

## AHIMSĀ AND INDIAN SECULARISM

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### Introduction

India is a land of many religions. The vast majority of the Indians follow one of the following religions, namely, Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, Sikhism, Jainism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism and Judaism. Over and above these, there are many distinct groups of the aborigines with their animism. Their number runs into tens of millions. The democratic Indian constitution guarantees religious freedom to all in a manner, which is impossible as things are at present to the neighbours of India like Pakistan and Nepal. India is a secular nation, although the original Indian Constitution did not explicitly designate her as being such until the forty-second amendment, which modified the Preamble.

In secular India, "Religious liberty is based not on considerations of political expediency but on the conviction of the ultimate oneness of the religious quest, however numerous the different paths which might be followed."<sup>1</sup> Our purpose in the following pages is to dwell at some length on this Indian conviction while trying to understand Gandhi's religion and his conviction that all religions are equal. However, before we take up these two topics a few observations on the multi-religious nature of the population of India seem to be necessary.

### The Religious Quest

Hinduism is the religion of by far the largest section of the Indian population. It is quite aware of the many *mārgas* or paths of liberation and *mukti*. There are within the fold *mārgas* as disparate as *jñānamārga* (the

path of knowledge and enlightenment), *bhktimārga* (the path of devotion), *yogamārga* (the path of *yoga* or selfcontrol and meditation), *karmamārga* (the path of duty), and so on. Even the use of the word, fold, has to be understood loosely, not as indicative of any central organization or unity of doctrine and ritual. Monistic Shankara has an equally dignified and revered name as the monotheistic Madhva. If Vishnu is the supreme god of the Vaishnavites, Shiva is the divinity of the Shivites. Neither of the groups may frown upon Krishna the divine *avatāra* of the *Bhagavadgītā*, because one may say, *ekam sād vīprā bahudhā vadanti*: "The wise poets (Rṣis) call the one reality by many names."<sup>2</sup> There are innumerable gods and goddesses, who are worshipped in temples, wayside shrines, on hilltops and river-banks, on the mountains and at the lakes, in homes, and so on. The cults too vary from the most esoteric forms to those held during the most popular annual pilgrimages and festivities, which used to be performances of the altogether rare ancient Vedic *yajñas* or sacrifices in certain parts of this vast country.

Even a superficial knowledge of Buddhism will convince anyone that the *yāna* (i.e., vehicle, course, career or way<sup>3</sup>) is dual, which shows the way to *nirvāṇa*. Āśvaghoṣa and Nāgārjuna are poles apart from each other. Āśvaghoṣa's *tathatā* doctrine of the absolute, unchangeable and ultimate reality is the very opposite of Nāgārjuna's *nairātmya* doctrine or *śūnyavāda*, i.e., the doctrine of the 'essencelessness' or 'voidness' of all appearance.<sup>4</sup> The two great thinkers were contemporaries. They lived towards the end of the first century, A.D.

Jainism is at least as old as Buddhism. It agrees in the protest against the ritualistic sacrifice of the Brahminic priesthood.<sup>5</sup> Ahimsā (i.e., non-killing) may be said to be the fundamental ethical virtue of Jainism.<sup>6</sup> Jainism strikes a middle course between the Upaniṣadic absolutism of the ultimate reality and the absolute momentariness or the pluralism of the *śūnyavāda*. Buddhism in that it admits a kind of relative pluralism known as *syādvāda* (*syāt* means 'may be,' but adapted to mean 'somehow,' 'in a way', the second element, *vāda* means 'doctrine').<sup>7</sup> Jainism is indeed the religion of *ahimsā*, it follows the way of *ahimsā*. *Ahimsā* is the greatest duty or law: *ahiṃsā paramo dharmaḥ*. Together with their followers, the Jina and the Buddha struck out to find each his own distinct way of liberation from the

cycle of sin and suffering, of transmigration and rebirth.

The advent of Islam with its strict monotheism and its political and religious dominance heightened the conflict in the hearts and minds of the people of India. We can detect clearly the inner conflict and its solution in Guru Nanak, who sang, "At God's gate there dwell thousands of Muhammeds, thousands of Brahmas, of Vishnus, of Sivas; thousands upon thousands of exalted Ramas. There is one Lord over all spiritual lords, the creator whose name is true."<sup>8</sup> Kabir, coming after Nanak, spoke in similar tones, "O servant, where doest thou seek me, Lo, I am beside thee. I am neither in Kaaba nor in Kailash: neither am I in rites and ceremonies, nor in yoga and renunciation."<sup>9</sup>

Almost a century after Nanak, at the peak of the glory of the Moghul Empire, Akhbar's Thursday discussions in the Ibadat Khana brought together Muslims and Hindus, Jains and Buddhists, Christians and Zoroastrians.<sup>10</sup> The famed chronicler, Abul Fazl, the Emperor's Jonathan. the author of *Ain-i-Akhbari*, puts the consternation in Akhbar's mind thus:

"...There gradually grew in his mind the conviction that there were sensible men in all religions, and austere thinkers and men with miraculous gifts in all nations. If some truths were thus found everywhere, why should truth be restricted to one religion or to a comparatively new creed like Islam, scarcely a thousand years old."<sup>11</sup>

Abul Fazl gave vent to his own restlessness when he wrote,

"A while I frequent the Christian cloister, anon the mosque, but Thee only I seek from fane to fane."<sup>12</sup>

However, the people living on this side of the Sindhu found themselves on an equal footing with Islam only when the imperial British became the rulers of India, thus ending over 700 years of Muslim superiority.<sup>13</sup> With the political presence of Christian England, the Muslims in India were made to feel equal with their Hindu brothers and perhaps could voice the sentiment of Mangu Khan of Peking (middle of XIII cent.), namely, "Like the five fingers of the hand are the several ways to Paradise."<sup>14</sup> But it was equality in political and cultural subjection to the ruling western Christian overlords.

Of this conflict of cultures were born men like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Vivekananda, Mahatma Phule and Rajendra Prasad, C.

Rajagopalachari and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Jawaharlal Nehru and Zakir Hussain, Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi, and many others, who shone in the socio-political firmament.

