

GANDHI'S ATTITUDE TO RELIGION

by

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DEDICATION

With great love and satisfaction do I dedicate my thesis on Gandhi's Attitude to Religion to my wife Grace and children Holly, Lily, Joy and Jessy who have encouraged and helped me in their own big and small ways to bring this 'labour of love' to a successful completion.

ABSTRACT

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In this close analysis of Gandhi's attitude to religion, we find that he shares very closely the Hindu concept of the nature of God as an indefinable Supreme Being rather than a person. Religion is basically a process of self-realization of the oneness of all essential realities or atmans with God. Salvation is the ultimate assimilation of every reality into the supreme reality. Differing, however from the traditional Hindu thinkers, Gandhi introduces a qualified notion of religious eclecticism, qualified because, while saying that all religions are good, Gandhi holds strongly to his Hinduism in all its details. Religious tolerance rather than religious eclecticism expresses this idea better. What is unique about Gandhi is that he has made a supreme effort to put his religious convictions into practice in all the monumental activities of his life, whether it be to gain political independence for India or to bring about a social, economic and religious renaissance for its people.

INTRODUCTION

MÓHANDAS KARAMCHAND GANDHI affectionately called by his countrymen 'The Father of the Indian Nation' could be more adequately designated as one of the greatest seekers after truth the world has ever known. He called the story of his life 'The Story of My Experiments with Truth'. It was a continuous search for truth and the application of this truth to every detail of his life that cast its imprint on almost all that concerned India and the Indian people well over half a century. During this period the all round resurgence of the Indians on the political, religious, social and economic fields seemed to have derived more from Gandhi than from any one else in India. In every field of activity where Gandhi set to work, he seemed to have been motivated by one purpose, namely that truth should come out victorious. 'Truth alone is real and truth will win in the end' was his motto in life. In all the evils that he saw around him in India and all over the world, he found the negation of truth and the supremacy of falsehood as the ultimate cause. When he fought for political freedom for India and for economic and social resurgence for its people, it was for the victory of truth over falsehood that he really fought.

that falsehood he saw in the form of political slavery and the resulting economic and social decadence of a whole nation. But in all his struggles it was his conviction that he should not swerve from the path of truth that he was trying to establish everywhere. (App. I.) *

When we analyse Gandhi's attitude to religion in the coming pages, our attention will be focused on the following questions. What was his concept of God? What was the driving force behind his life struggle to gain independence for his country? We will also consider other questions like, what was predominant in Gandhi? Gandhi the political hero? Gandhi the religious reformer? Or was it Gandhi the philosopher? Or again was it Gandhi the seeker after truth? Another ticklish question that needs answering would be, what was the great secret of the seeming paradox of Gandhi's life where an apparent philosopher, a deep religious thinker, is also a successful politician? The general feeling is that politics and religious convictions, especially those of the nature that Gandhi held, would not mix properly without a considerable degree of compromising of principles on both sides, with ultimately the religious principles being sacrificed on the altar of political expediency. Was this really the case with Gandhi? Did he succeed in both the fields? Was his success a balanced one that did not sacrifice any one

*Brief account of the life of Gandhi.

of them for the other? Did Gandhi look for immediate results at all costs or was he prepared to wait for the ultimate victory of truth even if it meant waiting and working with greater patience?

Finally, what kind of Hinduism did he preach and practice. We hear of a high degree of religious tolerance and religious freedom taught and practiced by Gandhi. Did this mean that his own Hindu religious beliefs were watered down to some modern form of free thinking in religious matters or was it something of a typically Gandhian mixture of orthodoxy with modern religious free thinking.

All the above points will be examined and discussed through the primary sources in almost all cases leaving aside opinions and comments from secondary sources. Unlike many primary sources, Gandhi's utterances are not voiced through systematically published books; they are scattered through most of his speeches, discussions, and periodic publications of articles, all of which were posthumously published together by his followers. Repetition of ideas are frequent in this publication. Because Gandhi spoke and wrote for the general public, his ideas and teachings have been sufficiently well explained and clarified. Consequently there will be a prevalence of frequent quotations

in the present treatise followed by personal comments and criticisms. These self evident quotations are constantly used to explain and support Gandhi's views on the various topics of our discussion. They are used also to answer the various questions we have raised above. The general approach is to express Gandhi's opinions on God, religion and related ideas through his own words.*

CHAPTER I

GANDHI'S CONCEPT OF GOD

Gandhi's Idea of God

Gandhi's concept of the Supreme Being is that it is an indefinable something. God is more of an abstraction than of a definite personality. This is what he says about God's nature and our way of coming to know Him.

I have not seen Him, neither have I known Him. I have made the world's faith my own, and as my faith is ineffaceable, I regard that faith as amounting to experience. However, as it may be said that to describe faith as amounting to experience is to tamper with truth, it may perhaps be more correct to say that I have no word for characterizing my belief in God. (1)

However the common man's intellect will not find much satisfaction with just an 'indefinable something', it has to be fed with more 'definable something' even when it struggles to bring within its grasp the very infinity of God. God is an indefinable something, a mysterious power pervading everything. But man can feel Him, thinks Gandhi. God cannot be seen but He makes himself felt. In Gandhi's own words,

(1) HOP., p. 102

It is this unseen power which makes itself felt and yet defies all proof, because it is so unlike all that I perceive through my senses. (2)

Even though it is possible to reason out the existence of God in a limited way, it is safer and more natural to approach God through the heart rather than through the intellect, through faith rather through reason.

This belief in God has to be based on faith which transcends reason. Indeed, even the so-called realization has at bottom an element of faith without which it cannot be sustained. In the very nature of thing it must be so. Who can transgress the limitation of His being? I hold that complete realization is impossible in this embodied life. Nor is it necessary. A living immovable faith is all that it requires for reaching the full spiritual heights attainable by human being. God is not outside this earthly case of ours. Therefore, exterior proof is not much avail, if any at all. We must never fail to perceive Him through the senses, because He is beyond them. We can feel Him, if we will but withdraw ourselves from the senses. The divine music is incessantly going on within ourselves, but the loud senses drown the delicate music, which is unlike and infinitely superior to anything we can perceive or hear with our senses. (3)

However Gandhi does not altogether exclude the ability of reason to find God. The following quotations from his writings will indicate his attitude to the nature of God.

(2) M.L., p. 21

(3) M.L., pp. 22, 23

I do dimly perceive that whilst everything around me is ever-changing, ever-dying, there is underlying all that change, a Living Power that is changeless, that holds all together, that creates, dissolves and recreates. That informing Power or Spirit is God. And since nothing else I see merely through the senses can or will persist, He alone is. (4)

Gandhi defends his view that the heart is a better guide to God than reason, by saying that the philosopher's God is of no practical value to anybody, especially to the common man.

He is no God who merely satisfies the intellect, if He ever does. God to be God must rule the heart and transform it. He must express Himself in every smallest act of His votary. This can only be done through a definite realization, more real than the five senses can ever produce. Sense perceptions can be, often are, false and deceptive, however real they may appear to us. Where there is realization beyond the senses it is infallible. It is proved not by extraneous evidence but in the transformed conduct and character of those who have felt the real presence of God within. Such testimony is to be found in the experiences of an unbroken line of prophets and sages in all countries and climes. To reject this evidence is to deny oneself. (5)

But faith goes beyond reason and is a better path to God than reason.

Yes, there are subjects where reason cannot take us far and we have to accept things on faith. Faith then does not contradict reason but transcends it. Faith is a kind of sixth sense which works in cases which are without the purview of reason. (6)

(4) MH., p.22

(5) SB., p.9

(6) HT., Vol. IV, pp.167, 168

4

What is this God Like?

To me God is Truth and love: God is ethics and morality: God is fearlessness. God is the Source of Light and Life and yet He is above and beyond all these. God is conscience. He is even the atheism of the atheist.... He transcends speech and reason.... He is a person to those who need His touch. He is the purest essence. He simply 'is' to those who have faith. He is all things to all men. He is in us and yet above and beyond us. He is long-suffering. He is patient but He is also terrible. With Him ignorance is no excuse. And with all He is ever forgiving for He always gives us the chance to repent. He is the greatest democrat the world knows, for He leaves us 'unfettered' to make our own choice between evil and good. He is the greatest tyrant ever known, for He often dashes the cup from our lips and under the cover of free will leaves us a margin so wholly inadequate as to provide only mirth for Himself.... Therefore Hinduism calls it all His sport. (7)

This is a very global, all comprehensive picture of God. Picture Him any way you want and He will respond to your fancies. Thus Gandhi's concept of God, like the concept of Hinduism itself, is so malleable that all sorts of divine images are possible. If any definition is attempted, God is an undefinable Power or a concept.

God is not a person.... God is the force. He is pure and undefiled consciousness. He is eternal and yet, strangely enough, are not able to derive either benefit or shelter in the all-pervading living presence.... This living force which we call God can be found, if we know and follow His law leading to the discovery of Him, in us.
(8)

(7) MGP., Vol. 1, pp. 421, 422

(8) MGP., Vol. 1, p. 599

In keeping with his Hindu belief in the nature of God, Gandhi reassures us that God really is our soul, the atman that has achieved moksha.

God exists, and yet does not. He does not in any literal sense. The soul or the atman that has attained moksha or salvation is God and therefore omniscient. The true meaning of bhakti or devotion is search for the atman. When the atman realizes itself, bhakti is transformed into jnana or knowledge. (9)

So God is within us and our constant effort should be to realize His presence in us. Continues Gandhi:-

Krishna, Rama and others were divine incarnations, but we too, can be like them when immense punnya or virtue has accrued to us. The atmans about to attain moksha are so many divine incarnations. We need not believe in their perfection while yet alive. It is difficult to say who was the greatest among Krishna, Rama, the Buddha and Jesus. Their achievements differ, because they lived in different times and under different circumstances. In point of character alone the Buddha was the greatest. But who can say? They have been described by their devotees according to their own inclinations. (10)

As for the nature of these avathars or incarnations, Gandhi does not think that these avathars are any more gods than we are. We are all on the same road to divinity, only the avathars have advanced a little or much more on this path of divinity, depending on how far we have advanced in this respect. But they are a necessity at certain times because they are better qualified to guide humanity at the

times when they are most needed. We are no substitutes for them. Gandhi says:

Avathar is and will remain a necessity. It is only when people are in utter despair and when immorality is wide spread that a belief in avathar comes to prevail. A small number following normal morality in midst of a wicked majority looks for support. In a situation of this kind, a man of great moral strength, who has no fear of the wicked, but of whom the wicked stands in fear, is looked upon as an avathar after his death, or even during his life. (11)

This above makes one wonder if Gandhi himself would be an avathar destined to guide the Indian people in one of the greatest periods of their history. His countrymen thought so and even erected temples in his honour while he was alive. But Gandhi never thought of himself as anything but the humblest of the humblest. He was, one 'reduced to a zero', 'the last among his fellowmen', 'one who has become sick of the adoration of the unthinking multitude', 'one who would feel certain of his ground if he was spat upon by everybody', and the one 'who has no desire for prestige'. (12)

The Definition of God.

When he tries to give a clear definition of God Gandhi's idea sounds something like the 'Iam Who Am' of the Old Testament definition of God, or like the

'Deus Est Esse' of St. Thomas Aquinas. God can be defined in many ways, because there are innumerable aspects of Him. But for Gandhi the best definition of God is that He is Truth. (*) "But I worship Him as Truth only". (13)

Gandhi further analyses the above definition by pointing out that God has as many names as there are creatures and therefore one could say that God is nameless. He uses the same logic while pointing out that God may be considered formless since He has many forms, and speechless since he expresses himself in innumerable ways. He goes on to point out that he finds the same type of diversity in other religions and therefore, he agrees with all definitions of God; but for himself he has come to the conclusion that the best definition is 'God is Truth'.

Later on Gandhi reversed this position a little and said that Truth is God and finally towards the end of his life he came to the conclusion that God and Truth are convertible terms. From this of course Gandhi passed on to his other conclusion that truth is goodness and falsehood is evil. Therefore evil in any shape or form is merely the negation of truth. Therefore again, when Gandhi

(*) Truth with a capital T is identical with the Supreme Being; otherwise it is only a quality applicable to various facts.

fought his religious, political, social or economic battles he was merely trying to establish the reign of truth in these fields where there was a lot of negation of truth existing.

For me, God and Truth are convertible terms, and if any one told me that God was the God of untruth or torture, I would decline to worship Him. (14) Truth is God gives me the greatest satisfaction. (15)

If God is Truth, why is it that people fight in the name of Truth or God or religion? Gandhi answers this very vital question by stating that imperfect human beings understand truth in different ways. It is unfortunate that they fight to defend their way of understanding Truth; Gandhi would tell them to be tolerant of one another's views. Gandhi's trend of argument is as follows. The human mind works through innumerable media. The evolution of the human mind is not the same for all. It follows that what may be truth for one may be untruth for another. Hence those who have made these experiments have come to the conclusion that there are certain conditions to be observed in making those experiments.

It is because we have at the present moment everybody claiming the right of conscience without going through any discipline whatsoever that there is so much untruth being delivered to a bewildered world. Gandhi

(14) *MT.*, Vol. 111, pp. 174, 177. (15) *Ibid.*

concludes,

All that I can in true humility present to you is that Truth is not to be found by anybody who has not got an abundant sense of humility. If you would swim on the bosom of the ocean of Truth you must reduce yourself to a zero. (16)

Therefore humility is the foundation of truth, and self discipline remains the only passage to truth.

Truth is relative. Its closeness to the absolute depends on the degree of self discipline and humility acquired by the seeker after truth. Whereas God is indefinable by His very infinite nature, truth is definable.

Gandhi defines truth as:

That which you believe to be true at this moment, and that is your God. If man worships this relative truth he is sure to attain the Absolute Truth. (17)

Therefore it is clear that Gandhi makes a distinction between relative truth and Absolute Truth, the latter is identified with God, whereas the former may be defined as your degree of comprehension of the Absolute Truth or God.

Truth is our supreme guide in life. After one has tried his best to find out truth, one should do one's duty without worrying about results. His destiny is in a way almost completely guided by God, who overrides all man's plans.

The Meaning of Moksha.

