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## **Chapter-IV**

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### **Secular or Religious**

Was Gandhi a Hindu? His critics called him he was a devout Hindu. True Gandhi was a Hindu, since he was born Hindu. He belonged to a Vaishnava family. His mother, Gandhi says, was deeply religious. About his father, Gandhi writes, "Of religious training he had very little but he had that kind of religious culture which frequent visits to temples and listening to religious discourses make available to many Hindus"<sup>1</sup>

His childhood was spent accompanying his mother to Haveli, the Vaishnava temple. She was a devout woman and followed the rituals of Hinduism with utmost devotion and fervour. All this certainly made its first impression on his mind, and which he carried on throughout his life. There were other situations also in his home, which too made their impressions upon him and made him liberal in outlook. His father very often used to invite learned people of other faiths and discussed with them nuances of other religions. To quote Gandhi, "He had, besides, Masalman and Parsi friends, who would listen to them always with respect, and often with interest. Being his nurse, I often had a chance to be present at these talks. These many things combined to inculcate in me a toleration for all faiths."<sup>1A</sup> About the influence his mother made upon him, Gandhi says, "the outstanding impression my mother has left on my memory is that of saintliness."<sup>2</sup> About the other quality of his mother, Gandhi writes, "she would take the hardest vows and keep them without flinching. Illness was no excuse for relaxing them."<sup>3</sup>

Gandhi's mother was raised in 'pranami' sect, which was recognized for its latitudinarianism vis-à-vis Islamic doctrines. The temple his mother used to take him had no idol in it. The headmaster of the school was a Zoroastrian. One of the closest friends of Gandhi in his school days was a Muslim. These were the non-Hindu influences which also played their some role in giving a shape to his mental and spiritual outlook.

About his early influences, Gandhi has different story to narrate. He writes in his 'Autobiography', "Being born in the Vaishnava faith, I had often to go to the Haveli. But it never appealed to me. I did not like its glitter and pomp. Also I heard rumours of immorality practised there, and lost all interest in it. Hence I could gain nothing from the Haveli."<sup>4</sup>

Though he learnt 'Ramanama' from his nurse Rambha, he used to repeat 'Ramanama' only to quell his fear of ghosts and spirits. "...At a tender age I began repeating 'Ramanama' to cure my fear of ghosts and spirits,"<sup>5</sup> Gandhi wrote. However, in the same spirit he confesses, "This was of course short-lived, but the good seed sown in childhood was not sown in vain, I think it is due to the seed sown by that good woman Rambha that today Ramanama is an infallible remedy for me."<sup>6</sup>

In his boyhood, the reading of the Ramanama before his father created a deep impression in him. Gandhi would simply be in rapt adoration when he used to hear one Ladha Maharaj reciting the Ramayana. About Ladha Maharaj, he says, 'was a great devotee of Rama'. Gandhi was little more than thirteen, when his father had taken to bed. At this juncture, Ladha Maharaj would come and read out of Tulsidas's Ramayana before the elder Gandhi in his melodious voice, which enthralled Gandhi. That bred in him a deep devotion to the Ramayana, which lasted him till his death. Gandhi appreciates, "Today

I regard the Ramayana of Tulsidas as the greatest book in all devotional literature.”<sup>7</sup>

Gandhi confesses that though he developed toleration for other religions in his early childhood, Christianity remained an exception with him. He developed a sort of a dislike for it because he had noticed, while going to school, Christian missionaries in their discourse, beside his school, hurling abuses on Hindus and their gods, Gandhi could not swallow this insult though it was a chance experience for him. Gandhi gives further explanation for his dislike for Christianity in his ‘Autobiography’, “About the same time I heard of a well known Hindu having been converted to Christianity. It was talk of the town that, when he was baptized he had to eat beef and drink liquor, that he also had to change his clothes, and that thenceforth he began to go about in European costume including a hat. These things got on my nerves, Surely, thought I, a religion that compelled one to eat beef, drink liquor, and change one’s own clothes did not deserve the name. I also heard that the new convert had already begun abusing the religion of his ancestors, their customs and their country. All these things created in me a dislike for Christianity.”<sup>8</sup>

In fact, these were the outpourings of an immature mind, gradually with gaining more and more experiences, Gandhi changed his standpoint on Christianity. In those days, though Gandhi was tolerant to other religions, he did not have much faith in God. “But the *fact* that I had learnt to be tolerant to other religions did not mean that I had any living faith in God.”<sup>9</sup> Even his encounter with ‘Manusmriti’<sup>10</sup> was not very pleasant. Gandhi was a votary of ‘ahimsa’ or non-violence, but he found the teachings in ‘Manusmriti’ contrary to his point of view. ‘Manusmriti’ at any rate did not then teach me ‘ahimsa’. I have told the story of my meat eating. ‘Manusmriti’ seemed to support it.”<sup>11</sup> In reality,

the doctrines of 'Manusmriti' turned him 'somewhat towards atheism'. Gandhi recalls later as early as at the age of twelve he began to feel his growing disbelief in the practice of untouchability. There was scavenger named Uka who used to serve in their house. Gandhi was asked to perform the ablutions whenever he accidentally touched Uka. Though he obeyed such command of his elders, he did not do it without protesting that untouchability was not sanctioned by religion. He had heard in the Ramayana that one low-caste boatman had ferried Rama, the hero in the epic, across the Ganges. As he grew up, Gandhi developed a close affinity, rapport and fellow feeling with so-called untouchables.

Even without bothering the verdict of the caste council to forgo his pre-planned journey, he left for England. The ritual aspects of Hinduism had no attraction for Gandhi. In fact, Gandhi found extremely hard to understand how untouchability, cruel orthodoxy and superstitions could be associated with the high ideals of Hinduism. He concluded there was something seriously wrong, but he was unable to anatomize due to his inexperience. Gandhi could never reconcile himself to untouchability. He regarded it as an excrescence. On many evil practices of Hinduism, Gandhi writes, "It was true that it has been handed down to us from generations, but so are many evil practices even to this day. . . I should be ashamed to think that dedication of girls to virtual prostitution was a part of Hinduism, yet Hindus in many parts of India practise it. I consider it positive irreligion to sacrifice goats to kali and do not consider it a part of Hinduism ...Untouchability is repugnant to reason and to the instinct of mercy, pity or love. A religion (Hinduism) that establishes the worship of the cow cannot positively countenance or warrant a cruel or 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 the 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."<sup>11A</sup> Even Gandhi called untouchability a device of Satan and the supporters of the practice of untouchability, who quote scriptures, devils. He expresses his serious anguish against those people who despise scavengers, "There is neither nobility nor bravery in treating the great and uncomplaining scavengers of the nation as worse than dogs to be despised and spat upon."<sup>11B</sup>

Yet, in the face of this seesaw of religious attractions and revulsions, Gandhi paved his own path of morality based on truth. "But one thing took deep root in me –the conviction that morality is the basis of things, and that truth is the substance of all morality. Truth became my sole objective. It began to grow in magnitude everyday, and my definition of it also has been ever widening."<sup>12</sup>

His acquaintance with 'Bhagavada Gita', the other great book of Hindu religion, came much later. In fact, in the company of the two theosophists brothers in England, he began to read the 'Gita'. He read the original in Sanskrit as well as its English version, rendered into English by Sir Edwin Arnold. The reading of the 'Gita' left an indelible mark on his mind. About the impression left on his mind by the reading of the 'Bhagvadagita', Gandhi writes, "the book struck me as one of priceless worth. The impression has ever since been growing on me with the result that I regard it today as the book par excellence for the knowledge of Truth. It has afforded me invaluable help in my moments of gloom."<sup>13</sup>

Gandhi gathered further from the 'Gita' that reward or punishment should not be predicted beforehand while one is performing his rightful duties. Let there be suffering but the same should be neglected in course of one's action. He says, "This is the unmistakable teaching of the Gita. He who gives up action falls. He who gives up only the reward rises. But renunciation of fruit is no way means indifference to the result. In regard to every action, one must know the result that is expected to follow, the means thereto and the capacity for it. He, who being thus equipped, is without desire for the result and is yet wholly engrossed in due fulfillment of the task before him is said to have renounced the fruits of his action."<sup>13A</sup>

In England, he began seriously to read about religion. He read Sir Arnold's 'The light of the Asia', written in the context of the Buddha. His reading of Madame Blavatsky's 'Key to Theosophy' stimulated in him a desire to read more books on Hinduism. This reading has disabused Gandhi of "the notion fostered by the missionaries that Hinduism was rife with superstition."<sup>14</sup>

About the same time, he met one Christian from Manchester, under whose company Gandhi's doubt was dispelled that Christianity supports meat eating and drinking. On the advice of the Christian gentleman, Gandhi began to read the Bible, though the reading of Old Testament induced his sleep. Whereas the reading of New Testament, especially the reading of the Sermon on the Mount, produced a different impression, it went straight to his heart and he began to compare it with the teachings of the 'Gita'. On the similarities found in between them, he elaborates thus, "I have not been able to see any difference between Sermon on the Mount and the Bhagvadgita, what the Sermon describes in a graphic manner, and the Bhagvadgita reduces it to a scientific formula. It may not be a scientific book in the

accepted sense of term, but it has argued out the law of love –the law of abandon as I call it –in a scientific manner. The Sermon on the Mount gives the same law in the wonderful language. Today, supposing, I was deprived of the Gita and forgot all its contents but had a copy of the Sermon, I should derive the same joy from it as I do from the Gita.”<sup>14A</sup> He further speaks without hesitation, “My young mind tried to unify the teachings of the Gita, the Light of the Asia and the Sermon on the Mount. That renunciation was the highest form of religion appealed to me greatly.”<sup>15</sup> On the recommendation of a friend, Gandhi also read the chapter ‘The Prophet’ in Carlyle’s ‘Hero and Hero-worship’ and “learnt of the Prophet’s greatness and bravery and austere living.”<sup>16</sup> Jains pursuit for realization of ultimate truth beyond the senses and take a non-injury to any living thing had also left its lasting impression upon Gandhi in his early childhood. Here the concept of ‘ahimsa’ or non-violence had its initial beginning in the immature mind of Gandhi. In his later life, Gandhi became a downright votary of this concept of ‘ahimsa’. “Jains search for ultimate truth beyond the senses and take a vow of non-injury to avoid harm to all living things, including micro-organisms. This pledge of personal non-violence in ahimsa, found also in Buddhism and Hinduism is a virtue of the man who renounces the world. Under different influences Gandhiji later interpreted and expanded this principle to include temporal and collective as well as spiritual and individual matters.”<sup>16A</sup>

