Chapter 2

Idolatry
The worship of some kind of idol or other is almost a universal feature of Hindu worship. Idol, used in a broad sense, that is, either any tangible material object like an image or a statue or a living object like a tree, snake etc. constitutes the focus of a Hindu's worship to which a ritual is directed. On the other hand, all the Semitic religions have denounced it strongly. As such the Hindu practice has been criticised both by Muslims and Christians. It has been described as idolatry, as worship of a mere stone, worship of a mere living being not of the one true God, etc. To this sort of challenge varied responses have arisen on the part of the Hindus. We shall consider illustrations of such responses in this chapter. We have chosen for our consideration the responses of Raja Rammohun Roy (RR), Swami Dayananda Saraswathi (DS), and Mahatma Gandhi (G).

In the first Section of this chapter, we shall just state the foundations of the challenge to Hindu idol worship. In the subsequent three Sections, we shall try to give a brief, but a clear account of the views of the three Hindu representatives mentioned above. And in the final Section, we shall attempt at an analysis, though summarily, of the different responses of the Hindu leaders, wherein we hope to show that Gandhi's response is the best. It is the best not
only because it meets the criticisms of the challengers squarely, but more so because, it is religiously a proper response, besides being theoretically sound.

(i) The Challenge to the Hindu idol worship

In all the Semitic religions idol worship has been denounced, we said just above. The foundation for our statement is their scriptures themselves. We may cite but a few examples of their condemnations. In the Old Testament, it has been most insistently and fiercely reproached: "Do not make for yourselves images of anything in heaven or on earth or in water under the earth. Do not bow down to any idol or worship it".¹ This is one of the Ten commandments given by God to the Israelites. The reason for this commandment was also given: "When the Lord spoke to you from the fire on Mount Sinai, you did not see any form. For your own good, then, make certain that you do not sin by making for yourselves an idol in any form at all — whether man or woman, animal or bird, reptile, or fish. Do not be tempted to worship and serve what you see in the sky — the sun, the moon and the stars."² The kind of consequences they had to bear in case of violation of the commandment were also made known to them: "God's curse on anyone who makes an idol of stone, wood, or metal and secretly worships it; the Lord
hates idolatry. An actual illustration of such consequences has also been given in the Bible: "Their idolatry made the Lord jealous; the evil they did made him angry.... When the Lord saw this, he was angry and rejected his sons and daughters. 'I will no longer help them', he said;... With their idols they have made me angry. My angry will flame up like fire and burn everything on earth. It will reach to the world below and consume the roots of the mountains. I will bring on them endless disasters and use all my arrows against them. They will die from hunger and fever; they will die from terrible diseases. I will send wild animals to attack them and poisonous snakes to bite them. War will bring death in the streets; terrors will strike in the homes;...".

Idol worship has been made a matter of ridicule too: "A tree is cut down and is carved by the tools of the wood-carver and decorated with silver and gold. It is fastened down with nails to keep it from falling over. Such idols are like scarecrows in a field of melons; they cannot speak; they have to be carried because they cannot walk. ... All of them are stupid and foolish. What can they learn from wooden idols?" Still more deriding is the passage from Psalms.

The same spirit of contempt and condemnation is continued in the New Testament also. "They say they are
wise, but they are fools. Instead of worshipping immortal God, they worship images made to look like mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles. So, the Christians were warned "to keep away from the worship of idols." The denouncement by the Quran is still more fierce. "Those who believe do battle for the cause of Allah; and those who disbelieve do battle for the cause of idols." Even positive destruction of idolaters has been given: "Then, when the sacred months have passed, slay the idolaters."

With this background, when the Muslim invaders, as well as the Christian missionaries came into contact with Hindu idol worship they became convinced that it was wrong and were inclined to think that it was their duty to set it right in India. Presumably it was this sacred aim that moved the Muslims to destroy and desecrate famous temples like those at Kashi, Somnath and other holy places of Hindus. Perhaps it was a similar sort of zeal that explains many of the Edicts of the Portuguese King in Goa. In an injunction addressed to his viceroy in the year 1546, that regulates the relations between the Civil Authorities and the Hindus, the then Portuguese King John III says as follows: "You knowing what an abominable thing Idolatry is in our eyes, the same shall for the future not be tolerated in my Dominions. Being informed that in the country about Goa the Pagan Temples are suffered and frequented both in public and private, as well
as diverse sorts of Pagan Diversions, we command you once for all to have the same demolished, burnt and rooted out; and that all imaginable care be taken to prevent the importation of idols either of wood, metal, earth or any other matter."\(^{11}\)

**Again it was in this perspective, that the Protestant missionaries viewed Hinduism as a stronghold of 'tyrant thrones and idol shrines,' a phrase from John Page Hopps' missionary hymns. Likewise another passionate affirmation of missionary zeal by Philip Doddridge was that:**

"Why then, almighty Father, Why
Do wretched souls in millions die?
While wide th' infernal tyrant reigns,
O'er spacious realms in ponderous chains."\(^{12}\)

Further, if Hinduism appeared to the Scottish missionary "an old perstilent religion", and to his fello-missionary John Wilson, "the grandest embodiment of Gentile error",\(^{13}\) it was all mainly because the popular manifestations of Hinduism looked to them as mere idolatry and superstition. Naturally therefore the missionaries of the day made out a strong case for conversion to Christianity and sincerely worked for the cause. Particularly the Serampore Missionaries starting a Press, and some periodicals both in English and vernaculars, stimulated a spirit of inquiry among the people
about their practice so contemptuous and ridiculous. Thus there arose a clear challenge to the age old Hindu form of worship through idols. As answers to this challenge, varied responses have arisen on the part of Hindu leaders. We shall give an account of the responses of the three leaders in the following three Sections.

(ii) RR’s Response:

RR seems to be substantially in agreement with Muslims and Christians in condemning idol worship as idolatry, a matter of scorn and contempt. Participating, as one of his countrymen, in the disgrace and ridicule to which they have been subjected, RR decided to rescue them from the scorn of all the world. It was thus that he was led to forsake idolatry, himself first, and also to persuade his countrymen to do the same. With this end in view, he got himself involved in many controversial engagements with idolaters. He also published many tracts against idolatry. He had even to publish some 'Defences' against the advocates of idolatry who tried to attack his attempts to fight against it.

In support of his position RR tried to give many kinds of grounds which may be grouped into four main classes: (a) Scriptural grounds (b) Rational grounds (c) His consideration of reasons for idolatry from the point of view of
tradition (d) His consideration of reasons from 'inclination'.

