Chapter - V

AN ESTIMATION OF THE CONCEPT OF SECULARISM BY GANDHI AND NEHRU
Secularism in the Indian context was thus an expression of the spirit of tolerance, diversity in unity as well as a broad spirit of humanism. Gandhi, who laid down his life at the alter of secularism, may be hailed as the father of Indian secularism. He has opposed to any proposal for a state religion. He recorded on 22nd September 22nd 1964. "The state would look after your secular welfare, health, communication, currency and soon, but not your or mine religion, that is everybody's personal concern."1

Gandhi has been most misunderstood and misrepresented in regard to his concept of religion. He has been labelled as Saintinist Hindu, renegade Hindu, A Buddhist, a theosophist, a Christian and a Mohammedan and lately, fundamentalist.

Gandhi did not believe that "his is the only true religion and all others are false"2. The Truth is that the various religions were "as many leaves of a tree "though" at the trunk they were one". Allaha, Rama, Narayan, Ishwar, Khuda were names of the same being. No nation or race can claim a monopoly of his grace and revelation. To quote Gandhi.
I do not take as literally true that text that Jesus is the only begotten son of God. God cannot be the exclusive father and I cannot describe exclusive divinity to Jesus. He is as divine as Krishna or Rama, Mohammed or Zoroastra. Similarly, I do not regard every word of the Bible as the inspired word of God even as I do not regard every word of the Vedas or the Quran as inspired. The sum total of these books is certainly inspired, but I miss that inspiration in many of the things taken individually. The Bible is as much a book of religion with me as the Gita and the Quran.³

Gandhi firmly believed that if man reached the heart of his own religion, he had reached the heart of others too. The mark of a true religion was that it made us reach the core of reality, thus affording an insight into truth. "Every one had to grow perfect in one's faith. In God's house there are many mansions and they are equally holy".⁴ All forms of worship had equal validity. Equal respect for all religions, in the Indian idioms, signifies servapanth samabhavana and not sarva dharma samabhavana. Since dharma connotes human essence, truth, ahimsa, love, confession, freedom and justice, how can one conceive of a state which has not these values as its basis? For Dharma, to Gandhi, symbolized the universally applicable principles and values. And the more a society or a polity was attended to this ideal, more cosmopolitan, free just and orderly it would be.
Neutrality in regard to religions was indeed a virtue for a state, but it can not be the same in regard to ethical conduct for its people.

For Gandhi, nation or religion, to which one belonged to, was a part of larger whole, with each one contributing to the well-being of all, and thus demanding equal respect. There was no question of denying one’s religion or family background or nation. Each unit must learn to serve and sacrifice for the higher entity to achieve a sense of harmony. He enjoins the sacrifice of oneself for the family, of the family, for the village, of the village for the country and of the country for humanity.

According to Gandhi there is politics without religion. He explains that his is “not a religion that hates and fights, but the universal religion of toleration. In some, Gandhi does not fit in the Strait Jacket of western or even liberal Indian models of secularism. His secular credentials are beyond question. His version of secularism is most suited to a multi-religious country like India. His secularism evolved out of India’s glorious traditions of humanism and tolerance.

Jawaharlal Nehru occupies a unique position in history as a freedom fighter and builder of modern India. He was a writer, thinker and statesman of great eminence. He virtually laid the
foundation for modern India, in his thoughts and deeds. As the first Prime Minister of free India, he played a significant role in determining the basic features of the Indian society and polity. Democracy, Socialism and secularism can very well be considered as his precious contributions to modern India.