After his return from England during his short stay at Bombay in the house of Dr. Mehta, who was his old acquaintance in England, Gandhi was introduced to a poet named Raja Chandra or Raychand Bhai, who was also a well-known businessman and a connoisseur of gems. Though this man himself was only 25 and Gandhi hardly 21, he made a deep impression upon the latter’s mind by his pursuit for self

realisation. He used to mutter always: "I shall think myself blessed only when I see Him in every one of my daily acts."<sup>17</sup> Gandhi writes about Raychandbhai's influence upon him, "The thing that did cast its spell over me I came to know afterwards. This was his wide knowledge of the scriptures, his spotless character, and his burning passion for self-realisation."<sup>18</sup> Though this man was a busy businessman, Gandhi marked, in the midst of his busy business transactions, he was always absorbed in godly pursuits. "But all these things were not the centre round which his life revolved. That centre was the passion to see God face to face."<sup>19</sup> Raychandbhai by his advice and guidance dispelled the problems and doubts of Gandhi on religious matters and steered him on towards the correct path. "In my moments of spiritual crisis, therefore, he was my refuge."<sup>20</sup> But never did Gandhi enthrone him as his 'Guru'. Gandhi has acknowledged that three moderns have left lasting impressions on his life and captivated him; "Raychandbhai by his living contact; Tolstoy by his book, 'The Kingdom of God is within you'; and Ruskin by his 'Unto the Last'."<sup>21</sup>

Gandhi's early days in South Africa proved to be disturbed. He came in touch with certain Christian friends, who never became tired in their efforts to convert him. He could not reconcile himself to the idea of needing a mediator who could only mediate between man and God. He could not convince himself that Jesus was the only incarnate Son of God "and that only he who believed in Him, would have everlasting life."<sup>22</sup> Gandhi argued, "If God could have sons; all of us were his sons. If Jesus was like God, or God himself, then all men were like God and could be God Himself," though Gandhi accepted Jesus as a martyr, an embodiment of sacrifice, and a divine teacher, but not as the most perfect man ever born.<sup>23</sup> Even "eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth" philosophy of the Old Testament did not appeal him. He could not

accept the basic principles of the Bible that unless one was Christian he could not be redeemed.

Gandhi writes, "Thus I could not accept Christianity either as a perfect, or the greatest religion, neither was I then convinced of Hinduism being such. Hindu defects were pressingly visible to me. If untouchability could be a rotten part of Hinduism, it could but be a rotten part or an excrescence. I could not understand the *raison d'être* of a multiple of sects and castes. What was the meaning of saying the Vedas were the inspired Word of God? If they were inspired, why not also the Bible and the Koran?"<sup>24</sup>

As his Christian friends were endeavouring their level best to convert him, his Muslim friends were no less anxious. Though he left no stone unturned to familiarize himself with the Prophet and the ethics of Islam, he became never tempted to adopt the faith. He also read a book called the "Sayings of the Zarathustra" and concluded that there were lot of things common in most religious philosophies.

Gandhi from his early youth associated himself with all faiths and beliefs. But his approach at no point of time was biased with any preconceived belief, he made his access simply with an open mind with an anxiety to find out the truth. He writes, "Thus I gained more knowledge of the different religions. The study stimulated my self-introspection and fostered in me the habit of putting into practice whatever appealed to me in my studies."<sup>25</sup>

"By religion I do not mean formal religion, or customary religion, but that religion which underlies all religions, which brings us face to face with our Maker," Gandhi defines his assessment of religion.<sup>26</sup> To Gandhi there is always an indefinable mysterious Power that pervades everything. Though he felt, he never saw it. It is this unseen Power,

which makes itself felt, however there is no proof to define it. Since "it is so unlike all that I perceive through my senses. It transcends the senses."<sup>27</sup> He spells out in the same vein, "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." To him God is Life, Truth, Light and Love personified as well as Supreme Good.<sup>28</sup> But still he holds that God's existence "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."<sup>28A</sup>

He states that no man can live without religion, though he accepts that there are some people who in the egotism of their reason declare that they have nothing to do with religion. Yet these people, they may be rankest agnostics or atheists, do acknowledge sometime or other, the need of a moral principle and associate something good with its observance and something bad with its non-observance. Any joy, which emanates as an aftermath of some good works, is not at all worldly, but it brings out of his communion with the divine. Thus verbal disowning does not preclude a man from religion. Gandhi projects his unflinching faith in God, "I can tell you this –that I am surer of His existence than of the fact that you and I are sitting in this room. I can also testify that I may live without air and water but not without Him. You may pluck out my eyes that will not kill me. But blast my belief in God and I am dead."<sup>28B</sup> Gandhi was true believer of traditional Hinduism and customs associated with it. "I have asserted my claim to being a Sanatani Hindu."<sup>29</sup> In support of my assertion, Gandhi writes,

"My religion is Hinduism, which for me, is the religion of humanity and includes the best of all the religions known to me." Therefore, it will be incorrect to judge that the influences of the New Testament and other scriptures on him as secondary. Consequently he could boldly declare, "My Hinduism is not sectarian." He adds further, "In it there is room for the worship of all 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 of an evolutionary imperceptible character. Hinduism tells every one to worship God according to his own faith or dharma, or it lives at peace with all the religions."<sup>30</sup> Gandhi could never reconcile to any such idea, which interpreted that one religion would be enough for the earth. Gandhi said never would that be possible. Though there is one God, there are different interpretations of Him. Moreover, no two persons could maintain the same identical conception of God. "Therefore, there will, perhaps, always be different religions answering to different temperaments and climatic conditions."<sup>30A</sup> Gandhi adds further, "I do not share the belief that can be or will be on earth one religion. I am striving, therefore, to find common factor and to induce mutual tolerance."<sup>30B</sup>

His conviction in Hinduism leads him to believe that all religions are more or less true and all proceed from the same God. "My Hindu instinct tells me that all religions are more or less true. All proceed from the same God, but all are imperfect because they have come down to us through imperfect human instrumentality."<sup>31</sup> To Gandhi, paths may be different but the goal of every religion is the same. God is one, though we call Him by different names. "The Allah of Islam is the same as the God of the Christians and Isvara of Hindus. Even as there are numerous names of God in Hinduism, there are many names of God in

Islam. The names do not indicate individuality but attributes, and little man has tried in his humble way to describe mighty God by giving Him attributes. Indescribable, Immeasurable. Living faith in this God means equal respect for all religions. It would be the height of intolerance –and intolerance is a species of violence –to believe that your religion is superior to other religions and that you would be justified in wanting others to change over to your faith.”<sup>32</sup> Gandhi tried his best in his own way to secularise the Hindu mind by teaching that all religions are equal. This is the chief ingredient of a democratic secular society. To Gandhi, religion was the personal matter of an individual. On 25<sup>th</sup> April, 1925, he had written to Nehru, “But religion is after all a matter for each individual and too a matter of heart,” Nehru had subscribed to this view of Gandhi, “... if I were a dictator, religion and state would be separate. I swear by religion, I will die for it. But it is my personal affair. The state has nothing to do with it. The state would look after your secular welfare, health, communication, foreign relations, currency and so on, but not your or my religion. That is everybody’s personal concern.”<sup>32A</sup>

Gandhi could never reconcile to the idea of conversion. “It is impossible for me to reconcile myself to the idea of conversion after the style that goes on in India and elsewhere today.” He questioned, “Why should a Christian want to convert a Hindu to Christianity and vice versa? Why should he not be satisfied if the Hindu is a good or godly man? If the morals of a man are a matter of no concern, the form of worship in a particular manner in a church, a mosque or a temple is an empty formula.”<sup>33</sup>

There was a story in the English Press that Miss Slade, better known in the Ashram as Mirabai, has embraced Hinduism. Gandhi has vehemently denied this story and said that never was she asked to embrace Hinduism. The name adopted by Miss Slade was not a Hindu

name but an Indian name. Gandhi elaborates, "I have had the privilege of having under me Mussalman, Parsi and Christian minors. Never was Hinduism put before them for their acceptance. They were encouraged and induced to respect and read their own scriptures ... No proselytizing is practised or permitted."<sup>34</sup> Gandhi had a fixed mission in life that was to realize 'moksha' or final beatitude. He wanted to free his soul from the bondage of flesh. He considered himself a humble seeker after truth. But he was a practical seeker, who never believed in taking shelter of cave to realize 'moksha'. Gandhi knew road to salvation lies in rendering incessant service to country and there through to humanity. He observed, "I have no desire for the perishable Kingdom of earth. I am striving for the Kingdom of Heaven, which is 'moksha'. To attain my end it is not necessary for me to seek the shelter of a cave. The cave dweller who hovers round the world on the wings of thought has no peace. For me the road to salvation lies through incessant toil in the service of my country and there through of humanity."<sup>35</sup>

Gandhi's religion was based on the concept of humanity, though he called himself a Hindu. 'Service to man is service to God', was his fundamental standpoint. He elucidates, "The immediate service of all human beings becomes a necessary part of the endeavours, simply because the only way to find God is to see Him in His creation and be one with it."<sup>36</sup> Gandhi knew in a secluded place like the Himalayan cave, he would never be able to realize God because he had conviction that God could not be set apart from humanity.

"Man's ultimate aim is the realization of God, all his activities – social, political, religious – have to be guided by the ultimate aim of the vision of God. ... I am a part and parcel of the whole, and I cannot find Him apart from rest of the humanity. My countrymen are my nearest neighbours. They have become so helpless, so inert that I must

concentrate myself on serving them. If I could persuade myself that I should find Him in a Himalayan cave I would proceed there immediately. But I know that I cannot find Him apart from humanity.”<sup>37</sup>

Gandhi was critical of Hindus’ fetish for outward observances. He said Hindus would be doomed if they attached undue importance to the spiritual effects of foods and human contacts. He writes, “Before the throne of the Almighty we shall be judged, not by what we have eaten nor by whom we have been touched by but whom we have served and how. Inasmuch as we serve a single human being in distress, we shall find favour in the sight of God. Bad and stimulating or dirty foods we must avoid as we must avoid bad contact. But let us not give these observances a place out of all proportion to their importance. We dare not use abstinence from certain foods as a cover for fraud, hypocrisy and worse vices. We dare not refuse to serve a fallen or dirty brother lest his contact should injure our spiritual growth.”<sup>38</sup>

Gandhi maintained that man is a part of whole and wholeness is enfolded within him. He has an underlying unity not only with all the other fellow human beings but also with everything else that exists, such as the animals, the plants and beyond the earth with the whole universe. A great man like Gandhi could never think within a particular limit nor could he confine his thoughts within anything which he thought to be limited. He loved humanity without any precondition; caste, creed, religion etc. were simply secondary factors to him. He used to reiterate, “I am part and parcel of the whole,” or “I cannot find Him apart from the rest of humanity.”<sup>39</sup> “Whatever life exists in this world, is the abode of the lord,” Gandhi has a special fascination for the couplet from the Ishavasyopanishad.<sup>40</sup> Even he found inspiration in the following couplets from the Gita:

“The eternal Brahma has hands and feet, eyes, heads, mouths and ears everywhere. It pervades the entire universe.”<sup>41</sup>

Or,

“Whatsoever is the seed of all beings, that am I. There is nothing in this sentient or insentient world which is bereft of me.”<sup>42</sup>

Being not satisfied with the repressive measures adopted to suppress the Civil Disobedience Movement, the then British Government tried another tact to divide the Hindus on communal ground by announcing the communal Award, which sought to confer on the scheduled castes reserved seats, like the Muslims, in the proposed central assembly and legislatures by separate electorates.