We shall not go into the details of (a), (c) and (d), because, we propose to consider (a) in greater detail in the Chapter on Interpretation of Scriptures. As regards (c) and (d) they are not really arguments. Any way, to be complete we shall make a mention of these at the end of this account. But since the Scriptural support he seeks, constitutes the most important ground for his attack on idolatry, we shall give the gist of it here at this point. After that, we shall go over the rational grounds in detail.

(a) The real spirit of the Hindu Scriptures or Shastras according to RR, is but the declaration of the unity of God. All that bear figure and appellation are invention. Hence, the real worship according to Scriptures, he said, consists in adoring Him in spirit. This he called 'rational worship' or 'pure worship'. This implied first a conviction of His existence as testified by His wise and wonderful works, and secondly, a continuous contemplation of His power so displayed, together with gratitude. However, RR was aware of the fact that support can be found for idol worship also. Yet he proposed his 'pure worship' as the correct form of worship, as against idol worship. He argued that the very same scriptures say that idol worship is prescribed only as an aid to the ignorant, but really what is inculcated is pure worship. So, RR contended that if anybody did not want
to be classed among the ignorant, and if he was ready to give some serious thought to what the scriptures say, then he must give up idol worship and take up pure worship.

(b) Over and above the scriptural support, RR argued out his contention with his own reasons. It is these we call as rational grounds. His main argument against idol worship is this: Worship can never be offered to a material thing. But in the Hindu idol worship, this is what is being done. For, after prana pratishttha, the worshipper believes the idol to have been endowed with animation, he feeds it every morning and evening, fans it in the hot season, and in the cold he covers it with warm clothes. He prays to it for obtaining the objects which he wishes for. And he is also afraid of dishonouring it for fear of punishment by it. But all this is wrong.

Suppose an idol worshipper says that all these acts of worship are never directed to the idol, but only to the god or goddess represented by the idol; that deity itself being a figurative representation of an Attribute of the one Supreme Being, the worship is ultimately directed to the Supreme Being only. Then the retort of RR consists of two stages. In the first instance, he points out, each particular deity, represented by idols is supposed to be existing independently, with a separate mode of existence and in a
separate locality of habitation. Thus for example, Siva is supposed by the Saivites to have his habitation in the northern mountain of Kailase accompanied by two wives and several children and so on. Whereas Vishnu to whom Vaishnavites offer worship is believed to be the chief over all other gods, who has resided with his wife and attendants on the summit of heaven. Similar opinions are held by the worshippers of Kali in respect of that goddess and so on. If this is so, RR argues, then worship offered under the denomination of the different gods and goddesses is directed to that particular deity, with an independent existence, and cannot be said to be directed to the Supreme Being.

If it be said by an idol worshipper that his worship under the denomination of a particular deity is never directed to that deity itself, but only to an Attribute of the one Supreme Being, then RR comes out with a theoretical impossibility: "Are all these peculiar gods the great Brahma, the Supreme Being, or only one of them so?", he asks, "Now, if each of them were regarded as the Brahma, then each of them should possess the Almighty power including the power of creating, preserving and destroying and so on,— because one who is not possessed of Almighty power cannot be called Brahma. But if the creation, preservation etc. is the work of one omnipotent Brahma, then all the other Brahmas would be
perfectly useless. Consequently each of these gods cannot be considered as the independent Supreme Brahma. Neither can only one of these gods even be considered as the Supreme Being, for, as the Puranas in different places have spoken of several different fictitious personages as Brahma, it is consistent to consider one fiction in one place as truth and others as false. 25

"But can we not take all these gods as appearances of the really one Supreme Being?" If this be argued by an idol worshipper, then RR argues back in the following way: "If all these peculiar gods who have different shapes, dwelling places, wives, and children, pursuits, lusts, passions etc. can be but one being, why should not also all things of nature, as well as man made things be but one being?" 26 That is precisely what is meant by his 'rational worship'. Thus he thinks that he has finally established his contention.

(c) Despite these arguments, both from the scriptures and reason, idol worshippers might hold on to their own position: "Whether it be agreeable to the Scriptures or to reason, or not, we must do what the forefathers did. And since idol worship has been practised for so many centuries, that custom renders it proper to continue it." 27 This is an argument from Tradition. Against this, RR showed that customs or traditions were not only liable to change but many
of them had actually been changed, almost every twenty years for the sake of little convenience, to promote worldly gain etc. So he asked them: Why should they not change their tradition in respect of idol worship also, and turn to pure worship?"28

(d) One more consideration which could be in support of the idolaters is from 'inclination'. That is, one can argue for example in this way: "We will follow our inclination. We will do what we are inclined to; why should you feel distressed about it and argue against it?"29 To such an argument also RR has a reply. What their inclination has urged them to do has actually made them behave in an inhuman way. Thus they become childish: e.g. presenting food, bed etc. 'to idols. They behave like madmen e.g. stamping with feet, turning hand, snapping with fingers, breathing heavily and so on. They also behave like drunken men, setting up a goddess whom they call a mother, pronouncing words, related to illicit sex relationship etc.30 When such is the situation, RR says, he cannot leave it simply to the inclination of the devotees; he has every reason to be distressed about that kind of worship, particularly when it was widely practised; and to work to remove it, and to introduce 'pure worship' in its place.
(iii) **The Response of DS**

Unlike RR, DS was more a religious leader than a thinker. True to his vocation as a Swamiji, DS was quick to see the enormity of the evils that were being perpetuated in the name of idol worship in Temples and places of pilgrimages. Referring to the intense pain that DS experienced at a Kumbha Fair at Haridwar, a biographer writes as follows: "So much idolatry, so much degrading and debasing adoration of the temporal so much chicanery and fraud, so much of all that is low and mean, he had never before seen in one single spot, and his soul sickened at the sight." 31

It was such a degraded situation of the different places of worship that converted him into an iconoclast of a high order in India. What pained him most was the fact that it was not just the ignorant and illiterate but even the learned Pandits and sadhus who clung to this 'error'. So he held many \textit{shastrāthās}, debates with advocates of idolatry throughout Northern India 32. His discussions with Christian missionaries and Muslim Maulvis were also noteworthy. 33

The details of these discussions are not available except in a very scanty way. But, basing ourselves on his 'magnum opus', \textit{Satyarth Prakash} 34 and on whatever report is available on the \textit{shastrāthās}, we shall attempt to formulate the main
grounds on which DS had sought support to attack the 'monstruous evil' of the day.

