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## UNIT 9 SPIRITUAL FOUNDATIONS OF GANDHIAN DEVELOPMENT

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### 9.1 INTRODUCTION

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Economists are appropriately studied without undue reference to their personalities. Biographies of Adam Smith, Alfred Marshall, Karl Marx, J.M.Keynes, etc. may all throw some light upon their theories but need not affect our appraisals of them. No doubt, it is sometimes useful to know about the declared purposes or practical intentions of the abstract theorists. For example, our awareness of Karl Marx's complex personality may be relevant to our grasp of his theories. But when we turn to Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy, we find it peculiarly difficult to ignore his personality and his activities.

For a proper appreciation of the ideas of Gandhi on any subject, it is necessary to bear in mind two things. First, he was not an academician in the conventional sense of the term. As Acharya J.B. Kripalani puts it, "If ever there was a planner without elaborate blue prints Gandhi was one". (Kripalani, 1961, p.252). Unlike other scholars, he did not study the subject academically. It was not in his nature too. He did not assign himself the task of setting up an academic discipline. He did not present his ideas in any systematic form and at one place; they have to be culled from innumerable passages occurring in his articles, Interviews, speeches and answers to the questions, etc. He was not a theorist; he was primarily an actionist a Karamyogi. He himself admitted "I am not built for academic writings. Action is my domain. What I understand according to my lights to be my duty and what comes my way I do" (Harijan, 03-01-1946). He did not spin his theories in the cloistered atmosphere of his study, they grew and developed in the crucible of experience in the course of his attempt to wrest freedom for his country and to solve the various practical problems as and when they emerged in the course of his long struggle against foreign domination. It could not have been otherwise in the situation he was placed in. The solutions he offered for the alleviation of the economic

ills did not derive out of any rigid doctrinaire approach. His solutions were rooted in necessity. Thus Gandhian development was primarily a response, to use a Toynbeen expression, 'to the challenge that poverty ridden India flung at a particular phase in the process of the development of Indian history'. For a person in the position which Gandhi occupied it was incumbent that he took the most pressing economic problems and issues into account and offered his own solutions. And from these solutions and experiences, there emerged a definite development theory.

Second, his genius was more spiritual and moral than intellectual. His whole life was cast in the spiritual and moral mould of which truth and nonviolence were the fundamental tenets. His ideas have to be studied from the view point of his own moral and spiritual principles and ideals. One must try to understand the language that Gandhi used. It was not the language used by specialists. It was the language which the common man uses and understands.

In considering Gandhian development, or, for that matter any socio economic philosophy, the scientific procedure as suggested by Professor N.K. Bose should be followed. The scientific procedure is to understand and assess the doctrines in terms of the conditions that give rise to them (Bose, 1940, p.52). Gandhi's ideas, can, therefore be best understood in the light of physical and social conditions. Throughout the ages India was known for its riches. It was known as 'Golden Sparrow'. The source of its riches was not agriculture, in those days its produce could not be exported. Its wealth was derived from its industry, carried on in almost every home and village. The product of this industry found a ready market throughout the then known world. It was the lucrative trade with India that induced the seamen of the maritime countries of Europe to find a sea route to India. The trade with India was at first the monopoly of the Portuguese merchants. But soon other nations in Europe participated in it. Ultimately the British succeeded in creating for themselves a vast empire.

In England the Industrial Revolution began in the later part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The British rulers progressively started destroying Indian handicrafts in favour of their own manufacturers. All the raw material was taken from India and products finished in England were shipped to India and were given a ready market here. Deprived of their industry more and more of growing population of India had to rely for all its requirements on their income from land. The size of the farm holdings went on diminishing, till most of them became uneconomic. The question before Gandhi was how to find useful and remunerative work for this vast population. His mental horizon was bound by the economics of colonial rules. The problem of the problems that confronted India during the British Raj was Poverty and Gandhi reacted sharply to the crushing effect and demoralising influence of grinding poverty of the masses of the country. This obvious fact should not be lost sight of in any study, worth the name, of the development doctrines he propounded. Along with the objective background the ethos has to be taken into consideration. Failing this approach pre-possessed feelings and subjective inclinations may blind our vision and lead us far away from an intelligent appreciation of the subject.

