CHAPTER III

GANDHIAN CONCEPT OF RELIGION AND RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

Gandhi’s conception of religion is primarily concerned with spiritual development. It is essential not only for the countries practicing religious pluralism but also for the re-education of the human race. As the world focuses its attention on materialistic civilization, Gandhi’s religious philosophy gains special significance in our age. Gandhi propagated the essential unity of all religions and the basic unity of all humanity. His idea on religion and world endorses the view of the political philosopher Thomas Paine who considered the world as his country, all mankind are his brethren and to do good is his religion.

Gandhi’s conception of religion acquired worldwide acceptance both as an ideology and as a policy. Other religious and social reformers and the leaders of worldwide leaders also strengthened the secular spirit of Gandhi. His opinion is that in different religions the same God being worshiped by the people in their own ways. No doubt they all lead to the life of purity which helps people to live together with the moral and religious principles. Gandhi felt that even the most liberal formulation of the dogma of any Universal Religion would only set up another sect and begin circumscribing itself. Therefore, he clearly stated that there is no need for establishing new religion. Gandhi seems to have been quite aware of this, and so does not make any attempt to formulate a universal religion, nor hold a belief for Hinduism or any other religion.

The third chapter is titled as “Gandhian Concept of religion and religious pluralism.” In the first part of this chapter, an attempt has been made to expound the various definitions of religions and the significance of Gandhi’s definition of religion. Gandhi stated that Religion is the search for Truth. He
brought both theists and atheists under the banner of the seekers of Truth. He also asserted that true religion and true morality are inseparably bound up with each other. In his view, religion is an instinct within the human heart, it is a thing not alien to us. It is always there and always within us; with some consciously and with others quite unconsciously. It has to be developed out of us. In order to explain these ideas, in the first part of the chapter, an attempt has been made to explore Gandhi’s understanding of religions, the essence, purpose and their fundamental objectives and significance and his right approach to towards the religions.

The second part of the chapter is devoted to present his views on religious pluralism where he mentions that “Religions are different roads converging upon one point.” In this connection, his views on secularism and his classification regarding secularism have been presented in the third part of the chapter.

In the fourth part of the chapter, another important aspect, ‘spiritual awakening in man’ has been discussed. It is an eye opener to man to move out of sensual life to self-sacrificing life. Here, he introduces a theological concept ‘true renunciation,’ meaning, renouncing the self and personal good for the sake of others. He gave much importance to prayer through which people surrender and subordinate themselves to God.

The last part of the third chapter is devoted to expound Gandhi’s interpretation of Religion and his extraordinary perception of what religion accomplishes. It is also important to examine Gandhi’s understanding of other religions. He wanted people to continue to accept the significance of rationality with the revelation of God. By recognizing the pluralistic reality, Gandhi wanted every Christian to be true Christian, every Hindu to be a true Hindu and every Musalman to be a true Musalman.
3.1 DEFINITIONS OF RELIGION

Religion is said to be a collection of belief, culture and worldviews. The word *religion* is sometimes used interchangeably with *faith* or *belief system*. These relate humanity to spirituality and to moral values. Joachim Onyeakor in his book titled ‘Did We Create God?: God Scam Exposed!’ stated that religion is a collection of cultural systems, belief systems, and world views that relate humanity to spirituality and, sometimes to moral values.² It is also asserted that religion is the set of beliefs, feelings, dogmas and practices that define the relations between human being and the diviner. Nevertheless, a given religion is defined by specific elements of a community of believers, particularly of dogmas, sacred books, rites, worship, sacrament, moral prescription and organization. It has been stated that the majority of religions have developed from a revelation based on the exemplary history of a nation, of a prophet or a wise man who taught an ideal of life.

It is important to mention here that many languages have words that can be translated as “religion,” but they may use them in a very different way, and some have no word for religion at all. According to Max Muller, the root of the English word “religion”, the Latin *religio*, was originally used to mean only “reverence for God or the gods, careful pondering of divine things, piety” (which Cicero further derived to mean “diligence”).³ However, in the words of Emile Durkheim, religion differs from private belief in that it is “something eminently social”.⁴

The Sanskrit word *dharma*, sometimes translated as “religion,” also means Law. Throughout classical South Asia, the study of law consisted of concepts such as penance through piety and ceremonial as well as practical traditions. Medieval Japan at first had a similar union between “imperial law” and universal or “Buddha law,” but these later became independent sources of power.⁵
There is no precise equivalent of “religion” in Hebrew, and Judaism does not distinguish clearly between religious, national, racial, or ethnic identities. One of its central concepts is “halakha,” sometimes translated as “law,” which guides religious practice and belief and many aspects of daily life. The uses of other terms, such as obedience to God or Islam are likewise grounded in particular histories and vocabularies.6

Religion is often expressed as a set of laws or rules and regulations. God Himself gave a set of laws known as ‘the Law’. For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.7 There are numerous definitions of religion and only a few are stated here. The anthropologist Clifford Geertz defined religion as a “system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.”8

Modern scholars such as Tom Harpur and Joseph Campbell favor the derivation from ligare ‘bind, connect’, probably from a prefixed re-ligare, i.e. re (again) + ligare or ‘to reconnect’. The medieval usage alternates with order in designating bonded communities like those of monastic orders: “we hear of the ‘religion’ of the Golden Fleece, of a knight ‘of the religion of Avys’.”9 Max Muller characterized many other cultures around the world, including Egypt, Persia, and India, as having a similar power structure at this point in history. What is called ancient religion today, they would have only called “law”.10 Edward Burnett Tylor defined religion as simply “the belief in spiritual beings”.11

The theologian Antoine Vergote also emphasized the “cultural reality” of religion, which he defined as “the entirety of the linguistic expressions, emotions and, actions and signs that refer to a supernatural being or
supernatural beings”; he took the term “supernatural” simply to mean whatever transcends the powers of nature or human agency.12

The sociologist Durkheim, in his seminal book, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, defined religion as a “unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things”.13 In his book *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, William James, pragmatist and psychologist defined religion as “the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine.”14 For the German theologian Paul Tillich, faith is “the state of being ultimately concerned,”15 which “is itself religion. Religion is the substance, the ground, and the depth of man's spiritual life.”16

The development of religion has taken different forms in different cultures. Some religions place an emphasis on belief, while others emphasize practice. Some religions focus on the subjective experience of the religious individual, while others consider the activities of the religious community to be most important. Some religions claim to be universal, believing their laws and cosmology to be binding for everyone, while others were intended to be practiced only by a closely defined or localized group. In many places religion has been associated with public institutions such as education, hospitals, the family, government, and political hierarchies. Anthropologists John Monoghan and Peter Just stated that, “it seems apparent one thing that religion or belief helps us do deal with problems of human life that are significant, persistent, and intolerable. One important way in which religious beliefs accomplish this is by providing a set of ideas about how and why the world is put together that allows people to accommodate anxieties and deal with misfortune.”17

A religion may be defined with its three great characteristics: a) Beliefs and religious practices, b) The religious feeling i.e. faith and c) Unity in a community of those who share the same faith: the Church. It is what
differentiates religion from magic. Some scholars classify religions as either *universal religions* that seek worldwide acceptance and actively look for new converts, or *ethnic religions* that are identified with a particular ethnic group and do not seek converts.\textsuperscript{18} Others reject this distinction, pointing out that all religious practices are ethnic because they come from a particular culture.

In the 19\textsuperscript{th} and 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries, the academic practice of comparative religion divided religious belief into philosophically defined categories called “world religions.” However, some recent scholarship has argued that not all types of religion are necessarily separated by mutually exclusive philosophies. The current state of psychological study about the nature of religiousness suggests that it is better to refer to religion as a largely invariant phenomenon that should be distinguished from cultural norms.

### 3.1.1 The significance of Gandhi’s definition of religion

Gandhi’s conception of religion could be called modernist as well. He believed that all religions are equal (*sarva dharma samabhava*); and all are to be tolerated. For Gandhi religion is a purely personal matter, and in his view there are as many religions as there are individuals. One could also say that he is committed to the modernist reduction of religion to ethics. He has his own special version of this reductionist religion. Religion is the search for truth, an endeavour even inclusive of atheists. Also modernist holds the position that the State should not support religious organizations. But this did not prevent his holding that religion should be integrated into political action as its ethical ground and justification. This was a foundational belief for Gandhi and it was shared by political thinkers of the European Enlightenment. It is only some contemporary American critics who insist on a strict separation of religion and politics.
3.1.2 The essence of religion

Gandhi stated that the essence of religion is morality. The adherent of such religion cannot afford to abstain from any field of life such as social, economic and political. That is why his devotion to truth has drawn him into the field of politics. Without the slightest hesitation and with all humility he stated that those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means to them. Further Gandhi said, “I could not be leading a religious life unless I identified myself with the whole of mankind, and that I could not do unless I took part in politics.”

Gandhi strongly believes that no religion is inferior or superior to other religion. The more sects there are, the more opportunities there are for making successful appeals to the divine instinct in all men. Human beings need spiritual as well as material sustenance. Without spiritual sustenance, it is difficult to get and maintain peace of mind. The purpose of religion is not to argue which one is the best. All religions can learn from one another; their ultimate goal is to produce better human beings who will be more tolerant, more compassionate, and less selfish. Buddha, Jesus Christ, and all other great teachers created their ideas and teachings with sincere motivation, love, and kindness toward humanity, and they shared it for the benefit of humanity. The common goal of all moral precepts laid down by the great teachers of humanity is unselfishness.

According to Gandhi human life is a synthesis of all dimensions. He writes, “the whole gamut of man’s activities today constitutes an indivisible whole. You cannot divide social, economic, political and purely religious work into watertight compartments. I do not know any religion apart from human activity. It provides a moral basis to all other activities which they would otherwise lack, reducing life to a maze of sound and fury signifying nothing.” However, his understanding of morality as the very essence of
religion and its relation to public life is necessary to consider some of the specific ways in which Gandhi’s life and teachings on religion can contribute to the present-day world.