(a) The first and foremost basis he sought for his stand was from the Scriptures. Scripture meant, according to him, only the Veda. And he contended that the Vedas, not only, did not support idolatry, but also positively denounced it. As against those passages which were brought to his notice as supporting idol worship, he gave such a re-interpretation of them as to make them mean exactly what he wanted to say on idolatry. When it was pointed out to him that his re-interpretation could not be accepted, and when he could not defend his own, then he would finally dub them as mere interpolations. The details of DS' techniques of interpreting the "Scripture", will be seen in the chapter on Interpretation of scripture, and so we shall not go into them at present.

(b) Besides the scriptural basis, DS has considered many possible reasons for idolatry, and refuted them. Such refutations in turn form good grounds for his anti-idolatry campaign. We may call them as rational grounds. They may be outlined in the following order:

(i) God being formless, cannot be contemplated without any aid. It is the idols which provide these aids.
So, why should not one use them to think of God and to recite His name?

But DS's conviction was different. God being formless, cannot have an image. So, idol really cannot enable one to think of God. Even if the sight of an idol were to help one to think of God, it would mean that when the idol is out of sight, the devoted would not be able to think of God, and be prone to succumb to all temptations. Further, DS pointed out that merely taking the name of God was no use, unless one contemplated what it connoted.

(ii) Though God is formless, yet he has incarnated as Shiva, Vishnu, Ram Krishna etc. Cannot these appearances of Him in flesh be taken as images?

But, DS denied the very possibility of incarnation of God. For, the Vedas declare God to be unborn, invisible, etc. So He cannot be subject to birth and death and so on. Reason also cannot accept the theory of incarnation. He who pervades the universe infinite and invisible, cannot be contained in a drop of semen or in the uterus or bodily tenement. Moreover, coming into and going out can be predicted of only a finite being, and so cannot properly be applied to God.
At any rate, the attainment of God is possible only through faith. Hence, in any object one may choose to pin his faith on, he can find God and contemplate Him. So, why can he not find God in an idol?

To this DS's answer was that since God is all pervading, it is blasphemy to imagine Him to exist in one particular object only. If you really believe in God as pervading all things and still if you worship the idol, then you must be worshipping either the pervader or the pervaded. Now if you worship the former, then it is not necessary to offer flowers, food, drinks, apply sandal paste to it, burn incense before it etc. If the latter, then it is a false claim that you are worshipping God.

Cannot the ignorant use idol worship as a first step to gain the divine knowledge and purity of heart, just as a staircase is needed to reach the house-top, a continued practice of shooting at smaller objects is needed to acquire skillful target shooting, or as doll-playing is necessary for girls before they actually get married?

But DS argued that the real aid for acquiring divine knowledge consisted in association with learned men and/or idol worship, because the worship of material objects would make people forget even what they had learned earlier. So it could more appropriately be called a ditch, not a staircase.
Neither could it be compared with target shooting. For, it was the association with pious and learned men that constituted the real target in gaining divine knowledge. Nor could it be said to be a preparation for later life. For the real preparation for acquiring divine knowledge consisted in learning the alphabet and good habits and not idol worship. At least to get mental concentration, cannot idol worship be taken as an aid?

However, DS did not agree with this also. A material object like an idol had diverse parts and so the mind was bound to wander over them. And once all the details of the material objects were grasped and mastered, the mind would begin to wander over fresh objects; whereas in the case of God, mind could not wander about since He is indivisible. Again, as He is infinite and immaterial, the mind could never comprehend Him and so the possibility of going over different objects also would not arise. Thus it was God, rather than an idol that could really aid us in getting mental concentration.

(vi) By looking at an image symbolic of peace and imperturbability etc. one will attain a state of quietude and indifference to joy or sorrow. At least in this sense will not idol worship be said to be useful?
But DS appeared to think that the thinking faculty of the worshipper would be blunted on account of his soul being influenced by the inertness of the dead matter out of which the idol was fashioned. Anyway, it was not a mere look at the image of a person that would influence the worshipper, rather it was only the knowledge of the good qualities of the person of whom the image was a representation. So whatever benefits accrued to the worshipper had to be from the study of their biographies and perusal of their books, not from the worship of those statues.\(^44\)

(vii) At least the many miracles that were displayed by the various important idols at different places, could they not be enough justification, for idol worship?

But DS, by a detailed examination of the so-called miracles, reported to have happened at Kashi, Calcutta, Jagannath, Rameshvaram, Somnath etc. showed that they were all false, because they could be explained by natural forces, or by trickery and so on.\(^45\)

Thus whatever reasons that could be proposed to justify idol worship, DS tried to counter them all, and thus established his own stand against idol worship.

(c) However, there could be people who would argue for the defence of idol worship on the basis of tradition.
"Idol worship and pilgrimage to holy places have been in vogue since time immemorial. How can they be false?" They would argue.46

But DS maintained that it did not exist in India in the ancient times. It had no place in the Vedic Teachings. It had no existence in Satya yuga or any of the first three Yugas. It has originated only in the present Kaliyuga and that too, after the birth of the Jain and the Buddhist creeds.47 So it could not really be of an ancient tradition.

It might be pointed out that the difference between the Jains' and the Hindus' idol worship (thus e.g., (i) in respect of idols, the Jains' were always naked, renunciative of the world etc., while the Vaishnava idols were well dressed out, with lewd charms and licentious looks; (ii) in the manner of worship there was plenty of difference between the Jains and Hindus: while the former never blew conch-shells, nor ring bells etc. the latter did all these) was so great that one could not be inferred to have been copied from the other. But DS says: "Had they made idols resembling Jain idols in every detail, they would have become Jains. It is by introducing the differences by way of pomp and glory, both in dressing up the idols as well as in the manner of worshiping them, that the Hindu priests escaped from the clutches of the Jains."48
Thus, according to DS, ultimately it was in antagonism to the Jains' practice of idol worship, that the selfish priests in Hinduism started the above said practices. And Idol worship was not really the ancient Hindu tradition. So the argument from Tradition also fell to ground.

(d) Finally, DS also gave a long list of evils arising out of idol-worship. Many of them look very flimsy and trivial. Yet that reveals his sincerity of purpose. He was so earnest about eradicating the evil of idolatry that he would like to strengthen his position by taking issue with anything that was evil and seemingly originating from idol worship. We may just mention some of the evils which he enlists in the manner of scoring debating points.49

(1) Millions of rupees are spent in constructing temples for idol worship. This leads to poverty and indolence.

(2) Free mixing together of the sexes in temples leads to adultery, spread of disease etc.

(3) The idol worshippers, thinking that this mode of worship is the sole means of attaining salvation, and so, are led to give up all active work and waste away their precious lives.
(4) The differences in idol worship and their mutually antagonistic beliefs create bad blood in the country and lead it to its ruin.