### **Aims and Objectives**

After studying this Unit, you should be able to understand

- The Spiritual foundations of Gandhian Development
- The Development and Ethics are inseparable

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## 9.2 MORAL AND SPIRITUAL APPROACH TO DEVELOPMENT

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Gandhi formulated his economic ideas and principles in the context of his design, of an ideal social order; a non violent, non exploitative humanistic and egalitarian society. This social order embodied the fundamental philosophy of his life. He approached all facets of his social order – its economics, its politics from the philosophical premises – truth and non violence – that governed his entire life. It was, therefore impossible for him to produce an idea that would be ethically neutral. When economics is related to this way of life it becomes "Meta Economics". "True economics", Gandhi said, 'never militates against the highest ethical standard, just as all true ethics to be worth its name must at the same time be also good economics. An economics which inculcates Mammon Worship and enable the strong to amass wealth at the expense of the weak, is a false and dismal science. It spells death, True economics on the other hand stands for social justice; it promotes the good of all equally including the weakest, and is indispensable for decent life (Harijan, 20.10.1937). He was not willing to draw any sharp distinction between development and ethics. "I must confess that I do not draw a sharp or any distinction between development and ethics. Economics that hurt the moral well being of an individual or a nation are sinful. Thus the economics that permit one country to prey upon another are immoral" (Young India, 13.10.1921). "That economics is untrue which ignores or disregards moral value. The extension of the law of non violence in economics means nothing less than the introduction of moral values as a factor to be considered in regulating international commerce" (ibid, 26.10.1924).

The fullest statement of his views about ultimate criterion in the development sphere is to be found in his 1916 speech at Muir College, Allahabad. In that speech he declared, "I venture to think that the scriptures of the world are far safer and sounder treatises on laws of economics than many modern text books.... He (Jesus) is himself the "greatest economist of his time" (The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, vol. XIII, pp.311-17).

This emphasis of the ethical aspect distinguishes Gandhian development from that of Smith, Marshall, Marx or Keynes. Take for example, in his Liquidity Preference Theory of Rate of interest, J.M. Keynes argued that rate of interest is determined by demand for the liquidity (cash) in the short period because the supply of liquidity by and large remains constant. He tells us various motives for the demand of money and then the sources for the supply of cash. But he does not tell us whether this particular rate of interest is 'reasonable' or not or what should be the actual rate of interest, which does not exploit any one.

Let us take another example, While discussing the price determination in Perfect Competition, Marshall tells that price can be determined by the demand and supply of any commodity. If the demand is greater and supply is less, then price will be high and vice versa. But he does not tell us whether this price is reasonable or not? There is every possibility and some supplier might have created artificial scarcity to decrease the supply so that the price may increase, or the price determined in this way may be so high that it may be beyond the reach of a common man to purchase that particular good. Marshall is silent over such queries. These conventional ideas are neutral towards the value judgments. This is merely the science of getting rich. But there are many different ways of getting rich. There was a time in Europe when people sought to acquire wealth by poisoning owners of large estates and appropriating their possessions. Now-a-days,

merchants adulterate the food sold to the poor, for example, milk with borax, wheat flour with potato flour, coffee with chicory, butter with fats and so on. This is on the same level as getting rich by poisoning others. "Can we call this either an art or a science of getting rich?" asks Ruskin.

He further argued that "let us now, however, assume that by getting rich, experts merely mean 'getting rich by robbing others'. They should point out that theirs is a science of getting rich by legal or just means. It happens these days that many things which are legal are not just. The only right way therefore, to acquire wealth is to do so justly, and if this is true, we must know what is just. It is not enough to live by the laws of demand and supply. Fish, wolves and rats subsist in that manner. Bigger fish prey on smaller ones, rats swallow insects and wolves devour even human beings. That for them is the law of nature, they know no better. God has endowed man with understanding, with a sense of justice. He must follow these and not think of growing rich by devouring others by cheating others and reducing them to beggary" (Ruskin, 1940, p.18).

