CHAPTER TWO

THE RELIGIOUS BASE

AND

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2. a Introduction: - Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy is largely based on morality and religion. His concept of individual and society were also related to religious values. Religion appears today almost as an universal phenomenon. True religion according to Gandhi, is one which purifies, which binds one indissolubly to the truth and to righteousness. Such religion was inherently bound up with morality and like water to the seed, religion to morality was essential. But philosophers, sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists and many others have given different theories about the nature, origin, and necessity of religion. It is necessary to find out the real nature of religion. By protecting us from being tossed about on the stormy ocean of the world, religion helps us to reach our destined goal. The different religions are the different roads converging at the same point. A single religion for the whole world is an impossibility and there is no need for it.
Most of the definition of religion stresses on one aspect at the exclusion of the other. This religion has been identified with reason, feeling, instinct, cult, ritual faith and so on. Religions claim that they are based not only on inner disposition or values but on spiritual experiences. According to Feaver, "Religion is manifestly a content or element of human experience". We can say that in religion the whole of a human being's personality is involved. In etymological sense the word religion has two meanings. According to Ciero the word religion comes from the word "relegere" which means "together", signifying performances of certain activities to show respect and reverence towards Gods. The Roman Lactations derived it from 'religate' meaning to bind together signifying that religion is essentially a bond of piety.

2.b Meaning: Word 'Dharma' and Religion: We know that in India the word Dharma is commonly used for the word religion, although it is not identical with it. Dharma in India is understood in a broader sense. Dharma refers to the social, ethical, spiritual, moral goal-oriented and humanistic aspects of religious behaviour. The term "dharma" comes from the sanskrit root 'dhri' which means to uphold, to support.
The significance of the word "dharma" is much wider than that of word 'religion'. According to Annie Basant, "Dharma has come to acquire a deep and rich meaning in the course of long development of Hindu thought, which cannot be covered by any single term like religion, law, morality, goodness etc. It signifies all these things and many others. Besides, conformity to spiritual rules and regulation is certainly a part of its meaning but it also involves the observance of moral principles and the performance of good acts. Whatever promotes individual and social welfare through the efficient regulation and control of the physical, political, economic and social environment comes within its purview. It may be called "Abhyudaya"\textsuperscript{13}.

We have seen that in Mahabharata it was said that religion is not merely a symbol of external conduct, practices, rites and beliefs. Religion means that energy which sustains society and keeps it organized and maintained.\textsuperscript{14} Again according to the Mahabharata, conducting oneself in accordance with the code of empirical as well as transcendental world is religion.\textsuperscript{15} Religion means to accept God for truth and reason to rule the heart and remove selfishness, ill will.
ignorance, and unreason and all the passions like anger, greed and lust that follow there from. In the Mahabharata etymologically 'dharma' has two meanings. First, that which helps in accumulating riches or containing opulence, the latter implying the felt of the material world as well as that of the spiritual or transcendental world. Secondly that which sustains all, taking which as pivot all life moves.

In the west E.B Tylor formulated the minimum definition of religion as- "the belief in spiritual beings". Frazer also says "By religion I understand a proposition or conciliation of powers superior to man which are believed to direct and control the course of nature and human life. Thus defined, religion consists of two elements, a theoretical and a practical, namely belief in powers higher than man and an attempt to propitiate them. Frazer also added that belief clearly comes first since we must believe in the existence of a divine being before we can attempt to please him. But unless the belief leads to a corresponding practice, it is not a religion but merely a theology.

Again Max Muller said, "Religion is a mental faculty or disposition which enables man to apprehend the infinite."
Gandhi tried to place his body and mind at the service of God, efface his ego and vanity by surrendering himself to God and doing "His will and work". He did not allow his little self and its narrow desires to stand in the way of the larger interest of humanity- which was God incarnate to him, Gandhi tried to dedicate the results of his honest efforts success as well as failure to God as the harvest of the Divine will acting in him. But Flint thinks that there can be no religion if feeling and affection are not added to knowledge. He says that, "Religion is man's faith in being or beings, mightier than himself and inaccessible to the senses but not indifferent to his sentiments and actions with feelings and practices which flow from such belief."[10]

Again According to Friedrich Schleirmacher religion emerged from a, "feeling of absolute dependence on God"[11] Regarding religion Rudolf Otto says that religion is an outcome of the 'apriori luminous feelings'. By this Otto has put religion on a secure pedestal. The word Numinous derived from numinous feeling is suigeneris and can not be reduced to any other. The name God is terrifying and
yet fascinating and is mysterious and in that sense is never fully knowable.\(^{(12)}\)

Another famous thinker Mathew Arnolds view is that, "Religion is nothing but morality touched with emotion"\(^{(11)}\). This view does not distinguish between religion and ethics. Kant also thinks that religion is based upon ethics and the existence of God is due to the existence of morality.

