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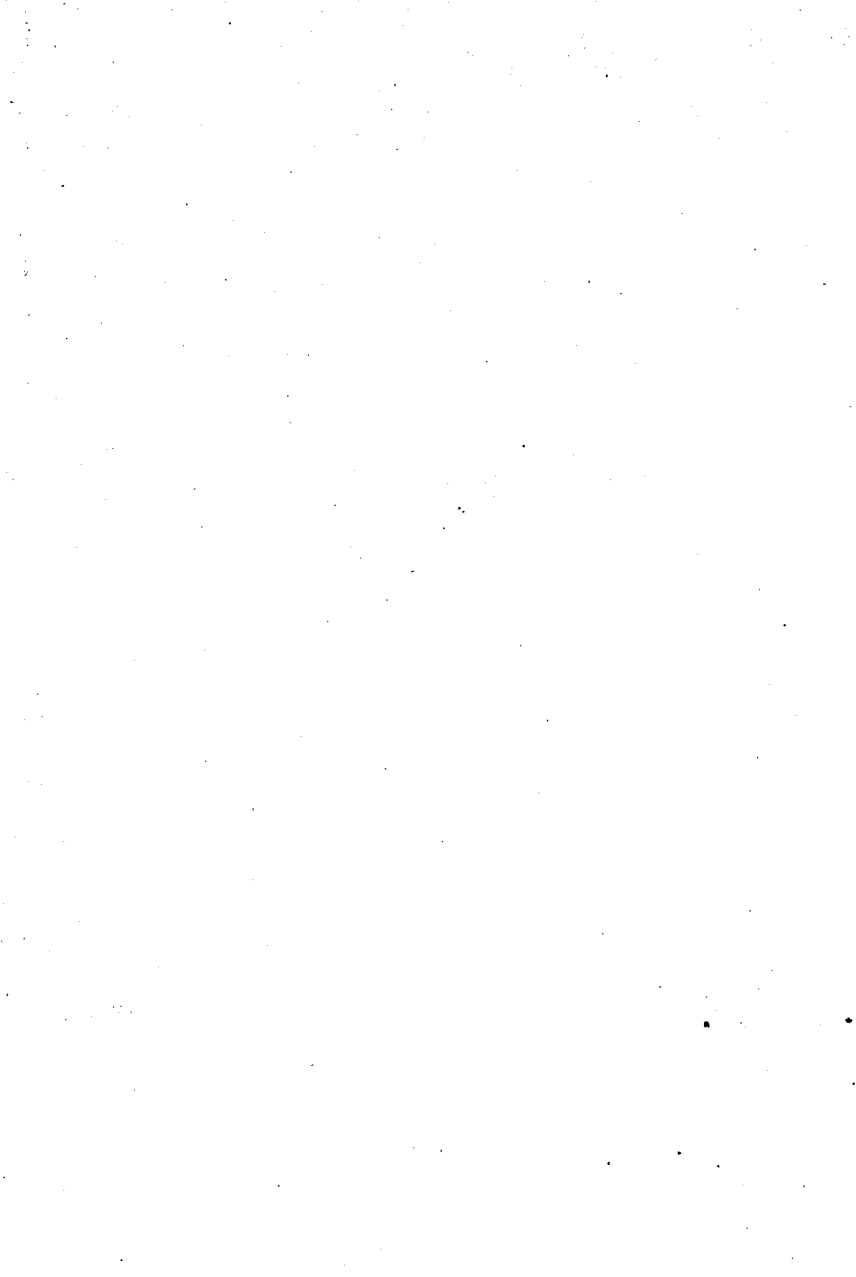
# RUSKIN AND GANDHI