Nehru was opposed to communalism and he was aware of its danger to his integrity of the nation. Discussing on communalism Nehru says: "In its essence it is a throw back to medieval slogans. Let us not go back to something that has no relevance to the Modern word".5

Truth, according to Nehru, "transcends, and should transcend petty barriers raised on basis of beliefs and faiths of people. At any rate, communalism which is only another name for groupism, dividing mankind on some primitive notions and faiths, has placed truth at our door-step."6 According to him, communal clash is due to religious intolerance; "one religious man says this, and another says that. And often enough, each one of them considers of other a fool or a knave. Who is right?...... But it seems rather presumptuous for both of them to talk with certainty of such matters and to break each other's heads over them. Most of us are narrow-minded".7 Again Nehru is not blind to the cause that communal clash is due to economic reasons also and he traces the various events in the provinces during the pre-
Independence period. Whatever the cry of communal groups that their religion was in danger then, Nehru declared, as early as in 1946, that the fundamental creed of the congress was freedom of religion. Nehru unequivocally denounces communalism as an exploitation of religions for earthly purpose. Political ideologies are not infrequently based on the appeal to religious sectarianism's. This will inevitably disintegrate the society in to groups eternally at war with each other. So warns Nehru: "We must have it clearly in our minds and in the mind of the country that the alliances of religion and politics in the shape of communalism is a most dangerous alliance." Communalism is the first enemy of the unity of India. This unity could be preserved only by the spread of scientific knowledge and the recognition of the objectivity of what science intimates to us by an open and natural inquiry in to the nature of things. So says Nehru: In India, the first essential in the maintenance of the unity of the country..... a unity of the mind and heart, which precludes narrow mindedness, makes, for disunity and which breaks down the barriers raised in the name of religion."

An Estimation on Religion by Gandhi and Nehru

The importance of peace and unity in the contemporary cannot be over emphasized, nor can it be denied that religions provide the most significant sources and justification of our search for peace and harmony in the society. The quest for unity and
integrity is the basis of religious harmony which is the crying need of our time. Therefore, the concept of secularism specially by Gandhi and Nehru prevents us from understanding the problems of communalism in contemporary India and their thoughts and ideologies of secularism helping us to solve the problem of communalism and helps in adopting the secularism as a practical approach.

In the previous chapter we have analyzed the various problems and principles involved in Gandhi's and Nehru's concept of secularism. We have also analysed their views on religion, Secular state, we have also comparatively analysed the views of Gandhi and Nehru towards religion, secular state, problems of communalism, National integration and nation building in better understanding of the concept of secularism.

Now it is necessary and useful to make an evaluation of Gandhi's and Nehru's concept of secularism.

**Estimation of Gandhi's and Nehru's concept of Secularism**

**Religion**

One who has tried to Penetrate the dim vistas of time in history of India must have been impressed with the wonderful systems of philosophy, ethics, and religion, which the Indian mind produced. Indian culture has been moulded in a special way of religion and philosophy. From time immemorial, spirituality has
formed the backbone of India. It has left an indelible impression, not only upon her social structure, but also upon her many cultural achievements. The philosophy of Vedanta has proved beyond the last shade of doubt the ultimate unity of all individual souls in the one indivisible ocean of knowledge, existence and bliss, and that all the different religions are so many different ways leading to that, one call it God, or the Absolute or the Brahma, or by any name as one pleases.

Religion is the only one, among various means that has approached the real, the one in which he has God, the Eternal Reality, as the object, not of his thought, but of his whole being.

In India, great philosophers, from the age of the Vedas down to the present era, have shown that the central conception of religion is that of eternal. The test of religion is realization (anubhuti) The Atman is to be seen; says the Upanishad. Spirituality in core of religion. If the divine reality, man's true nature, his hope for a fuller and better life becomes well founded; for he can become the divine by realizing the divine; and this is the purpose and goal of life.