When Ram Mohan Roy established Brahmo Samaj in the early XIX century as a church open to all for "the worship and adoration of the Eternal, Unsearchable and Immortal Being Who is the Author and Preserver of the Universe," he was in search of a universalism, which would embrace all irrespective of their religious affiliations.<sup>15</sup> The search for universalism in religion is not a search for the divine only, but it is also a search for equal dignity with the rest of mankind. It is a search for human and personal dignity and honour among the worshippers of one and the same God. India's quest for self-realization has taken a new turn. Ram Mohan declared, "Reason and conscience were henceforth to be regarded as the highest authority and the teachings of Scripture were to be accepted only in so far as they harmonized with the light within us."<sup>16</sup> In order to understand him, we have to keep in mind not only the contemporary rationalistic world of Europe, but also the multi-religious and multi-racial Indian milieu with its religious and cultural differences, disparities and conflicts.

We hear the same voice from Gandhi when he says, "I decline to be bound by any interpretation, however learned it may be, if it is repugnant to reason and moral sense."<sup>17</sup> Again he says, "Let us not deceive ourselves into belief that everything that is written in Sanskrit and printed in shastra has any binding effect upon us."<sup>18</sup> He repeated, "That which is opposed to the fundamental maxims of morality, that which is opposed to trained reason, cannot be claimed no matter how ancient it may be."<sup>19</sup> This attitude does smack of rationalism, but what is more pertinent and to the point is this Indian's search for self-realization and self-appropriation of the dignity of the human conscience.

It may fairly be concluded from the foregoing observations that the mental attitude which holds that all religions are equal is not an exclusively Hindu phenomenon, let alone exclusively Gandhian, and that it contains an implicit humanism in search of a universalism with equal and personal human dignity in spite of political, cultural and religious differences. Before we attend to Gandhi's position that all religions are equal, let us take up the prior question of his religion.



## Gandhi's Religion

It may not be altogether wrong to say that it is a common experience that the title of Gandhi's *An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiments with Truth* causes uncertainty in the minds of the readers and unleashes speculation. It is a matter of curiosity why Gandhi did not write at the top of his book "*The Story of My Experiments with Ahimsā*," or "*The Story of My Experiments with Satyagraha and Ahimsā*," or simply "*The Story of My Experiments with My Religion*." For he has said towards the end of the book,

"My uniform experience has convinced me that there is no other God than Truth. And if every page of these chapters does not proclaim to the reader that the only means for the realization of Truth is Ahimsā, I shall deem all my labour in writing these chapters to have been in vain.. But this much I can say with assurance, as a result of my experiments that a perfect vision of Truth can only follow a complete realization of Ahimsā."<sup>20</sup>

He has also said, "Satyagraha is search for Truth; and God is Truth. Ahimsā or nonviolence is the light that reveals that Truth to me."<sup>21</sup> In the context, these are religious terms: search for Truth, realization of truth, realization of God, self-realization, complete realization of Ahimsā.

"The term 'religion' I am using," Gandhi wrote in his Autobiography, "in its broadest sense meaning thereby self-realization or knowledge of self."<sup>22</sup> Religion is in the "search of God and striving for self-realization."<sup>23</sup> That is why he was confirmed in his belief that "religion and morality were synonymous."<sup>24</sup> He was convinced that "morality was the basis of things and that truth is the substance of all morality"<sup>25</sup> and that "the only means for the realization of Truth is Ahimsā."<sup>26</sup> "My love for non-violence," he said, "is superior to every other thing mundane or supramundane. It is equalled only by my love for Truth which is to me synonymous with non-violence through which and which alone I can see and reach Truth."<sup>27</sup> The discerning may discover that what is meant by Truth is not what is obviously meant by the term in the ancient Greek and the western culture. It is not the intellectual and rational appropriation of Truth, but it is closer to the appropriation of Truth according to one's moral consciousness, which is

another name for conscience as it is manifested in one's courage to be consistent between one's knowing and doing.<sup>28</sup> This is the way to the realization of Truth and self. It stands to reason, therefore, that "The experiments I am about to relate are not such [i.e., not incommunicable]. But they are spiritual, or rather moral, for the essence of religion is morality."<sup>29</sup> It is a similar thought, which is contained in the statement, "To develop the spirit is to build character and enable one to work towards a knowledge of God and self-realization."<sup>30</sup> One may ask what God's part in one's self-realization or *ātmasākṣātkāra* is. "He is no God who merely satisfies the intellect, if He ever does. God to be God must rule the heart and transform it. He must express Himself in every smallest act of His votary."<sup>31</sup>

Speaking of in the Introduction, entitled *Anasaktiyoga*, to his translation of the *Gita*, he hints at his concept of religion and self-realization thus:

"In Hinduism, incarnation is ascribed to one who has performed some extraordinary service of mankind. All embodied life is in reality an incarnation of God, but it is not usual to consider every living being an incarnation. ...And therefore he who is the most religiously behaved has most of the divine spark in him. It is in accordance with this train of thought, that Krishna enjoys, in Hinduism, the status of the most perfect incarnation. "This belief in incarnation is a testimony of man's lofty spiritual ambition. Man is not at peace with himself till he has become like unto God. The endeavour to reach this state is the supreme, the only ambition worth having. And this is self-realization. This self-realization is the subject of the *Gītā*, as it is of all scriptures."<sup>33</sup>

Perhaps, the transformation of the heart and the moral integrity he expected to find in his christian friends, he failed to discover in them. For, he gives his evaluation as he writes, "The pious lives of Christians did not give me anything that the lives of men of other faiths had failed to give. I had seen in other lives just the same reformation that I had heard of among Christians."<sup>33</sup>

Gandhi has described above what he meant by self-realization. To let oneself be ruled in everything by God is what brings peace and self-fulfilment. Gandhi wanted to go beyond, transcend, the present mediocrity

and be in God's presence in his daily activities. He wanted his body to be a temple of God in all his activities.<sup>34</sup> He describes the characteristics of a devotee according to *Gītā* thus:

"He is the devotee who is jealous of none, who is fount of mercy, who is without egotism, who is selfless, who treats alike cold and heat, happiness and misery, who is ever forgiving, who is always contented, whose resolutions are firm, who has dedicated mind and soul to God, who causes no dread, who is not afraid of others, who is free from exultation, sorrow and fear, who is pure, who is versed in action and yet remains unaffected by it, who renounces all fruit, good or bad, who treats friend and foe alike, who is untouched by respect or disrespect, who is not puffed up by praise, who does not go under when people speak ill of him, who loves silence and solitude, who has a disciplined reason. Such devotion is inconsistent with the existence at the same time of strong attachments.

