CHAPTER 5

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From his early childhood religion failed to have any appeal for Nehru. He remarked:

"Of religion I had very hazy notions. It seemed to be woman's affair."

Nehru seems to have derived his ideas from Romain Rolland's *Life of Ramakrishna* from which he quotes in his Autobiography, and finally agrees with the French scholar's views on religion:

"...many souls who are or who believe they are free from all religious belief...in reality, live immersed in a state of supra-rational consciousness, which they term Socialism, Communism, Humanitarianism, Nationalism and even Rationalism...Scepticism itself, when it proceeds from vigorous natures true to the core, when it is an expression of strength, not weakness, joins in the march of the Grand Army of the Religious Soul."  

Religion, according to Nehru, consisted of:

"the inner development of the individual, the evolution of his consciousness in a certain direction which is considered good."

But at one place he appears to be so much disenchanted with its misinterpretations that he wants to drop the word
altogether, and get it replaced with expressions "having limited meanings" such as theology, philosophy, morals, ethics, spirituality, metaphysics, duty, ceremonial, and the like. Mysticism, with a narrow, primitive connotation, irritated Nehru greatly, as he himself confessed:

His questioning mind could not accept the apodictic theology, the supposed supernatural communion achieved by the mystics through catalytic fits, which they described as supreme ecstasy, or the apparitions materialised by them. He felt that mysticism was a loose discipline which led one to surrender one's ratiocinative faculties. However, he did not decry intuition, the ability to grasp truth directly without any conscious or preliminary logical reasoning.

While accepting the mystical power of cognition, Nehru seems to have been influenced by Spinoza who regarded intuition as a third kind of knowledge, and Descartes who felt that it could unmask the complete truth in combination with deductive reasoning.

Nehru's approach to metaphysics or speculative philosophy dealing with the basic nature of existence, reality or experience, was not like that of a theologian who considered it as the ultimate goal of his life. Although he argued that too much indulgence in conjectures about the Cosmic Reality, led one nowhere, yet he sometimes felt a certain intellectual fascination in trying to follow the rigid lines of metaphysical
and philosophical thought of the ancients or the moderns. Nehru admitted to have been attracted by the concepts of Monism and the Advaita Vedanta, even though he could not claim to understand them in all their subtleties.

"I realise that merely an intellectual appreciation of such matters does not carry one far", he wrote. Nehru, the man of action, was unprepared to spend a life resolving the mysteries of the other world. Hence he never "felt at ease" in the domain of metaphysics, and escaped from its spell" with a feeling of relief."5

Nehru held religious prophets like Jesus Christ, Gautama the Buddha and Guru Nanak, in high esteem, he was opposed to organised religions as they had bred violence and hatred in the very name of God, opposed change and progress, and helped the reactionary forces. To quote him:

"Often in history, we see that religion, which was meant to raise us and make us better and nobler, has made people behave like beasts. Instead of bringing enlightenment to them, it has often tried to keep them in the dark; instead of broadening their minds, it has frequently made them narrow-minded and intolerant of others. In the name of religion many great deeds have been performed. In the name of religion also thousands and millions have been killed, and every possible crime has been committed."6

Nehru excoriated religions for their hypocrisy and selfishness, ritualistic mummary and chicanery. He was
convinced that they encouraged a temper which was very opposite to that of science. He took the Christian Church, especially the Church of England, to task for serving the cause of Imperialism, denying human rights, promoting sentimentality, and making religion run like "big business." Nehru felt that the prevailing religion laid stress "on the inner change" and regarded "outward change as but the projection of it". But he argued, that:

"The outer environment influenced the inner environment of man in much the same manner. He wanted the people of the East to shake off the delusion that they had attained greater spiritual heights simply because they had not progressed as much as the West in the material field. It might be possible for a few individuals to get enlightened by obliterating the effects of circumstances or environment, but it was impossible for large groups or nations to do so. Like Sri Ramakrishna Paramhamsa, who said that religion was not meant for empty bellies, Nehru observed that any one "hedged and restricted by the struggle to live" would fail to "achieve inner consciousness of any high degree."7

Simultaneously, he extended the purport of his argument from the individual to the class and the nation:

"A class that is downtrodden and exploited can never progress inwardly. A nation which is politically and economically subjected to another, and...circumscribed and exploited can never achieve inner growth."8
Gradually, Nehru employed his interpretation of the matters of the spirit to the struggle for political emancipation. "Thus, even for inner development", he wrote:

"external freedom and a suitable environment become necessary."\(^9\)