That is why men of wisdom have held that where Mammon is God, no one worships the true God. Wealth can not be reconciled with God. God lives only in the homes of poor. Perhaps that is why Gandhi equated God with Daridranarayan. "Daridranarayan is one of the millions of names by which humanity knows God who is unnameable and unfathomable by human understanding, and it means God of the poor, God appearing in the hearts of the poor." Because, for the poor economic is spiritual, you can not make any other appeal to those starving millions. It will fall flat on them. But you take food to them and they will regard you as their God. They are incapable of any other thought." While writing in *Young India*, he poured his heart, "It is good enough to talk of God whilst we are sitting here after a nice breakfast and looking forward to a nicer luncheon, but how am I to talk of God to the millions who have to go without two meals a day? To them God can only appear as bread and butter" (*Young India*, 15.10.1931).

The Mahatma does not ignore the divinity of man which is epitomised in the great maxim that 'a jiva is always shiva': a man is by and large, divine. And in this respect, it is difficult to distinguish between a man and a man. It is from this deep feeling of spirituality and divinity of man that Gandhi derived his development theory.

He approached human problems from an integral outlook of life in which development, ethics, psychology and religion were synthesised. He wanted development to be reduced to the terms of religion and spirituality. But since he was sensitive to the feelings and needs of the masses, he could never stand apart from his people. As has been correctly observed by Frank Moraes, "To him the basic fact of life is that man must eat. Freedom from want is the first article of his creed, and throughout his public life he has worked passionately to free his countrymen from the degradation of this poverty" (Moraes, 1944, p.24). In his own words, "No one has ever suggested that grinding pauperism can lead to anything else than moral degradation. Every human being has a right to live and therefore, to find wherewithal to feed himself and where necessary to cloth and house himself" Satisfaction of basic needs and moral elevation of individuals are not antithetical for him. And that is why he could adopt a spiritual and moral approach to -development.

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### 9.3 STUDY OF MAN

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Adam Smith, the father of modern economics defined economics "as an enquiry into the nature and causes of wealth of nations." Smith has paid his attention exclusively to

wealth. Little attention was paid to man for whom wealth is really meant. Writers like Carlyle and Ruskin condemned this Mammon worship. They accused economics of selfishness and meanness and therefore called it a dismal science. Alfred Marshall removed this shortcoming to a great extent in his definition. According to him, "Economics is a study of man's action in the ordinary business of life; it enquires how he gets his income and how he uses it. Thus, it is on one hand a study of wealth and on the other, and more important side, a part of the study of man" (Marshall, 1949, p.1). Marshall made it clear that although economics still studies wealth but it has a secondary place and the first place being given to man. It is for his sake and for the sake of welfare that wealth is studied. Thus, it becomes a study of material welfare.

L. Robbins offered a more acceptable definition. In his words, "Economics study human behaviour as a relationship between end and scarce means which have alternative uses." He raised three fundamental issues (i) Human wants are unlimited; (ii) Means to satisfy them are limited; and (iii) Means have alternative uses. And because of these, there arises the need to study economics. It teaches us how to get maximum satisfaction from limited resources.

The centre of Gandhi's Thought is man and not the material prosperity or scarcity. He aimed at the development, upliftment and enrichment of human life rather than a higher standard of living with scant respect for human and social values. He wanted to elevate his philosophy from a materialistic base to a higher spiritual plane where human actions were motivated by social objective rather than individualistic and selfish consideration. But it does not mean that he did not give any importance to the economic conditions of man. He was of the confirmed view that economic development must proceed other developments. That is why he gave due importance to the economic activities of an individual. In a speech at Muir College Economic Society, Allahabad he clarified, "By economic progress, I take it, we mean material advancement without limit, and by real progress we mean moral progress which again is the same thing as progress of the permanent element in us. The subject may therefore be stated thus: Does not moral progress increase in the same proportion as material progress? I know that this is a wider proposition than the one before us. But I venture to think that we always mean the large one even when we lay down the smaller" (The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, vol.LXIII, pp.311-12).