According to Swami Vivekananda, "all morality can be divided in to the positive and negative elements. It says either, 'Do this' or 'Do not do this'. When it says 'Do not', it is evident that it is a check to a certain desire which would make a man a slave. When it says 'Do' its scope is to show the way to freedom and to the breaking down of a certain degradation which has already seized the human heart"\(^{(14)}\). According to Hoffding, "Religion is the faith in the conservation of values."\(^{(15)}\) Again J.H. Leuba says that religion is necessary for man because the needs of life are not only physical but also spiritual.\(^{(16)}\) William James says that religion opens a higher dimension of our physical being above the levels of sense and thought.\(^{(17)}\)

2.\(e\) **Gandhi's Concept of Religion:** Mahatma Gandhi describes religion as a mighty tree that absorbs its sap from
the moral height of those who profess that religion. But Radhakrishnan said, "We cannot ignore the world of scientific achievement and withdraw into the inner life of contemplation. We are involved in the mechanism of the modern world and so should seek even religious truth not merely with our emotions but with our minds. We cannot go back on the scientific civilization nor can we drop religion." For Gandhi, "Life without religion is life without principle, and life without principle is like a ship without a rudder." By protecting us from being tossed about on the stormy ocean of the world, religion helps us to reach our destined goal. According to Stace, if religion is viewed from scientific angle it is nothing but a "mass of false ideas and superstitions of which the ultimate source is wishful thinking." Religion upholds man's dissatisfaction with the finite nature. Hegel said, "All that has worth and dignity for men all where in he seeks, his happiness, his glory, and his pride, find its ultimate center in religion, in the thought, the consciousness and the feeling of God. Thus God is the beginning of all things and the end of all things. As all things proceed from this point, so all return back to it
again. He is the center which gives life and quickening to all things, and which animates and preserves in existence all the various forms of being.

In religion man places himself in a relation to this center, in which all other relations concentrate themselves, and in so doing he rises up to the highest level of consciousness and to the region which is free from relation to what is other than itself (22)

Regarding religion Max Muller says that religion is a subjective faculty for apprehension of the infinite. Religious consciousness is a matter of faith. Religion is a mental faculty which is independent of sense and reason. Without that faculty no religion, not even lowest worship of idols and fetish would be possible. (23)

But Gandhi gave a practical colour to the lofty principles of religion not only in individual life but also in the social plane. Gandhi cannot be regarded as originating any new system of philosophy or any new religion in the academic sense of the term. He was influenced by the greatest traditional and religious teachers of the world.

India has been described as the cradle of world
religions. India is practically the only home of the Parsis, the follower of Zoroaster and the second country of the Muslims. The culture of the Dravidian and the non-Dravidian people before the so-called Aryan invasion, the actual sanskritized Aryan culture, the culture of the later invaders. The influence of Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism and of Islam and, Christianity can be traced at various stages of evolution of Hindu thought. (24)

India has set before herself the ideal of democratic republic and has been endeavouring to move towards this goal. Indians who contributed much in making modern India and developed secularism in his country are mainly Mahatma Gandhi, Radhakrishnan and Nehru. The ethical ideals of these thinkers will give us the cream of contemporary Indian Philosophy (25)

Gandhi has been the greatest religious personality in the social context in modern India. His crusade against untouchability, his discouraging conversion, his prayer 'Iswar Allah Tera nam' all go to show this great secular humanistic and yet deeply religious attitude towards life in the society.
Mahatma Gandhi was the first Indian after Asoka the great, to apply non-violence to politics. He spiritualized India's struggle for independence, truth and non-violence which form the crux of his philosophy. What type of religion did he adopt and what was his concept of religion? In this connection Dr. S. Radhakrishnan once put three questions to Gandhi.

