquered people.

Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the Sutras and the Sastras contain at places passages of unsurpassed greatness. For one thing they touch all aspects of life; every activity of man. The life of a man is divided into four stages called the four Asramas. The four Asramas are Brahmacharya or the student life, the Garhasthya or the life of a house-holder, Vanaprastha or the hermit's life, and Sanyasa or the life of an ascetic. Detailed prescriptions are laid down for the moral and spiritual advancement of the individual in all the four stages.

In this Asrama concept of life we see an emphasis on other-worldliness. One gets a thorough grounding in his social and individual responsibilities as a student. And then he starts his life as a householder, socially the most important stage. But he is reminded that the householder's life is not all, he has to renounce the world to repair to the forest to meditate and prepare for a greater life. Then at the end he has to take up Sanyasa and become in effect an ascetic. This life is only a preparation for another life, an eternal life.

Dharmasastras exhort men to lead a life of virtue
and goodness. Wealth acquired in this world is of no consequence, because dharma alone follows him beyond the grave. So a man should collect merit by virtuous living: "Neither a man who lives unrighteous, nor he who acquires wealth by telling falsehoods nor he who always delights in doing injury, ever attains happiness in this world. (Manu 4-170)

In Manu's moral code ahimsa or non-injury is praised high. A man even in fun or in anger should not injure any living thing. He is not to offend others in words, deeds, or thought:

Let him not be uselessly active with his hands or feet, or with his eyes, nor crooked ways, nor talk idly, nor injure others by deeds or even think of it. (Manu 4-170)

**RAMA, THE IDOL OF THE PEOPLE**

Every Indian has heard of Sri Rama, the hero of the oldest epic Ramayana. In the life of Rama and his devoted brother Lakshmana one sees the life that he should imitate. Bharata is the ideal brother who would not touch Rama's share of his father's realm—come what may. The women have in Sita, the consort of Rama, their ideal. And in the kingdom of Kosala itself we see the ideal of a peaceful community ever living in harmony and prosperity.

The original Ramayana is said to have been written by Valmiki in 24000 verses. Valmiki's Ramayana is written in Sanskrit which has always been the language of the elite, and the Ramayana in Sanskrit could not have reached all. But with the appearance of regional tongues Ramayana also came to be translated into these regional languages. In the eleventh century, Kamban produced the first Tamil Ramayana. Soon after versions of the epic appeared in Kannada and Telugu. In Malayalam, the immortal Thunchathu Ezhuthachan brought out his Adhyatmaramayan almost simultaneously with its breaking away from Tamil as a separate language. In Bengali Kirtibas produced the Bengali Ramayana in the fourteenth century. In the next century Madhava Kandal translated Ramayana into Assamese.

Briefly the Ramayana story is this: There was once a king of Ayodhya Dasaratha, who had three queens Kausilya,
Kaikeyi and Sumitra. He had four sons—Rama from Kausilya, Bharata from Kaikeyi and Lakshmana and Shatrughana from Sumitra. Rama won the hand of Sita, the daughter of Janaka, the king of Videha and the younger brothers wedded the sisters of Sita. The trouble started when Dasaratha decided to proclaim Rama heir-apparent. At this queen Kaikeyi recalling a long forgotten boon wanted the king to banish Rama to the forest for fourteen years and proclaim her own son Bharata the heir-apparent. Accordingly, Rama went into exile to the south accompanied by Sita and Lakshaman. Broken-hearted Dasaratha died, but Bharata refused to take over the kingship and himself followed Rama to the forest. Rama, however, prevailed upon Bharata to return to Ayodhya and rule the ancestral kingdom in the name of Rama. During the exile Sita was abducted by Ravan, the demon king of Lanka. After many adventures in the forest in the course of his search for Sita, Ram entered into an alliance with the monkey king Sugriva. With his new-found ally Rama crossed over to Lanka and with the help of Bibhishana, a younger brother of Ravan, defeated Ravan and recovered Sita. Then they returned to Ayodhya where Rama was declared the king. But Rama’s woes were not over. A scandal on Sita came to spread in the country on account of her long stay in Lanka, and Rama had to abandon her to satisfy the people. And in the forest Sita gave birth to twins who were to become his heirs; but Sita was lost to him for ever.

In the life of Rama an ordinary Hindu sees dharma—righteousness, morality, and virtue—personified. The life of Rama in the epic is not a life of roses. It is full of cares and troubles, recurring calamities and unmerited misfortunes. When he is about to start the life of a pious house-holder with his beloved wife, we see him on his way to the forest in fulfillment of his father’s promise. He ungrudgingly undergoes all the privations of a forest life wandering from place to place. Then when he is finally restored to his ancestral kingdom he has to forsake his beloved Sita for ever to satisfy the wishes of his people. As the ideal Dharmaraja he could not have stopped at anything to make his people happy and contented.

Rama is really an ideal of an ahimsa monarch. His is a unique personality completely human and very much a man
of this world. He is noble and great; he does not feel enmity or envy. He does not keep a grudge against his jealous stepmother Kaikeyi who so violently usurped his throne and his parental roof. To Bharata who follows him to the forest trying to persuade him to come back to the kingdom of their ancestors as its rightful sovereign, Rama inquires:

"Doth the peerless queen Kaikeyi pass her days in duties fair,

Guard her Bharata's mighty empire, tend him with a mother's care."

There is no hatred, no indignation, only solicitude for the welfare of the same people who were opposed to him. There the Hindus have a splendid lesson on ahimsa.

Rama is essentially a man of peace. But we see him, always on the move fighting for truth and righteousness. He does not shrink from risking a major war with Ravan to rescue Sita and regain his honour. When he is faced with evil he does not shrink, he fights according to the dictates of his Kshatriya dharma. No two characters could be poles apart as Rama and Ravan. Rama represents the best in humility and virtue whereas Ravan represents vanity and wickedness. By winning a bloody war against the forces of evil represented by Ravan, Rama establishes the supremacy of the good over evil.

The epic of Rama is an epic of struggle of good over evil, of humanism over wickedness and violence. Also, it is the story of human bondage, the father, the husband, the mother, wife, the king and the subjects—all live in harmony and peace. The correct social bonds are the basis of this harmony, and love is the ruling passion everywhere. Rama is the darling of his subjects and earns it by the dutiful discharge of his dharma. The ideal in Rama is the ideal of a selfless worker for the social and moral uplift of his community.

And great is the devotion of the brothers to one another. The younger brothers turn to Rama for advice and guidance and Rama looks upon them as his own children. The brothers vied with one another in showing their affection to their elder brother. Though it fell on Lakshman to serve Rama throughout his wanderings, Bharata loves him no less. After the departure of Rama to the forest, Bharata condemns his mother
for bringing such a calamity on his fond elder brother, lives like an ascetic and rules the kingdom in Rama’s name, using Rama’s sandals to symbolize his presence in the city.

More than anything else Ramayana excels in the depiction of domestic virtues. The devotion of Rama and the faithfulness of Sita in all their trials and tribulations appeal to the hearts of millions of Indians more than anything else in this epic. Hindu women whatever be their social position cling to the ideal of Sita to give them power to resist evil, to face a life of suffering or neglect. Sita’s had been a career of life-long suffering. As a faithful and devoted wife she follows her husband into exile. In the forest she comes under the clutches of the wicked Ravan. Even Ravan has to retire at her steadfast attachment to virtue. When she is finally rejoined with her husband, now the lurking suspicion of the people separates her permanently from her husband. Are these not sufferings enough!

Ramarajya, that is the society that is depicted in Ramayana, is unique. For Mahatma Gandhi, Ramarajya, represented the ideal of a society based on the creed of ahimsa. The life of Rama is an example of the ahimsa way of life, detached from the world but still very much of the world, searching for truth and facing trials with calm deliberation, and fighting evil with all strength. In Rama and Sita the Mahatma saw the ideals of man and wife and in the country under Rama the ideal of a peaceful people wedded to justice and truth.

**LIFE IN THE MAHABHARATA**

The Mahabharata is an encyclopaedic epic which focuses attention on a study of life in all its various facets. It is the world's largest epic containing one lakh verses. It is indeed vast, dealing with even aspects of philosophy and theology. It is intended, as the name itself indicates, to be the story of the Bharata clan or tribe. But it includes in it not only that, but also Dharmasastras, Arthasastras, Kamasastras—in fact everything worth knowing.

The Ramayana is a class by itself which is the story of one hero Rama. The saintliness of Rama, his unconquerable thirst for dharma, his steadfast adherence to truth and virtue are of an other-worldly nature. But here in Mahabharata we move amongst human heroes who are liable to fall, passionate,
at times even unreasonable and violent as all human beings. Here in the place of Rama we have a galaxy of heroes and heroines who capture our imagination at one time or the other in the long drawn-out progress of the epic.

The *Mahabharata*, though it is mainly concerned with the topic of war, is a veritable treasure-house for the seekers of ahimsa. The epic does not just narrate the story, but every-time speaks of the ideals of truth and virtue that should guide the conduct of mankind. Throughout this unique book we come across passages of striking beauty, interesting parables, and telling anecdotes which bring home to the people the greatness of *dharma*—law, righteousness and virtue. The immortal *Bhagavadgita* is but a part of it. But considering the importance of *Gita* in the study of Hinduism, its ahimsa teachings will be treated in a separate section.

Vedavyasa, the same as the classifier of the *Vedas*, is said to have composed the *Mahabharata*. It is possible that the original was composed by him, but the book as it has come down to us could not have been the work of one individual author. The *Mahabharata* grew to its present form by the additions of many authors extending to many centuries. Many interpolations must have taken place during the years to bring the book to its massive proportion.

Briefly the epic tells of a great civil war in the kingdom of the Kurus, known as Kurukshetra. Santanu was the Kuru king whose eldest son was Bhisma. Bhisma took the vow of chastity and renounced the throne in favour of the children of Satyavati whose father had insisted on this as a condition for marrying his daughter to the old king, Santanu. After the death of Santanu the kingdom passed on to the two sons of Satyavati both of whom died young. One of them, however, left two heirs, Dhritarastra and Pandu. The eldest Dhritarastra being born blind, Pandu ascended the throne. The progeny of Dhritarastra and Pandu formed the rival parties that fought the war at Kurukshetra.

Pandu while still a king committed some offence against a sage and had to resort to the forest with his two wives where he spent many years in penance. During his stay in the forest the two wives of Pandu gave birth to five children called Pandavas; Yudhishthira, Bhima, Arjuna, Nakula, and
Sahadeva. The blind Dhritarastra had one hundred sons. They were called the Kauravas—the eldest of whom was Duryodhana. After the death of Pandu in the forest, Pandavas came back to the capital of the Kurus, Hastinapura, to join the Kauravas. Both the Pandavas and the Kauravas grew up in the palace under the guardianship of the old grandsire Bhisma.

Almost immediately the trouble started. Both in learning and in arts of war the Pandavas were superior, and this aroused the jealousy of the Kauravas. They plotted against the five brothers and tried to injure them by all possible means. Meanwhile, in a contest of archery, Arjuna won the hand of the princess Draupadi who became the joint wife of all the five brothers. Bhisma, the head of the family, in order to bring mutual understanding and peace between the two branches of the Kurus divided the kingdom and established the Pandavas in a new capital Indraprastha, a few miles away from Hastinapura.

This did not improve matters; the Kauravas still kept up their enmity towards the Pandavas. Incited by their uncle Sakuni, Duryodhana invited Yudhishtthira to a great gambling match. With the aid of Sakuni, Duryodhana won from Yudhishtthira his whole kingdom, his brothers and their wife, Draupadi. Finally it was agreed that the five brothers and Draupadi should go into banishment for thirteen years; spending the last year incognito after which they were to receive back the kingdom.

However, after the stipulated thirteen years when they came back to demand their paternal heritage, Duryodhana refused. War became imminent. Accordingly two enormous armies assembled on the plains of Kurukshetra to decide the issue. Almost all the kings and chieftains of the time are said to have taken part in this violent conflict in which a lot of blood was shed. The battle raged for eighteen days, at the end of which the Pandavas were victorious and Yudhishtthira was crowned king.

Consistent with its length, the heroes of the epic are numerous. Separately each one of them has given rise to innumerable folk songs and devotional hymns which have made them a household word throughout the length and breadth of the sub-continent. A pious Indian when faced with the problems of life finds solace in one or other of these heroes and heroines.
Parables and anecdotes are quoted from the epic in assemblies and panchayats to bring home to the hearers the righteousness of one view or the other. The epic is certainly the greatest repository of Indian knowledge and Indian way of life.

It is difficult to exhaust all the characters that appear in the Mahabharata. Apart from the two great characters, Bhism and Yudhishthira, there is the wise Vidura, the elder kinsman of the royal Kurus, then there is the Lord Krishna, the relentless fighter of evil. The spirited warrior Karna and Rajaguru, Drona that is the teacher of the princes, form a class by themselves. The Pandava and Kaurava brothers are unique characters. As for the heroines we have the proud Draupadi, ever ready to take an offence and fight back, the simple Gandhari, the wife of Dhritarashtra who went with her eyes closely bandaged in deference to her husband’s blindness, the Pandava mother Kunti, and so on and so forth. A countless number of lesser known men and women are there enlarging the scope of the epic so as to include all sections of people and professions.

In Bhism we have the example of a life dedicated to the service of his people. At the prime of youth he takes a vow of celibacy and renounces his paternal heritage so that his old father Santanu may be happy. That in itself is a great sacrifice, but this does not make an ascetic of him; his dharma would not allow him the title of an ascetic. Living with his people he devotes his entire life to selfless service of his community—this is non-attachment to the world in the ahimsa sense.

As the grandsire of the Kurus, Bhism brings up both the Kauravas and Pandavas with paternal care. However, he soon finds out that it is better for peace to separate them; So he establishes them in two palaces dividing the kingdom, that again does not help. He is always on the move to bring about lasting settlement between the two warring factions of his own house. But the forces of evil prove too much for him, and we see him leading the Kaurava forces at that advanced age to the battlefield at Kurukshetra to uphold his Kshatriya dharma.

The other great hero is Yudhisthira, also called Dhrama-putra. He is different, simple, modest and god-fearing, a lovable figure with a serenity that one would not easily attribute to the Kshatriya caste. Arjuna is a real knight, ready
to take offence and willing to uphold his honour with arms. Bhima is a dynamic character and could never suffer an insult. And it was left to their elder brother Yudhisthira to keep them in check and hold peace.

Yudhisthira lives through war and bloodshed, but still remains a man of ahimsa. He holds himself high over wickedness and cruelty. Lord Krishna’s assurances of immortality for the vanquished warriors do not satisfy his intense attachment to non-violence. His conscience reminds him again and again of the command that thou shalt not injure any being, and we see him always at loggerheads with his Kshatriya dharma.

After the war he wants to renounce the gains that have been made. He fears that he will not be able to practise true ahimsa in the palace and longs to lead a hermit’s life. He is conscious of guilt and only Krishna’s arguments could hold him back for a time. But still his conscience would not give him peace. He carries on for a few years, but the news of Lord Krishna’s death so upsets him that he decides to forsake the kingship that his Kshatriya dharma has imposed on him, and departs to the forest.

The Mahabharata in a wider sense is actually the social history of the Indian people. The society is predominantly based on ahimsa. Ahimsa is recognized as the noblest principle which should govern the life of all. Like most other books written in that period it also condones caste. But there is a difference. Caste is thought of here as division of labour according to the merits of the individual very much like the classes that Plato envisages in the Republic. It is not the inferiority or the superiority of the caste that is being dealt with, but the duties of each caste. Caste divisions are at times even questioned and the equality of the individual is tacitly recognized. We read:

“Truth, self-control, asceticism, generosity, non-violence, constancy in virtue—these are the means of success, not caste or family.”

The Mahabharata’s emphasis is on social behaviour. Dharma is considered the essential pre-requisite for the preservation of society and social institutions, and is thereby given a dynamic character. What is dharma is decided by the condi-
tions of society. An individual’s responsibility is to seek harmony with his social dharma. He has to fulfil his duties as a member of society and it is not right for an individual to renounce the world before his time. As is put in Santiparvam his attitude to life should be governed by:

“Whatever is not conducive to social welfare, or whatever you are likely to be ashamed of doing, never do.”

The eternal nature of truth and ahimsa is recognized in this epic. An individual may seek pleasure and seek to avoid pain. But nobility lies in learning to be detached from pleasure and pain. By being, so to say, above pleasure and pain he can fearlessly tread the path of virtue and truth. He can live according to the dictates of his dharma and be in peace and harmony with his inner conscience.

In the voluminous epic the teachings are illustrated by parables and other significant narrations. Such anecdotes from Mahabharata form the main theme of many poems and plays down the ages. In recent years the films drawing their stories as they do many a time from characters and anecdotes of the Mahabharata are making them still more popular with the masses. The tale of Nala and Damayanti, the legend of Parasurama, a Brahmin who killed all the Kshatriyas of the world in fulfilment of a vow, the toil of Bhagiratha who brought down the Ganges from the skies to the earth to obtain the salvation for his ancestors, and so many other stories, both big and small, which every child in India knows are all interwoven in this epic.

The Mahabharata like the Ramayana has been tremendously popular all over the Indian subcontinent. Like Ramayana it has been translated into all the major regional languages of the country. The first Tamil translation of the Mahabharata seems to have come out as early as the eighth century followed by Kannada and Telugu versions in the eleventh century. In other languages too it has been translated more or less at the same time as the Ramayana and got the same popularity. It is the popularity of these two great books that has been the most unifying factor in the life of the country and contributed greatly to the harmonious development of the Indian way of life.

In practically all the regional languages there are stories of
the *Mahabharata* with illustrations for the children. The *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* stories in such languages are a must now for the growing children and the impact on their mind of these stories is immense. The *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* have now been retold in simple English by many Indian writers and such books have spread in the foreign market. The *Ramlila* celebrations every year have made the *Mahabharta* stories more popular. The burning of Ravana though not non-violent emphasizes the truth that virtue ultimately survives.

**THE SECRET OF THE GITA**

For a Hindu the *Bhagavadgita*, often called simply the *Gita*, stands on the same plane as the sermon on the mount to the Christians. The *Gita* is also a sermon, given by the Lord Krishna to Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. As such, the *Gita* forms a part of the *Mahabharata* epic, actually chapters 25 to 42 of *Bhismaparvam*. It is believed to give the teachings of the whole *Mahabharata* in a nutshell. It contains all the philosophy and ethics discussed and explained in the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads* and the *Sastras*. The Hindus believe that the *Gita* contains the essence of all the teachings of Hinduism.

It is easy to visualize the situation on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. The two formidable armies, the biggest ever seen, are lined up on either side. All the noted personalities of the age are there; kings, chieftains and warriors of all shades and callings. There are virtuous men who come to fight in obedience to their *dharma*, also there are wicked men who come for glory and power. They have come face to face in a fratricidal struggle to kill or be killed. In this situation Arjuna, the hope of the Pandava camp is affected by a sense of frustration and doubt. Is it proper to kill his own kith and kin just to win the war and worldly gains? He is alarmed at the prospect of war and tells his charioteer and principal ally of the Pandavas, Lord Krishna, that he would retire and rather renounce the world for good!

Some scholars are of the opinion that the *Gita* does not form a part of the original *Mahabharata*. They say that it has been inserted in it by some unknown author. Well, if it is so one could not have found a better situation to insert a
treatise of this kind. Imagine the psychological moment just on the eve of the generation’s most crucial battle. The milieu is just the right one for a spiritual treatise of this type.

Arjuna’s doubts, says Lord Krishna, are due to his ignorance. His duty is to act and not to worry about consequences. As to the killing of his kith and kin in the war Arjuna ought to know that one cannot kill or get killed. This talk about killing is all nonsense when one should know that the soul of man is immortal. Whoever has heard of killing the immortal? The essential thing in man is not the body or the sense, but the changeless spirit which cannot be killed. Lord tells Arjuna:

“How will the man who knows this soul to be imperishable, eternal and free from birth and decay, cause anyone to be killed, or kill anyone.” (Gita 2-2-21)

Nevertheless, Arjuna remains unconvinced and repeats, “Why dost thou set me to a work of violence. Lord Krishna now starts on a discussion of man’s mission on earth.

It should not be forgotten that the background of the Gita is the world of the epics. It is a world of stresses and strains in the social and religious life of the people. The Vedic age is past, the heroic age of the epics has come to stay, the Upanishadic thoughts are still in ferment, the unorthodox religious systems like Buddhism and Jainism are introducing new divisions in the community, the synthesis of Aryan and non-Aryan cultures is in progress, and the Gita sets out new dimensions to accommodate all these diverse forces into the religion of Hinduism. It thus becomes universal, eclectic and catholic in its outlook.

The killing that Lord Krishna promotes in this book is not *himsa* or violence in any sense. What Arjuna is exhorted to do is only the fulfilment of his duties whatever that might involve. Killing or not killing is immaterial since there is absolutely no difference between the living and the dead. Lord Krishna says:

“They are both ignorant; he who thinks that the soul is capable of killing and he who thinks that it can be killed; for verily the soul neither kills nor is killed.” (Gita 2-19)

The Gita insists on the correct performance of one’s duties. In this way it builds up a strong basis for action.
The philosophy that the *Gita* preaches to humanity is *karmayoga*, the philosophy of activism—or to put it in a literal translation—yoking, yoga, of the self to *Karma* which in *Gita* means action. Act according to one's own conscience. It does not matter whether it is right or wrong in the eyes of the world. Lord Krishna says:

"Better is one's own duty, though devoid of merit, than the duty of another well-executed. He, who performs the duty enjoined by his own nature, does not incur sin."

(*Gita* 18-47)

One should not be worried about rewards and outcomes, for you have the right to work but not to the fruits thereof."

"Thus the *Gita* would ever remain a scripture for social action and social service. The selfless service of love, humility and duty that the *Gita* emphasizes is of a unique nature and constitutes its special message to the world.

How is this non-attachment to the world to be obtained? The *Gita* says that it can be brought about through *jnana* or knowledge. The knowledge of the true self should lead anyone to forsake attachment. It is here that we come across the Upanishadic thought about Brahma and Parabrahma. If one would realize "*Aham Brahma*" that is 'I am Brahma', then the distinction between self and nonself disappears forever and man attains blissfulness. Worldly attachments would not trouble such a man. He would perform action not in the spirit of a doer, but as a part of his existence. The *Gita* says,

"He, who sees inaction in action, and action in inaction, is wise among men; he is a yogi, who has accomplished all action."

(*Gita* 4-18)

The *Gita* does not even say that a *Karmayogi*—that is one who finds salvation in selfless action—need have faith in God. But it says that faith in God can help one attain non-attachment. Devotion or *Bhakti* is a way by which a man can forget self and act with nobler motives. Lord Krishna exhorts men to leave the fruits of actions to God:

"Offering the fruits of actions to God, the *Karmayogi* attains peace in the shape of God-realization; whereas he who works with selfish motive, being attached to the fruits of actions through desire, gets tied down." (*Gita* 5-12)

The *Gita* does not encourage renunciation. It strikes a
balance between renunciation, and involvement in *Samsara*, worldly existence, by the concept of *Karmayoga*—an ideal that is worthy of ahimsa. It does not abandon activity; in fact it glorifies it, but then it preserves in it the spirit of renunciation by discarding from action the play of selfish interests.

The divine preacher in the *Gita* is Lord Krishna whom the Hindus believe to be an incarnation of God Vishnu. The *Gita* is explicit in recognizing the divinity of the preacher and enjoins devotion to Him as a way of salvation. It is this aspect of the *Gita* teachings that has made it very dear to many Indians. As we shall see later India in later years became absorbed in the Bhakti cult which means salvation through intensive devotion to one deity or another. Lord Krishna says:

“Fix your mind on Me, be devoted to Me, worship Me and bow to Me; so shall you without doubt reach Me. This I truly promise to you; for you are dear to Me.”

*(Gita 18-65)*

But the *Gita* does not insist on devotion only to Lord Krishna. It does not even insist that the path of the *Gita* is the only path. The *Gita* recognizes the existence of other schools, other sects and philosophies. An outstanding characteristic of Hindu thought, nay of all Indian thought, is the spirit of tolerance that it breathes at every stage.

The following passage from the *Gita* could be considered as the ideal definition of a man of ahimsa.

“Non-violence in thought, words and deeds, truthfulness and geniality of speech, absence of anger even on provocation, renunciation of the idea of doership in action, tranquillity of mind, refraining from malicious gossip, kindness to all creatures, absence of attachment to the objects of senses even during their contact with senses, mildness, sense of shame in doing things not sanctioned by the scriptures or usage, abstaining from idle pursuits, sublimity, forgiveness, fortitude, external purity, absence of malice, absence of feeling of self-importance: these are the marks of one who is naturally endowed with divine virtues, O descendant of Bharata.”

*(Gita 16-2,3)*

**Dharma in the Puranas**

The *Puranas* which mean old narratives form the treasure-
house of Hindu mythology. They cannot be counted as high as religious literature. But their hold on the common people is immense. All beliefs, superstitious or otherwise, of the Hindus trace back to one or other of the Puranas. In popularity they come next only to the two epics and like the epics, the Puranas too have contributed greatly to the evolution of the way of life of the Indian people.

Folklore and legends must have been the first form of religious literature that came into existence in any community. So it must be guessed that the nucleus at least of the stories of the Indian Puranas must have originated in very ancient times. The original Puranic stories must have been authored by popular bards in very remote past; later it is possible that a lot of details were added to them by resourceful preachers with a view of raising the religiousness of the people. Hindus take them to be of divine origin; they believe that they have come down to us through the great Sage Vyasa, the author of Vedas from the creator himself.

There are eighteen main Puranas and some Upapuranas or sub Puranas. Some of the more important Puranas are Vishnu, Naradiya, Agneya, Kurma, Garuda, Vayu, Skanda, Markandeya and Bhagavata Puranas, out of which Bhagavata Purana is the most popular amongst the masses. Each Purana has a central purpose—that is to glorify the cult of one god or another. For instance Vishnupurana extols the cult of Vishnu; Kurmapurana that of Shiva, Markandeyapurana that of Shakti or Durga and Bhagavata Purana that of Vishnu in his avatar as Krishna. We will not, however, go into the details of these cults since our object is only to find out the ahimsa contents of these works.

The basic teachings of the Puranas is the cultivation of dharma. Dharma is conceived as that which is approved by the Vedas. Apart from the Vedas, the Puranas give importance to one’s own conscience which is considered to be divinely inspired. One should obey the dictates of his conscience, then he can do no wrong. The individual dharma should contribute to the general welfare of all mankind. It would work for preservation, progress and welfare of human society, and in a wider sense for the happiness of the whole world.

The Puranas are greatly concerned with the social welfare of all humanity. The social ethics that they preach is practical
and utilitarian. The common good of all is the supreme standard by which virtue is measured. One should lead a normal life, meaning that life must be led according to the dictates of the Sutras and Sastras. Running away from responsibilities is never condoned by the authors of the Puranas. One should be unselfish and discharge his duties to the family and society with a sense of humility and devotion. He should live in peace and contentment in a state of equanimity and communion with God.

The caste system is expressly mentioned in the Puranas as the necessary social adjustment for securing maximum progress, harmony and welfare of mankind. The duties of society are divided and each caste is asked to perform the duties allotted to it. The four castes are considered to be limbs of society and are asked to strive to achieve maximum efficiency in discharging their duties. To use a modern term what is envisaged in the caste system of the Puranas is a form of specialization. Though caste cannot be condoned it must be admitted that the excellence of arts and crafts that ancient India has been famous for is partly due to this division of labour and the generations of specialization it insists.

The Puranas utilize the Upanishadic concept of immanent soul for inculcating social virtues. All living beings in the world from the lowest to the highest are linked together in a mysterious way. Any injury done to any part thereof could be only at the risk of causing harm to another part. One who is injuring any living being is in a way injuring his own self. Hence it is necessary to avoid harming any living thing. Ahimsa is thus declared to be the greatest dharma. “Ahimsa paramo Dharma” says Padmapurana (1-31-27).

Again just avoiding bodily injury only will not be enough. Agneyapurana enumerates ten ways in which injury can be done to a fellow man which includes not only the causing of different grades of physical pain, but also back-biting, obstructing the good of another, betrayal of trust and so on. A virtuous man should consider every living thing whether man or animal or even insect his own kin. One attains blessedness by never injuring—by words, deeds, or thought,—any living thing. Padmapurana says: “Do not do unto others, what you do not desire for yourself.” (1-56-33).
Puranic dharma is based on Satyam (truth), yet another aspect of ahimsa virtue. "Satyammulam Jagat Sarvam", exhorts Brahmandapurana. Its greatness is illustrated through such stories as those of Sri Harishchandra and the sage Visvamitra. The story of Sri Harishchandra is very popular with all sections of the people and especially so with the children. The story shows how a man, whatever be his position in the world, should go to any length in quest of truth.