At the Second Round Table Conference in London, Gandhi opposed every move of the British Government to create a separate electorate for the depressed classes. Even he did not entertain Ambedkar’s proposal for reservation of a certain number of seats in the legislatures for them based on common electorate for Hindus.<sup>43</sup> It is said, in one of his speeches in the conference, Gandhi had uttered, “If I was the only person to resist this thing, I will resist with my life.”<sup>44</sup>

However, on 17 August 1932, the Communal Award of Ramsay MacDonald, the British Premier, was announced. What Gandhi had feared so long was confirmed. Gandhi immediately wrote to Ramsay MacDonald to revise the decision, but in vain. On the contrary, he defended the decision of the government. The British Premier failed to appreciate Gandhi’s emotional and religious approach. It is needless to add here, the news of Gandhi’s proposed fast unto death stirred the whole of India. Even it had produced some commotion in England. A special prayer was held throughout the country to save Gandhi’s life.

Gandhi could never tolerate the division of his beloved countrymen into caste and communal lines.

Greatly perturbed at the news of Gandhi's resorting to 'fast unto death', Tagore sent a telegram to Gandhi on 19 September 1932:

"It is worth sacrificing precious life for the sake of India's unity and her social integrity. Though we cannot anticipate what effect it may have upon our rulers who may not understand its immense importance for our people, we feel certain that the supreme appeal of such self-offering to the conscience of our own countrymen will not be in vain. I fervently hope that we will not callously allow such national tragedy to reach its extreme length. Our sorrowing hearts will follow your sublime penance with reverence and love."

Gandhi commenced his fast on September 20, 1932 at Yeravda Jail. The British ministers failed to find any logic behind this Gandhi's action. It was beyond their comprehension how could Gandhi draw a parallel between 'fasting' and 'political action' and hold the British government to ransom,' Gandhi's action to put life at stake touched every Indian's heart. What could not he achieved for ages through sermons of the great saints of the past in India, was achieved by Gandhi at one stroke. Wells, public places and the gates of the temples were thrown open to the untouchables being overwhelmed by emotion. For the first time in Allahabad twelve temples, in Calcutta Kalighat temple and in Benaras Ram Mandir followed suit. In Delhi the Hindus and the Harijans fraternized in the street. Gandhi's fast brought a religious transformation and a psychological revolution in the annals of Indian history. However, Nehru and other Congress leaders felt this to be too big a gesture by Gandhi over too small an issue. They thought that there was no point in dying for anything less than freedom.<sup>45</sup> But

these opinions made no impact on the people. Gandhi went on with his fast.

Ultimately the British government did not find any suitable alternative that to accede to the demand of Gandhi. Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya called a conference to find a solution to this imbroglio, wherein Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, the most prominent leader of the Depressed Classes, was invited to join in. A settlement was finally arrived at on 25 September, which is better known in history as the Poona Pact. A common electorate of all the Hindus was accepted, and Dr. Ambedkar did away with his demand of separate electorates for the Depressed Classes. This was the triumph of Gandhi. The British government accepted the new electorate arrangement of the Poona Pact. By accepting the clauses of the Poona Pact, Dr. Ambedkar showed a great regard for Gandhi. "There was the life of the greatest man of India to be saved, and on the other side, the interests of my people." Gandhi broke his fast on 26 September 1932 with the limejuice prepared by Kamala Nehru in the presence of Rabindranath Tagore. Though with the settlement the seat reserved for the Depressed Classes were increased in the provincial and central legislatures, it prevented vivisection of Hindus on caste line. On the whole, Gandhi's fast was successful in doing away with separate electorates for the Depressed Classes. Tagore commented, "We know in the Upanishads, God who ever dwells in the hearts of all men has been mentioned as Mahatma. The epithet is rightly given to a man of God whom we are honouring today, for his dwelling is not within the narrow enclosure of individual consciousness, his dwelling is in the heart of untold multitudes who are yet to come."<sup>46</sup>

However, it seems Nehru was not at all impressed by Gandhi's achievement. He writes, "I felt annoyed with him for choosing a side

issue for his final sacrifice. What would be the result on our freedom movement? Would not the larger issues fade into background, for the time being at least? And, if he attained his immediate object and got a joint electorate for the depressed classes, would not that result in a reaction and a feeling that something had been achieved and nothing more need be done for a while? And was not his action a recognition, and in part an acceptance, of the communal award and the general scheme of things as sponsored by the Government? Was this consistent with non-cooperation and civil disobedience? After so much sacrifice and brave endeavour, was our movement to tail off into something insignificant?

“I felt angry with him at his religious and sentimental approach to a political question, and his frequent references to God in connection with it. He even seemed to suggest that God had indicated the very date of the fast. What a terrible example to set!”<sup>47</sup>

Admittedly, Nehru did not support Gandhi's method of undertaking fast as the panacea of all problems, but he was awe-struck at the overwhelming response of the people at Gandhi's diktat. He has to admit, “Again I watched the emotional upheaval of the country during the fast, and I wondered more and more if this was the right method in politics. It seemed to be sheer revivalism, and clear thinking had not a ghost of chance against it. All India, or most of it, stared reverently at the Mahatma and expected him to perform miracle after miracle and to put an end to untouchability and to get swaraj and so on –and did precious little itself! And Gandhiji did not encourage others to think; his insistence was on purity and sacrifice,”<sup>48</sup>

Gandhi coined the word ‘Harijans’, i.e., children of God to identify the untouchables.

Gandhi always repudiated the prevailing spirit in Indian society of inequality and superiority connected with caste system and prohibition made thereof on inter-caste contacts. Therefore, to remove inequality and stigma attached to untouchables Gandhi insisted on allowing their entry into Hindu temples. "Temple entry is the one spiritual act that would constitute the message of freedom to the 'untouchables' and assure them that they are not outcasts before God." Elsewhere he writes, "I don't want to be reborn, but if I have to be reborn, I should be untouchable so that I may share their sorrows, sufferings and affronts levelled at them in order that I may endeavour to free them from their miserable condition."<sup>49</sup> Even Gandhi considered the practice of untouchability as a hindrance to the achievement of Swaraj. "Swaraj is as unattainable without the removal of the sin of untouchability as it is without Hindu-Muslim unity."<sup>50</sup>

Soon after his release from jail, Gandhi embarked upon a long tour and covered almost 12,500 miles. His object was to bring home to the Hindus the evil of untouchability. He called upon the Harijans to get rid of their vices of consuming intoxicating stuffs, such as liquor etc. to enable them to join the main stream of Hindu society. Gandhi's Harijan tour, no doubt, proved highly successful, though occasionally he had to face opposition from the orthodox Hindus, who could not digest Gandhi's mission. Even in one place a bomb was thrown at his brigade though Gandhi remained unhurt, a couple of others were injured.

Gandhi established an organization, the Harijan Sevak Sangh with an objective to remove all their disabilities; and which continued to function even after independence. Even Gandhi brought a Harijan family to live in the Ashram and created a precedent.

All these efforts of Gandhi did not go in vain. After independence, the practice of untouchability has been made a penal offence under law. True, no social evils of long standing can be removed through legislation at one go, but Gandhi has set the ball in motion. It is hoped, one day this practice of untouchability along with other social evils, such as child marriage etc. will definitely be vanished from the Indian society forever. Gandhi never accepted that caste system has any base in religion. He testifies it only to be a custom. "Caste has nothing to do with religion. It is a custom whose origin I do not know and do not need to know for the satisfaction of my spiritual hunger. But I do know that it is harmful both to spiritual and national growth."<sup>51</sup>

Gandhi always emphasized that politics could not be divorced from religion. He had his own concept of secularism, which he did not want to compromise with its modern definition. "There could not be any politics without religion and that he entered politics because he was primarily a religious man," it was his oft-repeated expression.<sup>51A</sup> Even he said that he entered politics because it would develop the religious faculty in him. "I certainly do introduce religion into politics. It is my humble view that not a single activity in the world should be independent of religion,"<sup>52</sup> he had announced as early as 1921. Gandhi was a religious man, yet he was drawn into politics only because of his concern for humanity. He wanted to go close to more and more people, yet it was not possible, if he had not entered into politics. Therefore, he declared, "Politics bereft of religion are a death-trap because they kill the soul."<sup>53</sup>

Gandhi advocated politics had to be based on morality, thus it had to be moral. Religion to him had its origin in morality. Morality, to sum up, is the focal point of both politics and religion. Therefore,

politics and religion are closely related to each other. : "I still hold the view that I cannot conceive politics as divorced from religion,"<sup>54</sup> Gandhi emphasized. Elsewhere, he wrote, "... political action is nothing worth, if it is not backed by sound grounding in religion by which is not meant sectional or sectional belief."<sup>55</sup>

He opined that politicians could be on the safe ground, if their politics is based on certain moral values, such as, humanity, tolerance, forgiveness, love, unselfishness etc. that are intrinsic to every religion. "For me there is no politics without religion –not the religion of the superstitions and the blind, religion that hates and fights, but the universal Religion of Toleration. Politics without morality is to be avoided,"<sup>56</sup> Gandhi writes. He further maintains that if in politics there is no religion then that politics deserves to be boycotted. "Politics bereft of religion are absolute dirt ever to be shunned."<sup>57</sup> Gandhi's position can safely be called utopian politics. He unhesitatingly stated, "... in politics also we have to establish the Kingdom of Heaven."<sup>58</sup> Gandhi's every activity, be it political, or otherwise, had been inspired by his profound religious commitment. His religious predisposition, Gandhi writes, "... in other words, a seeker after God and Truth." To him there is no other God than Truth. He received his sense of discretion from religion.

"To see the universal and all pervading spirit of truth face to face one must be able to love the meanest of creation as oneself. And a man who aspires after that cannot afford to keep out of any field of life. That is why my devotion to Truth has drawn me into 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 means."<sup>59</sup>

Gandhi was in South India leading a movement against untouchability, when a terrible earthquake devastated Bihar on January 15, 1934. About this earthquake Nehru writes, "It was the afternoon of the 15<sup>th</sup> January, 1934. I was standing in the verandah of our house in Allahabad addressing a group of peasants. Suddenly I become unsteady on my feet and could hardly keep my balance ... Doors started hanging and rumbling noise came from the adjoining Swaraj Bhawan, where many of the tiles were sliding down the roof. ... I did not take the earthquake seriously ... We did not know then, nor could we guess, what those two to three minutes had meant to millions in Bihar and elsewhere."<sup>60</sup>

Nehru did not realise then what a cataclysmic catastrophe befell Bihar! Later he writes, "The ruins were an impressive and terrifying sight. The survivors were thoroughly shaken-up and cowed by their nerve-racking experience."<sup>61</sup> The destruction was thorough. Thousands died.

Though the reaction of Gandhi was instantaneous, the reason he assigned to this devastation was fantastic. He said that the earthquake in Bihar was a divine chastisement imposed by God against the sin of untouchability. He wrote in 'Harijan', "The cause of Bihar earthquake was the sin of our society for untouchability."