The questions are (1) what is your religion (2) how are you led to it and (3) what is its bearing on social life. Gandhi answered, "my religion is Hinduisim which for me is religion of humanity and includes the best of all the religions known to me." Then why did a great man like Radhakrishnan put such a question to Gandhi? Because there is some extra-ordinary conception of Hinduisim in Gandhi. He observed, "By religion I do not mean formal religion, or customary religion but that religion which underlies all religions, which brings us face to face with our Maker."
For Gandhi religion represented the way of human beings conceived and related to God. Since he postulated both impersonal and personal conceptions of God, he distinguished two different levels of religion. The 'formal', 'customary', 'organised', or 'historical', religions were based on distinct conceptions of God whom they reduced to the limited categories of human mind. They involved prayer, worship, rituals, asking God for favours, and so on and were all sectarian. For Gandhi Hinduisim, Islam, Christianity, Judaism, and all religions belonged to this category. According to his opinion religion was the basis of life and shaped all one's duty. Gandhi believed that the original ideal behind the caste-system was based upon such a conception of natural classes.

Gandhi had tremendous faith in Hinduism which, to him, is a living organism liable to growth and decay, and subject to laws of nature. Gandhi believed in Varna and Varnashrama Dharma followed in ancient Hindu society. According to his opinion every person was born with certain definite limitations which he could not overcome. The law of Varna establishes certain spheres of actions for certain people, thus avoiding all unworthy competition. This great law, however, had been degraded and had fallen into disrepute.
In ancient Hindu society the influence of Varna and Ashrama is tremendous and all pervading. The Varna in conjugation with Ashrama comprises the Varnashrama Dhrama. The system of Varna was a very high and improved social system. It means selection of one's own means of livelihood or profession, according to his calibre and taste. This system had its root in the principle of division of labour. This was very important for a disciplined social order and for steady progress of the society. The whole society was divided into four segments according to their duties and responsibilities, like teaching class, ruling class, traders and labour class and these four classes are called brahmana, kshatriya, vaishya, and shudra respectively. Brahmana had the power of knowledge and spreaded knowledge to masses and also performed all religious activities. The kshatriyas were the ruling class and ruled the people and took responsibility of protecting the people. Vaishyas were the business class and had the ability of trading, farming, and catering of cattles. The shudras were entrusted with the duty of nursing the above three classes by bodily activities. It could not be compartmentalized, or reserved for special occasions.

2. d Hindu concept of the ancient society:- In 'Rig Veda' we find the conception of the universe as an organic whole, and society was also conceived as an organism composed of different limbs. This idea is very clearly revealed by the
hymn to Man in which the different classes of society are metaphorically described as forming the mouth, the arms, the thighs, and the feet of the Supreme person who manifests himself in the world and also remains mostly unmanifested.

The different classes in Vedic society seem to have been based on the different necessary functions performed by individuals in accordance with their diverse natural aptitudes. They had not yet been stratified into rigid, unalterable, and hereditary castes which developed later in India. Gandhi called it as natural classes.

Gandhi accepted this original Indian conception of natural classes (Varnas). He was very much critical to the later conception of caste and tried to reform the new conception of castes which he regarded as an undesirable and an ugly growth of the original ideal. The argument behind the opinion was that, like living body, social organism also requires division of labour and their co-ordination for effective maintenance. All kinds of labour, whether intellectual, military, commercial, agricultural, and unskilled manual, were necessary for the society. So, they should be performed in the spirit of duty. As all are valuable for society they deserved equal wages. Discrimination against any kind of honest labour, therefore, does not arise. He disliked the hierarchy of class system and oppression in the name of class can be eliminated if every kind of work enjoyed equal dignity and done with a sense of labour.
The Varna system was based upon **virtue and work**. Diversity and inequality among people living in the society is natural. So, the basis of this division of labour in varna was based upon diversity in virtue, aptitude, and nature. This division of labour in varna was based upon three virtues: they were - sattva, rajas, and tamas. Brahmans primarily have the virtue of sattva. Kshatriyas were predominantly sattvaika and rajasika. Vaishyas were dominated by the virtue of rajas and tamas and shudras had the virtue of tamas primarily.