As regards the means for attaining a set objective, Nehru felt that these should be such as lead to the end; otherwise, they will be wasted effort. The nobility of means as advocated by Mahatma Gandhi, had an appeal to him, but unlike his political mentor, he did not want to make a fetish of it. Besides, he felt that the right means were often beyond the capacity of infirm and selfish human nature. The dilemma faced by man was whether he should withdraw from life's struggle, and surrender for not being able to contain evil by employing only right means, or act in compromise with some form of that evil. Limitations notwithstanding, he wrote:

"A worthy end should have worthy means leading up to it... How can we march ahead swiftly and with dignity if we stop or crawl."\(^{10}\)

The spiritualization of politics, in a wider religious sense, as professed by Mahatma Gandhi, appeared to him as a good ethical doctrine. That does not, however, mean that he approved of the Mahatma's religious and sentimental approach to political issues. He was particularly irked by Mahatma Gandhi's occasional
fasts undertaken for self purification, or used as potent weapons during the course of a Satyagraha. By the word ethical Nehru meant the moral qualities of conduct, not the commandments of some religion. There was no place for renunciation, penance or asceticism in his ethics, nor for any prescribed duty. He recognised only such ethical virtues as truthfulness, non-violence, justice, wisdom, courage, earnestness, humility, love and adventure.

Nehru’s approach to religion was rational and scientific. It clearly distinguished between the ideal and the real, the outworn and the eternal, the supposed symbols and human forms of the Supreme, and the Transcendental being himself. His criticism of the traders and the intermediaries in religion reminds one of Voltaire, and his irreverence towards dogmatic beliefs and superstitious practices makes him a rational seeker after truth. Nehruvian religion aimed at the ascent of man in all the departments of human activity, and deemed anything as religious which would lead up to it. It was not a religion tracing its descent from some divine revelation, drawing sustenance from the Ipse dixit of some prophet. It did not create the fear of damnation nor gave any hope of salvation. It was a religion which sought to reconcile reason with intuition, and mysticism with science. It was a religion of action based on human values.
Nehru’s general outlook towards life was not coloured by religious beliefs and practices. He developed an aversion towards religion from the very beginning and this is manifested in his writings and speeches. He stated:

"I am not wedded to any dogma or religion, but I do believe in the innate dignity of human beings. I do believe in the innate dignity of the individual."\(^{11}\)

Nehru realized that men of religion have been and still are often of the highest moral and spiritual type. However, Nehru believed:

"The religious outlook does not help and even hinders, the moral and spiritual progress of a people."\(^{12}\)

The objection of Nehru against religion was that it clouded man’s minds and obstructed clear and rational thinking. Nehru pleaded for the method of science and gave an account of the methodology of science:

"Science seeks to find out why things happen. It experiments and tries again and again and sometimes fails and sometimes succeeds and so bit by bit it adds to human knowledge."\(^{13}\)
According to Nehru science is free enquiry and religion is fixed dogma. Not one but all religions in his opinion, degenerated into something which was completely opposed to the scientific temper. He said:

"Religion as I saw it practised and accepted even by thinking minds whether it was Hinduism or Islam or Buddhism or Christianity, did not attract me."  

He looked at Science as the only way to pull India out of the old graves of thought and put her on the track of modernity and secularity. Nehru repeatedly said:

"Science today challenges the old concept of religion. A new India could not be built up without discarding the old reliance on some supernatural factors and encouraging the spirit of free enquiry in a free atmosphere."

According to Nehru, secular philosophy meant neither irreligion nor only material well being. It contained spiritual elements also. He wrote,

"A purely secular philosophy of life may be considered enough by most of us... And yet that secular philosophy itself must have some background, some objective other than material well-being. It must essentially have spiritual values and certain standards of behaviour."

Nehru was of the opinion that most essential for secularism is the maintenance of the unity of India i.e the
unity of the country, not merely a political unity but a unity of the mind and the heart which precludes the narrow urges that make for disunity and which break down the barriers raised in the name of religion or between state and state or for that matter any other barrier. He stressed the spirit of unity or tolerance. In his speech at Trichur on 26 December 1955, he said:

"I lay stress on the unity of India, not merely the political unity which we have achieved, but something far deeper, the emotional unity, the integration of our minds and hearts, the suppression of feelings of separatism." 

The other dimension of Nehru's secularism is that of communal harmony. He was of the opinion that in order to arrive at the goal of secular politics we have to solve the problems of communalism. In the periods of reaction it was not difficult for the communalists to play upon this feeling and exploit it in the name of religion.