Ahimsa rests on the practice of virtues like compassion, charity and generosity. As for compassion, charity and generosity one could never find a nobler story than that of emperor Sibi. Here it is the gods themselves who come to test the emperor. They come disguised as a dove and a hawk. The dove seeks protection with the emperor from the clutches of the hawk who is following it. At this the hawk starts an argument with the emperor. Is not a dove a legitimate food for a hawk? The hawk contends that smaller birds are his natural prey. The emperor is in a quandary and offers an equal weight of his own flesh as food for the hawk. But it is found, because of a trick played by the gods, that no weight of his flesh would equal the weight of the dove. Only his whole weight could equal the weight of dove. At this emperor Sibi offers his whole body as food to the hawk so that he may spare the dove.

Stories like this are numerous in the Puranas and all of them underline moral instructions. One can well imagine how popular these stories could become with the people shaping their life, their thoughts and actions.

The study of the Puranas will be a great corrective to the moral bankruptcy of the modern man. From the cradle to the grave these are the stories that inspire them to a life of truth, compassion and generosity. Like the Jataka tales of Buddhism the stories of the Puranas have greatly contributed to the ahimsa way of life of the Indian people. In fact in the Puranic stories we see the influence of Buddha and his teachings. In the Puranas, Lord Buddha is recognized as an avatar of Vishnu as a first step towards the absorption of Buddhism into Hinduism.
Hinduism absorbs Buddhism

In a previous chapter we traced the fortunes of Buddhism till the reign of the Kushan emperor Kanishka. Kanishka died in the year 162 A.D. His successors were also well disposed towards Buddhism and contributed much for the enrichment of the Sangha. But none of them attained the same greatness as Kanishka, and the Kushan empire slowly shrunk and began to disintegrate. This state of disintegration continued till the rise of the Guptas in the fourth century after Christ.

The Guptas were imperialists to the core. The Buddhist doctrine of ahimsa, and peaceful conquest by dharma could not have been very popular with them. Rather Hinduism with its god-head Vishnu and many minor gods and goddesses were more in keeping with their aspirations and valour.

The Brahmin priesthood allowed the Guptas the divine right of kings. The kings were raised to the status of representatives of God on earth with arbitrary and unbounded
powers to rule. The Dharma of the Kshatriya was war and conquest. It was their responsibility to protect the realm from internal and external enemies through courage and valour. That the Gupta rulers rose to the expectations is shown by their defeat of the Huns who repeatedly came to invade the country from the north-west. While Europe and even the mighty imperial Rome fell to their assaults, the Indian subcontinent saved itself from their plunder and pillage by the military strength of the Gupta rulers.

While Buddhism developed the theory of Bodhisattvas, the Hindus came to worship Vishnu in his many incarnations. In this idea of incarnation any number of gods could be accommodated. They obliged the Buddhists by allowing Buddha the status of an incarnation of Vishnu.

The Guptas were Vaishnavas, the worshippers of Vishnu. Their coins carried the image of Garuda, the vehicle of Vishnu, and they are found almost all over the subcontinent showing that their power was supreme as long as it lasted. It is not only Vishnu whom they worshipped but also many other gods and goddesses, that are prominent in the Puranas. The fourth Gupta ruler, Kumaragupta is said to have been a great devotee of the god Kartikeya. He issued coins depicting Kartikeya riding on a peacock on one side; and the king feeding the peacock on the other side.

By far the greatest sovereign of the Gupta period was Chandragupta II also called Vikramaditya. He is said to have been a patron of all learning. His court was famous for the Navaratnas, the nine gems, who were authorities on different branches of learning. Kalidasa, the greatest dramatist was one of the jewels of his court. Dhanwantari a famous name in Indian medicine was another, Aryabhatta, the great astronomer and mathematician was yet another. The age of Vikramaditya recorded tremendous advances in all branches of knowledge.

However, the greatest event in the reign of Chandragupta Vikramaditya was the visit of the Chinese pilgrim Fa-Hien to India. We notice that by this time China had already been converted to Buddhism; the missionary zeal of Ashoka and Kanishka was already paying rich dividend. The converted Chinese were naturally anxious to know about the country of
origin of their faith, and pilgrims risking life and overcoming untold difficulties came to visit the sacred land hallowed by the footsteps of the Buddha. Two of them Fa-Hien and Yuan Chang have left an account of their travels in India and thus have become important historical figures.

Fa-Hien travelled in the realm of Chandragupta for about ten years, from 400 to 411 A.D. and has left a detailed account of his travels in India. From these accounts we know that Chandragupta was a powerful ruler, the undisputed master of Hindustan. His reign was benevolent and just. Fa-Hien says that the people were happy, the taxes were light and the country was rich and prosperous. He is full of praise for the people: "Throughout the country," he says, "no one kills any living thing, nor drinks wine, nor eats onions or garlic." What we see from his description is that Buddha's teachings had already penetrated into the masses and were influencing their everyday life.

Fa-Hien does not speak of any persecution of the Buddhists from which we must conclude that although the Guptas were themselves devout Hindus they did not interfere with the religion of their subjects. Hinduism had never been an aggressive faith and certainly the tolerant spirit of the Hindus must have allowed the Buddhists to co-exist. During these days of co-existence these two faiths must have been working out a synthesis. The resurgent Brahmin priesthood under the Guptas tried to win over the masses imperceptibly with the popularization of Puranic stories. In fact the Hindus and the Buddhist masses were fast moving towards identification.

Hinduism today depends mostly on the philosophical doctrines propounded by Sankara. It was he who framed a new outlook and gave a subtle vitality to the old religion so that it was able to resist successfully the onslaught of Islam as well as of the West. It was he who raised Hinduism to a religion with a modern philosophy and a definite theology. Sankara actually moulded the old religion to the particular standard of his own genius. In fact, he was responsible for the orthodox Hindu India as we know it today.

Sankara was born at a time when the country was on the verge of a collapse. It was an age of decadence. The art and
architecture of the age bear testimony to the moral degradation of the people of the period. There was no outstanding Acharya or preacher who could lead the spiritual life of the country.

Buddhism still had a hold on the masses, but then as a religion it had changed greatly. The great ethical doctrines preached by Buddha had lost much of their force and simplicity. Buddhism had faded into a body of superstitions and dogmatic beliefs. It was Sankara who reformed and once for all put Hinduism on sure and firm footing, and thereby brought about the complete assimilation of Buddhism into the all-embracing fold of Hinduism.

It is difficult to establish the exact time when Sankara lived. He must have flourished sometime in the ninth century, and probably the Malayalam era started with him. Anyway, it is certain that Sankara was born at Kaladi in Kerala state in a family of Namboodhri Brahmins of Malabar. He was the only son of his father Shivaguru and mother Aryamba. His father was a great devotee of Lord Shiva, that is why perhaps his only son came to be called Sankara.

Unfortunately Shivaguru died when Sankara was still a child, and Sankara was brought up by his mother. One can well imagine the hopes and dreams of his widow mother centred on her only son. She brought him up with the greatest care and affection. Sankara remained devoted to his mother to the very last days of her life.

Young Sankara was very fond of Vedas, and early in life memorized a great part of it. The world did not interest him, his greatest wish was to become a Sannyasin or a wandering ascetic. But how could his mother allow her only son to forsake the world to become a Sannyasin? The legend is that Sankara was caught by a crocodile while taking bath in the river Pariyar. His mother prayed to God that she would make him a Sannyasin if He would only spare his life. So Sankara had a miraculous escape! After that his mother could not keep him in the house. Sankara left after promising to come back to be by her side in her last days and to perform her last rites.

Sankara left his country behind and came to the banks of the river Narmada, to the Vedic school presided over by Sage
Govinda was a pupil of Gaudapada one of the earliest exponents of the Vedanta. It must have been from Govinda that Sankara learned the fundamentals of the Vedanta philosophy which later was to become the basis of his own Advaita Vedanta. But his inordinate quest of knowledge did not end there, Sankara from there went to Banaras. In his wanderings he met eminent teachers and thinkers and came across different schools of philosophical learning. Quite early he must have come across the different schools of Buddhist philosophies of the age also.

Sankara's fame as an Acharya, a teacher, was now established all over the country. His disciples increased and he toured throughout the length and breadth of Hindustan. In the course of his wanderings in his divine vision he learnt that his mother was sick and was about to die. Sankara hurried back home to Kaladi and thus fulfilled his promise given to his mother at the time of his renunciation of the world that he would come home to her side at the time of her death and that he himself would perform her last rites.

It is said that in open defiance of the rules governing the order of Sannyasins, Sankara prepared to perform the funeral rites of his mother. There arose naturally serious opposition to this move from his orthodox kinsmen. When they saw that he would go ahead without caring for their opposition they refused to co-operate with him. They would not give him firewood for the funeral pyre; nor would they help him to move the corpse. So, according to the legend, Sankara had to cut the corpse into pieces to carry it to the pyre. Instead of wood he gathered plantain leaves from the garden of their house and made up a pyre in a corner of the garden. It is said that by his mysterious powers the wet plantain leaves burnt like firewood and thus his mother's body was cremated!

The legend is very revealing. Sankara was on the path of revolt. His kinsmen fanatically struck to the letter of the law and Sankara revolted against their irrationality. He rose against all sham and superstition that were flourishing around him at the time. Like the Buddha some hundreds of years before him, he was up in revolt against all irrational beliefs. He was out to cut out a new path for himself to lead his people to spirituality. His path was the path of Advaita Vedanta.
THE PRACHHANNA BUDDHA

Sankara cannot be considered a teacher of ahimsa. He was more of a philosopher. But philosophy in India always had a direct application to life. Sankara saw that the people were confused about religious values and were going astray from their tradition of virtuous living. He was fully aware of the greatness of Buddha's teachings. But also he was learned enough in the Hindu scriptures to understand their merits, and realized that they had a role to play in elevating the religious life of the people. The many schools of Hinduism that were then prevalent had all in them some element of truth. So what he did was to harmonize these different schools and direct afresh the spirituality of the Indian nation.

Sankara did not consider Buddhism to be an alien faith; he took it as a growth within the Hindu fold. By his time Buddha had already been raised to the status of an Avatar (incarnation). Sankara now incorporated the teachings of the Buddha into the beliefs of the Hindus while purifying and revitalizing the old faith. But the reactionary elements in Hinduism represented by the Mimansakas were against it. The Mimansakas attached great importance to rituals and Sankara attacked this empty ritualism as much as Buddha. And so they called him Prachhanna Buddha, or concealed Buddha!

In this famous Advaita Vedanta, Sankara was not expounding a completely new system. He claimed that he was only interpreting the scriptures according to new lights. He based his interpretations on Badarayan who in his Brahma-Sutra had attempted to harmonize the different doctrines of the Upanishads. Sankara wrote a commentary on Brahma-Sutra elaborating the doctrines contained therein. He also wrote commentaries on the principal Upanishads and the Gita.

In expounding the doctrine of Advaita Vedanta, Sankara brought into Hindu thought, the then popular belief of Sunnyavada of Mahayana Buddhism. Mahayana Buddhism recognizes the absolute reality as infinite which is neither existent nor non-existent, which is in fact absolute Sunnyata that is nothingness which is described as Buddha. Sankara maintains that the material world is only illusion, Maya. The world is mere show—there is neither a world nor a creator. There is
only the supreme Parabrahma, the Absolute who is neither real nor unreal, who has no attributes—Nirguna Brahma.

But Sankara argues that God can be conceived from another angle. If one looks at him from the standpoint of ordinary experiences from which the world is considered real, God is the creator, the sustainer and the destroyer of the world. He is Omnipotent and Omniscient Being with attributes. God in this aspect is called Saguna Brahma or Iswara. To the common people Sankara recommends worship and devotion to this personal God as means of attaining salvation. This again corresponds to the Bodhisattva concept of Mahayana Buddhism.

Men are in fetters. Every being is a potential Bodhisattva or part of the Infinite Sunnyata or Buddha. But then Buddhism holds that he is in the bondage of avidya or ignorance. And Sankara says that every man is in essence a jivatama and forms as part of the Infinite Parabrahma, the Absolute. But then he is in the bondage of Maya or illusion. When the forces of Maya or Avidya are removed the man realizes his Self and is saved.

Thus having paved the way for the philosophical merger of Buddhism in Hinduism Sankara sets out to reform the old religion by purging it of the bad and unhealthy customs and practices that had crept into it. In certain places in South India and elsewhere human sacrifice to please gods was in vogue; Sankara rebelled against this cruel practice and was able to put it down. There again he suppressed the grosser manifestations of Sakta worship. The worship of the goddess Kali had turned obscene and undignified, largely owing to the influence of the Tantrics. Sankara purged the religion of such objectionable features and raised the aesthetic sense of the people as a whole.

In some respects Sankara was a social reformer; though not to the same degree as Buddha. Like Buddha, however, Sankara questioned caste divisions. He maintained that Nirvana was in the reach of all, irrespective of caste. Sankara saw that to keep society clean and strong the people must be free from superstitions of all kind. He condemned irrationality and uncleanness, and glorified virtue and saintliness. He introduced healthy practices in the religious life of the people and once for all established Hindu society on a firm footing.

Common with the Upanishadic teachings Sankara insists
that detachment from the world of Samsara is essential before one can attain liberation. The whole life is Maya and why be fascinated by illusions! However, one should realize that virtue lies in living a life ordained by society. Though life is Maya, it is in a sense important because only by living through life one would come to the true knowledge. True knowledge would show that he is one with the Self of all things. So for an enlightened soul the whole world becomes one with the Self.

Sankara’s basis for the moral and social life of man is the underlying unity of all creations. Advaita Vedanta which is literally non-dualistic monism, in its practical application becomes an altruistic ahimsa creed. When one realizes the kinship of all beings violence and war become ridiculous. Racial and national boundaries become obsolete. Destiny of all men is intimately connected and it is in the fulfilment of each other’s life that the sanctity and harmony of the world depends. One should strive for the unity of all creation, for the fraternity of all nations.

Sankara condemned all ceremonial piety. On his deathbed, it is said, Sankara prayed for forgiveness for having frequented temples, since by so doing he had outwardly shown disbelief in the omnipresence of God!

Sankara organized different orders of Sannyasins who popularized the reform movements initiated by him. He also established great Mutts or monasteries in the four corners of the country to propagate his teachings which were to serve as centres of religious activity. They are still there; at Badri in the North, at Puri in the East, at Dwarka on the West coast, and at Sringeri in Mysore state. It must have been from Buddhism that Sankara got the idea of establishing Mutts to propagate his teachings. He himself drew up regulations for the proper administration and functioning of these Mutts. The head of these Mutts are called Sankaracharya and it is their responsibility to maintain unpolluted the teachings of Adi-Sankara that is Advaita Vedanta.

Sankara was a great organizer—he organized religion on a distinctive pattern. All his life he worked incessantly for the spiritual uplift of the masses. In his life-time he wandered all over India establishing, so to say, the spiritual integration of the country. His four Mutts located at the four corners of the
country clearly show what he had intended them for. His illustrious disciples who have adorned the pontifical headship of these Mutts have shed their spiritual lustre upon the whole country. And they are still there as landmarks of the spiritual unity and solidarity of the Indian nation.

And at the age of thirty-two Sankara died, it is said, at Kedarnath in the Himalayas. A man born hundreds of years ago in Kerala dying in the North at a shrine on the Himalayas—is it not a fitting tribute to the great teacher who considered the whole of India his own country? The vast sub-continent extending from Kashmir to Kanyakumari was his field of activity. He disregarded the barriers of state or territory; and conceived India as one country, one people.

Sankara was primarily responsible for the disappearance of Buddhism from India. Buddhist Church in the course of centuries had fallen low; it had become a corrupt and superstitious institution. What Sankara did was to eliminate the unhealthy influence of the Buddhist church from the life of the people. But the noble precepts of Buddha had already got integrated with the everyday life of the Indian people. Buddhism never disappeared from India, it only got integrated with the life of the people. Buddhist ahimsa became a part and parcel of the Indian way of life.

RAMANUJA, THE ACHARYA

Some three hundred years after Sankara, was born Ramanuja—the great Vaishnava Acharya or teacher who initiated a new pattern in the religious life of the country. That pattern was based on Bhakti or devotion to God. We are interested in him not so much as a teacher of ahimsa as in the man who had made lasting contributions to the life and thought of the Indian people. The subsequent religious and social history of the Indian people is intimately connected with the teachings of Ramanuja. Many of the later devotional sects derived their inspiration from him.

By Ramanuja’s time the assimilation of Buddhism into Hinduism was almost complete. We notice that at this period of Indian history there was great popular interest in philosophy. There were many schools of philosophy which attracted many teachers and followers. Nowhere was this religious ferment so
deep-rooted as in the South. The revival of Hinduism there coincided with the spread of two main sects—The Vaishnavas and the Shaivas. These two sects are different only in the way Shiva or Vishnu is looked upon as the supreme godhead. By the time of Ramanuja these two sects flourished side by side in South India.

In this milieu of religious activity was born Ramanuja in the years 1017 A.D. in Sriperumbudur in Tamilnad. By birth Ramanuja was the son of a grand-daughter of Alavandar or Yamunacharya, the then Acharya of the Vaishnava sect. One of the grandsons of Alavandar had settled down in the holy shrine of Vishnu at Tirumalai with his aged father and two sisters. The elder of these sisters was married to a Brahmin scholar named Kesava Somayaji of Sriperumbudur. Out of this marriage was born Ramanuja who was destined to succeed Alavandar as the Acharya of the Vaishnava sect.

Ramanuja probably had his early education at home under the guidance of his own father who was himself a reputed scholar. According to the custom of the day he married when he was only seventeen years old, and began the life of a pious householder. Soon after his father died, and Ramanuja with his widowed mother and a sister moved to Kanchi, a day’s journey from his native village Sriperumbudur. There Ramanuja took up the study of Advaita Vedanta under a distinguished teacher named Yadavaprakash.

Yadavaprakash was an independent thinker who was then famous all over the country for his great learning and scholarship. He criticised even the great Sankara and wrote an independent commentary on Brahma-Sutra. Though Ramanuja could not agree with all the interpretations of Yadavaprakash he continued his studies under the great teacher. And before he was twenty-two Ramanuja came to be recognized as a rising star. His reputation soon reached the ears of the saintly old Alavandar in Srirangam. Alavandar who was then looking out for a successor undertook a journey to Kanchi to see for himself if the reputation did not belie the greatness of the youthful Ramanuja. After seeing him in the company of his Guru Yadavaprakash, it is said, Alavandar decided to make him his successor. However, Alavandar did not take him away from his studies but allowed him to continue his search for
truth under Yadavaprakash.

In course of time when the old Alavandar realized that his end was near, he sent for Ramanuja so that he might give him his last blessings. Ramanuja made haste, but before he could reach Srirangam from Kanchi the great Acharya had breathed his last. Ramanuja thought that he was not yet ready to take his duties as the successor of great Alavandar. He went back to Kanchi to continue his studies and make himself fit to lead the sect. He then studied under many teachers and scholars and became well versed in all schools of thought.

All this while Ramanuja had been leading the life of a householder. His mother had died and his wife did not prove very helpful to his religious aspirations. Like many before him and after him, Ramanuja found his life as a householder as an obstruction to his spiritual quest. So he decided that he should forsake the world. He first provided for his wife and thus fulfilled his obligation to the social norm. He became an ascetic and received the insignia of monastic life at the Vishnu temple in Kanchi.

Ramanuja was now free to devote himself to the task of leading his followers to God. He finally settled down at Srirangam as the Acharya of the Vaishnava sect. His first endeavour was to bring about a sense of cohesion and unity in the sect. As the successor of Alavandar he had a sort of pontifical authority in the sect. His knowledge of the varied aspects of the Vaishnava cult helped him to bring together all shades of opinion under his personal influence. He was soon recognized as the undisputable spokesman of the Vaishnavas.

Ramanuja now took up the task of giving a firm philosophical basis for Vaishnavism. He wrote a commentary on Brahma-Sutra and also on the Gita. Apart from these he wrote a number of books on Vedanta; Vedantasara, Vedantasamgraha, and Vedantadipa. In these works he brought forth his philosophy—his ideas about soul and God. His main concern was to reconcile the thought of the Upanishads and other scriptures with the practices of and beliefs of the Vaishnava sect.

Basing his arguments on the sacred texts Ramanuja declares that there is one God, the eternal Brahman. According to him God is not characterless, Nirguna; but is possessed of many qualities, Saguna. He indentifies God with Vishnu or
the god of the Vaishnava sect. Again Ramanuja holds that God in His infinite mercy comes to this world in different incarnations. This gives justification to devotion to Rama and Krishna, the two very popular incarnations of Vishnu and also to other incarnations.

Though Ramanuja admits that there is only one reality, the Eternal Brahman, he proclaims that God is possessed of two integral parts, the matter and spirit. God contains within himself the material objects of the visible world as well as the souls which are real. It is here that he deviates from the absolute monism or Advaita Vedanta of Sankara which insists that everything else but God is Maya or illusion. This monism of Ramanuja which while admitting the oneness of God recognizes the existence of matter and individual souls is called Visishtadvaita or qualified monism.

Ramanuja holds that a man has a soul and a body. The soul is never dead, it remains the same in different births and rebirths. It transmigrates from one body to another. A non-liberated soul due to its karma is in bondage of the body. The liberation is obtained by Bhakti or devotion. Ramanuja declares that God will redeem from bondage the man who flings himself at his infinite mercy, and constantly remembers him as the only object of love and adoration.

Like the Bodhisattva of the Buddhists Ramanuja conceives God as an infinitely compassionate Being, always ready to listen to the prayers of his devotees and very free with his unbounded graces. Like the Buddhists again Ramanuja did not attach any importance to caste. He declares that the distinctions of caste have nothing to do with the nature of soul; he offers Mukti to all. All Bhaktas are equal in the eyes of the Lord. There is no real distinction between a man and a woman, a Brahmin or a Pariah; whatever distinction there exists is social and not spiritual.

Ramanuja’s idea of Bhakti is not mere emotional devotion to the Almighty, but a perfect life of virtue and charity. A Bhakta first of all should not be attached to anything but God, just like a lover to the beloved. Since God is but an integral part of the world he would come to consider all the world his kin. This should naturally lead him to a life of charity and benevolence. Injury to any living thing is unthinkable, even
casting aspersion on others is to be avoided. His speech should be based on truth, and action based on the will of God. His life is dedicated to God, that is to say he should devote his entire existence to the well-being of the whole humanity. He should live in harmony with the world, and always show hope and cheerfulness. In fact a Bhakta is exhorted to lead a perfect ahimsa way of life.

Ramanuja was soon recognized as a great teacher, and the fame of his teachings was widespread. He had many disciples and the number of his converts increased day by day. The influence of his Vaishnava sect increased all over the country and that is said to have brought upon him the wrath of the Chola monarch who was a Shaiva. Ramanuja had to flee from Srirangam which was inside Chola territory and had to take refuge for some years in Mysore. There is a tradition that Ramanuja lived to an age of one hundred and at last attained Nirvana in the year 1117 A.D.

Ramanuja is a great name in the religious and social life of India. The religious beliefs of the present day Hindus especially of the masses owe perhaps more to Ramanuja than to Sankara. This Brahmin saint from South India sought to rationalise man's relation with his Creator on the foundation of Bhakti, devotion. His concept of God, full of love and Divine kindness, is an ideal which even the lowest human being can easily understand and appreciate. He cleared the philosophical cobwebs of the day by steadfastly adhering to selfless devotion to the infinite as the ultimate goal of all religious teachings. He made the Indians spiritually strong to withstand the hard time that were to follow the advent of the Islamic invasions.
The Mediaeval Mystics

The rise of Islam is a remarkable event in the history of the world. The religion of Islam was founded by prophet Mohammad in Arabia in the seventh century after Christ. It is uncompromisingly monotheistic in its belief and recognizes Mohammad as the prophet of God. The teachings of Islam are based on the holy Koran which Muslims believe to be a revealed book. It is against idolatry of any kind, and preaches a doctrine of Islamic brotherhood reaching beyond the barriers of race and colour. Islam is a proselytizing faith and stamps everybody outside its pale as an infidel. This belief makes Islam rather puritanical in its dealings with other faiths.

As a religion Islam gained tremendous popularity in the world. In Arabia itself it became the predominant faith soon after the death of the great prophet. India came into contact with Islam very soon. Like Christianity Islam too first came into India through the sea-route. The Arab merchants brought the tidings of the new faith to their settlements on the Malabar
coast and it is said that they made some converts from the local people. The Mappilahs of Malabar are said to be the descendants of these early Arab Muslims.

The real conquest of Islam in the Indian soil started only three centuries later with the coming of Turks through the north-west passes of the Himalayas. They came in successive waves causing great bloodshed, destruction and desolation. The Hindu India fell prostrate under the mad rush of the Turkish hordes. India which until then tamed the barbarians proved unequal to this relentless onslaught of the Turks from Afghanistan and central Asia.

This period of Indian history from the death of Harsha to the reign of Akbar witnessed the rise of a new class of citizens called the Rajputs. They were organized in various clans and are said to be the descendants of Gujaras, Parihar, Huns and other central Asian tribes who came into India in the fifth and sixth centuries after Christ and embraced Hinduism. They accepted the Brahmin spiritual superiority and were absorbed into Hindu society as Rajputs, and were given the status of Kshatriyas. They were born warriors and extolled war, deeds of heroism and chivalry.

History speaks of the heroism of Rajput warriors. The exploits of the Rajput prince Prithviraj Chauhan are legendary. But there was no unity amongst the many clans of the Rajputs. Having had idealized war they often fought amongst themselves on any pretext. That is the stark truth which actually made these warriors petty and vainglorious. Ahimsa was singularly absent in all their activities. They threw to the wind the idea of a wider nationality and universal brotherhood. They neglected the nobler duties of government and administration of justice, and rather stuck to a code of himsa or violence.

Under the Rajputs himsa reigned supreme. Himsa ruled the land, and himsa again the invaders brought to India. The beginning of the conflict with Islam on the Indian soil was actually the conflict of two himsa doctrines; the one the hardy Turks took as a convenient cover for their wanton plunder and pillage, and the other the proud Rajputs indulged in by internecine quarrels among themselves. The Rajputs were then the rulers of the country and in spite of their bravery could not put up a successful physical resistance against the advance of
the invaders. In this conflict the foreigners won a decisive victory. But then it did not take long for the latent strength of the indigenous culture to exert itself and soon the ideal of ahimsa comes up to the foreground to evolve a synthesis of Hinduism and Islam.

The advent of Islam in India was far from being peaceful; neither was it planned on a systematic basis. It came like a storm with plunder and pillage in its train. The invaders who brought Islam to India were more bent on carrying off the wealth of the country rather than preach the precept of their religion to the people whom they considered idolators and cowards worthy of only abject contempt. True, they made some converts, but the number of such converts to Islam were ostracized from Hindu society and they gradually identified themselves with the conquerors.

In course of time Islamic rule came to be established in India under the Sultans of Delhi. Generally speaking the history of the Sultans of Delhi is a monotonous repetition of wars of succession, of murders, plunders, and conquests. When they were not occupied with internecine quarrels they were engaged in loot and aggrandizement.

Violence begets violence, and those who inflict violence on others come to end in violence, because violence produces more violence which ultimately boomerangs. The life of every Turkish Sultan amply testifies this. We are not surprised to note that in this violent epoch when the ahimsa teachings seem singularly absent in the national life of the Indian people almost everyone of the Sultans who came to occupy the throne came to a violent end. Significantly in this span of less than three centuries as much as five dynasties came to occupy the throne—the Slave kings, the Khiljies, the Tughlaks, the Sayyids, and the Lodhies. No single dynasty ruled for more than one hundred years.

In the beginning Islamic rule in India remained essentially foreign and completely Muslim. The Hindus lived a miserable existence under the repression of their fanatical and ruthless masters. But eventually the conquerors lost their unreasonable contempt for the conquered. There began greater mixing and understanding between the Muslims and the Hindus.

By the time of Mohammad Tughlak who became Delhi
Sultan in 1325 this tendency became more evident. Mohammad Tughlak was in many ways an enlightened despot though at times he showed signs of instability and bigotry. He was more tolerant than his predecessors to the religious sentiments of his Hindu subjects which made the orthodox Muslims turn against him. He was in a way more cultured and liberal and so was appreciative of the good qualities of the Hindus. He appointed them to positions of trust and responsibility. But for the actual evolution of a Hindu-Muslim partnership we have to wait till the time of Sher Shah and later of Akbar, the Great.

Then came the Timur's invasion in 1398. The question of religion, caste or creed did not come in the way of plunder and pillage at the hands of these Mongol invaders. The result of Timur's invasion and sack of Delhi could be easily imagined. Apart from humbling the proud Afghans, it must have led to a sense of comradeship between the Hindus and Muslims. Thereafter we see that the Hindus too joined in the turmoils; at times they came to have a commanding voice in the affairs of the Delhi Sultans. Another Mongol invasion which came more than a century later found the Hindus and Muslims fighting hand-in-hand to protect their hearth and home.

In 1525 came the invasion of Babur, a direct descendant of Timur and grandfather of the great Akbar. Babur defeated the then Sultan of Delhi at the historic battlefield of Panipat and occupied Delhi. This was followed by an equally contested war against a Rajput confederation in which Babur was successful. The last hope of the Rajputs to revive Hindu political authority was dead for ever! Babur established the Mughal empire in Hindustan. But his son and successor Humayun did not prove so successful. Humayun was not able enough to crush the revival of Afghan power under the leadership of the bold and gifted Sher Shah. Sher Shah re-established the Afghan regime in India and put Humayun to flight.