Tulsidas, Meerabai, and Kabir were the Indian saintly predecessors of Gandhi’s spiritual life. Their inspirations, aspirations and mystic experiences were the ‘guiding light’ of his unique and successful non-violent battle for freedom. Gandhi’s life was infused with morality which was the basis of all his ideas, activities and works. His fundamental contribution in the field of religion was to give primacy to Truth rather than giving importance to traditional religious practices. In fact, he made the concept of Truth on the basis of all morality. His strong conviction is that one has to be morally strong in order to be strong in spirit. To be strong in spirit, one must live in accordance with one’s beliefs, by a strict code of conduct. Gandhi, with such an all-encompassing vision of life, deeply involved himself in every area of human life. “True religion and true morality are inseparably bound up with each other. Religion is to morality what water is to the seed that is sown in the soil.”

The rationality of the religious view is based on an existential understanding of religion as a total outlook on human life in the world. With such view, it is argued, religion cannot be excluded from any area of human activity including politics. In other words, one’s religion must guide all of one’s activities. The advocates of this view also might give a pragmatic justification to the effect that religion, being the most potent force in our society, must be utilized for social change and the building of the new, egalitarian India envisaged in its constitution.

The great religions of the world, according to Gandhi, should strive in promoting a life of self control, sacrifice, harmony, peace and understanding amongst its followers so as to create a heaven on earth. He made his view point very clear that the world does not need a new religion. What it does need is, the
people who, discovering the eternal and universal truths in their own religion are bold enough to live in accordance with those truths. Gandhi believed that all life was a part of one’s ultimate spiritual reality. The supreme goal was self-realization; the realization that one's true self was identical with ultimate reality.

All religions, for Gandhi, contain some element of truth and this accounted for his own religious tolerance. Gandhi stressed absolutely on the moral nature of human beings. He believed that the cause of all social evils and maladies is the immoral nature of men. Men must be moral by following certain code of conduct. It is the religion which provides that code of conduct and makes men moral. The main function of every religion is social contract. That is to put certain restrictions, rules, regulations so as to avoid conflict, ill-feeling and immoral way of living in the society. Gandhi believed in a universal religion and morality. These are interchangeable as he believed. He also believed and stressed on the relevance of man and society through morality and religion.

Non-violence, Gandhi holds, is the means of realizing his Truth which he considered as God. He wrote in Harijan “If the morals of a man are a matter of no concern, the form of worship in a particular manner in a Church or a Mosque or a Temple is an empty formula. It may even be a hindrance to individual or social growth. Instead of religious conversion the efforts should be on making Hindus and Christians better Christians.”

Everyone has a right to acquire spiritual knowledge if one had devotion to God. Spirituality can be received through the spiritual sense. A man with intense spirituality may be without speech or gesture touch the hearts of millions who have never seen him and whom he has never seen. It is not like many other things which we can perceive, analyze and prove through our sense. Such person’s action will be entirely different from the action performed
by a person who is materialistic. Gandhi believed in the spirit of *Bhagavad Gita* which taught the culture of *Karma yoga* or performing one’s duty without expecting any reward or fruit. It also means performance of *Swadharma* or one’s own profession on duty.

Gandhi sought spiritualization of politics because politics devoid of religion makes man corrupt, selfish, unreliable, materialistic and unrealistic. He was of the opinion that politics without religion stinks. At the same time, he did not approve exploitation of religion for political purposes. He wanted to endeavour to translate politics in terms of spirituality. He has stressed on the close relationship of religion with politics in the following manner. Those who say that religion has no relationship with politics do not understand the meaning of religion. For Gandhi there is no politics without religion. Politics is subordinate to religion. Politics without religion is death-trap because it kills man’s soul. Therefore, he did not favour separation of religion from politics. But his political friends were unhappy because they say even his Political ideologies were derived from religion. Gandhi’s answer to them was not only politics but other activities when derived from his religion. He went further and said that every activity of a man must be derived from his religion, because religion means being bound to God, that is to say God rules your every breath.²⁷

Gandhi never advocated that religion has to be practiced in a cave or on a mountain-top. A truly religious person cannot isolate himself from society. In fact, religion must manifest itself in all the actions of man in society. He says: “I do not conceive religion as one of the many activities of mankind. The same activity may be governed by the spirit either of religion or of irreligion. There is no such thing for me therefore as leaving politics for religion. For me every, the tiniest, activity is governed by what I consider to be my religion.”²⁸
Religion is a thing not alien to us. It has to be developed out of us. It is always within us, with some consciously and with others quite unconsciously. But it is always there. And whether we wake up this religious instinct in us through assistance or by inward growth, no matter how it is done, it has got to be there.\textsuperscript{29} For Gandhi, giving respect for all religions and making personal integrity are the only primary matters in religion. The differences between religions, including belief in God was given a secondary position in his religious thought. He holds that, it is living that has primacy in religion, not believing. With such an ordering, it is easy to tolerate and even respect differences as long as the religious pursuit is taken seriously. Since his secularism is not opposed to religion, we can appreciate how this understanding of religion becomes also the core of his secularism. A religion is only as true as it is lived in the lives of its followers.

Gandhi clearly stated that all the religions in their own way are “pursuing” the Truth. It is only the difference between possessing and pursuing makes a world of difference in people’s attitudes. Some, who believe that they possessed the Truth, become arrogant and competitive leading to misunderstandings and conflicts. On the other hand, those who pursue the Truth, honestly and diligently, are imbued with humility, understanding and acceptance that others also have a bit of the Truth. With that attitude one could come to a better understanding and appreciation of one’s religion by incorporating within it the fragments of truth from others. This philosophy of pursuit of truth led Gandhi to conclude that \textit{ahimsa} can only be interpreted as ‘love’ and not as ‘non-violence’. Gandhi believed that all life was a part of one ultimate spiritual reality. The supreme goal was self-realization; the realization that one's true self was identical with ultimate reality. The belief that all religions contain some element of truth not only account for one’s own religious tolerance, it will destroy hatred towards other religions and develop love towards all.
As Gandhi believed in fasting and prayer, he believed that the best form of prayer was serving the distressed and the greatest spiritual attainment was putting the ‘Law of Love’ into practice, with all, in life. *Ahimsa* being the law of love consists not in claiming but in giving. Gandhi believed in the principle, ‘Love ever suffers, never resents, never revenges itself', it is self-suffering.’ Fervent spiritual prayers do not come from a full stomach. A genuine fast cleanses the body, mind and soul. It crucifies the flesh and to that extent sets the soul free. A sincere prayer can work wonders. It is an intense longing of the soul for its even greater purity. Purity thus gained, when it is utilized for a noble purpose, becomes a prayer.\(^{30}\) I believe that there is no prayer without fasting, and there is no real fast without prayer.\(^{31}\)

Gandhi considered fasting as a means of personal spiritual discipline. He used this again and again for his own sake, for self-purification. When he felt that he was not an adequate instrument of the Divine, he undertook a fast to bring himself back to a more complete position. Once, he fasted for twenty-one days because of the Hindu-Moslem tensions and riots. He fasted not against those riots, but against himself because he was not strong enough to stop those riots and tensions. He suggested that an occasional fast is necessary to relieve an overworked digestive system. This is needed for physical cleansing and it is as such beneficial. Fasting is good for one who is absorbed in a moral and spiritual issue. Fasting brings change in moral and spiritual attitudes of the one against whom one is fasting. It is an intense moral appeal, re-enforced by his own willingness to suffer.

Prayer was the speciality of Gandhi’s spirituality. As a hungry man relishes a hearty meal, so does a devotee of God feel hunger for the name of God. While he mentions about the importance of prayer, he emphasised on three things; 1) One must feel a real hunger for prayer. In his own words, “My soul is longing for God. I feel intense longing to lose myself in the Eternal. I desire to be like a lump of clay in the Potter’s hands.”\(^{32}\) 2) “Let Him fashion me
as He likes,” he says. 3) It should not be petitional; but it should be for the sake of communion with God.33

The essence of Gandhi’s ideas on religion was expressed thus: “After long study and experience, I have come to the conclusion that (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, in as much as all human beings should be as dear to me as one's own close relatives. My own veneration for other faiths is the same as that for my own faith.”34

With such views one would expect him to advocate a theocratic State. On the contrary, he wanted the State to be secular. “If officers of the Government as well as members of the public undertook the responsibility and worked wholeheartedly for the creation of a secular state, we could build a new India that would be the glory of the world.”35 Gandhi goes to the extent of saying, “If I were a dictator, religion and State would be separate.” He continues:“The State would look after secular welfare, health, communications, foreign relations, currency, and so on, but not your or my religion. That is everybody’s personal concern.” 36 The matters discussed above provide clarity of Gandhi’s understanding and the essence of his religion and the objectives of his religion. The objectives are; people should understand that every activity of a man of religion must be derived from their religion. His secularism is not opposed to religion. He made it very clear, how this understanding of religion also becomes the core of his secularism. Sincere efforts were made to remove all social evils practiced under the banner of religion and religious movements. He wanted to create a sense of receptiveness towards every sphere of life and show the world that if men lived truthfully and loved others then all the possible objectives would be achieved.
3.1.3 The purpose of religion

Religion is necessary for man’s moral and spiritual conditioning. Religion fulfilled certain purposes. Some special purposes of religion are briefly discussed here.

a) Religion provides mental peace: Man struggles for his survival. It is the religion which consoles and encourages him in all such time of crisis. Religion gives mental peace and emotional support to man’s survival amidst the uncertainties, insecurities and dangers in his life. Religion is an effective means to strengthen self-confidence. There are certain beliefs like ‘work is worship’, ‘duty is divine’, ‘result in predestined’ etc. which is found in various religions give strength to the individual and promotes self confidence.

b) Religion promotes social virtues: Religion promotes the major social virtues like truth, honesty, non-violence, service, love, discipline etc. A follower of the religions internalizes these virtues and becomes disciplined citizen of the society. Religion is simply the way people organize themselves. The real implication of equal distribution is that each man shall have the ability to supply all his natural wants and more. For example, if one man has a weak digestion and requires only a less quantity of food and another needs more, both should be in a position to satisfy their wants. To bring this ideal into being the entire social order has got to be reconstructed.