Nehru was of the opinion that the communal problem had an economic background. It was not particularly a religious question. Its roots could be traced down to the different economic conditions of the Hindus and the Muslims and their different developments. For Nehru this communal question was fundamentally a "conflict between the members of the upper-middle class Hindus and Muslims for jobs and power."
continuation This conflict resulted in a sense of fear and insecurity which gripped the minority communities, which in India are neither racial nor national, but religious. Nehru observed: On the one side, there were the Muslim fears of a Hindu majority, on the other Hindu resentment at being bullied.21

In a letter the PCC Presidents, Nehru wrote,

"Communalism is essentially based upon the dominance of one religious community. If that community is in a minority, this is opposed to all ideas of secular democracy. But if that community is in a minority, this is opposed to all ideas of secular democracy. But if that community is in a majority, even so its dominance over others as a religious community would be wholly undemocratic."22

The resolution on communalism supported by Nehru in April 1948 was passed by the Constituent Assembly:

Whereas it is essential for the proper functioning of democracy and the growth of national unity and solidarity that communalism should be eliminated from Indian life:

This Assembly is of opinion that no communal organisation which by its constitution or by the exercise of discretionary power vested in any of its officers or organs, admits to or excludes from its membership person on grounds of religion, race and caste or any of them should be permitted to engage in any activities other than those essential for the bonafide religious, cultural, social and educational needs of the community and that
all steps legislative and administrative, necessary to prevent such activities should be taken.23

Nehru believed that India is a country of many communities and unless we can live in harmony with each other, respecting each other's beliefs and habits, we cannot build up a great and united secular nation.

He was of the opinion that secular education has great importance because secular democracy is not only a form of Government but a higher value of life. Nehru said:

"Democratic values can be acquired and developed by the people only through secular education as India is multi-religious, multi-culture, multi-regional."24

In addition to Secularism Nehru, had also a Programme for Social action and Change.

Nehru felt very strongly the need for changing the traditional basis of the Indian society. The constitution of India itself contains a provision. Clause (2) (b) of Article 25, empowers the State to enact laws for social reforms and welfare.

Nehru was determined to eradicate the caste system, particularly the system of untouchability, with the help of legislative enactments. Nehru emphasized the need for giving special opportunities to the oppressed backward classes. He said,
"Our social programme must lay down clearly that we cannot tolerate the many disabilities which various classes called the depressed classes suffer from."25

To make them equal citizens in all civic matters he deemed it essential that special opportunities for educational, economic and cultural growth must be given to backward groups so as to enable them to catch up to those who are ahead of them. Article 44 of the Constitution provides:

"The state shall endeavour to secure for the citizens a Uniform Civil Code Throughout the territory of India."26

As a first step in this direction, Nehru considered it most important that the beginning should be made from modifying the Hindu Law. The Hindu Code Bill, sought to modify Hindu Law in regard to marriage, adoption, guardianship, women's property rights etc. Many orthodox and most communal-minded Hindus considered it a direct invasion on the traditional Hinduism and there was a great hue and cry in the country.

There was great challenge to Nehru to fight the opponents by laying stress on the fact that the Bill dealt with purely social and secular matters which had no relevance to religion. To create a climate in favour of the Bill, he in his presidential address to the Congress emphasized the progressive outlook inherent in the Bill. He defended himself by arguing.
"Thus, the Hindu Code Bill which has given rise to so much argument, became a symbol of this conflict between progress and reaction in the social domain. I do not refer to any particular clause of Bill...but rather to the spirit underlying that Bill. This was a spirit of liberation and freeing our people and more especially, our womenfolk from outworn customs and shackles that bind them." 

Nehru was criticised over the Hindu Code Bill. The charge was that he was trying to change Hindu Laws but did not want the Muslim Laws. He argued:

"Muslim community is a minority and we do not wish the Hindu majority to do it. These are personal laws and so they will remain for the Muslims, unless they want to change." 

Some called Nehru as an atheist scholars called him "Agnostic Nehru." but very few suspected his secular spirit and even his hostile critics admitted that it was an "instinct" with him.

Nehru's general grouse against religion is that it prevents the penetration of science and its method into the society, which he has revealed through his writings and speeches. He had no patience with the crude interpretation of religion and dogmatic approach to it which are the seed-tied of all superstition, bigotry and intolerance.
Nehru was by temperament and upbringing a secularist. Much before he became the prime-minister, Nehru had expressed his dislike of the "uncritical credulousness" and "the reliance on the supernatural" which he described as the common features of all religions. Thanks to this early scepticism regarding religion, Nehru's nationalism did not acquire any revivalist overtones and was distinct from the spiritual or religious nationalism of Tilak, Dayananda and Vivekanand, or for that matter even Gandhi. In fact, Nehru was often distressed by what he considered Gandhi's attempts to mix religion with politics and his attempts to give a religious colour to things. In the Autobiography, Nehru admits that quite some of Gandhi's phrases like "Ram-rajya" as the Golden Age "jarred upon me."