Sher Shah was an enlightened monarch. Born and brought up in India he was in many ways wedded to the tradition of toleration of the Indian nation. He strove to establish Hindu-Muslim unity in the country and was equally solicitous about the welfare of both his Hindu and Muslim subjects. He set up an administrative machinery in the country which was both efficient and benevolent. He is said to have founded
charities for the distressed, constructed roads for the benefit of travellers, built resthouses and arranged for the care of the poor and the needy. On the whole Sher Shah was a just and capable ruler in the noble tradition of Indian rulers.

However, this gifted Afghan could not realize his dream of establishing a national monarchy in India because he died young. His successors had not the ability to continue the great work and could not even wield power for long. The fugitive Humayun came back in 1555 and could muster enough power to re-conquer Delhi and the rule of the Afghan Sultans came to an end.

**AKBAR, THE GREAT**

Of all the Islamic rulers of India Akbar deserves our greatest esteem and admiration. He was a noble monarch equally great in war and peace. He was a benevolent ruler, a man of enlightened ideas and a soldier of uncommon merit. In fact he was one of the wisest of the rulers of Hindustan. It is seldom that such men of courage and wisdom appear to steer the destiny of a nation into channels of peaceful progress.

Akbar was a prince of the house of the fierce Timur, but he lived to become a benevolent ruler of India. He was first to recognize the ideal of an Indian nation based on the unity of the Hindus and the Muslims. He identified himself with the destiny of India and changed the concept of his Islamic realm to the ideal of a national state of all his people. He was courageous enough to stamp out all opposition of his co-religionists against his policy of friendship with the Hindus. He was not afraid to go against the general trend of Muslim rulers for putting into practice what he was convinced to be the righteous path.

Akbar was born on November 23, 1542 in Amarkot. His mother Hamida Begum was then just fifteen years old and had married the fugitive Humayun when she was only fourteen. Humayun was then in flight fleeing from place to place, everywhere unsuccessful in enlisting support to his cause. Still he was overjoyed at this news of the birth of a son and named him Akbar, meaning the great.

Akbar had a very turbulent childhood. Humayun's fortune for a few years after his birth was far from being good.
He had to leave the infant Akbar at the mercy of his rebellious brothers and run for life to Persia. The boy appears to have been well treated by his uncle who sent him to Kabul. Akbar was restored to his parents only when Humayun with the help of the Shah of Persia established his power in Kabul. In a phase of his war with his treacherous brothers, it is said that Akbar fell into the hands of one of them who exposed the child on the ramparts of a besieged fort, to his father’s guns. The guns were promptly put out of action when the prince was recognized. This way the young Akbar was brought up in an atmosphere of war hysteria.

Humayun spared no troubles to get his son educated. Akbar was put under a tutor when he was five years old. His first tutor perhaps proved inefficient. Anyway he was followed by others. But none of them could make any headway in imparting to the boy even elementary knowledge of reading and writing. Akbar successfully resisted all the attempts of his parents and teachers to give him conventional learning and to the end remained almost illiterate. This conventional learning was perhaps responsible for the unconventionality of his thoughts and actions that we notice throughout the span of his active life.

Nevertheless Akbar was far from being uneducated. He had a great love for history, theology, philosophy, and other subjects. Though he could not himself read he enjoyed books read out to him. He had a stupendous memory, and had a great fascination to learn by heart poetry, and songs of the Sufi poets. These poems made a lasting impression on his youthful imagination and their mysticism appealed to his particular frame of mind.

So grew up the future emperor in the turbulent Kabul. As a boy he accompanied his father in his Indian expedition. Humayun after having had established his position in Kabul yearned to recover his lost dominions in India. The death of Sher Shah gave him confidence and Humayun crossed the Indus and set out for Delhi. Akbar was then only twelve years old and keenly took part in all the deliberations. Humayun’s campaign in India was successful and without much difficulty he was able to reoccupy Delhi.

Humayun then sent Akbar in charge of his tutor Bairam
Khan to the Punjab to stamp out opposition there, while he himself remained in Delhi consolidating the hold in the capital. But before long Humayun fell from a ladder and died. At the news of Humayun’s death Bairam Khan acted quickly and had the young Akbar hastily enthroned. Since Akbar himself was too young to rule, Bairam Khan acted as a guardian and took up the affairs of the state in his own hands.

It was not a well-knit empire that Akbar inherited; he had to fight to establish his right. Actually when he ascended the throne in January 1556 he possessed no definite territory. Rival factions were fighting for supremacy in India. The Afghan power was still very much alive, only they had no leadership. Bairam Khan acted swiftly and marched against Hemu who was in command of a vast Hindu-Afghan army which had occupied Agra and Delhi. The two armies met in the historic battlefield of Panipat. Hemu’s army was routed and the resistance to Akbar collapsed. Yet Akbar was emperor in name only; the real power rested with Bairam Khan. The young lad amused himself in athletics and hunting, and paid little attention to politics.

During this period an incident occurred which gives us a clue to the intense spiritual yearning of Akbar. Though naturally content and happy Akbar was at times subject to overwhelming restlessness. Perhaps his receptive mind had by then started questioning, everything making him something of an angry young man. One day, it is said, he felt so restless that he got on a horse and galloped away to the wilderness—consumed with a passion to be alone. Away from the palace Akbar dismounted and fell into a trance and in his own words, ‘communed with God’. When he awoke from this trance he saw that his horse had gone. So Akbar remained there for some time immersed in the ecstasy of his spiritual vision. After some time he saw his horse again, galloping back to him. Akbar took this as a divine intimation that he must return to his people.

Then came a period of court intrigues and dissensions and it took some time for Akbar to get freed from their corrupt influence. The protector Bairam Khan was the first to be got rid of. After that Akbar came under what Vincent Smith calls, “the monstrous regiment of unscrupulous women.” But
soon he asserted himself and war freed from all unnecessary restrictions. Akbar took into his own hands the affairs of the state never to loosen his grip.

First by a series of successful campaigns Akbar secured the borders of his extensive empire. He added to his already vast realm Bengal, Gondwana, Orissa and Gujarat. He made provisions for a strong and dependable standing army so that his power would not be questioned by anybody inside or outside. His administration was efficient and just. He allowed no belittling of his authority and ruled his extensive empire with an iron hand.

Akbar cannot be called a monarch wedded to ahimsa. Conditions were such that he could not have successfully pursued a no-war policy to keep peace in his realm against internal and external dangers. What he could do was only to rationalize waging of war. He was not for war if peace could be maintained without it. That is why we see him willing to come to terms with the Rajputs. No earlier Muslim ruler ever thought of coming to terms with the Hindus the way Akbar did.

Nevertheless in his policy of bringing unity and harmony between the different sections of his people we see him as a promoter of ahimsa virtue. The true greatness of Akbar lies in his attempt to evolve the idea of Hindu-Muslim unity in political life. That is his lasting contribution to the way of life of the Indian people. Akbar was the first Islamic ruler who realized that India must be united and ruled with the consent of her people and not by imposing Islam on an unwilling people.

Step by step Akbar went ahead with the task of uniting the two sections of his people, Muslims and Hindus. First of these was his own marriage with the eldest daughter of a Rajput chieftain. From this marriage was born the future emperor Jehangir. This was followed by the proclamation putting an end to the custom of demanding contributions from Hindu pilgrims visiting the holy places. The most important of his new legislations to remove the disability of his Hindu subjects was the cancellation of Jizya, a poll tax levied on non-Muslims as 'the equivalent, or contribution, for not being put to death!'

Akbar established the equality of his subjects under the government. Hindus were admitted to high places in the administration. The famous Todar Mal who reorganised the
revenue structure of the empire was a Hindu and so was Raja Man Singh, one of the trusted generals of Akbar. Raja Man Singh was for some time the governor of Kabul, actually a Hindu governor over a Muslim population. The emperor himself had intimate friends among both Hindus and Muslims.

It is however as a seeker of truth that Akbar is most worthy of our admiration. He was subject to an unquenchable thirst for truth and for the realization of God. His son, emperor Jahangir declares that Akbar, “never for one moment forgot God”. He had from his early childhood a sort of blind faith in the divine will.

When he grew older he yearned to get into the secrets of all religions. His intense intellectual curiosity probed into every minute details of religion, his own and that of others. His search for the true faith started when he began to pass his time in the company of learned philosophers and thinkers. In his new capital, Fatehpur Sikri, a special building was constructed under his own supervision, called the house of worship. At first only Muslims were admitted there. Even if he had desired otherwise Akbar just then could not have admitted philosophers of other faiths there since the strength of the orthodox Muslims was then so great that they would not have allowed it.

In course of time Akbar came to dislike the fanatical Muslims who aspired to a monopoly of religion.

Anyway he was not satisfied with the precepts of Islam alone, and began to turn to other sources for the satisfaction of his religious cravings. “I wait”, says he with incredible holiness, “the coming of some discreet man of principle who will resolve the difficulties of my conscience.”

Subsequently he was attracted more and more to Hinduism which approached nearer to his own secret mysticism. Akbar began to solicit acquaintance with ascetics and Jain monks. An important incident which took place during this period would make us think that at that time he was on the point of becoming an ascetic himself; Akbar was on a hunting spree and a multitude of beaters had covered an area of about forty to fifty square miles. At that time suddenly a strange state of ecstasy came upon the emperor and he ordered the hunting to be abandoned and every animal was set free. This remarkable show of mercy to the poor animals must have been the effect
of his contact with the ahimsa teachings of the Jains.

Apart from Hinduism and Islam, Akbar was interested to know the precepts of other religions. Whenever he came to hear of a new teacher or a new doctrine, he at once wanted to go into the root of it. It was during his Surat campaign that Akbar came across the principles of Zoroastrian creed. To Fatehpur Sikri he invited its teachers to take part in the discussions there. The rites of that faith seemed to have had very much impressed the emperor who established a sacred fire in his palace and venerated it publicly.

Akbar also came into contact with Christianity. For a while he preferred to all other doctrines this exciting new creed brought to him by the Portuguese missionaries from Goa. For a time it even looked as if he would make Christianity his religion. The Jesuit missionaries were welcomed with honour and were allowed to practise their faith at Fatehpur Sikri.

On questions of religion Akbar kept an open mind. Akbar was a rationalist and was prompt to enquire into the elementary concepts of all faiths. He had fully realized the value of free and frank discussion. That is why he admitted into his court men of all faiths and persuasions for disputations of philosophical questions. He liked to listen and to take part in their deliberations. There were Parsees, Hindus, Christians, Jews, and Jains at Fatehpur Sikri.

His restless rational spirit, however, could not find satisfaction from the theological wranglings of the religious leaders assembled in his house of worship. He did not find what he sought for in any of the many creeds. He then attempted to find a new synthesis of the various teachings which had made their impressions on him. His Din-a-Ilahi or the divine faith is the result of his longings to find a spiritual bond which will make all men in the world brothers.

Abul Fazl, a close friend of Akbar, was the greatest exponent of Din-e-Ilahi. He begins the official account of the new creed by declaring that all religions have a common source and that man and God are one and the same in the mystical sense. He sums up the mystical oneness of God and man thus:

The lover and the beloved are in reality one.

Idle talkers speak of Brahman as distant from his idol,
There is but one lamp in the house, in the rays of which Wherever I look a bright assembly meets me.

Akbar’s religion failed, because he refused to use force to propagate it amongst his people. Din-e-Ilahi did not last long, it vanished soon after Akbar’s death. Akbar himself did not mean to make it a religion. What he wanted was to make it an intellectual movement to bring together all the religions of the world to promote understanding and harmony. It was mainly meant to be an institution for Hindu-Muslim understanding. As long as Akbar lived it served its purpose. Unfortunately amongst his successors there was none who could appreciate the ideals that it stood for and so it simply discontinued to function. He was a man of tolerance.

Akbar remains in India’s history one of her wisest monarchs. For nearly fifty years he ruled India. His great aim was the unification of the two great cultures that had come to stay in the subcontinent. As long as he lived he succeeded in patching up the differences between his people and establish peace and understanding between them. Unfortunately his successors were not men of vision and the ideal of Hindu-Muslim unity on which Akbar based his policy crumbled into pieces in their reign, especially at the hands of his great grandson Aurangzeb.

**RAMANANDA, THE MYSTIC**

The spread of Islam on the Indian soil produced in the fullness of time a class of religious devotees called the mystics. The mystics are saints who believe that God can be realized by a process of self-culture. They conceive God as a Being with many human attributes whose relation with man is comparable to that of a master to his servant, or of a lover to the beloved. They are indifferent to pleasure and pain, and many shut themselves away from the world without bothering to teach or preach.

While in the political scene the success of the Muslim arms was sure and complete, in the religious and philosophical plane Islam gave way to a process of synthesis represented in the life and teachings of these mystics. At first India stood aghast at the bloodthirsty invaders from the North-West. But in course of time India reasserted herself and the mystics took up the torch of ahimsa teachings, now nearly extinguished.
The need of the hours was religious tolerance, and the most prominent feature of these mystic saints was their spirit of tolerance. The mystics held that religion was nothing but a question of individual approach to God in which no outside interference was necessary. They did not even differentiate between the Muslims and the Hindus. Both Muslims and Hindus, they believed, were children of the only one True God. They looked with disdain all conversions, and themselves never were attached to Hindu or Muslim faith. They had both Muslim and Hindu followers. Nevertheless they were fearless in pointing out the defects in the beliefs of both Hindus and Muslims. Whereas they fought casteism and ridiculed idolatry of the Hindus, they did not shrink in their criticism of the Muslims for their undue attachment to external observances. It was in the abode of these mystics that for the first time Islam met India on a basis of friendship and understanding.

All these years a process of interaction of two cultures, Hindu and Muslim, was silently going on in India. Islamic contact brought India closer to the outside world. It gave rise to new social and religious thinking and opened up new vistas of knowledge. The recurring success of the Muslim armies served as an eye-opener, and the Indian people were ready to welcome new ideas and assimilate new ways. The Hindu society woke up to reform itself and recuperate in accordance with the demand of the new outlook. As the great historian, Dr. Sir Jadunath Sarkar, so well puts it: "the example of Islamic society acted as a solvent on Hindu prejudices."

In religious beliefs the Islamic ideal of strict monotheism had its effect on the polytheistic tendencies of the Hindus. The Bhakti cult, or the religion of devotion to the godhead, is essentially an interpretation of Hinduism in terms of Islamic monotheism. It was the most popular creed of the time; the reformers and teachers all over the land were preaching the unity of the godhead. There was marked decline in blind idol-worship and in the external observations of religion. Greater emphasis was placed on inward worship of the one Supreme Being.

Again the ideal of Islamic brotherhood influenced Hindu social thinking. Islam's recognition of the equality of all men
in its turn led to a complete disregard of caste in the new
developments of the Bhakti philosophy. The mystics held that
in the eyes of God there was no difference between a Brahmin
and an outcaste, a Hindu and a Muslim. The love of God is
universal, the whole universe is tied up in a brotherhood. This
practical ideology is a product of the synthesis of Hindu
philosophy and Islamic teachings.

In its own way Hinduism was slowly influencing the
customs and beliefs of Indian Muslims. Even the Islam
prevalent in India at that time among the cultured Muslims
was Sufism. The Sufism was willing to understand the Hindu
approach, it accepted much of the modes of Hindu worship.
The Sufi recited the praises of God in the Koran in a loud
sing-song voice till he shut himself off from the world and sank
into a meditative trance. He, just like the Hindus, attached
great importance to meditation. The Sufis went on pilgrimage
to the tombs of Sufi saints, lit oil lamps on them and venerated
them as a Hindu would his idol in his temple.

The Sufi conception of God is poetic. According to it
God works everywhere, more so in the human heart. They
declare that it is possible for the humble human soul to know
God, and to see him if one only turns away from the bondage
of the senses and sense objects. This knowledge of God, this
escape from one's individuality to realise the only Reality,
they term mystical experience. The details the Sufi practices
for the attainment of this realization are akin, in many respects,
to the methods of the Yoga of the Hindus. The Sufis are not
orthodox Muslims, and they even recognize that all religions
are of the equal value. Though they are Muslims by religion
their feeling for humanity reaches beyond the barriers of race
and creed.

There were some distinguishing features about these
mediaeval mystics. They were against idolatry and preached
the realization of God through mental and moral efforts. God
lives in one's own self, and it is futile to search him in the
temple or the mosque. They assert that God is one and the
God invoked by various religions under different names such as
Krishna, Rama, Shiva, Allah and so on—all refer to the same
Supreme Being. To fight on these different names of God,
they point out, would be ridiculous, and exhort the Muslims
and Hindus to live like brothers.

The philosophy of these mystics who led mostly a married life but kept a detached existence had its origin in the tradition of the country. That is why their teachings came to be very popular with the masses. But it is not all; a new vigour came to be associated with them because of intensely personal nature of this new creed. Mediaeval mysticism though Hindu in origin is Islamic in its mould. Through Sufism Islam exerted a great influence on the life and teachings of the mediaeval mystics, perhaps much more than what is recognized by historians. And the contributions of the mystics to the evolution of the Indian way of life has been very solid.

The first of these mystics is Ramanada. Born in the South sometime towards the later part of the fourteenth century, he belonged to a Vaishnava community and came to read the works of Ramanuja as a part of the religious training of the sect. But definitely towards the later part of his life he travelled to the North and began to live in Banaras where he was recognized as a great teacher. Some authorities believe that Ramananda was born in Allahabad and only after coming to Banaras he learned the philosophy of Ramanuja. At any rate there are sure signs of the predominant influence of Ramanuja on the life and teachings of Ramananda.

Ramananda has not left behind any written book containing his ideas. But we have the words of his disciples; Kabir, Nanak and others, to understand his teachings. Ramananda started a religious renaissance which ably guided the spiritual life of the Indian people throughout the period of its conflict with Islam. He introduced social and religious reforms and upheld the traditional way of life of the Indian people. He cleared society of unhealthy and extraneous growths and paved the way for greater and more solid achievements of the mystics who followed him.

Ramananda believed that karma could be overcome by divine grace. And divine grace comes in abundance to all those who have put their trust in God Almighty. One must make himself fully and completely subservient to the will of God. He exhorted men to find salvation in the holy name of Rama whom he identified as Brahman. He recognized no differences of caste or creed of his worship of Rama. He held
that all men and women had equal right to the name of Rama. He so much popularized the name of Rama, Ram-mantra, that even to this day peasants in the remote parts of the country use the name of Rama as a mode of salutation!

Ramananda declared the equality of all men and women before God, and insisted upon correct moral conduct and a life dedicated to virtue and charity to obtain the grace of God. He had both Hindus and Muslims as his followers. In the matter of caste too, he was indifferent; among his disciples were Sudras—the outcastes or untouchables. He had even many female followers. The magnetic personality of Ramananda appears to have attracted towards him thousands of selfless disciples. During his life time he became very famous and was held in very high esteem by the people.

God is everywhere; even in the smallest creature dwells God. That Divine Energy envelops the whole universe, the rocks, the mountains and the seas; and even in the minutest particle of matter one can notice the Divine Presence. The gist of the teachings of Ramananda can be understood from one of his songs quoted in the Sikh scripture, Granth Sahib:

I had an inclination to go with sandals and other perfumes to offer worship to Brahma. But the Guru revealed that Brahma was in my heart. Wherever I go, I see only water and stones (worshipped); but it is Thou who hast filled them all with Thy presence.

KABIR THE SINGER

One of the immediate disciples of Ramananda was Kabir. Today in India, Kabir is a household word. He is one of the greatest religious poet saints of India. His songs are very popular, and they remain a veritable storehouse of wisdom.

Very little is known about the birth and childhood of Kabir. Scholars are not agreed even about the exact year of his birth. It is reasonable to assume that he was born in a village near Banaras or in Banaras itself sometime towards the close of the fourteenth century. Kabir's birth again is shrouded in mystery, a legend has gathered currency about his real parentage. It says that he was actually the son of a Brahmin widow who cast him off near a pond to escape social wrath. The baby, it is said, was picked up by a Muslim weaver Nura
and his wife Nima. Nura and Nima had no children of their own, so they took this baby home, named him Kabir, and brought him up as their own child.

At any rate we know that Kabir grew up as a Muslim. Nima brought him up with great love and affection. As he grew up he took up the profession of his adopted father and became a weaver himself. As a child Kabir had little or no systematic education. It is said that Kabir was first put under a Muslim teacher, but he does not seem to have had gone very far. He himself admits that all his life he never touched either ink or paper indicating that he did not have any formal schooling. Like others of his age and status he probably led a care-free life at home as a darling of his foster mother, now and then assisting his father in his daily occupation. There was nothing to worry the young man, nor was he obliged to work for a living as long as his good father lived.

As he grew up there arose in the young Kabir a keen desire to know God, to realise the Infinite. His heart was set on God. It is possible that Kabir in his search for divine wisdom at first came into contact with Sufis. His early life as a Muslim boy must have given him some ideas about the precepts of Islam. Perhaps he learned Sufi doctrine from Muslim divines. The mystical approach of the Sufi saints must have greatly attracted the naturally poetical temperament of young Kabir.

However, Kabir did not recognize any Sufi saint as his Guru or preceptor. Kabir found his Guru in the great Ramananda of Banaras. In his search for divine wisdom Kabir had to depend only on listening to the discussions that his Guru frequently had with Pandits and Mullahs in Banaras. In this somewhat crude way Kabir became surprisingly well versed in the philosophies of Hinduism and Islam.

Meanwhile, it must be remembered that Kabir continued to lead the life of a householder. He did not run away from his responsibilities. Even in the course of his religious quest, he found time to assist his father Nura in weaving. After Nura’s death Kabir took over the responsibility of supporting his family. He earned his living by weaving.

Nevertheless, his pre-occupation with religion and religious questions at times led to occasional neglect of his
family duty which probably brought him rebukes from his poor mother. Again, his total disregard of the popular religious practices of the day created a good number of enemies who brought troubles to the family. These things did not find favour with his mother who insisted that Kabir minded, his work and did not get himself involved in religious controversies of any kind. But Kabir did not stir from his devotion, he declared that he had left everything to the will of God—he sang:

Kabir's mother is distressed and
Weepeth, saying, O God, how,
Shall I support my children?
Kabir hath relinquished weaving and
Has made God's house his only support.

Kabir began by attacking the prevalent superstitions amongst both the Hindus and Muslims. He was vehement in his condemnation of rituals and image worship of the popular Hinduism of his day. He considered fasts, ablutions and pilgrimages as useless. He sang.

There is nothing but water at the holy bathing places and I know that they are useless, for I have bathed in them.

The images are lifeless, they cannot speak;
I know for I have cried aloud to them.
The Puranas and the Koran are mere words;
lifting up the curtain, I have seen.
Kabir gives utterances to the words of experience;
and he knows very well that all other things are untrue.

Once, it is said, he thought of making a pilgrimage to holy Mecca of the Muslims. But on second thoughts he realized that it was futile and gave it up. Kabir in fact abhorred all institutional religious practices and was unsparing in his criticism of the priestly class. "The barber, the washerwoman, and the carpenter," he declared, "are nearer to God than the priests." He had nothing but contempt for ascetics. All religious observances are irrelevant, God is within you. He sang:

O, servant, where dost thou seek me?
Lo! I am beside thee.
I am neither in the temple nor in mosque;
I am neither in Kaaba nor on Kailash:
Neither am I in rites and ceremonies, nor in
Yoga and renunciation.
If thou art a true seeker, thou shalt at
once see me:
Thou shalt meet me in a moment of time.
Kabir says, O Sadhu! God is the breath
of all breath.

The people, both Hindus and Muslims, naturally did not
like this wholesale condemnation of their customs and beliefs.
They were enraged at his consistent indifference to the religious
practices of both Islam and Hinduism. The Muslims complained
that Kabir, being a Muslim, at least by name, outraged the
sentiments of the faithful with his cries of "Ram, Ram". The
Hindus complained that his use of tilak that is the sandalwood
mark on the forehead and sacred thread was not authorized
by Hindu law. There were interested parties, as we can well
imagine, who traded on the credulity of the ignorant people
for whom Kabir was an inveterate enemy. Everywhere there
was a great hue and cry against the infidel Kabir. The
complaints soon reached the ears of Sikander Lodi, the then
Sultan of Delhi, who is said to have banished Kabir from
Banaras.

In the life and thought of Kabir, we see the mingling of
Hindu and Muslim ideals. He accepted the Hindu doctrine
of Karma and transmigration, but like the Muslims he denounced
idolatry and polytheism. Between Hindus and Muslims he preached harmony, love and understanding. He proclaimed,
"the Hindus, and the Muslims have the same Lord." He declared the equality of all men before the Lord. He recognized no barriers of caste or creed. He sang:
The barber has sought God, the washerman and
the carpenter
Even Raidas was a seeker after God.
The Rishi Swapacha was a tanner by caste.
Hindus and Muslims alike have achieved that
End, where remains no mark of distinction.

Kabir's concept of an ahimsa society is that of a peaceful community living in virtue and goodness. The ideal of life that Kabir puts before the world is one of love and universal
brotherhood. There is no room for violence in such a world. As the love of the Lord prevails in the world, so too the love of one's neighbour should prevail amongst men. An often quoted saying of Kabir is:

That body in which love does not dwell is a crematorium; the heart which is without love is like a blacksmith's bellows, breathing but lifeless.

Kabir does not find salvation in asceticism or renunciation. He himself led the life of a householder. His mother figures very prominently in some of his songs. So too his wife, Loi, who is shown often as complaining about want of rice and salt.

Kabir's teachings did not die with him. His immediate successor was Surat Gopal Das, one of the most favourite disciples of the saint. He is credited with founding the order of Kabir's followers known as Kabirpanthis. The followers of Kabir organized themselves into a religious community which is alive to this day. They number almost a million today. There are many centres of this order in Northern India, notably two at Banaras. The monks attached to the order travel about singing the songs of Kabir exhorting men to lead a life of virtue and goodness.

NANAK, THE GURU

A follower of Kabir was Nanak, the Sikh Guru. Guru Nanak was born in 1469 in the village of Talwandi, some thirty miles from Lahore, now known to the Sikhs as Nankana Sahib. His father, Kalu, was a petty government official. It is said that when astrologers were informed of the birth of Nanak they adored the child with folded hands and predicted that he would live to be a great prophet.

The Sikh chroniclers say that Nanak as a child manifested great religious piety and had great capacity to understand and discourse on divine topics. In the school he excelled in poetic compositions in praise of the Divine. He is said to have composed thirty-five stanzas of devotional hymns for every letter of the alphabet. Nevertheless he had great mistrust of conventional learning. He once confounded his teacher by saying, "Sir, to all your learning of the Vedas and the Sastras, I prefer Divine Knowledge."
From the beginning Nanak had little or no faith in rituals and blind religious observances. According to the practice of the time he was also made to undergo Upanayan, the ceremony of putting on the sacred thread after performing certain rituals. The legend is that while the Brahmin priest was at the point of putting on the sacred thread on his neck the boy snatched it away and questioned its value. He quickly disposed of the officiating priest after a learned discourse on true Upanayan!

His father, Kalu, wanted to make Nanak an officer of the government and so arranged to teach him Persian, the then official language of the country. Nanak with his brilliant intellectual acuteness soon became a master in that language. But his father's fond hope of making him an official was doomed to failure because Nanak had no intention of taking up government service. He was more interested in meditation and study of religion. He frequently retired to the forests and freely mixed with Yogis, spiritual thinkers, and devotees of all kind. He took to the life of a seeker after truth.

This thirst for learning and inner contemplation was not much to the liking of his father. At one stage his father thought that Nanak had gone mad, his thirst for God was so acute. It is said that a physician was even called to attend to his madness. Kalu got the youngster married thinking that it would cure him. Nanak married Sulakhan and settled down as householder. In fact Nanak was never against marriage or family life. He was an affectionate and loving husband; and had children of whom he was very fond of. Only he was so much immersed in God that he could not exert himself on anything in the ordinary way of mortals. He was born with a higher mission, with a spiritual ideal to guide him towards the Almighty.

His father thought of settling him down again as a tradesman. That too ended in failure as could be expected. Then at the persuasion of his brother-in-law Nanak served for some time as a store-keeper of Daulat Khan, the then governor of Sultanpur. It is here Nanak is said to have had his first communion with God. He had been in the forest for three days and the people had taken him for dead. He had fallen into a devotional trance and it was on this occasion that
Nanak had his first realization of his mission. Nanak, overcome by his love to the Lord, sang in praise of the Divine, and a voice was heard:

"O, Nanak, Thou hast seen my sovereignty......I am the Primal Brahman, thou art the divine Guru."

Thereafter Nanak was a freed man. He never again bothered about earthly affairs, even his family he temporarily abandoned so as to devote all his attention to preaching. Like Kabir, Nanak started his teachings with the simple statement, "There is no Hindu, there is no Musalman." He took as his companions Hindus and Muslims indiscriminately, and went about preaching from village to village. The Guru composed his sermons in verse and his colleagues set them to music and sang with the lute. His teachings soon became very popular and he had a very large number of followers.