The respective functions of sattva, rajas, and tamas were manifestation, activity and restraint, producing pleasure, pain and sloth. The three virtues were never separate. They supported one another and intermingled with one another. This class system was neither based upon birth nor hereditary. Though varna was based upon work and virtue, the influence of birth could not be ruled out because the virtue of parents were automatically inherited. But if someone deviated from the inherited virtues due to some reasons then division on the basis of labour and virtue was inevitable. So, the varna system was not based upon caste, but based upon virtue.

The varna system was a social system based upon the concept of **social decentralisation**. If a particular class is entrusted with all works and bestowed with all powers then there is always chances of misuse of power and exploitation of people by that particular privileged class. By following moral principles and rules all classes according to their own virtues should carry out
defined duties and responsibilities. Whatever status one had got in the society by virtue of his varna or qualities of action, he had to work in accordance with that. There was no question of any one's work being superior or inferior to that of the other. All works had got their own value and therefore all were equally valuable. There was dignity of labour.

The system of varna is very much essential in maintaining an ordered society. To lead the society in a systematic and organised way to the path of development the varna system has positive and lingering impact. The aim of this system is to confer work and responsibility to individuals according to their nature, capability, skill, energy to establish a prosperous, well disciplined and developed society. Here, every individuals have their own deserved position in the society, acquired by their own work, occupation or activity. Every man in the society is not fit for every job, in contrary, one may be mastered in one skill only. This system of varna encourages people to do good work in favour of him, of the society and of the mankind as a whole. The people are encouraged in blooming their talents to excel in their respective fields of superiority, so that they become more responsible and satisfied in their acquired position in the varna system. So, the system is very much relevant in the present day society also.
The present caste system is a very antithesis of Varnashrama. It has nothing to do with religion, it is harmful both to spiritual and natural growth. Caste is essentially a way of organising society. It has come to become a source of division and conflict. Gandhi's principal propositions regarding caste system are as follows: (1) Varnashrama of the Vedas is based on absolute equality of status notwithstanding the passages to the contrary in Smiritis (the later books on law) (2) The caste-system is the antithesis of Varnashrama. The sooner it is abolished the better. (3) In Varnashrama there was no prohibition of inter-marriage or inter-dining. There was prohibition of change of occupation for purposes of gain; there was no such thing as untouchability. (4) The caste system prohibits inter-marriage or inter-dining. It tolerates anarchy of choice of occupations. (29)

The system of varna was not rigid and mutable accordingly. There were several examples of change of varna in ancient India. By dint of hard religious devotion the kshatriya Vishwamitra had elevated himself to the varna of brahmana. Similarly though Parasurama was a brahmana by birth he was downgraded to the varna of kshatriya due to his own action or work.
But the caste system is rigid, it does not tolerate any dilution. It can not be acquired by any means except by birth only. In this system there are several social customs and rules which should be followed in to-to in case of dining, marriage, etc. Inter-varna marriage was permitted but inter-caste marriage is an offence which sprouts social anger. Therefore, the ancient Indian varna system was different than the present Indian caste system. The high esteem of ancient varna system is now dimmed to social encumbrance by way of caste system.

Today, the whole question of caste is even more complex and perplexing. This is mainly due to the fact that, caste which has been created to play only its traditional role, has acquired a new one, that is one of mobilisation. There is now mobilisation of people or electorates on caste lines in order to seize power. Those who want to do this would also like to keep the issue of caste alive because as long as it remains there is ground for creation of vote banks.

This makes the task of annihilation of caste even more difficult. As long as caste persists, social tensions and inequalities will also persist.

Gandhi put forth the establishment of a classless society as his ideal. He did speak of the abolition of castes to the extent they obstructed inter-dining, inter-marriage, and social intercourse, of hierarchy in the caste system and the differences in the incomes of several callings, as also of persons doing different types of work in the same industry or institutions.
But the existence of classes in the sense of functional divisions is a permanent feature of most primitive societies. Gandhi suggested the solution of their conflicting interests in the principles of varna dharma.

Ashramadharma, an unique social system found in ancient India, divided the entire life of a human being into four equal stages considering life span as one hundred year. They are: 1. Brahmacharya 2. Grahastha 3. Vanaprastha and 4. Sanyasa. This was together called Ashramadharma. Different varnas had different activities and responsibilities in different ashramas. The aim of moral life was final beatitude, to get final liberation of soul following ashramadharma according to social customs were progressive stages in life.