"We thus see that to be a real devotee is to realize oneself. Self-realization is not something apart."<sup>35</sup>

Man's highest self-realization, according to Gandhi, is through love, the love of God above all and the love and service of human beings. In other words, "man's self-realization is by self-transcendence."<sup>36</sup>

Gandhi wrote in *Young India* (12 May, 1920), elaborating his concept of religion and expressing it more precisely, as follows:

"...I have been experimenting with myself and my friends by introducing religion into politics. Let me explain what I mean by religion. It is not the Hindu religion, which I certainly prize above all other religions, but the religion which transcends Hinduism, which changes one's very nature, which binds one indissolubly to the truth within and which ever purifies. It is the permanent element in human nature which counts no cost too great in order to find full expression and which leaves the soul utterly restless until it has found itself, known its Maker and appreciated its true correspondence between the Maker and itself."<sup>37</sup>

It seems, therefore, that he was not a Hindu. However, he also asserted that "all religions are almost as dear to me as my own Hinduism"<sup>38</sup> and that "My own veneration for other faiths is the same as that for my own faith, therefore, no thought of conversion is possible."<sup>39</sup> He asked his countrymen, moreover to "remember that his own religion is the truest to every man even if it stands low in the scales of philosophical comparison."<sup>40</sup> The above sentiment is not unlike the thought of Ramakrishna Paramahansa

(born: 1834), who said, "Every man should follow his own religion. A Christian should follow Christianity, a Muhammedan should follow Muhammedanism. For Hindus, the ancient path, the path of the Aryan Rishis, is the best."<sup>41</sup> The Bhagavadgita speaks in a similar tone, "Better one's own duty, bereft of merit, than another's well-performed; better is death in the discharge of one's duty, another's duty is fraught with danger,"<sup>42</sup> And Gandhi knew his *Gṛā* very well, since he has a complete translation of the book to his credit. Besides, he claims he has a practical knowledge of its teachings unlike any other translator, for he says, "But I am not aware of the claim made by the translators of enforcing their meaning of the *Gṛā* in their own lives. At the back of my reading there is the claim of an endeavour to enforce the meaning in my own conduct for an unbroken period of forty years."<sup>43</sup> This is indeed most remarkable. He says again in the introduction to his translation, "But after forty years" unremitting endeavour fully to enforce the teaching of the *Gṛā* in my own life, I have, in all humility, felt that perfect renunciation is impossible without perfect observance of *ahimsa* in every shape and form."<sup>44</sup> The message of the *Gṛā*, according to Gandhi, is contained in one word, namely, *anāsaktiyoga* (i.e., the "yoga of non-attachment").<sup>45</sup> It is the yoga of selflessness in action. This would mean that one has to be dispassionate and detached and free from all inordinate desire for personal gain, if one is in pursuit of what is truly good for oneself and for others.

Some of Gandhi's contemporaries understood him rightly. What Acharya J. B. Kripalani says about Gandhi may be considered as the summing up of the latter's world-view as culled from and developed according to the *Gṛā*:

"He also says that whenever in difficulty he had recourse to the *Gṛā* and it was the solace of his life. He held that through work, done as sacrifice, without hankering after desired results and with equanimity, one could get the *summum bonum* of life, 'salvation' or as he often said in accordance with the best thought of Hinduism, 'self-realization'. About this he says: 'Man's ultimate aim is the realization of God, and all his activities, political, social and religious, have to be guided by the ultimate aim of the vision of God.'"<sup>46</sup>

It need not be pointed out that the Bhagavadgītā is the most revered of books among the Hindus in modern times. The Ācāryas, like Shankara

and Ramanuja, held it as such centuries ago. The common man and woman did not know it for lack of translations of the original Sanskrit text. From the above observations we may infer that Gandhi was indeed a Hindu.

The above denial and affirmation are dialectical, and they show that Gandhi was a "Hindu-with-a-difference." Let us now name the "Hinduism-with-a-difference" as Transcendental Hinduism, according to his own descriptions.<sup>47</sup> What is the chief characteristic of this qualified Hinduism? It is Non-violence or Ahimsā, which is the most important characteristic, for he says, "My religion has no geographical limits. If I have a living faith in it, it will transcend my love for India herself. My life is dedicated to service of India through the religion of non-violence which I believe to be the root of Hinduism."<sup>48</sup> He has also said, "Satyagraha is the search for Truth; and God is Truth. Ahimsā or non-violence is the light that reveals that Truth to me."<sup>49</sup>

The Ahimsā which is peculiar to Transcendental Hinduism, or Gandhian Ahimsa, is what we may correspondingly describe as "Ahimsa-with-a-difference." Gandhi contends that it is not restricted to Hinduism only when he says, "I have been asked wherefrom in Hinduism I have unearthed Ahimsa. I say that Ahimsa is in Hinduism, it is in Christianity as well as in Islam. Whether you agree with me or not, it is my bounden duty to preach what I believe to be the Truth as I see it."<sup>50</sup>

What, then, is Ahimsā? The word, *ahimsā*, comes from *a-himsā*, which means "non-killing" or "not taking any life even by mistake or unmindfulness."<sup>51</sup> The doctrine of ahimsā of *Jainayoga*

"according to a householder, according to *anubrata* (i.e., small vows), would require abstinence from killing any animals, but according to *Mahābrata* (i.e., great vows) it would entail all the rigour and carefulness to prevent oneself from being the cause of any kind of injury to any living being in any way."<sup>52</sup>

Ahimsā is the fundamental ethical virtue of Jainism; judgement on all actions may be passed in accordance with the standard of *ahimsā*. The other vows of *sūnṛta* (i.e., *satya* speaking in such a way as is true, good and pleasing), *asteya* (i.e., not stealing, not taking which has not been given) and *brahmacarya* (i.e., chastity, abandoning lust for all kinds of object in

mind, speech and body) are regarded as virtues because their transgression leads to *himsā* or injury to beings.<sup>53</sup> It is the opinion of A. N. Upadhye that "Jainism is perhaps the only Indian Religion which has explained the doctrine of *ahimsā* in a systematic manner, because all other values were elaborated on this basis."<sup>54</sup> Gandhi hailed from Gujarat, and Gujarat has been the stronghold of Jainism from the earliest times.