His teachings were simple and direct. He taught that there was only one God. There is nothing vague about his God and he sang this basic truth of his teachings in fascinating verse:

There is one God
He is the supreme truth
He, the Creator,
Is without fear and without hate.
He, the Omnipresent,
Pervades the universe,
He is not born,
Nor does He die to be born again.

Nanak attached great importance to right living. He declared that God would not ask a man his tribe or sect, but what he had done. He emphasized that men could invoke the grace of God by righteous living. For him action was superior to inaction and he praised right action:

If thou wouldst the fruit of salvation cultivate
And let the love of the Lord in thy heart germinate,
Thy body be as the fallow land
Where in thy heart the Farmer sows his seeds
Of righteous action and good deeds
Then with the name of God irrigate.

Guru Nanak talked in the simple language of the people. He did not believe in high metaphysical speculations of intellec-
tual gymnastics. He believed in the Hindu doctrine of karma and transmigration, but rejected the authority of the Vedas, and especially the Sastras. He was against caste and idolatry of every kind. He advised his followers to perform their obligations to society without being worldly. He wrote:

"The lotus in the water is not wet,
Nor the waterfowl in the stream;
If man would live, but by the world untouched,
Meditate and repeat the name of the Lord Supreme."

Nanak did not prescribe asceticism for salvation. His moral precepts are simple and direct which any ordinary man could understand and appreciate. What Nanak insisted upon was purity of thought and action, love of God, and righteous living. He sang:

"Impurity of the heart is greed,
On tongue, untruth.
Impurity of the eyes is coveting
Another's wealth, his wife, her comeliness.
Impurity of the ears is listening to calumny."

Guru Nanak conceived life as harmonious fulfilment of the will of God. His ahimsa is more of a worldly nature though conforming to the pattern of mystic saints. Unattached to the world of Samsara Nanak insisted on the performance of one's duty. He himself was a householder all his life and he exhorted his followers never to run away from their duties to family and society.

Accompanied by his favourite disciples Guru Nanak travelled far and wide in Northern India and beyond India also, preaching his simple approach to godliness and a life of virtue and goodness. His followers were many especially in the land of the five rivers, and increased everyday. At first they were merely called Shis meaning disciples. Some time later the disciples of the Guru got organized into a homogeneous religious community and came to be called Sikhs.

In his wanderings Nanak met many holy men of different faiths and held discourses with them on religious topics. Many stories are told of his victories over learned opponents. It is said that at Banaras the chief pandit Chetur Das had long discussion with him; at the end of which the Hindu Pandit fell at the master's feet and became a Sikh!
The Guru could not stand superstitions of any kind. It is said that once while bathing in the holy Ganges he saw the Brahmins after bath throwing water towards the rising sun as an offering to their dead ancestors. Nanak faced the other way and threw water in the opposite direction. When questioned, he answered:

"I am watering my fields in the Punjab. If you can throw water to the dead in heaven, it should be easier to send it to another place on earth."

He was unsparing in the condemnation of superstitions whether of the Hindus or the Muslims. The story has it that once he happened to fall asleep with his feet towards Mecca. An outraged Muslim divine woke him up rudely and drew his attention to the fact. Nanak simply said:

"If you think I show disrespect by having my feet towards the house of God, turn them in some direction where God does not dwell."

Nanak was a tireless preacher; he was fired with a zeal to renovate and reform the customs and traditions of the Indian people. He was filled with infinite compassion for the suffering humanity and strove hard to raise them morally and spiritually. He showed a path for Hindu-Muslim unity, and exhorted:

"Make love thy Mosque; sincerity thy prayer carpet, and Justice thy Koran
Modesty thy circumcision, courtesy thy Kooba, truth Guru, charity thy Creed and will of God thy Rosary."

And at last when he was seventy, Guru Nanak died in Kartarpur. Before his death he chose Angad to be his successor, to carry on the torch of wisdom and vision that he had propounded. When he died it is said that a dispute arose among disciples as to whether his body should be buried as a Mussalman's or burnt as a Hindu's!

The spiritual legacy left by Guru Nanak continued to develop and prosper at the hands of his successors who assumed the title of Guru. Nanak was followed by a succession of nine Gurus who provided a continuity of thought and leadership to the Sikh community. The fifth Guru Arjan, from the teachings of Nanak and other saints compiled the
Adi Granth which forms the most important scripture of the Sikhs. The Gurus raised the Sikhs to the status of a distinctive people with definite characteristics and customs of their own.

CHAITANYA, THE SAINT

A younger contemporary of Guru Nanak was Chaitanya, the saint. While Nanak preached his doctrine to the people of the west and north-west, Chaitanya was converting people of the east and south-east to his religion of love to Lord Krishna. Immense has been his influence on the people in the eastern part of India especially of Bengal. Sri Chaitanya has left undying marks on the life and thought of the people of Bengal.

In many respects Chaitanya is different from other mystics like Kabir and Nanak. Though Chaitanya did not recognize the barriers of caste or creed he was in a way more Hindu than the rest of the mediaeval mystics. Chaitanya got his inspiration almost entirely from the sacred books of the Hindus, especially from Bhagavata Purana in which the glories of Krishna and his earthly spouse Radha form the subject matter. Also in certain ways Chaitanya’s mysticism was of a more fervent nature than those of the others.

Sri Chaitanya (his own name was Viswambhara Misra) was born in Nadia in West Bengal in the year 1486. As a young man Viswambhara got his education in the local school. There he became proficient in Sanskrit. Nadia was then a great centre of religious learning in Bengal. So it must be supposed that Viswambhara was well versed with the religious trends of the time. But as a young student he was more keen to become a successful man of the world rather than indulge in full time religious pursuits. He set up a school of his own and became a successful teacher. He married and settled down as a householder.

Then at the age of twenty-two something happened which changed the whole course of his life. He went to Gaya to make oblations to his deceased father and there met a Vaishnava saint, Isvara Puri. This meeting left a lasting impression on the youth. Isvara Puri initiated him into the Bhakti cult and brought to his heart the fascinating charms of Sri Krishna. Viswambhara became a passionate devotee of the Lord Krishna, so much so that he forgot his worldly life, and his companions
had some difficulty to induce him to go back to his native town, to his wife and family!

It was, however, a different man that came back to Nadia. He was no longer interested in his school which ceased to exist. He turned into a mystic now in passionate communion with the God—Lord Krishna. Viswambhara began to preach his new found Bhakti cult and a band of followers gathered around him. He was now taken up with a mission, a mission to induce people to turn their mind from the turmoils of Samsara to Lord Krishna. He established mass-contact through his chorus singings, Sankirtanas as were called. Sankirtana as a new religious innovation caught the fancy of the people and they began to flock under his banner in hundreds and thousands. These Sankirtana parties established a sense of comradeship in the community of Bhaktas or devotees that Chaitanya came to lead. Viswambhara and his prominent followers took out huge processions of devotees singing and dancing to the accompaniment of musical instruments; and the people came out and joined them. They were amazed at Chaitanya's religious fervour and were willing to follow him. His cult of Bhakti became immensely popular and he had powerful supporters and very many enthusiastic followers.

At the age of twenty-five Chaitanya renounced the world and became a Samnyasin. He was initiated into the Bhakti sect of Samnyasins by Kesava Bharati and took the name Jo Sri Chaitanya by which name he came to be known to the world. For six years he wandered about the country preaching the doctrine of love and converting people to his way of life. Chaitanya made extensive tours, but he was naturally attached to Vrindavan and Mathura in Uttar Pradesh hallowed by the footsteps of Lord Krishna during his earthly life. Chaitanya at first thought of settling down at Vrindavan. But at his mother's request Chaitanya finally decided to live in Puri in Orissa celebrated for its Jagannath temple of the Lord Krishna.

During his tours Chaitanya converted many ascetics to his doctrine of love. In Banaras he converted Prakasanand Sarasvati, a well-known teacher of Vedanta, and in Puri he converted Vasudeva Sarvabhauma also a scholar of Vedanta. Another two of his celebrated disciples were Advaitacharya
and Nityananda. It is said that two big officials of Hussain Shah, the then ruler of Bengal also became his disciples who later settled down in Vrindavan on the advice of the master. Chaitanya’s cult soon became a popular movement of the masses.

Chaitanya taught his followers a religion of love. He declared love to be the supreme regulating principle in the world. Love of God is the only sure way of salvation for the individual. He regarded Lord Krishna as the Supreme Being and maintained that Radha represented the love of the Lord for the vast humanity. The individual soul can attain Krishna, the Supreme Lord, by Bhakti and by Bhakti alone. The highest state of bliss that the individual soul attains is to be in eternal sports with his Lord, Lord Krishna, as in the relation of a lover to his beloved.

This love of the Lord is not to be understood in a narrow sectarian sense—it is to be preceded by a universal love of all humanity. The love of humanity and a feeling of brotherhood is the first step to the love of the Lord. Anything that comes against the ideal of universal brotherhood is against his concept of love. Chaitanya idealized love and brotherhood, and that is his greatest contribution to the progress of the ahimsa way of life of the Indian people. A mystic union of the whole of humanity is the ultimate goal of his religion of love.

Chaitanya visualized a classless society. Social barriers will come in the way of universal brotherhood, distinctions of caste and creed are against it. So it is essential to recognize equality of all people. Chaitanya himself had his disciples from all classes of society irrespective of caste, creed and sex. One of his favourite disciples was a Muslim devotee named Haridas. Outcasts and untouchables were amongst his followers. He was not interested in what they were; he was only keen to bring them together for communion with the Supreme.

Chaitanya, a man of ahimsa, was a man of great compassion. His own heart went out to those who suffered. He wanted to take away the load of suffering from them, and prayed to the Lord that their sins be transported to him so that he might suffer for them. He prays:

My heart breaks to see the sorrows of mankind
Lay thou their sins upon my head, let me suffer in hell for all their sins so that Thou mayst remove the earthly pangs of all other beings."

Chaitanya has been in many ways shaping the character of the Indian people. His love of the Lord naturally leads one to the love of all fellow beings. What an insignificant being is an individual before the Great Supreme? The stress is on humility, and what is required is self-surrender to the will of the Lord. This self surrender to the will of god is in fact a cardinal point in the Indian way of life. That is the way that one can become unattached from the world leading him to a life completely dedicated to ahimsa.

**POPULAR BARDS**

Mediaeval India saw the rise of linguistic regions in the country. In the South, the original Tamil broke into the present day Tamil, Kannada, Telugu and Malayalam languages. In the north, the different dialects of Hindi, as also Bengali, Assamese, Oriya, Rajasthani, Punjabi, Gujarati, and Marathi languages came to be evolved as languages of the common people. Though Sanskrit was still popular with the Pandits and scholars, any movement to uplift the masses had to be in the regional tongues.

It is true that the influence of some mystics like Ramana and Kabir reached beyond the regions which constitute the present day Uttar Pradesh. But then the influence of Nanak was almost entirely confined to the Punjab. Chaitanya remained the scholar and mystic of Bengal—although his influence in Orissa and Assam whose languages were akin to Bengali was considerable. Actually what was happening was the formation of regional leadership in religion. Innumerable poets and mystics roamed about the countrysdie raising the religious consciousness of the people and inculcating in them piety and virtue.

The real leader of the religious renaissance of Assam in the North-East edge of the sub-continent was Sankaradeva, a contemporary of Chaitanya. Assam had long been the melting pot of many cultures. Though the people of Assam were Hindus, they had come under the influence of Shaktas and Tantrics. This had led to unhealthy religious practices including
even human sacrifice, some of them perhaps derived from the pre-Aryan mongoloid people of the region. The different tribal people of the area kept up their own forms of worship, and the all-important cohesion in religious observances was wanting. It was Sankaradeva who reformed society and introduced healthy religious practices; of course all of them conforming to the pattern of the Bhakti cult that was then the prevalent creed all over the country.

Born in a Kayastha family of Ali-Pukhuri in Nowgong district of Assam, Sankaradeva was a great scholar of Sanskrit. But then the language he used for the propagation of his social and religious ideas was Assamese, the language of the people. He preached devotion to one God, or his incarnation Krishna, and maintained that the best form of devotional exercise was Kirtana. He composed several hymns in Assamese in praise of the Supreme. They form the greatest repository of religious literature in Assam, and helped to spread the Bhakti movement amongst the people of Assam. Sankaradeva recognized the equal right of all to receive the grace of the Lord and so converted Garos, Bhotias, Mikirs and other tribes of Assam to his Bhakti cult. He did not even differentiate between Hindus and Muslims and everyone irrespective of caste, race, or creed joined him in his prayer meetings. The Bhakti movement which he started began to take momentum, and before long Assamese people everywhere were being led to a path of peaceful living and non-violent worship.

In the South, where it can be said that the Bhakti movement had its origin, the religious life began to flow into two distinct channels—the Shaiva and the Vaishnava movements. Both these movements produced innumerable poets and saints in the South.

The early Shaiva saints called Nayanmars laid the foundation of Southern Shaivaisn by composing great many Tamil hymns which have been divided into eleven collections. These collections however had their origin before the religious renaissance produced by the impact of Islam. Later, inside the framework of Shaivism rose Virashaivism or Lingayats who are still a powerful community in Mysore. It is calculated that this cult has more than six million adherents in Mysore State. They are devotees of Linga or the phallic symbol. The
sect enjoin brotherhood of all the faithfuls inside the community, reminiscent of the teachings of the Islam. Moral injunctions called Panchacharas or five codes of conduct are laid down which are expected to control the way of life of all Lingayats. They are exhorted to lead a simple life based on humility and piety and unattached to the world or Samsara.

The Vaishnava counterparts of Nayanmars were the Alvars who were twelve in number and who flourished between the fifth and ninth centuries after Christ. The Alvars came from all castes and sections; there were even women amongst them. They were the early Vaishnava mystics who believed in the emotional union of the individual soul with the Supreme Soul, which they identified as Vishnu.

The greatest name in the history of Tamil Vaishnava movement is Nathamunni who flourished in the eleventh century. It was he who popularized the devotional hymns of Alvars by setting them to popular music. He conducted the services in the temples in Tamil and so raised the status of Tamil as a language fit for religious activities. Nathamunni was followed by a number of other Acharyas—the most prominent among them being Ramanuja of whom we have already talked about. These Vaishanava saints popularized Vishnu Bhakti amongst the Tamils.

Vaishnavism in Karnataka was led by a group of saints called the servants of God. These people wandered all over the country singing the praises of Hari, Vishnu. The patron deity of these people was Viththal of Pandharpur which is now a part of Maharashtra. The soul-stirring music that they popularized led to the uplift of the religious consciousness of the people. They extolled Bhakti and exhorted people to lead a life of purity and compassion. They attracted the masses by songs sung in diverse tunes. The South Indian music, known as the Karnatic music, to this day remains highly devotional.

The example of the Karnataka saints was taken up by those of the neighbouring Maharashtra. The most famous saint of Maharashtra was Namadeva who was a tailor by caste. He sang in popular verse the praises of the Lord, the dominant note being the love of the Lord. He sang:

"Love for him who filleth my heart shall never be sundered:

[Further text is not visible in the image provided.]
Nama has applied his heart to the true name.
As the love between a child and his mother.
So is my soul imbued in the God.'

However amongst the saints of Maharashtra Tukaram and Ramdas have attained greater celebrity because of their association with the Maratha chieftain Sivaji. Tukaram was a great poet and mystic, but, it is said, he felt not good enough to have Sivaji as a disciple. So on his advice Sivaji had to go to Ramdas who initiated him into spiritual life. Ramdas had a practical temperament and organized systematically a monastic order which for years served as the beacon light for the spiritual and social activity of the people of Maharashtra.

Nevertheless, the main stream of religious activity remained in the North where the followers of Kabir increased in number and popularity. The most famous of Kabir’s followers was Dadu (1544—1603) whose greatest wish was to see the people of different faiths living in harmony and understanding just like Kabir. Dadu also admitted both Hindus and Muslims as his disciples and recognized no barriers of caste or untouchability in one’s relation with the Supreme. The most celebrated of the disciples of Dadu was the mystic Rajjub who taught.

"The heart of the worshipper is the page on which the story of the universal truth is being written in letters of life. When all these hearts unite in the vast universe of man, there you will find all the Vedas and the Quran."

For the Hindi-speaking people this period produced the most unforgettable name—Tulsidas (1532-1623). His Rama-charitmanasa which describes the story of Rama from the angle of a devotee is perhaps the most popular book in the Hindi-speaking world.

It should not be supposed from the preceding accounts that the mystics and poets of mediaeval India invariably came from Hinduism. There were many Muslim saints who were equally famous as poets and mystics. Their influence on the way of life of the Indian people was considerable. They had many followers from both Hindus and Muslims, and greatly helped the evolution of the ideal of Hindu-Muslim unity. The gist of their teachings is clear from a poem of Jalaluddin Rumi, the foremost Sufi mystic who sang:
"Through love stings are as honey,  
Through love lions are harmless as mice.  
Through love sickness is health,  
Through love wrath is as mercy.  
Through love the dead rise to life  
Through love the king becomes a slave."

These poets and mystics were quietly introducing new sense of values into the way of life of the Indian people. To the idealism of Buddha they added new dimensions in the devotion to the Supreme as a means for the attainment of detachment from worldliness. Love and virtue become the greatest possession, and union with the Supreme becomes the greatest goal of life. This leads to a great emphasis on other worldliness which is today a striking characteristic of the Indian way of life.
The Western Dominance

Before the advent of the West Indian history had been following a somewhat set pattern. Each wave of invasion and emigration brought in their train a time of tension. Then there was a period of transition of synthesis and assimilation. Thereafter for a few centuries peace prevailed till there came another wave of invasion and emigration. This process of 'challenge and response' followed by synthesis and assimilation had been going on in India for many years, enlarging and enriching the culture and thought of the Indian people.

The West came into India not through the traditional north-west route. They came by sea, and in a sense were more foreign to India than other groups of foreigners that came before them. They were from far off Europe, not from the next door central Asia.

The west came into India with a new culture, with an entirely new civilization. The west had already made great progress in science and technology and brought into India a
culture largely based on industrialization. The white men brought into India western Christianity and also revolutionary political ideas that were then just taking roots in Europe. India was then faced with new problems, with completely new sets of values.

The western contact was unique in yet another sense. There was never any large scale migration of the people from the west. The Indian climate and environments proved unsuitable for European colonization. Besides, the discovery of American and Australian continents with their milder clime and greater potentials proved more hospitable for intending migrants. So we see that European conquest did not bring any new races to settle down in the sub-continent as previous invasions did. The western contact remained mainly in the realm of ideas. It did not create any problem of social absorption. Only the ideas that they imported created problems of social reformation and adjustments. The impact of these ideas is still continuing.

The first Europeans to appear on the Indian scene were the Portuguese. Vasco Da Gama, the Portugese sea captain landed in Calicut on the Kerala coast in the year 1498 opening up new route to India via the Cape of Good Hope. Under the able governorship of Alfonso Albuquerque (1510-1515), the Portugese became for a time the greatest sea-power, controlling the traffic in the Indian ocean. They established their capital at Goa and carried on a flourishing trade with India. But then they could not build up anything like an empire in the Indian soil, because India had then a very powerful central authority under the great Mughals.

The next to arrive at the Indian scene were the Dutch, followed by the British and the French. The new comers had to fight for their right to trade in India with the already established Portugese. The defeat of the Spanish Armada in Europe gave courage to the Dutch to challenge Portugese authority in India. The Dutch successfully eliminated the Portugese from their strongholds and by the second half of the seventeenth century the Portugese power was broken up. But at this time the Dutch themselves at home in Europe came under the rule of the French and that led to their eclipse in the East.
The fight for supremacy in India was ultimately between the French and the British. The British much more than other powers came into India for trade. Only the French ever showed any political ambition in their Indian venture. The British came purely as merchants under the banner of the East India Company looking for profitable trade; and occasionally found interference in the political affairs of the country a very profitable trade of all. How these traders came to carve out an extensive empire in the East makes fascinating reading, but it is outside the scope of this study.

India was not able to put up any effective resistance against the encroachments of the Europeans. After the break up of the national state founded by Akbar owing to the shortsighted policies of Aurangzeb there was no power in India which could command the respect and allegiance of all sections of the Indian people. The Marathas who became prominent for a short time after the break-up of the Mughals, though represented a movement of Hindu revival could not constitute themselves into a national state. The Marathas fought mostly for plunder and self-aggrandisement and could not succeed in forging a national consciousness necessary for the establishment of a large state.

A trading company coming to be in possession of an extensive empire is an anachronism in itself. At any rate the administration that they tried to evolve in their conquered territories could not have been intended for the welfare of the people of those territories. The events of the first part of the nineteenth century led to the so-called Sepoy Mutiny in 1857. We are not interested in the merits of the Mutiny, whether it was a national war of independence or if it was just an outbreak of disgruntled soldiers. The fact remains that British maladministration definitely contributed towards the creation of a general discontent without which a commotion of such dimensions could not have been possible. It must be admitted, however, that the British during the Company's rule of India did produce some brilliant men who introduced innovations into the country which in course of time produced far-reaching results.

The anachronism of a trading company ruling the country was removed in 1858 and India came under the direct rule of
the British Parliament. This was a direct result of the movement of 1857. The British people on the whole began to take keener interest in the welfare of their Indian subjects. The growth of progressive ideas in Britain itself led to administrative and social reforms in India. The British parliament ruled the country for less than a century.

THE NEW FACE

The western impact has been responsible for the growth of a new India. First of all the British paramountcy gave a semblance of unity to the country. By adopting a uniform system of education and administration the British people helped to arouse a sense of solidarity in the Indian people, and by developing commerce and communications they laid the foundations for rapid industrialization. Again the British opened up to Indian mind the vast knowledge in philosophy and theology of the western world. In a way they brought the country up-to-date; introducing great innovations in many facets of national life. At the same time we see great men appearing on the horizon of the country itself to uphold the traditional values and to cut out new paths for ahimsa in conformity with needs of a fast moving society.

Under the British the whole of India become a political unit. This is no mean achievement. No other government could ever accomplish this. The part played by the British in unifying the sub-continent can never be over-estimated. It is true that the British allowed some six hundred and odd princely states to flourish in India. But they all came under the paramount British power and the British considered themselves responsible for the political set up of the whole sub-continent. With the help of Residents and Political Agents the British in fact exercised complete administration control over the whole country.

There was a uniformity in the British administration through a common type of administrative machinery and a trained Civil Service. The British also introduced in India a uniform judicial system.

The British administration was responsible for the construction of a network of railways in the country. The transport, Postal Services and other communication organizations were developed. Apart from making their administration effective
this advance in methods of communication brought the different parts of the country closer and helped the growth of a composite Indian nationalism.

India was and still is primarily an agricultural country. India soon learnt from the west the technical know-how and many industries came to be started in the country. Industrialization led to greater commerce which meant the growth of a capitalist class. The result was economic maladjustment and the inevitable social discontent. An era of social and political upheaval began, and we are still in the midst of it.

The British introduced modern educational system in the country. It was Lord Macaulay who laid the foundation of English education in India. In the circumstances of the time, the decision that English should be the medium of instruction in India proved very beneficial to the advancement of learning. Through English many new ideas began to flow into India which led to great activity in social and political fields. Plato, Aristotle and others became just as much a part of Indian learning as the Upanishads and the Gita. An extensive field of knowledge was opened up to the Indian people through the medium of English education.

The spread of English education gave impetus to originality and change. Through this channel came the import of liberal ideas of the west which stirred the people and roused them from their age-old slumber. India was once for all opened up to the outside world.

The contact with the west not only opened to us the thoughts of the great philosophers of the west, also it made us see our own philosophies in a new light. Indian history and culture, her religion and thought attracted the attention of many scholars from the west and even today many of their works remain standard treatises on some subjects. Europeans in a way helped Indians to see India in the right perspective, from an altogether new angle. Indian scholars began to take greater interest in learning and interpreting their ancient texts. There arose in fact a search for a wisdom of ancient India and for the historical and cultural roots of the Indian people.

Lastly, but surely of very great significance, is the contact between religions that the British dominance produced in the Indian soil. Apart from merchants some Europeans also came
to India as missionaries to proselytize the country for Christ. This led to conflict in religious life. The Hindu religion suffered a temporary setback at the onslaught of the west. But soon it recovered its ancient vitality after a struggle in the cauldron of religious controversies which followed.

The missionaries opened up to India the current religious thoughts and religious movements of west. In trying to evangelize the Hindus, they gave impetus at least for the reformation and regeneration of the Hindu religion. In trying to educate them in the Christian faith, they imbibed in the Indian people a love for the quest of knowledge. And in attacking their spiritual strongholds, they advanced their philosophical curiosity and metaphysical acuteness. Soon there was a Hindu intellectual elite, ready to uphold and defend the traditional values.

The missionaries came in large numbers, and established educational and evangelical institutions all over the country. They started hospitals and devoted themselves in many deeds of charity and benevolence. An assessment of the good that these missionaries have done to India and its people is difficult to make. Neither is it necessary at the present context. Suffice it to note that their influence, as the influence of the Europeans in general on the recent history of India has been very substantial.

Happily for India, her western contact came at a time when the whole world was at the point of taking a plunge into a new age, an age of reason, an age of machine, and an age which opened up tremendous possibilities in science and technology. Under the British rule India changed rapidly, new social and economic forces were let loose. The ancient people of Hindustan needed a teacher, a reformer, a guide who would lead them to progress without at the same time destroying their spiritual ancestry. Soon there was Raja Rammohun Roy on the scene.

**RAJA RAMMOHUN ROY**

Rammohun was born on May 22, 1772 in the village Radhanagar, near Krishnanagar in West Bengal. His family was well-to-do and many of its members were in the service of the Muslim Nawabs of Murshidabad. For some favours done
to the Nawab by his ancestors the Nawab had confirmed on
his family the hereditary title of Roy. That is how Rammohun
came to have the title of Roy. He was actually a Brahmin by
birth. His family belonged to the Vişnava sect, the followers
of Chaitanya, who a few centuries earlier had swept the
masses of Bengal into his fold of Bhakti, or devotion to the
Supreme.

It is said that very early in life Rammohun showed signs
of conspicuous talent. Naturally his fond father spared no
pains to give him a fitting education. First he was given in-
structions in Bengali which was his mother tongue. In those
days Persian was the court language and it was an unavoidable
asset for anyone who wanted to do well in life. So a private
tutor was employed by his father to teach Rammohun Persian
at home.

According to the custom of those days Rammohun mar-
rried while he was still a boy. But his girl-wife died soon after
and his father made him marry again. When he was twelve
years old, to make himself proficient in Persian, Rammohun
was sent to Patna at that time a great centre of Persian learn-
ing and Islamic culture. He became proficient in Persian
language and literature. Apart from that it was during his
stay in Patna that he came in contact with the philosophy and
teachings of Islam. It was in Patna that he began his religious
quest; he studied the philosophy of Islam and the teachings of
Muslim divines. He is said to have been specially influenced
by the writings of the Sufi school of Muslim philosophers.

Back home he was critical of the meaningless rituals and
gross idolatry of the Hindus that he saw all around him. He
refused to take things blindly and began to question the efficacy
of rites and rituals. This soon brought him into conflict with
his father who was an orthodox. Finding that this might lead
to an open conflict with his father, Rammohun left home to
avoid a confrontation.

Then for some years Rammohun led the life of a wan-
derer in quest of finding a purpose. He came across various
people, and various cultures. It is said that during these
wanderings he visited Tibet and learnt from the holy Lamas
there the tenets of Tibetan Buddhism. But it is difficult to
substantiate this tradition. At any rate these wanderings made
a new man of him; it in fact completed his education. It gave him a first hand knowledge of the life of the people, of their wants and aspirations. It also brought him nearer to the thoughts and movements of his generation.

After about three years of wandering he returned home when he was twenty years old. He was received by his father with great kindness and affection. But again intellectually his father's roof proved inhospitable. Rammohun again left home, and this time went to Varanasi with a view of settling down there. In Varanasi, in that citadel of Hindu culture, he began the study of Sanskrit and Hindu philosophy. It did not take long for him to get well versed in the literature and philosophy of the Hindus. He had religious discussions with pandits and priests and listened to many discourses on Hindu dharma. He was most interested in the study of Vedanta which stood by him in good stead afterwards when he came across the teachings and philosophies of Christianity.

After his father's death in 1803, Rammohun moved his residence from Varanasi to Murshidabad, the Mughal capital of Bengal. Subsequently he entered the service of the East India Company under John Digby. With Mr Digby's help Rammohun took up the study of the English language and literature. And through the medium of English he was for the first time introduced to Western thoughts and institutions which were to play a significant role in his life and work. He worked for nine or ten years as a revenue officer under the East India Company. During this period also he continued his search into the teachings of different faiths. But then his duties as an officer often interfered with his religious quest. So when he had made a comfortable fortune Rammohun gave up his job to devote himself wholly to religion and society.