India is supposed to be a religious country above everything else, and Hindu and Muslim and Sikh and others take pride in their faiths and testify to their truth by breaking heads.
No one has ever doubted that Gandhi was basically a religious person, and he was religious not in any purely universalistic or essentialistic sense – a sense in which Socrates, Spinoza, Whitehead, Einstein, Tagore, or even Nehru could be said to be religious – but in the narrower source of religion in which it is divided into communities. Gandhi never thought of himself as anything but a Hindu, and Nehru describes him as a Hindu to the innermost depths of his being.’ If we asked to name the best representative of all that is best in the Hindu religion in our time, whom else could we name but Gandhi. I find if difficult to think of even Vivekananda in this category, for did he not say that he ‘wanted to lead mankind to the place where there is neither the Vedas nor the Quran? Further more, ‘Practical Advitism, which looks upon and behaves to all mankind as one’s own soul, is yet to be developed among the Hindus universally. On the other hand, our experience is that if ever the followers of any religion approach to this equality in an appreciable degree in the place of practical workday life....it is those of Islam and Islam alone.’ And his conviction that ‘for our motherland a junction of the two great systems, Hinduism and Islam-Vedenta brain and Islam body- is the only hope’ takes Vivekananda beyond the confines of Hinduism proper to a sort of universalistic religion. Gandhi would not think of such a junction. But what he did think of was equally startling.
Gandhi is on record as having told the federation of International fellowships in January, 1928, that 'after long study and experience. I have come to those conclusions; (1) all religions are true, (2) all religions have some errors in them, (3) all religions are almost as dear to me as my own Hinduism. My veneration for other faiths is the same as for my own faith,' It is true that many saints and sages, especially amongst the Hindus, had said before Gandhi that all religions if sincerely practiced lead to God. But that did not necessarily mean that all paths are equally long or equally smooth. Even when poet said: 'The shaikh reached (God) via kaaba and I via the temple of heart: Dard, he goal was the same, only the routes were different.' It is not difficult to see which route he approves. But when Gandhi said, 'my veneration for other faiths was the same as for my own; we may rest assured that he meant precisely what he said, and that he did not say it for the sake of politeness or for gaining any political ends. He could, in fact, make such a statement with perfect sincerity and with full conviction because 'his conception of religion had nothing to do with any dogma or custom or ritual. It was basically concerned with his firm belief in the moral law, which he calls the law of truth or love.

Yet neither Nehru, one of the greatest men of action of our time, albeit endowed with a rarely sensitive and astonishingly contemplative mind, nor Whitehead, whom we regard as the
greatest thinker of our era, the era of science, made the mistake of equating religion as such with organized religion and therefore denouncing the essence of religion because its communal manifestations were so abhorrent to them. It is necessary to draw attention to the possibility of making this particular mistake, for it has, in fact, been made by contemporary leaders of thought and action of no less structure then, for example, Russell and Lenin- to mention only one pair of illustrious names. Perhaps I am wrong in characterizing the confusion as confusion between essence and manifestation. Through a deplorable inexactitude in terminology, two easily distinguishable and sharply distinct phenomena have come to be denoted by the same word 'religion'. Nehru was painfully aware of the fact that the use of this word 'causes confusion and interminable debate and argument when often enough entirely different meanings are attached to it'.

We shall be primarily concerned with two meanings of the word, one in the personal sphere and the other in the communal. Though Nehru has some eminently sound observations to make about personal religion which I shall discuss later, his mind was greatly preoccupied with communal, or as he prefers to call it, organized religion. This is not at all surprising, considering the ghastliness of its appearance on the Indian stage during the last four decades, and on the European stage too during the nineteen-
thirties and forties when combination of religious and racial 
hatreds resulted in massacre of six million innocent and helpless
men, women and children. What is surprising is that when, in
spite of disaster which organized religion, brought over this land its
people, Nehru did attempt a definition of religion, he ignored its
communal manifestation and produced a definition of what
following William James, I shall call personal religion “What then is
religion probably it consists of the inner development of individual,
the evolution of his consciousness in a certain direction which is
considered good. What that direction is will be a matter of debate,
but as far as I understand it, religion lays stress on this inner
change, and considers outward change as but the projection of
this inner development’.

