**Question: Discuss Gandhi’s critique of Western Civilization.**

**Answer:** M.K. Gandhi’s critique of Western civilization is expressed in his book *Hind Swaraj* which he wrotein 1909 on his return voyage from London to South Africa*.* By that time, the British were firmly rooted in the Indian soil and they were spreading their influence in all aspects of life. The introduction of railways, legal system, medicine and education had begun to change the nature of Indian society. Gandhi examined the nature of British colonialism and in the process, he realized that the real problem lies with the Western civilization itself. According to Gandhi, modern Western civilisation is characterised by the many negative features like greed, aggression, colonialism, exploitation, extravagance and luxury, uncontrolled individualism and vulgar materialism, immorality, valueless and commercial education, and so on. He believed that Indians were distancing themselves from their civilisation which was essentially spiritual and, instead, moving towards the material richness on which the Western civilisation was based. This in his opinion was the inner and fundamental cause for India losing its freedom. In *Hind Swaraj*, therefore, he actively countered Western civilisation – and most of the values it stood for – with words, symbols, concepts, traditions, and values which are essentially Indian.

Firstly, Gandhi was against the modern Western ideal of the nation-state. Gandhi asserted that violent nationalism, otherwise known as imperialism, was a curse; non-violent nationalism was a necessary condition for civilised life. Against the aggressive concept of nationalism in the West, Gandhi proposed a concept of people’s Swaraj or self-rule based on truth and non-violence. Gandhi argues that parliamentary democracy was ineffective and that Swaraj should be a superior form of government which would be self-regulating, in which people's own spiritual progress would ultimately eliminate the need for a large government.

Secondly, Gandhi was thoroughly convinced that industrialisation as it manifested in the West was simply devastating for India. Not only did industrialism destroy the foundation of India’s village economy, it was also harmful to the dignity of labour in the way it exploited workers. His alternative revolved around his concern for providing profitable employment to all those who were capable. He argued that the way to take work to the villagers was not through mechanisation but through revival of the industries they have traditionally followed. His support for traditional crafts was not based on conservative reasoning, but on solid economic grounds in the sense that it was an alternative model of economic development that was suited to the Indian reality.

Thirdly, Western civilization was mostly focused on improving material comforts, but it had nothing to offer in the way of moral advancement. For instance, it resulted in improved housing structures for humans, improved clothing, and the development of advanced weapons and machines, such as ploughs, printing presses, and so on. However, in working to improve the lives of humans, Western civilization had pushed people deeper into materialism and the pleasures money could buy, leading to an increase in idleness, diseases, greed and dissatisfaction.

To conclude, Gandhi was critical of pursuit of materialism, opposed big machinery, and favoured, on the contrary, a life of labour for everyone in the society. But it would be erroneous to think that Gandhi rejected ideas from the modern West and remained uninfluenced by it altogether. Of course, he was both selective and innovative when it came to borrowing from the West. He was aware that there were elements in modern civilisation, like democratic political philosophy, that could be useful to India. In the preface to the English edition of Hind Swaraj, he even urged his countrymen to adopt such positive aspects of modern civilisation to drive out the English.