A man like Tagore, who nurtured a great respect for Gandhi and his works, could not swallow this unscientific explanation of Gandhi given against a natural phenomenon. "It has caused me painful surprise to find Mahatma Gandhi accusing those who blindly follow their own social custom of untouchability of having brought down God's vengeance upon certain parts of Bihar, evidently specially selected for His desolating displeasure. It is all the more unfortunate because this

kind of unscientific view of phenomenon is too readily accepted by a large section of our countrymen.... What is truly tragic about it is the fact the kind of argument that Mahatmaji used by exploiting an event of cosmic disturbance far better suits the psychology of his opponents than his own, and it would not have surprised me if they had taken this opportunity of holding him and his followers responsible for the visitation of divine anger.”<sup>62</sup> Nehru was equally critical of Gandhi’s outlandish comment; “...I read with great shock Gandhiji’s statement to the effect that the earthquake had been a punishment for the sin of untouchability. This was a staggering remark and I welcomed and wholly agreed with Rabindranath Tagore’s answer to it. Anything more opposed to the unscientific outlook it would be difficult to imagine. Perhaps even science will not be absolutely dogmatic today about the effect of emotional states and psychic occurrences on matter. A mental shock may result in indigestion or something worse to the person concerned. But to suggest that a human custom or failing had its reactions on the movements of the earth’s crust is an astounding thing. The idea of sin and divine wrath and man’s relative importance in the affairs of the universe –they take us back a few hundred years, when Inquisition flourished in Europe and burned Giordano Bruno for his unscientific heresy and sent many a witch to the stake! Even in the eighteenth century in America leading Boston divines attributed earthquake in Massachusetts to the impiety of lightening rods.”<sup>63</sup> Quoting an unscientific reason against a simple natural incident by Gandhi was too much for Nehru. He places several questions before Gandhi elsewhere, “And if the earthquake was a divine punishment for sin, how are we to discover for which sin we are being punished? ... that would be nearer the mark than to suggest that the more or less innocent people of Bihar were being made to suffer vicariously for the sins of untouchability of the people of South India. Why did not the

earthquake visit the land of untouchability itself? Or the British Government might call the calamity a divine punishment for civil disobedience, for, as a matter of fact, North Bihar, which suffered most from the earthquake took a leading part in the freedom movement.”<sup>63A</sup>

Even some of the leading dailies were critical of Gandhi's conclusion,<sup>64</sup> but Gandhi stuck to his theory. He writes, “We do not know all the laws of God nor their working. Knowledge of the tallest scientist or the spiritualist is like a particle of dust ... I cannot prove the connection of the sin of untouchability with the Bihar visitation even though the connection is instinctively felt by me.”<sup>65</sup> But these words prove that ultimately Gandhi relented a bit in his stand.

Gandhi fought tooth and nail against communalism throughout his life. He wanted Hindu, Muslim, Parsi, Christian and Jew should learn to respect each other's religion and live as one nation. As early as 1930, he has written, “In the Congress we must cease to be exclusive Hindus or Mussalmans or Sikhs, Parsis, Christians, Jews. Whilst we may staunchly adhere to our respective faiths, we must be in the Congress Indians first and Indians last.”<sup>66</sup>

Though his parting message to Indians in South Africa was whether you are Hindus or Muslims, Parsis or Christians, work unitedly, in India he clearly perceived Hindu-Muslim cleavage was a retarding factor vis-à-vis national unity and integration. This factor was being misutilised by the British to perpetuate their own rule.

In 1925, Gandhi returned to India and traveled extensively to gain a first hand knowledge of India's situation. He realized that India was full of diversity in terms of religion and language. He observed that the Hindus and Muslims looked each other with prejudice, mutual fear and suspicion, and the British were fanning this disharmony. But prior

to the British rule, this situation was not there in India, there was mutual respect for each other –a total harmony and peace prevailed amongst them. Gandhi analyzed the existing situation and noted that the main culprit to divide these communities was politics. Gandhi knew communal unity was essential prerequisite to achieve India's freedom and growth.

• Though there were both Hindu and Muslim members in the Congress, before the advent of Gandhi into Indian politics, they were identified either as a Hindu or a Muslim.<sup>67</sup> But with the entry of Gandhi, the situation changed. He made the people to take a vow, "With God as witness we Hindus and Mohamedans declare that we shall behave towards one another as children of the same parents, that we shall have no differences, that the sorrows of each other and that each shall help the other in removing them. We shall respect each other's religion and religious feelings and shall not stand in the way of our respective religious practices. We shall always refrain from violence to each other in the name of religion."<sup>68</sup>

It was Gandhi's intention not to embarrass the British during the First World War, but he interpreted the arrest of Ali Brothers and Ajad in 1915-16 as unjust and protested. Even he attended the annual session of the Muslim League in December 1916. For the first time in Indian politics an attempt was made on such a large scale to bring about Hindu-Muslim unity.

The concept of Hindu-Muslim unity reached its pinnacle in 1919-20, when Gandhi launched his non-cooperation campaign against the government. This was an expression of his solidarity with the Muslims on the Khilafat issue. Gandhi's speech at the Khilafat Conference on 24-11-1919 succinctly clarifies his objective;

“When it is said that the Hindus join the Muslims in regard to the question some people express surprise, but I say that, if Hindus and Muslims are brothers, it is their duty to share one another’s sorrow. There can be but only one question and it is whether the Muslims are in the right and their cause is just. If it is legitimate, then every child of the soil must sympathise with them as a matter of duty. We must not say that the question of Khilafat is exclusively for the Muslims to grieve over. No it belongs to all Indian.”<sup>69</sup>

But he confesses that to bring about Hindu-Muslim unity would be no mean achievement, “To bring about unity between Hindus and Muslims will be no mean achievement. That eight crores of people live in genuine amity with twenty-two crores of another community is a consummation greatly to be desired. It is certain too that for either to live suppressed by the other will do no good. We have therefore to promote mutual affection by living in equality and independence. The Khilafat movement alone provides the opportunity for this.”<sup>70</sup>

As a vigorous protest against the dismemberment of the Turkish Empire, the Khilafat agitation started all over India on October 17, 1919. But the agitation did not melt the British government; rather it continued to adhere to its decision of implementing the principle of national self-determination in respect of Turkey.<sup>71</sup>

It was a shock to Gandhi. In frustration he stated, “Khilafat question has now become a question of questions.” By raising the issue of restoration of Khalifa’s power, and also thereby making an appeal to their religious sentiments, Gandhi attempted to bring the Muslim masses into the fold of the anti-British national movement. But this proved counter-productive when the agitation fizzled out. The magic spell created for a short period simply vanished into thin air.

Rather the endeavour to mix up a partisan religious goal with the broad national issue simply created the ground for the emergence of religious fundamentalism at a later date.

It was the greatest mistake of Gandhi's career to take up the Khilafat agitation on behalf of the Sultan of Turkey.<sup>72</sup> True, the Khilafat became a popular movement because of its religious connotation, but it could never become a people's movement. "... the mass of Muslims who took active part in the Khilafat Movement remained unacquainted with modern anti-imperialist ideology or the modern principles of political organization such as secularism and democracy. Instead, the intrusion of religious outlook into politics or political problem was legitimized and perpetuated. When Khilafat Movement was withdrawn, hardly any residue was left. At the most a handful of sturdy secular nationalists like Maulana Abul Kalam Azad emerged."<sup>73</sup>

Certainly the Khilafat agitation was a failure, but for the first time the two communities moved together against a foreign rule under the leadership of Gandhi. Lasting amity between Hindu and Muslim could not be achieved by upholding the Khilafat issue, but it could not be denied that Gandhi all along stood against communalism. In true sense, Gandhi was an apostle of peace and amity amongst different communities. He was undoubtedly a secularist, though his concept of 'Ramarajya' was misunderstood very often. Sometimes towards the end of the 1920s when some people tried to misinterpret that by 'Ramarajya' Gandhi meant Hindu Raj, Gandhi immediately retorted, "By 'Ramarajya' I do not mean Hindu Raj. I mean by 'Ramarajya' Divine Raj, the Kingdom of God. For me Rama and Rahim are one and the same deity. I acknowledge no other God but the one God of Truth and righteousness."<sup>74</sup> Elsewhere he explained the expression 'Ramarajya' further, "It is a convenient and expressive phrase, the

meaning of which no alternative can so fully express to millions. When I visit the Frontier Province or address predominantly Muslim audiences I would express my meaning to them by calling it Khudai Raj, while to a Christian audience I would describe it as the Kingdom of God on earth."<sup>75</sup> But here Gandhi was proved wrong in his use of pseudo-religious terminology. His explanation of 'Ramarajya' was simply not being heeded, the way Gandhi wanted to be heard. It was misinterpreted, as subsequent history unfolds, by some elements to play with the mass psyche of the Muslim masses in order to alienate them from the main stream of the pre-independence Indian society.

When some people blamed Gandhi that he was communal and sought only to establish the Hindu superiority over the Muslim masses, they did it with a view to belittle Gandhi's popularity. These handful of people knew that Gandhi had the greatest power over the masses in India, and thus if any political gain had to be made out against him then that had to be done playing the false card of communalism against Gandhi. Least did Gandhi and the Congress realise that other elements might try to misutilise the ignorance of the gullible Muslim masses to gain their own selfish ends and would do a great harm to future generation. These people not for a single moment tried to look at the role of Gandhi in the Khilafat agitation, his friendship with the Ali brothers, his reverence and appreciation for Hakim Ajmal Khan and his profound confidence in Maulana Abul Kalam Azad; they simply tried to project Gandhi as a Hindu. These people simply forgot that it was Gandhi who gave his consent to the Communal Award of Ramsay MacDonald in 1933 and paved the way for separate electorates, though the Indian National Congress was in favour of joint electorates as a whole. This Gandhi did with a sole purpose to safeguard the Muslim representation, yet he knew if wrongly played it

might be highly harmful. Gandhi had full confidence on himself that his Muslim brothers would never betray him.

He was partially right. True, Gandhi had a strong mass base, but in order to keep the Hindu-Muslim amity intact, he had to face the two challenges simultaneously –one that of vested elements and the other of the government itself. With a view to perpetuate its rule in India, the then minority British government had all along tried to play the communal card. To quote his own words:

“... I venture to suggest that a real desire for peace between Hindus and Mussalmans is wholly inconsistent with the desire to retain British rule in India by force of arms. When British officials begin the work of peace between these two branches of Indian family, they will have begun to live in India on sufferance. After all, the discovery that India is governed by 'divide and rule' policy was made, in the first instance not by an Indian, but, if I am not mistaken by an Englishman. It was either the late Allen Octavius Hume or George Yule who taught us to believe that the empire was based upon a policy of divide and rule.”<sup>76</sup>

On many counts Gandhi failed to apply his two formidable weapons: non-violence and satyagraha to ease the Hindu-Muslim tensions. In fact, he did not know how to apply them, and surrendered himself to the situation and expected divine interference, which never came.

