1. Examine the purpose and aim in studying Gandhian Thought.

Ans: Gandhi believed in the unity of human life, which is a synthetic whole. It cannot be divided into separate, watertight compartments: religious, moral, political, economic, social, individual and collective. All the seemingly separate segments are but different facets of man’s life. They act and react upon one another. In reality, there can be no problems that are purely moral, economic, political, social, individual or collective. They are inextricably intertwined.

The division of human life into different compartments is often undertaken to facilitate analysis and study. The artificial individual thus created has, however, no existence in real life. Any knowledge derived from the study of such an individual will be partial and lopsided. It will not be true to the integrated facts of life. If relied and acted upon, it will create in the individual a split personality and in the social group a state of imbalance. Analysis and study are not the ends of human life. Life, individual and collective, is meant to be lived. Study and resultant knowledge are useful only in so far as they help man to act correctly and live well and worthily. Every seer, prophet or reformer, seeks to find an integrated way of life.

If life cannot be artificially divided in actual practice and if it is to be lived well and worthily, it must be regulated in accordance with a plan or an integrated scheme. It must be guided by certain basic principles and values. Bereft of them it would lack direction and purpose. Human conduct is largely social conduct, if it lacks direction and purpose, no expectations for the future can be built on it. Under such circumstances there is bound to be uncertainty. If life is a unity, the principles and values guiding it, must also be properly unified and integrated. They must also form a coherent system.

Gandhi’s own life was lived in conformity with certain basic principles and was, therefore, integrated and co-ordinated. It made a harmonious whole. His teachings and schemes of reform also reflect the same integration and co-ordination. There is a basic unity of purpose and aim. This unity, however, is not always apparent to a superficial student of his life and his speeches and writings. The elements of the unity are there, but they have not been reduced to a system. Gandhi himself never attempted a systematisation of his thought. Like many of the old reformers and prophets, he was content to act in a given situation and solve life’s problems, as they arose or presented themselves to him, in the light of his basic moral principles. Like them he left the task of logical ordering and systematisation to others. The solutions he offered to the problems that confronted him, the country and even the world, were practical and often coloured by the times and circumstances in which they arose.

2. Explain the essence of John Ruskin’s “Unto This Last” and the nature of influences on Gandhi.

Ans: 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 a

There is a bitter denunciation of the accepted practices. 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