

Chapter -3

Secularism in Modern Indian Thought: Rabindranath Tagore, Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi

This chapter is an attempt to bring out the secular thoughts that are weaved in the writings of Rabindranath Tagore, Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi.

In the last two hundred years, *Hinduism* has been greatly influenced by the impact of the West. It has not produced any really new doctrine but it has presented its old thought in a new light. These new developments are partly the result of the influence of *Christianity* but not entirely new. Indian society has undergone considerable changes. Since the advent of the modern age and it is only natural that this should result in certain changes of ideas. the development is connected with the rise of a new middle class.

The first period of Western impact which covers the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries is characterized by considerable conversion of *Hindus* to *Christianity*. *Hindu* religious leaders seem to have been at a loss in face of this challenge and little attempt was made to prevent conversion. However this period did not last very long and in fact the number of conversions seems to have been fairly small in view of the heavy impact of the west on India. This does not mean that *Christianity* had no effect on Hinduism . The *Hindu* leaders were forced to carry out considerable reform of religious practices and to revive many of the old traditions of *Hindu* thought which was not in practice. Though this chapter mainly deals with the secular thoughts of Rabindranath Tagore, Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi but here the thoughts of Raja Rammohan Roy are added as it acts like a connecting thread to the former thinkers.

This brings us to the second period which has often been called the period of '*Hindu Reformism*'. The pioneer in this movement was Raja Rammohan Roy, one of the reformer of Hindu society , the first modern man of India. He was a scholar and he read the scriptures of most of the world's religions in the original languages, only to find out that there was not much difference between them. The institution founded by Rammohan Roy originally called *Brahma Sabha* (1828) but the name was changed to *Brahma Samaj* in 1830. Rammohan was no mere religious reformer, but a stout social reformer who sought to eradicate the prevalent social evils and to introduce what was good for the society and

the people. He founded the *Brahma Samaj*, based on the Unitarian doctrines of the *Upanishads*. During this period he had to face the opposition of orthodox *Hindus*, among whom some of the less sophisticated even claimed that the *Upanishads* had actually been written by Rammohan himself to strengthen his case. But in reality, Rammohan depended on the *Upanishads* to formulate his views on religion. His outlook on social matters was progressive. He was very keen that the Indians should learn Western sciences and wrote to the governor general of India emphasizing the need for education in mathematics, natural philosophy, chemistry and other useful sciences. It was his agitation for the abolition of the *Sati* that led the *British* government to act.

Rammohan is the great path-maker of this country who has removed obstacles that hinders our progress at every step, and inspired us to humanism .Rammohan belongs to the lineage of India's great seers who taught us to acknowledge the divine in human affairs, to offer hospitality to all that is imperishable in human civilization, regardless of racial and national divergence, from the early dawn of our history. It has been India's privilege and also its problem, to harmonize the diverse elements of humanity which compels us to synthesize contrasting cultures in the light of a comprehensive ideal. The complicated structure of our social system with its intricate arrangement of caste testifies to the vigorous attempt made at an early stage of human civilization to deal with the complexity of our problem , to relegate to every class of our peoples however wide the cleavage between their levels of culture in a cosmopolitan scheme of society. Rammohan's predecessors, *Kabir*, *Nanak*, *Dadu* and other saints and seers of medieval India, carried on India's great attempt to evolve a type of human between peoples and races; they broke through barriers of social and religious exclusiveness and brought together India's different communities on the genuine basis of spiritual reality. Now, that our outdated social usages are yielding rapidly to the stress of an urgent call of unity, when rigid enclosures of caste and creed can no more obstruct the freedom of our fellowship. When India's spiritual need of faith and concord between her different peoples has become imperative and seems to have aroused a new stir of consciousness throughout the land, we must not forget that this emancipation of our humanity has been made possible through the works of the great unifier, Rammohan Roy. It was for him that it is possible to realize the significance of the modern age.¹.

He knew that the ideal of human civilization does not lie in the isolation of Independence, but in the brotherhood of interdependence of individuals as well as of

nations in all spheres of thought and activity. He applied this principle of humanity with his extraordinary depth of scholarship and natural gift of intuition, to social, literary and religious affairs, never acknowledging limitations of circumstance, never deviating from his purpose lured by distractions of temporal excitement. His attempt was to establish our peoples on the full consciousness of their own cultural personality, to make them comprehend the reality of all that was unique and indestructible in their civilization, and simultaneously, to make them approach to other civilizations in the spirit of sympathetic co-operation. With this end in view he tackled an amazingly wide range of social, cultural, and religious problems of our country, and through a long life spent in unflagging service to the cause of India's cultural reassertion, brought back the pure stream of India's philosophy to the futility of our immobile and unproductive national existence. In social ethics he was an uncompromising interpreter of the truths of human relationship, tireless in his crusade against social wrongs and superstition, generous in his co-operation with any reformer, both of this country and of outside, who came to our aid in a genuine spirit of comradeship.² Unsparingly he devoted himself to the task of rescuing from the debris of India's decadence, the true products of its civilization, and to make our people build on them, as the basis, the superstructure of an international culture. Deeply versed in *Sanskrit*, he revived classical studies and while he imbued the *Bengali* literature and language with the rich atmosphere of our classical period, he opened its doors wide to the spirit of the age, offering access to new words from other languages, and to new ideas. to every sphere of our national existence. He brought the sagacity of a comprehensive vision, the spirit of self-manifestation of the unique in the light of the universal.³

Rabindranath Tagore

Rammohan's work was continued by Maharshi Debendranath Tagore, a saintly character who did much to consolidate the *Upanisadic* faith of the Brahma Samaj. Debendranath was against Idolatry, but he accepted *Brahmo Dharma*, gave it a shape, and became the leader of a re-oriented faith founded on the pure monotheism of the ancient *Upanisads*. Every morning his sons had to recite, with correct pronunciation and accent, the verses from the *Vedas* and *Upanishads*. The daily recital of these beautiful moral verses and the simple prayer influenced young Rabindranath and made a lasting impression on his mental make-up. The poet Rabindranath, although born in a reputed family saw that the *Samaj* had one great weakness; it embraced only the elite and debarred the lower caste. In his poetry and other writings we find Rabindranath voicing the wisdom of the outcaste. In his *Hibbert Lectures* at Oxford, he expressed his love for the poetry of the medieval mystics and the *Bauls*. He loved to describe himself as an *Bratya* (out caste) in respect of the institutional religion. Being a member of Tagore's family in 1884, Tagore had to take charge as the secretary of *Adi Brahma Samaj*. During this time *Brahma Samaj* was the target of adverse *Hindu* criticism. As a reaction to *Brahma Dharma* ,a group of Hindu educated men was formed. They called themselves positivists or atheists. Akshay kumar Dutta was one of them. The *Hindu* revivalist Pt Sasadhar Tarkachuramani invented a new religion called *Scientific Hindu* religion. Its two sects, *Navajiban* and *Prachar* systematically published articles against religion. Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, the famous Bengali novelist used to write articles in these papers supporting *Hinduism*. Rabindranath, as a secretary, took up the challenge of the Hindus and replied to the articles of those. *Bankim Chandra* replied back and this heated exchange continued for some time. Ultimately a common understanding formed between them which turned into a kind of friendship.⁴ Meanwhile the 26th February 1891 was fixed for the Census in India. Some *Brahma* sects used to think themselves different from the *Hindus*. But the *Adi Brahma Samaj* sect of *Brahma Dharma* to which Tagore belonged, considered themselves as a special branch of *Hinduism*. In a letter to C.J.O' Donnell, in charge of Census, Tagore requested him to refer the *Adi Brahma Samaj* as '*Theistic Hindu*' . He published a circular in *Tattvabodhini* requesting *Adi Brahma* families to classify themselves as '*Hindu-Brahma*'⁵ . As a *Brahma*, Rabindranath was against the practice of idolatry in *Hinduism*. He was against the 'incarnation-theory' or *Avatarvada* of *Hinduism*. The taboos and prohibitions of *Hinduism* were repugnant to the poet. ⁶

In *Dharmer Adhikar*, he says: "there are two sides of man's power. one is his 'can' and the other is his 'should'. The man can do certain actions, this is the easy side of his power. but he should do certain actions, this constitutes the utmost exercise of his power. Religion stands on the high precipice of the 'should' and as such, always draws the 'can' towards it. When our 'can' is completely assimilated by our 'should', we attain the most desired object of our life, we attain truth. But these impotent people, who cannot act up to this ideal of religion, try to pull it down to their own level. Thus taboos and prohibitions arise".⁷ Rabindranath had an unprejudiced mind and did not subscribe to the views of any particular conventional religion. We have an idea of his religious view from the following statement, "I have been asked to let you know something about my own view of religion. One of the reasons why I always feel reluctant to speak about this is that i have not come to my own religion through the portals of passive acceptance of a particular creed owing to some accident of birth. It was born in a family who were pioneers in the revival in our country of a great religion, based upon the utterance of Indian sages in the *Upanishads*. But owing to my idiosyncrasy of temperament, it was impossible for me to accept any religious teaching on the only ground that people in my surroundings believed it to be true.....thus my mind was brought up in an atmosphere of freedom, freedom from the dominance of any creed that had its sanction in the definite authority of some scripture or in the teaching of some organized worshippers."⁸

Rabindranath Tagore, throughout his life , never clung to one belief. His thoughts were flexible and developed further. From the fiftieth year of his life we find a change in his ideas about religion. He was no longer against *Hinduism*. He was eager to incorporate the best of *Hinduism* into *Brahmas*. At that time there was a debate in the country, are the *Brahmas* *Hindus*? The *Brahma* leaders were divided on the issue. According to some, *Brahmas* are separate from *Hindus* like *Christians* and *Muslims*. But according to Tagore, *Brahmas* were *Hindus* and in support of this view, he read a paper in the *Sadharan Brahma Samaj Mandir* under the caption *Atmaparichaya*. He said, "*Brahmanism* has received its spiritual inspiration from *Hindus*, it stands on the broad basis of *Hindu* culture. *Brahmanism* has a universal outlook but it is always the religion of the *Hindus*. We have thought and assimilated it by the help of the *Hindu* mind. Today *Hinduism* must open the sacred, secret truth of its own heart. It must preach the gospel of universalism to the entire Universe. Today through the salvation of *Brahmanism*, *Hinduism* has been fulfilling its own mission".⁹

Tagore's unique ideas about religion began to take shape from this time. He was neither believer of *Hinduism* or *Brahmanism* but a synthesis between the two. He did not discard the old orthodox religion totally, and yet at the same time he did not accept *Brahma* religion with the same enthusiasm as before. *Brahmanism* also had become conventional and rigid like *Hinduism*. *Brahmanism* of Rammohan Roy, the aim of which was to unite people, failed to serve its purpose. *Brahmas* used to think of non-*Brahmas* specially *Hindus* as opposed to themselves. So it follows Tagore was not confined to any particular sect and religion. Man picks up that particular form of religion that suits him, but in the final analysis religion transcends all such particular forms., it is one's kinship with everything. Man has to realize his kinship with everything, he has to cultivate a universal feeling of love. Tagore insists that true religion must not be confused with so-called 'institutional religion.' He says, 'it should be remembered that religions or churches or religious-organizations are not the same. They are in one another as the fire is to the ashes. When the religions have to make way for religious-organization, it is like the river being dominated by sand beds, the current stagnates and its aspect becomes desert-like'.¹⁰

According to Tagore, the institutional religions are dogmatic and false and true religion must have the qualities of spontaneity and neutrality in it. Tagore says, 'in dogmatic religion all questioners are definitely answered, all doubts are finally laid to rest. but the poet's religion is fluid, like the atmosphere around the earth where the light and shadow play hide and seek'.¹¹ So, it follows that religion expresses the essential element of all things and man's religion is his innermost truth. Religion has been described as the spontaneous expression of the essential and inner aspect of man. In Tagore's view, "man possesses an extra-awareness that is greater than his material sense---this is his manhood. It is this deep abiding creative force which is his religion."¹²