(5) The sense of dependence upon the idols for the defeat of the enemies etc. do not make the idol worshippers to exert themselves. With the result they are easily defeated, and the government of the country, wealth etc. fall to the lot of their enemies.

(6) Taking of the stone to be the symbol of the Deity and of worshipping idols in the place of God will surely have the Divine wrath visit upon them.

(7) Idol worshippers peregrinate from temple to temple and from one country to another, and this spoils their worldly and spiritual welfare, and makes them suffer at the hands of thieves, thugs and so on.

(8) Money is given away to wicked priests who spend it on debauchery and gratification of the bestial appetites. Thereby the donors forfeit its happiness.

(9) These people are often ungrateful to their parents by not showing due respect to them, and worshipping idols instead.
(10) When these idols are stolen by thieves they set up loud lamentation.

(11) The priestesses and priests are corrupted on account of illicit intercourse with other men and women.

(12) The servants do not properly obey their masters.

(13) The material properties of the idol are transmitted to the soul because of their constant contemplation of them and this makes the soul lose the power of sound judgement.

(14) By plucking the flowers for worship of idols etc. the purificatory process is prevented. When thrown into a drain, unhusked grain, flowers and other offerings give off offensive odours.

(iv) Gandhi's views on Idolatry

G, unlike RR, has not involved himself in a formal controversy with advocates of idolatry. Nor has he, unlike DS, had any shestrathas with the Pandits on the problem of idolatry. Yet he has commented on the various controversial points on idolatry, in the context of actual controversies that took place among the members of different religions, and which were brought to his notice. Occasionally he had some discussions also with people of different religions on the
problem. It is these views, he has expressed at different times, to different people, in various contexts, that we are attempting to formulate in a systematic manner, here.

The different controversial positions on which G. has given his comments may first be arranged in the following order, along with his own comments. After this, we will formulate his general principles on the problem.

(a) A Muslim may think that he worships God in His true, imageless form; because he does not have even an image in the Mosque, whereas a Hindu Temple is filled with plenty of idols and images crude and fierce images, at that. He may come to think that the Hindu was an idolater because he has given an image to the imageless God, a crude form to the formless God, a material shape to the immaterial God. He may even consider it to be sinful to associate with a Hindu, the idolater. (This is actually a question a Hindu faced from his Muslim friend and was referred to Gandhi for his esteemed opinion about it.)

G's opinion on such a situation is twofold: First, as regards the opinion of the Muslim about superiority of his own form of worship because he does not have any idol in his Mosque, G would raise the following questions: "Why are Musalmans filled with awe and exultation when they enter a mosque? Why, is not the whole universe a mosque? And what
about the magnificent canopy of heaven that spreads over you? Is it any less than a mosque?" Why should a Mussalman give his life for defending a mosque, which he calls the house of God? What is a mosque? It is a species of idol worship. The word 'idol' does not apply only to a human figure. Anything that the eye can see is an idol. The belief that Allah resides in the mosque, and the custom to turn the face to Mecca during prayers, are a species of idolatry.

However, a Muslim might tell G. "May be, it is idolatry, but Hindu idolatry is of an altogether different variety. For, the Muslims don't worship the Mosque, but the one true God in the Mosque, whereas the Hindus worship the images and idols themselves. G's answer to this kind of opinion brings us to the second point of his answer, a point in defence of Hindu idol worship: Could it not be true that the Hindus also do not worship the idols, but only see God even in a stone and therefore take the help of an idol to establish his union with God. Every Hindu child knows that the stone in the famous temple in Benaras is not Kashi Visvanath. But he believes that the Lord of the Universe does reside specially in that stone. That sanctity is his imagination. But that play of imagination is permissible and healthy. It brings about marvellous concrete results. It changes men's lives.
(b) A Protestant Christian may find fault with a Roman Catholic for keeping images of Blessed Virgin Mary, or with Hindus for keeping the images of Krishna and others. And he may consider a Hindu or a Catholic place of worship containing images as bad or superstitious whereas his place of worship is far superior because there is no image at all. At the most it is only a cross or a Bible that is kept, and so the barest minimum of symbolization is used in his place of worship. 57

To this G's reply would be something like the following:

A place of worship, whether it should contain images or not, is a matter of temperament and taste. And he would not regard a Hindu or a Roman Catholic place of worship containing images as necessarily bad or superstitious and a mosque or a Protestant church being good or free of superstition merely because of their exclusion of images. A symbol such as a Cross or a book may easily become idolatrous and therefore superstitious. And the worship of the image of the child Krishna or Virgin Mary may become ennobling and free of all superstition. It depends upon the attitude in the heart of the worshipper. 58

(c) A Roman Catholic himself, when compared with a Hindu, may feel that his form of worship is superior to a Hindu form of worship. Actually such attitudes have been
very strong among the Catholics at least in the past. This was much more evident in a conversation of a Catholic priest with G. The reason he gave was that Hindus believe in many gods and are idolaters, whereas the Catholics are strictly monotheistic, and although they make use of images they are used only for purposes of veneration of saints, but never as a substitute for the worship of the one God.

However, G's reaction is very significant. First, with regard to the description that Hindus believe in many gods, Gandhi says that although the Hindus speak of many gods it is not proper to suggest that they believe in many gods. For, they certainly believe in many worlds. Just as there is a world inhabited by men, and another by beasts, so also is there one inhabited by superior beings, called gods, whom we would not see but who, nevertheless exist. The whole mischief is created by the English rendering of the word deva or devata for which there is not found a better term than 'god'. But really Hindus believe in one God, the Lokavāra, Devadhideva God of gods. So it is the word 'God' used to describe different divine beings that has given rise to such confusion. But otherwise Hindus never believe in many 'Gods'. No one teaches this.