What did Gandhi mean by the term, *ahimsa*? He used the term to mean passive resistance, non-injury, non-violence, pure love, and so on. He wrote, "I accept the interpretation of *ahimsa*, namely, that it is not merely a negative state of harmlessness, but it is a positive state of love, of doing good even to the evil-doer. But it does not mean helping the evil-doer to continue the wrong or tolerating it by passive acquiescence..."<sup>55</sup> similarly he wrote in *Young India* (20 Feb., 1930),

"The true rendering of the word (*Ahimsa*) in English is love or charity. And does not the Bible say

'Love worketh no ill to his neighbour,

Believeth all things,

Hopeth all things,

Never faileth."<sup>56</sup>

He wrote in the same paper (on 31 Dec. 1931), "But I then found that love has many meanings in the English language at least and that human love in the sense of passion could become a degrading thing also. I found, too, that love in the sense of *ahimsā* had only a limited number of votaries in the world."<sup>57</sup> Gandhi's finding points to a very uncommon understanding of the word. One naturally asks what kind of *ahimsā* it is that has only a limited number of votaries.

We have already found that "Truth" meant something special, that it is above all the moral sense of the word, indicative of the voice of conscience, which serves as the basis of all morality and self-realization.<sup>58</sup> It has to do with the judgements of true and genuine value, of what is worth striving after and what we would call the highest good and value in human life. In relation to this Truth, we may discover that something which is special to *Ahimsā*. After all, "the only means for the realization of Truth is *Ahimsā*."<sup>59</sup> Therefore, we may surmise that, apart from the ordinary and general meaning of *Ahimsā*, namely, non-violence and love of all beings,

there is a special meaning and that is the "non-violence" of Truth. It is an application of the concept of non-violence to the inner self and to conscience. It is the "non-violence" of the light within. It is properly called non-violation, rather than non-violence. But there is only one word to indicate both the concepts, and that word is "Ahimsā." Therefore, Ahimsā would mean, in its positive aspect, utter sincerity of self, absolute consistency with and adherence to the dictates of one's conscience. To put it negatively, Ahimsa is the inviolability of one's own self. In its active sense, it is a search for perfect integrity. This is the "love in the sense of ahimsa," which has "only a limited number of votaries in the world."<sup>60</sup> "Non-violence" of self is the means to self-realization. To be true to the inviolable inner self is the source of transcendence. Let us proceed to verify, if possible, the above meaning of transcendental ahimsā.

The word, integrity, comes from the Latin word, *integer* (adj.), or *integritas* (noun.). The word is formed with the negative particle, *in* (note the negative particle in *a-himsā*) and the infinitive, *tangere* (i.e., "to touch"). *Integer* comes to mean "untouched," "intact" (note *tactum*, pp. of *tangere*), "uninjured" "untainted," "whole and upright," and so on. Integrity implies that one is to be true to oneself and that one has the courage to live up to one's convictions. It implies that one should seek consistency between one's knowing and doing. Then the moral concept of integrity has to do with the "in-violability" of self and of conscience. Ahimsā, first and foremost, is the non-violation or the inviolability of one's own self and secondly the non-violation of the human person, especially, the other person, irrespective of who the other person is.

Gandhi gives in the autobiography his personal reflection - call it spiritual, moral or intellectual - on an incident in the manner of a confession. He reflects on his prick of conscience in having agreed with his doctor to add goat's milk to his diet against his vow to exclude interpretively all milk. He says,

"It seems to me that I understand the ideal of truth better than that of Ahimsā, and experience tells me that, if I let go my hold of truth, I shall never be able to solve the riddle of Ahimsa. The ideal of truth requires that vows taken should be fulfilled in the spirit as well as in the letter. In the



case I killed the spirit- the soul of my vow-by adhering to its outer form only, and that is what galls me. But in spite of this clear knowledge I cannot see my way straight before me."<sup>61</sup>

What galls him is the violation of truth in his own inner self. There is no doubt that he is talking about the inviolability of self. No wonder that "This *ahimsā* is the basis of the search for truth. I am realizing every day that the search is vain unless it is founded on *ahimsā* as the basis."<sup>62</sup>

Another dilemma of *ahimsa* is indicated in the narration of the sickness of his own son, Manilal. Gandhi decided against eggs and chicken-broth for his sick son. He writes,

"To my mind it is only on such occasions, that a man's faith is truly tested. Rightly or wrongly it is part of my religious conviction that man may not eat meat, eggs, and the like. There should be a limit even to the means of keeping ourselves alive. Even for life itself we may not do certain things. Religion, as I understand it, does not permit me to use meat or eggs for me or mine on occasions like this, and I must therefore take the risk that you say is likely."<sup>63</sup>

The commitment to *ahimsa*, according to which he tries to be consistent with his judgement, is beyond question.

A touching episode of Gandhi's boyhood days, together with his mature reflections at the time of writing, is beautifully narrated by him in the autobiography. The narration is simple. It throws much light on the working of the lad's mind and heart. He shows us how he came to terms with his own conscience as a boy of fifteen and set things right after a fall:

"It was not difficult to clip a bit out of it (of the armlet.). Well, it was done, and the debt cleared. But this became more than I could bear. I resolved never to steal again. I also made up my mind to confess it to my father. But I did not dare to speak. Not that I was afraid of my father beating me... I was afraid of the pain that I should cause him. But I felt that the risk should be taken, that there could not be a cleansing without a clean confession.

"I decided at last to write out the confession, to submit it to my father, and ask his forgiveness. I wrote it on a slip of paper and handed it to him myself. In this note not only did I confess my guilt, but I asked adequate punishment for it and closed with a request to him not to punish himself for my offence. I also pledged myself never to steal in future.

"I was trembling as I handed the confession to my father... He read it

through, and the pearl-drops trickled down his cheeks, wetting the paper...