So, man has a self-awareness, which reveals to him the fact that he has a capacity of going beyond himself, of constantly pushing himself ahead towards higher and higher regions. This is a distinct and essential peculiarity of man. Therefore, his religious life must consist in a constant exercise of this capacity. That is why Tagore clearly says, "if there is any philosophy of religion in my writings, it amounts to this ; to realise the relationship of perfect love between the supreme soul and the souls of all created beings is indeed true religious sense,-this love that holds duality on one side and non-duality on the other, union as well as separation and bondage along with freedom."¹³

According to Tagore, God is the supreme person, who is the combination of truth, beauty and goodness, that are related to human capacities . The different methods for understanding god are the art, philosophy ,religion, worship ,love and devotion. These will be meaningful when god is personal and the object of worship. A certain amount of isolation and sorting is needed in order to expose the metaphysical views of Rabindranath Tagore. It is needed as Tagore never tries to classify his doctrines. Tagore says, "I have never looked at god, man and nature as problems which can be considered in isolation from each other. I could never conceive of their occupying watertight compartment."¹⁴ His philosophy presents the integral picture of god ,man and nature. He says," My mind is used to look at reality as an integral whole, it being understood of course, that i am referring to the wholeness of spirit and not to material unity."¹⁵

God is considered as a postulate, an axiomatic reality in the philosophy of Tagore . No traditional proof for the existence of god was offered. God is the supreme person in Tagore's philosophy. He is the transcendent reality as well as an imminent being. Tagore's belief in spiritual love propels him to theistic conception of god. The formless absolute is conceived as one who has form for the purpose of love and religion. The absolute is considered as the personal lord of the universe. He says, ,"when I try to get a larger vision of this world with all its constant activity, I find that it is ever unwearied ,peaceful ,and beautiful. Through so much of movement and Endeavour, through the cycle of life and death , joy and sorrow, it does not seem over burdened.....how is it possible for peace and beauty to reside in the midst of such diversity and striving ? Why is it that all this is not just noise, but there is music in it ? The only possible answer is , there he stands, silent like a tree".¹⁶ God is knowledge but he cannot be known as things of the world. The worldly things can be experienced by our intellect but it is not able to have the knowledge of god. "The vision of the supreme one in our own soul is a direct and immediate intuition, not based on any ratiocination or demonstration at all"¹⁷

One finite intellect cannot reveal the nature of the infinite. God hides himself who is far from the finite consciousness. He can only be realized through intuition. "They are blind who hope to see it by the light of reason that reason which is the cause of separation. the house of reason is very far away."¹⁸ God is within us but we wrongly search him in the outer world. "To see god we should transfer ourselves to another dimension of reality. We should break down the barrier of individuality and relax the despotism of the sense, our ignorance will then remove. We escape from the light of separation and see god as the

transcendent darkness in which the whole universe is bathed."¹⁹ God is not an abstract reality like the *Brahman* of the *Vedanta*. We feel him in each and all, that is not only in nature but also in the family, in society and in the state. God is the concrete spirit. Tagore believes in the immanence of god.

Tagore never defines god in negative term. He describes god by calling him the sky, the tree and so many other things. The god of Tagore is not nameless and formless. He reflects himself in death and immortality. Tagore defines god as love, the supreme person is full of love for all creatures. He says; "The supreme person whose spirit is over us all, love for whom comprehends love for all creatures and exceeds in depth and strength all other loves leading to difficult endeavors and martyrdoms, that have no other gain than the fulfillment of this love itself."²⁰ Man's religious aspiration fulfils itself in his communion with a personal god. He seeks for a god who is a person like his own self, one within whom he may live, move and have his being. Thus the religion of man requires god as the personal being. God is mere abstraction in thought without the touch of the personal companionship or personal relations to man. God without personality is the absolute of philosophical conception. Tagore writes, "my world is given to a personal 'me' by a personal being. it is gift of soul"²¹ He further writes, "our personal 'I' must have relationship with the infinite personality".²² God is very close to Tagore. He never banishes his god in a far-off heaven. He writes, 'You come down from your throne and stood at my cottage door.'²³

God is the creator of the Universe. The supreme soul or god is also called as *Visvakarma* for his creative nature. The nature with its multiplicity of forms and forces are nothing but the outer manifestation of *Visvakarma* and god's inner manifestation consists in our souls. God manifests in the universe in order to find himself through his creation. Just as the eye cannot see the face and in order to do so, it requires a mirror, god creates this universe in order to realize his own nature that lies in absolute freedom. Tagore says that we can conceive neither *Brahma*, nor the world as the only reality. Reality, it can be described "as both this or that or neither this nor that."²⁴ The mere finite is like a dead well abstracting beyond the knowledge of the mere finite only accumulates but does not illuminate. It is like a lamp without its light, a violin without its music."²⁵ Just as a book cannot be known by counting its pages, a survey of all the finites cannot exhaust reality.

Tagore never conceives the world as an illusion or *Mâyâ*. He tries to give a new explanation of *Mâyâ* that never illustrates the world as an unreality. Tagore does neither totally reject *Mâyâvada* nor the theory of illusion as Ramanuja and other philosophers do. "To dismiss the world as ' *Mâyâ* ,' would imply that god is passive and inactive. If god is inactive then the result of this action, namely the phenomenal world must also be real."²⁶ He believes that god is both transcendent and immanent in the world. God and the world both are interdependent. Without the world god would be like phantom ; without god ,the world would be turned to chaos. Rabindranath Tagore further writes, "I began to ask the question who is he that attunes my ears to the universal music? Who has made me conscious of the subtle links that bind me every object of creation?"²⁷

God is neither separate from the world nor is the world detached from him. Tagore says that *Mâyâ* or ignorance only covers the truth. " *Mâyâ* is that which revolts against the truth of relatedness."²⁸ We find that Tagore believes in the reality of the phenomenal world. but from the standpoint of human existence. He says, Both *Mâyâ* and the world are real. The reality of these two is indubitable. The world appears as illusion only to those who approach it intellectually. It becomes positive and real to us when we enjoy it. Only a person having a narrow outlook, who is sitting inactive in a corner of his room, can divide this world as an illusion. Though the world has its own existence; yet it is not independent of god who is the creator of the universe. Tagore holds that this world is not a construction according to certain rules or laws. It is an expression or creation, a single unity expresses itself in diverse forms. The so-called natural laws are the reflection of this unity in diversity and the supreme unity is therefore, the law of all laws. the world with its manifold appearance has no meaning unless it has the creative unity or god, the supreme person .For Tagore, the world is real with its manifold appearance having a unity maintained by god who is therefore, called the creative unity in relation to this world.

The aim of Tagore's religion, therefore, is the realization of oneness of the individual soul with the supreme soul and this realization has to be a realization in love and joy. Thus we find that the innermost essence of man is the presence of divinity in him. Therefore, religion is nothing but an attempt to realize this divinity. A man possesses the universal man in him. In other words, he has given the name of the Divine as universal man. The liberation is, according to Tagore, the connection of the individual man to the universal man. From the coinage of the term 'Universal man' ,it is proved that a man may not remain confined within himself but can extend himself to all persons and times. It is

remarkable contribution of Tagore that he has emphasized on the fact that it is possible to realize the universal man within man. He has deliberately used universal man instead of god in order to point out that divinity does not come from outside but it lies in the heart of a man, which is a novel way of pointing out truth to mankind. This attitude of Rabindranath reveals his secular mentality.

His philosophy is a peculiar and yet a religious synthesis of abstract monism and a particular type of theism. Reality according to him is one. He identifies this reality with personal god. So Tagore's philosophy oscillates between *Sankara's Vedanta* and *Vaisnavism*, specially the *Visistadvaita of Ramanuja*. In this system it has stated clearly that an individual, though the part of Divine, cannot be infinite. Even at the stage of liberation the relation between a man and the divine is "worshiper and worshipped." As he thinks Divine as a lord of all, controller of the world, he cannot think himself equal to him. But in Tagore's philosophy a man remains in the middle stage. He, though conscious of his ego, thinks himself as infinite as the Divine. In the same individual there is *Vis'va*, i.e. the whole world and the ego. In other words, a person who is doing this worldly works is at the same time related to the divine. Tagore does not believe in liberation in the sense of *Kaivalya (Bairagya sadhane mukti se amer noi)*, but he speaks about liberation existing in innumerable bondages. that is, liberation lies in between finite and infinite or bondage and liberation. At this stage a man looks towards finite as the manifestation of the infinite and the infinite as the manifestation of the finite, which is real picture of harmony. Tagore has clearly pointed out that god intentionally takes the form of the finite out of love. Such type of view which is completely different from the traditional theories of liberation. *Vaisnavism*, the cult of the deity and devotee, the love between the two attracted him. Rabindranath received the inner significance of creation and love from the medieval *Bengali Vaisnava Padavali*. The *Vaisnava* concept of beauty is imbibed by the poet, as beauty and love form the keynote of Tagore's writings. In the lover's gift and crossing he says, "o, listen to the secrets of the world, I know that Lilly is pale for moon's love,"²⁹

He never hesitates in attributing personality of god, and this personal being designated by him as the '*Jivan-devata*', the lord of life, the guiding principle of his life. A clear picture of Tagore's conception of '*Jivan-devata*' would emerge only after having the idea of his philosophy of man because in his scheme god and man go together. Man is called the spark of the divine and supreme is conceived as the ideal which man has to realize. This ideal cannot be an impersonal or absolute. His presence has to be felt

everywhere because he also is an actual participant in the drama that is perpetually going on. This divine personality is 'infinite', finite personalities are individual centers whereas the infinite personality is the 'Universal man' as Tagore calls it. Tagore says "the world for me is both individual and Universal. my world is mine but it is also yours. it is not in my own individual personality that reality is contained but in an infinite personality". So there is a sense in which Tagore humanizes not only nature and objects but also god. His mission is- the divinization of man and the humanizing of god. Tagore was influenced by *Buddhism* also. He was attracted to *Buddhist* concept of *Ahimsā* . He was fascinated by *Buddhist* teaching of *Maitri* (brotherhood), *Upekṣa* (indifference), and *Karuna* (compassion). Tagore was also influenced by *Bauls* tradition. *Bauls* is a non-orthodox faith that flourished in Bengal. The *Bauls* philosophy is very similar to *Sufi* philosophy. The simple life style of *Baul* singers wandering around singing and dancing, always absorbed in the joy of life touched Tagore. The *Bauls* believed that there is god in every man's heart and he may be realized only by sincere love and devotion. There is no room for distinction of caste and sex. In *Religion of Man* he says, "The idea of the humanity of our god or the divinity of man to the eternal is the main subject of the book" .in this book he quoted a number of *Baul* songs and he composed many songs in tune of *Baul* .³⁰

One can never account for the emergence of a genius, for genius is always something in the nature of an exception to the general rule. It is at the same time the function of genius to find expression for the emotions and ideas which stir in the unconscious and subconscious mind of the community. A bond is thus established between the genius and his people, and helps to explain the admiration and wonder with which the genius is greeted when the first flush of amazement is over. Men find in his words and actions an embodiment of the feelings and aspirations which they have dimly felt but could not express. The genius also benefits by such relation. He derives his strength and energy from the feelings and vague aspirations stirring in the mind of the common man. Tagore is typical of genius in both respects. His uniqueness is beyond question and at the same time he life is deeply attached with the common people whom he loved and lived for.

Tagore analyses the existential conditions of man in turns of care and anguish, fear and boredom and assert that life means living in the midst of all these. It is true that he speaks about the ultimate escape, more or less, in the manner of the ancient Indian thinkers. But they made distinction between the concern of philosophy and the ideal of

philosophical thinking. Philosophy is concerned with the existent individual living in the midst of the life-situations, but the ultimate ideal that it recommends is the redemption both of the individual and of the race.