Moksha is the acquisition of the Absolute Truth. This Truth is total and all-embracing. It is indescribable because it is God. All else is either false or true only in a relative sense. The so-called worldly realities are shadows of the Absolute Reality of God. Unlike the common understanding that moksha comes after death, Gandhi thinks that this state of moksha can be achieved even before death.

He, therefore, who understands truth follows nothing but truth in thought, speech and action, comes to know and gains the seer's vision of the past, the present, and the future. He attains the moksha though still encased in physical frame. "God is one and in that oneness mankind is also one in its totality". (18)

Gandhi thinks of himself as a struggling, striving, erring, imperfect soul. He can progress only by experimenting upon himself and others. God and humanity form into one absolute unity, like one soul animating many bodies, or like many rays emanating from the same sun. Because of this says Gandhi, he can not detach himself from any part of humanity. He claims identity with the best and the worst of mankind.

God as the Dispenser of Rewards or Punishments.

Christianity and most other religions teach us

(18) CMO., Vol. XXI, p.473.

that the world and God are separate realities, and that depending on the merits or demerits we have acquired here on earth, God will reward or punish us after death. We had seen that the moksha of Gandhi's concept is attainable even before death when an individual reaches a sufficient degree of the vision of the Absolute Truth. We can grasp only a part of the meaning of moksha; the rest has to be experienced. It all comes as result of man's efforts at comprehending Truth. "At any rate" says Gandhi, "God is no dispenser of rewards or punishments, nor is He an active agent". (19) Moksha is a continued process of the realization of Truth and the result is total deliverance from suffering and the succession of births and deaths. The Atman that has reached moksha has lost his identity in God. He is simply assimilated into the Divinity.

God as light and benevolence.

God is a supremely benevolent being. Evil does not and cannot stain Him. To establish this Gandhi argues the following simple way.

I can see that in the midst of death life persists, in the midst of untruth, truth persists, in the midst of darkness light persists. Hence I gather that God is Life, Truth, Light. He is Love. He is the Supreme God. (20)

(19) CWG., Vol. XII, p.42

(20) MN., p.22

In thinking of God as constituting the whole of reality and the only reality, and everything outside of Him as merely shadows, Gandhi naturally, does not place man in any superior or privileged position. The saying that man is the crown of creation does not have much meaning for Gandhi. He holds that the dumb creatures, the elements of nature and the heavenly bodies like the sun and the moon and the stars are far superior to man.

Those who believe in God's guidance, says Gandhi, just do what they can and never worry. The sun has never been known to be suffering from fatigue and yet he slaves with such severe regularity! And why should we think that the sun is inanimate? The difference between him and us may be that he has no choice, we have a margin, no matter how precarious it may be. If we completely surrender to His will as the sun has done, we too will voluntarily give up the right of choice and then we need no wear and tear. (21)

Gandhi clearly implies that the sun having no choice of action is one with the will of God and so is superior to man who has to pass through the strain of choice, and almost force his will to obey the divine commands.

There are certain essential conditions to be fulfilled before we get a clear glimpse of God:- Earlier we saw that one must reduce himself to a zero in total self effacement to see God. 'Humility is the beginning of wisdom.' There are other requirements if one must see God clearly.

A seeker after truth must possess a high degree of peace of mind. Peace and tranquility of mind are divine qualities. One of the definitions of the divinity itself is 'Sat', 'Chit' and 'Anand' i.e., God is an embodiment of reality, knowledge and bliss. This eternal bliss is partly shared by a seeker after truth when he possesses the qualities of mental peace, and serenity of disposition. This tranquility of mind comes from one's focusing his attention on God alone. The more a mind is focused on the Eternal Truth, the more it finds its real rest. (App. II.a)*

God is within us, and self-effacement, self-denial and poverty are the ways to realize the spark of divinity within us. (App. II.b)*

To seek God one need not go on a pilgrimage or light lamps and burn incense before, or anoint the image of, the deity or paint it with red vermilion. For, He resides in our hearts. If we could completely obliterate in us the consciousness of our physical body, we would see Him face to face. (22)

Divine knowledge is not borrowed from books. It has to be realized in oneself. Books are at best an aid, often even a hindrance. Poverty of spirit and even actual poverty will lead one to the realization of reality. (23)

(22) MGP., Vol. 11, p.247

(23) SB., p.228

* Additional quotes on Gandhi's concept of God

After having told us that a seeker after truth must go directly to truth without getting lost in the accidentals of holy books, or external religious practices of candle lighting and incense burning, Gandhi goes on to point out another serious impediment to the knowledge of truth, namely attachment to material things. Actual poverty and poverty of spirit are the ways of removing this impediment. Detachment from worldly attachments (to material possessions) is nothing new to Hinduism or to Gandhi. It has been universally preached by all religions that attachment to the world in any undue degree is a great hindrance to the realization of divine truth. In Christianity we have the very outstanding examples of the monks and the religious taking the three vows of poverty chastity and obedience to divert themselves from all attachments to worldly things. Gandhi simply stresses this point. His own life was a living example of this spirit of poverty and detachment.

Poverty of spirit and even real poverty are a great help to reach a vision of Truth. Gandhi sincerely believes that he cannot have a vision of the Supreme Reality, the Absolute Truth, unless he first divests himself of the hindrances of worldly possessions and identifies himself with the poorest of the poor. In this Gandhi is

inspired not only by his great desire to see Truth, but also by his extreme compassion for the poor. "It is painful for me to eat or to dress as long as the poor do not have enough to eat or cover their bodies with." (24) says Gandhi. Everyone who is familiar with his simple attire is astonished at his spirit of sacrifice. He even went to the extent of depriving himself of the bare necessities of life, not out of any necessity, but out of pure love for the poor people. He wished to identify himself with his people.

Appealing to the people even through the medium of religion will have no effect, thought Gandhi, unless the needful was first done to raise the material standards of their life. This sounds something like St. Paul who said that preaching Christ to hungry stomachs would not produce any effect. Gandhi described the life of the poor Indians as 'cattle life' and affirmed that "not unless and until we have clothed the millions of skeletons of India will religion have any meaning for them". (25)

(24) CMG., Vol. XXIV, p.456

(25) Ibid., p. 547

Religion therefore, he rightly defined as 'the service of the helpless'. He thought of the service of the poor people as a penance for our sins against the poor, because we are mostly responsible for their present miseries. Gandhi could very well be referring to the part played by the favoured few in oppressing the poor majority through the unwise and even erroneous interpretations and application of the caste rules.

Self purification is another essential requirement for seeing truth. "The purer I try to become, the nearer to God I feel myself to be.", (26) says Gandhi. This purification is, above all, detachment from all worldly cravings. The world is a hindrance to the achievement of truth. The Christian ascetics taught the same. Gandhi, however, did not preach aloofness from the world and its affairs. He wanted to be very actively present in the world, trying to make it a better place to live in for all men, in fact for all creatures.

The path of self-purification, Gandhi knew very well, was not going to be an easy one. However, his life was known for its austerity and penance. This was the proof of his sincerity. In all his attempts he tried to be passion-free in thought, speech and action, and to rise above the opposing currents of love and hatred, attachment

and repulsion. The world's praise failed to move him to self-complacency, nor did its criticism deter him from his path.

Through the process of self-purification one learns to forget himself and identify himself more and more with God leading to a final stage of complete surrender to God. Such a person conceives his actions as the actions of God.

One has, therefore, to appear before God in all one's weakness, empty-handed and in a spirit of full surrender, and then He enables you to stand before the whole world and protects you from all harm. (27) says Gandhi.

This was really the secret of Gandhi's extraordinary moral strength and courage. He had reduced himself to nothingness before God, surrendering himself completely to God's will, working for the reign of Truth, identifying himself at the same time with the whole of humanity and translating his love for others, especially for the poor, into service. Gandhi found his recreation, his satisfaction and success in such unselfish service of the people.

A life of perfect continence in thought, speech and action is necessary to reach perfection in spirit, thought Gandhi. Men of such caliber are an asset to any nation. Clearly Gandhi did not count the strength of his nation in the possession of the destructive weapons of war.

Like the ascetics of all times and countries, Gandhi believed in keeping his body and its needs under strict control. Like them, he believed that our mortal body to be a hindrance to the perfect realisation of Truth. We cannot remove this bodily hindrance to the realisation of Truth as long as we are enveloped in it during our mortal life, but we can remove its hindrance to a great extent if we control its cravings through bodily penance. Gandhi's favourite penance was fasting which he meticulously practised at regular intervals in his life.

A man of God will be one who has completely surrendered himself to the will of God and is totally possessed by Him. He has no empty compartments in his life where God has not a say. He will preach his truth not so much through words as through concrete actions in the service of mankind, especially suffering mankind. In him, God is always present, not just the memory of the divinity, but the real person of God. He will strive for the reign of Truth without counting the result of his actions in immediate success or gains. He is patient and unselfish and waits for results in God's own good time. Gandhi tried to be such a person and seemed to have succeeded in his efforts in a very striking manner.

Gandhi's idea of religion could very well be translated into the common language of universal love and service of mankind. This sounds almost exactly like Christ's summing up all law and commandments into 'love God and love your neighbour'. Christ's or Gandhi's 'Love your neighbour' is not just a fine, pious feeling for all mankind, but real active love which translates fine feelings into actions wherever necessary. Religion viewed in this meaning becomes all important and all absorbing in man's life. All human activities are viewed as being motivated by religious ideals, as seen through the eyes of God.

"A man who aspires after Truth," says Gandhi, cannot afford to keep out of any field of life. That is why my devotion to Truth has drawn me in to the field of politics; and I can say without the slightest hesitation and yet in all humility, that those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion really means. (28)

Thus religion is all important for a man of God. In and through religion he finds the fulfilment of his life on earth.

One who sees all realities including himself as emanating from and sharing in the reality of the Supreme Being immediately realises his immense possibilities and enormous strength. He is actually possessed by the strength

of God. This makes him fearless and ever hopeful. Gandhi reiterated several times that this extreme trust in God was the great secret of his extraordinary strength and courage. He realized in a special way that God was always in him, with him, and all over him, directing and strengthening his will in all that he did. (App. II, c to h)*

I am surer of His existence than of the fact you and I are in this room. Then I can also testify that I may live without air and water but not without Him. You may pluck out my eyes, but that cannot kill me. But blast my belief in God and I am dead. You may call this a superstition, but I confess it is a superstition that I hug, even as I used to do the name of Rama in my childhood, when there was any cause of danger or alarm.
(29)

Gandhi warns against some people's belief that if we trust in God everything will be one continuous line of victories and all will be unmixed blessings. He tells us that truth will win, but may be very often, only at the end.

A final advise or admonition to people who trust in God is 'beware of pride', a feeling that since I trust in God I am not like the generality of people but much superior to them. It is true that with God we can do everything. It is also equally true that without God we

(29) MM., p.27

* Additional quotes on Gandhi's concept of God.

cannot do anything. Trust in God is very basic to our life without which nothing is really possible. This is truth and truth is the basis of true humility. (App.II, i to n)*

God above everything.

There is nothing on earth that I would not give up for the sake of the country (India) excepting of course two things and two only, namely truth and non-violence. I would not sacrifice these two things for all the world. For me Truth is God and there is no way to find Truth except through non-violence. I do not seek to serve India at the sacrifice of God and Truth can forsake his country, and his nearest and dearest ones. (30)

(30) HT., Vol.11, p.312

*Additional quotes on Gandhi's concept of God.

CHAPTER II.

WHAT RELIGION MEANS TO GANDHI

Religion for Gandhi is the self-realization of the Supreme Reality, a spark of which is equally present in everyone of us. Religion is meant to help us realize this Supreme Reality. The final assimilation happens after a long struggle, extending over a wide circle of many births.

Religion must not confine itself to philosophical cogitations and solitary meditations, but must translate itself into every aspect of our daily life, inspiring, guiding and strengthening every aspect of our individual and collective life. Gandhi, therefore, is neither a sage nor a down-to-earth commoner - he is a mixture of both, applying the principles of his religious convictions both in his private and public dealings. Compared to his country men, Gandhi is almost unique in the application of his religious principles to every detail of his life - his fellow Hindus tend to, in the matter of religion, either ascend to the heights of metaphysics and remain highly theoretical or descend to the level of religious superstitions and remain deplorably irrational.

Gandhi was unique also in the way he practiced religion. His way was through the path of non-violence or

ahimsa. Violence or hingu had no place in his realm of thought. Strict adherence to non-violence is the mark of a civilized and enlightened mind.

Gandhi's religious field encompassed the totality, not only of mankind but also of all creation. In his world, there are only two classes of beings, one following the path of Truth and the other not following the path of Truth. This classification includes the totality of creation, sentient and non-sentient, living and non-living. In this matter the dumb creatures that automatically and unquestionably obey the dictates of the Supreme Truth - the natural laws as they are commonly known - are even superior to human beings who have the freedom to choose to obey or not to obey these dictates. According to Gandhi, the dumb creatures who obey the natural laws unquestionably are more attuned to Truth, and are therefore almost one with the Truth.

Definition of Religion.

Gandhi does not accept the customary or formal concept of religion as real religion; they are at the most religious manifestations. Real religion says Gandhi is

that which underlies all religions, which brings us face to face with our Maker. It is not the Hindu religion which I certainly prize above all other religions, but the religion that transcends Hinduism, which changes one's nature, which binds us indissolubly to the truth within and which, ever purifies. It is the permanent element in human nature which counts no cost too great in order to find full expression and which leaves the soul utterly restless until it has found itself, known its Maker and appreciated the true correspondence between the Maker and itself.

(31)

Gandhi is clearly referring to the universal 'factum religiosum' which is inherent in human nature, both primitive and civilized. There is an inner thirst in every normal human being for associating himself with some supreme being whose infinite perfections he is continuously striving to achieve. Gandhi, because of the strong Christian influence on him seems to be using peculiarly Christian terms to express this religious fact in human nature. It is this basic human need that 'brings us face to face with our maker.' St. Augustin had given utterance to the insufficiency of every human being alienated from his 'Maker'. He had said something like, 'Oh God, you have made us for yourself, and our souls will not find rest until they rest in you'. Gandhi resounds almost exactly the same sentiments when he says that our soul without quenching this thirst for the realization of the Supreme

Being 'will remain utterly restless until it has known its Maker' and appreciated the true correspondence between the Maker and itself. This is the underlying basic factor of all religions, whether primitive natural religions or modern revealed religions. Gandhi is simply giving expression to this basic need of human intellect to seek and find its finality and direction which can be ultimately found only in its Supreme Author, God.

