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## UNIT 4 WESTERN INFLUENCES: RUSKIN, THOREAU, TOLSTOY AND QUAKERS

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## 4.1 INTRODUCTION

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Although Gandhi was an Indian and a staunch nationalist, there was a profound influence of the West on him. He was very largely influenced by Western thinkers and writers. He himself acknowledged his indebtedness to the West in the following words: *“I have nothing to be ashamed of if my views on Ahimsa are the result of my Western education. I have never tabooed all Western ideas, nor am I prepared to anathematize everything that comes from the West as inherently evil. I have learnt much from the West, and I should not be surprised to find that I had learnt something about Ahimsa too from the West.”*

Elsewhere he states: *“I do not think that everything Western is to be rejected. I have condemned Western civilization in no measured terms. I still do so, but it does not mean that everything Western should be rejected. I have learnt a great deal from the West and I am grateful to it. I should consider myself unfortunate if contact with, and the literature of the West had no influence on me.”*

Mahatma Gandhi is rightly described as the heir of the immortal heritage of humanity, “which knows no age or weariness or defeat”. As Dr. S. Radhakrishnan pointed out, *“It is a foolish pride that impels some of us to combat all external influences. Every spiritual or scientific advance which any branch of the human family achieves, is achieved not for itself alone but for all mankind.”*

### Aims and Objectives

After studying this Unit, you will be able to understand:

- How John Ruskin’s book, ‘Unto This Last’ wielded a profound influence on Gandhi;
- The influence of Henry David Thoreau’s ideas on Freedom, the Right to Resist and Civil Disobedience.
- Leo Tolstoy’s magnificent works and their deep impact on Gandhi.

## 4.2 INFLUENCE OF JOHN RUSKIN

In the year 1903, Gandhi, who was a practicing lawyer in South Africa, had an occasion to travel from Johannesburg to Durban in the course of his professional and voluntary work. At the Johannesburg Railway Station, one of his friends, Henry Polak gave him a copy of John Ruskin's *Unto This Last* to read during the twenty-four hour journey, with the remark that he would surely like it. In Gandhi's own words, "*The book was impossible to lay aside, once I had begun it. It gripped me...I could not get any sleep that night.*" He was simply entranced by it. It actually provided the stimulus for an extra-ordinary transformation in his way of life. Gandhi tells of the experience in his own words:

*"I believe that I discovered some of my deepest convictions reflected in this great book of Ruskin, and that is why it so captured me, and made me transform my life. A poet is one who can call forth the good latent in the human breast. Poets do not influence all alike, for everyone is not evolved in an equal measure. The teachings of 'Unto This Last' I understand to be:*

1. *That the good of the individual is contained in the good of all;*
2. *That a lawyer's work has the same value as the barber's, inasmuch as all have the same right of earning livelihood from their work;*
3. *That the life of labour, that is, the life of the tiller of the soil and the handicraftsman, is the life worth living.*

*The first of these I knew. The second I had dimly realized. The third had never occurred to me. 'Unto This Last' made it as clear as daylight for me that the second and the third were contained in the first. I arose with the dawn, ready to reduce these principles to practice."*

An immediate consequence was the establishment of the Phoenix Settlement near Durban in 1904, which proved so important to the Satyagrahis in South Africa. Gandhi also translated the book into Gujarati and gave it the title of '*Sarvodaya*', meaning 'welfare of all'.

How does one capture the essence of Ruskin's arguments in '*Unto This Last*'? There is a bitter denunciation of the accepted views on political economy, after John Stuart Mill and other orthodox economists of that time. He pleads for a 'human' view of economics. Men are not mechanical, and the way to induce the best from men is to treat them with affection. Every vocation is to service and every servant should rather die than see the end of his service corrupted. "*For truly, the man who does not know when to die does not know how to live!*" He urges that the real aim of economics is not to accumulate material wealth or power over men, but the promotion of the welfare of people at large – the manufacture of "souls of good quality". For, to accumulate much for one's self is to deny our neighbour his rightful share. He asks the wealthy to curtail luxury now so that all can have it in the future.