The first stage, brahmacharya, was purely reserved for students. It was the period intended for study, research and drawing inferences and generalisations. It was for duration of 25 years and during which the individuals would remain unmarried and concentrated on attaining pure knowledge.

Generally this part of life was spent in the house of Guru (the teacher, the guide). The students also acquired the knowledge applicable to their lives and necessary skills for reaching their
targets. They were imparted special knowledge and skills in requirement of their varna. They should be ready to part with their talents so that they might be of direct use to the people around. This ashram was preparation for entering into the future responsible life in the society.

The Grahastha ashram was life in the family after one got married and served the society through his acquired knowledge and skill. This ashram was considered to be the base of all other ashramas. Here people reproduced their heirs, accumulated wealths, fed and nourished their family, educated their children, and also took care of other living beings and guests. People learnt to be selfless and exercised the honest virtues like sacrifice, mercy, help, honesty, thrift, sympathy etc. The people in this ashram also took the responsibility of looking after the people of other three ashrams also.

In vanaprastha ashram, which started generally after 50 years of age, people took retirement from family life and active life. They spent life in serene beauty of nature entering in forest. They handed over all their life long gathered properties and wealths to their heirs and got rid off all materialistic feelings. The family bondage, inclination, feeling etc were torn and social responsibilities were parted with and practicing spiritual life became more dominant to elevate themselves to the stage of final liberation, which was called attaining 'Moksha'.
The sanyasa was the last phase of life and after spending 25 years of vanaprastha people entered to sanyasa ashram. In sanyasa people were relieved of all types of affection and attraction to life and completely devoted to meditation of God. Total emancipation of the individual soul from matter was their motto.

This ashramadharma prevailing in the society of ancient India was helpful for all round development of every Individual and it was a versatile social system. According to this social system every stage of the life was spent according to prescribed rules and thereby set the right path for entering into the next step of the life. Individual enrichment in the life by full devotion was helpful by following ashramadharma.

Gandhi tried to understand the true meaning of independence and freedom. Varna and Ashrama were institutions have nothing to do with castes. The law of varna taught us that we, each one of us have to earn our bread by following the ancestral calling. It defined not our rights but our duties. It necessarily had reference to calling that were conductive to the welfare of humanity.

In Hinduism he found tolerance and equality of all religions. It includes the principle of oneness and all inclusiveness.

The great thing about Gandhi's approach to religion was that he believed that it had intense connections with practical affairs. For example, he said to say that Swaraj is synonymous with Ram Raj, the establishment of the kingdom.
of righteousness on earth. Gandhi wrote in his Autobiography that he could not conceive of any political system that was divorced from religion.

However, religion was not to mean sectarianism. It would mean a belief in ordered moral government of the universe. This definition of religion transcends Hinduism, Islam, Christianity etc.

Gandhi stood for religious tolerance though he did not like the world tolerance as it might imply an assumption of the inferiority of others. His conception of tolerance was that one should entertain the same respect for the religious faiths of others as one accorded to his own. Some of the most interesting aspects of Gandhi's views on religion should also be noted. Gandhi did not believe in conversion through propaganda. Faith, according to Gandhi does not admit of propagation. It is to be believed and then it becomes self-propagating. Again, Gandhi always regarded religion as a very personal matter and not dependence on collective efforts at rituals etc. Divine knowledge, to Gandhi, could not be borrowed from books. It has to be realized in oneself. Everything ancient was not good just because it was ancient. Any ancient tradition, if it was inconsistent with morality, fitted to be banished. Untouchability, superstition etc. should be swept out of its existence. According to his opinion all those valuable things in other religions are already included in Hinduism.

The most appealing aspect of Hinduism to him is truth and non-violence.
lence. Truth and non-violence i.e love in wider meaning is the essence of Hinduism. He said "If I were asked to define the Hindu creed I should simply say; search after Truth through non-violent means". So, when he was asked by Radhakrishnan how he was led to his religion i.e Hinduism he replied." I am being led to my religion through Truth and Non-Violence i.e. love in the broadest sense. I often describe my religion as Religion of Truth.