But as against the abstract thinking about the nature of God and man's relations with Him, Gandhi made a very successful effort to come down to the level of the common man and give religion a more concrete meaning and explanation, generally understood by the masses. This is what brought Gandhi down to the plains of the common man's thinking from the Himalayan heights of the ages' 'abstractions' about the nature of God and religion, as found in the Hindu Upanishads and the holy thinkers like Shankara. Gandhi brought into his religious terminology words like incarnations or avatars, devotion or bhakti, sacrifice or puja and the like which are within the comprehension of the common man, and he defined and explained the concept of God and religion using these terms. Thus in his religion one can see God in the person, of Rama, Krishna, Parvati, Lakshmi etc. all possessing human qualities though in a special manner say. Thus Gandhi came with the abstract and the

concrete elements to describe the nature of God and religion.

The Nature of Religion.

Some religious insight is basic and universal, it originates in the human mind as a result of self-realization. Therefore religion strictly is not revealed as Christians and Muslims would teach. It is of a very personal nature. Because it is of a personal nature, it is subject to changes and growth according to the degree of self-realization of Truth by each individual. We remain imperfect seekers after Truth until we become one with it. Because we are imperfect seekers after Truth our concept of Truth and therefore our concept of religion must also be imperfect. This implies that our religious concepts are and must be subject to change and growth. Therefore it follows that no religion is absolutely true, or contains all the truth. We must respect and follow our own realization of Truth. However this must not make us blind to the possible faults of our religion or to the truth of other religions. Briefly, Gandhi seems to be telling us to hold on to ours without hating or ignoring the religious views of others. Accept what is good wherever it may be found.

The example of a tree with many branches is taken

by Gandhi to illustrate the concept of religious tolerance. Even though there are many branches and leaves in a tree the trunk is the same and common to all the parts. So is the perfect religion. But it becomes many as it passes through the human medium.

The one religion is beyond all speech, but imperfect men put it into such language as they can command, and their words are interpreted by other men who are equally imperfect. (32)

It is a favourite idea with Hinduism and Gandhi stresses the same that Truth being one and universal, can be reached through different paths. This is the simple explanation given to the fact of various religions existing in the world they are nothing more and nothing less than various paths followed by various people to reach truth. There is no room here for any religion to assert that it is superior to another religion. Based on the same logic the idea of conversion becomes meaningless and forced conversions become an offence against the conscience of man. 'Live and let live' is Gandhi's way in everything, especially in the way of religion. It is unlikely that Gandhi would deny one the right to change his religion out of intellectual convictions, otherwise he would be taking away the freedom of conscience from one which he

had always granted to man through his defence of and strong plea for religious tolerance. What he has in mind when he talks about various religions is that all are human inventions, that all are imperfect in some way, and that the least expected of us is to appreciate others' view points. If this appreciation can be done with proper understanding it would produce better and more lasting results for peace and amity among all peoples. (App. III, a to f) *

I believe in the fundamental truth of all great religions of the world. I believe that they are all God-given, and I believe that they were necessary for the people to whom these religions were revealed. And I believe that, if only we could all of us read the scriptures of the different faiths from the standpoint of the followers of those faiths, we should find that they were at the bottom all one, and were all helpful to one another. (33)

I believe that all the great religions of the world are true more or less, I say 'more or less' because I believe that everything the human hand touches, by reason of the very fact human beings are imperfect, becomes imperfect. Perfection is the exclusive attribute of God and it is indescribable, and non translatable. I do believe that it is possible for every human being to become perfect even as God is perfect. It is necessary for us all to aspire after perfection, but when that blessed state is attained, it becomes indescribable, indefinable. And, I, therefore, admit in all humility, that even the Vedas, the Koran and the Bible are imperfect words of God and, imperfect beings that we are, swayed to and from by a multitude of passions, it is impossible for us even to understand these words of God in their fullness. (34)

(33) MM., p.82

(34) MT., Vol. IV, p.121

*Additional quotes on Gandhi's concept of Religion.

Gandhi would even go so far as to say to the Christian who wants to embrace Hinduism in preference to Christianity because of his preference for the Bhagavat Gita over the Bible.

No, what Bhagavat Gita offers, the Bible also offers. You have not made the attempt to find it out. Make the attempt and be a good Christian.
(35)

For Gandhi the essence of religion is service, service of all the people without any distinction, without any hatred for anyone. Gandhi had made the religion of service his own, as he felt that God could be realized only through service.

The service of the Indians in South Africa ever revealed to him new implications of truth at every stage. Truth is like a vast tree which yields more and more fruits; the more you nurture it, the deeper the search in the mine of truth the richer the discovery of the gems buried there - in the shape of openings for an ever greater variety of service.

Gandhi held himself to be incapable of hating any being on earth. By a long course of prayerful discipline, he had ceased for over forty years to hate anybody. He

knew it was a big claim. Nevertheless, he made it in all humility. But he could and did hate evil wherever it existed and hated the system of Government that the British people had set up in India. He hated the ruthless exploitation of Indians even as he hated from the bottom of his heart the hideous system of untouchability for which millions of Hindus had made themselves responsible. But he did not hate the domineering Englishman as he refused to hate the domineering Hindus. He sought to reform them in all the loving ways that were open to him.

He was endeavouring to see God through service of humanity, for he knew God is neither in heaven, nor down below, but in everyone.

If service of one's fellow men is religion in practice for Gandhi, the soil on which this religion grows is morality.

One thing took deep root in him—the conviction that morality is the basis of things, and that truth is the substance of all morality. Truth became his sole objective. It began to grow in magnitude every day, and his definition of it also had been ever widening.

True religion and true morality thought Gandhi, are inseparably bound up with each other. Religion is to morality what water is to the seed that is sown in the soil.

He rejected any religious doctrine that did not appeal to reason and was in conflict with morality. He tolerated even unreasonable religious sentiments when they were not immoral.

For Gandhi irreligion is the main cause of most evils in the social, political and personal life of people and nations. Referring to the sorry plight India of his times found itself with poverty for the masses, religious and caste oppressions of a vast section of the people, Gandhi has this strong comment to make.

We have forsaken our duty. We have forgotten God and we worship Satan. A man's duty is to worship God. Telling one's beads is no symbol of that worship; neither is going to mosque or temple, nor saying the namaz or the gayatri. These things are all right as far as they go. It is necessary to do the one or the other according to one's religion. But by themselves they are no indication of one's being devoted to god in worship. He alone truly adores God who finds his happiness in the happiness of others, speaks evil of none, doesn't waste his time in the pursuit of richness, does nothing immoral, who acquits himself with others as with a friend, does not fear the plague or human being. (36)

But such people are rare.- Most people are irreligious and they seek wrong remedies for the evils of the time. The true remedy is to be sought in God. Continues Gandhi:

... all of us, whether Hindus, Muslims, Parsis or Christians, have forsaken our true religion. If this view is right, what you need is not remedies against the plague or revolt against the British rule; neither big associations with their ostentatious ways of doing things, nor societies nor meetings; neither will it be any use to keep looking at one another, waiting to act till others give us the lead. One thing alone is needful; all of us having learnt our duties, must persevere in it till the moment of our death. If this view is right, we need help from none save God. (37)

Some of the most distinguishing marks of a religious man are: adherence to truth at all costs, love and service of all mankind without distinctions of any kind, and special compassion for the weak and the poor. Lack of sympathy for the poor and the suffering is marked out as the clear proof of an irreligious man. This being so, oppression of any kind against anybody goes directly against the spirit of true religion.

Whenever Gandhi talks about oppression of the poor in India, he has almost always in mind the oppression of the untouchables of the Hindu society. It is a sort of self accusation. He sincerely and very rightly believed that untouchability was the real curse of the Hindu society. It has always been like cancer eating into the very marrow of the Hindu society for ages. Therefore any true remedy aimed at curing the evils in the Hindu society had to be

directed towards removing the evils related to untouchability. Gandhi painted the evils of untouchability in the worst possible form as the greatest offence against true religion and the worst denial of Truth - it was not just a social evil in the eyes of Gandhi. Therefore he appealed to the people to rid the Hindu society of the malignant cancer of untouchability and purify their notion of religion and Truth. He told the self-righteous high caste Hindus that they were not fooling anybody but themselves, and were hypocrites of the worst kind if they pretended that they loved God whom they could not see but oppressed their fellowmen who were suffering in their midst.

When Gandhi deplored the evils associated with caste system in his days, he was not oblivious of the good role it might have played in the ancient society. He argued that caste system of ancient India catered to the religious, social and even political needs of the people. The villagers managed their internal affairs through the caste system, and even dealt with any kind of external oppression from the ruling powers. He does not explain how all this was achieved through the caste system and his whole argument in favour of the caste system in the ancient society is open to serious question.

Whatever might have been the role of the caste system in the ancient society its role in the modern society was doing untold harm to India as a nation and to Hindu society as a community. Here Gandhi's sincerity and tenacity of purpose was transparently clear. He did not spare anybody in this matter. Religious sects like the Vaishnavas and the Antyajias who showed exaggerated respect for non-human forms of life and a total disregard for the sufferings of the untouchables were openly reprimanded by Gandhi. He pictured their practice as total distortion of religion. He told them that true religion was not touch-me-notism, but sympathy with the suffering, compassion for the poor and fellow-feelings for everybody. He did not think that religion meant anything without 'love for the oppressed and the depressed.' Any religion without this distinguishing marks of compassion and fellow-feeling was just a Godless and perverted religion. We can almost depict Gandhi in this respect as Jesus Christ attacking the self-righteous Scribes and the Pharisees for their hypocrisy - they called themselves religious leaders and strict observers of all religious rules and practices whereas in the eyes of Jesus they were 'blind, leading the blind' and oppressors of the poor and the widowed. Like Christ, Gandhi told his fellow believers that compassion and the service of the 'neighbour' constituted religion more than

anything else, and that religion devoid of compassion was nothing but fraud.

Compassion is at the very root of religion and one who forsakes it, forsakes God; one who forsakes the poor forsakes everything. If we do not look after the poor and the untouchables, we are sure to perish. (38)

Inferiority and superiority, especially based on birth and social standing are very much abhorred by Gandhi. People were classified into those who follow Truth and those who do not follow Truth. This is the only criterion to judge a person to be inferior or superior, sinner or saint. No one is exclusively good or bad. (App. III, g to m)*

In the opinion of Gandhi sinner and saint hold equal status before God, and has equal claim for His attention. He would even go to the extent of saying that a saint who would extal himself above a sinner is a proud saint and one to be disliked for that very reason. All this is well in keeping with his earlier idea of religion being equated with compassion, mercy and service of the poor and the needy who, are shunted out of the privileged classes of the high caste Hindus as out castes, suffering the effects of their sins according to the doctrine of Karma. For a blind believer in Karma it would be a sin

(38) CWNG., Vol. XXV, p.603

*Additional quotes on Gandhi's concept of religion.

to help a suffering outcaste because it would violate the doctrine of Karma. Gandhi tries to correct these misconceptions about karma saying that in the eyes of God the sinner and the saint are equal, and the best way to practice religion is through service of the needy. This is exactly what Christ meant when He said that the greatest commandment is charity. In order to love everybody, even the most unfortunate of God's creatures, one has to view everybody through the eyes of God; everyone as equal before his justice.

Gandhi is clearly fighting the evils of untouchability. The high caste purists of the Hindu religion would either ignore or explain away the sufferings and poverty of the untouchables as the result of Karma, whereas they themselves have caused most of the miseries of the poor outcastes. They had formulated laws and regulations that enslaved the majority of the people and clothed these wicked and damaging laws in the garb of religion, as sanctioned by God. Gandhi never gets tired of repeating that the evils of untouchability have nothing to do with the Hindu religion. He would refuse to admit that amoral religion i.e. religion without action in the service of mankind like that practiced by the sages is not the whole or even the essence of religion. In our attempt to know and serve God, we have to take the whole of creation with us, especially the more unfortunate part of it, namely the suffering humanity.

It is not enough not to hate anybody but we must positively like and serve them. Service is the key word in religion worthy of it's name.

For me the road to salvation lies through incessant toil in the service of my country through of humanity. I want to identify myself with everything that lives. In the language of the Githa I want to live at peace with friends and foe. Though, therefore a Mussalman or a Christian or a Hindu may despise me and hate me, I want to love him and serve him even as I would love my wife or son though they hate me. So my patriotism is for me a stage in my journey to the land of eternal freedom and peace. Thus it will be seen that for me there are no politics devoid of religion. They subserve religion. Politics bereft of religion is a death-trap because it kills the soul. (39)

I must proclaim to the very end that if we accommodate the present conception of untouchability in Hindu religion, it will surely lead to decay and bring about eventual death. (40)

Gandhi becomes prophetic in these words.

I tell the people of this land that Hindu religion is on test today, and it is weighed against all other religions of the world. If anything inconsistent with morality and compassion or reason is allowed to stay in the Hindu religion, then it will surely perish. I am fully aware of the virtue of compassion, and am therefore able to see what hypocrisy and ignorance is being practiced under the cover of Hindu religion. This hypocrisy and ignorance I shall fight alone, if necessary I shall do penance and die in this struggle. But if perchance I lose my reason, and in insanity admit my present views on untouchability as wrong, and say that I have sinned in describing untouchability as a blot on Hinduism, you safely conclude then that irresistible fear has overtaken me and being afraid of the consequences I have denied my formal belief. You must then regard me as one talking nonsense in a state of stupor. (41)

(39) CWMG., Vol. XXIII, p. 349 (41) Ibid., p. 567

(40) Ibid., Vol. XXV, p. 366

Gandhi's religious convictions and his understanding of how they should be practiced were put to severe test during his long political activities. Temptations to set aside the path of truth and honesty and take to easier and perhaps more useful ways for political expediency and compromise were numerous. He might have avoided many enemies in the rank and file of his coreligionists had he mitigated his views on caste system as the cause of most of the social evils. But he did not do that for cheap and immediate results.

Gandhi tried to make his followers and his countrymen see how seriously he took his religion and how earnestly he was trying to make it guide and inspire all his actions.