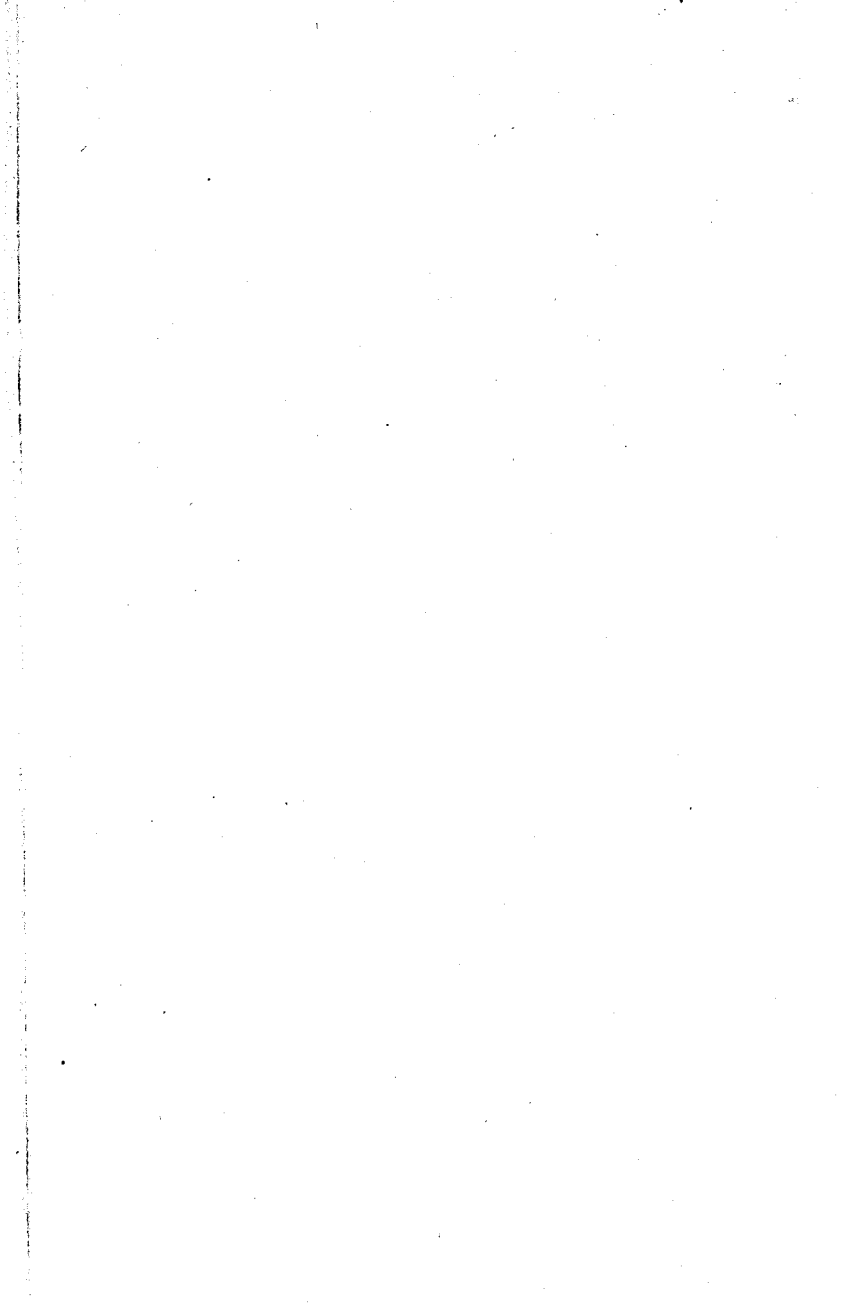


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—Dr. V. LAKSHMI MENON







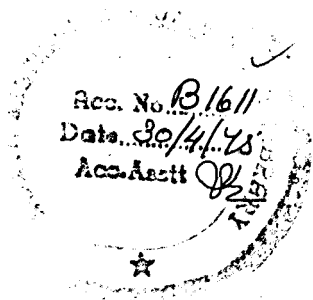
# RUSKIN AND GANDHI

Dr. V. LAKSHMI MENON

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प्रकाशक : मंत्री, सर्व सेवा संघ,  
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## FOREWORD

There are definite signs that Gandhi and his life, thought and action would be studied more and more by people and a vast amount of interpretative literature would be produced as days pass by.

Here is a study of the impact of Ruskin, especially his **Unto This Last** on Gandhi in the early days.

Though this study mainly emphasises the influence of Ruskin, it has also tried to trace other influences of western writers.

Gandhi kept his mind always open to good things from whichever direction and whichever persons and whatever religions they came. The influence of Ruskin which Gandhi generously acknowledged is obviously very important. In fact, the idea of Sarvodaya is

already implicit and reflected in **Unto This Last**. I am glad that it has been possible for Sarva Seva Sangh, Rajghat, Varanasi, to bring out this brief but good study of Ruskin and Gandhi.

There is no doubt that both Ruskin and Gandhi were great idealists ; but Gandhi never cared for any ideals which he could not immediately translate into action in his own life. That is how as soon as he saw that Ruskin's ideas were really good, he set about establishing the Phoenix settlement. We know how he translated the ideas of **Unto This Last** into a living symbol of human endeavour where bread-labour, dignity of manual work and equality reigned supreme.

—R. R. Diwakar.

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# RUSKIN AND GANDHI



## CHAPTER ONE

### THE MAGIC SPELL OF A BOOK

#### 1

In 1904 Gandhi read Ruskin's *Unto this Last* while on his way from Johannesburg to Durban. This book had been given to him at the station by Mr. Henry Polak 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. I determined to change my life in accordance with the ideals of the book."<sup>1</sup>

This was the first book of Ruskin Gandhi had ever read, and it brought about an instantaneous and practical transformation in his life. He translated it later into Gujarati entitling it *Sarvodaya*.

The book gave an organic unity to the long-maturing ideas in Gandhi's mind. "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 every one is not evolved in an equal measure.