Nehru presents this definition with evident approval, and no
reasonable person can disapprove of religion defined thus the
point, however, is that the inner development of the individual lives
in society and develops himself under given social conditions
which can help or hinder his personal development. Some rare
individuals may no doubt renounce society, squat under a Banyan
tree in a forest and ‘reach great inner heights’. But this is not
possible for the large majority of men and women. The logic of the
situation compels. Nehru, to add that, ‘even for inner development,
external freedom and a suitable environment becomes necessary’.
But was he right in maintaining that religion 'considers outward change as but a projection of this inner development'?

Gandhi’s great contribution lies in removing the common misgiving that there is a dichotomy between religious 'spiritual' and the 'practical'. All worlds are one- Gandhi refers to the scientific researches of the James Jeans who has demonstrated that the whole universe including the most distant stars, invisible even through the most powerful telescope in the world, is compressed in an atom. So, Gandhi says with confidence, "If any action of mine claimed to be spiritual is proved to be impracticable, it must be pronounced to be failure. I do believe that the most spiritual act is the most practical in the true sense of the term". Gandhi integrated religion with the problems of daily life and thus added prestige to religion in an era, which had witnessed its denigration. In fact, Gandhi believed in the 'philosophy of 'yes' to life'. Hence, he emphasized religion and spiritual values for dynamic fulfillment of life. Like Sri Aurobindo he evaluated a syntheses between his faith in god and his concern for man.

His mission was not only to humanise religion but also to moralise it. It is a tragedy that religion for us means today nothing more than restrictions on food and drink, nothing more than adherence to sense of superiority and inferiority. Birth and
observance of forms cannot determine one's superiority and inferiority. Character is the only determining factor,” said Gandhi. For him, “True religion and true morality are inseparably bound with each other. Religion is to morality what water is to seed that is sown in the soil.”13 There is no religion higher than Truth and Righteousness'. He would reject any religious doctrine, which is in conflict with morality. He would even tolerate “unreasonable religious sentiments when it is not immoral.”14 His thesis is that “as soon as we lose moral basis we cease to be religious”.

It is needless to say that one of the aspects of Nehru's concept of secularism is directed against religion. We shall analyse here what aspect or role of religion remained unassailed. It may be noted that religion stains a moral basis on society. It is rightly pointed out that “religion opens up the depth of man's spiritual life which is usually covered by the dust of our daily life and noise of our secular work. It gives us the experience of the Holy, of something which untouchable, awe-inspiring, an ultimate meaning, the source of ultimate courage. This is the glory of what we call religion.”15 Since the glory of religion lies in giving relief from the dusty and noisy secular life of man, it cannot be taken away from the individual's life. Therefore, when it was said earlier that Nehru's secularism was not directed against the internal content of religion, it was meant that this positive and beneficial
function of religion was clearly recognised by it. The show that his secularism does not countenance a meaningless attack on religion as such, but, or. the other hand, spurns purposeless and outmoded external manifestations of religion.

**An Estimation on Secular State By Gandhi and Nehru**

Gandhi advocated a classless and caste-less society in which equality of all was insured. He was a socialist who opposed exploitation of labour. Gandhi hated class war, or, for the matter of that any war, except against injustice, poverty, ill health and in sanitation. Gandhi believed in the dignity of labour and opposed economic parasitology. He viewed the economic problem of India from the circumstances prevailing in India and was unmoved by the economic theories of lightly industrialized countries of the world.

To Gandhi, the means was as important as the end. He would not like to achieve success by secret, unmoral and dubious means. He would give the individual an opportunity to evolve or develop his life.

Gandhi believed in the dispersal or devolution of power and opposed its concentration in one place. He founded his state on the base of thriving, self-supporting and self-governing small
communities. Co-operation, not coercion, was to be the cementing material between such communities and their individual members.