Rammohun went home for some time to stay with his mother. There again the orthodox atmosphere was not conducive to his radical views. Finally in the year 1814 he settled down in Calcutta and devoted his whole energy to the reformation and revitalization of Indian society. With an earnestness and conviction found only amongst the prophets, Rammohun plunged himself all out into this task.

Rammohun was a theist and he upheld the unity of God. He attacked polytheism and idolatry. He declared:
"I have never ceased to contemplate with the strongest feelings of regret the obstinate system of idolatry, inducing, for the sake of propitiating supposed deities, the violation of humane and social feelings. And this in various instances, but more especially in the dreadful acts of self-immolation and the 'immolation' of the nearest relations, under the delusion of conforming to the sacred religious rites."

In this task of reformation of Hindu society Rammohun had the advantage of knowing both Islam and Christianity. In Calcutta he came into close contact with Christian missionaries and great was their influence on his philosophy and teachings. He had observed:

"The consequences of my long and uninterrupted researches into religious truths has been that I have found the doctrines of Christ more conducive to moral principles, and better adapted for the use of rational beings, than any other which have come to my notice."

However, Rammohun found it difficult to accept the divinity of Christ, but accepted him as a great theist and extolled his ethics.

To make his reforms effective, Rammohun founded the Brahmo Samaj organization. It was started with a small group of like-minded men, whose main concern was the purification of Hinduism in the light of the teachings of Christianity. It soon developed into a monothestic religious creed based on Upanishadic philosophy. Because Rammohun stood for harmony and understanding between the different religious communities in the country, in the best ahimsa tradition he did not try to gain adherents to the Samaj at the expense of other faiths. Brahmo Samaj largely remained a reformist movement.

The Brahmos pioneered many social moves and also took part in politics. India owes a lot to the Brahmo Samaj.

Rammohun was a pioneer in many fields. He was the first nationalist and was the first journalist. It was he who first sowed the seeds of political consciousness in the Indian people. In religion his Brahmo Samaj was the first attempt to incorporate the good points of Christianity into Hinduism. Rammohun cannot be counted amongst the ahimsa teachers like Mahatma Gandhi—actually he must be counted as a forerunner of the
Mahatma. He was in fact a path-finder. At the advent of the Europeans with their somewhat aggressive religious and social ideas there was a great clash of cultures on the Indian soil. It was Rammohun who worked out a synthesis between East and West and thus saved the traditional culture from utter collapse. His Brahmo Samaj has been rightly found to be of the vanguard of India’s new era or renaissance.

However, his ideas and teachings show unmistakable imprints of the ahimsa creed. Written in the trust deed of the Brahmo Samaj temple in Calcutta is the gist of Rammohun’s ideals. The temple was intended to be a place of public meeting and worship. The trust deed says:

“That no sermon, preaching, discourse, prayer, or hymn be delivered made or used in such worship but such as have a tendency to the promotion of the contemplation of the Author and the Preserver of the Universe, to the promotion of charity and morality, piety, benevolence, virtue, and strengthening the bonds of union between men of all religious persuasions and creed.”

It was in his devotion to social reforms that Rammohun’s ahimsa virtue becomes more pronounced. He found that under the circumstances prevalent then Indo-British co-operation was essential for the fuller development of Indian culture. Under his leadership the East-West conflict gave way to Indo-British partnership in all spheres of social and political activity. He realized the unquestionable advantages of the then British rule and often enlisted its support in his endeavours for social reformations. He pleaded for English education and also supported all the enlightened legislations introduced by them in the country.

It was in his role in the abolition of the cruel practice of Suttee that Rammohun deserves our special admiration. Suttee is the practice of immolation of a woman at the funeral pyre of her husband. Though it did not have the sanction of the scriptures this cruel custom came to be prevalent in the country and many women had come to end their life this way. Rammohun revolted against this barbarous custom and spared no pains to put an end to it. It was mainly for the purpose of supporting the abolition of Suttee that Rammohun went to England in the year 1830.
However, the immediate reason for Rammohun’s journey to England was another. Akbar, the second, the descendant of the great Mughals and the titular emperor of India, picked him up to represent his case with the King of Britain and sent him to England. It was Akbar again who conferred on him the title of Raja, perhaps with a view of enhancing his prestige!

After successfully accomplishing his task for the emperor Rammohun stayed on in England and came into close contact with the social and political developments in Europe. But unfortunately he could not carry his experiences back to India for the benefit of his country and people as he died in Bristol, England.

Such was the life of Raja Rammohun Roy; one of the greatest sons of modern India. He can be said to have laid the foundation of all the great movements for the elevation of the Indian people. After the death of Rammohun the propagation of his teachings was carried on by the Brahmo Samaj. For many years the Brahmo Samaj remained the fountainhead of all religious and social reforms in the country. The whole of the intellectual life of Calcutta for some time was overshadowed by their activities.

THE RISE OF INDIAN NATIONALISM

Modern nationalism essentially is of European origin and is not older than the second half of the eighteenth century. It is a mass movement based on the concept of popular sovereignty which is primarily an outcome of the French revolution. The improvements in communications and the advance of science and technology gave great impetus to this movement and within a short time the whole of Europe came under its effective influence. Monarchies were toppled, boundaries were re-drawn, political divisions based on historical accidents were undermined, and in the place of old empires strong and compact national states came to be formed. The idea was soon on the move; the countries of Asia and later of Africa and Latin America soon took it up.

What is nationalism? Nationalism is a feeling of oneness felt by a group of people. This feeling of oneness may be the product of common heritage, religion, of language or even of common socio-economic goal. It gives rise to a unity of emo-
tions and ultimately finds fulfilment in the evolution of a national will. It might extend beyond frontiers of states as for instance we find in the pan-African nationalism of Africans. It can even exist within alien boundaries as we see in the national aspirations of the Kurds of Iraq.

Indian conditions were admirably suited for the growth of the idea of nationalism. Bounded in the North by the snow-clad peak of the mighty Himalayas, and secured on all the other sides by the waves of the Indian Ocean, India is geographically well fitted for the growth of a distinctive nationalism. Apart from this, all the Indian people could claim the same cultural heritage. The language barrier was there, but then the big-scale English education of the intelligentsia who naturally came to occupy the vanguard of the nationalist movement of the country, gave them a much needed common medium of communication. Whereas on the one hand the religion of Hinduism helped to bind them together to the concept of a common Indian nationality, on the other hand the presence of Muslim religious minority helped the growth of a dual nationality within the Indian sub-continent.

The idea of modern nationalism was inducted in India by the British with the spread of English education, the idea of an India based on the cultural, political and social aspirations of the Indian people began to take root in the minds of the intelligentsia. That of course is something that the British administrators did not bargain for. The ideas that they brought, as the goods that their ships carried, were not wholly British. India was particularly fascinated by the French and German philosophers. Voltaire, Rousseau, Hegel and Marx came to be admired in India just as much as Locke, Mill, Bentham and Burke.

Perhaps the biggest single factor for the growth of Indian nationalism was the British rule itself. As the ideas of liberty, fraternity and equality came to be more and more understood and appreciated by the Indian people they began to keenly feel the effect of political dependence. There was great awakening in the political consciousness of the people. This gave rise to a movement for the political emancipation which strengthened and enlarged the spirit of nationalism in the masses.

Undoubtedly, the first preacher of nationalism in India
was Raja Rammohun Roy. Rammohun, stood for a peaceful approach and cooperation with the British. The circumstances of the time necessitated an Indo-British partnership in politics and administration. Because of this partnership the nationalism of the people had to remain passive and it remained so for many years. Later there was an unfortunate swing to a virulent and aggressive form of nationalism. However, with the advent of mature leaders, notably with Mahatma Gandhi, Indian nationalism was steered to the traditional path of ahimsa.

The first visible sign of the birth of nationalist ideas in the Indian people was the founding of the Indian National Congress in the year 1885. To begin with it was largely a platform for public discussion and was clear about its loyalty to the British Crown. It enjoyed discreet encouragement from the government which was not altogether blind to the need of ascertaining public reaction to its rule. It was founded by A.O. Hume, a retired British Civil Servant in India, with the blessing of the then Viceroy. It enjoyed some prestige in the official circles too.

But the British government soon had to revise its opinion. Instead of being only a platform for public discussion of political affairs the Congress developed into an organization bent on criticism of government policies. Criticism of the virulent type did much to irritate the officials who were till then not used to any interference from the people into their bureaucratic machinery. With the coming of Lord Curzon as Viceroy in 1899, the Congress became an eyesore for the British administrators. The new Viceroy had no love lost to the Indian National Congress.

Whether the rulers liked it or not the Congress organization itself was gaining in strength and popularity although confined to the intellectuals and highly educated. During these days it did not have a mass appeal which it acquired only much later. But it became a powerful movement amongst the educated section of people. It also became popular with the new class of merchants, financiers and industrialists that the British policy of Laissez-Faire had produced in the country. These elements at times made use of the organization to gain commercial advantage against the government-backed foreign competitors. The Congress had also the support of a section of the landlords, who were educated and consequently more en-
lightened. The coming of these vested interests into the organisation made it somewhat a reactionary movement, and there began a certain amount of tussle within the organisation between the left and right which is continuing in the organisation to this day.

In course of time the old stalwarts who were loyal to the British crown, who like Rammohun Roy believed in Indo-British partnership in politics were dead and gone. The new leaders were faced with growing discontents and had to change their political goal to suit popular ideals. The revolutionary ideas were still pouring into the country. The new generation substituted pious discussions and public petitions with strongly worded resolutions and demands. Yet another section was impatient to gain political power by any means even by violence. Thus moderates who represented the old order and the extremists who were largely the new comers came to vie with one another for control of the Congress organization.

Meanwhile nationalism was becoming active throughout the country inside and outside the Congress. A large number of educated people because of their services under the British administration had to keep out of the Congress especially after it had earned official wrath. It would be unfair to consider them anti-national. The way that the Indian members of the services, both civil and military, rallied around the nationalist government after independence conclusively proves that though outwardly silent they were fully awake to the nationalist cause. Obviously it was those men who had independent means like lawyers and doctors who first came forward and became predominant in the Congress organization.

The partition of Bengal led to the first political action launched by the Congress in which all factions, all people, both moderates and extremists, throughout the length and breadth of the country took part. It was in 1905 that the then Viceroy Lord Curzon proposed the partition of Bengal ostensibly for the purpose of administrative efficiency. But actually it was a measure aimed at breaking up the solidarity of the Bengalees who were in the vanguard of the Indian national revolution. The people of Bengal immensely attached as they were to their province raised a strong voice of protest. But the protests, memorandums and demonstrations were of no avail; the ada-
manted Viceroy materialized his plan of partition in spite of tremendous opposition from the Indian public.

There were spontaneous outbursts of indignation all over the country. The nationalist sentiments became active and it found an outlet in the Swadeshi movement. The Congress session in 1906 in Calcutta presided over by India's grand old man Dadabhai Naoroji, endorsed the movement as an effective instrument for getting the alien government see reason. The turbulent years which followed till 1911 when the partition of Bengal was annulled should be considered as crucial years for the Congress and Indian nationalism. Swaraj became the ultimate goal of the Congress, and the leaders differed only in the means of attaining it. Nationalism became a living force in the country.

Following the Nihilist and Anarchist example of Europe notably of Russia some Indian nationalists took to destructive and disruptive activities. Inspired by the victories of the national revolutions in Europe these youthful entrants into the nationalist movement were bent on violence and played with fire and blood to throw away the British. They were men cast in a mould different from the traditional spirit of ahimsa of the Indian people, but then they were men of outstanding courage and patriotism for whom no price was too big for the independence of the Indian people. They thought the end justified the means. The government of course could not shut its eyes to their activities; they let loose oppression to contain such extremist elements in the country which only helped to increase the people's sympathy for them and in turn increased the nationalist sentiment in the country.

The three centres of what can be called nationalist extremism were the Punjab, Bengal and Maharashtra. In this connection we should remember the contribution of the trio of Indian nationalist leaders; Lala Lajpat Rai, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, and Bipin Chandra Pal—Lal, Bal and Pal as they were affectionately referred to. They were alleged to have led the band of youths who indulged in shooting British officials, throwing bombs, disrupting communications and such other activities. The administration was no doubt perturbed by this show of violence. They even feared that something like the mutiny of 1857 was in the offing.
The leader of the extremists was Balgangadhar Tilak, a Maharashtrian Brahmin born in 1857. To Tilak nationalism was more than a political ideal. He considered it more of a religion and identified it with Hindu revivalism. He made nationalism an acceptable creed to the orthodox Hindus. However, his unfortunate introduction of religion into the politics of the time was to prove maleficient in the long run to the larger interest of the country, because soon the Muslims came to evolve an equally vehement Muslim nationalism. This divided the Indian people which ultimately led to the partition of the country.

Tilak’s role in raising the national consciousness of the Indian people can never be over-estimated. An excellent journalist he was the founder and editor of the Marathi daily Kesari which propagated his extremist views. He got his opportunity to whip up nationalist feelings when the British Indian administration in spite of public disapproval, decided to divide Bengal. He came forward with the cry of Swaraj, self-government—“Swaraj is my birth-right,” he declared, “and I will have it.”

While Tilak was whipping up nationalist fervour in Maharashtra, Sri Aurobindo Ghose was doing it in Bengal along with Bipin Chandra Pal, Surendranath Bannerjea, Krishna K. Mitra and others. Ghose’s journal, Bande Mataram, became the voice of the revolutionary nationalism of the Indian people. For Aurobindo also nationalism had a deep spiritual and religious significance. In Bande Mataram he wrote:

“We recognize no political object of worship except the divinity of our Motherland, no present object of political endeavour except liberty, and no method or action as politically good or evil as it truly helps or hinders our progress towards national emancipation.”

The extremists were no doubt monopolising the attention of the government by their violent deeds and speeches. But it must be admitted that they constituted only a microscopic minority of the people. Violence was not suited to Indian temperament. Though Tilak and others due to their leadership and self-sacrifice came to occupy a high place in the nationalist movement, moderates like Dadabhai Naoroji, Surendranath Bannerjea and Gopal Krishna Gokhale enjoyed the con-
fidence of more of the people. They were believers in constitutional agitation.

The Moderates were men of peace and Gokhale particularly brought a religious fervour in his politics. The Moderates have been thrown into the dump by some historians but their contribution to Indian independence is very great. They had a sobering effect. With their pragmatic approach they could wrest many constitutional gains from the unwilling British administrators. They could evolve a band of intellectuals who joined politics and service on the social plan at a tremendous sacrifice. Gokhale’s Servants of India Society brought in a disciplined band of workers in the ascetic traditions of the country. Gokhale was a man of ahimsa, a true representative of the ideal of the Indian nation. He took to politics with a religious fervour. Gandhi called Gokhale his Guru and learnt much at his feet.

THE SPIRITUAL RENAISSANCE

Side by side with the nationalist ferment in India there was a great spiritual awakening. In some cases they were indistinguishably interlinked.

Many years of subjugation under Islam had made Hinduism introvert in character; and confined within its narrow domestic walls it had lost its vitality. The subtle philosophy of the Upanishads, the ethical teachings of the sages, and the glorious spiritual tradition of the Gita had long been forgotten. It was now a unhealthy assertion of taboos and superstitions. The caste-infested idolatrous Hindu society could not have given a good account of Indian tradition to the Europeans.

The Europeans had their missionaries who came to propagate a new creed. They came to convert the whole world to the ‘Kingdom of God’ with love, charity and benevolence. The clear ethical teachings and the undoubtedly glorious features of Christianity were attracting to it many followers. The educated Indians imbued with modern ideas could not for long stick to superstitions of their traditional Hindu faith. Rammohun who had been caught up in this dilemma founded the Brahma Samaj incorporating the ethical teachings of Christianity, but which had its soul in Indian life and culture. The monotheism of the Upanishad was the creed of the Brahma Samaj. There was no place for ‘idol worship’ or casteism in it. Later there was a
reaction. The leader of this reaction was the founder of the Arya Samaj, Dayanand Saraswati. Dayanand who was born in the year 1824, aimed at the revival of Hinduism to its pristine purity and thus paved the way for the Hinduization of the Indian people. He became the living symbol of the religious revival of Hindu India.

‘Back to the Vedas’, was his watch-word. Basing his arguments on the Vedas Dayanand advanced the unity of God. He declared that there was only One God who alone was to be worshipped and He was to be worshipped spiritually and not with images or idols. While acknowledging the authority of the Vedas, Dayanand was careful to deny the authority of the later scriptures. He regarded the Puranas as unhealthy outgrowths. He considered them even immoral, and had no hesitation to condemn them as the writings of ignorant men.

And so too were his views on Divine incarnation and sundry other beliefs of the Hindus. He proclaimed that neither Christ of the Christians nor Krishna or Rama of the Hindus nor any other great man could ever be an incarnation of the Supreme, for God could not be incarnated. Neither did he condone idolatry and rituals. Actually idol worship was a particular target of his attack. He was against even asceticism and all outward show of religion like pilgrimage, ceremonial bathing and so on. He recognized the equality of all men, and was against caste. He declared that caste had no religious sanction, and repudiated untouchability as an outrage on humanity.

Dayanand was a patriot. He was acutely aware of the disunity amongst the people of Hindustan. He viewed India as a whole and to realize unity he sought to establish an all embracing civilization based on the Aryan faith of the ancestors. While purifying the Hindu religion from inside he was bitter against the Muslims and Christians. Entirely clear as to his aim and purpose he was downright uncompromising and even unreasonable in his attack on the Christian missionaries. Undoubtedly this was not in the true spirit of ahimsa. The Indian people could never be for long uncompromising and intolerant in their attitudes towards other beliefs. But for a time Dayanand’s aggressive spirit did put the badly needed courage into the heart of his countrymen.
In 1875 in Bombay Dayanand launched his great society, the Arya Samaj. Two years later he established a unit of the Samaj at Lahore which eventually became the headquarters of the Samaj. Soon Arya Samaj became a very powerful organization steadily extending its activities throughout the country. After the death of Dayanand in 1883 the work of the Samaj was carried on by the celebrated trio of disciples; Lala Hansraj, Pandit Guru Datta, and Lala Lajpat Rai.

Aurobindo Ghose, usually referred to as Maharshi Aurobindo, was born in the year 1872 and was brought up mostly in England till he came to India at the age of twenty-one. He had a completely western upbringing and was well-versed in western classics and thought. Even his mother tongue, Bengalee, he had to learn later when he came back to work in India. But Aurobindo was a prodigy of learning and culture and very soon became a master of Indian classics and Indian philosophy. However, the happenings in India at the time could not keep him for long shut up in his studies. He was soon entangled in the revolutionary activities of Bengal. There again he could not remain for long, for he was in reality a man of religion and philosophy. He left politics and retired first to the French town of Chandranagar and ultimately settled down at Pondicherry in the South where he lived till death gathered him in 1950.

Aurobindo evolved an integrated system of thought which was in effect a synthesis of the spirituality of the East and the radicalism of the west. He preached a philosophy which was in essence the philosophy of inwardness based on the speculations of the Upanishads. In his book 'Life Divine' he declares that all beings are united in that ‘One Self’ but is only divided by a certain separateness of consciousness. Remove this separate consciousness and we would have the true Self, which is nothing but the Divinity inherent in all beings. This inward realization, Aurobindo maintains would lead to the unity of all mankind. The whole world is one, intermingled with the ‘Divine Life’.

Aurobindo did not like uniformity, he wanted the co-existence of different cultures. The different communities in the world must progress in their own way with mutual love and understanding giving full scope to the realization of the ultimate spiritual unity of all humanity. For a free world Sri
Aurobindo prescribes inner discipline as the governing principle. In his book *The Ideal of Human unity* he writes:

"The human society progresses really and vitally in proportion as law becomes the child of freedom; it will reach its perfection when, man having learned to know and to become spiritually one with his fellow-man, the spontaneous law of his society exists only as the outward mould of his self-governed inner liberty."

In the same book Aurobindo sums up his ideal in these words: "War, capital punishment, the taking of human life, cruelty of all kinds whether committed by the individual, the state, or society, not only physical cruelty, but moral cruelty, the degradation of any human being or any class of human beings under whatever specious plea or in whatever interest, the oppression and exploitation of man by man, of nation by nation, and all those habits of life and institutions of society of a similar kind which religion and ethics formerly tolerated or even favoured in practice, whatever they might do in their ideal or creed, are crimes against the religion of humanity, abominable to its ethical mind, forbidden by its primary tenets, to be fought against always and in no degree to be tolerated. Man must be sacred to man regardless of all distinctions of race, creed, colour, nationality status, political or social advancement. The body of man is to be respected, made immune from violence and outrage, fortified by science against disease and preventable death. The life of man is to be held sacred, preserved, strengthened, ennobled, and uplifted. The heart of man is to be held sacred also, given scope, protected from violations from supression, from mechanization, freed from belittling influences. The mind of man is to be released from all bonds, allowed freedom and range and opportunity, given all its means of self-training and self-development and organized in the play of its powers for the service of humanity.

The ideal that Sri Aurobindo preaches evidently are based on the eternal concepts of ahimsa. But Aurobindo was essentially a man of intellect and of philosophy, whose teachings remained unattainable to the common man. His dry philosophical reasoning and metaphysical dissertations could not make him a popular figure in the religious renaissance of the country. His influence was mostly confined to a few intellectuals and
admirers who have tried to propagate his teachings throughout the world through books, pamphlets, and the like. However, for more popular representatives of the spiritual renaissance of the Indian people we should take the study of Sri Ramakrishna.

SRI RAMAKRISHNA AND SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa stands out unique amongst the religious teachers of modern India. He was a God intoxicated saint. He was the embodiment of the religious awakening of the Indian people, a true representative of the ahimsa tradition of the Indian nation.

Sri Ramakrishna was born on February 18, 1836 in village Kamarpukur in the Hoogly district of West Bengal. As a boy he is said to have had a remarkable memory. He knew a good lot of devotional hymns by heart in the chanting of which he took immense pleasure. The pious villagers used to gather round him to listen to his songs. The devotional songs of the great lover poets, Chandidas and Chaitanya moulded his religious emotions and inspired in him a mystical love of the personal God.

His search for the realization of God started soon after his coming to Dakshineswar, a suburb of Calcutta where his brother was an officiating priest at the Kali temple. The Kali temple at Dakshineswar is situated on the banks of the river Ganga. It was here at Dakshineswar that Sri Ramakrishna lived and underwent that spiritual transformation which was to make him a saint and a mystic.

When his brother died Sri Ramakrishna himself took up the priesthood of the temple. The next twelve years of his life at Dakshineswar comprise his struggle to realize God. In those difficult days his nephew, Hriday, was his only companion and helper. The image of Kali in the temple was for him a veritable representation of God. He used to spend days and days together in deep meditation. He was seized with a burning desire for the vision of Kali, the Mother. Every night he would retire to the jungle in the neighbourhood of the temple and would meditate under a large Amalaki tree.

A Sannyasin Totapuri came to Kali temple at Dakshineswar quite accidentally and introduced him to Vedanta. Under
the guidance of this Sannyasin Sri Ramakrishna is said to have attained the greatest stage of samadhi, the Nirvikalpa Samadhi, as it is known, the highest stage of religious trance in which not a trace of human consciousness would remain in the person.

Now Sri Ramakrishna had come to the end of his search of the eternal Being. He attained the highest stage of a Sannyasin, he became a paramahansa. He came to realize that God is one and many, with and without form, and may be conceived either as a great universal spirit or through different symbols like Kali image at Dakshineswar. Ramakrishna explains:

“When the Supreme Being is thought of as inactive—not creating, sustaining or destroying—I call him Brahman or Purusha, the Impersonal God. When I think of him as active—creating, sustaining, destroying—I call him Sakti or Maya or Prakriti or Personal God. But really the distinction between Brahman or Sakti—or Impersonal God and Personal God—is a distinction without a difference.”

However, Sri Ramakrishna did not turn into a fanatical devotee of his concept of the Infinite. He studied the teachings and practices of other religious faiths like Mohamedanism and Christianity too.

So the saint of Dakshineswar became the prophet of harmony, of love and world fellowship. Differences of caste and creed, colour and race do not enter into his concept of the universal humanity; nobody is alien to his spiritual brotherhood. There are no untouchables, no rich nor poor in front of the Supreme Being who is the only Reality. Such an irrevocable spiritual basis for world brotherhood is Ramakrishna’s greatest contribution to the modern concept of ahimsa.

Sri Ramakrishna made no attempt to start a new religion nor a new sect. He, in fact, did not bother about this or that religion. The secret of his teachings was inwardness, the search within. The essential thing is spirituality. He believed that he who calls on God sincerely, whoever he is, would ultimately come to realize Him. He condemned the meaningless race for material power, and exhorted men to turn to the soul; “True happiness lies within”, he declared.

In the matter of service to others Sri Ramakrishna struck
out a new outlook. He did not talk of pity for the poor; there was to be no condescension in one's attitude of service for others. He considered that by genuine service it is the one who serves that obtains all the blessedness, and so he must be the one to be thankful for having got a chance to serve. "Do not speak of love to your brother," he exhorts his followers, "Realize it." It is this ideal of service that has turned his disciples to philanthropic activities. Today the followers of Sri Ramakrishna are scattered all over the country attending to the sick and the disabled, administering to the aged and the poor, and educating the ignorant.

In his own life-time Sri Ramakrishna became well known for his spiritual attainments. Many flocked around him to seek salvation from the tortures of a materialistic existence. People from all walks of life sought his advice and spiritual guidance. The illustrious Keshab Chandra Sen, the leader of the Brahmo Samaj came into intimate contact with him. Keshab Chandra Sen spoke about him to his friends in Calcutta and his popularity increased. Educated men, students from the university and others, started coming to him to listen to his talks. One of them was Narendranath Dutta, afterwards famous as Swami Vivekananda.

Sri Ramakrishna passed away on August 16, 1886. Like many other teachers and saints Sri Ramakrishna did not write any books, nor did he proclaim his teachings to any wide circle of admirers. He did not even travel far and wide. Only he had a small band of devoted disciples who were determined to take up his teachings to the vast humanity, administering a spiritual remedy to the ills of the modern materialistic civilization.

The mantle of the master fell an Swami Vivekananda. At the time of the death of Sri Ramakrishna, Vivekananda was only twenty-three. Born in the year 1863 he was a Calcutta University student before he came under the spiritual spell of Ramakrishna. But from the moment of their first meeting Sri Ramakrishna had looked upon him as his spiritual heir and had specially trained him to carry the torch of spirituality to the millions in the world. Vivekananda's primary concern was to keep the disciples of the master in a fraternal union. While he travelled all over India sharpening his
knowledge of Advaita Vedanta he was in constant touch with his brother-monks in Calcutta to see that they were not disintegrated into individual Samyayas unattached to the world and seeking individual salvation as monks of olden days. That would have been against the philosophy of action, Karmayoga, that the master preached.

Sri Ramakrishna was not a systematic thinker, his teachings must be compared to the spontaneous outbursts of a man inspired by spiritual knowledge. It was Vivekananda who put them together to evolve an integrated system based on Advaita Vedanta of the Upanishads. Vivekananda started from the point where Sri Sankara left, and advanced Vedantic ideas to suit the needs of the modern world.

The aim of Vivekananda's spirituality is to get rid of the hold of materialism on the life of the individual. Each soul is potentially divine and the goal is to manifest this divinity within by freeing oneself from attachment to the senses. It can be done by one or more or all of the four fundamental Yogas, which he named as Karmayoga (by work), Bhaktiyoga (by worship), Rajayoga (Psychic control) and Jnanayoga (by knowledge).

It was in the World Parliament of Religions held at Chicago in the year 1893 that he first proclaimed to the world the Vedanta approach as a solution to the social and spiritual problems of the days. Essentially the problem is one of adjustment to the needs of the material prosperity which has actually brought about the conflict between people and races. While not disparaging material prosperity the Vedanta puts it aside as Maya or illusion. What is important is the soul of man, the self within. And when one would realize the true self all differences between races and people would vanish. Vedanta seeks to establish not merely the brotherhood of all men on earth but the identity of all creation.

In absolute conformity with the spirit of tolerance Swami Vivekananda did not believe in religious uniformity for spiritual awakening in the world. He declared in the World Parliament of Religions:

"The Christian is not to become a Hindu or a Buddhist, nor a Hindu to become a Christian. But each must assimilate the spirit of the others and yet preserve
his individuality and grow according to his own law of growth."

Swami Vivekananda went to America primarily to attend the World Parliament of Religions. After the parliament he undertook a lecture tour of the United States. This lecture tour again was a thundering success. The Swami from India made a tremendous impact on the American public and he had many American followers. Sister Christine who heard him for the first time in Detroit and later became a nun of the Ramakrishna order speaks of him thus:

"Vivekananda burst upon us in a blaze of reddish gold, which seemed to have caught and concentrated the sun's rays. He was barely thirty, this preacher from India —young with an ageless youth and yet withal old with the wisdom of the ancient times. For the first time we heard the age-old message of India, teaching of Atman, the true self."