The teachings of *Unto this Last* I understood 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, in as much as all have the right of earning their livelihood from their work.
3. That a life of labour, i.e., the life of the tiller of the soil and the handicraftsman is the life worth living.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE PARABLE OF THE VINEYARD

#### 1

The famous parable of the Vineyard ( St. Matthew XX : 1-14 ) ending with the lines " I will give Unto this Last even as unto thee " supplied Ruskin the title of his book.

Since a study of the parable is necessary, it is quoted below :

1. For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an house-holder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard.
2. And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard.
3. And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the market place.
4. And said unto them ; Go ye also into the vineyard and whatsoever is right, I will give you. And they went their way.
5. Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise.
6. And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, why stand ye here all the day idle ?
7. They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard ; and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive.
8. So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first.

## CHAPTER THREE

### UNTO THIS LAST

#### 1

In the previous chapter it has been stated that Ruskin brought the whole content of his mind to bear upon *Unto this Last*. On what lines did his mind evolve ?

“The first step”, says Ruskin, “to the understanding either of the mind or position of a great man ought, I think, to be an enquiry into the elements of his early instruction and the mode in which he was affected by the circumstances of surrounding life.”<sup>1</sup> *Praeterita* and *Fors Clavigera* by Ruskin contain his autobiography. Brought up in an atmosphere of rigid discipline by his mother Margaret who had been a pattern girl in Mrs. Rice’s Academy<sup>2</sup> and a follower of Wesley, Ruskin soon imbibed the Wesleyan principle of ethical ordering of day to day life and the zeal to reform others. “I have with deeper gratitude to chronicle”, says Ruskin, “what I owe to my mother for the resolutely consistent lessons which so exercised me in the Scriptures as to make every word of them familiar to me in my ear in habitual music, yet in that familiarity revered, as transcending all thought, and ordaining all conduct.”<sup>3</sup> The Bible became the backbone of his thought and style. And when baby John, seated at the window, started his sermon to the people outside in these words, “People, be dood, if you are dood, Dod will love you.”<sup>4</sup> we see in him the essence of his lineage, and his future personality in the making.

John, in “muslin and sash”, could suggest to Northcote “the blue hills”<sup>5</sup> as the background for his portrait. His devoted father James, an honest merchant and a man of “high natural

## CHAPTER FOUR

### WEALTH

#### 1

Ruskin develops his Political Economy of Wealth as follows :  
“Three material things are not only useful but essential to life—Pure Air, Water, Earth.” This implies that the satisfaction of economic needs is vital to man. “Three immaterial things” adds Ruskin, after the manner of Wordsworth, “Admiration, Hope and Love are not only useful but essential to life.”<sup>1</sup> The term “immaterial” is used in the sense of “spiritual”, that is to say, “not material”. According to him, “Admiration is the power of discerning and taking delight in what is beautiful in visible form and lovely in human character; Hope is the recognition by true foresight of better things to be reached thereafter by ourselves or by others and Love is both of family and neighbour, faithful and satisfied...”<sup>2</sup> Man doth not live by bread alone. “Is not the life more than meat and the body than raiment?” ( St. Matthew VI : 25 ).

Ruskin defines wealth in terms of an integrated personality and the greatest wealth in terms of “the largest number of such personalities.”<sup>3</sup> “The final consummation of wealth is in the producing of as many as possible of full-breathed, bright-eyed, happy-hearted men.” Nourishing them is also a form of wealth; for, “that country is the richest which nourishes the greatest number of noble and happy human beings.”<sup>4</sup> The epithets “noble” and “happy” refer to the state of the mind of an integrated personality.

Then follows a flash of Ruskin’s spirit, “Life is Wealth, life including all its powers of Love, Joy and Admiration.”<sup>5</sup> The

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SARVODAYA

#### 1

The over-all impression one gets out of a study of the early formative influences on Gandhi is their highly ethical nature which conditioned the evolution of his mind. In this respect he compels comparison with Ruskin. "The Story of my Experiments with Truth" by Gandhi contains his autobiography.

The principal tenet of Vaishnavism, that Love more than intelligence is the road leading to self-realisation<sup>1</sup>, which Gandhi had imbibed from his Vaishnavite family blossomed into a conviction that "Love never claims but gives."<sup>2</sup> Gandhi found this lesson best illustrated in the Ramayana. Gandhi's concept of love began to widen.

That the surrender of the ego was vital to the discipline of the mind was a lesson he learnt from his mother and Gandhi became an apostle of morality. He began to regard every human action as a striving to put himself into right relation with God. Thus every action became an "Experiment with Truth."<sup>3</sup> Love took the form of truth and truth began to embrace within itself celibacy, non-telling of lies, control of the palate and passions, forbearance and other allied qualities. Gandhi's father initiated him into the beauty of Truth through Ahimsa. Truth became the sovereign principle and it encompassed within itself love, morality, and Ahimsa.