The economic activity of a man is concerned with the production of material goods, their exchange, distribution and consumption, these activities are necessary not only for the existence of man but also for his happiness and progress. Man lives in a society and all these activities concern not only the individual in isolation but they create social relations. As a matter of fact, all wealth is socially produced. No Robinson Crusoe on a solitary island, he be a capitalist or a labour can produce wealth. He therefore held that socially produced wealth must be equally divided among all those who are instrumental in producing it.

Gandhi had a total, integrated and an evolving approach at the centre of which was man's whole being in search of knowledge and truth. He rejected such categories as the 'pure economic man' or the pure political man. All facets of man's life can be unified if one set of moral values is applied to them all. If the same moral values are not applied to all human activities the result will be conflict within the individual and in society. Take, for instance, the Marxist idea that the whole of human history is a record of the conflict between economic classes is a partial view. Man has many urges. The economic urge is

one, however, basic it may be. It is true that an individual life would be bleak if he lacked the minimum requirements of a cultured life. But if economic competence is necessary for the happiness and progress of an individual and a group, freedom too is as necessary and so are moral and spiritual values. Christ truly said, "Man does not live by bread alone." But it is also a fact that he cannot live without it either. **Matter** may be less important than the spirit; but in human beings the spirit manifests itself and works through the flesh. The economic activity cannot dispense with moral values is a fact of life. Acharya Kripalani quotes a true story in his 'Gandhi: His Life and Thought'.

A young lady went to a fashionable shop, she purchased a piece of cloth. The price demanded was four times what would have been reasonable. The lady paid the price and went away. The merchant **afterwards** discovered that she had left her purse behind. The purse contained jewellery worth a few thousands. The merchant was very much disturbed. He did not know her address. What was he to do with the purse? After a few days of enquiry he found out the address of the lady and took the purse to her. The lady smiled and said, "You charged me four times the value of the cloth. The excess price could be Rs. 20 or 25; and now you have restored to me my purse which contains jewellery worth a few thousands. How is that? The merchant too smiled and said: 'Madam the price that I charged you was according to my commercial morality. The restoration of the purse in my individual morality, I am not a thief' (Kripalani, 1961, p.367). Such incongruities are found in our every day life. But the old habits, traditions and conventions do not allow purely economic gains to come in the way of man's moral sensitivity and intellectual honesty.

The main purpose of the development should be the happiness of man. Material advancement is only one ingredient in this. Along with it other elements such as moral, spiritual, psychological, etc. should also be taken into consideration. Then and only then a man can be truly happy which can lead to a perfect development of his personality.

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## **9.4 EMPHASIS ON WANTLESSNESS**

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Economic theory deals with the laws and principles which govern the functioning of an economy. An economy exists because of three basic facts: (i) Human wants are unlimited; (ii) Means to satisfy them are limited; (iii) Means have alternative uses. Had the wants been limited or resources unlimited or both, then there would have been no need to study economics. We can satisfy one want for all the times or all the wants for one time but we can not satisfy all the wants for all the times. Therefore, we must decide some way of selecting those wants which are to be satisfied first. In other words we face the problem of allocating scarce resources so as to achieve the greatest possible satisfaction.

However, there is a paradoxical twist in Gandhian method of solving problem of unlimited wants and limited resources. It almost amounts to putting the energy in the reverse gears. Instead of satisfying maximum wants with limited resources, Gandhi advocated reduction of wants. He was of the opinion that wants are the source of pain. Instead of adding to the sum total of human happiness, wants subtract from it to a good deal. In fact, he thinks that maximisation of satisfaction is rather completely inconsistent with the **maximisation** of human wants. A want is a painful experience. That is evident from the fact that we wish to satisfy it and want to get rid of it as soon as possible. We would not have bothered to remove or satisfy it, had it not been painful. So the removal of want is removal of pain and procurement of pleasure. This pleasure is something as satisfaction

or utility. If one wants to get maximum pleasure, one should see to it that all pain is removed and no fresh pain is experienced in future. At least this is the ideal for anyone who wants to achieve maximum pleasure from his limited resources.