Swami Vivekananda spent altogether three years in America and Europe explaining the Vedanta doctrine to west. His long and untiring efforts bore fruit and many people came to appreciate his teachings. The spirit of universalism and altruism that he sought to convey through Vedanta appealed greatly to the European mind. He attracted a band of staunch followers from Europe; one of them Miss Margaret Noble was later to become famous as Sister Nivedita of the Ramakrishna order. The Swami travelled far and wide in Europe and left for India in December 1896.

Coming back to India he was received like a hero and his name and fame increased in the whole sub-continent. Perhaps it was this western contact that made Vivekananda a firm Karmayogi, a man of action. He could view India and her people from the standpoint of a foreigner. He was quick to recognize the good points in the western civilization. He saw that nothing tangible could be achieved in India or elsewhere without an organization. There were already the followers of Sri Ramakrishna who had formed a loose brotherhood of Sannyasins. Vivekananda wanted to launch this brotherhood into a full-fledged mission. There was some opposition from some members of the brotherhood who maintained that an organization of any kind was against the spirit
of renunciation of true *Sannyasins*. But Vivekananda could prevail on them and he founded the Ramakrishna Mission in the year 1897.

Ramakrishna mission, thus organized, established *Maths* all over the country and outside, and in the style of western missionary institutions began to train new recruits to carry the message of the master far and wide. It welcomes into its fold all men and women irrespective of caste or creed, race or nationality. The aims of the Mission are manifold, the primary one being the propagation of *Vedanta* to the whole world. The mission’s task in India includes the reformation of Hindu society. It is against all social distinctions and race prejudices and endeavours to erase them from society. It condemns caste and untouchability as obnoxious social inequities.

Intense love for humanity is the special trait of the Ramakrishna Mission. Swami Vivekananda actually deified humanity. “God is here before you in various forms,” he declares, “he who loves his creatures serves God.” It is this ideal of service that we see manifested in Ramakrishna Mission’s many philanthropic activities. The Mission started relief centres, clinics, and educational institutions all over the country. Today the Mission brings solace and hope to the needy and neglected and it has become one of the prominent institutions in the country. Having seen the mission progressing under the able guidance of his brother monks Swami Vivekananda breathed his last in July 1909.
Gandhi, the Mahatma

Gandhi, the Mahatma, was the modern prophet of ahimsa. He was not only a teacher, but was also a leader who led the Indian people at an important juncture of their history. Clad in his loin cloth this man rose as a tower of strength of the Indian people leading to independence as a political entity.

To a world torn by conflict and violence came Gandhi with his philosophy of ahimsa. To a world of materialism came Gandhi with his message of truth and non-violence. To a world beset with prejudices and racial arrogance came Gandhi to show the path of love and understanding. He demonstrated that a people irrevocably wedded to the path of ahimsa can be strong, very strong—even stronger than an empire built on invincible armies and modern armaments.

Gautama and Gandhi belong to the same spiritual lineage. Gautama was a prince who saw suffering and was aroused to action through compassion. Born in the community of rich Banias, Gandhi became a lawyer and went to South Africa and
might have amassed wealth just like many others of his community. But he chose a different life. What aroused him was the terrible injustice that his own countrymen suffered in South Africa under the white colonial administration. He came forward as a champion of truth and justice. Buddha threw away his princely robes and took resort to the forest in search of the path; and the Mahatma discarding the robes of a barrister lived with the villager in Ashrams, to guide them along the path of truth and non-violence.

Gautama set in motion what the Buddhists call the wheel of dharma, the Dharma-chakra, whereas Gandhi symbolized in the spinning wheel, the Charkha, the humble service that he extolled to his followers. For Gandhi morality was religion and Truth was his God. Gandhi pointed to the path of action, Karmayoga, the way of good work performed solely for the sake of God without regard for success and failure.

A span of about two thousand and five hundred years divided Gandhi from Gautama. The land of Gautama, the Buddha, was now a world by itself. The old Aryavartha was now a unified geographical and political entity under the control of foreigners. Many races and tribes had got absorbed by now into Hindu society under the hegemony of caste and the racial arrogance and tribal prejudices had found an outlet in the rigid observances of casteism and untouchability. Islam had divided the Indian people under two faiths unfortunately often at loggerheads to one another. The contact with the west had produced stresses and strains in the social and religious spheres which were still far from being settled.

Gautama had led a revolutionary reform movement which brought about far-reaching changes in the country and stirred society to a new sense of brotherhood under the banner of ahimsa. But Buddhism which Buddha meant to be an organization for the furtherance of ahimsa virtue had long ceased to be a power in India. However, the creed itself never failed; its influence is felt in the affairs of the Indian people. As we have seen new movements came into being to replace the old ones and many seers, great and small, appeared on the scene to lead the people through the right path. Gandhi appeared in our own time to fulfil their great work, to consolidate their spiritual and social gains.
Gandhi built on the foundations that others had laid before him. We have seen in the preceding chapters how the ahimsa ideal perfected and proclaimed by Gautama came to be absorbed in the everyday life and work of the Indian people. Gandhi's role was more in the nature of setting up new dimensions to ahimsa in order to enlarge its scope to fit into modern environments. The world had greatly changed from the time Gautama preached his four-fold noble path. A gigantic problem of social and political adjustment arose when many races and tribes came into intimate contact with each other on the surface of the globe. The magnitude of the problem only increased with the march of science and technology. Also the clash of ideologies brought about by radical movements was no less stupendous.

In spite of all the efforts of philosophers and reformers alike caste was still a predominant force in Hindu society. What the British did was just to impose themselves, as many races had done before, as a super caste sitting as it were, on the summit of an already elaborate pyramid of castes.

The Indian people were now, as never before, under the grip of an autocratic foreign regime. The common man suffered under the reign of oppressive landlords and bureaucracy. This corruption and despotism was nowhere so acute as in the Indian states. There were about six hundreds of them with greater or less degree of autocracy. The rulers of these native states seldom cared for the welfare of their people, they were responsible to nobody.

In the World War I of 1914 some Indian politicians found an opportunity to advance their nationalist aspirations. But many of them including Gandhi saw in it God-sent opportunity to cement Indo-British partnership. They came to a sad disillusionment at the successful culmination of the war. Gokhale died in February 1915 and in the same year Mrs Besant launched her Home Rule League with the approval of the extremist Tilak. There was a swing to extremism and the Home Rule League almost in no time became a very powerful organization in its own right. However, it soon got amalgamated into the Congress. In the year 1916 at the historic Congress session at Lucknow all the political forces in the country found themselves united as never before under the leadership of Mrs Besant and Tilak.
It was at Lucknow again that the Muslims, now well-organized under the banner of the All India Muslim League, met alongside with the Congress and came to a political understanding with it which came to be known as the Lucknow pact. The Lucknow Pact was a communal arrangement in which the Muslim fear of a Hindu domination in Swaraj was set aside by the Congress agreeing to a communal electorates for Muslims and guaranteeing a representation for minorities in the country’s central legislatures far higher than what their numerical strength would entitle them. Behind the facade of agreements these ideas in course of time made the concept of dual nationality take root in the Indian masses.

Under the leadership of Tilak and Mrs. Besant who after the Lucknow Congress session came to a sort of monopolizing the political life in the country, the politics was taking to extremism. But then the great prophet of ahimsa had already appeared on the Indian scene. After a sojourn in South Africa which lasted about twenty years Gandhi had landed in Bombay early in 1915. He had attended the Congress sessions in 1916 at Lucknow. Little did the people who had attended this sessions realise that this comparatively stranger to India clad in home-spun Kathiawari dress was going to shake to British lion by the tail and utilise the current trends to win independence for India.

**LIFE OF GANDHI**

Gandhi was born on October 2, 1869 at Porbandar in Gujarat. By birth he was a *bania* belonging to the *Vaisya* or merchant caste. He was the youngest child of his parents and was brought up with all the affection normally shown to the youngest.

His father Karamchand Gandhi was then the Prime Minister of Porbandar state. Gandhi speaks of him as a truthful and brave man. However, it was his mother who had a greater influence on the young Mohandas. He mentioned, “The outstanding impression my mother has left on my memory is that of saintliness.”

Mohandas grew up in Porbandar where he had his early education in the local school. It seems that he was not at all conspicuous in his studies. In his own words:

“It was with some difficulty that I got through the
multiplication tables. The fact that I recollect nothing more of those days than having learnt in company with other boys, to call our teacher all kinds of names, would strongly suggest that my intellect must have been sluggish, and my memory raw."

However, his real schooling started only in Rajkot. His father was appointed as the Prime Minister of Rajkot state, and the family moved to Rajkot. Mohandas was admitted to Alfred High school in Rajkot. At school he was an extremely shy lad always scared of being bullied by other boys, and acutely aware of his limitations. To quote from his autobiography:

"My books and my lessons were my sole companions. To be at school at the stroke of the hour and to turn back home as soon as the school closed—that was my daily habit. I literally ran back, because I could not bear to talk to anybody. I even was afraid lest anyone should poke fun of me."

According to the custom of the day Mohandas married when he was only thirteen years old. His girl wife, also thirteen, was Kasturba. Although married his schooling went on without break. The young Mohandas was very fond of his wife and often wanted to establish his authority over her. But the young girl, determined as she was, refused to dance to all his whims and fancies. Many years later speaking of his wife Gandhi, the Mahatma said:

"I learnt the lesson of non-violence from my wife when I tried to bend her to my will. Her determined resistance to my will on the one hand, and her quiet submission to the suffering of my stupidity involved on the other, ultimately made me ashamed of myself and cured me of my stupidity in thinking that I was born to rule over her; and in the end she became my teacher in non-violence."

We get intimate glimpses of Gandhi's childhood and youth from his autobiography which he calls, *My Experiments with Truth*. Though a strict vegetarian at home he had experience of eating meat, an experience which he records he did not relish in the least. He had some unusual escapades with friends and class-mates. But he could control himself. On the whole he remained a normal but an ordinary boy in
his school. He left the school when he passed Matric in the year 1887. There was nothing extraordinary about him.

Mohandas was sent to Samaldas college, Bhavanagar. He remained there only for a short while as it was decided that he should go to England to qualify at the bar. But now the difficulty arose when the orthodox elders of his caste raised objections about the propriety of sending a young man to England crossing the high seas. What if he would take meat and wine and violate his caste obligations? Even his mother was afraid that her young son might fall into evil ways, away in an alien land. At this Mohandas took the three vows: namely that he would not touch women, wine or meat. Though this could satisfy his mother, the caste elders remained unmoved. But that did not prevent Mohandas from sailing to England in September 1888.

England indeed proved a very strange country for Mohandas Gandhi. He was still young, only nineteen, and not used to English ways and English food, not even wellversed in the English language. In England to be a vegetarian was something queer and definitely difficult and embarrassing; and Mohandas could not break his vow to his mother. The strange people and the strange society gripped him with a terrible sense of loneliness. He felt an intense longing for home, for the simple pleasures and happy surroundings of Rajkot. But he was unshaken in his resolve to stay on in England come what may. When he completed his studies and after being called to the Bar in England he sailed for India in the year 1891.

Only when Gandhi landed in India he came to know that his mother had expired in his absence in England. Then for a time he lived at home with his wife and his young son Hiralal who was then four years old.

Gandhi was unsuccessful as a practising lawyer both at Rajkot and Bombay. In the Bombay bar his experience was far from encouraging. He was sad and disspirited. But an opportunity came along on his way, an opportunity which was destined to make a new man of him. A certain business firm in Porbandar who had a civil suit pending in South Africa wanted a trustworthy man to help them in their case, and the job was offered to Gandhi. Gandhi accepted it and sailed for South Africa.
GANDHI IN SOUTH AFRICA

Gandhi had a long and varied career in South Africa covering a period of about twenty years, from 1893 to 1914. Though he landed in South Africa as a lawyer, in the capacity of an adviser to a mercantile firm, he soon got involved in the life and politics of the Indian people there. Gandhi saw that the Indian people there were subjected not only to unjust discrimination but also to inhuman oppression. The arrogance and racial prejudices of the white settlers knew no bounds. So when he had finished his legal assignment Gandhi decided to stay on in South Africa. His idea was to take up the cause of his countrymen, to help them to secure redress to their many grievances and also to improve their political status.

This was a momentous step which in course of time dragged him to politics and freedom struggle of the motherland. Gandhi no longer could remain a detached onlooker; by staying on in South Africa on the wishes of his countrymen while he had accepted the leadership of the Indian community there. His life and philosophy had now to be adjusted to the requirements of this leadership. The self-conscious and somewhat introvert bania lawyer became a popular champion of justice and truth.

Eventually he brought his family also to stay with him in South Africa after a short visit to India in 1896. Soon he established a fairly lucrative practice in Durban. But he was not one of the usual lawyers always hankering after money. Of his professional work he says,

"I realized that the true function of a lawyer was to unite parties riven asunder. The lesson was indelibly burnt into me, that a large part of my time during the twenty years of my practice as a lawyer was occupied in bringing about private compromises of hundreds of cases. I lost nothing there—not even money, and certainly not my soul."

And to seek redress of the grievances of his countrymen he was a tireless fighter. The details of his campaigns in South Africa are instructive. But more interesting for us is the study of its formative influence on the life and teachings of the future Mahatma. It is a fact that his life in South Africa made him
leader, a Mahatma in the true sense of the world. It was there that his weapon of Satyagraha was conceived and tested. It was in South Africa that he formed his philosophy of life and developed the technique for action.

The bulk of the Indians in South Africa were indentured labourers in plantations owned and managed by the white settlers. They were an ignorant mass, poor and illiterate, who having been induced to come to South Africa with fair promises now exploited and pushed about at the will of the planters. Their contribution to the development of the region was ignored and they were made to serve as aliens with no fundamental human rights.

Some of the Indians were well-to-do businessmen who had followed the labourers from India in the expectation of good business. Though these merchants were economically much better off than the labourers they were also equally oppressed. There was nothing like political consciousness in any one of them. There was no organization, no leadership, no purposeful life other than to carry on. They were the helpless victims of every form of legislation directed against them by the British colonial power for the convenience of the European planters. South Africa then, as it is even now, was a country in which racialism reigned supreme. The white minority who came to have had the political power, subjected all other races, including the Indians, to all sort of social and political discrimination denying them not only equality but even basic human rights.

Gandhi’s immediate task was the founding of an organization to fight for the legitimate rights of the Indian settlers. In the beginning of his career in South Africa he started the Natal Indian Congress. All the time he was there, he was the undisputed leader. He organized meetings, led demonstrations and in a way directed all the political activities of his people. He became acquainted with all forms of political agitations, but preferred to follow the path of his own conscience and remained non-violent in all the struggles he led against the colonial rulers.

For propagating his views, and to put forth the political claims of the Indian settlers he started a magazine *The Indian Opinion*. In his subsequent career in India, *Young India* and
Harijan were the two other magazines that he started in the same traditions. He had a high regard for the potentialities of the press. He says:

"I realized that the sole aim of journalism should be service. The newspaper press is a great power, but just as an unchained torrent of water submerges whole countrysides and devastates crops, even so an uncontrolled pen serves but to destroy."

As a journalists also he had his own sense of duty and he did not like the papers earn money through advertisements.

As in India later on Gandhi’s approach in South Africa was social rather than political. He endeavoured to reach the masses through devoted service and simplicity in living. He identified himself with the common man cultivating their mode of living. He systematically reduced his needs when finally he became his own barber and launderer. He trained himself to do service to the people by learning how to nurse the sick and even experimented in nature cure. Service to the poor and the needy was natural to him and was always anxious to take up the cause of the oppressed and the down-trodden.

Gandhi was not a voracious reader. Ruskin’s Unto This Last had made a great impression on him. In his own words:

"During the days of my education I had read practically nothing outside textbooks, and after I launched into active life I had very little time for reading. I cannot therefore claim much book knowledge. However, I believe, I have not lost much because of this enforced restraint. On the contrary the limited reading may be said to have enabled me thoroughly to digest what I did read. Of these books, the one that brought about an instantaneous and practical transformation in my life was Unto This Last.

It was this book that gave him the idea of starting a farm in Phoenix, some fourteen miles from the city of Durban. Actually we also see here the influence of Indian tradition on Gandhi. Phoenix farm was nothing but a modern version of an Indian Ashram. Phoenix farm was the first of such Ashrams that Gandhi started to train his disciples and launch his programme for social and spiritual regeneration.
Perhaps the greatest foreign influence on the life and philosophy of Gandhi came from the writings of Leo Tolstoy, the Russian thinker. The Kingdom of God is within you changed his outlook towards life. There Tolstoy redefined the essential Christian approach:

“A Christian enters into no dispute with his neighbour, he neither attacks nor uses violence; on the contrary, he suffers himself, without resistance, and by his every attitude towards evil not only sets himself free, but helps to free the world at large from all outward authority.”

It is this Tolstoy’s interpretation of Christianity that appealed to Gandhi more than the Christianity preached by Christian missionaries. He felt that their doctrinaire approach to the simple teachings of Christ was only confusing. Life of Christ, for Gandhi, was a book on self-denial and self-sacrifice. The cross for him was the symbol of a law of suffering, suffering for the common cause. The agony of Christ on the cross was actually Gandhi’s inspiration for the spirit of self-denial of the the Satyagrahi.

Gandhi had occasions to write to the Russian author and to receive full-hearted support to his scheme of struggle. Gandhi says:

Russia gave me in Tolstoy a teacher who furnished a reasoned basis for my non-violence. Tolstoy blessed my movement in South Africa when it was still in its infancy and of whose wonderful possibilities I had yet to learn. It was he who prophesied in his letter to me that I was leading a movement which was destined to bring a message of hope to the downtrodden people of the earth.”

It is the influence of Tolstoy that made Gandhi start the Tolstoy farm, another Ashram in the outskirts of the city of Johannesburg. There he collected all his followers and began to live according to the ideals that he was gradually evolving for himself through study and contemplation. The Tolstoy farm was actually his hermitage where his spiritual and moral ideas came to be formed.

Thus started Gandhi’s quest after truth or experiment with truth. He was becoming a sannyasin. Though he did not forsake his wife and family like Gautama, the Buddha,
Gandhi had begun a life detached from *samsara*, that is worldly existence. He took the vow of *Brahmacharya* or celibacy. From now on Kasturba was to be his companion. He had renounced the world becoming indifferent to pleasure and pain. Truth was his only goal and his means.

Gandhi did not escape to the forest, but lived with his people studying their problems, thinking out remedies and practising the mode of life that he preached. As an eminently practical teacher he wanted to see his truth tested in the cauldron of life instead of remaining as an isolated ideal of the philosopher and moralists.

After a study of the tenets of different religions Gandhi came to the conclusion that all religious teachings were fundamentally true; truth and righteousness being the basis of them all. He could not understand why then man fought in the name of God and religion. For him all men are brothers, he says:

"A variety of incidents in my life have conspired to bring me in close contact with people of many creeds and many communities, and my experience with all of them warrants the statement that I have known no distinction between relatives and strangers, countrymen and foreigners, white and coloured. Hindus and Indians of other faiths, whether Mussalmans, Parsis, Christians, and Jews."

Gandhi’s mind was truely entrenched in pure Hinduism although he saw good in all religions. It was *Bhagavad Gita* which really touched him as an immortal work. Gandhi was at once impressed by the lofty idealism preached in the holy book of the Hindus. Later on he even translated it with comments in his own mother tongue, Gajarati.

The *Bhagavad Gita* became Gandhi’s spiritual handbook, and he often read it and pondered over it for light and guidance. "Perform action denouncing attachment and balanced evenly in success and failure", so says *Bhagavan*, the God in the *Gita*. It is this detached activity that Gandhi considered as the mainstream of the teachings of the *Gita*. That became a basic principle on which Gandhian ahimsa came to be based. He says:

"After forty years of unremitting endeavour fully to enforce the teachings of the *Gita* in my own life, I have
in all humility felt that perfect renunciation is impossible without perfect observance of ahimsa in every shape and form."

Though primarily a man of God and religion, Gandhi nevertheless came to be closely associated with the social and political life of his people. Especially now in South Africa he was faced with the urgent need for social and political action. Gandhi evolved the technique of Satyagraha in an effort to find a scheme of political and social resistance against the forces of evil. It was first conceived during his South African struggle. Subsequently it underwent much transformation in principles and practice, until at last it took the form of a unique ahimsa weapon to fight the forces of evil that everyday were threatening the peace and happiness of mankind.

SATYAGRAHA

Satyagraha is a Sanskrit term which literally means 'holding on to truth.' Satya means truth, and the emphasis on Satyagraha is on truth. At no time, on no occasion can a Satyagrahi leave the path of truth. Holding on to truth a Satyagrahi launches his movements to obtain redress to any social and political grievances of his people. "Our creed" says Gandhi, "is devotion to truth. Our business is the search for and the insistence on truth."

Truth is incompatible with violence. And so Satyagraha came to be based on ahimsa. Its central idea is conquest by love. At no time a Satyagrahi is to feel hatred or anger towards anybody least of all towards an opponent. One should show his love to his opponent in no uncertain terms. Gandhi's antagonist in South Africa, General Smuts brings out the greatness of this ideal with these words:

"In Jail he (Gandhi) had prepared for me a pair of sandals which he presented to me when he was set free. I have worn these sandals for many summers since then, even though I may feel that I am not worthy to stand in the shoes of so great a man."

For a Satyagrahi force is the force of love, of suffering and self-sacrifice. While on the path to retrieve an erring human being he may be spit at, tortured or otherwise ill-treated.
But no words of abuse, revenge, anger or retaliation should ever escape his mouth. He should approach things with a spirit of forgiveness, just like Jesus Christ who only prayed to God to forgive his tormentors: "Forgive them, Oh Father," prayed Jesus, nailed on his cross, "they know not what they are doing."

Love conquers all, and self-suffering will open the eyes of the opponent if love alone cannot melt his heart. In Satyagraha violence is replaced with self-suffering; and love gives rise to fasting and penance to work as a spiritual antidote on the presence of evil in the opponent. Speaking on Satyagraha Gandhi says:

"I have ventured to place before India the ancient law of self-suffering. For Satyagraha and its offshoots, non-cooperation and civil resistance, are nothing but new names for the law of suffering."

An intensive dislike of all evil in all its forms is the psychological make up of a true Satyagrahi. His weapons are love and non-violent protest and it should come to him rather instinctively. It is not to be directed against anybody, rather it should work to bring about a change of heart in the opponent, terminating the influence of evil on him. It is the evil that catches hold of man’s consciousness and that is how one becomes bad. And so it is this evil that a Satyagrahi tries to get him free from. It depends for its success on the conversion of the opponent rather than in his destruction.

The only element of coercion that can be applied on an opponent is non-cooperation or passive resistance. One should not cooperate with evil at any cost. Holding on to truth, as he always should do, it would be unthinkable for a true Satyagrahi to cooperate with evil. But this non-cooperation should be applied as not to lead to any ill-will. It should not be done even with an intention of putting the antagonist into trouble. In South Africa we see Gandhi suspending his campaign so as not to harass the administration at a critical juncture when they were threatened with a strike of white labourers. There is no room in Satyagraha for collective bargaining nor taking up an opportunity for decisive action against an opponent.

For a true Satyagrahi recourse to physical force is tanta-
mount to an admission of weakness. It is not weakness that makes a Satyagrahi take to the path of non-violent resistance but his conviction that non-violence is superior to violence. In fact a Satyagrahi is not weak, can never be weak as long as he has the strength in him of the soul force which is infinitely stronger and definitely nobler than physical force. Gandhi says:

“If I could popularize the use of soul-force which is but another name for love-force, in place of brute force, I know that I could present you with an India that could defy the whole world to its worst.”

Passive resistance of a Satyagrahi should not be taken in the same light as the passive resistance movements launched in the west. The passive resistance movement in the west is derived from a sense of helplessness. For example, because there was no other course open to them, the Suffragettes of England took up passive resistance to press their demand. In Gandhi’s own words in this type of passive resistance:

“there is no scope for love; on the other hand not only hatred has no place in Satyagraha, but is a positive breach of its ruling principles. In passive resistance there is always present an idea of harassing the other party, and there is a simultaneous readiness to undergo any hardships entailed upon us by such activity; while in Satyagraha there is not the remotest idea of injuring the opponent.”

Satyagraha is the weapon of the strong, not of the weak. A coward can never be a true Satyagrahi. He must be completely unattached to the world and his sole purpose in life should be the conversion of the opponent. He should induce the opponent to desist from evil by love and soul force. Even if death should become necessary for the fulfilment of this mission he should welcome it cheerfully. He must have the inner discipline to be steadfast in his principles. He should not be provoked to violence and anger at any stage of his movement.

In this connection it is appropriate to consider the place of public fasts in Satyagraha movement. Gandhi, in his own lifetime undertook a number of fasts and it is important to note the real idea behind these fasts. Gandhi’s fasts must be considered in a way a continuation of the law of suffering. It is mainly intended as a soul force which would convert the evil
doer to the path of truth. It also should work as a sort of self-purification technique. Gandhi himself called some of his fasts simply purification fasts.

Fasting for spiritual and moral strength is an admitted religious practice in almost all religions of the world. Hindu calendar sets aside certain days for fasts every year. Christians have fast and abstinence several days a year. Muslims have their Ramzan month for fasting. But more than in any other religion fasting gets the highest praise in Jainism.

Gandhi had been strongly influenced by the Hindu tradition. He had in him the making of a Rishi, a sage, who in ancient India dwelt in a hermitage far from the crowd and fully devoted to the quest of True knowledge. Gandhi, of course, in the circumstances in which he lived, could not have possibly escaped to the Himalayas for his ‘experiments with truth’. But we notice that wherever he went he founded an ashram to live in and continue his spiritual quest. In South Africa he founded the Phoenix farm and later the Tolstoy farm. Back in India almost immediately he started the Satyagraha ashram on the banks of Sabarmati river in the suburbs of Ahmedabad which became his hermitage.

It is for the purpose of training his followers in Satyagraha tactics that Gandhi started the Satyagraha ashram. Gandhi lived in this ashram with his followers a simple and austere life, the mainstream of which was asceticism. All differences like caste, religion or race were set aside and all lived like brothers. The untouchables came to be socially recognized as equal to caste Hindus. There, though not belonging to any denominational religion, spirituality became a matter of everyday life.

A Satyagrahi has to be basically a man of ahimsa; he has to fashion his life on the traditional ahimsa pattern. The life in the Satyagraha ashram was meant to inculcate this pattern on its inmates. The inmates of the ashram had to take several vows—vows of truth, ahimsa or non-violence, celibacy, non-stealing, non-possession and control of palate. These vows reflect Jain influence on Gandhi’s thinking. The Jains enumerate the code of conduct for a devotee as Ahimsa (non-violence), Satya (truthfulness), Brahmacharya (celibacy), Asteya (non-coveting), and Aparigraha (poverty).
The ashram was a self-contained unit where according to Gandhi the inmates practised 'a group life with religious spirit.' The several vows that they had to take were themselves capable of making their life simple and austere. There was no room for indolence or laziness. There were no servants or sweepers to help the inmates in their daily chores; everybody had to work for the common good in a community spirit. There was no work too low or menial that any inmate would not do. All work, even sweeping, cleaning and washing had to be done, Gandhi himself not being excluded. Sometimes they worked in the farm or alternately busied themselves in spinning and weaving. This community life was designed to build up in the inmates courage and self-confidence and train them in moral and mental control. It was a finished product, a highly disciplined Yogi that came out of the ashram to lead the Satyagraha struggle for the country.

A Satyagrahi is not expected to launch his campaign straight off when he comes across a social or political evil which needs to be remedied. Before he launches the campaign he should see that all other peaceful means to remove the evil have been exhausted. He should search all avenues to have talks, consultations and discussions for an amiable settlement of the issue. And when everything else fails he may resort to Satyagraha. He should not, however, keep any secrecy about his moves. He is even expected to warn the opponent in time if he is going to do something which may likely put the opponent in trouble. All opportunities should be given to the opponent at every stage to come to terms and so call off the campaign. It is also to be remembered that no Satyagraha campaign should be launched for personal gains.

Throughout the campaign, of course, non-violence should be strictly adhered to. For Gandhi, means were as important as ends; in fact he often stressed that the means and ends are the same—they cannot be treated separately. The end is truth and so too should be the means; one cannot be separated from the other. A Satyagrahi throughout his campaign remains steadfast in truth and non-violence.

As an example of a successful Satyagraha campaign let us take the Vykom temple road Satyagraha. Vykom is a small
village in Kerala formerly under the jurisdiction of the Travancore State at the southern tip of India. The untouchables had been prohibited from using the roadway leading to the Vykom temple. The road was a public road and the denial of the road facility to the untouchables constituted the social evil which was what the Vykom Satyagrahis took up for redress in the year 1924. It was peculiar that a Christian, a Muslim or even a dog could pass by the road but not an untouchable.

The Travancore government actively supporting the vested interest of Brahmins opposed the demand of the Satyagrahis for opening the temple road to the untouchables. Among the Satyagrahis were both untouchables and caste Hindus. All efforts at negotiations having failed, the campaign started in right earnest after enlisting Gandhi’s support. First processions and public meetings were held to focus public attention on this social discrimination against a section of the community. Then non-violent resistance was organized against the unjust law. A combined procession of untouchables and caste Hindus was taken out along the prohibited road. There was violent opposition from orthodox Hindus who tried to break the procession with the help of the State police. The Satyagrahis were beaten, arrested and imprisoned in large numbers. But in the true spirit of ahimsa there was never any retaliation, the Satyagrahis suffered it all without even any show of resentment. The arrested Satyagrahis were replaced by new ones and the campaign continued unabated. Gandhi gave his personal guidance to the leaders of the campaign by letters and wires. At one stage he visited Vykom and gave speeches.