Ruskin, upholding the dignity of man, stressed that whatever hurts must be relentlessly rejected. He thought that political economy took no account of the spirit of man and it concentrated on the material aspect of human welfare. He, therefore, attacked the mammon worship in society. He thought that riches were a power like that of electricity,

acting through inequalities or negations of itself. That country, he emphasised, was the richest which nourished the greatest number of noble and happy human beings; that man was the richest, who, having perfected the functions of his own life to the utmost, had also the widest helpful influence, both personal and by means of his possessions, over the lives of the others. There was no wealth but life. His irrefutable conclusion was that true economics was the economics of justice. He believed in the eternal superiority of some men to others, sometimes even of one man to all others and approved the advisability of appointing such person or persons to guide, to lead, or on occasions even to compel and subdue their inferiors according to their own letter, knowledge and wiser will.

Gandhi resembles Ruskin in several respects. Both preach the supremacy of the spirit and trust in the nobleness of human nature; to both character is more important than intelligence; both seek to moralise politics and economics; both emphasise the priority of social regeneration to mere political freedom; both greatly distrust machinery and plead that if employed at all, it should be so used as to free and not enslave men; both insist that the capitalist should adopt a wise paternal attitude in relation to his employees.

However, there are significant points of differences too. Unlike Gandhi, Ruskin did not believe in non-violence, democracy and equality. Gandhi differed from Ruskin in his distrust of the people and in his belief in the rule of the wisest. Both disagreed in their views regarding the nature and functions of the State.

Gandhi has drawn inspiration on education from Ruskin. Both of them attach primary importance to education in their constructive programmes. According to them, education is the discipline of the inherent instinct of man. Both took into consideration the child's essential nature and emphasised that education must begin with the child. Ruskin regarded individual taste, national character and all those things which arose from national character as reflections of home life. Gandhi also stressed the home education. Both attached equal importance to the education of boys as well as of girls. Both were of the opinion that spirit was higher than matter, both of them tried to spiritualise the political, economic and social spheres of human life.

The writings of Ruskin made Gandhi to realise the dignity of labour and the ideal that action for the good of all is the most virtuous principle. Ruskin's *Unto This Last* left such an abiding impact on Gandhi's life and thought that he started experimenting the philosophy contained therein, in his own life, renounced property and privileges, established socialist colonies thereafter, thought in terms of *Sarvodaya* and gave to the translation of the book, the title of *Sarvodaya*, under the impact of Ruskin's book. Gandhi equally believed that differential wage should not be paid for intellectual work in preference to manual work since intellectual labour should not be treated as superior to manual labour.

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### **4.3 INFLUENCE OF HENRY DAVID THOREAU**

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Gandhi was influenced by the ideas and activities of Henry David Thoreau, the well known American Anarchist who refused to pay taxes as a protest against slavery in America. Thoreau's plea for the supremacy of conscience under all circumstances appealed to Gandhi so much that he admitted that his technique of passive resistance found scientific confirmation in the former's essay on 'Civil Disobedience'. The core of Thoreau's politics was his belief in a natural or higher law. He rejected the idea that the highest responsibility of the individual must be to the State. He refused to recognise a government, which failed to establish justice in the land.

The anarchist view of Gandhi was fully supported by Thoreau's declaration that 'that government is best which governs the least'. Gandhi believed that a free and enlightened State could be established on this planet if its inhabitants could be truthful and non-violent in thought, word and deed.

Thoreau was the first to use the term, 'Civil Disobedience' in one of his speeches in 1849. Gandhi, however, did not derive his idea from the writings of Thoreau. He wrote, 'The statement that I had derived my idea of Civil Disobedience from the writings of Thoreau is wrong. The resistance to authority in South Africa was well advanced before I got the essay of Thoreau on Civil Disobedience. I began the use of his phrase to explain our struggle to the English readers. But I found that even Civil Disobedience failed to convey the full meaning of the struggle. I, therefore, adopted the phrase of 'Civil Resistance' and finally modified even this to 'Non-Violent Resistance'. Thoreau believed in man's natural impulses to goodness, argued for the supremacy under all conditions of conscience and held up the ideal of a future society without any government''.