I could not live for a single moment without religion. Many of my political friends despair of me because they say that even my politics are derived from religion. And they are right. My politics and all other activities of mine are derived from my religion. (42)

Religion is translated into human activity.

I do not know any religion apart from human activity. It provides a moral basis to all other activities which they would otherwise lack, reducing life to a maze of 'sound and fury signifying nothing'. (43)

Gandhi is practical to the utmost in the above statement. His religion finds its practical expression in all his daily activities, and most of his daily activities were in the political life of the day. He continues:

(42) MH., p.70

(43) Ibid., p.71

I am not a statesman in the garb of the saint. But since Truth is the highest wisdom, sometimes my acts appear to be consistent with the highest statesmanship. But, I hope I have no policy in me save the policy of Truth and Ahimsa. I will not sacrifice Truth and Ahimsa even for the deliverance of my country or religion. That is as much as to say that neither can be so delivered. (44)

I lay claim to nothing exclusively divine in me. I do not claim prophetship. I am but a humble seeker after Truth and bent upon finding it. I count no sacrifice too great for the sake of seeing Truth face to face. The whole of my activity, whether it may be called social, political, humanitarian or ethical is directed to this end. As I know that God is found more often in the lowest of His creatures than in the high and mighty, I am struggling to reach the status of these. I cannot do so without their service. Hence my passion for the service of the suppressed classes. And as I cannot do this service without entering politics, I find myself in them. I am no master, I am but a struggling, erring, humble servant of India and, therethrough of humanity. (45)

Gandhi's application of his religious beliefs to life indicates the practicality of his beliefs and life.

If any action of mine claimed to be spiritual is proved to be unpracticable it must be pronounced to be a failure. I do believe that the most spiritual act is the most practical in the true sense of the term. (46)

As in everything else even in the matter of religious beliefs and practices non-violence should be the guiding principle. (App. III, n to t)*

(44) MM., p.1

(46) Ibid., p.224

(45) SB., p.46,47

*Additional quotes on Gandhi's concept of religion.

CHAPTER III

GANDHI AND HINDUISM

Individual freedom and tolerance are the key-words that strike us when we discuss Gandhi's attitude to religion in general and Hinduism in particular. Religion for Gandhi as we have already seen is a personal matter based on the individual's ability and preparedness to realize the Supreme Truth. The degree of this realization must differ from individual to individual and from group to group. All religions must of necessity contain truths, and also some falsehood. Gandhi therefore advises: 1) understand all religions, accept what is good and reject what is evil in each; 2) if all religions are sort of man made, there can't be any revealed religion in the special sense of the word, 3) therefore no religion can claim exclusive allegiance from its followers and 4) any religion adhering to the idea of forced conversion in any way is to be rejected for that very reason. Accept what is best for you, and for Gandhi of course Hinduism is the best because Hinduism has the richest treasure house of the Supreme Truth taught by its many sages and saints through long centuries of self-research in the field of Truth, especially in the field of non-violence, compassion and love for all mankind. Gandhi's unflinching faith in Hinduism may have been inspired also,

besides his personal convictions about it, by the needs of the day for which he was fighting, namely political freedom for his country and economic self-sufficiency and religious enlightenment and tolerance for its people. This latter is the practical aspect of Gandhi's attitude to religions.

Gandhi would have liked to think of all the religions as shades of one and the same religious reality underlying all the religions of the world. This especially is true of the religions that have originated in India, like Buddhism, Jainism and even Zoroastrianism. In the face of strong opposition from Buddhists and Jains, this ambition was finally given up and he was forced to accept the fact of patent differences among the various religions, even those of Indian origin. The next step was to preach religious tolerance among the various religious groups.

Hinduism as the oldest religion possessing the greatest numbers of enlightened seekers after truth is the greatest embodiment of truth. Hinduism having originated in India, has almost all its adherents Indians. "It is also the shortest and the clearest channel to the hearts of the Indians for whom religion, right or wrong, occupies the highest place in their daily activities. We will analyse Gandhi's view of Hinduism under two main aspects; 1) what is essentially Hinduism? 2) what is expected of its followers?"

The Essence of Hinduism.

Hinduism teaches that the maximum amount of truth is to be found in the holy books of the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Puranas. These holy books have resulted from the intellectual search after truth by men who had reached the highest degree of self-purification and self-realisation of the Supreme Truth. They can, however, be interpreted in various ways depending on the degree of enlightenment of truth possessed by an individual.

Another aspect of the Hindu teaching is that, the abstract notions about the Supreme Truth have been brought home to the understanding of the common man, time and again, by minor gods and goddesses who are incarnations of the One Divinity. Krishna and Rama, Parvathi and Lakshmi are some of these avatars. They must be accepted and venerated as minor deities. In fact their number reaches up to several thousands and even millions.

Hinduism lays great stress on an individual's worthiness to attain truth. This worthiness is to be judged according to the degree of purity of mind, innocence of life and ability for self-control, control over one's passions and evil inclinations. Some such evil inclinations are desire for wealth, love of worldly pleasures especially those of the sexual nature, and so on. Naturally poverty of spirit and even actual poverty, self-control and

austerity, great regard for celibacy are top priority virtues of a holy man.

The gurus or enlightened men are the official teachers of the Hindu doctrines. They are known as acharyas and are to be greatly respected by all.

The Christian concept of heaven as reward for a meritorious earthly life may be vaguely expressed by the Hindu term 'moksha'. When a Christian reaches heaven he still remains himself in the eternal bliss of the Supreme Divinity, whereas a Hindu in moksha is really assimilated into the reality of the Supreme Being and he loses himself in it abandoning his identity. Really speaking it is deliverance from the sinful illusions of earthly phenomenon and total realisation that we are one with the Supreme. If there is anything anywhere near to the idea of a Christian hell idea, it is the Hindu belief in transmigration and reincarnation. For a Hindu, an eternal punishment in hell can in no way be reconciled with the infinite mercy of God. Therefore one is given infinite opportunities to repent and mend his ways until he qualifies for assimilation into the Supreme.

Another striking characteristic of Hinduism, to which a parallel is hardly ever found anywhere else, is the institution of the four varnas or castes. In the very

ancient Aryan society in India this categorisation of society might have been very distantly akin to the division of labour of the modern industrial society. But in course of time these varnas changed considerably, assuming alarming proportions of class differences, and descending into the formation of countless subcastes and Jatis, with religious sanctions of purity and impurity, of dharma and adharmā, and became powerful enough to decide an individual's destiny.

Gandhi is a defender of the caste system in its original meaning. He explains it in this way. All are born to serve God's creation, a Brahmin with his knowledge, a Shatrya with his power of protection, a Vaisya with his commercial ability and a Sudra with his ability to perform bodily labour. This however does not mean that a Brahmin, for instance is absolved from bodily labour, or the duty of protecting himself and others. His birth makes a Brahmin a man of knowledge, the fittest by heredity and training to impart it to others. There is nothing, again, to prevent a Sudra from acquiring all the knowledge he wishes. Only he will best serve with his body and need not envy others for the special quality of service they possess. But it is wrong for Brahmin to claim superiority over others by right of knowledge.

Gandhi is clearly giving his own interpretation

of the caste system. Originally caste rights were birth rights which could not be shared with other castes. But Gandhi says that a Sudra may acquire all the knowledge he wishes. However the fact was that he was not allowed to do so by the higher castes. It is these and other worse evils of oppressions, rightly or wrongly attached to caste system that Gandhi took great pains to explain and condemn all through his life.

Belief in cow protection is very central to popular Hinduism. Gandhi always remained a staunch, but not a fanatic supporter of this.

Cow-protection to me is one of the most wonderful phenomena in human evolution. It takes the human being beyond his species. The cow to me means entire sub-human world. Man through the cow is enjoined to realize his identity with all that lives. Why the cow was selected for apotheosis is obvious to me. The cow was in India the best companion. She was the giver of plenty. Not only did she give milk, but she also made agriculture possible. The cow is a poem of pity. One reads pity in the gentle animal. She is the mother to millions of mankind. Protection of the cow means protection of the whole dumb creation of God! The ancient seer, whoever he was, began with the cow. The appeal of the lower order of creation is all the more forcible because it is speechless. Cow-protection is a gift of Hinduism to the world. And Hinduism will live so long as there are Hindus to protect the cow. (47).

Hinduism is not an exclusive religion. In it there is room for the worship of the prophets of the world. It is not a missionary religion in the ordinary sense of the term. It has no doubt absorbed many tribes in its fold, but this absorption has been an evolutionary imperceptible character. Hinduism tells everyone to worship according to his own faith or dharma, and so it lives at peace with all the religions of the world.

Untouchability and animal sacrifice are not parts of Hindu religion, especially the former though the latter was occasionally permitted.

A religion that established the worship of the cow cannot possibly countenance or warrant a cruel and inhuman boycott of human beings. And I should be content to be torn to pieces rather than disown the suppressed classes. Hindus will certainly never deserve freedom, nor get it if they allow their noble religion to be disgraced by the retention of the taint of untouchability. And as I love Hinduism, dearer than life itself, the taint has become for me an intolerable burden. Let us not deny God by denying to a fifth of our race the right of association on an equal footing. (48)

Hinduism is able to assimilate all truths from anywhere and so is undefinable in a strict sense.

Hinduism does not rest on the authority of one book or one prophet; nor does it possess a common creed - like the Kalma, of Islam - acceptable to all. That renders a common definition of Hinduism a bit difficult, but therein lies its strength also. For, it is this special feature that has given to Hinduism its inclusive and assimilating character and made its gradual, silent evolution possible. (49)

(48) C.M.G., Vol. XXI, p.245, 250

(49) Ibid., Vol. XXV, p.516

Ahimsa or non-violence is essential to all religions, especially to Hinduism.

Our religion is based upon ahimsa, which in its active form is nothing but love, love not only for your neighbours, not only for your friends but love even for those who may be your enemies. (50)

The religion of this country, the Hindu religion, was abstention from himsa, that was to say, taking animal life. That was, the guiding principle of all religions. The Hindu religion said that even evil-doer should not be hated. It said that nobody had any right to kill even the evil-doer. (51)

This almost exactly corresponds to the Christian teaching that God is love and 'love God and your neighbour like yourself' is the greatest commandment. Only Gandhi uses a different term 'ahimsa'. Maybe it goes farther when Hinduism tells us that 'your neighbour' is not just the mankind but the whole of creation, and the cow perhaps assuming an equal or a higher status than man. Referring to the need for Hindu-Muslim unity and basing this unity on a religious bond, Gandhi says that,

Love is the basis of our friendship as it is of religion. I seek to gain Mussulmans' friendship by right of love. And love persists even on the part of one community, unity will become a settled fact in our national life. (52)

(50) CWMG., Vol. XIII, p.65,66

(51) Ibid., p.45

(52) Ibid., Vol. XXL, p.318

The doctrine of non-violence which I preach may possibly seem ridiculous. It represents Hinduism. In its practice, in greater or smaller measure, lies the vitality of all religions. There is religion only to the extent that there is compassion. There can be no limit to compassion and it is not for me to lay down any. Everyone fixes a limit for himself. In Vaishnavism, non-violence reigns supreme. I concede that the idea is elaborated with special emphasis in Jain works, but neither the Jain nor any other doctrine has a monopoly of non-violence. It is a universal, immutable law. (53)

Gandhi's Christian friend, C.F. Andrews argued that, inspite of Gandhi's efforts to spread ahimsa, the Indian historical tradition was against it. The incarnated heroes of Mahabharatha and Ramayana, argued C.F. Andrews, are glorified as chiefly war heroes. They are described as bloodthirsty, revengeful and merciless to the enemy. Their warriors are equipped with weapons of destructions such as could be possibly conceived by the human imagination. The finest hymn composed by Tulasidas in praise of Rama, gives the first place to his ability to strike down the enemy.

Then take the Muhammadan period. The Hindus were not less eager than the Muhammadans to fight. They were simply disorganised, physically weakened and torn by internal dissensions. The code of Manu prescribes no such renunciations that Gandhi imputes to the Indian race. Buddhism, conceived as a doctrine of universal forbearance,

signally failed and, if the legends are true, the great Shankaracharya did not hesitate to use unspeakable cruelty in banishing Buddhism out of India. And he succeeded.

Then comes the English period. There has been renunciation of arms but not of the desire to kill. Even among the Jains, the doctrine of ahimsa has signally failed. They have a superstitious horror of bloodshed, but they have as little regard for the life of the enemy as a European. They would rejoice equally with anybody on earth over the destruction of the enemy.

All then that can be said of India is that individuals like Gandhi have made serious attempts, with greater success than elsewhere, to popularise the doctrine of non-violence. But there is no basis for the belief that it has taken deep root among the people. Even during Gandhi's own life he was appalled by the frequency of communal rioting in various parts of India.

To this Gandhi answered as follows. Ahimsa is not a weapon of weakness but of great moral strength. The periodic fights mentioned in the holy books are instances of the good fighting to destroy the evil. For the doctrine of ahimsa to succeed any time, man has to reach a very high degree of moral enlightenment. As for the Hindu Muslim riots during the freedom struggle, they were more exceptions than the rule. Here we may add that the ruling British

played a very dominant role in fanning communal animosity to continue their policy of divide and rule. The very formation of the Muslim League as a political party to oppose the Congress of which they have been long members, was the invention of the ruling party to divide and weaken the strength of the ever-growing Congress party. However in spite of the fact that there have been great advocates of peace and nonviolence like Buddha, Chaitanya, Mahavira and Gandhi throughout the history of India violence and wars have had their reign among the Indians as among all the peoples of the world.

Also we cannot deny the fact that Hinduism had created a warrior caste for the purpose of fighting wars to defend justice. Wars and feuds were not unknown to the Indian people as it was not to other peoples of the world. However mercy, compassion and fellow feelings are considered key notes of the Indian character, at least in principle. While Gandhi stresses this aspect in the Indian character, C.F. Andrews may be reminding us of the aberrations of this character at various times in the history of the Indian people. Both maybe correct in their own way. Therefore, in order to do justice to Gandhi's efforts at spreading peace and amity among his people, we must admit that he was speaking a very ancient 'native language' when he was uttering the language of non-violence. Even from

the practical and the common-sense point of view, this was the best approach he could take to his people to unite them in a common cause of fighting for national independence and achieving national greatness.