J.K. Mehta, a distinguished economist, further elaborated this concept that to satisfy a want is to yield to it. To remove the pain caused by the presence of wants by satisfying them is, therefore, an undignified way of getting pleasure. Instead of obeying the orders of want we can ourselves order the want to quit. When we satisfy a want we make it quiet for the time being. When we order it to quit we do not merely make it quiet we kill it as it were. The process of killing of wants has been called elimination of wants. But wants can be killed by wants. That is why Professor Mehta suggests that stronger wants must be employed to kill the weaker wants. When such a battle is fought all the inferior wants get ultimately killed and one is left with superior wants only. The better among these can, in their turn, be employed to kill the other wants. In this way we can ultimately reach a stage in which only one, the most superior want, would be left. It is only when this stage is reached that we can with impunity satisfy the wants. Once satisfied such wants never recurs. Thus by the process of killing or eliminating wants, we ultimately reach the state of wantlessness a stage in which perfect happiness is experienced.

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## 9.5 DOCTRINE OF NON-POSSESSION

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Gandhi approached this problem from another angle also. "We should not receive any single thing that we do not need," he wrote in 'From Yervada **Mandir**', "We are not always aware of our real needs and most of us improperly multiply our wants and thus unconsciously make thieves of ourselves. If we devote some thought to the subject, we shall find that we can get rid of quite a number of our wants. One who follows the observance of Non-stealing will bring about a progressive reduction of his own wants. Much of the distressing poverty in this world has arisen out of breaches of the principle of non stealing" (Gandhi, 1932, p.14). He further said that the profound truth upon which this observance is based is that God never creates more than what is strictly needed for the moment. Therefore, whoever appropriates more than the minimum that is really necessary for him, is guilty of theft. The propensity to accumulate commodities cramps the soul and degenerates into the morbid desire to make a fetish of external goods of life. The luxury of the ascendant classes therefore makes them morally deprived. The monopolisation of the things needed by all, by a few men at the top, is unjust. Moreover, accumulation is condemnable because it is not possible to be practised by all. Accumulation by a few amounts to the dispossession of the many. Thus the alternative lies in renunciation. To him, renunciation is life. Accumulation spells death. But he classified, "This does not mean that if one has wealth, it should be thrown away and the wife and children should be **turned** out of doors. It simply means that one must give up attachment to these things and dedicate one's all to God and make use of His gifts to serve Him only." He advised the moneyed men to earn their crores (honestly only, of course) but asked them to dedicate themselves to the service of all. For those who wish to follow this way, "The best and most effective mantra is (Tena Tayaketen **Bhunjitha**) (Enjoy thy wealth by renouncing it). Expanded it means: Earn your crores by all means. But understand that your wealth is not yours; it belongs to the people. Take what you require for your legitimate needs and use the remainder for society" (**Harijan**, 01.02.1942).

Thus it is clear that he offered his doctrine of non possession as an indictment of one

of the most powerful drives in modern economic society- the drive for multiplication of wants, fuelled by an insatiable propensity for superfluous or conspicuous consumption.

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## 9.6 ALIENATION

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Gandhi refused to accept the thought that the problem of poverty was a fact of nature and that unless external assistance or government action would be forthcoming, poverty would not be overcome. In order to overcome the twin evils of poverty and unemployment, Gandhi held that self-realisation or **dealienation** is necessary.

He took into account the dual aspect of life i.e. material and spiritual. He considered both mind and body as of equal importance. He did not rule out the fact that all living things first strive for material existence. The idea of better life comes only after the material existence is secured or in other words before there can be good life or spiritual life, there must be life. In reply to Rabindranath Tagore's criticism of Non-Cooperation movement and Spinning Wheel, he wrote, 'When all about me are dying for want of food, the only occupation permissible to me is to feed the hungry.... To a people famishing and idle, the only acceptable form in which God can dare appear is work and promise of food as wages'.