Thoreau's primary contribution to the realm of thought is his plea for defiance of a state based on injustice. A champion of the dignity of man and liberty of the individual, he would sweep aside the obstacles preventing fulfillment of their personality. He advocated a just social and political order devoid of exploitation in the form of slavery. He viewed that the poverty of the poor was the direct consequence of the luxury of the rich. He said:

*"Perhaps it will be found that just in proportion as some have been placed in outward circumstances above the savage, others have been degraded below him. The luxury of one class is counter-balanced by the indigence of another. On the one side is the palace on the other are the alms house and 'Silent Poor'. The myriads who built the pyramids to be the tombs of the Pharaohs were fed on garlic, and it may be were not decently buried. The mason who finishes the cornice of the palace returns at night perchance to a hut not so good as a wingman. It is a mistake to suppose that in a country where the usual evidence of civilization exists, the condition of the very large body of the inhabitants may not be as degraded as that of savages".*

Thoreau's message is contained in his saying 'if thy hand has plenty, be liberal as the date-tree; but if it affords nothing to give away, be an *azad* or freeman like the cyprus'. He advocated service to fellow beings which may lead to renunciation. He was convinced that every one should earn his bread by his own labour. His very thesis that one can produce his own food for the year only by working for six weeks is a hint that earning one's bread by physical labour is a philosophy that covers even the intellectual.

### **Freedom**

Thoreau and Gandhi conceive of Freedom as obedience to law, not so much to law in the narrow legal sense of the term as to the moral law which is a categorical imperative. It impels men to seek good and to attain it. "A man is free to speak the truth, not free toil, free to serve, not to exploit, free to sacrifice himself but not free to kill or injure," says Gandhi. Similarly, Thoreau attaches no value to freedom from a King George, if it is not accompanied by freedom from King Prejudice! Thus, freedom, far from being mere absence of restraint is construed as willing acceptance of restraint and control of self-imposed bonds and obligations. It is submission to the law of one's being and the

conquest of the self, an attempt to correct the false values ascribed to things material, to subdue them and sublimate them. It is a rational synthesis of desires and passions in an integrated life.

### **Right to Resist**

Both Thoreau and Gandhi had to face tyrannical governments. Their problem was the age-old problem which still remains in institutional terms – the problem of a proper choice between conflicting loyalties. It is the problem of the conscientious objector forced to choose between obedience to the laws of the State and the moral law as revealed to him by his conscience. Both believe that the laws of the State should be obeyed *so long as they are just*.

However, submission to an unjust law, far from being a duty is an immoral barter for liberty. Thoreau is of the opinion that if the injustice arises as a result of the necessary friction of the machinery of the government, it may be overlooked, but if it is such that it requires one to be the agent of injustice, then “break the law and let your life be a counter-friction to stop the machine”. According to him, no law should be enforced simply because it is declared to be good by the legislators if it is not really good. He exhorts all the citizens to cultivate enough boldness to rise in revolt against immoral laws and be prepared to lose their lives, if need be, in obedience to eternal laws. Hence his well-known statement: “Under a government which imprisons any unjustly, the true place for a just man is in prison.”

Exhorting the people to cultivate moral courage to resist unjust laws, Gandhi observed: “Swaraj will come, not by the acquisition of authority by a few but by the acquisition by all of the capacity to resist authority when it is abused.” Both Thoreau and Gandhi believed that citizens are men first and subjects afterwards. Gandhi thought that it is the height of good fortune to be in jail in the interest and good name of one’s country.

### **Civil Disobedience**

The method used for protest by Thoreau and Gandhi was Civil Disobedience. Thoreau was the first to use this word in one of his speeches in 1849. For him, it stood for maximum cooperation with all people and institutions when they lead to good, and non-cooperation with them when they promote evil. It included defiance on the part of the people and resignations from their offices on the part of the officers. According to him, a real revolution is accomplished when this happens. Thoreau’s essay on ‘Civil Disobedience’ became a Bible for the Satyagrahis in South Africa, and the teachings of Thoreau were applied by Gandhi for the uplift of downtrodden millions of Indian workers.

Thoreau and Gandhi are two irrepressible optimists and conscientious objectors who courageously fought for right; moral rebels who believed in practising what they preached. Thoreau was certainly not the only influence on Gandhi but he influenced him as many others did and helped him to work out a synthesis of the wisdom of the East and the West in theory and to work as a chosen instrument through whom was presented an attitude and a method which proved to be a panacea for the troubled world.

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## **4.4 INFLUENCE OF LEO TOLSTOY**

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There is no parallel in modern Indian intellectual history to what Gandhi says he owed to Leo Tolstoy.

Tolstoy exercised a greater influence on him. As we look at Appendix 1 of *Hind Swaraj*, we notice that of the twenty books listed there as many as six were by Tolstoy. Gandhi considered three of these – *Letter to a Hindoo*, *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, and *What is Art* – so important that either he himself translated them or he had others translate them into Gujarati. His adaptation into Gujarati of *Ivan the Fool*, gives us an idea of the high esteem in which he held Tolstoy.