Secondly, as regards idol worship itself, Gandhi says that one cannot do without it in some form or other.
Why does a Christian go to a Church, and when he is required to take an oath he swears by the Bible? And, what do the Roman Catholics do when they kneel before Virgin Mary and before saints — quite imaginary figures in stone or painted on canvas or glass? Not that G. does not understand what the Catholics do. In fact sympathises with them because when they kneel before Virgin Mary and ask her intercession, they only ask to establish contact with God through her. But he would add, "even so, a Hindu seeks to establish contact with God through a stone image... The Hindus have their own way of approach to the same Eternal Being. Our media of approach are different, but that does not make Him different." 51

To sum up G's understanding of the above given controversies (a, b, and c): In spite of the differences involved, the various forms of worships (without any images, or with a few symbols like Cross or a Book, or with a few statues, or many idols etc.) are all one in a fundamental sense, viz. that they are all expressions of man's hankering after symbolism about the Unseen. This can be further confirmed by G's own words: "The fundamental fact is that no faith has done without a habitation; and I go further that in the very nature of things it cannot exist so long as man remains as he is constituted. 62 We the human family, are not all philosophers. We are of the earth, very earthly,
and we are not satisfied with contemplating the Invisible God. Somehow or other, we want something which we can touch, something which we can see, something before which we can kneel down. It does not matter whether it is a book, or an empty stone building, or a building inhabited by numerous figures. A book will satisfy some, an empty building will satisfy some others, and many others will not be satisfied unless they see something inhabiting these empty buildings.”

In fine, therefore, Gandhi would say that the simple philosophy lying behind the worship in temples or mosques or churches is that they are what faith has made them. They are an answer to man’s craving somehow to reach the Unseen. And one cannot make any distinction between them.

One may grant that sort of fundamental equality of all the abodes of God. Yet he may claim superiority to one’s own form of worship over others on different grounds. Thus for instance a Muslim could argue: The person, whose image a Hindu adores, might have committed some wrongs in his lifetime. So naturally the adorer will be harmed by copying those wrongs, which he is likely to copy, if he worships his image. This likelihood is all the greater because the Hindu mythology about each god, represented by different idols is filled with immoral stories.
But Gandhi argues that the Hindu theory of incarnations is a peculiar description of gods with all their human frailties and weakness, yet combined with the divine achievements. However, G. would insist that for the faithful devotees of a particular god, say of Krishna, his incarnation is without blemish. No doubt the possibility of evil minded persons using the lives of Rama or Krishna to support their evil practices is not ruled out. But this is no proof of evil in the lives of Rama or Krishna themselves. It would be sheer perversity to argue that because in our opinion Rama practised deception we too may do likewise. The proper thing to do would be to believe that Rama was incapable of practicing deception. And that is what a devotee would do.

Secondly, it might be pointed out to G. that there are many superstitious growing round image worship. For example, many votaries offer vows and prayers in the places of pilgrimages for selfish ends, whereas such occasions will be avoided in cases of image-less worships. But Gandhi says that making of selfish request or offering of vows is not related to image worship as effect and cause. A personal prayer with selfish motive is bad whether made before an image or an unseen God. Whether offered in churches, mosques, temples or before trees and shrines it is a thing not to be encouraged. (1,245) A place of worship containing images is not necessarily bad or superstitious and a mosque or a
Protestant place of worship are not good or free of superstition merely because of their exclusion of images. A symbol such as a cross or a book may easily become idolatrous and therefore superstitious. And the worship of image of the child Krishna or Virgin Mary may become ennobling and free of all superstition. It depends upon the attitude of the heart of the worshipper.68 (231–32).

Another objection to the image worship could be raised in the following way: If we bow our head or join our hands before a living person, he replies in return, but the image does not. So, what is the use of worshipping before the lifeless image? Is it not better then to conduct worship without any image?69

This sort of question misses the whole point of image worship. Temple going is for the purification of the soul. The worshipper draws the best out of himself. In greeting a living person he may draw the best out of the person greeted, if the greeting is selfless. A living being is more or less fallible like oneself. But in the temple, one worships the living God, perfect beyond imagination. The whole function is a beautiful exercise of faith.70 No doubt that exercise of faith could be done also without an image in front of oneself. But whether there must be an image or not is a matter of temperament and taste.71 It is not necessary to have an
image to worship God. But, for him who cannot contemplate his God, the image may be necessary. It may be unfortunate, but it is true that for some one his Rama resides in the temple as nowhere else. One should not disturb that simple faith. Likewise, the simple minded village woman may not have a reasoned understanding of the implications of her act of worshipping the image or even a tree. She may not be able to give any explanation as to why she performs it. But then she acts in purity and utter simplicity of the faith. Such faith is not a thing to be despised; it is a great and powerful force that we should treasure.

So far we have seen (a) Gandhi's attempt to strongly propose that idol worship is no less valuable than the other forms of worship, and (b) his vigorous attempt to defend it in the face of all objections. From this, one should not think that G. had a mistaken zeal to uphold Hindu idol worship at any cost. G. was interested in defending idols not because he thought idol is absolutely necessary for worship, but only because he recognizes that men, being different, can make use of any symbol of their own choice, to establish communion with God, and that idol can be a valid symbol. This can be substantiated by what he once said with regard to Tree worship: "Let no one, however, from this understand me to mean that I advocate tree worship in general. I do not
defend tree worship because I consider it to be a necessary aid to devotion, but only because I recognize that God manifests Himself in innumerable forms in this universe, and every such manifestation commands my spontaneous reverence."  

Also he says elsewhere: "Whether the temples should contain images or not is a matter of temperament and taste." This again proves that G. was not wanting to show that idol is necessary aid to devotion. Nor did he think that idol worship is the only form of worship as a necessary aid.

And still, if G. was so vigorous in defending idol worship, it was only to show that it was not necessarily bad as was usually made out to be by non-idol-worshippers. His contention was that the use of idols in worship is possible without idolatry. He does distinguish between idol worship and idolatry. "Idolatry is bad", he says, "not so idol worship. An idolater makes fetish of his idol. An idol worshipper sees God even in a stone and therefore takes the help of an idol to establish his union with God. He believes that the Lord of the Universe does reside specially in that stone. This play of imagination is permissible and healthy... The sanctity (which he prescribes to it) is in (his) imagination. But that imagination brings about marvellous concrete results. It changes men's lives." Further he says: "When image worship degenerates into idolatry and becomes encrusted with
false beliefs and doctrines, it becomes a necessity to combat it as a gross social evil. On the other hand image worship in the sense of investing one's ideal with concrete shape is inherent in men's nature, and even valuable as an aid to devotion. Thus we worship an image when we offer homage to a book which we regard as holy or as sacred. We worship an image when we visit a temple or a mosque with a feeling of sanctity or reverence. Nor do I see harm in all this. On the contrary endowed as man is with a finite, limited understanding, he can hardly do otherwise."

But how should one judge whether idol worship is really worship or whether it has been degraded to idolatry? G. says that it can be done only with reference to the life of the devotees. "I would worship an idol even made of clay, if thereby my mind becomes lighter. If my life becomes fruitful, then only the worship of young Krishna's idol has meaning. The stone is no God; but God resides in the stone. If I besmear the idol with sandalwood paste, make an offering of rice and pray to it for strength to cut off so many heads, one of you should throw the idol into a deep well, or break it into pieces."  