In 1931 at the Karachi session of the Congress, Nehru was mainly instrumental in drafting the resolution which read, inter alia, "The state shall observe neutrality in regard to all religions." Two decades later in 1950 Nehru saw to it that the spirit of this resolution was embodied in the new constitution. Various clauses of the constitution not only gave all Indian citizens religious freedom but also sought to bring about a separation of religion and politics. While the faithful were given the right to profess, practise and even propagate their faith and religious institutions the right to hold property, care was simultaneously taken to give powers to the state to
regulate the secular activities of religious institutions and to impose reasonable restrictions on religious freedom in the interest of public health, law and order and morality.

How firmly Nehru was committed to the secular ideal can be seen by contrasting Nehru’s political style with that of Jinnah. Like Jinnah, Nehru was fully aware of the hold of religion on the Indian masses, but unlike Jinnah he stoutly refused to exploit it for political purposes or goals. Throughout his life Nehru remained critical of those Congressmen who were communal in nature and exploited religion if situations so demanded.

Nehru saw clearly the dangers, particularly for a country like India, in identifying with any particular religion. Any attempt to identify India with one religion would exclude sections of the population and the excluded elements would harbour feelings of second class citizenship. Secondly, Nehru argued, any attempt to identify India with one faith would give nationalism itself a restricted meaning and then in Nehru’s own words:

"we would have to consider Hindu nationalism, Muslim nationalism, Sikh nationalism, Christian nationalism and not Indian nationalism."31

Thirdly, it was Nehru’s contention that even if Hindus alone had resided in India, it would still not be easy to
dispense with secularism. Rastriya Sewak Sangh. Spokesmen once asked Nehru: Can’t we have Hinduism as the state religion and still be tolerant? Panditji’s reply was typical. Hinduism of which sect will be the official religion? he countered question, and went on to add,

"In view of the highly fragmented nature of Hindu society, India would have needed secularism even if it sheltered the Hindus alone."32

On the basis of Nehru’s various writing, speeches and action, we can say that he understood secularism in three distinct senses and exerted to promote secularism in all the three senses viz. (a) as the attempt to keep religion out of politics, (b) as equal respect for all religions and (c) as an attempt to transcend the narrow loyalties and identities of caste, creed and region by building a more broad based Indian identity.

Nehru fought communalism tooth and nail throughout his life. Perhaps his only weakness lay in considering majority communalism a far greater danger than minority communalism. He felt that the Hindus given their larger number and economically dominant position could more easily thrust their religious view on the rest of the population and hence he constantly pleaded
with Hindus to set the example of secular behaviour and act more generously, thus perhaps unwittingly encouraging minority communalism.

To conclude, Nehru did bequeath this nation a rich legacy viz. a modern, democratic, socialist, secular state. In one sense, Nehru could not have come on the Indian scene at a more opportune time. After the mid-nineteenth century fascination with Western ideas and culture, the Indian Renaissance went back to its Indian roots and there took place a somewhat aggressive revivalism. The rise of Nehru stemmed this tide which could have isolated India from world developments and instead gave Indian nationalism a wider perspective by identifying it with the larger forces of anti-colonialism and economic re-construction.

Jawaharlal was not only a great universalist but also a confirmed rationalist. His rationalism is clearly visible in his attitude towards science and religion as depicted in the Glimpses. He regarded science as a major triumph of the human mind, although he was critical of its misuses in war and destruction. According to him, science and its offspring, the machine, if properly utilised, could liberate man from eternal drudgery, illness and want. As he wrote to his daughter on June 10, 1932:
"What has been this quest of man, and whither does he journey? For thousands of years men have tried to answer these questions. Religion and philosophy and science have all considered them, and given many answers...In the main religion has attempted to give a complete and dogmatic answer, and has often cared little for the mind, but has sought to enforce obedience to its decisions in various ways. Science gives a doubting and hesitating reply, for its is of the nature of science not to dogmatise, but to experiment and reason and rely on the mind of man. I need hardly tell you that my preferences are all for science and the methods of science."33

He repeated the same view again on February 3, 1933:

"Organised religion....has various dogmas attached to it which its followers are supposed to accept without doubt or questioning. Science has a very different way of looking at things. It takes nothing for granted and has, or ought to have, no dogmas. It seeks to encourage an open mind and tries to reach truth by repeated experiment. This outlook is obviously very different from the religious outlook and it is not surprising that there was conflict between the two."34