Finding that violence and arrests did not stop the movement which only gained momentum in the face of these suppressive measures, the orthodox Hindus began a social ostracism of the Satyagrahis. The government matched this move with a threat to confiscate all properties belonging to those who took part in the Satyagraha. But the Satyagrahis stood firm in their resolve not to give up the struggle until and unless the discrimination was removed.

The police seeing that the Satyagrahis were not going to relent put up barricades on the road and kept a constant vigil on them with the intention of enforcing prohibitory order to
the full. At this the _Satyagrahis_ kept up the struggle by taking up their position by the side of the barricades; and held them on day after day. They persisted in this mode of action for about sixteen months suffering all the physical and social disabilities imposed on them without a word of complaint or feeling of resentment. During the monsoon they, at times, had to stand even in waist-deep water to keep up the struggle. Patiently they waited to see a change in the heart of the caste Hindus, who were trying to impose an unjust order on the weaker section of the community.

Finally the orthodox Hindus were converted by what can be called the sheer soul force of the Vykom _Satyagrahis_. The government with the consent and approval of the caste Hindus withdrew the restrictions placed on the untouchables on the use of the road. This opened the eyes of the orthodox parties elsewhere and a chain reaction started. Such restrictions placed on the untouchables all over the country were slowly withdrawn. There was public awareness of the evils of untouchability and this led to demand for social reforms of many kinds. A simple act of the _Satyagrahis_ in a remote village in a corner of the country became a significant turning point in the fight against the evils of casteism in the country as a whole.

**TRIUMPH AND TRAGEDY**

The Indian National Congress under Gandhi's leadership adopted _Purna Swaraj_ or complete independence as its political goal. The goal was now clear, but it was about the means that there was no complete agreement. There was a good lot of people in the Congress party itself who did not approve of Gandhian methods, notably Subhas Chandra Bose. In later days Subhas Chandra Bose became famous as Netaji of the Indian National Army.

Gandhi had now become the undisputed leader of the masses. And he was not willing to give up any of his high principles in his attempt to wrest independence. He could not and would not deviate from his faith in truth and non-violence.

What pained Gandhi more than the arrogance of the British was the lack of unity in his own people. He felt that it was this lack of unity among the Indian people that the British were exploiting to stay on in India. The separate
electorate granted to the Muslims was against the best interest of the country. And now Gandhi was shocked to note that by the terms of the Simon Commission's report similar separate electorate was to be granted to the untouchables! Gandhi saw in this a further evidence of the divide and rule policy of the British.

Gandhi characteristically did not blame the British for this state of affairs. He said that it was the Indians themselves who had to be held responsible for bringing about such a situation in which the untouchables felt themselves separated from the mainstream of Indian society. In September 1932 he announced a fast unto death if the British government went ahead with their plan of separate electorate for untouchables. This fast was aimed not so much against the British as against the caste Hindus who had created a situation in which the untouchables did not feel themselves as belonging to Indian society. By self-suffering Gandhi wanted to focus his people's attention to the disabilities of the Harijans.

The fast did produce the desired effect. There was a general realization of the urgency of social reform, especially Harijan uplift. It was a reminder to the nationalists to take up social service activities to make the cry of swaraj really acceptable to the whole people. The Congress leaders now were to divert their attention to the internal problems of their society. Throughout the length and breadth of the country concerted attempts were made to remove the fears of the untouchables. A new spirit of reform swept the land. Finally the great leader of the untouchables, Dr Ambedkar, agreed not to press his demand for separate electorates for untouchables and Gandhi's life was saved.

Gandhi, however, was to prove unsuccessful in his attempt to unite with his Muslim countrymen. There were two communities in India and everybody recognized that—why, there were many other communities also in India. But the age-old spirit of tolerance of the Indian people might have solved the problem without violence and bloodshed if they were left to themselves. Many cultures have co-existed on the Indian soil without demarcating political boundaries. But when many western educated Muslims took to nationalism they put forth the theory of the dual nationality. The All
India Muslim League, well-organized under the able leadership of Mohamad Ali Jinnah, put forth the demand for a separate homeland for the Muslims in India, Pakistan. Earlier in the first phase of Non-Cooperation, Gandhi himself had espoused the Khilafat cause. This was a mistake as the Muslims in India were told thereby to look beyond India's frontiers to the Muslim countries. The Khilafat was abolished in Turkey and the ephemeral of fraternisation with the Muslims boomeranged on Gandhi, Congress and India as a whole.

The communal riots that henceforth became a regular feature of Indian political life were perhaps a product of western nationalism applied in an Indian setting. Gandhi was unsuccessful in veering his Muslim countrymen to his idea of a composite Indian nationality. The British, forced by the exigencies of the situation, encouraged this separatist tendency. The Muslim nationalists being led to believe that they actually formed a separate nationality refused all compromise and understanding with Gandhi. The common Muslim fear of possible economic and social dominance in an independent India was cleverly exploited and actually Muslims came to hate the Hindus!

This naturally aroused a reaction in the orthodox Hindu circles and the result was an equally vehement Hindu nationalism, again based on western ideas. There was an inevitable clash, and this clash was to plague the affairs of the Indian people ever since. Gandhi, the Mahatma, was the only beacon light in this mad orgy of violence and hatred.

The new constitution granted to the Indian people by the government of India Act of 1935 was admittedly a passing phase. The Congress, though rejecting it as unacceptable, reluctantly took part in the elections under the new constitution and won in many provinces. The Muslim League was equally successful in Muslim majority provinces, a notable exception being the North-West Frontier province where Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, known to the world as Frontier Gandhi, had won this predominantly Muslim province for the Congress by conscientious application of the principle of ahimsa.

Now started a typical political tug-of-war between the three contenders for power; the British government, the Congress and the Muslim League. The actual political events of this period are of little interest to us here except for the fact
that all these years the antagonism between the Hindus and Muslims was rising to new heights in spite of the best efforts of Gandhi to bring about compromise and conciliation between these two sections of the Indian people. Though the bulk of the masses still followed him, the politicians were finding him somewhat irksome. In the fast moving political scene, his patient and peaceful approach and his insistence on truth and non-violence could not have been helpful for the ambitious politicians. However, Gandhi never left his people, he was always there, ready at hand to guide them along the chosen path of compromise, peace and ahimsa.

And the World War II came in 1939. Neither Gandhi nor other Indian politicians had any desire to use this as an opportunity to wrest power from the British. Only Subhas Chandra Bose, who had earlier escaped from house-internment in Calcutta and had reached Germany after a very eventful and exciting journey, saw this as a chance to win Indian independence by allying himself with the axis powers. With the help of the Japanese after their occupation of Malaya and Burma he organized the Indian National Army there, the famous I.N.A., and hoped to march into India and push out the British from the motherland. Some of the nationalists naturally were sympathetic with his endeavours but could not approve of his tactics.

Actually Indian public opinion especially that of the intellectuals was definitely on the side of the British. It is natural that they were apprehensive of the ideology of the axis powers. There was general agreement in India about the righteousness of the British cause. But the Indian people refused to co-operate with the war efforts unless the democracy for which the British were allegedly fighting for was extended also to India.

The world forces were turning the trend of events in favour of Indian independence. The rise of Soviet Russia as the socialist state wedded to equality and fraternity brought in new dimensions in political thinking. The United States of America with its progressive ideas against colonialism was becoming a world force changing the pattern of political power. Even such a thoroughbred imperialist like Sir Winston Churchill could not for long hold in check the enlightened public opinion
in Britain itself which was all for granting the legitimate demands of the Indian people. In March 1942 we find Churchill sending the radical socialist Sir Stafford Cripps to India with a draft declaration which almost in principle agreed to Indian independence.

But the Cripps proposal did not satisfy the Congress leaders. The British had lost their face and were not trustworthy in the eyes of the Indian leaders. They thought that the draft declaration was a mere political gesture to satisfy the Americans and gain time to fight the war. All the same the Indian people were fully aware of the trouble knocking at their doors in the form of Japanese invasion. Gandhi announced that the Japanese invasion would be met with the only force that was then available in Indian hands — non-violent resistance.

The time was running short, the people were getting restless. Gandhi insisted that the British should first go away and allow the Indian people to settle their affairs without outside interference of any kind. On August 2, 1942 Gandhi put forth his ‘Quit India’ demand. It was a strong and decisive demand, a demand which meant complete independence to India. All the resources of the Congress were diverted to this Satyagraha to the finish—the whole country reverberated with the cry of “Quit India.” The leaders including Gandhi were put away in prison before even they could give guide-lines to carry out the movement.

There was mass civil disobedience everywhere. There was also violence on a scale perhaps unprecedented in a Satyagraha struggle. It was largely the work of misguided elements, as the leaders had been removed. There was a large element that stuck to peaceful methods. The British government now took stern repressive measures.

The whole country was in turmoil. There was famine in Bengal in which millions of people lost their lives. The government was indifferent and largely ineffective. The general law and order situation deteriorated and there was uncertainty in political life. The communal tension was as acute as ever. Meanwhile Lord Linlithgow was recalled and a professional soldier, Lord Wavell, was appointed Viceroy. Lord Wavell’s first responsibility was the organization of defence efforts
against the threatened Japanese invasion. This state of affairs continued till the end of the war.

After the war the labour party came to power in England and Clement Attlee became the Prime Minister. Lord Wavell was recalled and Lord Mountbatten was appointed Viceroy with definite instructions to arrange the transfer of power to Indian hands as early as possible. Thus the non-violent campaign led to a decisive victory for Gandhi and his people when on August 15, 1947, the British peacefully withdrew from India. It was a friendly withdrawal for which posterity will ever be praising British wisdom and statesmanship. For Gandhi it was a decisive victory for truth and non-violence that he stood for.

The question that often comes up is: how far has Gandhi been responsible for the partition of the country? Gandhi had the undisputed leadership of the country and wouldn't he become at least theoretically responsible to whatsoever happened under his leadership? Could he have not appeased his Muslim countrymen by allowing them greater political concessions? Could he have brought together the two warring factions of his people by compromise and conciliation? Could he have thought out some political tactics from the very beginning to prevent the alienation of the Muslims under the Muslim League? And lastly would the partition have taken place if he stood firmly against it?

It must be admitted that Gandhi's power for political bargaining was limited because of his steadfast adherence to truth and non-violence. He was always caught between truth and falsehood—goodness and evil. He stood firmly by truth at all costs. This made him a Mahatma, but stood in a way against the hard realities of politics. To take just one instance: if the Congress had agreed to the communal award and later co-operated with the Muslim League to form coalition governments in some provinces, the history of the transfer of power of 1947 might well have been different!

From the point of view of the Mahatma, he considered the communal award as evil and he could not have any compromise with evil. The evil of communalism, he rightly foresaw, would only grow with the communal representative system. Gandhi wanted the two communities to come together in politics and society and stood firmly against anything that might
encourage communal divisions. He might not have been immediately successful, but we should not fail to appreciate the principles he stood for against tremendous odds.

Islam had divided the Indian people vertically into two communities with different social and religious beliefs. The many movements started for the social and religious integration of these communities were still in their infancy when the British came in with their divisive tactics to perpetuate their political hold on the country. It is unfortunate that the leadership of the Muslim community was then in the hands of the Western educated intellectuals and they looked for a western type of nationalism. They did not appreciate the traditional approach and so played upon the divisive factors and the two-nation theory took root in the hearts of the people.

Gandhi hoped—and we have no reason to be pessimistic—that out of partition when sanity would be restored there would come about a mass movement for integral nationalism which would one day undermine political divisions making them obsolete. The recent conflicts in the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent must be looked upon as civil strifes usually accompanying the ill-conceived partition of paternal assets. The salvation for the people of both India and Pakistan lies in peace—the way of compromise and understanding, in fact in ahimsa, to which both Hindus and Muslims are equal heirs.

However, Gandhi’s last days were rendered unhappy by the inhuman fratricide and communal tension that shook this country in the last days of the transfer of power. The joy of victory was marred by the partition. Gandhi took the partition of India as a personal failure. “Vivisect me”, he cried in anguish, “before you vivisect India”. But he had advocated a friendly partition of India after the Britishers had left keeping Defence and a few other services common to India and Pakistan.

The forces that worked for the partition of the country were too strong for anybody’s control. And Gandhi finally bowed down to the wishes of his Muslim brethren. The unnatural division of a composite whole naturally produced in its train chaos and confusion. The aftermaths of partition, the orgy of violence and wanton destruction filled Gandhi with dismay. The sight of uprooted humanity on the move on either
side of the borders pained him, and the indiscriminate killing of innocent men and women all over the affected areas shocked him. One could well imagine the distress of this man of peace while details of violence and brutality began to pour in!

And to Noakhali in East Bengal, to the very heart of communal tension, went Gandhi. "I do not know", he said, "what I shall be able to do there. All I know is that I won't be at peace unless I go." He did not stay in Delhi to join in the public rejoicing of the independence day. He felt that his work lay elsewhere. So on August 15, 1947, we see him in Calcutta in a humble home in the Muslim quarters of the city with the last prime minister of undivided Bengal Shaheed Suhrawardy trying to maintain peace amongst the Hindus and Muslims in Calcutta. It is nothing less than a miracle that he was able to establish peace in Calcutta by his healing presence.

The atmosphere of violence and mistrust let loose by the partition finally led to his assassination on January 30, 1948 barely six months after India attained independence. Nathuram Godse shot him with a revolver and death gathered the Mahatma. The Mahatma uttered, "Hey Ram", Oh God, and passed away a martyr for the cause of Hindu-Muslim unity.

**GANDHIAN CONCEPT OF AHIMSA**

Gandhian concept of ahimsa is based on truth and non-violence. But Gandhi believes that there can be no truth without non-violence and so he maintains that in an indirect way non-violence is implied in truth. It was to this truth that Gandhi held fast all his life. Truth, Gandhi identified with God. He wrote in *Young India* in 1925:

"Ahimsa is my God; truth is my God. When I look for ahimsa, truth says, 'Find it out through me'; when I look for truth, ahimsa says, 'Find it out through me'!"

Gandhi calls himself a seeker after truth. But this quest because of the godliness of truth becomes a spiritual quest, and it has to be by its very nature non-violent. Truth cannot be realized without non-violence. Means and ends being convertible terms—as Gandhi always insisted—truth and non-violence become a part of the spiritual make up of Gandhian ahimsa. Gandhi says: "Truth is God; non-violence is the means of realizing Him."
Truth is imperishable, eternal and all-pervading. Being an attribute of God Himself, truth is somewhat inconceivable. Being inconceivable, Gandhi even admits that truth founded by two men can be outwardly different though in essence it will be the same. It is the duty of all men to find out the truth according to his own light and follow it. Gandhi says:

"Nobody in this world possesses Absolute Truth. This is God’s attribute alone. Relative truth is all we know. There, we can only follow the truth as we see it."

Truth is everything, and one must continually be on the march from untruth to truth, from darkness to light. It is truth that should be one’s guide; truth is what one should always strive for. Like the seeker after knowledge in the great Upanishads, he should search for truth everywhere. Gandhi says:

"To see the universal and all-pervading spirit of truth face to face, one must be able to love the meanest of creation as oneself."

Consistent with the Indian view of ‘Self’ as the eternal, all-pervading Supreme Being, Gandhi recognized the spiritual bond that exists between all living things. Gandhi holds that the love of creatures is the same as the love of God. The Supreme self is nothing but the Self which is present in all beings. In a letter written to Meera Behn, an inmate of the Satyagraha ashram, he said:

"True love consists in transferring itself from the body to the dweller within and then necessarily realizing the oneness of all life inhabiting numberless bodies."

Ahimsa in the sense of non-injury should be viewed from the point of universal love for all beings. Non injury should be applied intelligently, in fact it may even include killing. Gandhi permitted the mercy killing of a calf suffering from an incurable pain in his Satyagraha Ashram. The orthodox Hindus were shocked because they considered it cow-killing, and what could be a greater sin than cow-killing? Gandhi had no patience with such prejudices. What he did was in the best interest of the calf; killing here had become an act of charity. One should not rigidly adhere to the literal application of the law of non-injury; but should seek a charitable and benevolent interpretation of its significance.
The Mahatma’s approach to ahimsa is throughout tempered with sweet reasonableness. Gandhi is not unreasonable enough to insist that one should not do himsa or injury, come what may—he is not a fanatic in any belief. He rightly saw that life would be impossible without a certain amount of injury done to some beings. Agriculture, farming or any other occupation would involve killing. Even breathing or eating could be in a way considered as himsa. Perhaps one cannot move or walk or talk without injuring something or other. It would be just impossible to sustain one’s existence without the destruction of some creatures. What Gandhi calls for is balance. In his own words:

“This himsa calculated to take us on the onward path, must be spontaneous, must be the lowest minimum, must be rooted in compassion, must have discrimination, restraint and detachment at its back, and must lead us every moment onwards to the path of ahimsa.”

A man of ahimsa must of necessity be a man of humility. A humble man is a sincere man; but a vain man is always extra-cautious about his name and fame and will often stoop to violence and untruth. It is a pet Gandhian saying that:

“The seeker after truth should be humbler than the dust. The world crushes the dust under its feet, but the seeker after truth should so humble himself that even the dust could crush him.”

Similarly a man cannot attain truth unless he controls his passions. There is no room for anger or hatred there. A man immersed in worldliness being always after the material pleasures of the body would never be able to come face to face with truth which is actually an attribute of the soul. According to Gandhi:

“A successful search for truth means complete deliverance from the dual throng such as of love and hate, happiness and misery.”

Gandhian ethics is based on the ancient belief of Karma and transmigration. It is a universally accepted belief throughout India. Buddha believed in it, and so did Jina. Sages seldom questioned it and philosophers took it almost as axiomatic. No man can escape the results of his deeds. If not in this birth, in the next he is answerable to them. As Gandhi
puts it:

"I am a believer in previous births and rebirths. All our relationships are the result of deeds we carry from previous births."

Gautama, the Buddha, considered suffering as an inevitable consequence of worldly existence and so endeavoured to put an end to this existence—that is the unending chain of birth and rebirth—by following the eightfold noble path of ahimsa. Gandhi on the other hand raised suffering, that is self-suffering, to a high pedestal and considered that this is in itself a means of salvation. Here he seems to be more in line with the thoughts of Jainism. The many fasts he undertook for self-purification and self-mortification could be viewed from this angle. But he agrees with the path of the Buddha when he says:

"It has been truly said that desire for enjoyment creates bodies for the soul. When this desire vanishes, there remains no further need for the body and man is free from the vicious cycle of births and deaths."

Non-attachment as also non-possession become a part of Gandhian ahimsa. However, Gandhi gives a pragmatic interpretation to the idea of non-possession; non-possession need not mean the possession of nothing. It may be that one may possess a lot of wealth but he should not be attached to his wealth. Gandhi says in his *My Experiments with Truth*: "I understand the Gita teachings of non-possession to mean that those who desire salvation should act like trustees who, though having control over great possessions, regard not an iota of them as their own."

Gandhi believed in equality. He thought that ahimsa was impossible without economic, political and social equality. There is an element of warning in his words:

"A non-violent system of government is clearly an impossibility so long as the wide gulf between the rich and hungry millions persists. The contrast between the palaces of New Delhi and the miserable hovels of the poor labouring class nearby cannot last one day in a free India, in which the poor will enjoy the same powers as the richest in the land. Violent and bloody revolution is a certainty one day unless there is a voluntary abdication of riches and the
powers that riches give, and sharing of them for the common good.

Consideration of the welfare of others and the general well-being of society is a paramount virtue in the Gandhian concept of ahimsa. When others do not have their legitimate needs satisfied if one becomes selfish and enjoys himself the material gains without a thought to the suffering humanity it is theft. Gandhi says:

"In India we have got three millions of people having to be satisfied with one meal a day, and that meal consisting of a chapati containing no fat in it and a pinch of salt. You and I have no right to anything that we really have, until these three million are clothed and fed better."

Without caring for the world about them some men become greedy and indulge in hoarding wealth. It is this possessive instinct, Gandhi feels, that makes people adopt immoral and crooked methods in business transactions. Bribery, corruption, and many other social evils are the outcome of men's greed to have more for themselves than others. Gandhi in a way advocates social control of wealth to save the community from such rapacious individuals. He says:

"Strictly speaking, all massing or hoarding of wealth, above and beyond one's legitimate requirements, is theft. There will be no occasion for thefts and therefore, no thieves, if there is wise regulation of riches and absolute social justice prevails."

Service before self is the ideal that Gandhi puts forth to his followers. He saw God in every human being. It is not by study of high-level philosophy or by practising religion with all its rituals and dictates that one can attain God. One can attain God only through devoted and unselfish service. Gandhi wrote in Young India on August 4, 1927:

"I am endeavouring to see God through the service of humanity, for I know God is neither in Heaven nor down below but is in everyone."

Gandhi's love of humanity was far-reaching. He neither believed in man-made frontiers nor in the idea of inferior and superior races. While he fought against caste and untouchability in India he sought to establish world equality between races and nations. He wrote in his book Satyagraha in South Africa:
“In my opinion, there is no place on earth and no race, which is not capable of producing the finest types of humanity, given suitable opportunity and education.”

For Gandhi patriotism was part of his humanism. He says: “For me, patriotism is the same as humanity. I am patriotic because I am human and humane.” Gandhi became a nationalist because of his conviction that he can serve humanity best by serving India. But he wanted to guide Indian nationalism through proper channels. He writes:

“It is not nationalism that is evil, it is narrowness, selfishness, exclusiveness, which is the bane of modern nations, which is evil. Each wants to profit at the expense of, and rise on the ruins of the other. Indian nationalism has, I hope, struck a different path.”

Gandhi’s view was: one must be a nationalist before he could become an internationalist.

Like Gautama, Gandhi considered war a great evil. The killing and bloodshed that the Second World War brought about filled Gandhi with dismay. The devastation caused by the Atom Bomb shocked his conscience. He believed that permanent peace could be established in the world on the basis of ahimsa only. He wrote in the Harijan on July 7, 1946:

“Mankind has to get out of violence only by non-violence. Hatred can be overcome only by love. Counter-hatred only increases the surface as well as the depth of hatred.”

War is the product of envy, ill-will and misunderstanding between nations. The factors that lead nations to war are the same as those that lead individuals to moral and spiritual degradation. Gandhi holds that war can be abolished for ever, and peace and harmony can be established between nations by an extension of the principle of truth and non-violence. He says:

“We have to make truth and non-violence not matters for mere individual practice but for practice by groups and communities and nations.”

However, it would be wrong to consider Gandhi a pacifist. Gandhi was not a pacifist, he was not just a conscientious objector to war. What he sought for was the elimination of the conditions in which war becomes an anomaly, an unavoid-
able disaster. When there is a question of evil to stand against, he does not advise non-violent pacifism. He is against all such cowardice. In an article 'The doctrine of the sword' he says: "I do believe that when there is only a choice between cowardice and violence, I would advise violence". He continues:

"I would rather have India resort to arms in order to defend her honour than that she would in a cowardly manner become or remain a helpless victim of her own dishonour."

GANDHI'S LEGACY TO THE INDIAN PEOPLE

In the wider context of history Gandhi must be considered as one of the teachers of the Indian people. Starting with Jina and Buddha, a galaxy of sages, great and small, have left their unmistakable imprints on the life and thought of India. Gandhi did not seek to break from these teachers of the past nor did he preach an entirely new creed. His role has been that of a renovator of ancient thought who defined anew the teachings of the sages to conform to the requirements of the modern world. Gandhi himself says: "I do claim to throw a new light on many old truths".

While Gandhi wanted India to be free from foreign rule he insisted that it alone would not usher in the Swaraj of his ideal. The ideal of Swaraj he put forth clearly as early as 1939 in these words:

"Under Swaraj based on non-violence nobody is anybody's enemy; everybody contributed his or her due quota to the common goal; all can read and write, and their knowledge keeps growing from day to day. Sickness and disease are reduced to the minimum. No one is a pauper, and labour can always find employment. There is no place under such a government for gambling, drinking and immorality or for class hatred. The rich will use their wealth wisely and usefully and not squander them in increasing their pomp and worldly pleasures. It should not happen that a handful of rich people should live in jewelled palaces and the millions in miserable hovels devoid of sunlight and ventilation. In non-violent Swaraj there can be no encroachment upon just rights; contrariwise no one can possess
unjust rights. In a well-organized state, usurpation should be an impossibility and it should be unnecessary to resort to force for dispossessing an usurper."

It may be an utopia but it explains Gandhi’s idea of Swaraj, “a Vedic word, meaning self-rule and self-restraint, and not freedom from all restraint which ‘independence’ often means.”

The path for the attainment of such a just and peaceful society is long and hazardous. But Gandhi insists:

“The Swaraj of my conception will come only when all of us are firmly persuaded that our Swaraj has got to be won, worked and maintained through truth and ahimsa alone. True democracy or Swaraj of the masses can never come through untruthful and violent means.”

To Gandhi life without religion and spirituality was an incongruity. According to Gandhi spirituality means consistent and unflattering adherence to truth and non-violence. What is the sort of life he intended the Indian people to live for achieving the spiritual leadership of the world? A life based on truth and non-violence. Such a life should be a simple life, free from pomp and luxury and detached from the world of pleasure and pain. Such a life should be free from want while at the same time keeping away from greedy accumulation of wealth. Too much of commercialization and technological progress, Gandhi feared, would bring about different classes in human society with its accompanying evils of oppression and exploitation. In such environments peaceful spiritual life becomes impossible and so Gandhi warns against the craze for mechanisation and insists that too much of mechanisation is not conducive for the spiritual advancement of the people. Gandhi declares: “I refuse to be dazzled by the seeming triumph of the machine.”

Without becoming a slave to the machine a man must live in close communion with nature, earning his bread by the sweat of his brow. To do so agriculture is the best vocation. But in the changed circumstances of life and living everyone may not be in a position to take to it. And Gandhi says:

“A person can therefore spin or weave, or take up carpentry or smithery, instead of tilling the soil, always regarding agriculture, however, to be the ideal.”
Gandhi was at heart a democrat and believed that democracy was the best form of government. He believed that every citizen, whether poor or rich, literate or otherwise must have equal share in the government of the country. But he insisted that:

"True democracy cannot be worked by twenty men sitting at the centre. It has to be worked from below by the people of every village."

What Gandhi wanted was a village-based democracy. Democracy, he maintained, must be worked from the village upwards. "Back to the village," was the Gandhian slogan for the political and social uplift of the Indian people. No real progress could be achieved without planning for the prosperity and happiness of the villages. Gandhi says:

"I have believed and repeated times without number that India is to be found not in its few cities but in its 7,00,000 villages."

That is why he wanted the villages to be improved. His Wardha scheme was for educating the villages.

Gandhi believed that Independence should begin from the bottom. Gandhi’s Swaraj would be a collection of village republics, a national structure built with the village as its fundamental unit—a Panchayati raj. He says:

"In this structure composed of innumerable villages there will be ever widening, never ascending circles; life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. But it will be an oceanic circle whose centre will be the individual always ready to perish for the village, the latter ready to perish for the circle of villages till at last the whole becomes one life composed of individuals, never aggressive in their arrogance, but ever humble, sharing the majesty of the oceanic circle of which they are integral units."

Gandhi looked upon with suspicion the state authority based on elaborate government machinery. What would have been his reaction on the computer revolution that is currently taking place could be well imagined! He was for a government, even when based on democracy, which governed least. He visualizes an ideal in which everyone is governed by ahimsa. He says:

"That state is perfect and non-violent when the
people are governed least. The nearest approach to purest anarchy would be democracy based on non-violence."

Gandhi considered 'purest anarchy' as an ideal which is to be attained by a few generations of intensive education of the people in ahimsa. He agrees:

"A government cannot succeed in becoming entirely non-violent—because it represents all the people. I do not today conceive of such a golden age. But I do believe in the possibility of a predominantly non-violent society. And I am working for it."

A strong centralized government, Gandhi feared, would destroy individuality and in Gandhi's scheme of things individual was to be the supreme. Nothing should be done to cut short his freedom and reduce him into a mute organism of a social machine. For the same reason he was against every form of fascism and militarism. He says:

"It will be a poor democracy that depends for its existence on military assistance. Military force interferes with the free growth of the mind."

In any society it is inevitable that reformations take place as a continuous process. As the environment changes due to progress in different spheres of human activity, it becomes necessary to introduce changes in social norms. A society without change becomes stagnant, unproductive and will eventually deteriorate. It is possible that vested interests might try to resist change. The answer is Satyagraha. Any change, any social reformation can be brought about only through non-violent and truthful means. Should the reformations be brought about by violence, hatred would be the outcome and no peaceful social life is possible in an atmosphere of hatred.