The two traits of Hinduism in practice that Gandhi hates most are untouchability and religious intolerance.

He condemns the Hindu practice of untouchability in the strongest possible terms. Says Gandhi,

That the untouchables as a separate class, is a blot on India's forehead. The caste system is a hindrance, not a sin. But untouchability is a sin, a great crime, and if Hinduism does not destroy this serpent while there is yet time, it will be devoured by it. The untouchables must not be considered as falling outside Hinduism. They should be treated as respectable members of the Hindu society and should be assigned their varnas according to their vocation. (54)

Gandhi compares untouchability to Ravana the savage ruler of Lanka (modern Ceylon or Sri Lanka) and thinks that untouchability is ever more terrible than Ravana who is evil incarnate. This evil in the Hindu society is far worse than the Negro problem in America. Gandhi abhors the very concept of untouchability being in any way associated with Hinduism. If there is any truth in such a concept in Hindu religion he would forsake such a religion and would fight it if necessary alone.

I shall put up a lone fight, if need be, against this hypocrisy. Alone I shall undergo penance and die with His name on my lips. It is possible that I may go mad and say that I was mistaken in my views on the question of untouchability, that I was guilty of a sin in calling untouchability a sin of Hinduism. You should take it, in that event, that I am in delirium. (55)

I at any rate declare, though I may be in a minority of one that there can be no swaraj, that Hinduism will perish, unless this sinful practice is abolished. To cling to the sin of untouchability as a part of dharma and at the same time to hope to preserve Hinduism, protect the cow, practice nonviolence and have equal regard for all, I believe all this to be impossible. Just as crops will not ripen without sunshine, so we shall certainly not reap the harvest of swaraj till the darkness of untouchability has vanished. (56)

Many sincere and otherwise noble-minded Hindus consider untouchability as a part of the Hindu creed and would, therefore, regard the reformers as outcastes. If untouchability was a part of the Hindu creed, I should decline to call myself a Hindu and most decidedly embrace some other faith if it satisfied my highest aspirations. Fortunately for me, I hold that untouchability is no part of Hinduism. On the contrary, it is a serious blot upon it, which every lover of it must sacrifice himself to remove. Suppose, however, I discover that untouchability was really an integral part of Hinduism, I should have to wander in the wilderness because the other creeds, as I know them through their accepted interpreters would not satisfy my highest aspirations. (57)

Gandhi seems to be straining every nerve of his to prove to us that untouchability has nothing to do with the

(55) CWMG., Vol. XIV, p.74

(56) CWMG., Vol. XXII, p.383

(57) Ibid., Vol. XXIII, p.485

essence of Hindu religion. One may as well ask how the whole thing took such deep roots in the Hindu society for thousands of years and kept a major part of it in veritable slavery. How could this happen in a society where everything is viewed through the religious lens?

Concerning the other point of religious amity among all religious adherents, chiefly the Hindus and the Muslims, Gandhi was very strong in denouncing communal hatred. The cow often stood between the Hindus and the Muslims. When we know from Gandhi's own mouth how integral a part of Hindu faith the sacred cow was, we also come to realise this sacred cow could have been a bone of contention between the Hindu and the Muslim: the Hindu wanted to worship the cow, whereas the Muslim wanted to eat its flesh. But Gandhi's sincerity was quite evident when he preferred communal amity to cow worship and cow protection. Says Gandhi,

If Hinduism teaches hatred of Islam or of non-Hindus, it is doomed to destruction. Each community should then put its house in order without bargaining with the other. To nurse enmity against the Mussulmans, for the sake of saving the cow is a sure way to kill the cow and doubly sinful. Hinduism will not be destroyed by a non-Hindu killing a cow. The Hindu's religion consists in saving the cow, but it can never be his religion to save the cow by resort to force towards a non-Hindu. The Hindus want swaraj in India and not a Hindu raj. Even if there was a Hindu raj, and tolerating one of its features, there would be place in it for Mussulmans as well as Christians; it would be to the credit of Hinduism, if stopping of cow-slaughter was brought about not by force, but as deliberate voluntary act of self-denial on the part of Mussulmans and others. I would therefore deem it unpatriotic even to nurse a dream of a Hindu raj. (58)

The cow is so much a part of the Hindu worship and that

Any one who is not ready to sacrifice his life to save the cow is not a Hindu. So long as the Hindus, the Muslims, and the Christians do not work sincerely together to defend India, the Hindus will remain Hindus only in name. But the path of non-violence which I follow tells me that I should not kill Muslims or Christians to save the cow, that on the contrary I should lay down my life to save her. (59) (App. IV.)*

Concerning the attitude of the Hindu religion to marriage in general and widow remarriage in particular Gandhi has the following to say. Restraint and brahmacharya (celibacy) are the best. The other three stages of life grahasthashrama (family life), vanaprastha (life of seclusion) and sanyasa (life of a sage) are also equally praiseworthy. But bramacharya, meaning restraint and detachment from pleasures is the noblest ideal. Even in the family life a certain degree of brahmacharya is to be practiced.

This is what Gandhi has to say about marriage.

Gandhi seems to be permitting marriage as a concession for the weakness of man, something like 'it is better to marry than to burn' (in the fire of lust) idea of St. Paul. However if one decides to get married, let him accept it as a sacrament, as something very serious and even

(59) CWMG., Vol. XX, p.35

*Additional quote on Gandhi's concept of Hinduism.

holy. In other words sex is sacred and it is to be handled seriously and only in marriage.

Many marriages are often a failure and I can certainly speak from experience - a restrained unmarried life is infinitely superior to a married one. Marriage divides your attention as nothing else does. It is after all in the majority of cases a concession to our weakness and it was in order to find a solution for the difficulties of a married life that I have prescribed the rule in the ashram and the rule which without proscribing, I advised in Phoenix for willing people. (60)

Gandhi is of the opinion that widows should be respected and honoured as widows, and their remarriage can only be a rare exception to the common rule of no remarriage for widows. Marriage says Gandhi,

is a sacrament. Love can marry only once. A widow deserves to be looked upon with reverence. It is a sin to despise her. The sight of a pure widow is a good omen. It is a sin to count it as an ill-omen. To attempt to end the practice of widowhood is injurious to religion. (61)

He is equally strong on another evil Hindu custom of child marriage. Child marriage implies total ignorance on the part of the two involved about the meaning, responsibility and sacredness of this holy institution.

(60) CMMG., Vol. XVI, p.476

(61) Ibid., p.233

If marriage is, or is considered to be a sacrament, and if it is a symbol of pure love, then marrying children and ill-matched partners must be considered a sin. If it is not wrong for a man of fifty to marry a girl of nine, and if such a man is not excommunicated, then it is also a sin to excommunicate or otherwise punish that girl if, becoming a widow, she marries again. (62)

To the widows, I would say look upon your widowhood as sacred and live a life worthy of it. (63)

His sanctification of widowhood does not seem to have done justice to the unfortunate widows whose plight was really anything but desirable even as a way of life, no matter holy or unholy. Gandhi had said in praise of the widows that,

God created nothing finer than the Hindu widow. Whenever I hear men recounting their misfortunes, the picture of the widow comes vividly before my eyes and I laugh at the man who bewails his misfortunes. Self-control has been carried by Hinduism to the greatest height and, in a widow's life, it reaches perfection. Man can find a remedy for his misfortune, which are usually the consequences of his own folly. Much of his misery is due to his greed. But what of the widow? Widows find their happiness in their self-denial. This is not an undesirable state. On the contrary it is good. It is Hinduism at its best. I regard the widow's life as an ornament to Hinduism. When I see a widow I instinctively bow my head in reverence..... If this holy life lived by widows becomes a thing of the past, if this living image of service is destroyed through ignorance or pride, incalculable harm will be done to Hinduism. (64)

(62) CWMG., Vol. XVI, p.233

(63) Ibid., p.234

(64) CWMG., Vol. XXIII, p.524

Therefore Gandhi would give the following advice for preserving Hinduism and for order in Hindu society.

1) No father should get a daughter under the age of fifteen married.

2) If a girl below this age is already married and has become a widow it is the father's duty to get her married again.

3) If a fifteen year old girl becomes a widow within a year of her marriage her parents should encourage her to marry again.

4) Every member of the family should look upon the widow with utmost respect. Parents or parents-in-law must provide her with the means of improving her knowledge.

Gandhi seems to be a bit confused about what really is to be done with a widow. Sometimes widowhood is so sacred that he doesn't want her to forsake it. At other times he wants the parents to arrange for her remarriage.

A widow's life in itself means a life of single-minded devotion. The wife's constancy connotes the purest loyalty. Ordinary loyalty relates to the body and dies with it. The loyalty of the women living as a widow is to the husband's a spirit. By giving a religious significance to the state of widowhood, Hinduism has shown that marriage is not a physical but a spiritual union. (65)

Therefore to conclude, my view about remarriage is that it would be proper for a man or women not to marry again after the death of the partner. The basis of Hinduism is self-control. Of course self-control is enjoined in every religion, but Hinduism has attached to it a special importance. In such a religion remarriage can be only an exception.... I would not put it into the head of even a child widow to remarry, though if she did marry, I would not regard her action as sinful. (66)

Gandhi is a believer in the Hindu concept of re-birth. Says he,

I am a believer in previous births and re-births. All our relationships are the result of the *samsaras* we carry from our previous births. God's laws are inscrutable and are the subject of endless search. No one will fathom them. (67)

His abhorrence of the practice of all untouchability and his awareness of possible hurdles in removing from outside, the psychosocial constraints imposed by it on the victims of his practice (the untouchables - HARIJANS), is made very clear when he says "I will be willing to be reborn as an untouchable to help them." (68)

We may conclude our discussion of Gandhi's attitude to Hindu Religion, and to religious tolerance, again in his own words.

(66) C.M.G., Vol. XIV, p.449

(67) Ibid., Vol. XV, p.54

(68) M.T., Vol. V, p.378,379

I hold my religion dearer than my country and that therefore I am a Hindu first and nationalist after. I do not become on that score less of a nationalist than the best of them. I simply thereby imply that the interests of my country are identical with those of my religion. (69)

— India of the near future stands for perfect toleration of all religions. Her spiritual heritage is simple living and high thinking. (I consider Western Christianity in its practical working a negation of Christ's Christianity.) Cooperation with forces of Good and non-cooperation with forces of Evil are the two things we need for a good and pure life whether it is called Hindu, Muslim or Christian. (70)

(69) CWMG., Vol. XXII, p. 462

(70) Ibid., Vol. XXI, p. 169

CHAPTER IV

GANDHI AND CHRISTIANITY

Gandhi's interest in Christianity was more academic than practical. He did not have to face Christianity and Christians in his day to day life as he had to do with the Muslims. As a student of all religions Gandhi came to study Christianity. His contact with Christians and Christianity during his studies in England provided him with the first opportunity in this field. The presence of the British in India, and his experiences with European Christians did not leave many good memories in Gandhi's mind. If we summarise Gandhi's impressions of Christianity it will look something like this, 'I love Christ, but not the Christians, especially of today.'

Gandhi's diminished regard for the Christians was chiefly due to the fact the Christians were almost synonymous with 'himsa, violence, war, oppression and everything else Gandhi disliked most. According to Gandhi, the Christians of today, especially those in Europe and America, are not practising the teachings of Jesus Christ, who was a man of peace and tolerance, in short, a paragon of all virtues Gandhi prized very highly.

Christianity, says Gandhi, is like any other reli-

gion. It is not in any special way a revealed or unique religion as Christians would like to think. Jesus Christ, though one of the greatest of enlightened men, is only an enlightened MAN, no special redeemer, no God and not even the son of God, in any sense other than that we are all sons of God. The Christian religion with all its rigid organisations, hierarchies and dogmas and infallibility, and especially with its activities of conversion is quite out of tune with Gandhi's idea of religion. Religion according to Gandhi, should be personal in character, with a lot of adaptability and plenty of fluidity characterised by the quality of assimilation of anything good seen outside it. Christianity did not measure up to these ideals. It was authoritarian and intolerant.

Jesus to me is a great world teacher among others. He was to the devotees of his generation no doubt 'the only begotten son of God'. I regard him as one among the many begotten sons of God. The adjective, 'begotten' has a deeper and possibly a grander meaning than its spiritual birth. In his own time he was the nearest to God.

Jesus atoned for the sins of those who accepted his teachings by being an example to them. But the example was worth nothing to those who never trouble to change their own lives.

The miracles said to have been performed by Jesus, even if I had believed them literally, would not have reconciled me to any teaching that did not satisfy universal ethics. Somehow, words of religious teachers have for me, as I presume, for the millions, a living force which the same words uttered by ordinary mortals do not possess. (71)

In so many words Gandhi has told us that all the religious founders fall in the same category. None of them, including Jesus Christ, is divine in any special way. The divinity of these prophets or incarnations is different from the divinity of any ordinary mortal only in degree, not in kind, because we are all on the way to achieving the same kind of divinity as they had if only we try hard enough.

What exactly Gandhi had in his mind is not very clear. Was he trying to place himself on the same pedestal of glory with these divinities? He was too humble for that. Maybe he was reiterating his monistic idea about the nature of God and all other realities, namely that everything is the emanation of one and the same Supreme Reality of God.

Gandhi was a little surprised and even amused when some of his many Christian friends suggested that he should become a Christian. He recalls how one of his friends who had been at him for some thirty years trying to persuade him that there was nothing but damnation in Hinduism and that he must accept Christianity. When he was in jail he got from separate sources no less than three copies of Life of Sister Therese, with the hope that he should follow her example and accept Jesus as his divine Saviour. He read the book alright but could not or did not accept Sister

Theresa's testimony. He said that he had an open mind, but claimed that unless things were to happen to him as they did to Saul before he became Paul, he would not make any basic change in beliefs.

He rebelled against the Christian churches because, according to him, these churches do not preach the original message of Christ. Time and again they distort Christ's message of peace and tolerance to suit their intolerance, wars and oppressions. Jesus Christ was an Asiatic whose message was delivered through many media. But when it had the backing of the Roman emperor, it became an imperialistic fact and it ever remained so. But of course there are noble though rare exceptions of great followers of Christ; the general trend, says Gandhi, is unacceptable to him.