To the same extent as we progress towards our goal in our lives it is necessary to find contentment and happiness. The first step is to minimize one’s need keeping in mind the economic condition of India. Lack of contentment would definitely leads to dishonesty. All his earnings would be free of dishonesty. The second step is to practice all virtues mentioned above as much as possible in one’s own life, only then he will be in a position to preach this ideal among his associates and neighbours. The third step is to understand the root of this doctrine of equal distribution which lies in that of trusteeship of
the wealthy for superfluous wealth possessed by them. One should have the spiritual depth or spiritual maturity to understand the significance of its principle. The fourth step is to learn how equal distribution can be brought about through right means, non-violence. Any violent action to grab the wealth from the rich cannot benefit the society.

Society will lose the wealth by such actions because such wealthy people have the gift of how to accumulate wealth. Therefore, the non-violent way is evidently superior. The rich man who is in possession of wealth, will use what he reasonably requires for his personal needs and will act as a trustee for the remainder to be used for the society. In this argument Gandhi expects sincerity and honesty on the trustee. If such attempt fails or bears no fruit then Gandhi suggested the solutions which would bring success. The solutions such as non-violent, non-co-operation and civil disobedience are the right and infallible means. The rich cannot accumulate wealth without the co-operation of the poor in society. If people are properly educated on this issue and this knowledge were to penetrate to and spread amongst the poor, they would become strong and would learn how to free themselves by means of non-violence from the crushing inequalities which have brought them to the verge of starvation.\(^{37}\)

Gandhi affirmed that no man is born unequal. His assertion is,

My idea of society is that while we are born equal, meaning that we have a right to equal opportunity, all have not the same capacity. It is, in the nature of things, impossible. For instance, all cannot have the same height, or colour or degree of intelligence, etc.; therefore in the nature of things, some will have ability to earn more and others less. People with talents will have more, and they will utilize their talents for this purpose. If they utilize kindly, they will be performing the work of the State. Such people exist as trustees, on no other terms. I would allow a man of intellect to earn more, I would not
cramp his talent. But the bulk of his greater earnings must be used for the good of the State, just as the income of all earning sons of the father go to the common family fund. They would have their earnings only as trustees. It may be that I would fail miserably in this. But that is what I am sailing for.\textsuperscript{38}

c) Religion promotes social unity: One cannot deny the fact that there are many common factors which are considered to be the significant cementing factors which strengthen unity and solidarity of people in the world. Such factors are common believes, common sentiment, common worship, participation in common rituals, etc. Religion is viewed as one of the most important agents of socialization and social control. It has a significant role in organizing and directing social life. It helps in preserving social norms and strengthening social control. It socializes individual and exercises control over both individual and group in various ways. As an informal means, religion regulates the activities of people in its own way. Religious bodies like Temples, Mosques, Church, Gurudwaras etc. also control the behavior of the individuals at different level. Religious rites and festivals are more or less performed in every religion which gives relief to the people from mental exertion. Similarly religious lectures, \textit{bhajans, kirtans}, musical concerts followed by the utterance of hymns etc. gives much more pleasure to the people and provides eternal recreation.

d) Religion promotes welfare: Religion teaches people to serve the masses and promote their welfare. It has the message, ‘service to humanity is service to God’. For this reason, people spend money to feed the poor and the needy. Great religions like Hinduism, Islam and Christianity lay emphasis on taking care of the poor and the needy. Religions develop the philanthropic attitude to the people and thereby inject the idea of mutual help and cooperation. With the influence of religious belief different religious organizations engage themselves in various welfare activities. Love and exclusive possession can never go together. Theoretically when there is perfect
love, there must be perfect non-possession. The body is our last possession. So a man can only exercise perfect love and be completely dispossessed, if he is prepared to embrace death and renounce his body for the sake of human service. But that is true only in theory. In actual life, we can hardly exercise perfect love, for the body as a possession will always remain with us. Man will ever remain imperfect and it will always be his part to try to be perfect. So that perfection in love or non-possession will remain an unattainable ideal as long as we are alive, but towards which we must ceaselessly strive.³⁹

Every man has an equal right to the necessities of life. Every right carries with it a corresponding duty. The corresponding remedy for resisting any attack upon such right is merely a matter of finding out the corresponding duties and remedies to vindicate the elementary fundamental equality. It is necessary for one to have a clear idea to use the means of non-co-operation when one deprives him of the fruit of his labour. When one has the clear knowledge of moral standards of right and duties he will be an eye opener to the society. Gandhi stated, “And if I would recognize the fundamental equality, as I must, of the capitalist and the labourer, I must not aim at his destruction. I must strive for his conversion. My non-co-operation with him will open his eyes to the wrong he may be doing.”⁴⁰

e) Influence of Religions on Political system: Gandhi stated that one cannot separate politics and religion. Religion has played a significant role in political system in the ancient and medieval society. Even in modern times in many countries of the world religion either directly and indirectly influences political activities. During ancient and medieval period, the monarchs were treating themselves as the representatives of God or ruling the society in the name of God. Even today, Political leaders take oath in the name of God. The political system of the countries of the world like Bhutan, Pakistan, Italy, Germany, England and others are influenced by religion. For Gandhi writes,
For me, politics bereft of religion are absolute dirt, ever to be shunned. Politics concern nations and that which concerns the welfare of nations must be one of the concerns of a man who is religiously inclined, in other words, a seeker after God and Truth. For me God and Truth are convertible terms, and if anyone told me that God was a God of untruth or a God of torture, I would decline to worship Him. Therefore, in politics also we have to establish the Kingdom of Heaven.\textsuperscript{41}

In the present scenario many people of different faith are even afraid now to publicly admit of being identified with a particular religion. It is because of some interpreters of such religions who involve in certain activities which destruct their own community people and also other religious communities. Surprisingly, many have left ‘organized religion’ altogether and prefer to say that they are ‘spiritual’ instead. Here, it is important to state that though Gandhi was a profoundly religious man who was proud to identify himself as a Hindu, he was critical of some aspects of how Hinduism was practiced and interpreted. Gandhi didn’t mind this identification because he saw what the true purpose of religion is. He did not consider religion as only a path that leads to Truth but for him the purpose of religion is to work towards education and promotion of the well-being of humankind. Religion has served throughout history as the ultimate authority in giving meaning to life. Importantly, in reaching to the roots of motivation, religion has awakened in every man the capacities to love, to forgive, to create and to sacrifice himself for the common good. Still it continues to represent a unique power in humanity’s collective life.

3.1.4 The role of religions

Historical evidences prove that religions have played an important role in most civilizations. Therefore, it is worthwhile to consider it in some depth. It is because most people believe that religion has often been used as a tool of oppression. God and religion have been controversial topics for the last few
centuries. It is partly true that religion has been used to divide and oppress rather than to liberate and unite the peoples of the world. Further, the way in which religion practiced certain principles also affected the growth of religion. It is also evident that religion has been followed rather blindly. In order to find the truth in each religion it must be sought out independently by each individual. If this is done correctly, an unbiased study of religions certainly reveals to the seeker the many elements that the world faiths have in common. Gandhi upholds the Oneness of God and the essential oneness of religion. The essential basis of religion is a perception of order in the soul of man who strives for harmony or identifies with that order.

The soul which is said to be a spiritual element in human beings constantly strives to seek the presence of its Creator. This can be understood as the laws of sciences and life are inseparable from matter and living beings, as religion is a law that cannot be separated from man’s nature. Because, religion is said to be the reflection of man’s spiritual nature. It is religion which directs man towards God who is the Creator of the world.

Religion was with man from the beginning of his life. For such a long time that it covers the entire recorded history of human life and goes back into the depths of pre-historic times. Religion presents to man a correct explanation of his existence. It gives him a lasting vision that helps to root out his doubt, mental anxiety and fear of perishing, losing, and uselessness in this life. It is also asserted from a psychological point of view that religious feeling is one of the basic human instincts of the human soul. This is an inborn tendency found in man since his existence on earth. Such tendency explains the genuine driving force and the inner compulsion present in man’s constitution, pushing him towards worshipping a being greater than him. He has been practicing different forms of worship and piety. According to William James Durant who was a prolific American writer, historian, and philosopher, religion has always gone
hand in hand with human history. The idea of piety can never be removed from human heart.\(^\text{42}\)

It is obvious that, at a time, when the level of human thinking was insufficient, the sciences had not made any remarkable progress in man’s thinking process. This internal feeling was the prime factor for an incredible way mixed with superstition. Later, the gradual progress of sciences on the one hand and persistent efforts and teachings of the prophets on the other, his thinking was purified of adulterations and thus it regained its purity and originality. Gandhi asserted that life without religion is like a ship without rudder. The purpose of life of man is achieved only by religion. It is the path that takes human beings to their ultimate destination. In fact, logic demands that whatever is one’s goal in life, there should be a means for reaching that goal. Religion is the realization of a “Divine presence” within oneself while leading a normal life. If divinity, progress and truth are not realized in human existence then the very purpose of man’s life is defeated. True religion implies a search for the Truth and flexibility, in the individual approach to spiritual matters. Myths, forms and systems have fossilized religion and destroyed ‘The Truth’ and vitality in it.

Religion is the key to real happiness because it produces harmony by an integrated development of human personality and control of impulses, desires and thoughts. No religion restricts individual freedom and disallows the fulfillment of some desires as people think. In fact, the aim of religious teaching is not to put an end to logical freedom. In contrast, religion accepts the principle of obligation and responsibility and thus lays the foundation of its teachings on the freedom of human will.

Religion leads man towards a consciousness of moral responsibility in everything he does for himself or for others, whether great or small. Human existence comes to an end when morality is extinct. The common idea of most
people is that morality and religion are distinct things. Some regard religion as more than morality and some think that where there is morality, there is no need for religion. However, they may find close relationship with each other. It is therefore necessary to analyse how, intellectually and scientifically, religion and morality are united.