Gandhi- without consciously attempting at systematic theory- explained the phenomena of poverty, unemployment and of economic distress of individual through alienation. He was of the opinion that the more nature was overpowered the more alienated man would become **from** nature. He simultaneously wanted to focus on the relationship between man and his natural environment which would end human exploitations, which in turn is the very cause of exploitation of nature. But to Gandhi **the** alienation of man is as much **from** the environment as from his true self. His true self is what man can discover through the search for truth following the path of non-violence. Man ceaselessly tries to get more and more money through any means. He desperately wants to improve his standard of living. Life has become very fast for him and he lives in fear and insecurity because of the demolition of joint family system. He lives with crime, fraud or assassination as in the West, or in a state of total fear as in the communist countries. Man indulges in heavy smoking, drinking and drugging to relieve tension and frustration which **inturn** further aggregate his problems. To him alienation meant fear, the craze for luxuries and exploitation of man by man.

The term self-alienation seems to suggest some or all of the following points-

1. The division of the self into two conflicting parts was not carried out from the outside but is the result of an action of the self.
2. The division into conflicting parts does not annihilate the unity of the **self**; despite the split, the self is nevertheless a self.
3. Self-alienation is not simply a split into two parts that are equally related to the self as a whole: the implication is that one part of the self has more right to represent the self as a whole, so that by becoming alien to it, the other part becomes alien to the self as a whole.

Though Gandhi did not elaborate these technicalities of alienation, he had a full or total view of man, his spiritual, cultural and social aspects as much as his economic needs. This led him to advocate that machine must adjust to man and not the other way round.



He would not permit imbalance to be created between increase in material production and man's spiritual and cultural needs. He was more concerned with the contradictions created by the way machinery was being used to debase man.

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## **9.7 BREAD LABOUR**

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Bread labour was both philosophy and economics to Gandhi. In a precise sense it means 'that to live man must work'. The work is to be done with physique not by mind. To borrow a terminology from economics Gandhi means by bread labour something like 'productive labour' as explained by Adam **Smith**, the father of modern economics. Strictly speaking, Gandhi would have restricted the meaning of bread labour only to agricultural labour but being conscious of the impracticability probably due to the scarcity of primary factors of production-land, he allowed for undertaking other works as well. He said, "This labour (Bread Labour) can truly be related to agriculture alone. But at present at any rate, every body is not in a position to take it. A person can therefore spin or weave, or take up carpentry or smithery instead of tilling the soil, always regarding agriculture however to be ideal." According to Gandhi, the violation of the bread labour is the root cause of the present economic disequilibrium. He considers it to be the natural law and therefore enjoins even Rabindra and **Raman** to do some manual labour. "It is a tragedy of the first magnitude", he remarks, "that millions have ceased to use their hands as hands. Nature is revenging herself upon us with terrible effect for this criminal waste of the **gift** she has bestowed upon us as human beings". Also, "We are destroying the matchless living machines, i.e. our won bodies, by leaving them to rust and trying to substitute lifeless machinery for them." He extols labour so much that he conceived it as the medium of exchange. He observes "Under my system it is labour which is the current coin, not metal. Any person who can use his labour has that coin is wealthy. He converts it into cloth, he converts his labour into grain. If he wants paraffin oil, which he cannot himself produce, he uses his surplus grain for getting the oil. It is exchange of labour on **free**, fair and equal terms hence it is no robbery, you may reject that this is a reversion to the primitive system of barter. But is not 'all international trade based on the barter system'" (Harijan, 02-11-1934). He regarded manual labour to be the yajna prescribed in the Bhagbadgita and while explaining the dignity of labour he used to quote several verses **from** Gita in support of himself.

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## **9.8 SUMMARY**

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Gandhi and his ideas continue to be enigmatic and yet of continuing interest and debate. He was not a system builder, nor a professional economist. But the insights as they arise **from** his writings and speeches lead to some conceptualisation and visualisation of Gandhi's vision of development, indeed, of society as such. It is so because of Gandhi's intuitive and inward look, pulse on the psychology of the people, the imperative of the situation and convincing as well as smooth, effortless identification with the common people and their hopes and fears, aims and aspirations. The quest among economists, social scientists, environmentalists and concerned citizens all over the world for an alternative model of development has led to renewed and wide ranging interest in Gandhi's ideas and views in this regard.

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## **9.9 TERMINAL QUESTIONS**

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1. Discuss the Spiritual foundations of Gandhian Development.
2. "Development and Ethics are inseparable". Comment.

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## **SUGGESTED READINGS**

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