The affinity between Wesleyan ethics and Vaishnavite ethics is brought home to us. Both aim at making the principle of love a living force in our day-to-day life and both emphasise the significance of morality.

## CHAPTER SIX

### EDUCATION

#### 1

“Within the human heart”, says Ruskin, “there is always an instinct for all its duties—an instinct which you cannot quench, but only warp and corrupt if you withdraw it from its true purpose ; as there is the intense instinct of love which rightly disciplined maintains all the sanctities of life and mis-directed undermines them.”<sup>1</sup>

Gandhi voices forth a similar idea in these words, “one realises the bond of duty because there is bond of love and this results from the culture of emotions through education.”<sup>2</sup>

Education is the discipline of the inherent instincts. While Gandhi uses the term “Non-violence” for the fullness of love, Ruskin uses the term “sensation” or “passion”, and says, “being human creatures, it is good for us : nay, we are only human in so far as we are sensitive, and our honour is precisely in proportion to our passion.”<sup>3</sup> Ruskin and Gandhi give primary importance to education in their construction programmes.

Like Rousseau, they take into account the child’s essential nature and insist that education must begin with the child. Gandhi’s words to Madame Montessori are significant. “You have very truly remarked that if we are to reach real peace in this world, we shall have to begin with the children. If they grow up in their natural innocence, we shall grow from love to love and peace to peace until at last all corners of the world are covered with that peace and love for which the whole world is hungering.”<sup>4</sup>

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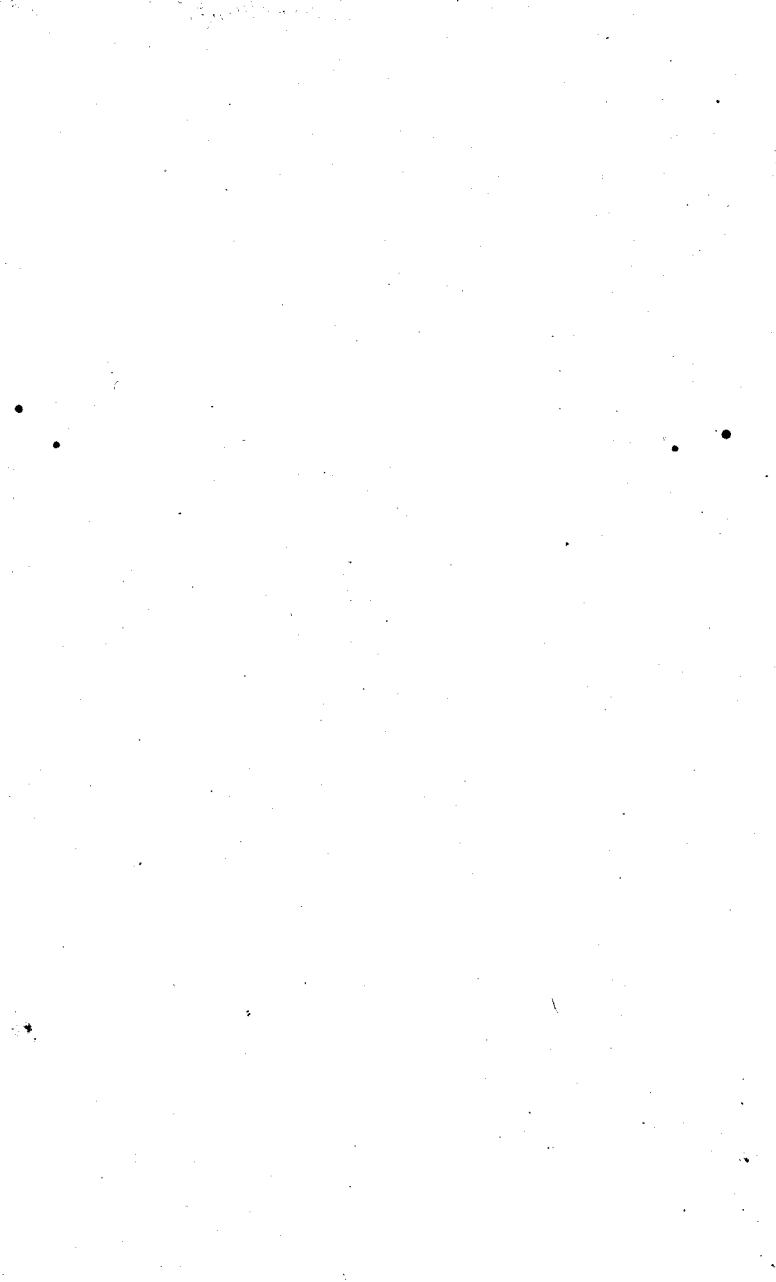
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