Not only with reference to an individual's worship did he suggest 'Life' as the yardstick, but also applied it for deciding the value of corporate worship, of all religions:
"Churches, mosques, and temples, which cover so much hypocrisy and humbug and shut the poorest out of them seem but a mockery of God and His worship, when one sees the eternally renewed temple of worship under the vast blue canopy inviting every one of us to real worship, instead of abusing His name by quarelling in the name of religion. If people have not learnt the real worship, then he would even be satisfied with the worship which the whole Nature is abounding with. "A lovely morning; cool cloudy, with a drowsy sun whose rays are soft as velvet...there is a hush upon it, as of prayer. And the mists are like incense, the tree worshippers in a trance, and the birds and insects pilgrims come to chant bhaajas, one could wish how one could learn true abandonment from Nature'.

Gandhi's clarity lies in this that he does not allow himself to be moved by any kind of prejudice. But he only insists on the essence of religion, viz., 'the living'. And he is never insisting on the manner of its expression which may include variety of ways. Even those who accept 'idols' in worship may find fault with worship of 'Trees', and other living beings. They may even be inclined to dub a tree worship as superstition. But Gandhi gives the best interpretation of that also. "Far from seeing anything inherently evil or harmful in tree worship, I should find in it a thing
injint with deep pathos and poetic beauty. It symbolizes true reverence for the entire vegetable Kingdom, which with its endless panorama of beautiful shapes and forms' declares to us as it were with a million tongues the greatness and glory of God."

While G. is thus ready to see every form of worship in the best light possible, and judges it good in so far as it enables people to 'live' their religion, he is also quick to see that any form of worship can degenerate into idolatry. It is not only 'idols' which can degenerate into idolatry, but even the other symbols, like books, or Cross etc. can become superstitious, encrusted with false beliefs, and be made fetish so much so that they are made substitute for the authentic living. In that case, they are also equally idolatrous and superstitious. "I do not regard a Hindu or a Roman Catholic place of worship containing images as necessarily bad or superstitious and a mosque or a Protestant place of worship being good or free of superstition merely because of their exclusion of images. A symbol such as a Cross or a book may easily become idolatrous and therefore superstitious. And the worship of the image of Child Krishna or Virgin Mary may become ennobling and free of all superstition. It depends upon the attitude of the heart of the worshipper".
From this it is clear that no one should think that one's own form of worship is superior, or that he should impose his form of worship on others, much less even try to destroy the other form of worship, which he considers to be superstitious, judged from the standards of his own form of worship. If anybody thinks so, then G. is of the opinion that he is indeed the idolater of the first order and that kind of subtle form of idolatry is worse than what is ordinarily known as idolatry. Hence G. would be all out to destroy this evasive idolatry: "I am an iconoclast in the sense that I break down the subtle form of idolatry in the shape of fanaticism that refuses to see any virtue in any other form of worshipping the Deity save one's own. This form of idolatry is more deadly for being more fine and evasive than the tangible and gross form of worship that identifies the Deity with a little bit of a stone or a golden image."\(^*\)

But he is an idolater in the sense that he 'values the spirit behind idol worship'. "It plays a most important part in the uplift of the human race", he says. And he also says: "I would like to possess the ability to defend with my life the thousands of holy temples which sanctify this land of ours."\(^*\)

In fine, then, Gandhi's following claim may clearly describe his position with regard to idol worship: "I am
both an idolater and an iconoclast in what I conceive to be the true senses of the terms. He is an idolater in the sense that he is keen on defending idol worship against all attacks, although he himself neither believes nor disbelieves in it. At the same time he is an iconoclast, but in a well-defined sense, as indicated above.

(v) A Summary analysis

The foregoing account gives us some idea as to how the different leaders of Hinduism have attempted to face the challenge regarding idol worship, posed by other religions. RR and DS agree with others in denouncing it as idolatry. Whereas G. distinguishes between idol worship and idolatry and sees in the former a possibility of good worship, while at the same time seeing in a non-idol worship the possibility of idolatry. How far each one's position is tenable, and on what basis, we shall attempt to make clear in this Section.

One thing is clear: all the three of them accept worship. They are not atheists. But, while RR and DS are destructive in their approach towards idol worship, Gandhi is not. RR and DS attribute to idol worship a number of defects, on account of which they think idol worship is necessarily idolatry, and so needs to be given up. They also suggest their own mode of worship in the place of idolatry.
In the case of RR it is the 'pure worship' or the 'rational worship'. In the case of DS it is Vedic worship, the worship through Mantras.

The presupposition of both RR and DS is (a) that the mode of worship they suggest do not have the defects which idol worship has; and (b) that idol worship does not have the advantages of the mode of worship, they are suggesting. However, both the presuppositions seem to be very questionable. For, it is not at all clear that the modes of worship they suggest are free of all the defects which could possibly be found in idolatry. Again it is not clear at all that idol worship is all that idolatrous as it is made out to be by them.

This we hope to bring out by considering (i) a person performing idol worship, (ii) another who performs rational worship (iii) still another who performs Vedic worship, and examining what they do in their own mode of worship, and seeing where the difference lies.

(i) In the case of an idol worshipper, it is clear that he does his worship in front of an idol. He sprinkles the idol with flowers, he bathes it, clothes it, also applies sandal paste to it. Sometimes he also offers food to it and so on. But is that all? No. He also offers prayers to it in the form of petitions. May be his petitions are for getting some material benefits; may be a passing in the examination;
or success in his business; or cure from a disease and so on. Also he prays that he be freed from the cycle of births and deaths. Therefore, there is also another petition that he may not do wrong and do the right only, that he be not led into temptations.

(ii) Now, let us take the worshipper of the kind, suggested by RR. He will look at 'the wise and wonderful works of nature' from which he gets 'convinced of the existence of the Supreme Being', and raises his mind to Him in 'continual contemplation of His power so displayed, together with gratitude' His prayer will consist in being grateful to God for all the good he has received in and through Nature. Will there not be anything else? Will he not say at least the minimum: "let me not do wrong and do right only". He has to. Otherwise, his worship will be empty.

(iii) What about the worship of DS? It consists in making use of the Vedic Mantras for offering stuti, prarthana and having Upasana with the only one God. Stuti consists 'in speaking of God as endowed with such qualities as almighty, infinite immutable, eternal etc'. And prarthana in 'asking for help in all righteous undertakings or strenuous endeavours.' And DS further says that prayer is positive only when you address God as possessed of good attributes and ask for good causes, as against immoral purposes. So naturally, his worship
is having as the focal point a good living, according to the principles of doing only what is right and avoiding the evil, and thereby attaining the Communion with the Divine.