It is the contention of religious leaders that religion is a force for good and love in the world. Yet, at the same time, we see religion regularly used for war, mass murder, terrorism, and even genocide. Such things raise several questions within oneself as to know why does this difference exist - how can religion be claimed as a basis for peace while so many use it as a basis for terrorism? Can any religion teach violence which brings destruction, disharmony and spirit of separation? Religion is often known as a force for good and it is said to be a binding force. But in reality it is not so. It is because of the misconception of religion it has often been used as a force for separating people, creating confusion and for certain evil happenings around us. One of the ways in which religion can cause problems is by causing religious leaders to become intolerant: intolerant of other religions, intolerant of other races, etc. Some time people of different religions live together without ill feelings. But it is due to the false teachings, misinterpretations, misguidance and intolerance of the men who are recognized by some groups or claim themselves religious leaders become the cause for all kinds of violence and terrorism.

Terrorism and violence can be found in religions and cultures all around the world. Although there may be variation in the complaints being made, there are remarkable similarities in the attitudes and tactics employed by religious terrorists. This is due in part to the fact that violent behavior is independent of religion, but also to the ways in which religions are similar to each other.
In due course, the happenings around the world made people to think terrorism and religion have become closely linked. Such happening is curious because through the 1980s terrorism was as likely to be committed for irreligious, political causes as it was for religious causes. Part of the problem here is that the absolutism of religion makes religious terrorism more extreme, dramatic, and dangerous than most political terrorism.

It is distressing to note that some religions proclaim that they are peaceful and opposed to violence, but in reality, these same religions generally have traditions in which violence, war, and aggression are sanctified. To be “sanctified” means “to be made holy”. Thus violence becomes a form of religious devotion like prayer or reading sacred Scripture.

Morality, in the beginning, was simply the customary conduct of a community. It was a settled way of acting of men living together. It is by a natural process the good customs tended to survive and the bad ones to die out. If the bad ones did not die out, obviously, they would weaken the community and lead to its extinction. Even today one could see this process at work. Either morality or religion should help people to observe good practices. However, the above points make things clear that most of what passes for morality in the world today consists of good customs. Gandhi made a clear statement that, ‘If the seed of morality is not watered by religion, it cannot sprout. Without water it withers and ultimately perishes. Thus, it is obvious that true or ideal morality ought to include true religion. In other words, morality cannot be observed without religion. So to say, ‘morality should be observed as a religion’.\textsuperscript{43} Gandhi considers morality as the essence of religion.

To Gandhi, “Perfection is the exclusive attribute of God, and it is indescribable, untranslatable. I do believe that it is possible for human beings to become perfect. It is necessary for all of us to aspire after that perfection but when that blessed state is attained, it becomes indescribable, indefinable.”\textsuperscript{44}
3.1.5 Gandhi and other religions

For Gandhi, words are nothing if they are not demonstrated by action. He actively sought out people of other faiths. After his initial encounter with Christians in England, he read the Bible; after meeting and working with Muslims in South Africa, he read the Quran. His spiritual maturity helped him to learn about the teachings of other religions and welcome dialogue, as long as it was pursued in the spirit of a sincere, friendly and respectful interchange of ideas and knowledge. There are several principles that governed Gandhi’s interaction with those of other religions.

Gandhi firmly believed that all religions lead to the same goal, ‘Truth or God’. According to him ways may be many but the Truth is one. Religion should unite and bind people together. It cannot be denied that the rituals, the symbols, the places of worship are aids so long as they help to nourish and fertilize the inner spiritual life of their followers. In true spirit all religions call for peace and brotherhood in any society. The great religions of the world should strive, according to Gandhi, in promoting a life of self control, sacrifice, harmony, peace and understanding to create a heaven on earth.

Gandhi read the Bible, the Quran, and memorized the Bhagavad Gita. He felt that true religion vitalizes and elevates the inner life of every human being. According to him the progress of any religion depends on how effectively one has been able to realize the inner spirituality and convictions in his everyday life. To live a spiritual life means, one has to be connected with the Inner Being. People call it different things, like Higher Self, God Self, and Spirit. It does not matter what we may call it, but all have to know that they have it. If one is connected with the Source Energy, he is at peace with himself and the world around him. Gandhian thought owes much to the Scriptures of Hinduism, Islam, Christianity and Jainism, and the Buddha’s legendary life which is like a Scripture. He pondered deeply over them and understood their
distinctive contributions as well as the points at which they all converged. Gandhi was not much attracted by the idea of a “Universal Scripture”, Just as he was not persuaded that the major faiths of mankind should merge into single universal faith. The Bhagavad Gita influenced Gandhi as no other book did. He described the Gita as his ‘spiritual dictionary’ and looked upon it as a profound allegory. Gandhi’s main source of spiritual inspiration came from the Bhagavad Gita that taught him the primacy of egoless action in the service of God.

Gandhi studied the life of Mahavira and the ethical writings of Jainas. He even grappled with few philosophical texts like Haribhadra Suri’s Asddarshana-samuchchaya (Collection of six systems of Philosophy). It is through Jainism, Gandhi learnt the philosophy of non-violence. More than refraining from violence, for Gandhi, it is a deep reverence for all life and it begins when one starts cultivating a genuine respect for oneself. That is, when one starts cultivating a genuine respect for one's consciousness or life force, and for each of its supportive elements, the body, mind and emotions.

Gandhi was also influenced by Buddhism for various reasons. Gandhi did not give importance to historical, ritualistic and institutionalized approaches of any religion. He found that Buddhism gives less ritualistic and deity-dependent than Hinduism. It arose as a reform movement out of Hinduism. Gandhi said Buddhism in a more positive light as the religion that integrated Hindu beliefs, excluding the negative aspects of Hinduism. The attractiveness of a philosophy and religion of peace and general freedom, including a rejection of the social stigmas of caste for “untouchables” he found in the teachings of Buddha.

Gandhi ’s interest to read New Testament and his immense pleasure in its lofty principles proved that he had a profound respect for the teachings of Jesus Christ. He was concerned with the individuals’ inner purity and perfection. His aim was to moralize the society, purity and political atmosphere
and spiritualize the laws of the State. He intended to practice the Christian principle of ‘Resist not Evil’. His deep religious feelings became more prominent. His daily prayer was for inner light and guidance. He was also attracted by the teachings of Islam with regard to unity and brother-hood. At his prayer meetings verses from the Quran were invariably recited along with selections from the *Gita*.

### 3.1.6 Gandhi and his religious understanding

Gandhi’s life and work can be understood only by his spiritual ideas and ideals in the light of which he conducted his struggles against group injustice and tyranny and carried out his reform programmes. His ideas grew and developed as he had to face practical situations and find solutions to problems. The establishment of British rule in India led him to a review of existing ideas, ideals and institutions. So the first impact of this contact was naturally in the religious field because most of the ideas, ideals and institutions in India were, more or less, connected with religion. It is said that the result of this was the rise of new reformist sects like the *Brahmo Samaj* and the *Prarthana Samaj*. There was not only the growth of these reformist sects, but, there were also movements within the orthodox Hindu fold to interpret and restate the basic doctrines of Hinduism. The *Arya Samaj* and the interpretation of Hinduism by Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, Vivekananda, Ramatirtha and the Theosophical movement under the leadership of Annie Besant were established.

Gandhi was born a Hindu Vaishnavite but his interpretation of Hinduism was his own. Though his religious beliefs were firmly rooted in ancient Hinduism, he welcomed contact with other religions, especially the Christian doctrines. As he declared, “Let me explain what I mean by religion. It is not the Hindu religion which I certainly prize above all other religions, but the religion which transcends Hinduism, which changes one’s very nature, which binds one indissolubly to the truth within and whichever purifies…”45 It is apparent that
he did not do any injustice to Hinduism or depart from its essential teachings. His belief was that Hinduism could assimilate and synthesize whatever is good in other religion and to look beyond Hinduism. He preferred to retain the label of his forefathers so long as it did not restrict his growth and did not debar him from assimilating all that is good. At the same time he did not subscribe to the viewer that every word and every verse in the Hindu scripture is divinely inspired. This view is expressed in his words:

*My belief in the Hindu scriptures does not require me to accept every word and every verse as divinely inspired. ... I decline to be bound by any interpretation, however learned it may be, if it is repugnant to reason or moral sense.*

He further stated “I reject any religious doctrine that does not appeal to reason and is in conflict with morality.”

Gandhi believed in a respectful study of other’s religions. He considered that to be a sacred duty and it did not reduce reverence for one’s own. According to Gandhi every religion is said to be a path towards the Supreme Truth and he was looking out for those universal principles which transcended religion as a dogma. Further, he expected religion to take account of practical life and it should appeal to reason and not in conflict with morality. He strongly believed that it was his right and duty to point out the defects of his own religion, but to desist from doing so with other’s faith. He refused to abuse a man for his fanatical deeds for he tried to see them from the other person’s point of view. Moreover, when the Supreme Truth is expressed through men who are imperfect, despite of their greatness, they are bound to be imperfect while they are in the mortal body. Therefore, it should be understood that as all the religions are the expressions of men’s spiritual thought and therefore open to evolution and reinterpretation. As Gandhi states,

*No religion, in principle, deserves more respect than another; in other words, every religion must be equally respected. Such an understanding, says Gandhi will, “give one a grasp of the rock-bottom...*
Gandhi studied the scriptures of all major religions for his spiritual development. One will get a good understanding of idea of religion while reading his writings on religion and spirituality. He was influenced by the teachings of Jesus Christ and he fell in love with the New Testament and especially with the Sermon on the Mount. His thoughts and words prove that he was cherished by the reading of the scripture. He considered spirituality as the basis of social change and he used them effectively. While he incorporated Christian notions of love, forgiveness and uncomplaining suffering into his philosophy, he also repudiated the idea that salvation could come only through Christ. He clearly pointed to the fact that the term religion was synonymous with spirituality.