A study of the Gandhi-Tolstoy relationship has a great lesson for us even today. It is that where universal ideas are concerned, cultural origins do not matter: they transcend all cultural barriers. The Gandhi-Tolstoy relationship is valuable for yet another reason. It is a model of how one should go about assimilating ideas taken from other cultures. Gandhi read Tolstoy carefully but critically, and he assimilated only those elements in his works which he thought were necessary for the development of his own original philosophy.

By the time Gandhi came to know Tolstoy, which was in 1894, he was just an unknown Indian lawyer finding his way in South Africa, while Tolstoy - forty one years senior to Gandhi in age- had already reached the zenith of his fame. Their correspondence started only in 1909, a year before Tolstoy's death. They exchanged seven letters in all, four from Gandhi and three from Tolstoy. Tolstoy came to know Gandhi only through *Hind Swaraj* (1909), and Doke's biography, *M.K. Gandhi: An Indian Patriot in South Africa* (1909). Though the duration of their contact was very short, it nevertheless proved to be very significant. Tolstoy had enough time to recognise the historic importance of *Hind Swaraj*, and of what Gandhi was doing in South Africa. Thanks to that contact, Gandhi came to be seen as an inheritor of Tolstoy's moral legacy into the twentieth century.

Looking back on this historic relationship, we see three works of Tolstoy as being especially significant. They are:

- (1) *The Kingdom of God is Within You*;
- (2) *Letter to a Hindoo*; and
- (3) *What is Art?*

They deal with three enduring themes in Gandhian philosophy, namely, the need for spirituality based on a practical love of God and fellow human beings; the problem of violence and its resolution; and the place and function of art in life.

(1) *The Kingdom of God is Within You*

Gandhi read this book in 1894, the year of the first English translated version. As he states in his Autobiography, the book *overwhelmed* him. It was a required reading for members of the Phoenix Settlement and Tolstoy Farm. It was his constant companion during his South African days and all three of his prison stays in South Africa.

The underlying theme of the book is the question of violence and its peaceful resolution. Its basic insight, which remains valid even today, is that peace is a social good, and that there can be no peace on earth, unless there is a genuine spiritual self-renewal among individuals, supported by a strong public opinion favouring peace. By spiritual self-renewal, Tolstoy meant a new understanding of the meaning of pure religion. The essence of pure religion, in his view, lay in "man's faculty of foreseeing prophetically the true meaning of life". As far as the resolution of violence was concerned, he felt that a new appreciation of the relevance of the ethic of the *Sermon on the Mount* was needed.

Tolstoy next turned to a discussion of what pure religion was and how it alone could lead to true inner progress. Pure religion had its source in the unconditional love of God, from which flowed the true love of fellow human-beings. And human life, taken at the individual level, was a process of striving to achieve the fullness of this love. The love of God guides human beings not by external rules but by “an inward consciousness of the possibility of reaching divine perfection”. This growth in inner perfection is the necessary spiritual condition that would make life at the social and political level less violent. He called the reality of this development as the kingdom of God. It is a metaphor signifying “a new system of life, free from violence”. This kingdom is found within each individual human being. It can flourish only if we live “according to the light in us”. The development of such an inner kingdom was the end of all true religions. And its attainment depends on human effort. “The Kingdom of God can only be reached by effort, and only those who make such effort reach it.” And effort here meant the effort to rise above external conditions and to follow the truth that is revealing itself within. The ability to cultivate the kingdom within was an ability which all human beings possessed. The kingdom within, then, provides the most effective solution to the problem of violence: it provides a solution superior to that provided by the State and by scientific humanism. This is, more or less, the basic contention of Tolstoy in the book.

Gandhi said, “*It was forty years back when I was passing through a severe crisis of skepticism and doubt that I came across ‘The Kingdom of God is Within You’, and was deeply impressed by it. I was at that time a believer in non-violence. Its reading cured me of my skepticism and made me a first believer in Ahimsa. What has appealed to me in Tolstoy’s life is that he practiced what he preached and reckoned no cost too great in his pursuit of truth*”.

Again, “*He was the greatest apostle of non-violence that the present age has written and spoken on non-violence so fully or so insistently and with such penetrations and insight as he. I would even go further and say that his remarkable development of this doctrine puts to shame the present day narrow and lop-sided interpretation put upon it by the votaries of Ahimsa in this land of ours*”.