Even a rapid glance over the three kinds of worships, as we have described above, will reveal one point that is common to all the three. They are all able to provide a sort of preparation for facing successfully the fundamental problems of life, the problem of dealing with oneself and one's relation with others. They all enable the respective worshippers to have a self-examination cum mediation, a certain kind of self discipline, a kind of communion with self, with others and with God. They give the worshippers the strength to face various misfortunes of life, a critical illness or even death of one's near and dear ones, or other crises in life. They all give their worshippers a way of meeting the challenges of life, particularly the serious temptations in life, say either of sex, or of money and so on.

If this is the one common function served by all the three kinds of worship, why should BE and DS think that their own worships are superior to that of an idol worship? First let us take RR's considerations for thinking his own mode of worship as superior to idol worship. As against idol worship, which he thinks irrational, RR puts up rational worship.
Because he thinks that God cannot be represented through symbols like idols, images etc. and so we should be able to worship God in spirit, by elevating our mind to God through the marvellous works of nature, without making use of any other symbol. But is it possible to worship God purely in spirit, without any symbol other than the works of nature? Even if RR succeeds in removing such symbols as idols, images etc. he has to retain at least the symbols of the word 'God' or 'Brahma', 'Supreme Being' etc. If thus symbols are surely used in both cases, it does not matter whether the symbol is one word or another -- different languages use different words for the same object -- or in one case the symbol is a word and in another the symbol is a tri-dimensional object.

RR might suggest that people can mistake the lifeless stone to be God. But it is equally possible that people take the name of God itself in vain.

Perhaps RR will say that people actually take the idol to be animated with Divine consciousness. But so also the word 'God' is thought to be as important as in the other case.

RR will further point out that people pray to the idol, ask for reward etc. But then, the worshippers of the rational kind will also be praying by taking the name of God.
Another way in which RR might prove the superiority of his mode of worship could be that it is associated with the essence of worship more directly. For it aims at a sincere attempt at elevating one's mind throughout the day and at a heart-searching all through the day's proceedings. Whereas in the idol worship, more of 'external acts' like plucking flowers, going to the temple, bathing the idols etc. are involved, and this might not give chance to get at the essence of worship, namely the heart-search.

However, it must be pointed out that the 'interiority' of pure worship is not that interior, as it is made out to be. Because, to have that 'interior or pure worship' of the heart, we need a particular posture of the body, at least certain amount of mental withdrawal from the routine works of the day, and at times certain words need to be used. Likewise, the idol worship need not be all that 'external' as it is alleged to be. For, all those adjuncts of idol worship, like the acts of taking bath, plucking flowers, going to temple, bowing before the idols, etc. may be done with so much of 'mental-withdrawal, dedication of heart that they will all form as necessary a part as the 'heart-search' itself.

Even granted the presence of both the elements involved in both the types of worship ('externality' in pure worship, and 'interiority' in idol worship) RR might argue that the
'externality involved in pure worship is much simpler than that involved in idol worship. Hence the latter is bound to be more mechanical and so easily will lead to deterioration, whereas the possibility of deterioration is much more reduced in pure worship. But RR here fails to realize that first of all it is not a matter of statistical verification to say that one has proved more mechanical than the other. Secondly, if in the case of some people, idol worship can prove mechanical, in the case of others the very act of heart-search can also prove mechanical and superficially done. And even with regard to the same person, one thing may be mechanical at one time, and at another time the other thing may be done mechanically. It all depends upon the worshipper,— how carefully he works out his salvation, with what vigilance he performs his worship so as to be enabled to solve the fundamental predicament of man and not on the worship itself whether it becomes mechanical or not, deteriorates or not.

This is not to say that idol worship will not deteriorate. RR points out, and rightly so, that idol worship creates various difficulties. But he foregets that his so called 'rational' worship also can lead to difficulties. Suppose one claims to have followed the rational worship and has achieved the Realization easily, he cannot escape from the sin of vanity. Actually cases of such failures find mention in the Scriptures, e.g. the fall of Vishvamitra.
So then, we may confidently say that between the mode of idol worship and that of RR's rational worship, there can be no question of inferiority/superiority. Both of them have their own advantages as well as disadvantages. One of them cannot be superior to another.

Now, what shall we say about the superiority claimed by DS in favour of his Vedic worship?

May be as a matter of fact idol worship had degenerated to such an extent that DS, a sincere and committed Swami as he was, found it necessary to eradicate them, what then? Sometimes it is easier to introduce another mode of worship rather than reforming the already existing one, because it was too pervasive. In this context, then if we look at his introduction of Vedic worship, it is perfectly all right. But in so far as he seems to imply that even as a matter of principle, the Vedic worship is superior to idol worship, his thinking does not seem to be correct. This will be clear from the following considerations.

Most of the objections he raises against idolatry are due to the fact that he does not recognise the symbolic value of idol, but rather gives a very literal understanding of the idols. That is why he raises such questions: "How can idols be naked?" "How can idol, the material thing represent
the immaterial God?" "How can a particular form be made to stand for the formless God?" etc.

But then, the very same questions can be raised against the Vedic Mantras, if taken literally. Thus e.g., "Does God have ears to hear our prayers? Can he not know our needs without our asking Him? Does he need our glorification, why should we glorify Him?"

But then DS would say that it is not from the standpoint of God that we need to pray to or praise Him. But it is only to realize our nothingness, our dependence upon Him, and show our acknowledgement of the gifts we have received from Him that we need to offer _prarthana, stuti_ etc. But an idol worshipper could legitimately claim that his idol worship also has no other function than the very same ones. After all both 'idols' as well as 'Mantras' are symbols. One is visual, the other is auditory. If the one is permissible the other could also be. If the one can be found fault with, on the basis of the literal understanding of it, the other can also be found fault with in the same way. Thus we see that both can help people to get at the substance; and both can also hinder people from getting at the substance of worship. So then DS cannot contrast one symbol as against the other. They both are equal in a fundamental sense, viz., that they both can be used as effective means of getting at
the substance (enabling him to establish the communion with the Divine, to prepare him for facing the fundamental predicament of man and achieve the ultimate goal of man) and that they both can also be used as substitute for the substance.

There is one more argument, used by both RR and DS, for establishing their stand. Hindu Idol worship has become associated with immoral practices, they argued because the Hindu idols are often connected with immoral stories of the person whom the idol is supposed to personify. RR and DS think that Hindu idol worship is closely connected with such stories of gods, and that it is only the existence of such mythological stories which gave rise to Hindu idol worship. And they also think that in so far as the stories of these gods are immoral the idol worship is bound to be immoral.