Gandhi's concept of religion is very much in consonance with his concept of Truth or God. By 'Truth' we have seen, he meant amongst other things, the law, the Moral order, the Dharma or the Rta. It is in this sense that he very much liked the Buddhist idea of God in which the Law and the Law-maker were one or the Law or the Dharma itself was God.

According to Gandhi religion was not something which concerned an individual in his isolation from his fellow beings. True religion consisted in helping the helpless and the poor and working for the welfare of humanity, or rather of the entire creation. He said, "I am endeavouring to see God through the service of humanity, or rather of the entire creation. He said, "I am endeavouring to see God through the service of humanity, for I know that god is neither in heaven nor down below, but in everyone".
Religion consists in nothing but loving one's neighbour as oneself, and for that matter, loving the entire humanity and entire creation. All religion invariably teach this lesson of love and brotherhood, but Christianity teaches this lesson in the most effective manner by identifying God with love. It is again Christianity which teaches service of the poor and the needy.

Gandhi's conception of religion as a way of life was based on some sort of spiritualistic conviction with regard to the universe as a whole and may be seen to be equally applicable to all the prevalent religions of the world. Religion whether it be Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Christian or any other, consists of certain specified principles of living. This goal is the goal of Truth which the different religions conceive in their own relative ways. Gandhi seems to be influenced by the anekantavada and syadvada of Jainism. Gandhi was more or less 'echoing the idea of the great neo-vedantist Vivekananda who also took different religions as representing the different aspects of the same Truth partially, and which could therefore be regarded as different paths leading to the same goal.

Regarding the necessity of religious tolerance Gandhi said, "Even as a tree has a single trunk, but many branches, so there is one true and perfect religion, but it becomes many, as it passes through the human medium. The one religion is beyond all speech."
Tolerance gives up spiritual insight, which is as far from fanaticism as the north pole from the south. True knowledge of religion breaks down the barriers between faith and faith.\(^{34}\)

Gandhi's religion means to accept God for life. Acceptance of God means to allow love, truth, reason to rule the heart and remove selfishness, ill will, ignorance and unreason and all the passions like anger, greed, and lust that follow therefrom. Gandhi thinks that prayer is very essential for religion. "Prayer is not asking. It is a longing of the soul. It is daily admission of one's weakness".\(^{35}\) Prayer purifies ones soul and should be a part of life. Regular prayer is always essential and found in every religion. "In all critical stages in his life, whenever he had to make moments decision, he would retire to himself, and even observe silence and fast, and check his accounts and motives with the God in him- Truth, Reason, and Love and earnestly pray 'lead kindly light'".\(^{36}\)

Gandhi believed in Varna and Varnasharma Dharma. Every person was born with certain definite limitation which he could not overcome. The present caste system was a very antithesis of Varnasharma. It had nothing to do with religion, it was harmful both to spiritual and national growth. Gandhi thought that untouchability was a plague, which it was the bounden duty of every Hindu to combat. Gandhi was opposed to animal sacrifices and corruption in religious institutions.
He felt that if he remained a true Hindu he could reform the Hinduisim in a more affective manner from within. Reformation of Hindu society in the teeth of all orthodox opposition was one of the chief tasks to which Gandhi dedicated his life; and no one could achieve so much in so short a time. That was also an achievement for humanity at large.\(^{37}\)

The Vedas and the Upanisads have always laid stress on the value of life. These scriptures lay emphasises on the well-being of all living beings and inculcate the value of Ahimsa - the non-injury to all living beings.

"All this that we see in this great

Universe is pervaded by God-

Renounce it and enjoy it.

Do not covet anybody's wealth or possession"\(^{38}\)

When Gandhi was speaking of the partial but equal status of all religions, it was really his Hindu spirit that was finding echo through him. Further, the Jaina Syadvada, the theory of the relativity of truth, filled him with the conviction that all religions expressed the same truth relatively and therefore all were correct in their own ways. Gandhi was no less influenced in this respect by the several references in the Koran which spoke of religious tolerance.
Gandhi worked for a major change in human nature. Religion is the discipline by which we are helped to overcome the discord in our nature and integrate our personality. Gandhi was essentially a religious person. By the practice of spiritual exercises, by fast and prayer, he aimed at the production of a new type of human being, fearless, greedless and hateless. Man is still evolving. (39)

All these considerations show how deeply religious a man Gandhi was. The world needs him most fervently today, if it has needed him ever at all.