Gandhi’s attitude to Christianity is difficult to define because of his intolerance towards some Christian missionaries who treated Hinduism with contempt that kept himself away from Christianity. During his stay in England, Gandhi saw the positive side of Christianity and studied the Bible carefully. ‘Jesus Christ played a great part in my life,’ he said many years later. What Gandhi accepted about Christian religion in his personal life is clearly spelt out in these words:

Unconsciously how much, I do not know; consciously how much do, I do know. When I began to read the Sermon on the Mount, I felt the beauty of it. I cannot say that it is singular, or that it is not to be found in other religions. But the presentation is unique....So many of my words are chosen from the bible. I am unable to speak without reference to it.\(^49\)

As it has been mentioned earlier Gandhi was brought up in a religious atmosphere, though he belonged to a Vaishnavite Hindu family, he was influenced to some extent by Jainism. Anekāntavāda, the principle of relative
pluralism, is one of the basic principles of Jainism. In his view, the truth or the reality is perceived differently from different points of view, and no single point of view is the complete truth.\(^50\)

Jain doctrine states that an object has infinite modes of existence and qualities and they cannot be completely perceived in all its aspects and manifestations, due to inherent limitations of the humans. Only the Kevalins - the omniscient beings - can comprehend the object in all its aspects and manifestations, and all others are capable of knowing only a part of it.\(^51\) Consequently, no one view can claim to represent the absolute truth. Jains compare all attempts to proclaim absolute truth with andhgajnyaya or the “maxim of the blind men and elephant,” wherein all the blind men claimed to explain the true appearance of the elephant, but could only partly succeed due to their narrow perspective.\(^52\)

Psychologist, Kenneth Pargament, has described four possible stances toward client religious and spiritual beliefs, which he called rejectionist, exclusivist, constructivist, and pluralist. Unlike the constructivist stance, the pluralist stance recognizes the existence of a religious or spiritual absolute reality but allows for multiple interpretations and paths toward it. In contrast to the exclusivist who maintains that there is a single path “up the mountain of God,” the pluralist recognizes many paths as valid. Although both the exclusivist and the pluralist may agree on the existence of religious or spiritual reality, the pluralist recognizes that this reality is expressed in different cultures and by different people in different ways. Because humans are mortal and limited, a single human religious system cannot encompass all of the religious or spiritual absolute reality.\(^53\)

Religion, for Gandhi, is so absolute that he would go to the extent of saying that he “could not live for a single second without religion.”\(^54\) It is an indissoluble whole which cannot be separated from other spheres of life. On
the contrary, one’s religion commands one’s absolute allegiance in every sphere of one’s activity. “I do not conceive religion as one of the many activities of mankind...For me every, [even] the tiniest, activity is governed by what I consider to be my religion.”

Gandhi asserted that religion should pervade every one of our actions. He proclaimed that his politics is an extension of his religion. Further he states,

Many of my political friends despair of me because they say even my politics are derived from religion. And they are right. My politics and all other activities of mine are derived from my religion. I go further and say that every activity of a man of religion must be derived from his religion, because religion means being bound to God, that is to say God rules your every breath.

Finally Gandhi crystallized his views on religion by saying, “all religions are more or less true. All proceed from the same God, but all are imperfect because they have come down to us through imperfect human instrumentality.” He subscribe to the view, “In reality there are as many religions as there are individuals.” “I do not share the belief that there can or will be on earth one religion.” “So long as there are different religions, everyone of them may need some outward distinctive symbol. But when the symbol is made into a fetish and an instrument of proving the superiority of one's religion over other, it is fit only to be discarded.” Also about proselytization he said, “(they) may change the lives of as many as they like but not their religion. They can draw their attention to the best in their respective religions and change their lives by asking them to live according to them.”

Countries which were once ruined by traditional thinking have been changed due to easy access of communication and technology. Scientific knowledge has been playing crucial role to change human thinking. Secularism works both ways; firstly, it does not permit religion to interfere in affairs of the
State and secondly, it also forbids the State from seeking to control religion. So it is clear that adopting secularism is the best way to ensure that those with faith can pursue their beliefs freely—so long as these beliefs do not interfere with human rights.

3.1.7 Right approach towards religions

People have great expectations and predictions of the religion that they belong to. Contrary to the expectations and predictions of many, religion has been misunderstood, misinterpreted and misused in the 21st century. This resulted in manifesting itself as a rise in religious nationalism and also as a threatening rise in religious fundamentalism resulting in terrorism and the war on terrorism. It gave rise to the formulation of the theory of the clash of religiously defined civilizations. Such things acquired a new significance in the current international scenario because it can prove fatal to human existence. So it is time to rethink of a proper model for inter-religious relations. Gandhi had developed a model for such an encounter in his attempt to create a healthy way for the major religions of the world to encounter and relate to one another. Gandhi called for this *SarvadharmaSamabhava* emphasizing on the equality of religions and equal respect for religions.

3.2 RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

The term pluralism has the basis in the principles of acceptance and diversity. It is promoted as a system for the common good of all. It is a coming together with common recognition and credence to all beliefs and developments of modern social, scientific, and economic societies. As pluralism functions as a system and be successful in achieving the common good, all groups have to agree to a minimal consensus regarding both shared values, which tie the different groups to society and shared rules. It may be considered that things seem to be impossible when there will always be certain truths that are non-compromising. Religious pluralism is considered to a set of
worldviews that stand on the premise that one religion is not the sole exclusive source of values, truths, and supreme deity. Therefore, it must be recognized that at least “some” truth must exist in other belief systems.

We are living in a period of increasing religious plurality and an increased and accelerated process of globalization and pluralisation of the world communities. It is becoming more common for individuals in the world to have neighbours and acquaintances with other religious faiths such as Christians, Muslims, Hindus or Buddhists and other sects. Such developments will only serve to further heighten the various and annoying problems connected with religious pluralism. Diversities of religions are nothing new in the history of mankind especially in the history of India. They are also found everywhere in the world. Many of the world’s major religious traditions including Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism have co-existed side by side in harmony with indigenous folk religions in China, Korea and Japan. The religious traditions have been so interrelated and integrated in these countries that they are often treated as a unified system.

In Sri Lanka and Pakistan, the neighbouring countries of India, Hinduism, Buddhism as well as Jain, Sikh, and Islamic traditions have co-existed for many years. Hinduism is, in particular, considered to be the most multi coloured phenomenon in the world of religions. In fact, Hinduism which may legitimately be viewed as a collection of religious traditions, has gone through remarkable changes and willing to accept members of the other faiths, especially of Indian origin, namely, Buddhists, Jainas, and Sikhs.

It is believed that religious pluralism should not bring about competition but co-operation. Religious pluralism deals not only with differences between different religions but also denominational conflicts within the same religion. It is argued that societal and theological change is necessary to overcome these religious differences. No doubt, if certain rights given to one religion or
denomination but the same rights are denied to others that can weaken the spirit of religious pluralism.

Religious pluralism may be classified into 1) *inter*-religious pluralism and 2) *intra*-religious pluralism. *Inter*-religious pluralism refers to the views held within one major faith tradition about the validity or truth of other major faith traditions (e.g., Judaism, Buddhism, Islam, etc.) *Intra*-religious pluralism refers to views held by specific schools or denominations *within* a major faith tradition about the validity or truth of other schools or denominations within the same major faith tradition (e.g., Protestant Christianity or Roman Catholic Christianity).

Religious pluralism is not accepted by all because it is considered to be an invalid or self-contradictory concept. Moreover, it is said, most forms of religious pluralism claim that all religions are equally true. Also, it holds that one religion can be true for some and another for others. But most Christians disagree with this idea. For they believe that it is logically impossible from the principle of contradiction. Here, it is important to point out Gandhi’s notion on religious pluralism.

3.2.1 Gandhi and religious pluralism

Religious Pluralism, according to Gandhi, does not include the historical or institutionalized religion because he considered them as manmade religions. John Macquarie wrote, “I do not deny for a moment that the truth of God has reached others through other channels - indeed, I hope and pray that it has. So while I have a special attachment to one mediator, I have respect for them all.” The Hindu religion is naturally pluralistic. A well-known *Rig Vedic* hymn makes this point clear. “Truth is One, though the sages know it variously.” (Ékam sat vipra bahudā vadanti)
Similarly, in the Bhagavad Gītā (4:11), God, manifesting as an incarnation, states that “As people approach me, so I receive them. All paths lead to me” (ye yathā mā prapadyante tās tathāiva bhajāmyaham mama vartmānuvartante manuyā pārtha sarvaṣa). The Hindu religion has no theological difficulties in accepting degrees of truth in other religions. Hinduism emphasizes that everyone actually worships the same God, whether they know it or not.

As Gandhi was engaged in the study of the main religions of the world such as Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Sikhism, Buddhism, Jainism etc, he had their scriptures on his table. When a Muslim friend saw that, he told him in distress that to keep the Koran among other books was showing disrespect to it. He told Gandhi to put it in a bag and hang it on the wall. In order to respect the sentiments of his Muslim friends, Gandhi did it sincerely. From Gandhi’s point of view the greatest hindrances to religious independence were untouchability and communal disharmony. Therefore, he availed himself of every opportunity to come into intimate contact with the Muslims. He stated that “I had realised early in South Africa that there was no genuine friendship between the Hindus and the Muslims. I never missed a single opportunity to remove the obstacles in the way of unity. My South African experiences had convinced me that it would be on the question of Hindu-Muslim unity that my ahimsa would be put to its severest test.” He also stated that, “I was seeking the friendship of good Musalmans and was eager to understand the Musalman mind through contact with their purest and most patriotic representatives.”

For Gandhi the problem of Hindu-Muslim unity was no less important than that of the removal of untouchability. He knew it for certain that if this problem was not satisfactorily solved, rivers of blood would flow in India. He held that Hindu-Muslim unity was vital to freedom struggle movement. His objective was “to see the Universal Spirit of Truth face to face.” This is possible only when, “One must be able to love the meanest creation as of
This love should be practiced, without distinction of race, nationality, caste, creed or sex, was the basis of Gandhi’s universal toleration. This toleration is also inculcated by the Hindu scriptures. In the Gita Lord Krishna says: “As men approach me, so do I accept them in my love; men follow in every way my path.”

The above mentioned views of Gandhi may lead to find answers to the intriguing question as to how does Gandhi reconcile such a separation between religion and State with the all embracing character of religion? How could there be such a separation if all of one’s activities are guided by one’s religion? Is there a contradiction? The answer lies in Gandhi’s understanding of secularism and religion.