Tagore asserts that an analysis of human aspiration clearly reveals that it is an ever-going, ever-progressing process. It is never satisfied with the goals of life. No satisfaction is final. It is always aspiring for more-for going higher and higher. Tagore calls this aspect of man "the surplus in man". Tagore comes to assert that everything concerning man depends ultimately on man himself, who can shape his own destiny. As such, he does not feel the need of relying upon any super-natural or spiritual powers. Thus this kind of Humanism becomes positivistic, secular and worldly in its outlook.

Swami Vivekananda

Another new school of *Hinduism* developed in Bengal under the influence of Ramakrishna *Paramahansa*. His approach was not intellect and he put much emphasis on simple devotion to God. This is of course in direct line with the *Vedanta*. His disciple Swami Vivekananda, declared himself a socialist, spread this *Vedantic* doctrine of *Advaita* in India and abroad and many Western countries now have branches of the *Ramakrishna Mission*. In the time when materialistic science was gaining ascendance Vivekananda introduced to the Western world the ideas of *Vedanta* which he called 'the science of the soul.' Swami Vivekananda known in his pre-monistic life as Narendra nath Datta, was born in an affluent family in Kolkata on 12th January 1863. His father, Vishwanatha Datta, was a successful attorney, with interests in a wide range of subjects and his mother Bhuvaneshwari Devi ,was endowed with deep devotion, strong character and other qualities. A precious boy, Narendra excelled in music, gymnastics and studies. By the time he graduated from Calcutta University, he had acquired a vast knowledge of different subjects, especially Western philosophy and history. Born with a yogic temperament, he used to practice meditation even from his boyhood, and was associated with *Brahma* movement for some time. At the advent of youth Narendra had to pass through a period of spiritual crisis. His mind was filled with doubts about the existence of god. It was at that time, he first heard about Sri Ramakrishna from one of his English professor at college. One day in November 1881, Narendra went to meet Sri Ramakrishna, who was staying at the Kali temple in Dakshineshwar. He straightaway asked the master a question which he had put to several others but had received no satisfactory answer; 'sir, have you seen god?'. Without hesitating for a moment Ramakrishna replied, " yes I see him as clearly as I see you, only in a much intense sense". Apart from removing doubts from the mind of Narendra , Sri Ramakrishna won his heart through his pure, unselfish love. Thus began a guru-disciple relationship which is quite unique in the history of Bengal.

After the death of Ramakrishna in 1886, he undertook an extensive travel of almost the whole of India, and thereby acquainted himself with the social and economic conditions of the country. He came to feel that India, in spite of its rich spiritual heritage and very strong cultural history, had not been able to root out poverty, weakness and social evils. He strongly felt the need of bringing about a spiritual revolution, which, he also realized, required a very strong spiritual leadership. At that very time he came to know that the *Parliament of Religion* was going to meet at *Chicago*. He decided to go there and to

participate in the meet. What happened there is today a household story, but this was a fact that the Parliament of Religions enabled Vivekananda to assume the spiritual leadership of the Indian people. He travelled extensively even in foreign countries and learnt about their good things. After his return, he founded the Ramakrishna Ashram at Belur, near Calcutta and started with great vigor, the work of social reform and service. In 1899, he undertook a second journey to the West and breathed his last on the 4th of July 1902, leaving behind an institution and a host of disciples to carry on forward the good work he had started.

During his lifetime, he was under the influence of *Brahmo Samaj* and it can be said that his strong feelings against the prevalent orthodox and superstitious rites were generated under that influence. He seemed to be influenced by the personality of Dayananda Saraswati. It can be said that Dayananda's emphasis on the indeterminate nature of reality and his practical insistence on the quality of fearlessness had left a deep mark on Vivekananda. Then, there was the *Gîtâ*, which, with its emphasis on "selfless work", was a source of constant inspiration to Vivekananda.

Vivekananda, to a very great extent, was a *Vedântist*. The deepest influence upon his thought is ancient *Hindu* philosophy-especially of the *Vedanta*. His basic belief in the essential unity of everything, that is, in the completely monistic nature of reality, owes its origin to the *Vedanta*. His doctrine of *Mâyâ*, again, is derived from the same source. The distinction between "an empirical point of view" and "a transcendental point of view" that he so often makes and to which he refers time and again in order to solve certain apparent contradictions of his thought, is borrowed from the *Vedanta*. It is true that Vivekananda always emphasizes the need of re-interpreting *Vedanta* in accordance with the demands and needs of the time; in fact, his philosophy itself is an attempt in the direction, but this remains a fact that some of the basic ideas of the philosophy of Vivekananda are derived from ancient *Hindu* philosophy-from *Vedanta*.

Vivekananda is influenced by *Buddhist* philosophy. There are three ideas in Vivekananda philosophy for which he remains indebted to *Buddhist* thought. The first is the idea of "mass-liberation", that Vivekananda envisages; it has a clear similarity with the *Buddhistic* ideal of bodhisattva. secondly, Vivekananda is impressed by the *Buddhistic* assertion that the raft with the help of which one crosses a river in storm, should be left for the use of others. *Buddha* himself, even after attaining *Nirvana*, kept on roaming about and helping others in their struggles against sufferings. Vivekananda frankly recognizes the

worth of such humanitarian and altruistic work. His own missionary zeal for service is influenced by this. Thirdly, some of the *Buddhist* ideals, like, *Samyak karmanta* and *Ajiva* have also inspired Vivekananda a great deal.

Along with these Indian influences, he also carried, on his thought, the influence of *Christianity*. He was impressed by the strength of character, the soul-force that the Man of the Cross possessed. He could see that it required a supreme spiritual strength to forgive the oppressor even in the midst of acute physical suffering. From *Christianity*, therefore, Vivekananda takes up the ideal of service and love. His conviction that man contains within him the spark of divinity and his optimistic belief in the possibility of man's redemption contain elements that greatly resemble the *Christian* notion of the kingdom of God.

But the profoundest influence, in the light of which every other influence was remodeled and shaped, was that of his master-Sri Ramakrishna *Paramahansa*. In fact, the story of the life of Vivekananda would have been entirely different, had he not come under the influence of Ramakrishna. It is said that Ramakrishna brought about a spiritual transformation in the personality and the mental make-up of Vivekananda. Swami Nikhilananda, speaking about this, says, "it was his master who had taught him the divinity of the soul, the non-duality of god-head, the unity of existence and one more great thing- that is the universality or harmony of all different religions"¹ it is true that Ramakrishna initiated him to spiritual discipline and meditation.

Vivekananda conceives the cosmos more or less, in Sankara's way. Sankaracharya believes that in reality there has never been any creation. From the transcendental point of view, creation, according to Sankara, is unreal. "*Jagat mithya*". Vivekananda not merely asserts the reality of the world, but feels that Vedānta does not intend to uphold that the world is unreal. He thinks that the word '*mithya*' has been misunderstood. There are many other scholars of Vedānta who also feel that way. They all feel that in Vedānta the word '*mithya*' has been used in a special sense. It means that which has no permanent value-that which is constantly changing and varying- that which is transitory and temporary. In this sense, it is not opposite to "*the real*". Thus Vivekananda feels that what Vedānta asserts is not the unreality of the world, but its *mithyatva*, it merely emphasises that *Jagat* cannot have any fixed or absolute character of its own.

This means that creation is not a complete process. World does not come out of god as a finished product. Creation, according to him, is timeless, having no beginning or end in time. The universe is just a manifestation—an expression of god and the question of time cannot be raised with respect to this. He says, 'it is not that this world was created the other day, not that a god came and created the world and since that time has been sleeping, for that cannot be. the creative energy is still going on. God is eternally creating. He is never at rest'²

That shows that Vivekananda has tried to combine the notions of 'creation' and 'evolution'. Usual theories of evolution find it difficult to explain the beginning of everything, even Darwin could not explain how the first living cells came into being. Vivekananda's theory of creation is able to explain the origin of the cosmos, and he explains the growth of the world in terms of evolutionary process. According to him, everything in nature grows from certain subtle form to its grosser form. The story of the world is the story of the unfolding of the rudimentary elements into their more clearly expressed forms.

Vivekananda has borrowed the doctrine of *māyā* from *Advaita Vedanta*, but his conception of *māyā* is not similar to that of Sankara. Like Sankara, Vivekananda believes that *māyā* is a power of the creator. but in *Advaita Vedanta*, *māyā* is the power that creates illusion. It is that divine *sakti* which has the capacity of deluding man into believing that the world is real. Vivekananda accepts this position. According to him *māyā*, does not necessarily mean being illusory or unreal in Vivekananda's philosophy, *māyā* is conceived just as a fact about the nature of the world, it seeks to express the essential characters of the world as it exists. If the world is false, then to abolish the system of exploitation of the rich and welfare of the oppressed people also have no means. He did not believe this type of *māyāvāda*. Vivekananda explains the nature of this fact in a very clear manner when he says "... *māyā*. is not a theory for the explanation of the world; it is simply a statement of facts as they exist, that the very basis of our being is contradiction, that everywhere we have to move through this tremendous contradiction, that wherever there is good, there must also be evil, and wherever there is evil, there must be some good."³ This description of *māyā* differs from the *Vedāntic* concept of *māyā* without contradicting it. the *Vedanta* says that *māyā* is the power of god through which the world-illusion is created. Vivekananda would add the power in itself is neither good nor bad, it is neutral. Therefore, *māyā* must have a neutral character. *māyā's* neutral nature can be

retained only if *māyā* is conceived as the name for the fact of contradiction apparent in the world.

Swami Vivekananda has harmonized between material and spiritual needs. He has given emphasis on both the sides. To him the doctrine of *Advaita Vedanta* not only quenches our spiritual thirst but it serves the needs of our day-to-day life too, which is also essential. To Sankara the whole world and an individual's body, mind, sense-organ, etc, become illusory after realizing *Brahman*. in *Advaita Vedanta* , an individual's body and materialistic world are therefore neglected. Vivekananda has given a new interpretation of *Advaita Vedanta* after considering its practical aspect. He has taken the human body and the material world as manifestation of divinity or as real as the divine. This philosophy the role of the body and mind is as important as the manifestation of the spirit. To him bread is first and thereafter comes religion or spirituality. Thus he has harmonized the material and spiritual worlds. To him both are to be considered

Vivekananda himself says that he has brought down the doctrine of *Advaita Vedanta* from the forest to serve an individual's day-to-day needs. He says, 'what we want is not so much spirituality as a little of the bringing down of the *Advaita* into the material. first bread and then religion' Vivekananda thinks that all the forces that are working in this body have been generated from food. If fasting is adopted our body gets weak leading to the loss of physical forces. Due to the gradual loss of physical force the mental forces become lost as a result of which we cannot think of undertaking any course of reasoning. To him,' we have, therefore, to take care what sort of food we eat at the beginning, and when we have got strength enough, when our practice is well-advanced, we need not be so careful in this respect' {cws.vol.3.p-136}. That is why, he thought of amalgamating '*Islamic* body and *Vedantic* brain.' We generally try to convince ordinary persons about religion when what they actually need is food, dogmas or theories about religion will fall flat if their hunger is not appeased. For this we require a feeling heart this 'feeling' possesses us automatically if we consider others as our own and if we realize that all persons-rich and poor-are manifestation of the infinite. Swamiji has brought harmony between an individual's emancipation as well as that of others. Not only in materialistic thinking, but in spiritual pursuit also, an individual should not seek his own well-being and emancipation neglecting those of others. Swamiji's master, Sri Ramakrishna, had told him to be as great as a banyan tree so that many persons tormented by worldly woes could take shelter under him.⁴ It will make one to expand his personality and be one with the entire

world. An individual's personal emancipation or freedom is not really freedom if others who are non-different from him are not free. To Vivekanand, freedom or emancipation of others is not a selfish self-seeking endeavour or an act of cowardice or escapism. It is spiritual truth made living, made practical.