“... I do not touch the problem of Hindu-Muslim unity. It has passed out of human hands, and has been transferred to God's hands alone ... Let us ask the help of God, the All Powerful and tell Him and that we His tiny creatures failed to do what we ought to do ... Let us ask God in all humility to give us sense, to give us wisdom,”<sup>77</sup> these

were the words spoken in sheer frustration by Gandhi when he failed to restore amity between Hindus and Muslims.

Sometimes he passed out such comments, which seemed to be ridiculous, "Hindus and Muslims are going more and more away from each other. But this thing does not disturb me. Somehow or other I feel that separation is growing in order only to bring them all closer later on."<sup>78</sup> Sometimes people felt sympathetic, when they saw the helplessness of Gandhi to bring about unity among Hindus and Muslims. "I sincerely want unity among Hindus and Muslims, but I do not know how it is to be brought about."<sup>79</sup>

Gandhi was not sure as to what was the exact cause of tension between Hindus and Muslims. Sometimes he pinpointed the cause as unequal economic relations at the other moment he concluded that the reason was the ignorance of each other's scriptures. But whatever be the cause or reason, Gandhi did not have any practical remedies in his coffer to ease the knot.

"Of certain things which I hold as dear as life itself Hindu-Muslim unity, i.e., unity among all the races in India, is one, and as I did some years ago in Delhi I should be prepared, given the occasion and the inspiration, to take my life again for the same cause. My life is one individual whole, and all my activities run into one another, and they all have their rise in my insatiable love of mankind. Seeking to realise oneness in life in practice, I cannot be happy if I see communities quarrelling with one another or men suppressing fellowmen."<sup>80</sup>

Gandhi was always against the partition of the country on communal ground. He put forth his argument, "Partition means a patent untruth. My whole soul rebels against the idea that Hinduism and Islam represent two antagonistic cultures and doctrines. To assent such

doctrine is for me a denial of God. For I believe with my whole soul that God of the Koran is also the God of Gita.”<sup>81</sup> He could never swallow the theory of the Muslim League that ‘Hindus and Muslims of India are two nations. Even he had faith in God that man could never be able to divide.

But Gandhi has failed to read between the lines. He even expressed his faith on Mountbatten that the latter was against the idea of India’s partition. When the Mountbatten Plan was announced on June 3, 1947, it narrated a different story. It prescribed for the partition of the country.

The League readily accepted the Plan of Mountbatten. Patel and Nehru, who were practical politicians, accepted the partition as inevitable. On June 15, 1947, All-India Congress Committee passed a resolution which accepted the Mountbatten Plan. The vivisection of the country on communal line was sealed. A person like Gandhi, who called the demand for Pakistan of the Muslim League as ‘unislamic’ and ‘sinful’, could ultimately relent is not understandable and beyond wildest of imagination. Even he had once said, “ They cut me to pieces but they cannot make me subscribe to something which I consider to be wrong.”<sup>82</sup>

When the final phase of negotiation for the transfer of power was going on, Gandhi was not in the picture, the leadership of the Congress was in the hands of Patel and Nehru. To Patel Pakistan was a ‘diseased limb’,<sup>83</sup> and he wanted it to be removed in the greater interest of future generation. Gandhi simply felt lonely and segregated.

The British also betrayed Gandhi. He knew no Pakistan was possible unless the British government acceded to the demand of the League. The partition was the culmination of the British policy of ‘divide

and rule'. They divided and quitted. An irreparable tragedy had befallen the Indian sub-continent. What transpired after the partition is not hidden from anybody. This tragedy could have been averted had the independence been not hurried because the 'Father of Pakistan' Muhammad Ali Jinnah had not many years at his disposal to be on this earth.<sup>84</sup>

Nobody tried to listen to Gandhi. His lonely voice simply vanished into the cacophony of jubilation. Gandhi took partition as his personal tragedy. He declared publicly that he would not participate in the celebration of 15<sup>th</sup> August 1947. He left for Calcutta on 9<sup>th</sup> August 1947 to stand beside the riot stricken people in the city. Within a couple days of his presence, normalcy was restored in Calcutta. From Calcutta to Noakhali or from Bihar to Delhi, Gandhi's moral strength remained undaunted. He won; the riotists had no option than to surrender. It was not the victory of any physical might, but the triumph of Gandhi's spiritual ability. On 30<sup>th</sup> January 1948, Gandhi was shot. A life ended for espousing the cause of Hindu-Muslim unity, it was a task which Gandhi took it as a mission of his life in South Africa continued till he breathed his last.<sup>85</sup>

## II

Jawaharlal Nehru was born at Allahabad on November 14, 1889 to prosperous parents. Since he was an only child for almost eleven years, Nehru received much affection, care and attention from all of his family members. His father Motilal Nehru was very fond of English way of life. To quote Nehru, "... he admired Englishmen and their way,"<sup>86</sup> To look after his son, Motilal engaged English nurses. Though Nehru claims that his childhood was a sheltered and uneventful one,<sup>87</sup> it is not correct, Nehru was gradually becoming accustomed to the Westernized way of life. However, he has confessed elsewhere, "And gradually our ways became more and more Westernized."<sup>88</sup>

Nehru's father was quite a respectable person in Allahabad. Because of his law profession, he was known to a lot of Englishmen. Occasionally these Englishmen used to visit him, who were introduced as friends. In his heart, gradually Nehru started admiring the English.<sup>89</sup>

Nehru writes that one of his early confidants was a Munshi of his father, Munshi Mubarak Ali. To him, Nehru used to take refuge whenever unhappy or in trouble. From his mother and aunt he heard stories from the old Hindu mythology, from the epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata.

Regarding his impression on religion in his childhood, Nehru writes, "Of religion I had very hazy notions. It seemed to be a woman's affair. Father and my older cousins treated the question humorously and refused to take it seriously. The women of the family indulged in various ceremonies and pujas from time to time ... Sometimes I accompanied my mother or aunt to the Ganges for a dip, sometimes we visited temples in Allahabad itself or in Benares or elsewhere, or

went to see a sanyasi reputed to be very holy. But all this left little impression on my mind."<sup>90</sup>

Nehru's father was an extremely bold person, who had the courage to defy the orders of the orthodox members of his community to perform the rituals of purification ceremony after his trip to Europe. Nehru writes, "He refused to perform any prayashchit or purification ceremony on his return."<sup>91</sup> To Nehru himself this kind of ceremony was absolutely farce, and was not related to religion since it "merely signified an outward conformity and submission to the group will."<sup>92</sup>

But gradually with the frequent visits of a large number of Kashmiri young men and girls to Europe or America for their studies, the rituals of performing purification ceremony was simply not imposed. Even there were no food restrictions "except in the case of a handful of orthodox people, chiefly old ladies, and interdining with non-Kashmiris, Muslims and non-Indians" was common. Purdah system had disappeared among Kashmiris. Even both of the sisters of Nehru married non-Kashmiris and one young member of his family married a Hungarian girl.

On the whole, Motilal Nehru's way of life, his disregard for religious discipline, his close association with Christians and Muslims, his love and admiration for English language, manners and ways of life, the modern outlook of young Kashmiris and the boldness of his sisters to marry non-Kashmiris – all these had left a deep impression upon Jawaharlal's mind.

As late as 1933, Nehru commented on his attitude towards religion, "Religion is not familiar ground for me, and as I have grown older I have definitely drifted away from it.... I have grown to rely

entirely on the workings of the mind. Perhaps they are weak supports to rely upon, but search as I will, I can see no better ones."<sup>92A</sup>

Never in his life Nehru seemed to be attracted towards any religion. His approach towards everything was scientific. He judged every concept vis-à-vis the scientific standpoint. If on analysis he found that any philosophical concept did not fit into the litmus test of science, he simply ignored the same. Religion was no exception.

He writes, "Religion, as I saw it practised, and accepted even by thinking minds, whether it was Hinduism or Islam or Buddhism or Christianity, did not attract me. It seemed to be closely associated with superstitious practices and dogmatic beliefs, and behind it lay a method of approach to life's problems, which was certainly not that of science. There was an element of magic about it, an uncritical credulousness, a reliance on the supernatural."<sup>93</sup>

Nehru could never think of anything beyond the world. What will happen after death never bothered Nehru, nor was he even interested to know. "Essentially, I am interested in this world, in this life, not in some other world or a future life. Whether there is such a thing or a soul, or there is survival after death or not, I do not know; and, important as these questions are, they do not trouble me in the least. The environment in which I have grown up takes the soul (or rather the ātma) and a future life, the Karma theory of cause and effect, and reincarnation for granted. I have been affected by this and so, in a sense, I am favourably disposed towards these assumptions. There might be a soul which survives the physical death of the body, and a theory of cause and effect governing life's actions seems reasonable, though it leads to obvious difficulties when one thinks of the ultimate

cause. Presuming a soul, there appears to be some logic also in the theory of reincarnation.

“But I do not believe in any of these or other theories and assumptions as a matter of religious faith. They are just intellectual speculations in an unknown region about which we know next to nothing. They do not affect my life, and whether they were proved right or wrong subsequently, they would make little difference to me,” Nehru admits.<sup>94</sup>

Elsewhere also Nehru speaks in the same vein, “I am afraid the next world does not interest me. My mind is full of what I should do in this world, and if I see my way clearly here, I am content. If my duty here is clear to me, I do not trouble myself about any other world.”<sup>95</sup>

These utterances of Nehru are very much close to the philosophy of the Bhagvadgita, which says, “Do your assigned duty without thinking of the fruit that accrues.” Similarly, Gandhi had also insisted on the refinement of one’s means. Nehru was a down to earth person, though his views on religion identify him as an agnostic.