Looking at the practical side of all Gandhi's approach to religions, it is not difficult for us to visualise the consequences from his followers if he had said anything more in favour of Christianity. For Christianity was identified with the evils of the British rule in India. Unlike the case of the Muslims, Gandhi or the Hindus did not need to pacify the Christians and woo them to their side to fight for their cause as the Christians formed only a very small minority of the Indian population. They did not present any big problems to the Hindu population as the

Muslims did. Therefore an academic interest in Christ and the Christian religion was all that was necessary for his cause. Whatever unpleasant things he had to say about modern Christianity applied mostly to its Western version only.

Therefore Gandhi resisted all attempts by anybody to bring him any closer to Christianity. There was absolutely no question of him being converted to it. In a reply to Rev. M. Wells Branch's letter, Gandhi makes his point quite clear.

I believe that Jesus Christ was one of the greatest teachers of the world. I consider him as an incarnation in the Hindu sense of the term. I do not believe him to be the World Saviour in the sense in which orthodox Christianity understand the expression, but he was a saviour in the same sense as Buddha, Zoroaster, Mohammed, and many other teachers were. In other words, I do not believe in the exclusive divinity of Jesus. The Sermon on the Mount left a deep impression on my mind when I read it. I do believe with you that the real meaning of the teaching of Jesus will be delivered from India. I have moved among thousands upon thousands of Indians, but I have not found any secret follower of Jesus. I think that some of the principles of Christianity are bound to leave their impression upon the future development of India. (72)

In a speech delivered at the Missionary Conference at Madras in 1916, Gandhi reiterates his love for the Bible and regard for Christ especially for the Sermon on the Mount.

I have endeavoured to study the Bible. I consider it as part of my scriptures. The spirit of the Sermon on the Mount competes almost on equal terms with Bhagavat Gita for the domination of my heart. I yield to no Christian in the strength of devotion with which I sing 'Lead Kindly Light' and several other inspired Hymns of similar nature. I have come under the influence of noted Christian missionaries belonging to different denominations. And I enjoy to this day the privilege with some of them. (73)

But Gandhi would not change his identity as a Hindu for anything in the world.

On the question of proselytisation Gandhi speaks out quite clearly against it.

May it not be that the 'Go ye unto all the World' message has been somewhat narrowly interpreted and the spirit of it missed? It will not be denied, I speak from experience, that many of the conversions are only so called. In some cases, the appeal has gone not to the heart but to the stomach. And in every case, a conversion leaves a sore behind it which, I venture to think, is avoidable. Quoting again from experience, birth, a change of heart, is perfectly possible in every one of the great faiths. I know I am now treading upon thin ice. But I do not apologise, in closing this part of my subject, for saying that the frightful outrage that is just going on in Europe, perhaps, shows that the message of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Peace, has been little understood in Europe, and that, light upon it may have to be thrown from the East. (74)

Once again he tells us that he likes Christ and his teachings but not the Christians of today. He even makes

(73)

(74) Ibid., Vol. XIII, p.220

bold to remind those Christians of Europe who had fought two world wars and still profess to be good Christians who come over to India as missionaries to make the Indians good Christians, that the 'unbaptised Rama or Krishna, or Ramesh' is a better follower of Christ and that the so called Christians of Europe better learn the lessons of Jesus Christ from these unbaptised 'Christians' of India.

CHAPTER V

GANDHI AND ISLAM

Coming to Islam, Gandhi is more matter of fact in his approach. He had to face the Muslims in his daily struggles. Islam was a reality that stared him rather uncomfortably in his face which he could neither ignore nor disregard. Nor could he minimize its importance for the success of his great mission. Islam had become a very hard reality towards the end of his struggle for national freedom. The British had made a tool of some of the Mussalmans to fight the Hindus and delay the independence of India as far as possible. Islam had become a sizable and an integral part of the Indian population having existed there for several centuries and ruled over the country for a good part of its history. It would not be untrue to say that the major part of Gandhi's struggle was against the Mussalmans. Strictly speaking, the struggle against the Mussalmans was not to alienate them from the Hindus but to unite them with the Hindus and the Indian people in general. It would be incorrect to say that Gandhi had only political motives in this regard. The sincerity of his religious convictions, his universal love practised through non-violence and tolerance for all were reflected in his attitude towards the Mussalmans at all times. If it were only political expe-

diency his insincerity could have come out some time or other, for the Mussalmans indeed did surely try his patience and forbearance. For, the Mussalmans, much more than the Hindus, were and are a people intimately united in the unity of their creed in such a way that it is difficult for them to cooperate and work together with those of another religion, especially with the Hindus with whom they had fought several religious and political battles. However it goes to the credit of Gandhi that he achieved a great degree of cooperation among the Hindus and the Mussalmans and for a time it looked that the Hindu-Mussalman unity was almost an accomplished fact. The degree of success could be attributed to Gandhi's sincerity of purpose, and its failure to the insincerity or religious bigotry of the followers on both sides of the fence.

The methods adapted by Gandhi were again genuine understanding and appreciation of the Islamic religion and the sincere aspirations of its followers. Gandhi, we know, respected all religions equally and was willing to assimilate any good he saw anywhere into his Hindu religious beliefs. But religious tolerance was not the strongest point in the Muslim religion, and on various points of religious and political cooperation the Hindus and the Muslims fell apart.

Ultimately Gandhi's mission of Hindu-Mussalman cooperation for a united free India failed.

Gandhi's Hindu-Mussalman unity struggle was motivated in part by political reasons.

For me the only question for immediate solution before the country is the Hindu-Mussalman unity. I agree with Mr. Jinnah (Muslim leader counterpart of Gandhi) that Hindu-Mussalman unity means swaraj - independence. I see no way of achieving anything in this afflicted country without a lasting heart unity between Hindus and Mussalman of India. I believe in the immediate possibility of achieving it, because it is so natural, and necessary for both, and because I believe in human nature. (75)

But the reality was that the little Gandhi achieved in this respect was far from being adequate for his purposes of religious or political unity.

Gandhi was motivated by genuine sense of respect for the Mussalman and his religion. He was equally willing to share the blame with his Hindu followers for any breach of trust with the Mussalman that might have gone against establishing a permanent Hindu Muslim unity.

The Mussalmans are brave, they are generous and trusting the moment their suspicion is disarmed.. Hindus as they do, living in glass houses, have no right to throw stones at their Mussalman neighbours. The fact is that they threw stones many a time and the result was Hindu-Mussalman fights sometimes resulting in a lot of bloodshed. Islam, in its glorious days was not intolerant. It commanded the admiration of the world. When the West was in darkness, a bright star rose in the Eastern firmament and gave light and comfort to a groaning world. Islam is not a false religion. Let Hindus study it reverently and they will love it even as I do. If it has become gross and fanatical here, let us admit that we have had no small share in making it so. If the Hindus set their house in order, I have not a shadow of doubt, that Islam will respond in a manner worthy of its liberal traditions. The key to the situation lies with the Hindus. (76)

In part, the Koran shares Gandhi's views on non-violence.

Violence under certain circumstances is permitted in Koran. However it (Koran) prescribes self-restraint as dearer to God than violence. That is the law of life. That is satyagraha. Violence is a concession to human weakness, satyagraha is an obligation. (77)

Gandhi praises Islam and the Prophet Mohamed. After such reading says Gandhi,

(76) CIMG., Vol. XXIV, p.153

(77) Ibid., Vol. XV, p.298

I became more convinced that it was not the sword that won a place for Islam in the scheme of life. It was the rigid simplicity, the utter self-effacement of the Prophet, the scrupulous regard for pledges, his intense devotion to his friends and followers, his intrepidity, his fearlessness, his absolute trust in God and his own mission. These and not the sword carried everything before them and surmounted every obstacle. As I do not regard any human being absolutely perfect, be he a prophet or an avatar, it is necessary for me to be able to explain to the sensor's satisfaction, every detail of the prophet's life. It is enough for me to know that he was a man among millions, who tried to walk in fear of God, died a poor man, wanted no grand mausoleum for his mortal remains and who did not forget even on his death-bed the last of his creditors.. The teaching of the Prophet is no more responsible for the degrading intolerance or the questionable proselytizing methods that one sees around himself than Hinduism is responsible for the degradation and intolerance of present-day Hindus. (78)

Gandhi reiterates his view that Islam is not a religion of the sword, especially for conversion, as Hindus commonly believe.

Islam does not sanction forcible conversion; it even prohibits the use of force. It is wrong to say that Islam has employed force. All those who profess a religion are not true followers of it. Does Hinduism sanction killing of Muslims for saving cows? No. Do we not know that Hindus, lose their heads and fight with the Muslims on this issue? If Islam recognises the use of force it is no religion but irreligion. I am positive that Islam does not sanction the use of force. (79)

Gandhi had repeatedly said that the cow played an

(78) CWMG., Vol. XXV, p.127

(79) Ibid., Vol. XXI, p.203

essential part in the Hindu religion. It played a very important part in disturbing the Hindu-Muslim unity. In spite of his very high regard for the cow Gandhi did not let that stand in the way of Hindu-Muslim cooperation.

THEY - the Hindus - commit no sin if they cannot prevent cow-slaughter at the hands of the Muslims, and they do sin grievously when, in order to save the cow, they quarrel with the Mussalmans. "Though I regard the cow-protection as the central fact of Hinduism, central because it is common to classes and masses, I have never been able to understand the antipathy towards the Mussalmans on that score. We say nothing about the cow slaughter that daily takes place among the Englishmen. Our anger becomes red-hot when a Mussalman slaughters a cow. All the riots that have taken place in the name of cow have been an insane waste of effort. They have not saved a single cow, but they have on the contrary stiffened the backs of the Mussalman and resulted in more slaughter. (80)

Gandhi made an effort to comprehend Islam. It was necessary that he understand the Prophet and his message properly to talk intelligently and convincingly to the Mussalmans around him. He stressed the practical side of the Prophet's teachings that was immediately relevant to his purpose, namely to present the Prophet as a man of peace. He stressed in Islam those points common to all religions, and how the Mussalmans on this ground could and should unite with the Hindus and fight for the common cause of India's independence and prosperity as a united nation. Just because Gandhi did not say too much on the philosophi-

cal aspect of Islam, it did not necessarily mean that he was either insincere or merely pragmatic about his approach to Islam. Gandhi was expressing his views on religions in general from the standpoint of Islam, namely that Islam also should insist on preaching and propagating love of ALL men, above everything.

CHAPTER VI

GANDHI AND THE HOLY BOOKS

The word 'Absolute' has only one meaning in Gandhi's terminology, namely when speaking of the Supreme Truth or God; everything else is relative. Our realization of the Absolute Truth is relative to each individual's preparedness to receive Truth - the various religions are only relatively true, the various religious founders too are only relatively more or less perfect, and finally when it comes to the question of 'Bibles' or Holy Books, 'relative' is the term to be used with regard to their credibility.

All holy books are revealed in a relative sense in as much as they adhere to the revelation of the Absolute Truth. No one book contains all the truth or the whole of the truth. There is nothing really inspired as we generally understand the meaning of this term. Of all the holy books Bhagavat Gita holds the highest place of respect for Gandhi for the very same reasons that hold Hinduism above all other religions. To him, all holy books, especially the Gita teach about the Truth and also the path of non-violence as the only way to propagate this Truth.

Recitation of holy names, or repeated readings of

the holy books in themselves produce no magical or miraculous results; action guided by truth alone can produce good results.

I believe in the fundamental truth of all great religions of the world. I believe that they are all God-given, and I believe that they were necessary for the people to whom these religions were revealed. And I believe that, if only we could all of us read the scriptures of the different faiths from the standpoint of the followers of those faiths, we should find that they were at the bottom all one and were all helpful to one another. (81)

However, Divine knowledge is not borrowed from books. It has to be realized in oneself. Books are at best an aid, often even a hindrance. (82)

In other words, holy books can lead to truth only if they are handled properly, i.e. if they are read and interpreted in the right spirit, without prejudice and with an open mind.

In the matter of interpretation of religion and holy books one must rely more on the heart than on the intellect.

The matters of religion should be decided not by intellect but by the heart.... You should know that the Gita can be interpreted so as to justify crime. Bhima used his club against Duryodhana. If someone says that cousins are therefore, free to regard each other as enemies and kill each other, I would say that such a person does not know how to read Gita right. This whole matter falls within the province of the heart. My religion does not trust reason; it trusts only the heart. I therefore pray that you look into your hearts. (83)

(81) MM., p.84 (83) CWNG, Vol. XXIII, p.337

(82) SB., p.228

Gandhi is quite positive that violence can never be glorified in any of the holy books. "For me, I am positive that neither in the Koran nor in the Mahabharata there is any sanction for and approval of the triumph of violence." (84)

Without giving any special reason, Gandhi affirms that the two books of his choice are the Ramayana and the Gita.

Nothing elates me so much as the music of the Gita or the Ramayana by Tulasidas the only two books in Hinduism I may be said to know. When I fancied I was taking my last breath, the Gita was my solace. (85)

Even though Gandhi doesn't give specific reasons for his special love for these two books, we surmise the following to be his reasons; these two holy books appeal to his heart more than to his reason; also the theme of these books is devotion to the persons of Rama and Krishna who are considered to be flesh and blood like himself. These were introduced to him early in his life by his parents. The Vedas and the Upanishads with their rationalising, do not make much appeal to the heart and soul and are not the common man's vehicle of knowledge of the Supreme Truth. Gandhi is a practical man, a common man's man and the Ramayana and the Gita enjoy great popularity among the

(84) CWNG., Vol. XXII, p.489

(85) Ibid., Vol. XXI, p.246

common man.

With regard to the other holy books of Hinduism of a philosophical tone, like the Vedas and the Upanishads, Gandhi says that he believes in all of them,

I believe in the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Puranas and all that goes by the name of the Hindu scriptures, and therefore in avatars and re-birth. (based on these books) I believe in the protection of the cow and in idol worship. .. I refrain from using the term 'divine origin' in reference to the Vedas or any other scriptures. For I do not believe in the exclusive divinity of the Vedas. My belief in the Hindu scriptures does not require me to accept every word and every verse as divinely inspired. Nor do I claim to have any first hand knowledge of these wonderful books. But I do claim to know them and feel the truths of the essential teachings of the scriptures. I decline to be bound by any interpretation, however learned it may be, if it is repugnant to reason or moral sense. (86)

In his view, all the holy books are at one in the condemnation of violence and evil doers.