But surely this objection is not against idol worship in principle, but to an idolatry of a particular kind, viz., that which is connected with the gods conceived in a particular way in mythology. This raises a different kind of problem viz., of the interpretation of myths. So we need not go into that question now. We may touch upon it in the chapter on Interpretation of Scripture.

To sum up our analysis of the responses of RR and DS, the fundamental mistake involved in their responses is
basically to misunderstand the symbolic value of the idols, and consequently to attribute all the evils which are arising out of idolatry, are arising out of the nature of idols themselves, and also to think that their worship devoid of idols is superior to the worship which is connected with idols.

As against them, Gandhi sees that all forms of worship are symbolic in nature, and in that respect they are all fundamentally one. They all have the possibility of attainment as well as that of deterioration. It is up to the one who uses the symbols (whatever it may be, either idol, or works of nature, or Vedic mantras, or simply an empty building or a book) to use it in a manner to reach the substance and not use it as a substitute for the substance. If one realises the basic equality of different worships, he says that one would not try to think only one form of worship as superior to another or others, one would not try to destroy other forms of worships, and impose one’s own. If one does so, that is really the worst form of idolatry, a subtler form of idolatry, according to Gandhi. So he wants to fight out that kind of idolatry much more vehemently.

The fundamental reason he gives is that all forms of worship will necessarily use symbols, to lesser or greater extent. Those who make use of less symbols cannot blame those who make use of more symbols. The use of symbols itself
is not the cause of degeneration or superstition. Rather it is the misuse of the symbols which leads to superstition or immorality or idolatry. In the same way, it is not the use of less symbols by itself that can be a point of merit. Even the one who makes use of the minimum of symbols in worship can be idolatrous as a formal idolater. Hence a form of worship becomes idolatry or not depends upon not the use of idol but on the wrong use of any symbol for that matter.

Here we find that Gandhi's response is really one of fulfilling a tradition rather than destroying it. He does not allow himself to be carried away by any kind of prejudice. He insists only on the essence of religion, and not on the manner of its expression which immediately gives rise to a variety of ways. Even those who accept the use of idols in worship might consider themselves superior to others, as compared to the Tree worshippers. They may dub Tree worship merely as superstition. But Gandhi gives the best interpretation to that also. Far from seeing anything inherently evil or harmful in it, he finds it beneficial to the devotees. If the devotees, by means of such a worship, are ennobled in their living, that is enough for him. He never approaches a practice with a particular presupposition, say either of defending it or of attacking it. Rather he gives due consideration to the practice, in all its aspects. If anything
could be said in support of the practice, he takes care to preserve it, bring it to fulfilment. Although this will never prevent him from seeing the defects of that practice. He would point them out also to the devotees so that they would be able to remove them and concentrate on the substance very much.

This approach of Gandhi to see the practice of idol worship with a sympathetic understanding really strengthens the morale of all those who use idols, giving them a chance to understand their own practice in the best light, while at the same time purifying it from the excrescence that might have accrued to it in course of time. Thus it was Gandhi who really put a complete stop to all types of erosions, that came from the external forces of the attacking religions and also from the internal forces of degeneration of a particular form of worship.

In the light of Gandhi's approach, those of RR and DS become very much limited and partial. It is clear then that neither RR nor DS can be set up as standard but have to be judged by the standard of Gandhi. Their particular and limited outlook need to be fulfilled by the more complete and comprehensive outlook of Gandhi.

The great merit of Gandhi lies not merely in fulfilling a tradition. But much more in his theoretical understanding
of the issues, Gandhi has proved comparable to any of the great philosophers of religion in the contemporary world. To go into a formal comparison between Gandhi's thinking and that of others is not possible here. Nor can we do justice to it, even if we were to attempt it now. Hence we may here just point out a few points of contact between the essential points of Gandhi's views with those of some Philosophers in the West.

According to Gandhi there is nothing in the nature of symbol which makes it better or worse, but in the manner of using it. If this is so, this is a special instance of a very general point which Wittgenstein makes about symbols, saying that not a particular picture is wrong, but a particular use of a picture. It is a very general statement with reference to numbers. To make use of a heap (say a heap of five apples) to indicate No.5 is not wrong, but to make the heap as No.5 is wrong.37

Another basic point of Gandhi's position is that real idolatry will be to think fanatically that one symbol is the symbol. Parallel to this kind of understanding, Aldous Huxley expresses the point, almost in similar terms: "Fanaticism is idolatry; and it has the moral evil of idolatry in it; that is, a fanatic worships something which is the creation of his own desires, and thus even his self-devotion in support of it is only an apparent self-devotion;
for in fact it is making the parts of his nature or his mind, which he least values, offer sacrifice to that which he most values. The moral fault, as it appears to me, is the idolatry — the setting up of some idea which is most kindred to our own minds, and the putting it in the place of (the Perfect).  

Because people tend either to misuse symbol or to think of one symbol as superior or the only symbol, it is not possible nor necessary to do away with a symbol. For, it is only through symbols that religious concern, which is the ultimate concern, can be expressed. Hence no mode of worship can do away with symbols. Every mode of worship has to use symbols to a greater or lesser degree. In fact the main reason for Gandhi's position (that those who make of a non-idol-worship cannot blame the idol worshippers) is that they all have to use symbols to a greater or lesser degree, and in that they are all fundamentally one.  

And there is a very striking point of similarity in Paul Tillich's treatment of the dynamics of Faith. He defines faith as "the state of being ultimately concerned". Faith claims ultimacy because "it demands the total surrender of him who accept this claim and it promises total fulfilment even if all other claims have to be subjected to it or rejected in its name." After thus explaining what faith is, Paul Tillich goes into the question of the symbols of Faith, and
it is here that we find his thinking is parallel to that of Gandhi. "Man's ultimate concern", says Paul Tillich, "must be expressed symbolically, because symbolic language alone is able to express the ultimate." The reason he gives is this: "That which is the true ultimate, transcends the realm of finite reality infinitely. Therefore, no finite reality can express it directly and properly. Religiously speaking, God transcends his own name. This is why the use of his name easily becomes an abuse or a blasphemy. Whatever we say about that which concerns us ultimately, whether or not we call it God, has a symbolic meaning. It points beyond itself while participating in that to which it points. In no other way can faith express itself adequately. The language of faith is the language of symbols."

In fine, then, Gandhi's response is not only religiously sound, but also theoretically justifiable.