While the book *The Kingdom of God is Within You* captivated Gandhi, Tolstoy appreciated the non-violent struggle led by Gandhi. Gandhi said, “I made too an intensive study of Tolstoy’s books. *The Gospel In Brief, What To Do?* And such other books made a deep impression on me. I began to realise more and more the infinite possibilities of universal love”. He not only concurred with the belief of Tolstoy that “The Kingdom of God is Within You”, but realised it in his life by strenuous endeavour. His successful striving after truth was an eloquent demonstration of the Tolstoyan declaration that “The Kingdom of God can only be reached by effort and only those who make such effort reach it”.

## (2) *Letter to a Hindoo*

The background to the *Letter* is as interesting as its contents. It was written in response to two letters from Taraknath Das (1884-1958). The first was written on 24th May 1908 from University Station, Seattle, Washington State, and the second on 15<sup>th</sup> July 1908 from Norwich University, Northfield, Vermont. A former member of Bengal terrorist organisation, Das had emigrated to the United States in 1906. His two letters to Tolstoy gave a brief description of the terrible plight of India under colonial rule. Their purpose was to seek Tolstoy’s support for India’s cause.

Tolstoy took Das's letters very seriously. It took him seven months, 29 drafts and 413 manuscript pages to prepare the *Letter*, which is only about 6,000 words long. That a writer of Tolstoy's stature would devote so much time and effort to compose this document is in itself a sign of its historical importance.

Even though the *Letter* originated as a result of Das's initiative, it probably would never have become famous, had it not been for Gandhi. For, a copy of a typescript of the *Letter* fell into his hands in 1909 while he was in London. To verify its authenticity, he wrote directly to Tolstoy. He had also asked permission, if the document proved to be authentic, to have it published in both English and Gujarati. The permission was readily granted, and Gandhi edited and translated it.

The *Letter* makes two basic points. The first is that "the chief, if not the sole" cause of the enslavement of India is the absence of a pure religious consciousness in all nations, including India. Nations no longer believe in a spiritual element in their lives, an element which manifests itself in the love of God and fellow human beings.

Secondly, Indians are implicated in their own enslavement. Tolstoy pointed to them that they were repeating "the amazing stupidity" indoctrinated in them by their European teachers such as Herbert Spencer that force could be resisted only with force. The conclusion is clear: "If the people of India are enslaved by violence, it is only because they themselves live and have lived by violence, and do not recognize the eternal law of love inherent in humanity".

Tolstoy's conclusion was that India's liberation lay with Indians liberating themselves from the belief that violence could liberate them. They should begin to believe in the power of the soul and in that of a public opinion favourable to non-violence.

### (3) *What is Art?*

The first question that will cross the mind of anyone who looks into Appendix I of *Hind Swaraj* is this: Why would Gandhi include in it two works on art by two of Europe's greatest art critics, Ruskin and Tolstoy? The reference is to Ruskin's *The Political Economy of Art* or, in its revised title, *A Joy For Ever*, and to Tolstoy's *What is Art?* What have Western art and art criticism to do with India and its swaraj? What made Gandhi think that all serious students of his philosophy should read these works as well?

Living in a pluralistic society, Gandhi saw how art could bring different people together. He was able to invent and popularise universal symbols such as the charkha and khadi. His loincloth itself expressed 'the agony' of his soul for the poverty of the masses and his solidarity with them. A bare body and bare head, he said, were signs of mourning for India's plight. It was painful for him to eat or dress as rich people do, so long as the poor did not have enough to eat and enough to cover their bodies with.

Whatever critics and art historians might say, those who knew Gandhi personally well, or those who were artists themselves, saw the artist in him. Here, perhaps, E.M. Forster expresses the idea better than most. Speaking of Gandhi, he said that he was with the great artists, though art was not his medium. And Tagore, in the end, came to understand him as an artist. Nehru called him "the perfect artist".

Of the three works of Tolstoy, some consider '*What is Art?*' to be the most significant, for it gives us a unique entry into Gandhi's mind and feelings. We see him inventing new symbols, using them to shape public opinion, and to move people to action.