2.e Religion and God:- For Gandhi religion represented the way human beings conceived as related to God. Since he postulated both impersonal and personal conceptions of God, he distinguished two different levels of religion. For Gandhi true religion transcended popular Hinduisim, Islam, Christianity, Judaisim and all other religions. It dispensed with rituals, worship, dogmas and involved nothing more than a belief in the cosmic spirit and the commitment to realize it in all areas of one's life. such a religion represented the purest form of spirituality and acknowledged that the divine is too complex to be fully grasped by any one religion.

For Gandhi every major religion articulated a unique vision of God and emphasised his different attributes. Gandhi viewed the cos-
mic spirit differently. Since the universe for him was eternal, the question was not one of rating but one of ordering and structuring it. His cosmic spirit was therefore not a creator but a principle of order, a supreme intelligence infusing and regulating the universe from within. "Like most Indian thinkers, Gandhi was puzzled not so much by the material world as by living beings, not by the rhythmic and orderly movement of the stars and seas by the baffling phenomenon of life with its 'mysterious' origins, diverse forms, and their ingenious and complex mechanisms." 

Following the long-line of Indian sages he argued that the existence of God was a matter of experimental certainty. Like many profound experiences in life, the experience of feeling God's presence did not come naturally to all. One needed to go further. He wanted to dynamise the idea of God by putting it into action, by activating it.

All great religions are, in their essence, are love and truth. Knowledge is power. This is what Frances Bacon taught, and a whole age received that teaching and believed in it. The focus then was on knowledge of the physical laws of nature, the kind of knowledge which created new technology and so gave man greater power to produce material goods. Gandhi, too, was thinking of power, but power
of a different kind. Gandhi had a very experimental attitude towards religion. But it is with the law of love that he experimented, in personal life, in small groups in his Ashram, and on a national scale. It is impossible to understand Gandhi without taking into account his strikingly practical and experimental attitude.

But spiritual experiment is not a new thing in India. As a matter of fact, yoga is itself an experimental method and it has a long tradition. The yogi sometimes acquired great power. But it was not involved so much as a social experiment. The yogi was primarily concerned with his own salvation. That was more typical. Gandhi made the law of love as an instrumental of social action. Perhaps some branches of Buddhism came close to the Gandhian outlook. But Gandhi was born at a different stage of human history, his methods were different and his philosophy is more relevant for us.

There is in every man a spiritual energy, which is mixed up with many impurities. It can be purified and the purer it becomes the more powerful it is. In its pure forms it manifests itself as the power of love. Just as electricity can be made to work so too the power of love. Gandhi used it in two ways. In the first place, he used it for his programme of constructive work. But he also used it in a second way. That was the most striking thing he did.
Love can be used as an instrument of war against injustice. In fact it is the most potent instrument. This is the other manifestation of the power of love. Gandhi called it 'soul force' or 'truth force'. Satyagraha is truth force organised and applied for combating injustice.

The basic idea is quite simple. We should not withdraw love for love must be all pervasive and made to work.

Gandhi saw God in his creation. He sought the greatest good of all and not the greatest good of the greatest number. The ultimate object of man's life is according to Gandhi self-realization. Self-realization implies seeing God face to face, realizing Absolute Truth, attaining Moksha or knowing oneself. He believed in the principle of spiritual unity. So the immediate service of human beings becomes necessary to go through a long spiritual training in order to qualify for the experience, and those who had done so had invariably spoken of feeling, seeing, and hearing God. Human beings went beyond reason in most areas of life and could not live without faith. Unlike many believers, Gandhi advanced not the familiar strong thesis that there was an omnipotent God who created and ruled over the universe.