3.2.2 Gandhi’s conception of religious pluralism and its role

The term religious pluralism is used in two senses. Firstly, it signifies a state of religious diversity within a society, situation in which various religions exist and develop side by side. Secondly, it refers to a particular kind of attitude of a believer of one religion towards other religions. In this sense it signifies the view that recognizes, while holding one’s own religion as true and valid, other great religions also true and valid paths to the Supreme. Hence, there are effective ways for salvation. Thus it differs from exclusivism, which maintains that only one’s own religion is true and all other religions are false. In this perspective there is no room for mutual enrichment between religions. It also differs from inclusivism, which recognizes elements of truth in other religions. But they are partial and imperfect. The truth in other religions are included and fulfilled in one’s own religion.

Gandhi’s constant theme was, “the various religions should tolerate each other’s differences because they were all “rivers to that meet in the same ocean,” or in other words, “if we look to the aim, there is no difference among religions.” Religious pluralism helps one to understand how different
religious traditions influence people of different religions, different religious traditions within one’s own religion. It is through religious pluralism one understands religious resources as the common property of humanity. This also offers a relational convergence of religions. The important role of religious pluralism is to remove the bitterness of religions which is a sign of lack of non-violent atmosphere. In the study of multiplicity, diversity, nonviolence, tolerance, and respect for many authentic perspectives, glimpses of, and paths to Truth, religious pluralism plays a vital role.

3.3 SECULARISM

Secularism as it developed in the West is not primarily equality before the law; such equality can be considered merely as a by-product of secularism. Secularism in France is primarily an affirmation of the autonomy of the moral and the political from the religious. Similarly, the Western view is based on a distinction between faith and reason. It is obvious that Religion is the realm of faith and the secular is the realm of science and reason. Thus, secularism is defined in the Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary as ‘indifference to or rejection or exclusion of religion and religious considerations’.

Gandhi’s secular theories took on a special significance in the particular context of the Indian National Movement. No doubt, Indian society has been traditionally beset by the evils of caste and creed based on discrimination. It is obvious that the caste oriented stratification of the Indian society has hindered all chances of national unification from the early days of Indian society. The situation was complicated by the presence of various religious groups within the country, who were not ready to compromise any ground to reach a platform of commonality.

Gandhi realized it with great pain that India’s age old tradition of religious tolerance was not being maintained when it was more needed. In particular, he realized that it would be impossible to organize any nationwide
movement against the common opposition of the British oppressors, if society continues to remain divided on religious grounds. He felt that there is an absolute necessity to bring about constructive and all-encompassing political movement.

Gandhi preached his ideals of secularism and religious tolerance throughout the nation. Gandhi wrote extensively on the need of secularism in India, and made speeches on the same all over the country. The British were bent upon implementing the policy of divide and rule, and it took its worst form after the declaration of separate elections for the different communities in the declaration of the Government of India Act in 1935. Gandhi was hurt, but he maintained calm and tolerant. While reading relevant literature, it is understood that even at the intense riots on the eve of Indian independence, Gandhi was on the roads trying to unite the warring communal groups. No doubt, his death can in many ways be related to his life-long commitment to secular principles.

Secularism, in India, helps to promote harmony in the midst of several religious faiths and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people transcending religious, linguistic and regional or sectional diversities. Secularism, although integrating this aspect, goes a step further by giving tolerance a frame of legal rights which can be called upon before the law. Tolerance, as pointed out by Rajeev Bhargava, “despite preaching non-interference into one’s beliefs, does not actively prevent inequalities nor “the adamant refusal to respect someone else’s religion.” 74 Gandhi’s claim is that secularism, in contrast, involves neither indifference nor rejection of religion, nor the autonomy of reason or morality. No doubt Gandhi agrees that religion is in the realm of faith at the same time he stated that it is not a faith that is opposed to reason rather it is a faith that is supra-rational. Here, it is important to mention that he talks about faith not to give autonomy to reason, but for showing the limits of reason.
As Gandhi was aware of the limits of reason, he did not seek to base morality on it. Morality, rather than being an autonomous realm, is based on religion and considered it to be the very core of religion. He even goes to the extent of identifying religion and morality as one and not two.

Many people are not clear about the exact meaning of secularism. It is believed to be an anti-religious movement, anti-cultural movement, anti-ethical movement. Some others believe in secularism as freedom of conscience, establishment of democracy, abolition of improper custom, tradition, cultures and so on. Many countries in the world have pointed out the merits and the demerits of practicing secularism. Due to such experiences of many countries people are confused about the meaning of the concept of secularism.

The countries which have declared secularism are still practicing non-secular activities. A secular country should give equal rights to all religions. If any State gives more power to one particular religion and less power to others, it will increase inequality between rich and poor. Reducing such inequality is possible only when there is clear understanding of one’s own religion. So, secularism should be accepted optimistically.

The separation of the State and Churches is considered as the most efficient means to guarantee religious freedom and equality among citizens. They agreed not to accept the recognition of a specific legal regime for each community as they believed that this would enhance their political distinctiveness based on religious criteria. On the contrary, they supported the State guaranteeing the same set of fundamental rights for everyone. They believed that Indian nationality should not rest on any particular religion. It is in this regard Gandhi declared that the State should undoubtedly be secular. Following this, the All-India Congress Committee passed a resolution in which freedom of thought and the freedom to profess one's religion were recognized. Every religious denomination is thus entitled to the right to manage its own
affairs in matters of religion even though the State may intervene into religious affairs when its intervention is motivated by the common interest. Article 295 of Indian Criminal Code protects all places of worship. A country is defined as secular if it does not have a national religion. A secular country does not favour any religious belief over another, even atheism, in its laws. Secularism is not a “modern” movement but is a necessary ideal for any multicultural society.

Some hold the view that Secularism neither do better for someone nor harm anyone. It treats everyone as equal. State should maintain equal relation with all religions and should not give protection to any one religion. Secularism is indispensable part of a democratic country. Freedom of expression is a beauty of secularist country. It is believed that secularism controls superstition and fundamentalism but at the same time there is no guarantee of controlling superstition and fundamentalism.

It can be seen that in some secular countries, fundamentalism exists. In Turkey, there is extreme secularism. Such fundamentalism gives room for many superstitions. Education is only means to eradicate superstition. Even though India is declared as a secular country, there are certain difficulties that are noticed in maintaining this principle. Secularism is a new concept in the Eastern societies, started to practice after the victory of Gandhi in India over British ruler.

Secularism is indispensable part of our society but people are considering it negatively due to lack of awareness. It is re-emphasized by Gandhi that religion does not terrorize people. But in the name of religion, some radical religious leaders and politicians create terror in the minds of the people. In fact, doing politics in the name of religion in some countries stands as a major threat to the well being of people.
Religion never promotes terrorism but terrorism is organized by people for various reasons. Several religious people who are ignorant of their religious teachings do not concern about the right of the other religious people. Every religious group should be concerned about the rights of others. Gandhi compared secularism with tolerance. He said that there is no relation on declaring secularism with the percentage of people from particular religion. It is the necessity of a democratic country.

Gandhi’s notion of secularism needs to be viewed in the context of religious pluralism. ‘Religion’ in this context is a socio-cultural entity. It implies a community with its distinct set of doctrines, code of conduct, and manner of worship. As far as religions are concerned in India it is invariably pluralistic: there are Hindus, Muslims, Christians and other faiths. While he explains about secularism in this context, he mentions that his deep concern is with the relationship between members of different religions and the political status of minorities in Independent India. For him secularism meant: “All subjects would thus be equal in the eyes of the law. But every single individual would be free to pursue his own religion without let or hindrance so long as it did not transgress the common law. . . . What (Gandhi) wished India to do, was to assure liberty of religious profession to every single individual.”

Secularism, for Gandhi, is a matter of equality before the law. The adherents of all religions are free to pursue their own religion. He clearly stated that it would never pose any hindrance to their political life. Gandhi and his ideologies were quite successful among the common masses. He made a valuable contribution, firstly, to frame the secular agenda within the parameters of the Indian cultural tradition and equal respect for all religions. Secondly, he gave an indigenous content to the concept of nationhood, arguing that it was the common heritage of a highly pluralistic, multicultural civilisation, which would hold the Indian people together. This concept is in contrast with the
Western concept of ‘nations’ being one race, one religion and one language. He always believed in the idea of ‘unity’ in diversity.

Throughout his life Gandhi battled against the cult of violence and war. He sacrificed his entire life to work against cruelty of man to man, against industrialism and domination of man by machine and inequality and discrimination. He fought tirelessly to give equal rights to each and every person of the society irrespective of caste, class and religion. He tried to attain moksha (liberation) by rendering service to mankind. Gandhi portrays as ‘a multi-faceted moral and spiritual messiah’. His tireless endeavour to make people understand the basic happiness of life lies in contentment. His understanding of secularism is quite different from the Western understanding.

In a democratic country, secularism helps to protect cognitive right, increase equality as per race, gender, caste and reduce discrimination. Moreover, eradication of dictatorship and increase of respect to all is possible only in a secular State. Secularism opposes any discrimination based on ethnicity, caste, language. It is necessary to find out the variations and functions of secularism. The concept of secularism is unclear to many people. People have fear of ethnic violence due to the declaration of secularism. Secularism does not create social disputes rather it increases social solidarity by eradicating fundamental beliefs and superstitions. Secularism does not dominate conscience but it promotes conscience providing equal rights to all religions. A secular society favours no religious discrimination against any religion.

3.4 SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

Religion and spirituality are not the same. A religion is a formalised set of beliefs. It lays down what its followers accept as true and how they should behave, insisting on compliance and reproaching those who transgress. Gandhi opines that any religion which controls, divides and excludes cannot be truly
spiritual. A practicing religionist would realize that the godhead is not the possession of any one religion, for He is the object of spiritual realisation in all religions. God is identically the same everywhere. In Gandhi’s view the Allah of Islam is the same as the God of the Christians and the Isvara of the Hindus. Even as there are numerous names of God in Hinduism, there are many names of God in Islam. The names do not indicate individuality but attributes, and the Divine is beyond all attributes, indescribable, immeasurable. All this clearly shows the realisation of the Oneness of God in all religions. Gandhi knew that moksa (liberation) is God-realisation, and self-realisation is immeasurably greater than political freedom.