"Those pearl drops of love cleansed my heart, and washed my sin away. Only he who has experienced such love can know what it is....

"This was, for me, an object lesson in *Ahimsa*. Then I could read in it nothing more than a father's love, but today I know that it was pure *Ahimsā*. When such *Ahimsa* becomes all-embracing, it transforms everything it touches. There is no limit to its power."<sup>64</sup>

One may contend that the person who practised *Ahimsa* in the above incident was his father. However, the important moment to capture is the moment when the boy resolved never to steal again and decided to make peace with his own conscience. What followed were nothing but the attending circumstances and consequences, although these are more visible. The boy had violated his own inner being inasmuch as he went against the dictates of his own conscience and filial love. Whatever he did afterwards was aimed at winning back and re-establishing his own integrity. Between the son and the father, the one who stood up against himself and the other person was the son, who had committed the sin. By the time the father came to know of the crime, the son had been asking for parental forgiveness. The change of heart in the son had already taken place, it could not have been the result of *ahimsā* on the part of the father. The subsequent events show how the conscience was pacified, the conversion, sealed, the son, re-established in filial love by the "pearl drops of love."

Gandhi tells us of an episode, which took place among the indigo cultivators of Champaranya, to whose succour he hastened as a stranger from Gujarat. There was absolutely no violence, in spite of the fact that the government officers had threatened Gandhi with serious consequences if he went ahead with his visit. Notices were served on him, but he decided to offer civil disobedience and visit the peasants. However, as the events unfolded, he even struck up amity and friendship with the officers. The final outcome was that there was a spontaneous and unprecedented upsurge of the people. "The people had for the moment lost all fear of punishment and yielded obedience to the power of love which their new friend exercised," says Gandhi.<sup>65</sup> The officers themselves helped in regulating the crowds. He comments briefly how he came face to face with God, *Ahimsā* and Truth:

"And yet they (namely, the peasants of Champaran, the cultivators of indigo, among whom neither propaganda nor any political work had been done by Gandhi and the Congress party) received me as though we had been age-long friends. It is no exaggeration, but the literal truth, to say that in this meeting with the peasants I was face to face with God, Ahimsā and Truth.

"When I come to examine my title to this realization, I find nothing but my love for the people. And this in turn is nothing but an expression of my unshakable faith in Ahimsā."<sup>66</sup>

Gandhi felt that in going to the help of the helpless and listening to their grievances he was doing the right thing. He was almost alone but confident in this venture. He was true to himself and the dictates of love and conscience in rendering service to the distressed peasants with full trust in God, in Ahimsa and in the people. Such a quest for justice and self-sacrificing love has a redemptive role in society. An observation made by Lonergan is quite appropriate and applicable to Ahimsā in its social dimension:

"..., we may note that a religion that promotes self-transcendence to the point, not merely of justice, but of self-sacrificing love, will have a redemptive role in human society inasmuch as such love can undo the mischief of decline and restore cumulative process of progress."<sup>67</sup>

There is yet another instance of the transcendental Ahimsā in what Gandhi wrote in *Young India* as follows,

"I would say with those who say God is love, God is Love. But deep down in me I used to say that though God may be God, God is truth above all... But two years ago, I went a step further and said Truth is God... I then found that the nearest approach to truth was through love... I found, too, that love in the sense of ahimsā had only a limited number of votaries in the world. But I never found a double meaning in connection with truth and not even the atheists had demurred to the necessity or power of truth. But in their passion for discovering truth the atheists have not hesitated to deny the very existence of God-from their own point of view rightly. And it was because of this reason that I saw that rather than say God is Truth I should say Truth is God."<sup>68</sup>

It was because of his conviction that the atheists were sincere and that even they were hemmed in by their conscience, that is, by the demand for actions consistent with their convictions and principles, in short, it was because of the atheist's respect for 'ahimsa,' that Gandhi modified his

definition into Truth is God. However, eight years later he wrote in *Harijan* (3 June 1939), following upon a question asked by one of the members of the Seva Sangh whether those socialists and communists who did not believe in God could be Satyagrahis, thus:

"I am afraid not. For a Satyagrahi has no other stay but God, and he who has any other stay or depends on any other help cannot offer Satyagraha. he may be a passive resister, non-cooperator and so on, but not a true Satyagrahi. It is open to you to argue that this excludes brave comrades whereas it may include men who profess a belief in God but who in their daily lives are untrue to their profession. I am not talking of those who are untrue to their profession, I am talking of those who are prepared in the name of God to stake their all for the sake of their principle. Don't ask me again why I am enunciating this principle today and did not do so 20 years ago. I can only say that I am no prophet, I am but an erring mortal, progressing from blunder towards truth. 'What about the Buddhists and Jains, then?' someone has asked. Well, I will say that if the Buddhists and Jains raise this objection themselves and say that they would be disqualified if such a strict rule were observed, I should, say to them that I agree with them."<sup>69</sup>

The atheists and the others who did not believe or trust in God could be accommodated before. The reason for dropping them on the way is spelt out more clearly, as he writes,

"But far be it from me to suggest that you should believe in the God that I believe in. Maybe your definition is different from mine, but your belief in that God must be your ultimate mainstay. It may be some Supreme Power or some Being even indefinable, but belief in it is indispensable. To bear all kinds of tortures without a murmur of resentment is impossible for a human being without that strength that comes from God. Only in His strength we are strong. And only those who can cast their care and their fears on that immeasurable Power have faith in God."<sup>70</sup>

Ahimsā in the face of hatred, tyranny and injustice demands that a man may not yield or bow down if he wishes to keep his integrity inviolate and his conscience unsullied. The consequence is the untold suffering of the Satyagrahi. He may even have to lay down his life. Gandhi is quite unequivocal in his statement that one cannot undergo the sufferings with equanimity without trust in God. In spite of the sufferings, there is no guarantee that they will be instrumental in bringing about a change, a

conversion, in the mind and heart of the tyrant or the oppressor.<sup>71</sup> But the Satyagrahi perseveres. The dynamics of Ahimsā is such that it transcends itself, because it is not any more just inviolate integrity but it has got modified into the God-loving search for inviolable integrity and the surrender to God, in whom the Satyagrahi places all his trust and hope. If so, the Jain and Hindu principle of ahimsā has undergone a sea change.