Jawaharlal’s rationalism created in him an acute distaste for organised religion and for institutional worship. Though he continued to admire the great Hindu scriptures - the Bhagvad Gita was that jewel of a poem, and as for the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, who but the greatest of men could have written them? --They impressed him more as literature and historical testimony than as revelation. He disliked temple-going, was scornful of ritual and regarded prayers as morbid. In the Glimpses
Jawaharlal is critical of all established religions as they are built on dogmatism and credulity, not on reason or sense and as they tend to exploit the people materially and to create conditions that help misery to flourish. According to Jawaharlal Nehru:

"organised religion tends to be the enemy of man's own best interests. He detests the authority and authoritarianism of religion reigning over us and controlling our minds: The chains which sometimes tie bodies are bad enough but the invisible chains consisting of ideas and prejudices which tie up our minds are far worse. They are of our own making, and though often we are not conscious of them, they hold us in their terrible grip."35

He admitted that:

"the founders of the great religions have been among the greatest and noblest men that the world has produced but was emphatic that their disciples and the people who have come after them have often been far from great or good. Often in history we see that religion, which was meant to raise us and make us better and nobler has made people behave like beasts. Instead of bringing enlightenment to them, it has often tried to keep them in the dark; instead of broadening their minds, it has frequently made them narrow-minded and intolerant of others. In the name of religion many great and find deeds have been performed. In the name of religion also thousands and millions have been killed, and every possible crime has been committed."36

Organised religion, according to Jawaharlal, perpetuated human misery by preaching that unhappiness and poverty are the inevitable lot of man in this world.
To the rationalist Jawaharlal, religion's promise of "heaven or paradise or whatever it may be called" looked juvenile. "This reminds me of the child who behaves in the hope of being rewarded with a jam puff or jalebi. If the child is always thinking of the jam puff or jalebi, you would not say that it had been properly trained, would you? Much less would you approve of boys and girls who did everything for the sake of jam puff and the like. What then shall we say of grown-up persons who think and act in this way? For after all there is no essential difference between the jam puff and the idea of paradise. As for himself he said:

"I am afraid the next world does not impress me. My mind is full of what I should do in this world, and if I see my way clearly here, I am content. If my duty is clear to me, I do not trouble myself about the world."

Jawaharlal saw religion as a business established and maintained for the benefit of a few at the expense of the many: "It is strange how much people with simple faith will put up with. It is because of this that religion has become one of the biggest and the most paying business in my countries. See the priests in the temples, how they try to fleece the poor worshipper. Go to the banks of the Ganga, and you will see the Pandas refusing to perform some ceremony till the unhappy villager pays up. Whatever happens in the family—a birth, a
marriage, a death—the priest steps in and payment is required. In this regard Jawaharlal found no difference between the world's established religions. He considered them all alike in their exploitation of the credulous. "In every religion this is so—Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, Zoroastrianism. Each has its own methods of making money out of the faith of the faithful." Jawaharlal was well aware that often enough religion has served as a handmaiden to politics and imperialism, and he agreed with Karl Marx that "Religion in the opium of the masses." But Jawaharlal had at the same time due respect for all world religions. He preached religious tolerance: "There is so much that is similar in their outlook and their teaching that one wonders why people should be foolish enough to quarrel about details and unessentials." He was pained to see that "one religious man says this and another says that. And, often enough each one of them considers the other a fool or a knave. He concluded that:

"Most of us are narrow-minded and not very wise. Can one presume to imagine that we know the whole truth and to force this down the throat of our neighbour? It may be that our neighbour is also right. If you see a flower on a tree, you do not call it the tree. If another person sees the leaf only and yet another the trunk, each has seen part of the tree only. How foolish it would be for each one of them to say that the tree was the flower only or the leaf or the trunk, and to flight over this!"
This fight over religion perplexed Jawaharlal but its recrudescence in India horrified him. The memory of Kanpur riots in which his friend Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi lost his life was still fresh in his mind. Jawaharlal was particularly concerned with the savagery committed in the name of religion. It was important to release India from the chains of narrow, bigoted religious fanaticism, from the shackles of the complex ideology, custom, convention and superstition. He was at points to tell his fellow-countrymen that Islam did not believe in religious persecution. It, on the other hand, shook up India.

"It introduced vitality and an impulse for progress in a society which was becoming wholly unprogressive. Hindu art which had become decadent and morbid, and heavy with repetition and detail, undergoes a change in the north. A new art grows up, which might be called Indo-Muslim full of energy and vitality. The old Indian master-builders draw inspiration from the new ideas brought by the Muslims. The very simplicity of the Muslim creed and outlook on life influenced the architecture of the day, and brought back to it simple and noble design." 40

He is looked upon as a great leader of Islam who came to spread Islam to India. Most Muslims adore him; most Hindus hate him. As a matter of fact, he was hardly a religious man. He was a Mohammedan, of course, but that was by the way. Above everything he was a soldier, and a brilliant soldier. He came to India to conquer and loot, as soldiers unfortunately do, and he
would have done so to whatever religion he might have belonged. According to Jawaharlal the best of Indian culture was a synthesis; this had been badly frayed and should be rebuilt on the secular foundations of freedom and social equality. Therefore, Jawaharlal emerges, from the Glimpses a votary of secularism, not of this or that religion.