Gandhi agreed with Tolstoy's reminder to the mass of humanity, the language of Christ, that "We are all sons of one father, no matter where we live or what language we speak; we are all brothers and are subject only to the law of love, which the common father has implanted in our hearts". Tolstoy pointed to the division of men into castes: one labouring, oppressed, needy and suffering; the other idle, oppressing and living in luxury and pleasure. Gandhi upheld the Tolstoyan dictum that an ideal state would be an ordered anarchy, in which everyone would rule himself in such a manner that he would never be a hindrance to his neighbours.

Love is the basis of Tolstoy's principles of non-resistance and non-cooperation. He asserts, in his *Three Parables* that 'Evil must not be driven out with evil, that all resistance by violence merely increases the evil'. Tolstoy's philosophy of Christian anarchism repudiates the authority of the state and private property, for they are based on physical balance. His philosophy is the application of the teaching of the *Sermon on the Mount*, which contains the essence of Christianity, teaches us to live in peace with all men, to harbour anger towards none, and to love all men alike without distinction of nationality.

Tolstoy was the great apostle of *ahimsa*. His penetration into the efficacy of this weapon was deep. None in the West had so fully read and understood *ahimsa* as Tolstoy. J.J. Doke is of the opinion that the miscellaneous writings of Tolstoy, especially on ethical, religious and allied problems were traced out, read and digested by Gandhi; He calls him a disciple of Tolstoy. Gandhi wrote his first letter to Tolstoy in October, 1909, in which he described the passive resistance which was going on in Transvaal for three years. Tolstoy replied to this letter, addressing Transvaal Satyagrahis as 'dear brothers and co-workers'. In 1910, Gandhi laid the foundation of Tolstoy Farm which was to become a laboratory for experiments on the philosophy and teachings of passive resistance.

Tolstoy condemns the State and its machinery, law courts, police and military, private property and capitalism, even the schools, as all these offend against the law of love. He is opposed to the use of force, payment of taxes, and compulsory military service. He lays great stress on the moral regeneration of the individual.

There are some facts which differentiate Gandhi from Tolstoy. Gandhi is more practical than Tolstoy. Gandhi's idea of non-violence is also slightly different as he defined *Ahimsa* in the sense of avoidance of injury to any creature out of anger; Tolstoy took *Ahimsa* in the sense of avoidance of force in all forms. As life involves violence, Tolstoy turns away from it; Gandhi, on the other hand, followed the *Gita* ideal of action which preaches action without attachment. In certain circumstances, even killing may be called *ahimsa*, as life involves some amount of violence. Therefore, Gandhi follows the *Gita*'s ideal of action and resists evils with the detachment of spirit. Gandhi did not accept Tolstoy so far as the question of reincarnation is concerned. Gandhi wrote to Tolstoy, "Reincarnation or transmigration is a cherished belief with millions in India, indeed, in China also. With many, one might almost say, it is a matter of experience, no longer a matter of academic acceptance. It explains reasonably the many mysteries of life". Gandhi did not find anything new in Tolstoy. Therefore, he said. "There is no doubt that there is nothing new in what Tolstoy preaches. But his presentation of the old truth is refreshingly forceful. His logic is unassailable. And, above all, he endeavours to practice what he preaches. He preaches to convince. He is sincere and earnest. He commands attention".

Tolstoy had renounced the happy-go-lucky life and lived the life of a poor peasant, swept and cleaned his own room, his clothes and shoes, worked with peasants in his own estate Yasnaya Polyanna, ploughed and furrowed the land, worked for peasant families who were running short of labour, and sometimes performed all the farm operations for a poor widow, who could hardly afford to engage hired labourers. This life of renunciation and dedication to the service of the poor and the oppressed had such a great appeal for Gandhi that he refashioned his life accordingly. He renounced his property and embraced voluntary poverty, clothed himself like a poor peasant, made ample use of his limbs to earn his bread and travelled in third class railway compartments after he opted for a life of renunciation. To quote Pyarelal, "It was not Tolstoy's writings alone, but the example of his life, his passion for truth and ceaseless striving after perfection that enthroned him in Gandhi's heart . . . . In him he found kindred spirit, a single-minded seeker after truth, an aristocrat turned peasant and shoe maker in pursuit of the meaning of life who dedicated his wealth and talent and genius to the service of humanity, while he himself strove to live by his body labour".