Purity in personal life is the spiritual capacity to hear the ‘Indwelling’ Godhead’s Voice. Without preliminary training no one can be on the path of Spirituality. Mere ethics would not be enough. One should be confident that the inner voice spontaneously arises in man when moral expertness develops, and the discernment arises as a flame of truth, and in due course it would be recognised as the voice of God within.

One can understand from this how Gandhi tells us that there was on these occasions a clear indication of the course of action to be adopted, dictated to him by the inner voice of the Supreme Counsellor. There was no necessity for him to listen to any advice given by man. He was prepared to act implicitly according to the dictates of the inner voice. Gandhi heard the inner voice and words emerged from it. Gandhi wanted to meet this challenge by being prepared to sacrifice his life. He stated that, on one occasion before he entered fasting the inner voice had prompted him to undertake the fast in the interest of India and humanity. The inner voice about which Gandhi has spoken many times is also identified by him with God.
Gandhi tells that on certain occasions a clear indication of the course of action to be adopted was dictated to him by the inner voice of the Supreme Counselor. There was no necessity for him to listen to any advice given by man. He was prepared to act implicitly according to the dictates of the inner voice. Speaking about the Inner voice, Gandhi writes,

I saw no form. I have never tried for it. I have always believed God to be without form. But what I did hear was like a Voice from afar and yet quite near. It was as unmistakable as some human voice, definitely speaking to me, and irresistible. I was not dreaming at the time I heard the voice.\(^76\)

Gandhi’s actual words on this subject of inner voice may be recorded for further clarity:

The first question that has puzzled many is about the Voice of God. What was it? What did I hear? Was there any person I saw? If not, how was the Voice conveyed to me? These are pertinent questions. I saw no form. I have never tried for it. I have always believed God to be without form. But what I did hear was like a Voice from afar and yet quite near. It was as unmistakable as some human voice, definitely speaking to me, and irresistible. I was not dreaming at the time I heard the voice. The hearing of the voice was preceded by a terrific struggle within me. Suddenly the Voice came upon me. I listened, made certain that it was the Voice and struggle ceased. I was calm… Joy came over me. This was between 11 and 12 midnight.\(^77\)

Gandhi tells us how this spiritual experience came upon him. He writes, “It relates to my 21 days’ fast for the removal of untouchability. I had gone to sleep…… At about 12 O’clock in the night something wakes me up suddenly and some voice— whispers, ‘Thou must go on a fast’.” “ ‘How many days’ I ask. The voice again says ‘Twenty-one days’. ‘When does it begin’ I ask. It says, ‘You begin tomorrow.’”\(^78\) These are definite words of communication and contain definite instructions as to the time, the manner and the period of the
intended fast unto death from which the Inner voice alone could save Gandhi if it pleased. It noteworthy to see what Gandhi has to say about this experience of himself from the psycho-philosophical point of view. He denies that it could be a piece of his own imagination. He really believed that it came to him as the Voice of God.

Gandhi expresses his strong opinion that one who hears to the Inner voice would realise its reality and no further evidence is required. He says,

> Could I give any further evidence that it was truly the Voice that I heard and that it was not an echo of my own heated imagination? I have no further evidence to convince the skeptic. He is free to say it was all self-delusion or hallucination. It may well have been so. I can offer no proof to the contrary. But I can say this, that not the unanimous verdict of the whole world against me could shake me from the belief that what I heard was the true voice of God…. For me the Voice was more real than my existence.  

Gandhi held that radical purity of heart bears enormous positive ramifications for the entire world. This message was one of the most shocking and consistent core beliefs that are discovered when we read through his *Collected Works*. He firmly believed that the more we purify our inner lives, the more our lives will serve God’s work to end war, poverty and injustice. He taught that personal integrity was necessary for an authentic spirituality, for non-violence. To this end, he suggested regular fasting throughout one’s life, and became an advocate and proponent of fasting as a way to repent of one’s personal sins and the sins of those we love. He would tell all politicians, activists and religious leaders to get their own hearts in order, to let God disarm their hearts, if they wanted to be of any help to others.

Gandhi had awakened mankind and the religions to the sense of moral excellence which alone he says would make for the full experience of God and attainment of liberation. Morality should be practiced in the context of our
political society as well as in the context of religious institutions, so that purity is established. Untruth is something already destroyed and man has to be but a *nimitta* (temporal), an instrument. In Gandhi’s view, a moral agent has to be an instrument of Truth or God, and he has to treat it as his sacred duty. This nature of man grants him the capacity to be fearless about any results. The moral agent realising himself to be a *nimitta* of God becomes a religious aspirant seeking liberating service which is not only useful to him but also to the whole of God’s creation.

Gandhi says, “I recognize no God except the God that is to be found in the hearts of the dumb millions. They do not recognize His presence: I do. And I worship the God that is Truth or Truth which is God, through the service of these millions.” 80C.F. Andrews rightly observes, “Mahatma Gandhi is essentially a man of religion. He can never think of any complete release from evil apart from God’s grace. Prayer therefore is the essence of all work;” but as Gandhi stated his prayer was not of the Christian pattern. “I do not pray as Christians do, not because I think there is nothing wrong in it, but because words won’t come to me. I suppose it is a matter of habit.... God knows and anticipates our wants. The deity does not need any supplication... I cannot recall a moment in my life when I had a sense of desertion by God.”

Gandhi’s message of finding our power inside us gives insight into the way our spirit works. When we take action to find the power inside of us we begin to find all of our inner talents and when we develop the talents and use them for the power of good then things begin to happen. We begin to have an awakening and thus by being conscious and awake we are able to move in a positive direction to change ourselves and to change others.

Gandhi’s message can help us to find the humanistic side in all of us and to create a world where we co-exist and learn that regardless of our own beliefs we are all interconnected and thus have a responsibility to enhance each others
personal and professional lives. It is when we are open to receive and are willing to recognize that we are all created by the Divine that we make the world a better place for living. People who for the first time enter a spiritual recovery program or spiritual group of any kind can all be said to be somewhat ‘asleep’ in terms of their awareness about what is real or what is most valuable in their lives. The full significance of a spiritual awakening, however, is often much more extreme than most of us realize. A spiritual awakening is something that is actually much more profound and comprehensive than most people realize.

As spirituality is said to be a vague area of knowledge, there can be confusion about the idea of spiritual awakening. It is believed that any person can have spiritual awakening and can arrive at some kind of final condition wherein their spiritual journey is said to be complete. The idea of coming to an end should be understood with great clarity since it creates confusion in the minds of individuals. Great sages like Ramana Maharshi and Aurobindo Ghose have discussed these confusions in detail. They suggested that the condition may be extremely rare even though it is often reported by many individuals.

Gandhi held that the spiritual life, as well as all political and social work, requires a fearless pursuit of truth. Indeed, he consistently said that he worshiped God not just as the God of non-violence, but as the God of truth. As a devout religious person he came to the startling conclusion that Truth is God. In this journey, he demonstrated what Jesus Christ said, “The truth shall set you free.” Often Gandhi spoke this truth publicly, fearlessly, openly, and in total disregard of the consequences. He told the truth about poverty, war, racism, imperialism and nuclear weapons, when many people fail to speak about it. Gandhi’s spirituality was based in truth and spoken openly with love. Rarely popular people spoken about spirituality as boldly as Gandhi did. He firmly believed that if one holds to the truth, he would be clinging to God, and that the
truth once proclaimed would do its own work and lead to new freedom and peace.

The quest for a spiritual awakening can make a person into one of the most influential personality in history. Spiritual Awakening raises consciousness to a higher level so that reality is seen more clearly. As a result, spiritually awakened people are able to awaken each morning and live each day with greater hope and joy. Another result of spiritual development is that it gives a calmness and presence of mind. Life of human beings is in a constant flux, bringing many difficulties. When faced with a calm and clear mind, problems can be successfully resolved. When one loses control over his mind through hatred, selfishness, jealousy, and anger, obviously he loses his sense of judgment. A practicing religionist everywhere would realise that the godhead is not the possession of any one religion. He knows the truth that God is the object of spiritual realisation in all religions.

Gandhi believed that soul force was mightier than the atom bomb as a weapon of self-defense. Martin Luther King Jr. supported Gandhi’s view on spirituality as he writes, “We are tied together in the single garment of destiny… and for some strange reason I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. And you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be. To reach our potential, we must be mutually supportive of one another.”

3.5 GANDHI’S INTERPRETATION OF RELIGION

Gandhi’s interpretation of religion and particularly of Hinduism was remarkable. He proudly called himself a Sanatani(age old) Hindu. But a few Hindu fanatics called him a non-Hindu. Gandhi’s religion transcended Hinduism, Islam or Christianity. His interpretation of truth is an important factor in his approach to religious pluralism. Religion for him was nothing if it does not lead to realization. For him peace does not mean the absence of
violence, it meant the absence of conditions which lead to violence. Gandhi’s life was based on his innermost convictions. Therefore, his life was a challenging model and so inspiring to the whole world.

Some say Gandhi was a man of God and not a man of religion. In fact, his religion was considered ethical religion. His personal experiences with politics cannot be separated from morality and religion. He believed that morality is humane and humanism is thus a part of religion but not a substitute of it. The world we live in is going to have continuous dialogue between different world faiths. Intolerance towards the faith of other religions would lead to unpeaceful situations. A converging account of the qualities of God will emerge through committed dialogue. Gandhi had these extraordinary characteristics. Diversity of religions is the way for him to find the symbol of his faith towards the ‘One Within’ and lead his life with exemplifying characteristics shared by many faiths. He identified himself with non-Hindu faiths. His examples point to the non dogmatic temper of the Hindu sensibility at its best. He was open to truth wherever it is to be found, tolerant and receptive to differences. He could speak of religion in any context. But the central point of interest is always man. The welfare of every individual is the cornerstone of religion. He asserted that religion is positive force of inner awakening which makes man divine. For him, true religion is not a dogma. It is also not an external observance. It is faith in God. In real sense, Gandhi considers it as Truth. He tried to explore newer avenues of religion by sharing common ideas, common goodness, feelings and sentiments of mankind.