Without being a member of any church or sect Jawaharlal was imbued with a pervasive moral sense, his morality hinging on the notion of duty and the idea of humanity. A person should serve his fellowmen rather than concentrate selfishly on himself. What he should be concerned with is the larger good - the good of society, of our country, or of humanity. He approvingly quotes from Bhagavata: "I desire not the supreme state of bliss with its eight perfections, nor the cessation of rebirth. May I take up the sorrow of all creatures who suffer and enter into them so that they may be made free from grief." Jawaharlal is no tired of repeating the lessons of cooperation and sacrifice for the larger good. At another place in the Glimpses, he quotes from an old Sanskrit text that the individual should be sacrificed for the family, the family for the community and the community for the country. In this field, however, Jawaharlal did not consider man superior to animal. As he wrote:
"Many people nowadays are apt to boast of one great civilisation and the wonders of science. Science has indeed done wonders... It is well to remember that in many ways man has not are superior to him still. This may sound a foolish statement and people who do not know better may laugh at it. But you have just read Maeterlinck's Life of the Bee, of the White Ant, and the Ant, and you must have wondered at the social organisation of these insects. We look down upon the insects as almost the lowest of living things, and yet these tiny things have learnt the art of cooperation and of sacrifice for the common good far better than men... If mutual cooperation and sacrifice for the good of society are the tests of civilisation, we may say that the White Ant and the Ant are in this respect superior to man." 43

Nehru united that when tradition blinds us to truth, it has to be given up. What happened need not be taken as the final and unalterable act of destiny. History is moulded by man's vision and energy as much as man is moulded by historical circumstances. Nehru believes that religion has a major role in building up traditions and linking them with the idea of God. In that case, traditions become fixed and obstructive.

What Nehru opposes is the religious authority in matters in which the common law of the land could decide. The old religions have a way of covering and regulating every aspect of our day-to-day lives. Thus, Hinduism and Islam, quite apart from their purely religious teachings, lay down social codes and rules about marriage, inheritance, civil and criminal law,
political organisation, and indeed almost everything else. In other words, they lay down a complete structure, for society and try to perpetuate this by giving it religious sanction and authority.\textsuperscript{44}

Religion very often breeds superstitions and false beliefs. It is true, as Nehru says, that 'final mysteries' still remain far beyond the reach of the human mind and are likely to continue to remain so. But as a matter of theory, the so-called mysteries are capable of solution with result that there is no reason why men should be obsessed with the "ultimate mysteries". Nehru sees no justification what so ever in such an attitude that constantly dotes on the eternal ultimates. Life is a never-ending adventure offering untold opportunities and ever-new panoramas. What is required of man placed in this perfectly exciting world is unti ring exploration, ceaseless effort and unsatiated curiosity. His search for truth should not brook any chain of dogma or fetter of faith. It is with the temper and approach of a scientist, we must face life.\textsuperscript{45}

According to Nehru religion deals with the invisible and science deals with the visible. He says that he has no concern with the ultimate mystery of life. He writes:

"Religion, as I saw it practised, and accepted even by thinking minds...did not attract me. It seemed to be closely associated with superstitious practices and dogmatic beliefs,"
and behind it lay a method of approach to life's problems which was certainly not that of science. There was an element of magic about it, uncritical credulousness, a reliance on the supernatural...In the wider sense of the word, religion dealt with the uncharted region of human experience, uncharted, that is, by the scientific positive knowledge of the day."

According to Nehru, science is a free inquiry; religion is fixed dogma. He argued here that in the early days of science it was said that science was materialistic as it concerned itself with matter, but religion was spiritual. So there was talk of conflict between the two. Since then science has extended its area of operation from solid matter to the airy nothing and the conflict is no more real and there is little meaning in the talk of conflict. Nehru says: "That conflict hardly seems real today the whole of universe is its field of action, and converted the social matter itself into airy nothing." 

While religion and the mysteries that religion signified had always a fascination for the faithful, science has steadily advanced its frontiers. As Nehru puts it:

"Science was seen, not only to increase the human knowledge, but also to increase man's control over nature. It is also not surprising that science triumphed and that people bowed
down in worship before this all powerful new God. Furthermore, Nehru’s admiration for science is so great that he calls the scientists as the miracle-workers of today."