The society as it exists today is irrational, unequal and unjust. Some people have come to be in possession of wealth greater than what is their due or whatsoever is their need, mainly due to accidents of history. The Maharajas, the petty chieftains, the Zamindars and all the rest of the feudal lords have been created by a process of untruth and violence. Gandhi recognized the fact that these few have been exploiting the many. However, he did not believe in the inevitability of a class-struggle of the Marxian pattern:

"I do not want to destroy the Zamindar, but neither
do I feel that the Zamindar is inevitable. I expect to convert the Zamindar and other capitalists by the non-violent method, and therefore there is for me nothing like the inevitability of class-conflict."

Nevertheless, exploitation of any kind should not be tolerated. Gandhi has left the weapon of non-cooperation for the oppressed to fight the evil of exploitation. He approved of strikes by organized labour as a form of non-cooperation against exploitation by unscrupulous capitalists in industry. However, he warns against indiscriminate use of this powerful weapon in the hands of labour:

"Obviously there should be no strike which is not justifiable on merits. No unjust strikes should succeed. All public sympathy must be withheld from such strikes."

Strikes should be resorted to only for economic betterment of the workers. Strikes could have a political end, but Gandhi considered that Indian labour was not intellectually developed enough as to know for themselves the political implications of such action. He feared that crafty politicians might use this powerful weapon of strike to bring about violence and suffering on the public. He warns:

"A time has come now when attempts will be made to use labour as a pawn in more ways than one. The occasion demands consideration at the hands of those that would take part in politics. What will they choose? Their own interests or the service of labour and the nation?"

Apart from conditions of labour in industry what pained Gandhi was the general level of poverty in the country which was alarming indeed. He was very much concerned with the flight of the unemployed and also of the underemployed who waste away their time and so remain poor. He considered the creation of jobs for the unemployed as an urgent necessity. He declared:

"We should be ashamed of resting or having a square meal so long as there is one able-bodied man or woman without work or food."

Some people have a notion that the poverty and economic misery are parts of the Indian spiritual heritage. Nothing can be farther from the truth. No healthy spirituality can exist in an atmosphere of poverty and want. Gandhi was optimistic
about the economic future of the country. He says:

"I am able to restrain myself from committing suicide by starvation because I have faith in India's awakening and her ability to put herself on the way to freedom from this desolating pauperism. Without faith in such a possibility I should cease to take interest in living."

Characteristically, Gandhi maintains that economy must be undistinguishable from ethics. Based on sound ethical principles the economy of the country must be decentralized so that the national wealth will be equitably distributed in all the villages of India. This decentralization of economy he calls the Khadi mentality. The idea is to have the essential industries like spinning, weaving, soap-making, oil-pressing and so on and so forth fully village based. Gandhi meant that these industries which could give employment to millions of people in the villages should not be mechanised or centralized in industrial estates. However, Gandhi recognized that heavy industries like iron and steel or engineering industries like wagon building and so on might have to be centralized, but must be public owned so that capital would not get accumulat-ed in private hands.

Education must be designed to make the child a peace-loving citizen of the world society. It is natural that Gandhi sought to give in his scheme of education the greatest pride of place to ahimsa. The child must be made to appreciate the ahimsa way of life. Gandhi says:

"Ahimsa in education must have an obvious bearing on the mutual relations of the students. Where the whole atmosphere is redolent with pure fragrance of ahimsa, boys and girls studying together will live like brothers and sisters in freedom and yet in self-imposed restraint; the student will be bound to the teachers in ties of filial love, mutual respect, and mutual trust."

Education must be motivated by social needs; and it is a prime necessity to acquaint the students with a sense of service to society. Addressing students Gandhi said:

"Your education, if it is a vital thing, must shed its fragrance in your surroundings. You must devote a certain portion of your time daily to serving the people around in a practical manner. You must, therefore, be prepared to
take the spade, the broomstick and the basket. You must become voluntary scavengers of this holy place. That would be the richest part of your education, not learning by heart literary theses."

Gandhi felt that social needs of education cannot be served unless and until education be imparted in the mother-tongue. Though he maintained that Hindi is the unifying language of the nation, and should therefore be raised to the status of the national language of the country he was unequivocal in advocating mother-tongue to be the sole medium of instruction. He says:

"It is my conviction that Indian parents who train their children to think and talk in English from their infancy betray their children and their country. They deprive them of the spiritual and social heritage of the nation, and render them to that extent unfit for the service of the country."

Gandhi wished that India should live in harmony with other nations. Even she should go out of her way to cooperate with all the nations of the world for the economic and social betterment of humanity in general. Gandhi visualized India as a limb of the world working for the greater happiness of humanity. "She will," he says, "work for the establishment of a real world order based on freedom and democracy, utilizing the world's knowledge and resources for the progress and advancement of humanity."

The rise of India as an independent nation, Gandhi predicted, would bring about an upsurge in the world of nations. The weaker nations of Asia and Africa then under the grip of western dominance would be inspired by an independent India to throw off their yokes. This would herald a new age in international relations. As early as in 1928 Gandhi said:

"Through the deliverance of India, I seek to deliver the so-called weaker races of the earth from the crushing heels of western exploitation. India’s coming to her own will mean every nation doing likewise."

When India becomes fully wedded to ahimsa, she would naturally rise as a peace-maker of the world. India should become strong not militarily but spiritually. India should
rise as a bulwark for peace. Gandhi declares:

"The world is sick unto death of blood-spilling. The world is seeking a way out, and I flatter myself with the belief that perhaps it will be the privilege of the ancient land of India to show that way out to the hungering world."
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

Jawaharlal Nehru was born on November 14, 1889 in Allahabad, a city in Uttar Pradesh. He was the eldest child and the only son of Pandit Motilal Nehru, a prosperous Kashmiri Brahmin who was then a leading lawyer of the Allahabad High Court.

Jawaharlal had a comparatively lonely childhood. For eleven years he was the only child in the huge family home at Allahabad, Anand Bhawan, where Jawaharlal spent his childhood. Probably he was kept away from ordinary folks for we see his status-conscious father appointing a special English tutor Ferdinand Brooks to coach him at home. The child was brought up in fact in the company of domestic servants and indulgent relatives; and he became arrogant and self-willed and temperamental, the traits which never fully left him even in his mature years.
Jawaharlal Nehru started his political activity as a kisan worker when as the vice-president of the Kisan Sabha, of the then United Provinces, he undertook a tour to arouse political consciousness among the kisans by organizing demonstrations and delivering speeches. Thus coming into contact with the simple agriculturists in the villages, Jawaharlal Nehru was slowly changing his European ways and was trying to get to know his people. The kisans were re-educating this western educated youth to the real education of the soil.

However, in the non-cooperation movement started by Gandhi against the Rowlatt Act and the repressions in the Punjab, the young Jawaharlal aligned himself with Gandhi. Politics now became a family affair and since then the Nehru family has come to play a decisive role in the nationalist movement of the country. Motilal Nehru became a father figure in the Indian National Congress, and endowed it with an aristocratic appeal. Mrs Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Jawaharlal’s sister became an active political worker and held many important posts in independent India. Jawaharlal’s own daughter Mrs Indira Gandhi during Nehru’s lifetime became the Congress President and later, after his death, was destined to become Prime Minister of the country.

For Gandhi non-cooperation movement was a part of his pious Satyagrah campaign arising out of his religious conviction that cooperation with evil was sin. But Jawaharlal looked upon it as a dynamic ideal which would end British rule. He did not assign to it any moral or spiritual significance apart from its political use. He argued: “England holds India in bondage because India cooperates with the Englishmen and thereby strengthens British rule. Withdraw that cooperation and the fabric of foreign rule collapses.”

Naturally he was stunned when Gandhi withdrew the movement because of the Chauri Chaura incident. Nehru, the western educated nationalist, could not understand all the ‘prattle’ about truth and non-violence. He had supposed that the movement was exactly like any other revolutionary movement of the west in which violence and bloodshed was a part of the game. He had not understood the full significance of the ahimsa teachings and was flabbergasted at the seemingly defeatist attitude of the Mahatma.
Nevertheless it did not lead to complete break nor parting of the ways between Gandhi and Nehru, because as Gandhi, time and again, pointed out that there was some internal affinity which brought them together in spite of their divergent outlook. The Mahatma considered Nehru fundamentally good, good at heart and emotionally attached to virtue, but thought that he was a young man too much in a hurry. Gandhi was patient and understanding and often advised caution and non-violence. He wrote to Nehru: "You are going too fast, you should have taken time to think and become acclimatized."

Meanwhile Nehru's sojourn in Europe in 1926-1927, where he had gone for the treatment of his ailing wife, made him a socialist oriented nationalist in a thoroughbred Western fashion. During his European tour he had also visited, in the company of his father, Pandit Motilal Nehru, the Soviet Union and was greatly impressed by the communist revolution. The Russian experiment greatly interested him. He says about the Soviet Union: "The contrasts between extreme luxury and poverty are not visible, nor does one notice the hierarchy of class or caste."

These revolutionary ideas of the West only heightened the clash between the Ahimsa teacher and his reluctant disciple. Gandhi, the Mahatma, felt that the young Jawaharlal was drifting away from ahimsa and mourned:

"Differences between you and me appear to be so vast and so radical that there seems to be no meeting ground between us. I cannot conceal from you my grief that I will lose a comrade so valiant, so faithful, so able and so honest that you always have been; but in serving a cause comradeship has got to be sacrificed."

But there was no question of sacrificing a comrade, because do what he might, Gandhi had by then so much identified himself with the Indian people that Nehru said: "Gandhi is India". Nehru had, of course, become an undisputed leader in politics, but he could not have led the people without Gandhi. And, therefore, there was no question of breaking away. However, the tussle between them became a constant feature. In the year 1933 Gandhi resigned from the Congress because of some alleged left-wing pressure in the organization. Curiously enough, this did not diminish Gandhi's influence in
the country or even in the organization itself.

When Gandhi undertook a fast unto death against the communal award of the British government, Nehru was again at a loss. Nehru thought it was ridiculous to die for anything less than freedom. He had by then got used to Gandhian ways, but could not appreciate the idea of moral pressure on Hindu orthodoxy and all the rest of it. Nehru, of course had no doubt that untouchability was wrong, but what was the point of mixing it up with national independence? These things could be easily sorted out once India became free, so argued the young man in a hurry. But Gandhi did things according to what he called his ‘inner voice’ and his disciple could do nothing but fret. He complained: “I had a sudden and intense feeling that something broke inside me, a bond that I had valued very greatly snapped.”

But willy-nilly the cooperation between Gandhi and Nehru continued for the good of the country. Now Nehru was a practical politician busying himself with all the political activities of the nation whereas Gandhi remained in the background, interested only in the broad application of his ahimsa teachings. Gandhi declared in 1942:

“I have said for some years and say now that Jawaharlal will be my successor. He says he does not understand my language, and that he speaks a language foreign to me. This may or may not be true. But language is no bar to a union of hearts. And I know this that when I am gone he will speak my language.”

The second world war came as a challenge to the ideals of liberty and democracy that Nehru valued most. There was no doubt as to where his sympathies lay. He watched the onslaught of Fascism and Nazism in Europe with great forebodings. He was willing to cooperate with Britain if Britain would only give up her colonial policies and put an end to her imperialist hold in Asia and Africa. As a sign of change in Britain’s way of thinking, Nehru wanted her to grant independence to India. Otherwise, Nehru was not willing to give up the struggle for independence even during the period of war. “Though England’s difficulty is not India’s opportunity,” observed Nehru: “India cannot suspend her own fight for freedom.”

Then came the ‘Quit India’ movement which changed the
whole concept of the struggle for independence. The Congress was now out to fight to the finish and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru was its first soldier. The British government promptly shut him up inside a prison—for the last time in his many years of public life. But the struggle continued unabated. After the war it became clear that the British really meant to leave India. In spite of the best efforts of Nehru and other nationalist leaders, partition could not be avoided.

Gandhi died in 1948 and Patel followed him in 1950, after consolidating the Indian union on a firm footing. From now on till his death in 1964, Nehru was the undisputed leader of the nation. There was no serious challenge to his authority and even opposition to the Congress Party which he led was nominal and largely ineffective. He could shape the destiny of the nation as he wished and he certainly wished well, and to an extent succeeded in shaping the country according to his cherished ideals.

In spite of his Western upbringing Nehru's ideals had the imprint of Indian culture. It is true that Nehru was very critical of the superstitious beliefs of the Hindus around him and condemned casteism and untouchability as ridiculous and inhuman. But he was attracted by the Hindu scriptures. In his autobiography he says:

"The Hindu religion especially went up in my estimation; not the ritual or ceremonial part, but its great books, the 'Upanishads' and the 'Bhagavad Gita'."

Unlike Gandhi, Nehru was a voracious reader and read a lot, both Indian and foreign. He had an intellectual bent and a sensitive mind and naturally the great heritage of the Indian people must have influenced him deeply. Addressing the parliament of the Republic of India he declared: "India has a magnificent inheritance. We, of course, want to better that inheritance and to advance it."

Nehru was not a mystic like Gandhi, he was an idealist of the Western fashion. Whereas Patel, his deputy for three years, was a nationalist, always thinking in terms of the good of this country, Nehru was an internationalist, and was eminently suited to become the Prime Minister of his country at a time when the world was fast moving towards Internationalism. His heart beat in sympathy with the political aspirations of the
people of Indonesia as much as with the sufferings of the people of Africa and Latin America. In the true Indian tradition, he looked upon the whole world as his own country.

One can easily see in the personality of Nehru, who became the spokesman of the Indian nation, the influence of traditional ahimsa. Apart from his universal benevolence, his love of peace, his readiness for tolerance and compromise, and his anxiety to do his utmost to bring about understanding and friendship between warring nations are all typical of his innate sense of fellow-feeling. He was singularly free from vindictiveness of all kind, and considered none his enemy. There is no better testimonial to the love and non-violence of this man than the words of Sir Winston Churchill, the war-time Prime Minister of England: "This man has overcome two of the greatest failings in human nature—he knows neither fear nor hatred."

Gandhi was right. After him Nehru really spoke the language of ahimsa. In spite of his Western education and extremely active political life, Nehru remained a product of the traditional Indian culture; a culture which is ever assimi-lating new ideas, ever changing—a culture which is the product of the people's firm faith in ahimsa.

**VINOBA BHAVE AND SARVODAYA**

Gandhi, the Mahatma, was essentially a mystic, a man of God who was concerned with the spiritual and moral well-being of mankind. Circumstances forced on him the role of a politician. Though Gandhi was not a misfit in politics, he was not exactly at home in the company of politicians. Gandhi intended Nehru to be his political heir, but he was careful to see that his spiritual mantle fell on no less a man than Acharya Vinoba Bhave.

Vinoba Bhave—his real name was Vinayak Bhave—was born in 1895 at the village of Gangoda in Maharashtra state. He came under the spell of the Mahatma in 1916 in Banaras where he was studying Sanskrit and Hindu Theology. Thereafter, he never for once left the footsteps of the Mahatma. As for his early spiritual attainment, the Mahatma himself bears witness. The Mahatma wrote to young Vinoba's father: "His spiritual attainments are such as I myself attained only after
a long struggle.”

When Vinoba came out of his ashram to begin his social work after the death of the Mahatma, the conditions had changed. Already a national government based on parliamentary democracy was in the saddle, enjoying popular support. The immediate task was social reconstruction. The government was introducing a series of coercive legislations to bring about social reforms. Vinoba’s approach was different. True to the ideals of the master, Vinoba wanted to bring about all reforms through ahimsa. All men are intrinsically good. It requires only the loving approach of a true Satyagrahi to kindle the flame of compassion. Vinoba Bhave declares:

“Kindness can and does exist even in the kingdom of wickedness, but only as a pinch of salt exists in bad food to give a better taste to that with which it is mixed.”

Vinoba Bhave considers all men equal and sees no conflict in the ideal of equality. Since God made all men equal, it is impossible to conceive of one man’s true interest being against that of another. However, Vinoba Bhave does not believe in the inevitability of a class war to achieve the ideal of equality. Class struggle of the socialists is based on violence and so should be abjured. Violence is not capable of gaining anything to anybody except hatred and more violence. “Violence may kill the murderer,” argues Vinoba, “but it has never killed murder. The law of retaliation is the law of the multiplication of evil.”

All struggle must be based on the soul force of Satyagraha. Even legislation will remain ineffective unless and until there is a change in the heart of the people concerned. He points out:

“When every heart feels that the present order is unjust, when pity is created and there is proper understanding of the situation, then the right sort of legislation can come.”

After the death of the Mahatma, it was Vinoba’s turn to reaffirm the teachings of ahimsa in a way suited to the changing world. Vinoba believes that the happiness of humanity lies in a proper appreciation of the material and spiritual values of life. He does not approve of too much of mechanization, but considers that the modern developments in science and tech-
nology should be used to improve the economic condition of the people. But he insists that such progress must go hand in hand with moral and spiritual progress. Vinoba says:

"Science can transform this earth into heaven. But it can only do so in combination with non-violence. If science is yoked to violence, the world will be shattered to bits."

Acharya Vinoba Bhave has no organization in the modern sense of the word. He is recognized as the foremost leader of the Sarvodaya Samaj. But the Sarvodaya Samaj is not an organization; it is rather a movement aimed at the moral and spiritual regeneration of society on the basis of Gandhian teachings. Bhave explains: "it is a revolutionary idea and not an organization. It is a thing to be thought over, and acted upon."

Six weeks after the death of the Mahatma his disciples assembled in Sevagram, near Wardha, in a conference under the chairmanship of Dr Rajendra Prasad. Their aim was to decide the best way for co-ordinating the activities of many of the disciples of the master scattered all over the country. They were fully aware that a closely knit organization, if formed, might eventually turn into a sect, perhaps a Gandhian religious sect, which would have been contrary to the wishes of the deceased leader. Gandhi had said: "To bring into being a new cult is repugnant to ahimsa, to the very experiment I am making."

Finally a loose form of Samaj or brotherhood was suggested in the conference and it took the name of Sarvodaya Samaj. Its aim in the words of the chairman of the conference was to strive:

"towards a society based on truth and non-violence, in which there will be no distinction of caste or creed, no opportunity for exploitation, and full scope of development both for individuals as well as groups."

What is Sarvodaya? It literally means uplift of all. The word originated from Gandhi’s Gujarati translation of Ruskin’s Unto His Last. And so Sarvodaya can be considered as an ideal aimed at the social and moral uplift of humanity beginning from the poorest and humblest. Gandhi wrote in Young India:
“A votary of ahimsa cannot subscribe to the Utilitarian formula of the greatest good of the greatest number. He will strive for the greatest good of all and die in the attempt to realize the ideal.”

Sarvodaya incorporates within it the positive and benevolent aspects of Gandhian ahimsa. It is intensely practical but based on the foundations of truth and non-violence. According to Vinoba Bhave: “the idea of Sarvodaya, as preached by the Gita, is to merge oneself in the good of all.” He adds:

“Never should we resort to untruth in our private and public life, nor in our business or other occupations. We should try our best not to allow violence a place in our life. The constructive programme which is meant for the uplift of society should be carried out in part or in full, individually or with the co-operation of friends and colleagues, as also by establishing local institutions wherever necessary. We should meditate over the great thought that is behind all this, and should give expression to it, and remember it at all times.”

With Vinoba Bhave, Sarvodaya has become an all-embracing dynamic creed searching out new avenues for the application of Gandhian methods to satisfy the social and moral needs of the community. It gave rise to Bhoodan Yagna, or the sacrifice of land gift, aimed at bringing about a non-violent revolution in the pattern of land-holdings in the country. The Government has tried to bring about land-reforms through legislation by abolishing Zamindari and other aspects of a feudalistic landlordism in the country. But such application of coercive legislation is not in the true spirit of Gandhian ahimsa and so Vinoba Bhave has come forward with the soul-force of Bhoodan Yagna for the achievement of the same objectives.

The Bhoothan movement is based on the Gandhian idea of trusteeship of wealth. Wealth, be it land wealth or industrial wealth, does not belong to the possessor but to the whole community. Wealth puts on its holder a responsibility to use it in the best interest of the community. So Bhoothan asks for a voluntary surrender of the right to land so as to bring about an equitable distribution of land holdings. It depends for its success not on coercive legislation or violent
methods but a change of heart on the part of the landholders who should realize that the land rightly belongs to the whole community. In the words of Vinoba Bhave:

"In a just equitable society, land must belong to all. That is why we do not beg for gifts but demand a share to which the poor are entitled."

Vinoba Bhave did not stop at the surrender of land wealth only. He extended the idea of Bhooman Yagna to other fields too. In 1952, he came forward with the idea of Sampattidan or gift of wealth. He says:

"As the work of Bhooman progressed it became increasingly clear that the idea behind the movement could not be fulfilled unless we went further and asked for the portion of the wealth and property. And hence I made up my mind that I must ask for a share also of wealth and property from the people. I have now done it and placed my demand at one-sixth of it; it is up to the people to decide what they can and will give me."

The Bhooman movement has not only spread widely but has incorporated into its activities the idea of co-operative farming which may serve as an ahimsa alternative for the collectivization of the communist ideology. The non-violent way to achieve co-operative farming was opened up when whole villages were given as gifts to Vinoba Bhave under his scheme of Gramdan (gift of village) which was again a development of the Bhooman ideology. This made the common ownership of village-land possible through non-violent means. Vinoba Bhave says:

"I am always telling that land like water and air is a free gift of God and so God is its only owner. Our ultimate object is that village land should be managed by the village community."

Eventually, Sarvodaya attracted to its fold Jaya Prakash Narayan, the foremost socialist disciple of the Mahatma. A great soldier during the independence struggle, Jaya Prakash stood next only to Nehru in the political hierarchy at the time of British withdrawal. Earlier he was an ardent Congressman very close to Gandhi. He was imprisoned in the Quit India movement and made a dramatic escape from Hazaribagh Central Jail and escaped to Nepal borders. Later he left the
Congress because of ideological differences and founded the Socialist Party. He was not, however, successful in holding together all the socialist forces in the country. Constant discension and chronic indiscipline became a feature of the Indian socialist movement. Jaya Prakash, now equally disillusioned with politics and Marxist socialism, turned to Sarvodaya.

According to Jaya Prakash, party politics thrive on half-truths and untruths. It is not difficult to appreciate this contention when one thinks of the election time when rival party spokesmen indulge in nothing less than a war of nerves, when truth becomes a casualty and violence reigns in the heart of men. Jaya Prakash says:

"The need to catch votes creates an unlimited opportunity for indulging in half-truths, even outright lies sometimes, for exciting the passions, more often than not the base passion, for arousing false hopes by making dishonest but pleasing promises. Hardly any issue of public policy is presented to the people in its true light; everything gets distorted by partisan demogoguery."

How can this type of things help the formation of a society based on ahimsa?

Jaya Prakash visualizes a partyless democracy based on the village or a Panchayati Raj. Political power structure must start from the villages which must be classless, casteless communities of equals, where there is ideal "communism—that is sharing, participation, fellowship." A voluntary grouping of villages should form the 'oceanic circle' with delegated powers from village communities building up the national structure and the world community as is clearly the ideal preached by Gandhi, the Mahatma.

Apart from Jaya Prakash, many other followers of Gandhi too joined Vinoba. Dada Dharmadhikari, Dhirendra Mazumdar and U.N. Dhebar are some of them. They certainly do not make a big noise like the politicians; they work quietly in the countryside leading the people to non-violent progress and instill in them devotion to the ahimsa creed.

There is, however, some genuine opposition to the ideals to which Vinoba Bhave and Sarvodaya stands for. Some are sceptical about the success of the movement; some others say that it has already failed or is heading for a failure. Complete success
for movements of this type for the elevation of mankind is rare. If it were at all possible, we would have had a perfect world long ago. As it is, the moral fervour that the Sarvodaya movement has succeeded in arousing in the Indian people should be considered a tremendous achievement in itself. Perhaps it has failed to go anywhere near the target. That is a tragedy but as a force for moral rearmament, Sarvodaya has its role.

AHIMSA AND WORLD PEACE

No country can be said to be really independent today. Nations have become so much interdependent that each one of them is affected by the happenings in other nations. A few years ago we saw how the developments in a far off, tiny nation like Cuba could affect the life of almost everyone in the world. There is no such thing as an isolated event; every action, every occurrence has its world-wide reaction, world-wide repercussions. India is nothing but a limb of the world subjected to forces from outside as much as other countries. Ahimsa has to be fitted into the wider context of the world situation in order to be a worthwhile philosophy of life.

Mankind is coming together as never before under the impact of science and technology. Transport and communications have developed so much that the world has shrunk and has become a home to man. Even the moon has been brought nearer by the application of science and technology.

In spite of the factors that now divide the world, there is no doubt that many forces are still working towards the ideal of one world. It is true that the League of Nations failed and the United Nations might follow suit. Perhaps today it is only the fear of self-destruction that is keeping nations away from a world war! But still, one cannot deny that the trend is towards unity. The earlier humanity realizes this ideal the better for the happiness and prosperity of mankind.

It is important that mankind comes together to evolve a moral and spiritual outlook for a one world culture. Humanity must be rebuilt on a new base; internationalism must replace nationalism and ideology must be made subservient to the peace and prosperity of the universal man. Racialism with its accompanying evils of tribal and regional loyalties must be fought and individual patriotism should give place to the love
of all humanity untarnished by narrow attachment to geographical and political limits. Ahimsa alone can give this basis for the reconstruction of mankind.

"Above all nations is humanity", declared Goethe. Nations, races, tribes and states must all dissolve themselves to form the wider humanity. But any violent force applied to achieve the cultural and social integration of mankind to form this wider humanity would produce fear, bitterness and hatred, defeating the very purpose of such an integration. The world can be united and sustained only on a firm and un faltering foundation of non-violent humanism.

"The most striking features of ancient Indian civilization is its humanity", says Prof Basham, an authority on ancient Indian history and culture. We have seen in the foregoing pages how that tradition has been working down the ages, guiding the Indian people and leading them on the path of ahimsa. India with such a history of humanism has to contribute a great deal in the evolution of this universal non-violent humanism.

Non-violent humanism (ahimsa) has been an integral element of India's religion. From ancient times India never separated humanism from religion. India might have failed in other fields, but in its search for humanism it has found a moral basis for religion itself. In the words of Dr Radhakrishnan:

"Religion and humanism do not exclude each other. If we wrongly identify religion with world and life negation, and ethics with humanism and social progress, the two become quite different and require to be pursued on their own separate principles. They are, on the contrary, organic to each other. While the chief value of religion lies in its power to raise and enlarge the internal man, its soundness is not complete until it had shaped properly his external existence. For the latter we require a sound political, economic, and social life, a power and an efficiency which will make a people not only survive but grow towards a collective perfection."

The modern world is a complex entity. It has made tremendous progress in science and technology. It has put in man's hand unlimited power. Man is not to labour any more
with his own hands, he does not have to sweat—he has got the machine to do all the work for him. Sophisticated and newer machines are developed almost every day, increasing efficiency and precision. Faster and more reliable techniques are being invented to raise production both in agriculture and industry. This tremendous material progress is not in any way matched with a corresponding spiritual progress. The scientific knowledge and technological inventions are not guided by moral and human values. The progress is one-sided, man develops into a money-making and money-grabbing monster.

Ahimsa places its faith in the inherent goodness of humanity. It is not man that is bad, it is the environments and conditions of life that compel him to act against the interests of truth and non-violence. It is evil that imperceptibly enters into the heart of man, making him go against his better judgment and inner conscience, leading him to untruth and violence. There can be no progress without a relentless struggle against evil. Gandhian ahimsa in its technique of Satyagraha has evolved a non-violent approach to this struggle against evil. It aspires to eliminate evil from the affairs of men, and tries to generate only good-will and love in the process. Ahimsa never for once deviates from its path of love and its struggle against evil—that is the greatness of the ahimsa approach.

The role of ahimsa will not be one of getting the whole world converted to its ideal. It is only co-operation with the spiritual forces of the world that is needed. Christianity on which Western civilization is based is obviously not repugnant to the principles that ahimsa stands for. In fact Christianity has inspired many Indian thinkers and teachers, including Gandhi. The Christian ideal of "Love thy neighbour as thyself" is enough to bring the whole world together in bonds of brotherhood and understanding. The universality of Christian charity and benevolence is itself a sure guarantee for the co-operation between East and West.

The division of the world as East and West is unnatural and immoral. East and West have no separate goals. The idea of the materialism of the West and the spirituality of the East is nothing but outdated slogans. Eastern nations, of course, are not materially advanced, that is why perhaps they
look comparatively spiritual. It should be granted that the West has pioneered the material progress of mankind. But to stick to the fruits of their labour and to show reluctance to share them with the less fortunate brethren in Asia and Africa on the plea of race or colour would be an unpardonable offence against humanity. The whole of mankind has to work together as a team towards the common goal of material and spiritual progress.

In the sphere of cooperation between nations it is unnecessary to stick to that or this ideology or philosophy. There is an undercurrent of universality in all systems designed for the furtherance of man's happiness on earth. What is needed is a consolidation of the spiritual forces of the world to give a lead to humanity. It is here that ahimsa has to become a world force.
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