Gandhi made attempts to translate his ideas about religion into his own experiments with Truth. His understanding of religion is that it should be translated in his own life which he considers the eternal life-breath of humanity. In his view what is simply needed is to have broad minded attitude towards religions and uncover the call of compassion that lies at the heart of all our great religious traditions. In the end, Gandhi challenges each of us to seek
God through our own active pursuit of truth and non-violence. His attitude to religion holds the key to the understanding of his life and thought. He did not want to lead a religious life unless he identifies himself with the whole of mankind. He was very much against the untouchability. When he found Hindu religion justifying it, he rejected those scriptures which justify such crime. He considered untouchability as crime against God. His idealistic views seem to be very realistic which undoubtedly touch the soul of everyone.

3.6 CONCLUSION

The diversity of religions in the world has been a fact throughout the history of the world’s living religious traditions. It is being increased presently, especially by migration, globalization, and geopolitical events. The indistinctiveness of the term “religious pluralism” gets its clarity depending on how the term ‘religious pluralism’ is being used and understood. An indiscriminate rejection of the notion may misguide people in the world. Therefore, it is important that the term should be clarified, so that it will help not only to have a better understanding of the concept, but also to have more meaningful and productive discourse with others concerning this serious issue.

In this chapter, a thorough attempt was made to give a clear and systematic exposition of the dynamics of religious pluralism and the approach adopted by Gandhi for dealing with diversity that leads one to attain spiritual goal. In the first part of this chapter, an attempt was made to expound Gandhi’s definition of religion. The very essence of Gandhi’s understanding of religion is discussed in detail. Gandhi’s understanding was to live in communion with all masses as one among them. A truly religious person will have good rapport with the meanest and the lowest members of humanity. More than anything Gandhi showed that the religious life is the life of one who loves God in all levels of experience. It is a personal relationship of love with everyone. In his opinion so long as men do good and right things in their lives, they remain
loyal to their own religion. Gandhi clearly stated that a merger of all religions into one religion as a World Religion would be difficult to arrive at. Thus the effort to understand and reach out to the other, to reach out to evil-doers, should become not just a political or social but a spiritual process. Therefore, he personally felt that there is no need for new religion, any new prophets, any new revelations. Gandhi urges everyone to let go of our desire for fame, fortune, power and ego. He invites us to pursue the spiritual, political, economic and social depths of peace with the same fierce determination and sacrifice that he undertook.

The different approaches of Gandhi towards religious pluralism had been explored in the second part of the chapter. A detailed study was made on the basis of his statement and assertions regarding religious pluralism where he mentions that “Religions are different roads converging upon one point” and “true religion and true morality are inseparably bound up with each other.”

From the above quote, it is clear that Gandhi considers religions as different ways or different roads leading to the same centre, that is, God. Indeed, the varieties of religious believes are an advantage, since all faiths are good, so far as they encourage man to lead a religious life.

In this connection, his views on secularism and his classification regarding secularism have been presented in detail in the third part of the chapter. Humanity needs all the world's religions to suit the ways of life, diverse spiritual needs, and inherited various traditions of individual human beings. This spiritual power can be purposefully used to bring about the spiritual conditions necessary for world peace. Religious leaders and humanitarians all over the world have a special role to play in this respect.

Secularism in essence is giving equal respect towards all beliefs. It is recognition of rights specific to minorities and the taking into account of a particular context. It is described as being more than a passive attitude of
religious tolerance. It is a positive concept of equal treatment of all religions. This notion of a positive action makes sense in India where the State does not only respect all religions but may intervene to favour one belief or another whenever it seems necessary. Gandhi defines it as “Sarva Dharma Samabhava”, meaning ‘equal respect for all’. Particularly, in India, it helps to promote harmony in the midst of several religious faiths and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people transcending religious, linguistic and regional or sectional diversities.

There is no secularism without differentiation of the State and religions. A secular state never aims for religious ends. In fact, a secular State is separated from religious ends. Equality is essential in order to guarantee further rights such as freedom of thought, beliefs and the right to freely propagate religion. Secular beliefs are those that have nothing to do with any god or religion. Secular beliefs are based on Natural Law, while religious beliefs are based on supernatural or the divine.

In the fourth part of the chapter, the study was focused on another important aspect that Gandhi emphasised on ‘ the spiritual awakening in man ’. It is an eye opener to man to move out of sensual life to self-sacrificing life. A lifestyle characterized by abstinence from various worldly pleasures, often with the aim of pursuing religious and spiritual goals is said to be self-sacrificing life. Self-discipline or self-control and abstinence in some form and degree are parts of religious practice within many religious and spiritual traditions. Many religious traditions, for example, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Christianity, include practices that involve restraint with respect to actions of body, speech, and mind. The founders and earliest practitioners of these religions lived extremely austere lifestyles, refraining from sensual pleasures and the accumulation of material wealth. They adopted this practice not as a rejection of the enjoyment of life, or because the practices themselves are virtuous, but as an aid in the pursuit of liberation.
In the modern world of science and technology people are expected to have a certain way of life. People are forced to forget the moral or ethical way they are expected to lead their lives. Sometimes this leads people questioning the credibility of their life. Though they are forced to forget the way they are expected to lead their lives, they find it just impossible. Because they lack inner peace and happiness. This calls for spiritual awakening in the life of people in the universe.

The diverse cultural and religious lives of people in the whole universe are taking new levels. There is an extensive merging between beliefs and spiritual experiences. Some people do not prefer combining of spiritual life with their beliefs but strongly hold their beliefs to themselves. Some people who wish to have the spiritual unity find it very easy to embrace both sides of the spiritual life. The people who were not open to the spiritual life have started to widely make use of the spiritual intuition. This has made them to open to the information that can lead to wider access of the purpose in their life. This is the reason why the world has developed the dire need to embrace the laws of the universe where there are the symptoms of spiritual awakening.

This greater experience that shows a spiritual alteration in one’s life is the new change in energy levels. He finds himself at a unique point in history. In this world of rapid change and mass confusion, many feel a deep longing for something more – for relationship, love, joy, peace, and meaning of life. We are all awakened, each in our own way and in our own time. As we are aware of the changes in the world that we live in, there is also a change in our world view. It is no mystery that we share a collective belief system which has been transmitted to us from our ancestors.

Technology helps man in his journey to spiritual awakening. It can also help him in the advancements to evolve spiritually. One of the biggest advantages of technology is that it can save one’s time which can be used for
self inquiry and self study. This is an important aspect of the journey to spiritual awakening. “Meditate and realize this world is filled with the presence of God,” is what indicated in the *Upanishads*. Meditation is an essential aspect of spiritual advancement. By making use of modern technology one can find more time to meditate every day. Music is said to be one of the most inspiring things in the world. It is believed that music touches the heart and soul of individuals.

Listening to inspirational and spiritual songs certainly help a person to grow more in spirituality. This is also very helpful for motivating one’s daily spiritual practice. A consistent spiritual practice is the biggest requirement for spiritual awakening. We know the value of the internet which serves as a great medium for spiritual knowledge and wisdom. By using this amazing technology for spiritual knowledge, guidance and inspiration will definitely bring change in the individuals and world at large.

The fifth and last part of the third chapter expounds Gandhi’s interpretation of Religion and his extraordinary perception of what religion accomplishes. It is important to mention here that while examining Gandhi’s understanding of other religions it is found that it should be translated in his own life which he considers the eternal life-breath of humanity. His attitude to religion holds the key to the understanding of his life and thought. He wanted people to continue to accept the significance of rationality with the revelation of God. By recognizing the pluralistic reality, Gandhi wanted every Christian to be true Christian, every Hindu to be a true Hindu and every Musalman to be a true Musalman. His sincere advice to entire humanity is that one should have the fullest knowledge of his religious teachings and respect his religion by adhering to those teachings he becomes truly religious.
The ultimate goal of all mankind, the aim and end of all religions, is but one - re-union with God. Though various religions make exclusive claims about themselves, sometimes asserting the uniqueness and incomparability of their God and the aim of all religions, is the same. But, while the aim is one, the method of attaining may vary with the different temperaments of men. In Gandhi’s view no one need to be persuaded or converted to another religious perspective. If one follows or adheres the sacred teachings of his religion that would be more meaningful than giving importance to historicity or ritualistic practices of that religion. This is the ultimate purpose of all religions without exception. Gandhi’s view is, there is only One Infinite Being, whatever be the names applied to Him, whatever attributes may be given to Him. So, his view all religions ultimately lead to the same end.

Notes and references

2. Joachim Onyeakor, Did We Create God?: God Scam Exposed!, p.71.
6. Ibid.
8. Clifford Geertz, Religion as a Cultural System, pp.87-125.


21. Tulsidas also known as Goswami Tulsidas (1532–1623). He was a Hindu poet-saint, reformer and philosopher known for his devotion to the Hindu god, *Rama*.

22. Meerabai (c.1498 – c.1557 AD). The word 'bai' in Rajasthani is an informal term commonly used to refer a girl. She was a princess, a Hindu mystical and a devotee of Lord Krishna from Rajasthan. She was one of the most significant figures of the *Vaishnava* bhakti movement. Some 1,300 *pads* (poems) commonly known as *bhajans* (sacred songs) are attributed to her.

23. Kabir the sixteenth Century famed saint-poet of North India. He was not literate but he composed thousands of songs and couplets.


28. Ibid., p.60.


39. Ibid., p.125.
52. Ibid.
55. Ibid., p.6.
64. Chad V. Meister (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Diversity*, p.63.
70. Ibid.
73. Ibid.


82. Holy Bible, John 8:32.

83. Wolfgang Mieder, “Making a Way Out of No Way”: Martin Luther King’s Sermonic Proverbial Rhetoric, p.117.

84. Mahatma Gandhi, *All Men Are Brothers*, p.54.