Tolstoy believed in the efficacy of manual labour for earning one's bread. He made a plea for manual labour in the interest of the poor and also in the interest of the rich. His life was dedicated to the purpose of promoting the objective of an egalitarian society. His philosophy breathed in a large measure the message of extinguishment of socio-economic disparities, privileges, exploitation and creation of a society, whose cornerstones are equality, fraternity, fellowship, renunciation, non-exploitation and bread labour.

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#### 4.5 THE INFLUENCE OF THE QUAKERS

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The most notable exponents of Christian non-resistance and pacifism are the Quakers. It was George Fox who founded the Quaker Society of Friends in 1652. Fox, William Penn, Isaac Pennington and Robert Barclay were the leading Quakers of the seventeenth century. Penn established in Pennsylvania the first Quaker Settlement, otherwise known as the 'Holy Experiment'. In the beginning, the Quakers had to suffer persecution and martyrdom. But the Toleration Act of 1689 put an end to this.

The Quakers are noted for their firm opposition to war and violence, and for their advocacy of peace. According to Beales, the entire Christian Peace Movement was largely Quaker in origin. Thus, they may as well be called the fathers of Christian pacifism. As early as 1660, George Fox described the Quaker attitude to war in a statement to Charles II as follows:

*We utterly deny all outward wars and strife and fighting with outward weapons, for any end or pretence whatever; this is our testimony to the whole world.*

The Quakers believe that the attempt to secure the triumph of right through the application of physical force is based on a false philosophy. The Quakers do not merely stand passively and protest against war. Since 1917, they have added a constructive programme to their movement. After World War I, the Quakers carried on agricultural and social reconstruction work as well as typhus prevention, famine relief and child feeding in Serbia, Poland, Austria, Russia and Germany.

Gandhi must have been influenced by the Quakers in his opposition to war and violence and his strong advocacy of peace, pacifism and Non-Violence.

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## 4.6 SUMMARY

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The depth of Gandhi's wisdom and the rich variety of his thought do tell us that he was a man of varied influences and experiences. While he was not a great reader, whatever he read he read carefully and assimilated its contents and central message, to be put into practice in his personal and public life.

He himself acknowledged that the "three moderns have left a deep impression on my life, and captivated me: Raychandbhai by his living contact; Tolstoy by his book, *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, and Ruskin by his book, *Unto This Last*." He made his first contact with Tolstoy's writings in 1893-94 and with those of Ruskin in 1904. While Tolstoy's *Kingdom of God* made him realise the infinite possibilities of universal love, cured him of his skepticism and sowed the seed of an invincible belief in non-violence, Ruskin's *Unto This Last* brought about an instantaneous and practical transformation in his life.

Neither Thoreau nor Gandhi equated civilisation with mere technological advancement or sheer conquest of the physical environment. Man has traversed a long and tortuous distance from savagery to civilisation. Though man's achievements have been titanic, civilisation has become sick, neurotic and satanic. Condemning some of the "achievements" of man, Gandhi believed that the railways and the machines represent the true badge of slavery of the Indian people, as they do of the Europeans. In one of his works, Thoreau asks: *Have we no culture, no refinement but skill only to live coarsely and serve the devil; to acquire a little worldly wealth or fame or liberty, and make a false show with it, as if we were all hulk and shell, with no tender and living kernel to us?*

That the parallelism of views between Gandhi and Thoreau is not accidental is evident from the fact that ten years after writing his *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi observed that though the views expressed therein were his, he had made an attempt to follow Eastern and Western writers including Thoreau and Emerson.

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## 4.7 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

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1. Describe the essence of John Ruskin's 'Unto This Last' and the nature of its influence on Gandhi.
2. What are the major ideas of Henry David Thoreau and how did they influence Gandhi?
3. What are the major arguments of Leo Tolstoy in 'The Kingdom of God is Within You'? Are they similar to Gandhi's views on the subject?
4. Attempt an overview of the Western influences on Gandhi.

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## SUGGESTED READINGS

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1. M.K. Gandhi., *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 2007. (recent edition)
2. M.P. Mathai., M.S. John and Siby Joseph., ed., *Meditations on Gandhi*, Concept Publishers, New Delhi, 2002.

3. Usha Mehta., Mahatma Gandhi and Humanism, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Mumbai, 2000.
4. D.K. Dutta., Social, Moral and Religious Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi, Intellectual Publishing House, New Delhi, 1980.
5. James Mathews., The Matchless Weapon – Satyagraha, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1989.
6. Bhabani Bhattacharya, Gandhi, the Writer, National Book Trust, New Delhi, 1969.