The Hindu shastras are full of condemnation of evil-doers. They have pronounced curses upon them. Tulasidas who was the quality of mercy personified, has filled the Ramayana with adjectives against the enemies of Rama which it would be difficult to excel. Indeed the names themselves chosen for them are significant of their qualities. Jesus did not hesitate to draw down divine wrath upon those whom he called 'a generation of vipers, hypocrites, whited sepulchers'. Buddha did not spare those who killed the innocent goats in the name of religion. Nor are the Koran or the Zend-Avestan free from such use. (87)

(86) C.M.G., Vol. XXI, p.246

(87) Ibid., p.453

Holy books must be read in a spirit of devotion. There is less history in them than matter to appeal to one's imagination and heart.

The seers who wrote these words did not set out to write history but only to teach dharma and morals. Millions of peoples read these books and lead pure lives. They read them with guileless hearts and live in this world with innocent joy. It never occurs to them even in a dream to ask whether Ravana was a historical figure or whether they might kill their enemies as Rama killed Ravana. (88)

What Gandhi is repeating is again that we should approach these books not in a spirit of criticism but in a spirit of devotion to draw inspiration from them in order to lead better lives.

The reading of the holy books purifies our minds and helps to think truth and even enables us to act truth. (89)

Scriptures cannot transcend truth and reason. They are intended to purify reason and illuminate truth. (90)

Finally, the reading of the holy books according to one's choice is almost essential for salvation. But this alone does not suffice; action must follow our pious ideas.

(88) CWMG., Vol. XIII, p.43

(89) Ibid., Vol. XIV, p.137

(90) SR., p.229

You have to read the Gita, the Koran and the Bible and the Zend to go to Paradise. But if you mean to achieve your object, you will have to be active and then everything will come right. (91)

Gandhi and the Christian Bible.

Gandhi repeats more or less the same thing with regard to the Bible as he said about the Hindu holy books, maybe less emphatically and in more general terms. After having praised Jesus as a great man, Gandhi speaks of the Bible.

I do not regard the Bible as an infallible record of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. Nor do I consider every word in the New Testament as God's own word. While the Old contains some very deep truths, I am unable to pay it the same honours I pay the New Testament. I regard the latter as an extension of the teachings of the Old and in some matters rejection of the Old. Nor do I regard the New Testament as the last word of God. Religious ideas are subject to the same law of evolution as everything else in the universe. Therefore even God's message received through the imperfect human medium is always subject to distortion in proportion as the human medium is pure or otherwise. (92)

Gandhi deplores very much the fact the noble message of Christ and the constant reading of the Bible have not resulted in making good people of the so called followers of Christ.

(91) CWMG., Vol. XVI, p.311

(92) Ibid., Vol. XXV, p.86

The nations of Europe are called Christian, but they have forgotten the teachings of Christ. They may read the Bible or study the Hebrew language, but they do not act according to the teachings of the former. This wind blowing from the West is opposed to the teachings of Jesus. They have forgotten Jesus. They have forgotten Jesus himself. (93)

Thus Gandhi's interest in Jesus and the Bible is of a passing and superficial nature. It would not be altogether wrong to conclude that this kind of transient interest in Jesus and His teaching was partly caused by the example of the Christians.

Gandhi and the Koran.

When Gandhi deals with the Koran, it is mainly to draw from it sufficient proof to support his arguments against violence, cow slaughter, communal hatred and such other topics which were predominant in his mind. First of all he contends that the Koran is full of examples of kindness and generosity. He quotes two examples, one of a scrupulous money lender, a Jew, who being shown kindness and forgiveness in return for his avarice shown to a poor man, got converted from his avarice and became a Muslim, and the other of a cruel murderer being forgiven for trying to murder Mohammed himself repented and embraced Islam, (94)

(93) CWMG., Vol. XX, p.27

(94) Ibid., Vol. XXV, p.279

He says then that the main theme of the Koran is non-violence and ahimsa though the opposite is permitted under certain special circumstances.

There is warrant enough in the Holy Koran for satyagraha. Whilst violence under certain well-defined circumstances is permissible, self-restraint is dearer to God than violence. And that is the law of love in the Koran. (95)

Gandhi deplores the fact that Mussalmans have a tendency to be violent, but he doesn't blame it on the religion of Islam or on their holy book.

Though, in my opinion non-violence has a predominant place in the Koran, the thirteen hundred years of imperialist expansion has made the Mussalmans fighters as a body. They are therefore aggressive. Bullying is the natural excrescence of an aggressive spirit. (96)

But he consoles himself by saying that the aggressiveness of the Mussalmans is partly due to the intolerance of the Hindus, that if the Hindus trusted the Mussalmans at least as much as they trusted the Englishman the Mussalmans would react favourably towards the Hindus and they would give up violence altogether and join hands with the Hindus to fight for their common cause.

Even with regard to the very thorny problem of the Mussalman killing the cow and thereby causing a lot of bad blood among the Hindus and the Mussalmans Gandhi doesn't

(95) CWMG., Vol. XV, p.298

(96) Ibid., Vol. XXIV, p.271

believe that either the Islamic Religion or their holy Koran has anything to do with it.

Cow slaughter and man-slaughter are the two sides of the same coin" says Gandhi. He continues, "The Koran so far as I have been able to understand it, declares it to be a sin to take the life of any living being without cause. I want to develop the capacity to convince the Mussalmans that to kill the cow is practically to kill their fellow countrymen and friends - the Hindus. The Koran says that there can be no heaven for one who sheds the blood of an innocent neighbour. (97)

CONCLUSION

Gandhi was a staunch religious believer, a social reformer, and a courageous freedom fighter all rolled into one, with Gandhi the religious man, the relentless seeker after truth, the prophet of non-violence standing high above his other roles. His approach to all his problems through the medium of enlightened religious ideals, holding aloft the torch of Eternal Truth before his people, seemed to have produced the best results in all the fields he entered, except perhaps in the field of Hindu Muslim amity and the acquisition of political freedom for a united India. Even here, it is more the enormity of the problems than Gandhi's method of approach that should be taken into account as a cause of some degree of failure.

It would be improper to call Gandhi a politician in the ordinary sense of the word, as one who is aspiring for higher and higher positions of honour. Gandhi had categorically stated several times that he would step down from his political activities altogether once India obtained independence. He would then devote himself to the activities for improving the social and economic conditions of the poor people. He had recommended that the very political

party he had guided for long in its fight for freedom should be dissolved after obtaining independence, and re-organise itself as bodies working for general improvement of the people. However he did not live long enough to see this dream of his come true- he was assassinated a few months after India achieved independence on August 15, 1947 - exactly on the 30th of January 1948. All that we know is that the Congress Party took over the reins of political administration of the country and has continued doing so till today. But there is reason enough to believe that, had Gandhi lived long enough he would have withstood the strong temptations of politician's life of corruption and compromise. His religious convictions and search for truth were so predominant that it would have been extremely difficult for cheap politics to lure him away from his cherished beliefs. His own categorical statements in this connection would help us to reach this conclusion.

There is nothing on earth that I would not give up for the sake of the country, excepting of course two things and two only, namely, truth and non-violence. I would not sacrifice these two for all the world. For, to me Truth is God and there is no way to find truth except the way of non-violence. I do not seek to serve India at the sacrifice of Truth or God. For I know that a man who forsakes Truth can forsake his country and his nearest and dearest ones. (98)

To answer the other question, namely did Gandhi sa-

crifice his religious principles on the altar of his public life, especially in the field of politics, and more especially in his attempt to bring about communal amity between the Hindus and the Muslims, I will again defend Gandhi and affirm that he did not sacrifice his higher principles of Truth and non-violence. Having defined his religion as that which underlies all religions, namely man's search for the Ultimate Truth, which he identified with God, Gandhi seemed to have been on very secure and firm grounds to approach people of all religious denominations to unite and work together for common interests, such as political independence, social betterment and economic growth. He did not ask any one to give up his faith and religious convictions. He did not argue about the minor points of religious practices peculiar to each religious denomination. He adhered to his specific Hindu religious practices in his private life but did not permit that to interfere with his public dealings with people of other religions.

Furthermore, owing to his views about truth as relative and subject to various interpretations depending on the prerequisites for the understanding of truth being fulfilled by the seeker in a higher or a lower degree, Gandhi had no difficulty in accepting other people's religious views with sincerity, holding his own intact and still asking for cooperation on basic common grounds. We can

hardly disagree with Gandhi when he says that God is one, that God is unfathomable, and omnipresent and so on. These are universal beliefs.

This brings us to one of the most fundamental points of our discussion in the analysis of Gandhi's attitude to religion, namely what kind of Hinduism did he preach and practice, and what kind of Hindu he himself was. Was he an orthodox Hindu keeping strictly to the Vedic and philosophical principles of Hinduism, or was he a liberal minded Hindu, adapting and adjusting old Hindu religious principles to suit modern needs of man to establish freedom and equality for all men. Or was he perhaps a mixture of orthodoxy and modern liberalism?

Gandhi's exact attitude to Hinduism is rather like Hinduism itself, somewhat indefinable. At one time we feel that Gandhi is a strict adherent of the old Vedic and Upanishidic principles of Hinduism, especially when he tries to explain to us the nature of God. In this he was at one with the Hindu sages and thinkers. But we saw that he accepted the fact of minor gods or avatars chiefly Rama and Krishna. The historicity of the stories related to these avatars does not seem to bother Gandhi. As we saw on pages 5, 6, 25, 26, 42 and 77 these avatars differ from each other only in the degree of their perfection, not in the kind of their personality. They are a necessity of times and we must accept them.

and venerate them. Like any pious Hindu, Gandhi was in the habit of reciting the holy names of Rama and Krishna frequently. In fact his last words were 'Hare Ram, Hare Ram'. However, we must state that Gandhi saw in these avatars more of the reflection of the Eternal Truth, whereas the common Hindu was quite satisfied with the exemplary human stories piously related to their earthly existence. Whether historically true or false, as long as these stories helped the common man's devotion, they were quite all right for him.

Gandhi would advocate religious tolerance based on freedom of conscience, but practice his Hindu religion in all its details in his own life, with its caste system and cow worship, with its theories of rebirth and transmigration. He would also bring his religion into every one of his daily activities and look at each of them from a religious angle only. Accordingly social service was religion, politics was religion and so was everything else, or the other way about. His close associate and co-worker, Jawaharlal Nehru was his just opposite in this respect. For him religious activities were completely distinct from political, social, economic or any similar activities. He had no time for the former which he relegated to more convenient times i.e. when he had finished with the more urgent priorities in the political, social and economic fields.

Gandhi's approach to all problems through the medium of religion seemed to have made more inroads into the hearts of his followers, who included adherents of all re-

religious faiths, than Nehru's or for that reason of any other Indian leader either before or after him. Gandhi, more than any other Indian leader, realised the fact that religious sentiments and aspirations formed the very life-blood of the Indian people. It was to this that Gandhi appealed. It was through religion that he visualised and explained the problems of his times to his people. It was in this light that Gandhi saw Hinduism, preached Hinduism and practiced the same in his own life. Therefore to answer what type of Hinduism did Gandhi practice or what kind of Hindu Gandhi really was, we must say that his type of Hinduism was orthodoxy mixed with a very great doze of modern liberalism added to it. Again like everything else connected with Gandhi, it was typically a Gandhian type of Hinduism that he preached and practiced. There was something for everybody in this Gandhian mixture of Hinduism just as there is in Hinduism itself, which could be conveniently defined as a religion that accepts into its fold any good found anywhere.

We reach the same conclusion when we try to pass our judgement on Gandhi's attitude to other religions also. Gandhi's attitude toward other religions, in the light of our findings and explanations, could not exactly be termed religious eclecticism. Gandhi's was not simply acceptance of everything that was good in other religions, but merely

tolerance of others' views based on all kinds of reasons, philosophical, religious, and I would say, above all, practical. Gandhi believed in man's individual freedom of conscience and freedom of thought in all matters. In the matter of religion, he believed that no religious truth was revealed to any individual or group exclusively. From the practical point of view, Gandhi's attitude of extreme tolerance of other peoples' religious views was perhaps the only way he could make any sort of an effective appeal to them and unite them in any way for a common cause. But the astonishing fact is that with all his religious liberalism and tolerance of other religions, he remained a staunch Hindu, accepting and practicing all its principles in every detail. Together with his Supreme God, he accepted the many minor gods and goddesses also. Eclecticism involves selecting elements from various and diverse sources according to their validity, and combining them into a satisfying system of ideas or set of practices. One holds on to no single specific system from which the elements were originally selected, unlike what Gandhi seems to have done. Therefore Gandhi cannot be considered to have preached or practiced religious eclecticism. It could be stated though that he was certainly preaching and practicing religious tolerance. This was foremost in his mind when he said,

The need of the moment is not one religion, but mutual respect and tolerance of the devotees of the different religions. We want to reach not the dead level, but unity in diversity. Any attempt to root out tradition, effects of heredity, climate and other aspects of the environment is not only bound to fail, but is sacrilege. The soul of religion is one, but it is encased in a multitude of forms. The latter will persist to the end of time. Wise men will ignore the outward crust and see the same soul living under a variety of crusts. For Hindus to expect Islam, Christianity or Zoroastrianism to be driven out of India is as idle a dream as it would for Mussalman to have only Islam of their imagination rule the world; But if belief in one God and the race of His Prophets in a never ending chain is sufficient for Islam, then we are all Mussalmans, but we are also all Hindus and Christians. Truth is the exclusive property of no single scripture. (99)

One thing remains quite certain, namely Gandhi's own sincerity about his beliefs. He adhered to every detail of his beliefs. He nourished his religious convictions with fasting and penance. He practiced them in every aspect of his private and public life. Today Gandhi stands out as one of the staunchest proponents of civilised man's code of behaviour in his dealings with himself and with his fellowmen - That God is Truth, that Truth always wins in the end and only Truth will win in the end. This is the meaning Gandhi gives to God and religion.