That the philosophy of Vivekananda is that of harmony is evidenced from the fact that extreme situations are not acceptable to it. If someone engages oneself in meeting the material needs without spirituality, it is not acceptable. On the other hand, seeking spiritual bliss oneself, without caring for the material help others need, is also not desirable. Vivekananda believed in the salvation of all and not in the salvation of a single individual.⁵ Ideals expressed by the notion of 'spirituality' were an integral part of the *Hindu* tradition and thus taken for granted. It was only in a dialectic situation that this 'spirituality' could suddenly come to prominence. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee comments, 'religion in its broadcast and legitimate sense in culture. if this be true, the most perfect religion is that which supplies a basis for the most complete development of culture...Hinduism alone is a perfect religion.'⁶

Vivekananda is the first to have introduced *Hinduism* to the West. His primary goal is to remove the Western misconceptions about *Hinduism*. Vivekananda laid great stress on India's adherence to the lofty principles of spirituality. The problem was one of promoting India's material well-being without jeopardizing her spiritual outlook on life. He states with emphasis that "we should give our ancient spirituality culture and get in return Western science, technology, methods of raising standards of life, business integrity and technique of corrective effort."⁷ The mission of Vivekananda has been the teaching of *Vedanta* as "reconciling spirituality and material advancement, faith and reason, science and mysticism, work and contemplation, service to men and absorption in god".⁸ Religion helps to unfold all that is best in man, "this is why religion is often described as a science of being and becoming, a science of physical and intellectual growth is not enough. There must also be the moral growth, growth in character. this success of man depended greatly on the growth of religion. religion inspired him, guided him, took him to the height he has reached. This is what gives religion its credibility. Spirituality is what flows from such a man. His whole life becomes a model for others to follow, a model of practical spirituality. In other words, it is the values and conduct that give meaning and significance to the term 'spirituality'. Religion is the science, spirituality is its achievement."⁹

According to Vivekananda the pragmatic and humanistic philosophy of the West would seem to wither away unless their roots struck deeper into the spiritual life of man. Modern science and technology dominated the minds of the great thinkers to such an extent that religion could hardly get due recognition by them. But Vivekananda realized that the ideal was religion and nothing but religion, and that is why all our urges and activities were considered as being regulated by religious principles. Therefore, Vivekananda advocates a religion that was adapted to the needs of the time. He was not a political philosopher like Hobbes and Rousseau. He had made religion the centre of national life. He advocated the synthesis of the material sciences of the West with the *Vedantic* knowledge of the East, the basic requirement on the part of the pupils being restraint, regard and reliance on their own capabilities. It has been said that "while in the West, Vivekananda presented religion as such major concern whilst in India he emphasized on the "religion of work." "He wanted to make '*Hinduism*' aggressive, active and proselytizing'.¹⁰

Vivekananda realized that ours was an age of spiritual crisis in human history. This crisis was the climax of the one sided growth of our modern rational scientific civilization. A theoretical understanding of this crisis, its causes and its remedies, was a necessary prelude to future progress of man and it required an examination of the entire process and methods of social development. Man, to-day needs an integral philosophy which would clarify the relation between individual and society, as also help in an integral evolution of the human race into a spiritual era. It is not out of the way to think that the 'spirituality' which according to Vivekananda, is the 'theme' or principal characteristic of Indian culture and civilization was not a revealed message or a product of a sudden inspiration but the result of centuries of striving, experiment, and assimilation. Out of the innumerable religions, "Vivekananda has tried to evolve one religion which is as broad-based as atheism, as intense as *Islam*, and of which the most distinguishing feature is that it tolerates everything except intolerance .¹¹

Vivekananda was not a mystic or a transcendentalist. He was not a materialist either, though he had deep appreciation for the rational core of western materialism. He was truly religious in so as he subscribed to the basis values that constitute the essence of the religions. Vivekananda has tried to see through the intellectual tensions between continued emotional allegiance to past dogmas and the new rational acceptance of

scientific beliefs. He found a viable sacred-secular formula designed to reconcile spiritual heritage and achieve socio-economic change simultaneously.

The highest goal of religion is self-realization which transcends all diversities. In so far as the sanctity of the highest goal is not violated, changes can be introduced in the substantive content of beliefs and practices. As a challenge to the West, there has been an effort to locate the sources of secularism within the *Hindu* tradition. This led to a variety of interpretations of both the secular ideals and the *Hindu* tradition. Both were transformed in order to produce a synthesis which may combine 'good' elements from either. A distinction between the secular and non-secular is often sought by separating the personal from the inter-personal and thought from action. One can be non-secular in one's beliefs but secular in one's actions. The secular and non-secular continue to co-exist in a presumed harmonious whole. At the highest level, the two coalesce in a single definitive ideal; the perfect religious man is supposed to be a perfect secular man. On an intellectual plane, sacredness without the secularist attitude is dubbed as obscurantism while secularism without the sacred attitude is equated with gross materialism. The two in conjunction are expected to produce attitudes and institutions.

India's encounter with the West has not altered the basic analysis of *Hindu* thought. It has only transformed the intra-religious tensions between ethical demands and human short-comings into a tension between the traditional mode of behavior and the Western rational ideal. The value of secularism is still conceived within *Hindu* religiosity. Secular rationality is supposed to be the outcome of religious beliefs. It is wrong to categorize Vivekananda as either secular or non-secular. The temptation to analyze his thought in terms of modernism and pluralism is irresistible. Though *Vedanta* was the pivot around which he revolved, He was categorically aligned with the modern forms seeking radical purification of *Hindu* rituals and institutionalization of religious freedom. Vivekananda's chief contribution is not the propagation of a secular ideal, notwithstanding his occasional writings on the intrinsic equality of all religions. His major preoccupation was reinterpretation of *Vedanta* in order to transform it from a metaphysical creed of renunciation into a living motive force of altruistic activism. He was thus secularizing the non-secular. His positive valuation of the non-secular has lent respectability to religious pursuits. In fact, his non-secularity is considered to be an indispensable component of the dominant Indian ideal. The Indian secular ideal is not taken as alternative to religion but as a form of secularity. The secular is inspired and carried out by the non-secular. The outer

limits are indistinguishable and the two are united in a transcendental unity of the *Hindu* ideal. Without the higher order of values, Vivekananda's thought may appear fragmented into unrelated parts. The contradictory elements in his thought reveal a psychological unity which is characteristic of India's search of the secular model. His secularity or non-secularity does not stand in isolation. The two are functionally inter-related.

Vivekananda begins with the formulation of a non-secular framework. He operates in a *Hindu* world, is obsessed with *Hindu* degeneration and seeks *Hindu* renaissance. His mission assumes a secular character not by renouncing its *Hindu* predicament. Theoretically, the door is open to anybody who believes in 'renunciation' and 'service'. The ideal is freedom of the self and service of mankind. The method is work and worship. *Hinduism* is not mentioned here at all. But in all this, the major sources of inspiration are *Hindu* ideals as interpreted by Vivekananda. The identity of religions is conceived in terms of *Pedantic* non-dualism. Beneath the acceptance of the equality of all religions, the notion of the ultimate superiority of *Vedanta* continues to lurk in the background. The aspect of non-secularity was inherent in Vivekananda outlook from the very beginning. It was brought forth in two ways. One was his acceptance that religion is central to Indian life and the other was his belief in the universal relevance of *Pedantic* ideals. With respect to the first, he maintained that India cannot be understood nor changed except through its religion. In his framework "religious life formed this centre, the key note of the whole music of national life in India".¹² At this level the adoption of *Hindu* paraphernalia is merely a tactical retreat to advance secular work. In addition to this there is little doubt that Vivekananda believed in the inherent superiority of *Vedanta*. He could foresee the equality of all religions in order to bring about the unity of mankind. But as a *Hindu* he unhesitatingly glorified *Hinduism*. "whether we call it *Vedantism* or any ism the truth is that *Advaitism* is the last word of religion and thought and the only position from which one can look upon all religions and sects with love. I believe it is the religion of the future enlightened humanity"¹³

He held that *Vedanta* alone was compatible with reason and modern science. The argument launched in favor was that it could cater to individuals to different stages of spiritual development. Vivekananda has identified *Vedanta* as "the kernel of all religions and abstract science embracing all methods"¹⁴ He went to the extent of maintaining that '*Vedanta*' is the rationale of all religions. "Without the *Vedanta* every religions is superstitious, with it everything becomes religion"¹⁵ In its empirical application, this belief

is purely non-secular and explicitly denies an equal and secular status to other religions. In upholding his own religious potentials, he encourages religious particularism and tries to bring the secular ideal with a certain type of *Hindu* religiosity. All through he suggests popularization of spiritual and secular knowledge among the masses, so that they can see the evil of the caste system and resist the humiliation and exploitation following the caste system with courage and conviction. He writes, "I am no preacher of any momentary social reforms, I am not trying to remedy social evils, I only ask you to go forward and complete the practical realization of the scheme of human progress. I only ask you to work to realize more and more the *Pedantic* ideal of the solidarity of man and his inborn nature."¹⁶.

G.C. Nayak in his essay "The transcendental Secularism" maintains that *Hinduism* as a religion can be secularized. He told, '*Hinduism* in its form has no specific object of worship, everything is holy, every value is a matter of ultimate concern, every bit of life personal or social is considered sacred.'¹⁷ His is a unique approach and his views are rooted in *Vedanta*. It is seen earlier how Vivekananda appears to be non-secular by clinging on to the *Vedantic* ideal in spite of maintaining the equality of all religions at the same time, of course, the *Hindu* religion may be termed as secular because of its unique kind of monism, having no binding, no specific object of worship or of ultimate concern as held by Nayak, but the very attitude of holding first on to it and accepting it as the kernel of all religions is non-secular.

Within *Hindu* tradition this type of non-secularity is closely related to the conventional separation of religion and politics. At the same time it must be borne in mind that Vivekananda was a Patriot. For him religion was a means, a vehicle for rousing and awakening the millions of India. The West separates religion from politics by granting the two spheres their respective autonomy and assumes a situation of mutual non-interference. In *Hinduism*, politics is a lower level manifestation of the same goal and, accordingly, the two are hierarchically related. The sphere of action is identical but the means of attainment are different. He thinks that, "the threat of British subjugation is visualized in terms of its effects rather than its political consequence."¹⁸ Freedom in his vocabulary is not political freedom but spiritual freedom from the bonds of ignorance. He often felt that the West in its secular triumph is violating their moral codes. Similarly India's real degradation is not its political subordination but its spiritual bankruptcy. Vivekananda cut himself off from any political involvement but in spite of it, his call for moral re-armament did become a vehicle of inspiration for revolutionary extremists who sought India's political freedom

through religious nationalism. Non-secular thought became a motive for secular action. Between the secular attainment of freedom and the non-secular realization of liberation, there was hardly any choice. In Vivekananda outlook the former was meaningless without its socio-economic counterpart. He felt that true freedom was freedom from imperfection. This can be attained when the pursuit of *mukti* is itself transformed into an instrument of service. This transformation leads to the well-known synthesis which seeks to combine the sacred and secular into a single frame of reference. Both sacred and secular become instruments of each other. The former is supposed to facilitate ethically appropriate secular behaviour. The latter was supposed to become a vehicle of sacred values. The most common form in which this ideology is expressed is the desire to retain India's spiritual heritage and surpass the West's material modernity. This desire to have the best of both the worlds has led to a separation of Eastern spirituality and Western materialism. It is generally in the context of such separation that one talks of India's contribution to world thought and culture. Vivekananda himself distinguished between the oriental and occidental and realized that each needed the other for an ideal synthesis. Each of these types has its grandeur, each has its glory. Vivekananda said; "To the oriental, the world of spirit is as real as to the occidental is the world of sense... the oriental ideal is as necessary for the progress of the human race as is the occidental, and I think it is more necessary..... therefore it is fitting that whenever there is spiritual adjustment, it should come from the orient".¹⁹ The excellence of secular achievements is treated by non-secular criteria. The two are either fused in co-ordination or carried on separately but simultaneously. In case of the former the spiritual operates on a higher level, its primary functions being the maintenance of ethical standards. In the latter, the 'spiritual' does not interfere with the secular. It is noteworthy that Vivekananda has taken recourse to both these solutions with reference to the first, he maintains that, "there should be provision for secular vocational education but it should be tempered with religious training".²⁰ The education of mission is supposed to consist of course in Western sciences as well as Indian religions. Mission workers are expected to be both secular and spiritual teachers. With respect to the solution he believes that secular and non-secular pursuits should be carried on with an equanimity that comes only to saints. He says, "You must try to combine in your life immense idealism with immense practicality. You must be prepared to go into deep meditation now, and the next moment you must be ready to go and cultivate these fields."²¹