Such were Gandhi’s concept of state, the Individual and the Government. Are we working towards the ideal he placed before us? Let every Indian, man, women and child, ask himself this question. More particularly, those who are at the helm of Government and in a position to translate Gandhian ideals into action reconsider their responsibilities, lest these ideals remain confined to books exhibited in showcases.

At this stage it is interesting to examine the secular character, of India under Nehru’s prime-ministership. Nehru explained his concept of secular state in one of his circulars to pradesh congress committees. He wrote that the secular state must be thought of as a social ideal, the realization of which depended on for more than constitutional provisions. It is obvious the first and for most element of Nehru’s definition of secular state is that it should be separated from religion.

This is a school of thought, however, which insists that a secular state can not function in a religious society, that secularism is Government can only be build upon a broad based philosophy of rationalism and nationalism. According to this view,
Gandhi's idea that all religions are equally true may lead to a non-communal state which should be based on secular lines.

According to Gandhi, a nonviolent secular society will give birth to non-violent secular state. Gandhiji opposed state religion, though he believed in one religion for a community. In secular state all religions will be free and equal and will remain without let or hindrances by the state. The state, therefore, has not to interfere in religious matters. In the words of Gandhiji, "the state should undoubtedly be secular, every one living in it should be entitled to profess his religion without let or hindrance, so long as the citizen obeyed the common law of the land. There should be no interference with missionary effort but on mission could enjoy the patronage of the state as it did during the foreign regime." In reply to a friend about the states of religion in free India, Gandhiji wrote, "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. That is every body's personal concern". The state would look after one's welfare, health, communications, foreign relation, currency and so on, but not one's religion that is everybody's personal concern. About his conception of religion Gandhiji said, "you must watch my life, how I live, eat, sit, talk, behave in general. The sum total of all those in me is my religion". About religious institutions or bodies,
Gandhiji said that they are not to depend on state aid. An institution or group, which could not manage to finance its own religious affairs was not, in the views of Gandhiji, truly religious. Religious education is the function of religious association not of the state. Ethical teaching, however, is according to Gandhiji, the function of the state. Gandhi accepted the imparting of the teaching of the fundamental moral norms and ideals common to all religions, in educational establishments run or subsidized by the state. He had sponsored such a programme for the Gujarat Vidyapith which however, was a private institution. But certainly, he was opposed to the inculcation of denominational and sectarian religious teachings in state institutions. He wrote “I do not believe that the state can concern itself or cope with religious education. I believe that religious education must be the sole concern of religious associations.

Teaching of fundamental ethics is undoubtedly a function of the state. By religion I do not have in mind fundamental ethics but what goes by the name of denominationalism. We have suffered enough from state aided religion and state church. A society or a group, which depends party or wholly on state aid for the existence of its religion, does not deserve or, better still, does not have any religion worth the name. I do not need to give any illustrations in support of this truth obvious as it is to me.
Thus, it is clear that Gndhiji regarded religion as a matter of private judgment. The organized agencies of the state were not to muddle with the religious affairs of the people. Hence, he would not agree to the inculcation of religious dogmas by the state.

Jawaharlal Nehru’s conception differs from that of Mahatma Gandhi’s. Nehru believes in western orientation of a secular state because his view is not depended upon religious pre-suppositions, the divergence from Gandhi’s approach, Gandhiji’s starting point was that of a religious man who, believing all religions to be true, accepted a theory of the state which fit in with this belief. Nehru’s starting point is that of a practical thinker and leader who, while personally believing, “all religions to be worthy, had to provide for their freedom to function peacefully without prejudicing the democratic system, hence the secular state.”

Nehru defined the secular state as a state “which projects all religions, but not favour one at the expense of others, and does not establish any religion as of the official creed.” Secular statement, “cardinal doctrine of modern democratic practice, that is the separation of the state and religion.”

Here, it may safely conclude from the discussion of the above very well observations, two of the diverse currents, that our country is secular in good terms and we have formed our secular state with more firm foundation. Keeping in view the former thought of our two great leader of Indian independence.
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