Nehru reiterated time and again that religion simply kept the people in the dark, made them narrow-minded, cruel and intolerant of others. Religion was used as a tool by the rulers of all times to keep the masses in check in order to perpetuate their governance. Even crimes against humanity had been vindicated and millions of people had been killed in the name of religion by the people in power since time immemorial. “The old religions have a way of covering and regulating every aspect of our day-to-day lives.... In other words, they lay down a complete structure for society and try to perpetuate this by giving it religious sanction and authority... This religious perpetuation of a social structure makes change difficult,” Nehru supports his stand.<sup>96</sup>

Nehru was deadly against use of religion in political activity. He could never accept the Gandhian approach of mixing of religion with politics, though he admitted that religion did give a set of values to human life, and some of them continued to remain the foundation of morality and ethics. To quote Nehru, "... religion may be all right when applied to ethics and morals, but if it enters the political sphere it has a minus effect on morals."<sup>97</sup> He also acknowledges the inner association of religion and morality. "Hence religion and morality are, for me, synonymous terms."<sup>98</sup>

Nehru was always worried at the entrance of religious elements into Hindu and Muslim politics. "I used to be troubled sometimes at the growth of this religious elements in our politics, both on the Hindus and Muslim side. I did not like it all. Much that Moulvies and Maulanas and Swamis and the like said in their public addresses seemed to me most unfortunate. Their history and sociology and economics appeared to me all wrong, and the religious twist that was given to everything prevented all clear thinking."<sup>99</sup>

Nehru continues in the same note, "The old religions have a way of covering and regulating every aspect of our day-to-day lives. Thus Hinduism and Islam, quite apart from their purely religious teachings, lay down social codes and rules about marriage, inheritance, civil and criminal law, political organization, and indeed almost everything else. In other words, they lay down a complete structure for society and try to perpetuate this by giving it religious sanction and authority ... This religious perpetuation of a social structure makes change difficult."<sup>100</sup> Nehru never liked the idea that our life and politics are regulated by religion. Rather he upheld the view that religion is totally separate from the social structure and institutions.<sup>101</sup>

True, Nehru always said that he had no faith either in religion or in God, yet he might not be an irreligious man. He disliked the association of dogma or rituals with religion. In his opinion the spirit of dogma has affected badly the religious quest and made both minds and practices conform too rigidly.<sup>101A</sup> But he confesses, "Whether religion is necessary or not, a certain faith in a worthwhile ideal is essential to give substance to our lives and to hold us together."<sup>102</sup>

Elsewhere he reiterates in the same vein, "Yet it was obvious that religion had supplied some deeply felt inner need of human nature, and that the vast majority of people all over the world could not do without some form of religious belief."<sup>103</sup>

He maintains that if religion is freed from its attachment with dogmas and ceremonials and raised to deal with only higher things of life, then it will have no conflict with science. Even Nehru goes a step further and states, "Religion not in the conventional but in the broadest sense helps me to have a glimpse of the Divine essence."<sup>104</sup> In one place, Nehru says that life is a spark of the Divine.

It seems odd if we call Nehru a religious man, because of his contradictory statements. Yet, he was a religious man with different character, because his religion had no name. "Speaking for myself, my religion is tolerance of all religions, creeds and philosophies," Nehru clarifies.<sup>105</sup> Gandhi also felt that in spite of Nehru's claim that he did not profess any religion, he was a religious man. "While Jawaharlal always says that he does not believe in God, he is nearer God than many who profess to be His worshippers."

Nehru always denies his any attachment with the term God, though he finds this world mysterious. "Often, as I look at this world, I

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have a sense of mysteries of unknown depths.” But he admits, “What the mysterious is I do not know.” Even then he does not want to characterise this phenomenon as God. “I do not call it God because God has come to mean much that I do not believe in. I find myself incapable of thinking of a deity or of unknown supreme power in anthropomorphic terms, and the fact that many people think so is continually a source of surprise to me. Any idea of a personal God seems very odd to me.”<sup>106</sup> In no way could Nehru be convinced on the existence of God.

He further tries to open his mind on this issue, “Intellectually, I can appreciate to some extent the conception of monism, and I have been attracted towards the Advaita (non-dualist) philosophy of the Vedanta, though I do not presume to understand it in all its depth and intricacy, and I realise that merely an intellectual appreciation of such matters does not carry me far. At the same time the Vedanta as well as other similar approaches, rather frighten me with their vague, formless incursions into infinity. The diversity and fullness of nature stir me and produce a harmony of the spirit, and I can imagine myself feeling at home in the old Indian or Greek pagan and pantheistic atmosphere, but minus the conception of God or Gods that was attached to it.”<sup>107</sup> Nehru is not the person to accept under any situation the wonderment that is called God by the common people. He can throw arguments at length, but when the question of conclusion comes, he is impervious.

Nehru was highly critical of spiritualism. To him it is an “absurd and impertinent way of investigating psychic phenomena and the mysteries of the after-life.” He argues, “Usually it is something worse, and is an exploitation of the emotions of some over-credulous people who seek relief or escape from mental trouble.”<sup>108</sup>

Nehru is convinced one-day science will demystify the purpose of life, which is so far ensconced in mystery. "It is now widening its boundaries and it may invade the so-called invisible world before long and help us to understand this purpose of life in its widest sense, or at least give us some glimpses which illumine the problem of human existence."<sup>109</sup>

To Nehru science has revolutionized human life more than anything else and its methods and approach have opened doors and avenues further "leading up to the very portals of what has long been considered the unknown... its invasion of many problems which have so far been the monopoly of philosophy is becoming more pronounced. Space-time and quantum theory utterly changed the picture of the physical world. More recent researches into the nature of matter, the structure of the atom, the transmutation of the elements, and the transformation of electricity and light, either into the other, have carried human knowledge much further. Man no longer sees nature as something apart and distinct from himself. Human destiny appears to become a part of nature's rhythmic energy."<sup>110</sup>

Nehru goes further to substantiate the superiority of science in unfolding the mysteries of nature considered inaccessible so far. He puts forth his arguments, "All this upheaval of thought, due to the advance of science, has led scientists into a new region, verging on the metaphysical... 'Man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they are achieving; his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and beliefs are but the outcome of accidental collection of atoms.' And yet the latest developments in physics have gone a long way to demonstrate a fundamental unity in a nature..."

“Old as this belief is in Asia and Europe, it is interesting to compare some of the latest conclusions of science with the fundamental ideas underlying the Advaita Vedanic theory. These ideas were that the universe is made of one substance whose form is perpetually changing, and further that the sum-total of energies remains always the same. Also that “the explanations of things are to be found within their own nature, and that no external beings or existences are required to explain what is going on in the universe,” with its corollary of a self-evolving universe.”<sup>111</sup>

Nehru is undaunted. What he considers to be right scientifically, he stands by that. Neither does he relent, nor does he go back from his standpoint, no matter whoever is his detractor. Nehru never deviates, never flatters, he is categorical in his opinion. He speaks with open mind, “It does not very much matter to science what these vague speculations lead to, for meanwhile it forges ahead in experimental way of observation, widening the bounds of the charted region of knowledge, changing human life in the process. Science may be on the verge of discovering vital mysteries, which yet may elude it. Still it will go on along its appointed path, for there is no end to its journeying. Ignoring for the moment the ‘why?’ of philosophy, science will go on asking ‘how?’, and as it finds this out it gives greater context and meaning to life, and perhaps takes us some way to answering the ‘why?’.”<sup>112</sup>

Science is always in search of truth and new knowledge. It refuses to accept anything on its face value without testing and trial. It has got the capacity to modify previous conclusions in the face of new evidence since it relies on observed fact and not on any pre-conceived theory. But religion applies quite an opposite method. “Concerned as it is principally with the regions beyond the reach of objective inquiry, it

relies on emotion and intuition. And then it applies this method to everything in life, even to those things which are capable of intellectual inquiry and observation: Organized religion, alloying itself to theology and often more concerned with its vested interests than with things of the spirit, encourages a temper which is very opposite to that of science. It produces narrowness and intolerance, credulity and superstition, emotionalism and irrationalism. It tends to close and limit the minds of man, and to produce a temper of a dependent, unfree person."<sup>113</sup>

Nehru says, with advancement in knowledge, the domain of religion shrinks. The more the man understands life and nature, the less he goes to look for supernatural causes. Whatever he can understand and control ceases to be a mystery to him. The process of agriculture, the food, the clothes, social relations which were once upon a time under the domain of religion and its high priests, gradually passed out of its control and became 'subjects for scientific study.'<sup>114</sup>

About India, Nehru has got a specific prescription, "But for countries like India different emphasis is necessary, for we have too much of the past about us and have ignored the present. We have to get rid of that narrowing religious outlook, the obsession with the supernatural and metaphysical speculations, that loosening of the minds discipline in religious ceremonial and mystical emotionalism, which come in the way of our understanding ourselves and the world. We have to come to grips with present, this life, this world, this nature which surrenders us in its variety."<sup>115</sup>

He is critical both of Hindus and Muslims, "Some Hindus talk of going back to the Vedas; some Muslim dream of an Islamic theocracy. Idle fancies, for there are no going back to the past; there is no turning

back even if this was thought desirable. There is only one way traffic in Time."<sup>116</sup>

He feels, India must lessen her religiosity and turn its interest to science. He wants, she must get rid of the exclusiveness in thought and social habit, which has made life a prism to her, stunted her spirit and prevented her growth so long.

Though Nehru was critical of Gandhi making frequent reference to Rama Raj as a golden age, which was to return, he considers himself powerless to intervene. However, he admits the religion of Gandhi was not dogmatic, "His religion was not dogmatic, but it did mean a definite religious outlook on life, and the whole movement was strongly influenced by this and took a revivalist character so far as the masses were concerned." Nehru consoled himself with the thought that Gandhi used the words because they were well known and understood by the masses. For Nehru the latter had an amazing knack of reaching the heart of the people.<sup>117</sup>

But to him Gandhi was a difficult person to understand and his language to a modern almost incomprehensible. Even then he calls Gandhi a great and unique man. "He was a difficult person to understand, sometimes his language was almost incomprehensible to an average modern. But we felt that we knew him quite well enough to realise that he was a great and unique man and a glorious leader, and having put our faith in him we gave him almost a blank cheque, for the time being at least."<sup>118</sup>

Nehru's opinion about Gandhi on the latter's religious outlook is not always static. Sometime he is critical but at the other moment he heaps all praise. Gandhi's laying all stress on character building and attaching little importance to intellectual training and development was

not just to Nehru's liking. "Intellect without character is likely to be dangerous, but what is character with intellect? How, indeed, does character develop? Gandhiji has been compared to the medieval Christian saints, and much that he says seems to fit in with this. It does not fit in at all with modern psychological experience and method."<sup>119</sup>

But when the Pope had refused to grant an interview to Gandhi when he was returning from the Round Table Conference in December 1931, Nehru called it an affront to India. The attitude of the Pope seemed to Nehru intentional, though not thought of before.

Nehru has some accumulated irritation against religion and the religious outlook. He holds it an enemy to clearness of thought and fixity of purpose because he thinks it is based on emotion and passion. "Presuming to be spiritual, how far removed it was from real spirituality and things of the spirit. Thinking in terms of some other world, it had little conception of human values and social values and social justice. With its preconceived notions it deliberately shut its eyes to reality for fear that this might not fit in with them. It based itself on truth, and yet to sure was it of having discovered it, and the whole of it, that it did not take the trouble to search for it; all that concerned it was to tell others of it. The will to truth was not the same thing as the will to believe. It talked of peace and yet supported systems and organizations that could not exist but for violence that comes quietly and often in peaceful garb and starves and kills; or worse still, without doing any physical injury, outrages the mind and crushes the spirit and breaks the heart?"<sup>120</sup>

For the origin of all this irritative feeling in him against religion and religious belief, Nehru blames Gandhi, "And then I thought of him again who was the cause of this commotion within me."<sup>121</sup>

But immediately after this comment, Nehru backtracks and heaps praise upon Gandhi, "What a wonderful man was Gandhiji after all, with his amazing and irresistible charm and subtle power over people. His writings and sayings conveyed little enough impression of the man behind; his personality was far bigger than they would lead one to think. And his services to India, how vast they had been. He had instilled courage and manhood in her people, and discipline and endurance, and the power of joyful sacrifice for a cause, and, with all his humility and pride. Courage is the one sure foundation of character, he had said, without courage there is no morality, no religion, no love."<sup>122</sup>

From this statement of Nehru, it seems, he is trying to camouflage the damage he caused upon the personality of Gandhi with his hasty comment. At the same time, it can also be concluded that Nehru was aware what a colossus figure Gandhi was in the then Indian political scene, hence it suddenly dawned upon him to try to belittle Gandhi was as good as to belittle himself. Nehru had the capacity to realize his mistake immediately.