Vivekananda's *Practical Vedanta* seeks to combine idealism with activism and renunciation with service. The two are not integrated. Each has its own autonomy and a distinctive point of reference. Worldliness and self-realization are considered incompatible. However, he who can carry both without harming either, 'true to the kindred points of heaven and home- is an ideal man'²² In order to make the secular and the non-secular consistent with each other, both needs to be modified in order to make proper adjustments. The scope of 'non-secular' needs to be broadened. The apparent conflict between the worldly *māyā* and the transcendental truth has to be narrowed down to a point where *dharma* no longer requires a withdrawal from the secular involvement. This was one of the most important contributions of Vivekananda. The *Vedanta* does not in reality denounce the world. the ideal of renunciation nowhere attains such height as in the teaching of the *Vedanta*. The ideal of renunciation, according to Vivekananda, is "giving up the world as we think of it, as we know it, as it appears to us and to know w it really is"²³ He wants the world to be deified, regarded as god, not to be rejected as *māyā*. In deifying the world, Vivekananda has introduced a qualitative change from perception to substance. The world becomes real in substance and not merely an ignorant perception. god assumes the form of "*Daridra narayana*"(to treat the poor person as God) and the worship of man becomes primarily a religious action. There is a suggestion of moving *Advaita* from forest caves to busy streets and turning the intricate mythology into concrete moral forms. We no longer remain the passive recipients of the will of god but are active instrument of his power. The popular interpretation of the doctrine of karma which identifies it with fatalism is rejected. Vivekananda in fact, sums up the *Pedantic* message in a single word 'strength'. The sanctification of the secular and secularization of the religious implies two related innovations. One is to dissociate prevalent religiosity from its pristine forms. The other is to isolate within pristine forms its essential and non-essential aspects. Vivekananda's attempt to modernize *Hinduism* admirably succeeded on both these counts.

Vivekananda attacks the corrupt form of religious behaviour institutionalized by exploitive *Brahmins*, the skeptic attitude of disbelief and disillusionment popularized by the educated Westernized elites, and the endless antiquated ritual practices observed by the ignorant Indian mass. He is critical of the absurd notions of purity and pollution and through this criticism, he attempts to attack the very basis of *Hindu* social institutions. He says, "we are neither *Vedāntists*, most of us now, nor *Pauranics*, nor *Tantrics*. We are just

'don't touchiest'. Our religion is in the kitchen. Our- god is the cooking pot, and our religion is 'don't touch me, I am holy'. This goes on for another century, every-one of us will be a lunatic asylum."²⁴ Vivekananda argues that such notions of pollutions can be shed away to regain the lost purity of *Hinduism*. He could see the inner contradiction between the original teachings of *Hindu* religion and its latter practices., "No religion on earth preaches the dignity of humanity in such a lofty strain as *Hinduism*, and no religion on earth treads upon the necks of the poor and the low in such a fashion as *Hinduism*."²⁵

Despite Vivekananda's *Vedanta*-centricity, His *secularism* is indisputable. The religious pluralism is reinforced through his definition of *Vedanta* itself. He separates the religious *Vedanta* which has to be realized within oneself from different creeds and sects which have external relative validity for different communities. He accepts the truth of the bible for the *Christians* and of the *Korân* for the *Muslims*. The same truth is found in every religion and the good and virtuous have been produced by every creed. There is no point in leaving one's own religion in order to embrace another. People belonging to different religions of the world must assimilate the spirit of others and yet preserve their own individuality. He attacked all religions, including *Hinduism*, for promoting obscurantism. At the same time he upheld the achievements of all religions in so far as they inspired men to proper ethical conduct. About *Hinduism*, he frankly confessed, "Personally I take as much of the *Vedas* as it agrees with reason."²⁶ He was not apologetic and suggested deliberate alternations and additions in *Vedic* laws. His secular rationality, however, did not lead him to challenge the very validity of all metaphysical revelations. He says, "we want to lead mankind to the place where there is neither the *Vedas*, nor the *Bible*, nor the *korân*, yet this has to be done by harmonizing the *Vedas*, *Bible* and the *korân*. Mankind ought to be taught that religions are but the varied expressions of the religion, which is openness, so that each may choose the path that suits him best."²⁷ He was ready to forego any religious doctrine or throw away any ceremonial that acted as a barrier in his service to mankind. He was ready to forego *mukti* if it came in the way of his ungrudging service for mankind and the country. When the nature of his social service was criticized fearing that it may delude man from the spiritual domain, Vivekananda retorted, "You think *Jnâna* is dry knowledge to be attained by a desert path, killing out the tenders faculties of the heart. Your *bhakti* is sentimental nonsense which makes one important....who cares for you *bhakti* and *mukti*? Who cares what the scriptures say? I will go to hell cheerfully a thousand times, if I can rouse my countrymen, immersed in *tamas* and make them stand on

their own feet and he men, transpired with the spirit of karma Yoga."²⁸ He was bent upon serving and helping others even without caring for his own salvation. Here Vivekananda comes to approximate the pure secular ideal which seeks human welfare without any reference to divine authority. He is prepared to reject all sects and dogmas. He often spoke that a religion which tolerates and glorifies poverty cannot be a religion of man.

During his travel in India, he saw pathetic scenes of abject poverty which induces him to comment in the following manner, "I do not believe in god or religion, which cannot wipe the widow's tears or bring a piece of bread to the orphan's mouth"²⁹ Poverty was treated as a sin. Food came before god. In another context, playing football was considered more important than praying in order to reach heaven. Religious instrumentalities of limitless rituals, the various *vratas*, *danas*, and *pujas* common to a *Hindu* definition of ethical action, were dismissed as merely secondary details. Material advancement became for him a pre-requisite for progress. Service to humanity is regarded as the central idea and here no other gods are allowed. His secular rationality went beyond the constraints of reason. Even if it were unreasonable to equate man with god, Vivekananda did this in order to restructure and upgrade the norms of religious action.

Vivekananda's mission was designed to raise the level of religious consciousness to the height of secular ideals. The ideal in *Hindu* in Vivekananda's practical *Vedanta* is not a recluse looking after his own salvation. He is not a *sanyasin* operating above the norms of ordinary human beings. He is, in fact, immersed in the secular world pursuing secular goals in order to attain the desired level of religiosity. *Hinduism* becomes a creed of altruistic service. The secular and the non-secular are integrated to promote secularism in action and non-secularism in thought. In doing this, Vivekananda demolishes the dichotomy between secular science and non-secular religion. He questioned the unconditional obedience to authority. He emphasized: "To believe blindly is to degenerate the human soul. Be an atheist if you want, but do not believe in anything unquestioningly. Why degrade the soul to the level of animals.....stand up and reason out, having no blind faith. Religion is a question of being and becoming, not of believing. This is religion and when you have attained to that you have religion."³⁰

The sole mission of Vivekananda was to highlight and bring home the message of unity of faiths. He was a Universalist par excellence. He was a staunch critic of religious obscurantism but a champion of spiritualism. As a true *Vedantin*, Vivekananda preached

the fatherhood of god and the brotherhood of man. He was a great humanist, but his humanism was not confined to the domain of the human beings only. For him, not only man but also all other created beings and things are the expression of the one supreme consciousness. According to him, a religion which does not enable man to perceive the essential divinity and oneness of all created things and beings is no religion. For Vivekananda, it is the moral values or principles that constitute the life-breath of religion. The values that form the essence of religion are not merely humanistic but still more as they take cognizance of the interest and welfare of the whole of creation. The human welfare is, of course, incorporated and draws sustenance from the spiritual vision of oneness of all creation, animate and inanimate. Hence it would be more appropriate to label the humanism of Vivekananda as "Spiritual Humanism".

Vivekananda was a firm believer in education as an instrument of human betterment. He was greatly distressed to see the degradation in which the masses had fallen because of the denial of literacy and education of them. He was highly critical of the educational systems itself with its western bias and lack of attention to the development of the mental ability and moral character in its pupils. he wanted a thorough re-orientation of the educational system. he declared, "We must have life building , man-making, character-making assimilation of ideas. If education is identical with information, the liberties are the greatest sages of the world and encyclopedia's are the *rishis*, further he observed, 'we want that education by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanded and by which one can stand on one's own feet.'³¹ Vivekananda observed, "if you really want to judge the character of man, look not at his great performances. Watch a man do his most common actions. These are indeed the things which will tell you the real character of the great man. Great occasions rouse even the lowest of human being to some kind of greatness, but he alone is really great whose character is great always-the same whatever be".³² According to him, 'intellectuality' is not the highest good morality and spirituality are the things for which we strive. He remarks, 'our woman are not so learned, but they are more pure'.³³ He does not consider a man as educated if only he can pass some examination and deliver good lectures. The basis of all system, social or political, rests upon the goodness of man. No nation is great or good because parliament enacts this or that, but because its men are great and good. Vivekananda reminded that the notion lived in the cottage and therefore it was the duty of every educated younger to go from village to village and make the people understand their real condition, awake them from

their long slumber and advise them how to improve their own miserable lot. The sunken vitality of the helpless victims of social injustice was to be restored physically, intellectually as well as spiritually.

Vivekananda gave prime importance to the education of the masses. He asserted, "the chief cause of India's ruin has been the monopolizing of the whole education of the land, by dint of pride and royal authority, among a handful of men"³⁴ He further observed "If we are to rise again, we shall have to do it in the same way, that is by spreading education among the masses".³⁵ He considers that, "The great national sin is the neglect of the masses and that is one of the causes of our downfall. No amount of politics would be of any avail until the masses in India are once more well educated, well fed, and well cared for. They pay for our education, they build our temples, but in return they get kicks. They are practically our slaves. If we want to regenerate India, we must work for them".³⁶ Vivekananda formulated the most modern idea about social education. "If the poor boy cannot come to education, education must go to him. There are thousands of single-minded, self-sacrificing, *sanyasis* in our country going from village to village, teaching religion. If some of them can be organized as teachers of secular things also, not only preaching but teaching also. Suppose two of them go to a village in the evening with a camera, a globe, some maps etc, they can teach a great deal of astronomy and geography to the ignorant. By telling stories about different nations, they can give the poor a hundred times more information through the ear than they can get in a life time through books. But this requires an organization."³⁷

Vivekananda preached "Religion of realization, we may study all the books that are in the world, yet we may not understand a word of religion or of god".³⁸ His was a practical religion. He declared, "It will not do merely to listen to great principles, you must apply them in the practical field, turn them into constant practice, service of the poor was the best religion"³⁹ Vivekananda had great regard for all religions. "...let us take in all that has been in the past, enjoy in the light of the present and open every window of the heart for all that will come in the future. Salutation to all the prophets of the past, to the great ones of the present and to all that are to come in the future".⁴⁰

In *Vedanta* philosophy, human beings are covered with five-sheaths-the physical, vital, mental, intellectual and the spiritual, with the last one forming the core of character. Every soul, according to Swamiji, is potentially divine and everyone's goal is to manifest

the divine within .spirituality is the manifestation of this divinity already in man. Shri Ramakrishna, the guru of Swamiji, used to say that the Bengali synonym of man is *Manush*, i.e. *man+hush*, which symbolizes a mind with spiritual consciousness. This self-actualization is possible only through spiritual education. Education should involve all domains of health that is, physical, mental, social and spiritual with a ethical culture. But spirituality, which is the eternal principle that inspires every religion, must form the innermost core of education system. "What is the use of polishing the outside when there is no inside," he said, the ultimate aim of all training is to make a man. In today's world this spiritual consciousness translates itself as values of unselfishness ethics, compassion, tolerance, security and harmony to develop peace and democracy. As mother Teresa later explained, 'We should help a *Hindu* became a better *Hindu*, a *Muslim* to become a better *Muslim*, a *Catholic* to become a better *Catholic*'. {<https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/quotes/mother-teresa-on-equality-before-god>} Thus, in order to improve the quality of humankind, to eradicate socio-cultural dogmas, and to promote humanity, education must take its roots back into the science of spirituality. To counterbalance the unequal socio-economic growth in India, he prescribed, "...before flooding the land with socialistic or political ideas, first deluge the land with spiritual ideas. If you attempt to get secular knowledge without religion, I will tell you plainly, vain is your attempt in India, it will never have a hold on in the people."⁴¹ However, it is important to remember that for him, being religious meant leading life in such a way that we manifest our higher nature, truth and goodness in our thoughts, words and deeds.