There is a most telling confession by Gandhi, which proclaims his faith in God and attributes to Him the power and the grace that come to the ailing human being. Gandhi wrote in *Harijan*, 29.2 1936 about his observance of *brahmacharya* and a relapse from it, together with the "confession of the wretched experience," which brought much relief to him,

"How far I must be from Him, He alone knows. Thank God, my much-vaunted Mahatmaship has never fooled me. But this enforced rest has humbled me as never before. It has brought to the surface my limitations and imperfections. But I am not so much ashamed of them as I should be of hiding them from the public. My faith in the message of the *Gītā* is as bright as ever. Unwearied ceaseless effort is the price that must be paid for turning that faith into rich infallible experience. But the same *Gītā* says without any equivocation that the experience is not to be had without divine grace. We should develop swelled heads if Divinity has not made that ample reservation."<sup>72</sup>

He is indeed a great believer in God and in divine providence even in the most trying circumstances and personal experiences. He bears witness to his faith early on in his autobiography, when he says,

"Man, as soon as he gets back his consciousness of right, is thankful to the Divine mercy for the escape. As we know a man often succumbs to temptation, however much he may resist it, we also know that Providence often intercedes and saves him in spite of himself. How all this happens, - how far free-will comes into play and where fate enters on the scene, - all this is a mystery and will remain a mystery."<sup>73</sup>

The Gandhian Ahimsa may now be described as the spiritual principle or imperative within a person for the unflinching pursuit of personal integrity, which urges him to oppose injustice and evil wherever these are found with utter reliance on God in suffering, but without in any way violating the person of the opponent who is the root cause of disorder and the concomitant

suffering, which in its turn evokes a change in the heart and mind of the opponent.

Erik H. Erikson, the author of *Gandhi's Truth*, comes closest to our understanding of ahimsa, when he writes,

"With all respect for the traditional translations of *ahimsa*, I think Gandhi implied in it, besides a refusal to do physical harm, a determination *not to violate another person's essence* (emphasis added). For even where one may not be able to avoid harming or hurting, forcing or demeaning another whenever one must coerce him, one should try even in doing so, not to violate his essence, for such violence can only produce counter-violence, which may end in a kind of truce, but not in truth. For *ahimsā* as acted upon by Gandhi not only means not to hurt another, it means to respect the truth in him."<sup>74</sup>

The main differences between the above two descriptions are shown by 1) the fact that the determination not to violate another person's "essence" is made out to be a corollary, as it were, to a more fundamental principle, namely, the inviolability of one's own self—which is a principle more in consonance with the Indian preoccupation with the self (*ātman*) within—that urges one to strive after personal integrity at all costs, 2) the function of suffering in the scheme of Ahimsā and 3) Gandhi's reliance on God in suffering.

The first of the two statements above has three parts. The first part, namely, "the spiritual principle or imperative within a person for the unflinching pursuit of personal integrity," implies the determination not to violate one's own self, one's own conscience, one's own essence. It is indeed a reflective statement, which throws light on the nature of conscience, one's own inner self. The second part, namely, "which urges him to oppose injustice and evil wherever these are found with utter reliance on God in suffering, but without in any way violating the person of the opponent who is the root cause of disorder and the concomitant suffering," implies the determination not only not to injure the opponent physically, but also not to violate his essence, his truth, his inner self, in spite of the fact that he is the cause of great suffering, which has to be endured with superhuman strength and with utter reliance on God's help. The last part, namely, "which (suffering) in its turn evokes a change in the heart and mind of the opponent,"

which merely puts down the consequence of the pursuit. The sufferings are taken upon oneself neither in silence nor passive resignation. The sufferings are made to speak loudly and forcefully to the opponent who represents or wields power and authority and let him know of the great evil he causes to others through evil deeds, unsound policies, partisan laws, and so on. The choice lies between punishment of the perpetrator of injustice and suffering of the Satyagrahi in pursuit of the greater common good.

The first part of the descriptive definition indicates the inner ahimsā or what we may call transcendental ahimsa, since there is a conscious transition to the facts of the inner depths of the human person. The second and the third part are what are popularly known as ahimsa, or non-violence. The discovery we have to make is that the one and the same word, ahimsa, is indicative of a number of closely related concepts, namely, "non-violence," "non-violation" or "inviolability," and "integrity."

An insight like the one above into Ahimsa helps us to see clearly how Gandhi discovered and accepted the inviolability and dignity of the human person and the basic equality and freedom of all men. It was Ahimsā, which made him fight for the dignity and equality of the Hindu outcast and the untouchable. He declared very clearly, "Untouchability is the sin of the Hindus. They must suffer for it, they must purify themselves, they must pay the debt they owe to their suppressed brothers and sisters. Theirs is the shame and theirs must be the glory when they have purged themselves of the black sin."<sup>75</sup> It is again the realization of the inviolability of conscience and the dignity of man that led him to assert, "We are all equal before our maker-Hindus, Musalmans, Parsis, Christians-worshippers of one God."<sup>76</sup> He says in his autobiography,

"A variety of incidents in my life have conspired to bring me in close contact with people of many creeds and many communities, and my experience with all of them warrants the statement that I have known no distinction between relatives and strangers, countrymen and foreigners, white and coloured, Hindus and Indians of other faiths, whether Musalmans, Parsis, Christians or Jews. I may say that my heart has been incapable of making any such distinction."<sup>77</sup>

The same insight helps us see why he rendered Ahimsa into English as Love, love being the only sane and rational attitude towards persons, who by nature enjoy inviolable and sacred dignity.<sup>78</sup> It gave him "ineffable joy



to make experiments proving that love (meaning, Ahimsa) is the supreme and only law of life."<sup>79</sup> Love is the supreme law: *ahimsā paramo dharmaā*. "For me," he said, "the law of complete Love is the Law of my being."<sup>80</sup> Ahimsa, as he understood it, is a new creed and a new faith.<sup>81</sup> Speaking of the essential qualities of a true Satyagrahi, he says, "He must believe in truth and non-violence as his creed and have faith in the inherent goodness of human nature which he expects to evoke by his truth and love expressed through his suffering."<sup>82</sup> Gandhi was the Satyagrahi *par excellence* and his religion was the religion of Ahimsa: "My life is dedicated to service of India through the religion of non-violence which I believe to be the root of Hinduism."<sup>83</sup> Now we understand more adequately why he was so emphatic in saying, "And if every page of these chapters does not proclaim to the reader that only means for the realization of Truth is Ahimsa, I shall deem all my labour in writing these chapters to have been in vain."<sup>84</sup> There is no doubt that this was indeed a statement about his personal religion. The title, therefore, of his autobiography could very well have been, 'The Story of My Experiments with Ahimsa' or 'The Story of My Experiments with My Religion.'