But Nehru was wrong in his opinion on Gandhi. In fact, Gandhi considered religion as the personal matter of an individual. "But religion is after all a matter for each individual and then too a matter of the heart," Gandhi had written to Nehru on 25 April 1925.

Not satisfied, elsewhere Nehru tries to explain Gandhi's point of view on Hinduism. He writes, "Gandhi was essentially a man of religion, a Hindu to the innermost depths of his being, and yet his conception of religion had nothing to do with any dogma or custom or ritual. It was basically concerned with his firm belief in the moral law, which he calls the law of truth or love... claiming to understand the

spirit of Hinduism, he rejects every text or practice which does not fit in with his idealist interpretation of what it should be, calling it an interpolation or a subsequent accretion."<sup>123</sup>

Nehru tried to fuse science with morality. "He meant by spirituality something deeper and broader than mere religion. "It is a part of religion, but in a deeper and broader part of it. I think these two are essential, if the modern world should survive, and progress."<sup>124</sup>

About his concept on Hinduism, Nehru has a different thing to say. He says that though he was born a Hindu, he did not know how far he was justified in calling himself one or speaking on behalf of Hindus. But he thinks birth still counts in India.<sup>125</sup>

Nehru says that the word 'Hindu' does not occur in any ancient literature of India. "The first reference to it in an Indian book is, I am told, in a Tantrik work of the eighth century A.C., where 'Hindu' means a people and not the followers of a particular religion. But it is clear that the word is a very old one, as it occurs in the Avesta and in Old Persian. It was used then and for a thousand years or more later by the peoples of western and central Asia for India, or rather for the people living on the other side of the Indus river ... The use of the word 'Hindu' in connection with a particular religion is of very late occurrence."<sup>126</sup>

He goes further to state, "Hinduism, as a faith, is vague, amorphous, many-sided, all things to all men. It is hardly possible to define it, or indeed to say definitely whether it is a religion or not, in the usual sense of the word. In its present form, and even in the past, it embraces many beliefs and practices, or contradicting each other. Its essential spirit seems to be to live and let live."<sup>127</sup>

Nehru says that to Gandhi : Hinduism implied 'relentless pursuit after truth' and 'Hinduism is the religion of truth?' In fact, Gandhi did not give any definition either of Hindu or 'Hinduism'. Even he went on to describe that a man might not believe in God but still he could call himself a Hindu if he is a votary of truth and non-violence.<sup>127A</sup>

Nehru substantiates this argument of Gandhi and goes a step further to portray that 'Hindu' or 'Hinduism' is not related to Indian culture, even with reference to the distant past, though he admits that these expressions were used frequently in ancient writings. "Much more is it incorrect to use those terms, in that sense, today... A Christian or a Moslem could, and often did, adapt himself to the Indian way of life and culture, and yet remained in faith an orthodox Christian or Moslem. He had Indianised himself and become an Indian without changing his religion... The correct word for 'Indian', as applied to country or culture or the historical continuity of our varying traditions, is 'Hindu', from 'Hind', a shortened form of Hindustan... 'Hindu' has nothing to do with religion ... Unfortunately, the word 'Hindu' has become associated in India with a particular script –the devanagri script of Sanskrit –and so it has become difficult to use in its larger and more natural significance."<sup>128</sup>

Synthesis, Nehru adds, was the dominant feature of Indian cultural and racial development. "Each incursion of foreign elements was a challenge to this culture, but it was met successfully by a new synthesis and a process of absorption. This was also a process of rejuvenation and new blooms of culture arose out of it, the background and essential basis, however, remaining much the same."<sup>129</sup>

Nehru did not like to read the books of religion because of the totalitarian claims made in them. The outward practices associated with

them rather discouraged him further to go to their original sources. But he did not want to remain ignorant of their contents so he tried to read them in spite of the fact that they did not arise much interest in him. He also did not like the idea of claim made by votaries of various religions as their religious scriptures a revealed one, since their criticism and analysis with a view to project them as a human document could have offended them. Thus he found he was left with no other options than to keep mum on such issues. Nevertheless, he felt that some of them did powerfully influence humanity "and anything that could have done so must have some inherent power and virtue in it, some vital source of energy," but he could not make himself to accept the Holy Writ enshrined in them. "I could not approach these books, or any book as Holy Writ which must be accepted in their totality without challenge or demur. Indeed, this approach of Holy Writ usually resulted in my mind being closed to what they contained. I was much more friendly and open to them when I could consider them as having been written by human beings, very wise and farseeing, but nevertheless ordinary mortals, and not incarnations or mouthpieces of a divinity, about whom I had no knowledge or surety whatever," Nehru writes.<sup>130</sup>

He further elucidates his point of view, "It has always seemed to me a much more magnificent and impressive thing that a human being should rise to a great heights, mentally and spiritually, and should then seek to raise others up, rather than that he should be the mouthpiece of a divine or supreme power. Some of the founders of religions were astonishing individuals, but all their glory vanishes in my eyes when I cease to think of them as human beings. What impresses me and gives me hope is the growth of the mind and spirit of man, and not his being used as an agent to convey a message."<sup>131</sup>

True, Nehru always tries to drive home his belief that he did not have faith either in the entity of God or in the existence of any supernatural being as a “mouthpiece of a divine or superior power” but it is tantamount to accepting the existence of a superior power indirectly. Nehru was not totally an agnostic as he claims to be always, but his religion had also no name either. To Nehru ignorance and bigotry degraded the value of true religion. In 1923, he addressed his colleagues, “I think it is time for persons who wish to regard religion as something good and sacred, and the exercise of rational thought as essential for human progress to protest with all their might against all kinds of bigotry and superstition.”<sup>132</sup> Giving instance of professing true religion is a clear indication of Nehru's predisposition to something divine or some Divine Power. Elsewhere also in his writings the same attitude towards the existence of something supernatural is reflected but not very explicitly, “The old Hindu idea that there is a divine essence in the world and every individual possesses something of it and can develop it, appeals to me in terms of a life force. I do not happen to be a religious man, but I do believe in something –call it religion or anything you like, which raises man above his normal level and gives the human personality a new dimension of spiritual quality and moral depth. Now whatever helps to raise man above himself, be it some god or even a stone image, is good, obviously it is a good thing and must not be discouraged.”<sup>133</sup>

Nehru also did not like Gandhi's mixing religion with social issues and rendering them a personal touch. “Gandhiji is always thinking in terms of personal salvation and of sin, while most of us have society's welfare uppermost in our minds. I find it difficult to grasp the idea of sin, and perhaps it is because of this that I cannot appreciate Gandhi's general outlook.”<sup>134</sup>

Gandhi had certain reservations in terms of husband – wife relations. According to him, marriage implies spiritual union through the physical but not indulgence in sensuality. To him, marital relation is only a stepping-stone to reach the divine; therefore he called sensual attraction between husband and wife unnatural. Gandhi did not recognize the validity or necessity of the sexual act at any time except for the sake of children. He also refused to acknowledge any natural sexual attraction between man and woman.

Even he maintained once “undefiled love between husband and wife takes one nearer to God than any other love.”<sup>135</sup> Therefore, for its realization, Gandhi prescribed that husband and wife should behave like brother and sister.

Gandhi considered adoption of artificial means by couples for birth control as sin, he thus advised control instead. He says, “For years I have contemplated with satisfaction the prospect of suspending procreation by voluntary self-denial.”<sup>136</sup>

Nehru says that if Gandhi’s standpoint on this is “appreciated then one begins to understand a little Gandhiji’s attitude to sex, extraordinary as that seems to the average person today. For him ‘any union is a crime when the desire for progeny is absent,’ and ‘the adoption of artificial methods must result in imbecility and nervous prostration.’ It is wrong and immoral to seek to escape the consequences of one’s acts... It is bad for him to indulge his appetite and then escape the consequences by taking tonics or other medicines. It is still worse for a person to indulge his animal passion and escape the consequences of his acts.”<sup>137</sup>

Nehru thinks this attitude of Gandhi unnatural and shocking and the latter’s argument of not recognizing the validity or the necessity of

the sexual act any time except for the sake of children and refusing any natural sex attraction between man and woman as unacceptable.<sup>138</sup>

To quote Gandhi again, "But I am told that this is an impossible ideal, that I do not take account of the natural attraction between man and woman. I refuse to believe that the sexual affinity, referred to here, can be at all regarded as natural; in that case the deluge would soon be over us. The natural affinity between man and woman is the attraction between brother and sister, mother and son, or father and daughter. It is this natural attraction that sustains the world .... No I must declare with all the power I can command that sensual attraction, even between husband and wife, is unnatural."<sup>139</sup>

Let us observe what Nehru has to say on this attitude of Gandhi, "For my part I think Gandhiji is absolutely wrong in this matter. His advice may fit in with some cases, but as a general policy it can only lead to frustration, inhibition, neurosis and all manner of physical and nervous ills. Sexual restraint is certainly desirable, but I doubt if Gandhiji's doctrine is likely to result in this to any widespread extent. It is too extreme, and most people decide that it is beyond their capacity and go their usual ways, or there is friction between husband and wife. Evidently Gandhiji thinks that birth control methods necessarily mean inordinate indulgence in the sex act, and that if the sexual affinity between man and woman is admitted, every man will run after every woman and vice versa. Neither inference is justified, and I do not know why he is so obsessed by this problem of sex, important as it is. For him it is a 'soot or whitewash' question, there are no intermediate shades. It either end he takes up an extreme position which seems to me most abnormal and unnatural. Perhaps this is a reaction from the deluge of literature on sexology that is descending on us in these days. I presume I am a normal individual and sex has played its part in my

life, but it has not obsessed me or diverted me from my other activities. It has been a subordinate part."<sup>140</sup>

There is obviously marked difference in Gandhi and Nehru in terms of their outlook on sex and husband and wife relationship. Gandhi's extreme continence is not acceptable to Nehru, though the latter also advocates restraint, but only in a moderate scale. To Gandhi either it was summit or retreat, he wanted to project godly qualities in a man, but Nehru accepted human pitfalls, he knew 'to err is human'. Therefore, Nehru adopted the path of moderation, and it is, in fact, a down to earth policy. Though application of moderate continence in regard to sexual relationship between husband and wife is good, to keep them separated and to expect no attraction will take place between them is absurd. Sex is a strong bond. Not to allow sex between them is as good as to make them unrestricted and free, which will simply make the necessity of marriage inessential. If that situation ever comes, though it is most unlikely, social life will be a hell and no woman will be safe. Here Gandhi failed and Nehru won. To quote Nehru's comment, "Essentially, his attitude is that of an ascetic who has turned his back to the world and its ways, who denies life and considers it evil. For an ascetic that is natural, but it seems far, fetched to apply it to men and women of the world who accept life and try to make the most of it. And in avoiding one evil he puts up with many other and graver evils."<sup>141</sup>

Gandhi developed guilt complex regarding sex perhaps because of his own over-indulgence in sex at his early age. One day at late night having relieved of his ailing father by his uncle, he went straight to his bedroom and woke up his wife. In a few minutes he was informed that his father had expired. Gandhi felt extremely ashamed that on account of his carnal desire he could not remain beside his father at

that critical hour. "I felt deeply ashamed and miserable. I ran to my father's room. I saw that, if animal passion had not blinded me, I should have been spared the torture of separation from my father during his last moments... It was a blot I have never been able to efface or forget, and I have always thought that, although my devotion to parents knew no bounds and I would have given up anything for it, yet it was weighed and found unpardonable wanting because my mind was at the same moment in the grip of lust."<sup>142</sup> Even Gandhi's wife was also in an advanced stage of pregnancy at this time, and soon after father's demise the child was born dead. Again Gandhi was filled with a sense of remorse for his lust.<sup>143</sup>

Like Gandhi, Nehru's instinct was also clear about sex. Never did he keep his feeling on sex hidden from the public. Writes he further, "Most of us were strongly attracted by sex and I doubt if any of us attached any idea of sin to it. Certainly I did not; there was no religious inhibition. We talked of its being amoral, neither moral nor immoral. Yet in spite of all this certain shyness kept me away, as well as distaste for the usual methods adopted. For I was in those days definitely a shy lad, because of my lonely childhood.