During his travel all over. India, Swami Vivekananda was deeply moved to see the appalling poverty and backwardness of masses. He was the first modern religious *guru* to understand and openly declare that real cause of India's downfall was neglect of the masses. He realized that the immediate need was to provide food and other necessities to the hungry millions. For this they ought to be taught improved methods of agriculture, village and set up industries. Vivekananda grasped that the crux of the problem lies in poverty of India. This has escaped the attention of most social reformers. He realized that owing to centuries of oppression, the downtrodden masses had lost faith in their capacity to improve their lives. It was necessary to infuse into their minds faith. For this they needed a life -giving, inspiring message. Swamiji found this message in the 'principle of Atman', the doctrine of the potential divinity of the soul, taught in *Vedanta*. He saw that in spite of poverty, the masses clung to religion. But they had never been taught the life-

giving principles of *Vedanta* and how to apply them in practical life. Thus the masses needed two kinds of knowledge: secular knowledge to improve their economic condition and the second is spiritual knowledge to infuse in them faith in themselves and strengthen their morality. The next question was how to spread these two kinds of knowledge among the masses-"Through universal education"-this was the answer that Swamiji found ultimately. In Swamiji's words, "...travelling through many cities of Europe and observing in them the comforts that even the poor people had, I used to shed tears what made the difference? 'education' is the answer I got."⁴² He stated emphatically that if the Indian society is to be reformed, education has to reach to every nook and corner, rich and poor. He said that the sense of dignity rises in a man when he becomes conscious of his inner spirit and it is very purpose of education.

Every society has its outer sheath called knowledge and an inner core called culture. The culture of India has its roots in her spiritual values. The values are to be imprinted in the minds of the students through the study of the epics like *Rāmāyana*, *Mahābhārata*, *Gītā*, *Veda and Upanishads*. Swamiji has taught Indians how to master Western technology and nurture Indian spirituality. Swamiji has taught Indian how to adapt western humanities to Indian ethos. He made the Western people realize that they had to learn much from Indian spirituality for their own well-being. He showed that, in spite of her poverty and backwardness, India had a great contribution to offer to world culture. He was India's first modern educational and cultural ambassador to the West. He was the first modern religious leader in India to speak for the masses, formulate a definite philosophy of service, and organize large scale educational social service system.

The tremendous explosion of information without commensurate wisdom, and immense power not tempered with compassion, tolerance, ethics or humanity has made today's education a potential source of disaster. Today's education not only neglects training of mind but also negates all spiritual values. Brains are stuffed with information only. This obscures assimilation of information into knowledge and knowledge into wisdom. A moving storehouse of information is more encouraged today than cultivated humanity. He conceived civilization as manifestation of the divine within all individuals of the society. Unfortunately, till date, no society has made much progress into it. Morality is more lacking amongst the educated privileged few. Gentleness, comparison, tolerance have disappeared.

One of the most significant contributions of Swami Vivekananda in the modern world is his interpretation of religion and spirituality as the core of education. Swamiji met the challenge of modern sciences by showing that religion is as scientific as science itself, religion is the science of consciousness. as such, religion and science are not contradictory to each other but are complementary. This universal conception frees religion from the hold superstitions, dogmatism, conflicts, ethnic confrontations and intolerance. It makes spirituality the highest and noblest pursuit- the pursuit, of supreme emancipation, supreme knowledge and supreme bliss.

Vivekananda's concept of 'potential divinity of the soul' gives a new concept of universal humanity. Today, the degradation of man has been going on space, as witnessed by the enormous increase in broken homes, immorality, violence, religious conflicts, wars, addiction, crime etc. Vivekananda's potential divinity of the soul prevents this degradation, divinizes human relationships, and makes life meaningful and worth living. Swamiji has laid the foundation for 'spiritual humanism', recognizing his contribution, UNESCO in 1973 has declared him as one of the eminent educationists of the world.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi

The thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi will help to understand the nature of Indian secularism. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, one of the most articulate and influential figure of the twentieth century, a politician by heart, and a philosopher by trade, a prophetic figure of the modernizing India, a figure who has left behind a legacy of such reputation that even after 69 years of his death, we are still compelled to remember him. He is remembered for his actions and India followed his ideal because of his sheer force of will. He is considered as one of the most debated individual in Indian history. Mahatma Gandhi was born at Porbandar on the 2nd of October 1869, in a family of *vaisya*. His ancestors were *vaisya* by cast and *vaisya* by trade. For some time his father was the prime minister in the court of Rajkot and Vankaner. Other than his rich cultural heritage, there was another strong influence that was inflicted upon young Gandhi, and that was his family's orthodox religious beliefs, which he inherited to some extents. Although his parents were orthodox vaisṣṇavas, they were enlightened enough to give all the necessary arrangements for giving modern education to their children. He was raised in a mixed, but balanced set-up, he was introduced into religious and moral traditions, and yet his mind was sufficiently open to the changing needs of the time.

His educational career was uneventful. This is really strange for a person like him under whom the fate of an entire nation depended, although there are popular fables about his student life, and the stories demonstrate the abstinence of a young and honest child, who refused to cheat on tests despite his teacher's encouragement and who abstained from meat-eating and smoking. These anecdotes are scarcely challenged for their genuinity, and have now become a part of Gandhi's persona, hence believed to be true. These experiences had a good effect on him, as they aroused in him an ever-present moral sense. In 1888, he was sent to England for legal studies, after taking a vow in the presence of his mother not to touch meat, and not to keep in bad company. This vow would later on become a symbol of penance, and help to convince him that sincere determination for doing anything good was bound to success. This belief of him often contradicts with his *Satyagraha* policy, but then, the times were hard and needed desperate measures, and no one had the time to criticize the person who showed the light in time of crisis.

After completing his legal studies, he headed out to practice law in South Africa, where he would earn his first medals as a social activist along with some criticism. He

witnessed there various acts of racial discriminations committed by the white people that changed the entire course of his life and actions, and started his conquest to conquer evil by love. He started passive resistance by openly defying immoral laws and thus started putting to practice his moral and religious ideas. He was accused of fighting only for the aristocrat Indians, and only uses the slave class to power up his protests. But it's true that he failed to bring up the demands and their rights to free lives in his times during South Africa. He stopped his campaigns after the protests began to turn violent, frequently, and earned a good character certificate from the British Government.

After his unique experiments in South Africa, and his experiences with South American moral and political adventures, he returned to India with a vision to unchain his own country with his newly acquired techniques of *Satyagraha*. His unshakable faith in his methods and in the goodness of his character was bound to make a mark on the minds of the Indians.

Origin of Gandhian Philosophy

Gandhi did not have any training in academic philosophy, he inherited most of his religious beliefs from *Vaiṣṇava* cult, and his deeply theistic upbringing made him to believe in the idea of an all-powerful God.

Now to understand the dual character of Gandhi we must look back to an age old question that has been continuing in the arena of Indian philosophy for centuries. The question 'Is an omnipotent and omnipresent God at all necessary?'

The great Advaita Vedantist Śankara stressed upon the reality of *Ningana Brahman*, which convinced him that the world which apparently looks real, is metaphysically just an illusion created by ignorance of individuals, and if the reality is essentially one, if the perception of many is the product of an illusion-producing ignorance, then both creator and creation become unreal, hence the creator ceases to exist, and the creations are not creations.

The Vaiṣṇava thinkers on the one hand, accept the reality of the world, and therefore they are the believer of the creationism. According to Advaita, reality is an attribute, indeterminate Brahman, and salvation lies in the knowledge of reality, and reality cannot be approached in the devotional manner, because devotion pre-determines the interpersonal relations. On the other hand, Vaiṣṇavas are determined theists, and for them

God became a personal God. They feel that the cold and dispassionate way of knowledge will fail to establish the relationship with God. According to them God has to be felt, realized, and therefore the way of feeling and devotion is the only way of salvation. But like most puritans they don't deny the importance of knowledge altogether. And because of this simple path Vaiṣṇava cult became very popular in India, because they showed a path of salvation that can be taken up by any man, irrespective of their academic excellence.

Gandhi's philosophy of god was deeply theistic in nature; it is true that Gandhi talks about *nirguna* character of the real, but it is only because he feels that the academic distinction between 'saguna' and 'nirguna' is irrelevant for the belief and practice of a true believer which narrows down his actual belief. And God is needed not merely for the satisfaction of reason and intellectual curiosity, but also for providing strength and solace, and a faith in god must enable an individual to be in peace with the world.

"...He is no God who merely satisfies the intellect, if He ever does. God to be God, must rule the heart and transform it."¹ Gandhi said. And this is only possible when an inter-personal relation is conceived and God is thought of as a person.

While discussing Gandhian philosophy we often come across a tangled problem that directly address the reconciliation of the irreconcilable, truth is an impersonal principle, but God is directly conceived as a person by Gandhi. So how can the two be identified?

An answer can be found in one of his own speeches, he says "In my early youth I was taught to repeat what in Hindu scriptures are known as one thousand names of God. But these one thousand names of God were by no means exhaustive. We believe- and I think it is the truth- that God has as many names as there are creatures and therefore, we also say that God is nameless, and since God has many forms we also consider Him formless, and since He speaks to us in many tongues, we consider Him to be speechless and so on... if it is possible for the human tongue to give the fullest description, I have come to the conclusion that for myself, God is Truth."²

So, according to him God is a name or a category for the universal reality which appears to defy all descriptions, and God is described as truth, and Truth is not an attribute of God, but God alone is Truth. But later on he changed his statement to be 'Truth is God'.

These two statements may seem similar but this fine change caused by the juxtaposition of subject and predicate, change the meaning almost wholly. Just like ‘All men are mortals’ and ‘All mortals are men’ do not imply the same things, the aforementioned statements face the similar difficulty. Gandhi later explained his changed stance by the statement “But deep down in me I used to say that though God may be God, God is Truth above all. ...But two years ago I went a step further and said Truth is God. You will see the fine distinction between the statements, viz. that God is Truth and Truth is God. And I came to the conclusion after a continuous and relentless search after Truth: ...¹³

This statement shows there was a very strong motive behind bringing out the change, one of the many is that the word Truth is not as ambiguous as God. And although a logical mind can easily dismay the idea of an Omnipotent and Omnipresent God, but it is impossible for a modern mind to defy Truth, because if one defies Truth then one defies every logic, and crosses the boundary that separates the sane from the insane.

To understand Gandhian philosophy, we have to first understand the time in which he lived in, and that time is responsible for his unique philosophy. It has been mentioned before that Gandhian philosophy is closely related to the changing needs of the time, and his philosophy was a very important part of his politics. The times were hard, and he needed someone who may shelter all the thinking minds of India irrespective of their religious beliefs. And at that time most of the sharper minds were foreign educated, and an atheist trend was on the rise. Gandhi readily understood that it was as important to shelter atheists, as the other communal majorities, and for that he needed an idol that even the atheists could not deny. The answer was already before him for him to reach out and take it. So the new statement “Truth is God” came into existence. He even went out to say ‘I don’t care for God, if He is anything but Truth.’