Replying to the question whether Christianity has any future in India, Nehru said that he did not think that an organised religion had a large part to play. In the future religion would be an intimate matter for the individual soul, and will not be exploited for political purposes.

In the year 1948, when Pt. Nehru addressed the students of Aligarh Muslim University he came out with the following observations:

"As far as India is concerned, I can speak with some certainty, we shall proceed on secular and national lines in keeping with the powerful trends towards internationalism. India will be a land, as in the past, of many faiths equally honoured and respected". Again, in his another speech on Gandhi Jayanti day, he said,"We will not tolerate any communalism in this country and that we are building a free, secular state, where every religion and belief has full freedom and equal honour."
Nehru’s concept of secular state is a pragmatic solution to the problem of religious pluralism. This idea has been expressed by Nehru in one of his speeches in the year 1950:

"The Government of India, with many religions that have secured great and devoted followings for generations, can never function satisfactorily in the modern age except on a secular basis."^{52}

We believe that Smith was not wrong when he said that the secular state in India, on the other hand, is more reminiscent of the American experience, where the secular state was achieved with no hostility towards religion as such, and it has continued to evolve on a basis of mutual good feeling between the Church and the State.^{53}

In 1920s the Congress came under the control of Mohan Dass Karam Chand Gandhi, whose nationalism had deep roots in religious faith. In his autobiography Gandhi asserted that those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means.

Gandhi’s religious faith, however, was utterly different from that of the extremists. He declared that his Hinduism included all that he knew to be best in Islam, Christianity, Buddhism and Zoroastrianism. Gandhi strove unceasingly for Hindu-Muslim unity, convinced that ultimately both religions
were true and valid.

Nehru made a clear separation between religion and politics. Nehru firmly believed that secularism as a polity should regulate religion. Nehru’s criticism against an organised religion is that it often led to dogmatism since it was based on bigotry, intolerance, ignorance and fear. Nehru believed that an individual’s life should concern itself more with ethics and secularism then with religion, with the good of the community and society rather than attainment of moksha of one’s self after death.

Nehru held the view that organised religion should not have a major role to play politically because religion was a private matter for every individual and could not be exploited for political purpose.

Nehru saw that Indian social life was being governed by outmoded customs and social practices which rested on some narrow religious faiths. He looked at science as the only way to pull India out of the old grooves of thought and put her on the track of modernity.

According to Nehru secular philosophy meant neither irreligion nor only material well being. It contained spiritual elements also. His concept of secularism has four aspects: (1)
religious freedom, (2) neutrality of state in matters of religion, (3) an attitude of mind i.e. mental attitude and (4) secularization in all areas of social life.

Nehru was keen to institutionalise the theory and practice of secularism. He concretised secularism in India by giving it a legal and constitutional dimension through the Indian constitution and periodic enactments of parliament. His secularism has sought to incorporate certain basic ideas in the Indian constitution which constitutes the fundamental laws of the land. Such ideas as freedom of religion, right to equality, equality of citizenship and separation of state and religion are very much part and parcel of the constitution. He included the Directive Principles of State Policy for the upliftment of the backward classes in the constitution and this is regarded as the most significant contribution of Nehru.

Nehru abolished the communal electorates. He pleaded secularism through nationalism, anti-communalism, Hindu-Muslim unity, secular education, industrialisation, scientific enquiry, socialism, planning, modernization, social reforms, social legislation.

Nehru had to confront militant Hindu and Muslim communalism all through his political career. One can therefore understand his irritation with and indignation at 'the spectacle
of what is called religion'. But curiously enough, and
fascinatingly too, one important cause of his impatience with
religion was the great love and loyalty he bore towards Gandhi.

No one has ever doubted that Gandhi was basically a
religious person. And he was religious not in any purely
universalistic or essentialistic sense a sense in which
Socrates, Spinoza, Whitehead, Einstein, Tagore, or even Nehru
could beside to be religious—but in the narrower sense of
religion in which it is divided into communities. Gandhi never
thought of himself as anything but a Hindu, and Nehru describes
him as 'a Hindu to the innermost depths of his being'. If we were
asked to name the best representative of all that is best in the
Hindu religion in our time, whom else could we name but Gandhi?