Let us conclude this section with a summary. Gandhi's religion is what we have called Transcendental Hinduism. The distinguishing characteristic of Transcendental Hinduism is Transcendental Ahimsa or the ahimsa which is specifically his own. Transcendental Ahimsa is the God-loving realization of inviolable personal integrity, in the pursuit of which Gandhi and the others like him encounter suffering on account of non-violent disobedience to unjust authority. The serious study of *Gītā* accompanied by his religious effort to live and labour according to its teaching gives him an insight into a life of detachment and a determination to adhere unflinchingly to the highest moral standards in every avenue of life. One may say that Ahimsā in praxis is spelt out by Gandhi as he sums up on an intellectual level, one may say, his philosophy of life in the introduction, *anāsaktiyoga*, to his translation of the *Gītā*. Gandhi discovers the inviolable nature of the moral imperative and of the human person. He discovers in his life man's dynamic orientation to the divine, which is his highest good. Because of the simplicity, universality and sublimity of Ahimsā, Gandhi does not hesitate to call it his religion. The follower of this religion is a

Satyagrahi. The Satyagrahi is ready to undergo suffering in order to remain true to his commitment. It is his conviction that Ahimsā or Love is the supreme law.

### **Equality of All Religions**

Gandhi did not discriminate between the followers of various religions.<sup>85</sup> However, we cannot but notice a process of reductionism in the working of his mind and making itself felt in his writings. It is a process, which reduces the various religions like Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, to their followers, that is, to Hindus, Musalmans, and Christians. This process will not run into serious problems when someone steers clear of the history of the religions and the historically important writings about them- an attitude, which obviously an historian cannot take without violating his methodical spirit of inquiry. For it is history that makes every follower of every religion what he is at any given time. When an individual differs significantly, his biography and personal history in its wider context are important to have an insight into his personality. Even a historian is the product of history; he is not above history. It is this, which accounts for many differences in the historical perspective of the writers of history. The process, mentioned above, goes one step further in that the Hindus, Musalmans and others are reduced to men and women, who enjoy honour, dignity and equality by the very fact that they are human beings. This reductionism is discernible when Gandhi winds up his thoughts in the words of Robert Burns, "My Scheme of life, if it draws no distinction between different religionists in India, it also draws none between different races. For me 'man is a man for a' that."<sup>86</sup> To the well-meaning Christian missionaries he said, "Make us better Hindus, i.e., better men and women."<sup>87</sup> Yet again, he says ,

"...all religions are almost as dear to me as my own Hinduism, in as much as *all human beings* should be as dear to one as one's own close relatives....The aim of the Fellowship is to help a Hindu to become a better Hindu, a Musalman to become a better Musalman, and a Christian a better Christian...Pray merely that your friends may become better men, whatever their form of religion (emphasis added)"<sup>88</sup>

It may be suggested that the prototype for this reduction is Gandhi himself. Hinduism is first reduced to the Hindu and then the Hindu is further

reduced to this man whom people called Gandhi. However, the downward movement is matched by an upward integration. But there is an operator, which is the popular Ahimsā. Through his "experiments," he transforms first of all the popular Ahimsā into the Transcendental Ahimsā and he rediscovers his religion in the latter which is the religion of the Satyagrahi. He becomes the true Satyagrahi, whom people ultimately begin to call the Mahatma.<sup>89</sup> The process of the dialectical transformation in the emergence of the Mahatma is now complete. At the end of the process his religion is Hinduism, yet not Hinduism but Ahimsā. He is a Hindu, yet not a Hindu, but a Satyagrahi. He is whom they called Gandhi, yet not Gandhi, but whom they begin to call Mahatma Gandhi.

The two related vertices or evolutes of the downward and upward movements in the above process, namely, Man and Mahatma, show us easily that Transcendental Ahimsā, based on a doctrine of the human nature, could be for Gandhi the "Religion of Man," the universal religion.<sup>90</sup> And indeed he declared, "My religion is Hinduism which, for me, is religion of humanity and includes the best of all the religions known to me."<sup>91</sup> But Ahimsā is the root of Hinduism, for he has said, "My religion has no geographical limits. If I have a living faith in it, it will transcend my love for India herself. My life is dedicated to service of India through the religion of non-violence which I believe to be the root of Hinduism."<sup>92</sup> Gandhi holds that his Hinduism includes the best of all religions, because Ahimsā, the root of Hinduism, is its "firm foundation,"<sup>93</sup> and because it is the "rock-bottom unity of all religions."<sup>94</sup> "Non-violence is the end of all religions."<sup>95</sup>

Thus, Ahimsā is for Gandhi the religion of man. Gandhi may be said to have demonstrated convincingly in practice that the universality and catholicity, which Ram Mohan Roy and Rabindranath Tagore longed to achieve theoretically and in life, were contained in his Ahimsā. Ahimsā by definition and as the Religion of Man, enjoying universality, is a transcendental humanism, that is, a humanism, which is ever on the move to discover further horizons only to transcend them or go beyond them into the Ultimate, the Supreme. It is a humanism, which goes beyond itself. Ahimsā is not merely the achievement of personal integrity, but it is the god-loving realization of the inviolable self through universal love. These and other similar considerations make it abundantly clear why Gandhi said

that "love is the supreme and only law of life,"<sup>96</sup> that "every problem lends itself to solution if we are determined to make the law of truth and non-violence the law of life."<sup>97</sup> Ahimsā is the supreme law of life: *ahimsā paramo dharmaḥ*.