"Not having the religious temper and disliking the repressions of religion, it was natural for me to seek some other standard. I was superficial and did not go deep down into anything. And so the aesthetic side of life appealed to me, and the idea of going through life worthily, not indulging it in the vulgar way, but still making the most of it and living a full and many-sided life attracted me. I enjoyed life and I refused to see why I should consider it a thing of sin."<sup>144</sup>

Nehru developed his concept of secularism from his home environment initially. His father Motilal's friends comprised of Hindu,

Muslim and British. Nehru learnt to be tolerant of all regions from his childhood days. Later on his education at Harrow and Cambridge made him more broad-minded. Particularly at Cambridge he chose Muslim friends "to immunize him for a life time against the infection of any trace of communal feelings. He could not tolerate religious or racial prejudices and, therefore, had an ingrained and passionate realization that India must be rooted in the idea of a secular state".<sup>145</sup> It was this composite environment shaped his later attitude to the Muslim in particular and the communal problem in general."<sup>146</sup>

Nehru was extremely critical of Gandhi's mixing political issues with religion and God. "I feel angry with him at his religious and sentimental approach to a political question, and his frequent references to God in connection with it."<sup>147</sup>

As a theist tries to interpret every happening be it temporal or social in the light of theological symbols, similarly an agnostic explains every phenomenon from practical point of view, for him no situation is abnormal or beyond explanation. Therefore, for such a person to be secular in outlook nothing unusual. Nehru was never involved in any religious disputations or arguments. He exhibited no concern for *truths and advocated non-intervention in religious* religious matters by the state.

He says that since time immemorial, different authorities at different times have used the name of God and religion to fool their subjects and increase their own powers.

Nehru was extremely critical of men of religion who very often thrust themselves upon others, tried to force down their own views on them with a belief that they were doing a public service. In the name of God these people murdered and killed and did not hesitate to reduce

the mortal body to ashes and boasted that they have saved the 'immortal soul'. He writes, "The record of religion is very bad."

"India had never known in the whole course of her long history the religious strife that has soaked Europe in blood. The whole background of Indian religion, culture and philosophy was one of tolerance, and even encouragement of other beliefs. Some conflict arose when Islam came, but even that was far more political than religious side. It was the conflict between the conquerors and the conquered. In spite of recent developments, I cannot easily envisage religious conflict in India on any substantial scale. The communalism of today is essentially political, economic and middle class... It is a fact that one must never forget that communalism in India is a later-day phenomenon, which has grown up before our eyes. That does not lessen its significance and we may not ignore it, for it is at present a tremendous obstacle in our way and is likely to interfere with our future progress. And yet I think it is overrated and over-emphasized; it does not fundamentally affect the masses although sometimes their passions are roused."<sup>148</sup>

He admits that though there is communal conflict in India and Hindus and Muslims fight each other and kill each other, that happens only occasionally and in some pockets, yet "mostly we live in peace and friendship, for our real interests are one." He opines; "It is shameful thing for any Hindu or Muslim to fight his brother in the name of religion. We must put an end to it; we will of course do so. But what is important is to get out of that complex ideology of custom, convention and superstition which, under the guise of religion enchains us."<sup>149</sup>

To Nehru, secularism did not mean negation of religion, but existence of freedom of religion and conscience and also freedom for

those who professed no religion. It also amounted free-play for all religions but subjected to non-interference with each other.<sup>150</sup>

Nehru believed that the state should be secular honouring all faiths equally and according them equal opportunities however allowing it not to be attached to one faith or religion. He pleaded for adoption of the principle of secularism for India. "In any country like India, with many faiths and religions no nationalism can be built up except on the basis of secularity."<sup>151</sup>

Sometimes Nehru felt that communalism in the real sense of the term has nothing to do with religion; the real issue is the economic factor which kept the division intact. He wrote in 1931 "the real thing to my mind is the economic factor,"<sup>152</sup> and "religion, in any real sense of the word, has played little part in Indian political conflicts, though the word is often enough used and exploited."<sup>153</sup>

Nehru blames both Hindu and Muslim leaders for keeping alive the communal question. He calls them political reactionaries who have sided with the British imperialism in vital matters and have given their approval to the suppression of civil liberty. These people have sought to gain narrow profit for their group at the expense of the larger cause of freedom. He says, "With them there can be no cooperation, for that would mean cooperation with reaction."<sup>154</sup>

Long back in 1940, Nehru had anticipated, "So long as British imperialism functions in India, it will be exceedingly difficult to arrive at a real communal settlement. The bid of British Government can always be higher than of the other party, and barter away national freedom for apparent communal gains."<sup>155</sup>

What Nehru had anticipated proved right but only after the damage was done. The matter of the fact was that he had failed to read the writings on the wall and exerted less on solving the communal issue in the nick of time. Though there were other people also at the decision making level, the role of Nehru carried its own gravity. How he thought the communal issue not so important is self-evident from his own words, "I am afraid I cannot get excited over (the) communal issue, important as it is temporarily. It is after all, a side issue, and it can have no real importance in the larger scheme of things. Those who think of it as the major issue in terms of British imperialism continuing permanently in this country. Without that basis of thought, they would not attach so much importance to one of its inevitable offshoots. I have no such fear, so my vision of a future India contains neither imperialism nor communalism."<sup>156</sup>

Even the Congress Party, manned by the stalwarts like Gandhi and Nehru, kept the goal of independence on its priority and the communal and other issues in the background. "The Congress always put independence first and other questions, including the communal one, second, and refused to allow any of those other questions to take pride of place."<sup>157</sup>

However, the ground reality presented a different picture: Hindu and Muslim antagonism was taking an ugly turn. The line of exclusivism and separatism adopted by the leaders of the Aligarh movement was gradually culminating into the two-nation theory of Muhammad Ali Jinnah. But all along Nehru was constantly hopeful that adjustment would take between the two communities, but he was apprehensive also that with power concentrated in foreign hands, anything might happen.<sup>158</sup>

Nehru presents the same proposition elsewhere also, "Our communal or minority problem would have been settled long ago if a third party had not been always there to play it up and holding all manner of political gifts in its hands. So long as British imperialism functions in India, it will be exceedingly difficult to arrive at a real communal settlement. The bid of the British Government can always be higher than that of the other party, and the reactionary groups take advantage of this fact and barter away national freedom for apparent communal gains."<sup>159</sup>

Even Nehru went on record to state that the concept of 'Muslim nation' as politically absurd, economically fantastic and, therefore, hardly worth-considering, and called it a figment of imagination and had expected, "And even if many people believed in it, it would still vanish at the touch of reality."<sup>160</sup>

But that was not to be, a new beginning was in the offing for India in the form of two nations: India and Pakistan. Nehru conceded defeat. On the issue of why did he accept the Mountbatten Plan, Nehru opened his mind to Leonard Mosley, "The truth is that we were tired men, and we were getting on in years too. Few of us could stand the prospect of going to prison again –and if we had stood out for a united India as we wished it, prison obviously awaited us. We saw the fires burning in the Punjab and heard everyday of the killings. The plan for partition offered way out and we took it."<sup>161</sup>

On the eve of independence, Nehru gave a message to the press, "All of us, to whatever religion we may belong, are equally the children of India with equal rights, privileges and obligations. We cannot encourage communalism or narrow-mindedness, for no nation can be great whose people are narrow in thought or in action."<sup>162</sup>

True Nehru could not keep the undivided India intact, but he was not the sole destiny maker, yet he cautioned Indians to be careful in future with communalism, "The communal poison, which has brought disaster upon us, will put an end to our freedom also if we are not vigilant and if we do not take action in time."<sup>163</sup>

Nehru promised to the people of India that India would proceed on secular and national lines in keeping with the powerful trends towards internationalism. Whatever confusion the present might contain, in the future, India would be a land, as in the past, of many faiths equally honoured and respected but of one national outlook.<sup>164</sup>

The whole idea of secularism is enshrined in the Constitution of India and incorporated in Articles, 14, 15(1) and (2), 16(1) and (2), 17, 25(1), 26, 27, 28, 29 and 30. The Preamble to the Constitution declares India a Secular State and speaks loudly and clearly of the liberty of all citizens in relation to various important matters that include faith, belief and worship. The Constitution of India speaks volumes about Nehru's mind and his standpoint.

In a broadcast to the nation from New Delhi on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1948, Nehru declared firmly and succinctly, "We will not tolerate any communalism in this country and that we are building a free, secular State, where every religion and belief has full freedom and equal honour, where every citizen has equal liberty and equal opportunity."

If we read Nehru's will, written on 21<sup>st</sup> June, 1954, we can get a glimpse of what Nehru stood for throughout his life. He writes, "I wish to declare with all earnestness that I do not want any religious ceremonies performed for me after my death. I do not believe in any such ceremonies and submit to them, even as a matter of form, would be hypocrisy and an attempt to delude ourselves and others... When I

die, I should like my body to be cremated... A small handful of these ashes should be thrown into the Ganga... My desire to have a handful of my ashes thrown into the Ganga at Allahabad has no religious significance, so far as I am concerned. I have no religious sentiment in the matter. I have been attached to the Ganga and the Jamuna rivers in Allahabad ever since my childhood and, as I have grown older, this attachment has also grown ... And though I have discarded much of past tradition and custom, and am anxious that India should get rid herself of all shackles that bind and constrain her and divide her people, and suppress vast numbers of them and prevent the free development of the body and spirit..."

Nehru followed what he preached. He was secular in thought, remained committed to secularism throughout his life and proved even after his death that he was a true secularist.

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