What is Truth? In the logical sense of the word ‘Truth’, truth is considered to be a property of judgment, but in the metaphysical context Truth is conceived differently- it is considered as right knowledge, as knowledge that corresponds to reality. In Indian context Truth is conceived a self-illuminating as revealing itself. Gandhi somehow combined all these meanings of the word ‘Truth’ and then came up to identify the Truth with God.

Now one may raise questions: How can the two identified with each other? Truth is the picture of reality grasped by Human mind. How can the picture of the reality be identical with the reality itself?

In answer Gandhi said “ My uniform experience has convinced me that there is no other God than Truth ... the little fleeting glimpses, therefore, that I have been able to have of Truth can hardly convey an idea of the indescribable luster of Truth, a million times more intense than that of the sun we daily see with our eyes. In fact, what I have caught is only the faintest glimmer of that mighty effulgence.”⁴

But all these fancy, celestial, and surreal references fail to hit on the main point. A blind man may only touch an elephant’s trunk and deduce the elephant to be a giant snake, and that can be the truth to the blind man, but we, who can see, can easily say that, that is not the whole elephant. And just like that, only because we see the whole elephant, we cannot say that we know the whole truth about that elephant. The whole truth is unachievable, and will remain only a farfetched target unless we harness the concept of infinity. So, for us truth is only what we know, and what we know is regularly increasing every second. Although we are getting closer and closer to the whole truth every second, we can never really achieve it. Hence, according to Gandhi’s logic, God becomes unachievable.

Proof of God

For every question that unsettled his position, Gandhi came up with a distinctive, disoriented answer, ‘the inner voice’, ‘the voice of conscience’. Adding more to the list, Gandhi often ridicules ‘reason’ as the tool of finding the big answers. He writes “Rationalists are admirable beings, but Rationalism can be a hideous monster when it claims omnipotence for itself. Attribution of omnipotence of reason is as bad a piece of idolatry as the worship of stick and stone believing it to be God. I plead not for the suppression of reason, but for a due recognition of that in us which sanctifies reason.”⁵

Now before we proceed, it is important to understand what reason is. **Reason** is the capacity for consciously making sense of things, applying logic, establishing and verifying facts, and changing or justifying practices, institutions, and beliefs based on new or existing information. It is closely associated with such characteristically human activities as philosophy, science, language, mathematics, and art and is normally considered to be a definitive characteristic of human nature. Reason, or an aspect of it, is sometimes referred to as rationality.

So we can see that reason is not something that is hungry for worshippers in an all-devouring manner. Reason is used to verify the practices that are currently believed to be true, and constantly criticize them, a position similar to the intellectuals in a democracy. And criticism has to be fierce, unforgiving, unbiased, free from all manipulations, and pure. So in a way the meaning of rationality is purity. And every attempt to limit or censor rationalism is a fundamentalist approach. Fundamentalists believe only what they think is true and every other answer as untruthful, and they harbor these notions without any practical proof, and often their philosophical thoughts are fragile and based on their fundamentalism. And if we exclude all the other arguments, we can safely say that censoring rational thinking is equivalent to censoring common sense, censoring our individuality.

Gandhi is convinced that 'Truth' can only be known through inner realization, and God's knowledge can only be revealed in a serene and sacred state. It is true Gandhi does not oppose rational thinking, but he only acknowledges it as long as the parameters of criticism are favorable to the idea of existence of an omnipotent and omnipotence entity.

Now let us talk about some of those proofs of the existence of such deity. According to him, we exist, our parents have existed, and their parents have also existed, so who originated this chain reaction? As an answer, he offers God, he portrays God as the universal 'parent', displaying resemblance to the 'the casual proof'. Now if we want to believe what he says, we have to take a very stern step, and that is to completely ignore 'Evolution'.

As a theological proof, he says that there are universal laws that are governing the universe, and if there are laws this vast there must be a very fastidious governor. "I subscribe to the belief or the philosophy that all life in its essence is one...This belief requires a living faith in a living God who is the ultimate arbiter of our faith." ⁶

But the proof that appears to convince him the most is the Moral proof. He seems to believe that the voice of our conscience carries a dependable testimony of God. It creates an exalting feeling when a good deed is done, and pricks in case of a bad deed. He explains this as being the embodiment of God's will.

He offers a kind of 'pragmatic proof' where he says the wants and needs of every human being cannot be fulfilled with materialistic things, even after every fulfilled wish

humans wish for something more, something inexplicable, and he describes this to be the longing for God.

But after everything the main standpoint of his clearly indicates that proofs can never serve the function of creating faith in the existence of God, because every proof given by him can easily be mistaken. For the universal laws do defy themselves, for there are men and women so twisted that they have lost the voice of conscience, or never had it, and for the insatiable longing can be satisfied with art, music, literature, and by various other means, because every form of art searches for truth in its own way. And by nullifying proof, and reason, he nullifies every other argument, thus confining religion in a room, making it an entity that can very easily induce claustrophobia.

Gandhi conceives God as all-pervasive, everything that moves, and does not move, everything that exists is God to him. “There is an indefinable mysterious power that pervades everything. Feel it, though I do not see it. It is this unseen power that makes itself felt and yet defies proof, because it is so unlike all that I perceive through my senses.”⁷ He writes.

Gandhi often describes God as ‘Love’. The implication is not fully understandable unless we properly understand Gandhi’s concept of Love and Ahimsā. God is said to be present in everyone and by a gradual process of extending love, we can love everybody hence God. This kind of Love demands a certain kind of sacrifice, a sacrifice of egoistic and selfish ways, and to love and do good for others. He writes “I have but shadowed forth my intense longing to lose myself in the external and to become merely a lump of clay in the Potter’s divine hands so that my service may become more certain because uninterrupted by the baser self in me.”⁸

It is quite hazardous for a Nation if its prime leader harbors a wish to give up his own free will in the hands of a God. In a position like that the Nation always remains in close vicinity of the danger of religious fanaticism, especially in a country like India where there are countless diversities of God, and where the religious people show an even greater diversity, it is not very surprising if the two gods decide to clash among each other. From modern Indian History it is evident that uniting all the people under the banner of God was quite a risky gamble, which has not worked out for us very well. And the divine potter’s hands are starting to suffocate us more and more every day. The existence of God is a congenital debate of mankind, but what is very prominent that: If there is a potter we are

eloquent in corrupting It's hands, and what is a proper way of living today, tomorrow it can be twisted into bitterness to create a communal adversary.

God and Nature

Gandhi does not like to either raise or answer the question regarding the 'why' of the creation, according to him the Nature is an expression of God, and it is both real and finite, real because it is the creation of God, and finite because it is not God himself. Gandhi gathered some research and studies about the universe, and comes to conclusion that there is a Law governing every movement and every development in every corner of the universe. "All things in universe including the sun and the moon and the stars obey certain laws. Without the restraining influence of these laws the world would not go for a single moment."⁹ This statement comes from a view that a certain order or harmony is in existence, and it prevents the universe of all the destructions. The force for him is nothing but God, and the laws are nothing but the workings of God.

There are certain laws of physics, there is no doubt about that, but as far as 'we' know, it's not their job to preserve the harmony of the world, the Laws of physics work to maintain balance in the universe. And it is quite evident from recent scientific developments that celestial hazards do occur, so the so called prevention from disaster does not seem very prospectors.

It may be remarked that the world exhibits a gradual process- a continuous process of growth. What is the final end towards which this continuous process is approaching? According to Gandhi, it is God himself, who is perfect and ideal of everything. He is the beginning and end.

If God created the universe, then the universe is not itself God. And if the end result of the universe is God, then will there be two Gods at the end? Or are there many Gods, from each other? If according to Gandhi there cannot be two infinite entities, then how is it possible for more than one God to exist at the same time? These are the questions that Gandhi provides no answer for.

Nature does not merely appear to him as poetic charm. He perceives it as a field of action or '*Karma-sthala*' where man can discipline his soul by leading a moral life. He advises that humans should go back to nature. According to this philosophy Man's only objective is disciplining the soul by leading a proper life and anything we achieve during

our lifetime does not affect the universe. But if we view the surrounding scenario, it will be clear that it is the humans who by their greed, affecting our planet.

Gandhi's view on Nature is the following: The world is finite, it is finite because it is not infinite, it is not infinite because there cannot be two infinities. He says the discordant notes that we find around the universe do not negate its reality, but proves its finiteness. Even if we neglect the idea of the Natural laws that he mentioned earlier, and his claims that the laws prowess on maintaining the harmony in the world, which directly contradict his later views, we can easily raise another question. If the world is not finite because there cannot be two infinities, then even god is bound by a rule, otherwise he could have created an infinite world, according to that God is not omnipotent, and if God is not omnipotent, then he does not control everything.

Gandhi led India, taking his inspiration from an all-powerful God, if his idea of God is faltered then all his actions seem bewildered, and this bewilderment is all we see in our surroundings. Gandhi talked about the sanctification of reason, the over sanctification has completely corrupted the insight of the religious fanatics of our country. What Gandhi tried to use as a unifying banner is now falling apart, and it is clear that religion will not bring India together; it seems the Gods of different religions do not like each other anymore. We need something more than God, something more powerful than an omnipotent and omnipresent entity, something that is not omnipotent and omnipresent. We need 'us' who are not infinite, who are crooked, defected, imperfect, because so is our country. A perfect God cannot nourish our imperfect country; we who understand her imperfection can, because we know how to overcome those imperfections. God never had any imperfection, so it is natural he wouldn't know how to overcome them.

***Ahimsā* as a theory**

“I have nothing new to teach the world, Truth and Non-violence are as old as the hills. All I have done is to try experiments in both on as vast a scale as I could. In doing so I have sometimes erred and learnt by my errors. Life and its problems have thus become to me so many experiments in the practice of truth and non-violence...in fact it was in the course of my pursuit of truth that I discovered non-violence.”¹⁰

‘*Ahimsā*’ as a way of leading life is interweaved in Indian culture from ancient times. It first came into existence extensively with *Jains*. Jainism had a far more strict on

Ahimsā than Gandhi. According to Jainism himsā of any kind was forbidden. They are hardcore vegetarians, and abstained from even the tiniest demonstration of *himsā*. Even an act of killing mosquitoes and insects was against their religion. And not only did they not commit *himsā*, it was their moral duty not to permit any outburst of *himsā* in their surroundings.

Gandhi on the other hand, understood the unavailability of such ideologies, and acknowledged that even to sustain a benign life one has to commit certain acts of *himsā*. In the process of eating, drinking, walking, and breathing we commit countless acts of *himsā* without knowing it.

It is true that *Ahimsā* is not one of Gandhi's ideological creations, but it is true that Gandhi emphasized on certain aspects of *Ahimsā* that any of his precursors have not done before. And although it is true that the word existed before, the undeniability of Gandhi's contribution to the word *Ahimsā* is commendable.

“*Ahimsā* and Truth are so intertwined that it is practically impossible to disentangle and separate them. They are like the two sides of a coin, or rather a smooth unstamped metallic disc. Who can say, which is the obverse, and which the reverse? *Ahimsā* is the means; Truth is the end. Means to be means must always be within our each, and so *Ahimsā* is our supreme duty. If we take care of the means, we are bound to reach the end sooner or later.”¹¹

Ahimsā has both negative and positive aspects like every other thing. While negative aspects deal with our constant struggle to live with an ideology that our inhabitant does not always permit, and different situations when *Ahimsā* should not be seen as a vice, positive aspects deal with the meaning of *Ahimsā* and how it should be implemented in practical life.

According to him, to kill or to injure a living being with the intention of anger, pride, hatred, and selfish consideration is the direct form of *himsā*, and should be condemned and not practiced under any circumstances. But as Gandhi says “Taking life may be a duty. We do destroy as much life as we think is necessary for sustaining our body. Thus, for food we take life, vegetable and other, and for health we destroy mosquitoes and the like by the use of disinfectants etc., and we do not think that we are guilty of irreligion in doing so... for the benefit of the species we kill carnivorous beasts...

even man-slaughter is necessary in certain cases.”¹² Here he gives reason that a man must be killed when he is not sane and poses great threat, and malice for the rest of the humankind. Human beings may be killed to relieve them from sufferings, but this should be the last refuse only when there is no way to save that person’s life.