APPENDIX

I. BRIEF ACCOUNT OF THE LIFE OF GANDHI

Looking into the lineage of Mohandas Gandhi, we note that the Gandhis belonged to the Bania (Business Man) caste, and seemed to have been originally grocers. (Gandhi means grocer). But for three generations, from Mohandas' grandfather, they had been Prime Ministers in several Katiawad (Western India) States. Uttamchand Gandhi, Mohandas' grandfather, the Prime Minister of Porbandar state, was forced to leave Porbandar on account of some state intrigues, and seek refuge in the nearby little state of Junagadh. It is said that there he saluted the Nawab, the ruler of that state, with his left hand. When questioned about this discourtesy, he was said to have replied this: "The right hand is already pledged to Porbandar". (100)

Uttamchand Gandhi had six sons, the fifth of whom was Karamchand Gandhi, the father of Mohandas. His mother's name was Putlibai. Mohandas was the youngest of four children born to Karamchand and Putlibai. Mohandas recalls that his father was a great lover of his clan, truthful,

brave and generous but very short-tempered. The outstanding impression that he has of his mother is that she was very religious and even saintly.

About his early schooling at Porbandar and later at Rajkot, Gandhi has nothing much to say. He was a student of average intelligence for studies but more than average love for truth, honesty and respect for elders. He seemed to have had a weakness for smoking. He even seemed to have stolen money for this purpose. It is reported that Gandhi loved freedom for himself above every other quality.

All his life, Gandhi decried the evil custom of child marriage, of which unfortunately he himself was a victim, marrying at the early age of thirteen a girl of the same age. The girl's name was Kasturbai, the daughter of a Porbandar merchant named Gokuldas Mekanji. This marriage lasted sixty two years and was quite memorable in more ways than one. She was a participant in all of Gandhi's public life. Kasturbai showed some love for her personal independence and freedom of thought. She did not seem to have fully shared her husband's liberal views on the caste system and the rules of untouchability. All these led to some degree of family bickering and unhappiness for some time. Mahandas seemed to have been in

addition, a very jealous husband, and kept his wife under very strict surveillance, which going against her love of independence, resulted in more unpleasant relationship between them at times.

Mohandas' education continued long after his marriage. He tells us how he was puzzled about strict vegetarianism during his school days. It seems a poem was recited to him regarding meat eating which read like this:

Behold the mighty Englishman,
He rules the Indian small,
because being a meat-eater
He is five cubits tall. (101)

He was given to understand by some of his friends that Indians were a weak people because they did not eat meat. Gandhi apparently believed this and going against his social and religious customs and principles, started on to meat diet and continued so secretly for a time. Later he gave it up altogether.

His introduction to the principle of non-violence was as follows. At the age of fifteen he happened to steal some money from his brother. This produced a moral crisis for him. He had pangs of conscience and resolved never to steal again. Wanting to confess his crime to his father

and failing to pluck up enough courage to speak to him, he wrote a note to his father asking for pardon and adequate penance for his sin of stealing. The reaction of his father when he read the note was quite unexpected. Tears began to fall from his father's eyes as he read the note. Soon, both cried and his father was in deep agony for his son's offence. This deeply moved Mohandas' heart, cleansing it of all desire for any further stealing. He attributed his father's unwanted anguish to two facts, namely his extreme love for his son and his extreme hatred for the sin of stealing, or any sin for that reason. This, says Gandhi, is what really planted the seeds of non-violence or ahimsa in his mind, which developed into the life force of all his activities in his later years.

The early lessons of love of truth, self-control and self-discipline stood him in good stead during the years to come, during his studies in England, when he was fighting for the rights of his countrymen in South Africa, and all through his long struggles for Indian independence. These qualities grew in strength with the passing of time. They formed the main secret of Gandhi's extraordinary energy, moral courage and unflinching hope in the face of difficulties. It was not with atom bombs and machine guns that this half-naked man, Mahatma Gandhi, called his so insouciantly, fought against the might of British power.

and won a great victory where brute force might have failed. Gandhi's lesson of resisting brute force by the forces of moral strength was the greatest tribute to the dignity of civilised human nature.

II. ADDITIONAL QUOTES ON GANDHI'S CONCEPT OF GOD

a) Those endowed with the quality of SATTVA are tranquil, self-collected and discriminating. They do not bother themselves with the affairs of the world, but keep their minds fixed on God. This sattvic disposition has been rightly described as the 'SOOTHFASTNESS' quality. Soothfastness means calmness. With 'ness' the word becomes a noun and means peace. Only when the mind is peaceful can one realize God, and the state of mind in which such realization becomes possible is the sattvic state. God, as transcending the three qualities has no activity, good or otherwise, but through maya. (CWG., Vol. XII, p.189)

b) And those who have followed out this vow of voluntary poverty to the fullest extent possible - to reach absolute perfection is an impossibility, but the fullest possible for a human being - those who have reached the ideal of that state testify that when you dispossess yourself of everything you have, you really possess all the treasures of the world. (CWG., Vol. III, pp.155-157)

c) I am in the world feeling my way to light 'amid the encircling gloom'. I often err and miscalculate. My trust is solely in God. And I trust men only because I trust God. If I had no God to rely upon, I should be, like Timon, a hater of my species. (MM., p.13)

d) It is faith that steers us through stormy seas, faith that moves mountains and faith that jumps across the ocean. That faith is nothing but a living, wide awake consciousness of God within us. He who has achieved that faith wants nothing. Bodily diseased, he is spiritually healthy, physically poor, he rolls in spiritual richness. (MM., p.80)

e) There is something within me (my God) impelling me to cry out my agony. I have known exactly what it is. That something in me which never deceives me tells me now: 'You have to stand against the whole world although you may have to stand alone. You have to stare the world in the face although the world may look at you with blood-shot eyes. Do not fear. Trust that little thing in you which resides in the heart and tells you: 'Foreake friends, wife, all; but testify to that for which you have lived and for which you have to die. (MM., p.16)

f) I have passed through many an ordeal in my life.

The fiercer it becomes, the closer is the communion with God that I experience and the deeper grows my faith in His abundant grace. So long as it persists, I know it is well with me. (MGP., Vol.11, p.246)

g) God's ways are inscrutable. He often tests His favourites through manifold defeats and tribulations. (CWNG, Vol.11, p.163)

h) All our fear arises from lack of faith. If we put our faith in God, that is, if we trust that everything will happen as ordained by Him, we would never worry. But it is only when we on our own part have done our best that we can console ourselves with 'whatever is to happen will happen'. Man's efforts are assuredly rewarded by God's grace. (CWNG., Vol. XXII, p.190)

i) No man can be said to be good before his death. After death too, he is good for the person who believes in him. As a matter of fact God alone knows a man's heart (to judge who is really good and who is really bad). God alone is truly good and hence He alone is to be worshiped. (MGP., Vol. 11, p.100)

j) In all humility exclaims Gandhi: Why should He (God) have chosen me an imperfect instrument, for such a mighty experiment? I think He deliberately did so. He had

to serve the poor dumb millions. A perfect man might have been their despair. (MGP., Vol.11, p.801)

k) I do not sit in judgement upon the world for its misdeeds. Being imperfect myself and needing toleration and charity, I tolerate the world's imperfections till I find or create an opportunity for fruitful expostulation. (MGP., Vol.11, p.800)

l) Truth to me is infinitely dearer than the 'mahatmaship' which is purely a burden. It is my knowledge of my limitations and my nothingness which has so far saved me from the oppressiveness of 'mahatmaship'. I am a poor mendicant. My earthly possessions consists of six spinning wheels, prison dishes, a can of goat's milk, six home-spun loin-cloths and towels, and my reputation which cannot be worth much. (MT., Vol. 11, p.425-426., MT., Vol. 111, p.142)

m) If anybody tried to take out my body in a procession after I died, I would certainly tell them - if my corpse could speak - to spare me and create me where I had died. (NM., p.9)

n) Why evil exists and what it is are beyond our limited reason. It should be enough to know that both good and evil exist. And as often as we can distinguish between good and evil, we must choose the one and shun the other. (NM., p.227, 228)

III. ADDITIONAL QUOTES ON GANDHI'S CONCEPT OF RELIGION

a) Religions are different roads converging to the same point. What does it matter that we take different roads, so long as we reach the same goal? In reality, there are as many religions as there are individuals. (SB., p.225)

b) If a man reaches the heart of his own religion, he has reached the heart of the others too. (SB., p.225)

c) So long as there are different religions, everyone of them may need some distinctive symbols. But when the symbol is made into a fetish and an instrument of proving the superiority of one's religion over others, it is fit only to be discarded! (SB., p.226,227)

d) After long study and experience, I have come to the conclusion that 1) all religions are true; 2) all religions have some error in them; 3) all religions are almost as dear to me as my own Hinduism, in as much as all human beings should be as dear to one as one's own close relatives. My own veneration for another's faith is the same as that for my own faith, therefore no thought of conversion is possible. (SB., p.228)

e) God has created different faiths just as He has

the votaries thereof. How can I even secretly harbour the thought that my neighbour's faith is inferior to mine and wish that he should give up his faith and embrace mine? As a true and loyal friend, I can only wish and pray that he may live and grow perfect in his own faith. In God's house there are many mansions and they are equally holy. (SB., p.228)

f) I do not believe in people telling others of their faith, especially with a view to conversion. Faith does not admit of telling. It has to be lived and then it becomes self-propagating. (MM., p.84)

g) A sinner is equal to the saint in the eye of God. Both will have equal justice, and both in equal opportunity either to go forward or to go backward. Both are His children his creation. A Saint who considers himself superior to a sinner forfeits his sainthood and becomes worse than the sinner, who, unlike the proud saint, knows not what he is doing. (MM., p.167)

h) Whenever I see an erring man, I say to myself I have also erred; when I see a lustful man I say to myself, so was I once; and in this way I feel kinship with everyone in this world and feel that I cannot be happy without the humblest of us being happy. (MM., p.2, 3)

i) I am too conscious of the imperfections of the species to which I belong to be irritated against any member thereof. My remedy is to deal with the wrong wherever I see it, not to hurt the wrongdoer, even as I would not like to be hurt for the wrongs I continually do. (MM., p.3)

j) I know no greater sin than to oppress the innocent in the name of God. (MGP., Vol. 11, p.143)

k) I regard untouchability as the greatest blot on Hinduism. (MT., Vol. 11, p.47,48)

l) I am endeavouring to see God through service of humanity, for I know that God is neither in heaven, nor down below, but in every one. (MM., p.24)

m) It is a tragedy that religion for us means today nothing more than restrictions on food and drink, nothing more than adherence to a sense of superiority and inferiority. Let me tell you that there cannot be any grosser ignorance than this. Birth and observance of forms cannot determine one's superiority and inferiority. Character is the only determining factor. God did not create men with the badge of superiority or inferiority; no scripture which labels a human being as inferior or untouchable because of

his or her birth can command our allegiance, it is a denial of God and Truth which is God. (MT., Vol. III, p.343)

n) The common factor of all religions is non-violence. Some inculcate more of it than others, all agree that you can never have too much of it. We must be sure, however, that it is non-violence and not a cloak for cowardice. (CIMG., Vol. XXV, p.168)

o) No religion in the world can be protected by violence. After thirty years of experience and reflection I have come to realize that there is no way but non-violence to protect our religion and our country. One who draws the sword perishes by it. No religion can or will at any time endure on the strength of the sword. Islam has survived in the strength of fakirs and Hinduism on that of the tapsvis. The Hindu religion has produced rishis and munis who have unravelled the mystery of death. (CIMG., Vol. XXV, p.93,94)

p) In the moment of trial and our triumph let me declare my faith, I believe in loving my enemies. I believe in non-violence as the only remedy open to the Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Parsis, Christians and Jews of India. I believe in the power of suffering to melt the stoniest heart. The brunt of the battle must fall on the first three. The last named three are a fold of the combination of the first.

three. We must by our honest conduct demonstrate to them that they are our kinsmen. We must by our conduct demonstrate to every Englishman that he is as safe in the remotest corner of India as he professes to feel behind the machine gun. (CWMG., Vol. XXI, p.551)

q) I tell men of all religions that we wish to be bound in a unity of hearts. Are we not so bound to the Christians? Do we not accept the help that men like Andrews and Stokes offer us? We do not desire to make anyone our enemy. We wish rather to give our own blood. (CWMG., Vol. XX, p.103)

r) Everyone should be ready to lay down his life for his faith. He who gives his life will be saved. He who takes another's life will lose his own. If one could truly follow one's dharma by killing others, lakhs of men would have attained moksha by now. (CWMG., Vol. XXI, p.423)

s) Mine is a life full of joy in the midst of incessant work. In not wanting to think of what tomorrow would bring for me I feel as free as a bird... The thought that I am ceaselessly and honestly struggling against the requirements of the flesh sustains me. (MM., p.3)

t) I remain an optimist, not that there is any evidence that I can give, that right is going to prosper but

because of my unflinching faith that right must prosper in the end.... Our inspiration can come only from our faith that right must ultimately prevail. (MM., p.5)

IV. ADDITIONAL QUOTE ON GANDHI'S CONCEPT OF HINDUISM

The cow question is a big question. The greatest for a Hindu. I yield to no one in my regard for the cow, yet I would not kill a human being for protecting a cow, as I will not kill a cow for saving a human life, be it ever so precious. Hindus do not fulfil their trust so long as they do not possess the ability to protect the cow. The ability can be derived either from body-force or soul-force. To attempt cow-protection by violence is to reduce Hinduism to Satanism and to prostitute to a base end the grand significance of cow-protection. (CWMG., Vol. XX, p.111)

B I B L I O G R A P H Y

ABBREVIATIONS OF SOURCES

- CWMG The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi. Published by the Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, New Delhi.
- MT Mahatma, Life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, by D.G.Tendulkar. Published by Vithalbai K.Jhaveri and D.G.Tendulkar, Bombay 6, in eight volumes.
- AMG An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiments with Truth, by M.K.Gandhi. Published by Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad - 1945, 2nd edition.
- MGP Mahatma Gandhi, the last phase, by Pyarelal. Published by Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad.
- SB Selections from Gandhi, by Nirmal Kumar Bose. Published by Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, in 1948.
- MM The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi, compiled by R.K. Prabhu and U.R.Rao. Published by Oxford University Press, London, in March 1945.
- DM The Diary of Mahadev Desai. Published by Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad.
- BM Bapu's Letters to Mira, published by Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, August 1949.
- EG Essential Gandhi - Edited by Louis Fischer. (1962 Copyright)
- GT Gandhi's Truth - by Erik Erikson.