"I find it difficult to think of even
Vivekananda in this category, for did he not
say that he 'wanted to lead mankind to the
place where there is neither the Vedas nor the
Bible nor the Koran'? Furthermore, 'Practical
Advaitism, which looks upon and behaves to all
mankind as one's own soul, is yet to be
developed among the Hindus universally. On the
other hand, our experience is that if ever the
followers of any religion approach to this
equality in an appreciable degree in the plane
of practical workday life...it is those of
Islam and Islam alone'. And his conviction
that 'for our motherland a junction of the two
great systems, Hinduism and Islam-Vedanta
brain and Islam body—is the only hope' takes
Vivekananda beyond the confines of Hinduism
proper to a sort of universalistic religion."
Gandhi would not think of such a junction. But what he did think of was equally startling. Gandhi is on record as having told the Federation of International Fellowships in January, 1928, that:

"After long study and experience I have come to these conclusions: (1) all religions are true, (2) all religions have some errors in them, (3) all religions are almost as dear to me as my own Hinduism. My veneration for other faiths is the same as for my own faith."\(^5\)

It is true that many saints and sages, especially amongst the Hindus, had said before Gandhi that all religions if sincerely practised lead to God. But that did not necessarily mean that all paths are equally long or equally smooth. Even when the poet said:

"The shaikh reached (God) via Kaaba and I via the temple of heart; Dard, the gola was the same, only the routes were different' - it is not difficult to see which route he approves. But when Gandhi said,'my veneration for other faiths was the same as for my own', we may rest assured that he meant precisely what he said, and that he did not say it for the sake of politeness or for gaining any political ends. He could, in fact, make such a statement with perfect sincerity and with full conviction because 'his conception of religion had nothing to do with any dogma or custom or ritual. It was basically concerned with his firm belief in the moral law, which he calls the law of truth or love. Claiming to understand the spirit of Hinduism, he rejects every text or practice which does not fit in with his idealist interpretation of what it should be, calling it an interpolation or a subsequent accretion."\(^6\)
But to resume. What quarrel could Nehru have with Gandhi’s Hinduism which had ‘nothing to do with any dogma or custom or ritual’? And yet he had many a painful issue to join with his great mentor. In the first instance, Nehru insisted on using reason in the solution of moral and political problems. This seemed to him to be the only way. But Gandhi’s way was different. Whenever a crisis arose in the affairs of the nation and everyone including Nehru looked to him for guidance, Gandhi turned towards God; he waited for the light to come, he waited to hear his ‘inner voice’. Nehru admits that Gandhi’s instincts (he prefers this word to intuition or ‘inner voice’) were often right. And he has no objection to a leader acting on ‘instinct’ in a moment of crisis. But the leader must have a rational grasp of the situation, and is expected to give adequate reasons for his political decision, especially when he wants others to follow him. Not his actions but the reasons which Gandhi gave for his actions agonized Nehru.

"Gandhi had acted rightly in suspending the Civil Disobedience Movement. But the reasons he had given seemed to me an insult to intelligence and an amazing performance for a leader of a national movement. He was perfectly entitled to treat his ashram inmates in any manner he liked; they had taken all kinds of pledges and accepted a certain regime. But the Congress had not done so; I had not done so. Why should we be tossed hither and thither for, what seemed to me, metaphysical and mystical reasons in which I was not interested? Was it conceivable to have any political movement on this basis?"57
Of course, the basic conflict was that Nehru was a social engineer, whereas Gandhi was a spiritual healer. Gandhi no doubt wanted 'to wipe every tear from every eye' but he wanted to do this not by changing the forces and relations of production but by changing the minds of men, by teaching men to live simple and pure lives having few wants and working hard to satisfy most of them through their own individual (preferably manual) efforts. Gandhi was full of the ancient ideal of asceticism, whereas Nehru did not 'appreciate the ascetic life as a social ideal, though it may suit some individuals'. Above all, what caused dismay and 'desolation' (this last is the caption of a chapter in his Autobiography in which Nehru speaks of 'the vast distance which separated him from me') in his mind was his awareness of the fact that Gandhi was not only not much interested in raising the living standards of the people beyond a certain level which Nehru regarded as ascetic, but was positively giving his support to those very vested interests which stood in the way of their economic and social betterment.

Naturally therefore and almost inevitably 'some of my accumulated irritation turned to religion and the religious outlook'. Nehru's indignation would have been less restrained if he had not had to confront religion for decades and at the closest range in the person of one of the greatest men of
religion. For in spite of all conflict and irritation, his deep love for and almost childlike devotion to Gandhi never showed any cracks. He spoke with all his heart when he said a few hours after Gandhi’s assassination at the hands of a Hindu fanatic.

"The light has gone out of our lives'. Gandhi had always appeared to Nehru 'like a beam of light that pierced the darkness and removed the scales from our eyes."58

He did not descend from the top; he seemed to emerge from the millions of India, speaking their language and incessantly drawing attention to them and their appalling condition' (The Discovery of India, p. 361).
REFERENCES


19. S. Gopal. Ref. no. 6, p.250.


34. *Ibid*.


52. *The Hindu*, September 13, 1950