But the positive aspects of *Ahimsā* are vibrant, and lively, though *Ahimsā* is very closely related to suffering.

According to Gandhi *himsā* can never bring peace to the world, and however corrupt the subject of the *himsā*, and no matter how noble the practitioner of the *himsā* is, it should be condemned, because history records whenever brute force has been used against evil, the user has often fallen prey to the same evil.

Gandhi describes *Ahimsā* as evolution, according to him at the beginning, we were mainly collection of body and a trivial soul, but during our evolution the soul has developed, and that soul or the spirit is the direct embodiment of *Ahimsā*, even though the soul has no body. That is why the spirit cannot be wounded. We need to commit *himsā* to some extent to sustain our body, and the process of decreasing the amount of *himsā* committed by us is the process of *Ahimsā*.

The main theme of *Ahimsā* dictates that we should never harm our enemy, no matter whatever the case may be, and wait for our enemy to realize their mistake, and then forgive them when they do. But that does not mean one has to submit to the will of the Evildoers to practice *Ahimsā*, on the contrary practitioners of *Ahimsā* should be resilient, and strong. *Ahimsā* is often related to cowardice, but in reality the practitioners should have the strength to overpower their opponent so that they can save their lives if a decisive moment like that should come, and choose not to do so. Here it may seem that the evildoer holds the power to control the situation, but in reality it is the practitioner of *Ahimsā* who is strong, because he or she does not bend, and stick his/her principals.

Gandhi related this profound faith in the opponents and in their union with God. According to him, every being is usually one, and we all share the same origin. And the inner strength required to practice *Ahimsā* can only be achieved through an unshakable belief that is God. The ability to think of an adversary as a fellow-being is unachievable without a firm belief in God. Here a lack of faith in mankind, and its conscience can be

noticed, as it is clearly demonstrated that the strength and compassion can only be achieved through God.

But to think of a morally fallen being as a human being takes more strength, and if we negate God from the equation, the only thing that remains is compassion for the human kind, and faith in human kind, which somehow goes unnoticed if an all-powerful God is assumed as the source of our compassion.

Gandhiji's philosophy and his life were inseparable. He was not a system builder in an academic sense. He was not a political philosopher. For all this his sayings were pouring from his deep feelings and sincere realization of the truth. Gandhiji's thought is equally a philosophy of self-transformation. His philosophy is not only simultaneously political, moral, and religious. It is also traditional and modern, simple and complex. The two cardinal principles of Gandhiji's thought are truth and nonviolence and his politics influenced by these two principles very much.

National movement drew upon widening circles of Indian and imported material while becoming increasingly innovative, particularly under the leadership of Gandhi's creative genius. The emergence of M.K.Gandhi in Indian politics was regarded as very important event. In 1919, India's national movement was lagging due to lack of leadership which could involve general masses of the people in the struggle for freedom. He came to the forefront of the national movement by organizing a nation-wide mass movement against the *Rowlatt* Acts and other similar laws aimed at suppressing the national movement. It was Gandhi who made masses of the people active participants' in the movement and converted the national movement from its narrow middle-class base into a movement engulfing the whole nation. He became the Congress Supremo in 1920 and converted it from an 'elite' organization into a mass organization, which accepted his socio-political views, and his program and strategy and tactics in the freedom struggle.

Gandhiji's ideas and thoughts and methods were a curious amalgam of Western and indigenous and traditional. While learning much from the West-methods of civil disobedience and passive resistance from Thoreau, he made a deliberate turning back to the indigenous and traditional. He advocated "Swadeshi", by which he meant the use of indigenous and local institutions as well as Indian-made goods, and fostered the use of traditional spinning wheel, *Charka*. He called for *hartals* for the cessation of business activities, a traditional means of persuading the authorities to modify what the protesters

regard as oppression. The means of solving social and political conflict he invented is known the technique of *Satyagraha*, a technique of conflict and conflict resolution that has enjoyed for ages both wide familiarity and social acceptability in India.. It is the weapon of self-sacrifice for those whose weakness precludes them from using violence successfully. The *Satyagrahi*, the one who insists upon the truth, is a moral actor in conflict and a powerful one. As major parts of Satyagraha, Gandhi invoked Hindu and Jain concepts such as *Ahimsā* (non-violence) and *tapasya* (self-inflicted suffering). (pp-69) Gandhiji employed his *Satyagraha* technique to mobilize for the national movement. He mobilized many people to protest against British India. However, though Congress under Gandhiji's leadership mobilised tens of thousands of *Satyagrahis*, it did not want to fight but to negotiate and it negotiated on behalf of a mass movement for Indian Independence.¹³

Gandhiji led three extended campaigns involving increasingly large number of people drawn from all classes and strata and communities of society-Non-Cooperation Movement (1920-21); Civil Disobedience Movement (1930, 1931-32) and finally the Quit India Movement, 1942. The Non-Cooperation Movement instigated the Indian people not to cooperate with the British Raj and instead adopt the programme of *Swadeshi* for the realization of *Swaraj*. The Civil Disobedience Movement which started with the historic *Dandi* March influenced people not to pay back taxes to the alien rulers. The Quit India Movement demanded the British to leave the country.

Even though Gandhi reigns the decades from 1919 like a colossus, dominating the ideology of Congress and of Indian nationalism, there were other leaders like Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, who made their mark on Indian nationalism. There were socialists and communists. Their activities and *Kishan Sabhas* helped to retain for the national movement the adherence of the unprivileged, notably the working class and peasant groups. There was the Muslim League and a Muslim nationalism that denied any common nationhood with Hindus. Though some Muslims were attracted by growing success of Congress and the secular ideology, the Muslim League, encouraged by 'divide and rule' policy of the British Raj, drew increasing number of Muslims into the separatist movement in the 1940s. The Muslim separatist movement was aided further by the Hindu *Mahasabha* and its belief that with *swaraj*. India should become a Hindu nation of which non-Hindus, particularly Muslims, would be citizens on Hindu sufferance. There were other movements; an untouchable movement led by Ambedkar who denied that touchable Hindus were related to untouchables in any way other than on the principle of hierarchy,

purity; the Dravidian movement in Tamil Nadu which wanted its own state. During the latter decades of the British Raj there were also localized rebellions of poor peasants and tribals (*subalterns* as they have come to be called) who produced their own leaders or took leadership from outsiders affiliated to outside organizations and ideologies.¹⁴ But all these movements which marched under the banners of caste and class, tribe and religions had ultimately to come to terms with the national movement, a controlled movement of the middle classes and rising capitalist class under the characteristic leadership of Gandhiji.

The struggle of the Indian people for liberation reached a higher phase in 1945-46, when the British Government could no longer plead that the exigencies of the war demanded the withholding of India's freedom. Over the issue of the release of Netaji Bose's Indian National Army prisoners, unprecedented demonstrations were held in Calcutta, Bombay and Delhi and other cities. The mutiny of Royal Indian Navy in 1946, opposed by Gandhi and Congress, showed how the spirit of revolt ('non-Gandhian') and impatience with subjection had penetrated the Armed forces. Enormous working class upheavals demonstrated most spectacularly in Calcutta on July 29, 1946, extensive peasant uprisings in different parts of the country and the heroic struggle of people in princely States, without any assistance from the national leadership, from Kashmir to Travancore underlined the same thing. The British, exhausted militarily and economically during the Second World War and realising that India could no longer be governed in the old way, sought agreement, held conference at Simla (1945-46) with national leaders, sent first a parliamentary delegation and then the Cabinet Mission which parleyed with every important group. Ultimately, the failure of the Congress and the Muslim League leaders to come together to build a United India and the Muslim League's determination to form a separate state for Muslims, Pakistan, produced a calamitous situation of civil war between the two communities. And the Labour Government of Britain came out with the parliamentary legislation on Indian Independence. And it is in terms of the Indian Independence Act of British Parliament, India was divided into two dominions- Dominion of India and Dominion of Pakistan- on 14-15 August 1947 which would make their own constitutions by their separate Constituent Assemblies established for the purpose.¹⁵

Mahatma Gandhi often referred to as the spiritual father of Indian secularism. He was even been inaccurately and unjustly called a secularist. His vision, as has been noted so often, was holistic, with religion as its constitutive principle-as the source of value for judging the worth of all worldly goals and actions. Religion here means, altruism (

sevadharma), self-assurance arising from inner conviction (*atmatushti*), and the putting of one's faith in saving grace of God (*Rama nama*). Like religious *pictishts* generally, he believed that God permeates every fiber, nook and corner of human experience. This for him was a timeless principle and yet he was very sensitive to the conditions and demands of particular times and places.

Bikhu Parekh asserts in an insightful and thought-provoking discussion of Gandhi's political philosophy that, "there was hardly a *Hindu* religious category and practice to which Gandhi did not give a wordily and secular content". In other words, "Gandhi secularized *Hinduism* as much as it was possible to do within a spiritual framework..."¹⁶ The emphasis upon the word 'within' is Parekh's and it is of crucial importance. It signifies that the relationship of the sacred and secular- of *dharma* and *artha*, or religion or politics- is 'hierarchical, according to T.N.Madan. The latter category is opposed to the former but also encompassed by it. So, T.N.Madan holds, Did Gandhi, then, secularize religion or did he sacralise politics-- both positions have strong adherents. Regarding point of view, Margaret Chatterji's comments, "Gandhi seems almost a secularist, but judged by his handling of concrete issues, notably the communal (Hindu-Muslim) problem, he was not secularist, if by this we mean an attempt to prune away all religious considerations from political matters."¹⁷

Politics were sacralised by Gandhi, they became the *dharma* of the age (*yugadharmā*) and consequently the state was revalorized, for its constitutive principle is power or coercion. In his conception of the moral or perfect society, Gandhi was very careful with his use of words. He emphasized that its enduring basis can only be the moral caliber of the individuals who constitute it. He extended the principle to the relationship of the citizen to the state. According to Gandhi, the state, itself, is a moral, impersonal, distant, coercive and even violent. Though Gandhi's views on the modern state became less negative over time, he never up-to-date this institution.

In Madan's view, a Gandhian would have to say that secularism has run into difficulties in India because the modern states ruling is too heavy with us, and intrudes into areas of life where it has no business even to peep. That state is best which governs the least. The ideal to strive for is that of morally sensitive individuals actively promoting civil society.¹⁸ In conversation with a Christian missionary in September 1946, Gandhi said, "If I were a dictator, religion and state would be separate. I swear by my 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, communications, foreign relations, currency and so on, but not your or my religion. This is everybody's personal concern"¹⁹ Before his death, he commented; the state should undoubtedly be secular. Everyone in it should be entitled to profess his religion without any hindrance, so long as the citizen obeys the common law of the land.²⁰ Gandhi was totally against the idea of a state religion or state support for any religion.

In the period of British rule in India, two types of reform movements in Hinduism emerged. One is the reform, which called for changes in the cultural practices and values of Hinduism on the pattern of the primordial tradition of the Vedas, and second is the postulated synthesis of new cultural norms and values with the traditional norms and values. Among the reformers we may mention the names of Raja Rammohan Roy, Rabindranath Tagore, Vivekananda, and Mahatma Gandhi. Vivekananda and Gandhi did not reject the basic ideal-typical cultural themes of Hindu and non-Hindu cultural values and religious beliefs.

In August 1947, the British Raj came to an end with the transfer of power to two independent Dominions-India and Pakistan, through division of the Indian sub-continent. At that moment Gandhi and other Congress leaders had no hesitation to reject religion as the determinant of a nation, though they recognized a group with a common religion as a cultural and communitarian minority. In the post-1947 period, the ideological and political struggle against communalism has been severely vitiated by the tendency of secular parties and individuals to be associated with and enter into to compromises with the different communal parties and groups. And this is one of the causes of the crisis of Indian secularism. The next chapter will try to analyze the crisis of secularism in Indian society

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