**India Freedom Struggle**

**History, Qualities**

**Level 2**

**Who Inspired Gandhi?**

*Summary: Mahatma Gandhi was inspired by people as well as books. In this article the author elaborated - very briefly - on those people and books that inspired Gandhi. Raychandbhai and Gopal Krishna Gokhale were seen by Gandhi as his teachers. Tolstoy and Gandhi corresponded regularly. Both had similar views on truth and morality and both had the same heroes - Buddha, Socrates and Mohammed. Tolstoy's book 'The Kingdom of God is within you' overwhelmed Gandhi. Ruskin's book 'Unto this Last' had cast a magic spell on Gandhi so much so that he paraphrased the book as 'Sarvodaya' and decided to teach from it.*

*Article:*

To begin with Gandhi met Raychandbhai (or Shri Rajchandra) immediately on his return from London to India at Bombay. Gandhi was at once convinced that Raychandbhai was a man of great character and learning. He was a real seeker after truth. Gandhi very often found him absorbed in Godly pursuits in the midst of weighty business transactions. Gandhi never saw him lose his state of equipoise. Gandhi enjoyed the closest association with him. Above all Raychandbhai's impression as a spiritual guide on Gandhi's mind was unrivalled and Gandhi implicitly believed that Raychandbhai would never willingly lead him astray and in turn Raychandbhai would always confide in Gandhi his inner most thoughts. In Gandhi's moments of spiritual crisis, as in South Africa, Raychandbhai was Gandhi's refuge.

Gopal Krishna Gokhale, the rare gem among contemporary moderate political leaders, welcomed Gandhi as if they were renewing an old friendship. Gokhale seemed like the Ganga to Gandhi where one could have a refreshing bath in the holy river. In the sphere of politics the place that Gokhale occupied in Gandhi's heart was absolutely unique. Gokhale embodied the goal of spiritualizing (i.e. values of life) in politics and Gandhi steadfastly adhered to it by enriching it. It is significant to remember that Gandhi has devoted seven chapters exclusively to Gokhale in his autobiography. Finally on his return from South Africa to India in 1915, Gandhi looked upon Gokhale as a sure guide whenever Gandhi was in difficulty and that took a great load off Gandhi's mind.

Tolstoy of Russia was the only one with whom Gandhi had some prolonged correspondence. Both Tolstoy and Gandhi worshipped in the common shrine and the same heroes - i.e. Buddha's Light of Asia, Socrates, Mohammed, Upanishads, Gita. Both of them were not mere philosophers, but teachers of humanity who endeavored hard to practise what they preached. Gandhi described himself with characteristic candour as Tolstoy's disciple in his letters to Tolstoy. Tolstoy wrote to Gandhi emphasizing the almost pivotal significance of Gandhi's Satyagraha in South Africa. Tolstoy was the prophet of the latter half of the nineteenth century and Gandhi of the first half of the twentieth century. Finally Tolstoy's "The Kingdom of God is within you" overwhelmed Gandhi. It left an abiding impression on Gandhi. Tolstoy manifested independent thinking, profound morality and truthfulness.

Ruskin, the English thinker, was perhaps the most powerful source of inspiration when Gandhi himself described Ruskin's book, "Unto This Last" as "the magic spell". Gandhi was offered Ruskin's book by Gandhi's intimate friend Mr. Polak and Gandhi read it on his train journey from Johannesburg to Durban. The book gripped Gandhi so much that its teaching of the book appealed to Gandhi instantaneously and Gandhi paraphrased it into Gujarati as "Sarvodaya" (The welfare of all).

Gandhi learnt the teachings of the book to be:

1. The good of the individual is contained in the welfare of all.
2. All have same right of earning their livelihood from their work.
3. That a life of labour is the life worth living.

Gandhi read the Gita for the first time in England, i.e. Sir Edwin Arnold's "The song Celestial", and it made a deep impression on his mind and Gandhi regarded the Gita par excellence for the knowledge of Truth and it afforded him invaluable help in his moments of gloom. The Gita became Gandhi's life long companion and guide, especially the last eighteen verses of the second chapter of the Gita. Gandhi derived the Gospel of selfless action or duty from the Gita. His commentary on the Gita reflects his life and mission.

Gandhi read the Bible, especially "The New Testament" and "The Sermon on the Mount" which went straight to his heart. The compassion and renunciation of Jesus appealed greatly to Gandhi.

*Source http://www.mkgandhi.org/articles/inspiration.htm*