But it is doubtful if he really believed in a personal God. But it still seems safe to maintain that, for Gandhi the quest for God was a quest for God's law.
What then is God's law? For Gandhi God's law is the law of love or law of Truth. But why is it better to call it the Law of Truth. It is better to call it so because God is not confined in space. He is everywhere and in everything. Truth has this quality of universality. But what about love? Love is a slippery word, it is shaky. It has to be fixed by being joined with truth. This also is the reason why Gandhi adopted the word 'ahimsa' rather than love. Ahimsa is steadier and it is rather more obvious that it must mean absence of 'himsa' towards all. Ahimsa has been on the whole, less contaminated by the evils of the world. That word has retained a purity of its own, as Gandhi thought. Ahimsa obviously should not be used to describe a situation where there is himsa towards anybody. Once the basic idea is grasped, it matters little whether one talks of love or Ahimsa. Love is a beautiful word, but it is to the used interchangeably with God. It must be free of all taint of jealousy or ill will against anybody. It must mean active good will towards all.

Mahatma Gandhi did not see God. But God or spirituality is brought into the picture. Gandhi wanted to stress this mutually supporting relationship between God, Love and Truth. This tells us something about his idea of God. But Gandhi wanted to go one step higher in case of religion, and the latter was to be judged not by the philo-
sophical coherence and subtlety of its system of beliefs, but by its ideals and the quality of life they inspired. Gandhi believed that religion is the basis of life and shaped all one's activities.

Religion could not be compartmentalized, reserved for special occasions or days of the seeker, or viewed as a preparation for another world. To be religious was to live in the constant presence of the cosmic spirit and to translate that awareness in all our deeds. It affected the smallest as well as the most ordinary activities of one's life, including how one sat, talked, ate and conducted one's personal, professional, and public life, and was nothing more than their sum total, since one lived according to one's religious beliefs in all areas of life including the political. Religion was a matter of freely and sincerely held beliefs and ruled out all forms of coercion. Since the state was a coercive institution, it should not institutionalize, impose or favour a religion, it should support all religions equally. This did not, however, mean that political life should be secular and disallow religiously based appeals, arguments, actions, as that would violate citizen's religious integrity and their freedom to express their religious identity. For Gandhi Religion is a resource from which one freely borrowed whatever one found persuasive. It was thus a collective human property and formed part of mankind's common heritage.
2.1 Conclusion:- Every person was born into and deeply shaped by a particular religious tradition, which as it were constituted his original spiritual home, but other religions were not closed to him. Gandhi said that as a Hindu, he was heir to Hinduisim's rich and ancient heritage. As an Indian he was a privileged inheritor of India's diverse religious and cultural traditions. As a human being, all great religions were his spiritual inheritance, to which he had as much right as their native adherents. While remaining firmly rooted in his own tradition, he felt free to draw upon their moral and spiritual resources. To express the two central ideas of rootedness and openness, he often used the metaphor of living in a house with its windows wide open. The house was protected by walls and gave him a sense of security and rootedness, but its windows were wide open to allow cultural winds from different directions to blow in it and enrich the air he breathed.

The realization of God, as Gandhi opined, should be the ultimate aim of every body and all their activities whether social, political or religious had to be guided by the ultimate aim of the vision of God. The immediate service of all human beings becomes a necessary part of the endeavour simply because the only way to find God is to see Him in His creation and be one with it. This can only
be done by the service of all. So God is to him only another name for the Reality, the Truth, the Law, the Harmony that pervades the whole universe.

Unlike many believers, Gandhi advanced not the familiar strong thesis that there was an omnipotent God who created and presided over the universe, but a much weaker one that there was some spiritual power who informed and gently guided the universe.

Man has the brain and power to control the process of individual and society. In Hinduism Vedanta teaches that when we speak of man or women as the image of God, we do not mean his or her physical form but we mean the individual ego or the soul. If the divine Being or God be this universal spirit, then His image cannot be the physical form of man. The soul of the each individual man or woman is the image of Divinity. This idea has been beautifully expressed in Vedanta. The one is the eternal, absolute, real perfect and self effulgent such as the Sun, and the other the individual ego or the soul is like its reflection, or shadow or image. The one is such as the fountain-head of the blessed qualities and the infinite source of all divine power while the other contains the partial reflection of those qualities and powers. So according to the Vedanta, every individual soul
where it be more or less animal in its thoughts and action, possesses the divine images and is no other than the image of the divine principle or Being. The Upanisads boldly highlights the view that Atman is the divine, the immortal is the self of every man and woman and the child. So, the Upanisads said that the wealth and power are not the highest glory of man. Therefore, Gandhi believed in absolute oneness of God and that is the way to bind humanity.
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