It may be proposed with confidence that Transcendental Ahimsa was the fundamental reason why Gandhi held that all religions are equal. In it he discovered the religion which "transcends Hinduism, Islam and Christianity" and others.<sup>98</sup> just as he held that "ahimsā is the unity of all life,"<sup>99</sup> he also thought and acted upon the conviction that Ahimsa is "the rock-bottom unity of all religions."<sup>100</sup> He stated, "Ahimsā is in Hinduism, it is in Christianity as well as in Islam. Whether you agree with me or not, it is my bounden duty to preach what I believe to be the truth as I see It."<sup>101</sup> Gandhi found in Ahimsā what is best in all the religions, their supreme-message and perfection.

Friedrich Heiler has contributed his thoughts under "The History of Religions as a Preparation for the Cooperation of Religions" to *The History of Religions*. He treats of a number of areas, which are more or less common to many world religions as they are practised. Lonergan sets forth his appreciation of the author in the following words,

"But there is at least one scholar on whom one may call for an explicit statement on the areas common to such world religions as Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Zoroastrian Mazdaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism. For Friedrich Heiler has described at some length seven such common areas. While I cannot reproduce here the rich texture of his thought, I must, at least, give a list of the topics he treats: that there is a transcendent reality; that he is immanent in human hearts; that he is supreme beauty, truth, righteousness, goodness; that he is love, mercy, compassion; that the way to him is repentance, self-denial, prayer; that the way is love of one's neighbour, even of one's enemies; that the way is love of God, so that bliss is conceived as knowledge of God, union with him, or dissolution into him."<sup>102</sup>

Many of the ideas contained in the above description are clearly present in explicit terms also in Gandhi's religion of Ahimsā.

Gandhi has given us other reasons too for his *sarvadharmasamānātva*, the equality of all religions, or for "having equal regard for all faiths and creeds," as he puts it.<sup>103</sup> He explains this tenet

and gives its consequence in the following words:

"After long study and experience, I have come to the conclusion that (1) all religions are true; (2) that all religions have some error in them; (3) all religions are almost as dear to me as my own Hinduism, in as much as all human beings should be as dear to one as one's own close relatives. My own veneration for other faiths is the same as that for my own faith; therefore, no thought of conversion is possible. "104

He found imperfections in all the religions he had known : "There is no religion that is absolutely perfect. All are equally imperfect, or more or less perfect. Hence, the conclusion that Christianity is as good and true as my own religion."105 He came to the conclusion that every religion was "imperfect naturally and necessarily, because they were interpreted with our poor intellects, sometimes with our poor hearts, and more often misinterpreted. "106 However, his statement that all the religions are true is basic to his contention that all the religions are equal. For he has said elsewhere that for him all the principal religions were "equal in the sense that they are all true "107 It is not our purpose to question the logic of his argument just as we have not examined the wisdom of his earlier reduction, nor is it our purpose to explicate how his mind could have worked in alternate channels theoretically built to find out how it worked as a matter of fact. Perhaps the reader has also noticed that no question was raised about Gandhi's idea or philosophy of human action, Its fruit, merit and demerit ensuing from action. liberation from karma and so on. which he had in his own way absorbed from the *Gītā*. We have not gone into his notions of self and human consciousness. An understanding of the interrelationship between human identity and consciousness as manifested on the various levels of conscious operations, in other words, a philosophical theory of intelligence and of the human subject, is of the greatest value when one has to deal with the discourses on the self. No question was raised about what he knew about the dynamic self of the human subject, the dynamics of moral consciousness and the mysterious working of human love in daily affairs, its distortions and ultimate unfolding in every human life. Nor have we gleaned his ideas of human history. There was no inquiry into his concept of God and Providence as operative in the hearts of men. An account by a person of his own love for god cannot but be conditioned according to the

personal history and culture, which means that the accounts will diverge widely among persons of different religions. The accounts will depend on the ideas each person has of God, self, consciousness, divine and human operation, love, intellect, history and so on, which the person has imbibed from childhood onwards. A language is not always a means of personal liberation; it can imprison as well, e.g., an ideology based on the distorted facts about man and his labour in a society. Gandhi was a man of action. He worked hard to make himself dispassionate and free from unworthy attachments so that he could make momentous decisions for the good of an emerging nation. He was not one given to endless theoretical meditations. Suffice it, then, to notice that all religions, according to Gandhi, are equal if they are true. They are true if they contain Truth. But Truth is another name for Ahimsa, which is his religion.<sup>108</sup> Hence, the great importance Gandhi attached to his statement that "...Ahimsā is in Hinduism, it is in Christianity as well as in Islam."<sup>109</sup> These and the other religions are therefore equal.

Dr. Zakir Hussain, who was the President of India in the 1960's and who was an admirer of Gandhi and co-worker, seems to have understood the reason behind the latter's *sarvadharmasamānātva* when he says, "To him (Gandhi) the core of every religion was truth and non-violence, with love linking the tow. From this belief flowed his teaching of unreserved reverence for all the great religions in the world"<sup>110</sup>

From what has been said already, it is clear that Gandhi thought that he had found in Ahimsā, or in "Love is the supreme law," the central message of Christianity. His friends and close associates thought that he had realized in his life the Christian message. Tagore was one of them, who said.

"Charity, benevolence, and the like, no doubt have an important place in the religions of our country as well, but there they are in practice circumscribed within such narrower limits, and are only partially inspired by love of man. And to our great good fortune, Gandhiji was able to receive this teaching of Christ in a living way...For it was this great gift that our country had all along been waiting"<sup>111</sup>

No one but men of good will may feel inclined to believe what Tagore has said. But, no Christian will be surprised to be told that Love is the



supreme law of life or Ahimsā, as we have understood it, is quite central to Christianity and that the Bible bears ample testimony that love must be a distinctive mark of a follower of Jesus Christ<sup>112</sup> It is also true that no committed and educated Christian will accept without qualification Gandhi's statement that all religions are equal in every aspect even if the comparison is to be made between the religion of Gandhi's forefathers and his own Transcendental Ahimsa with its popular Christian message of love. So also is the case with the followers of Islam, not to mention the followers of other religions like Sikhism, Judaism, and so on. However, it is hoped that our attempt in unravelling the meaning of Ahimsa and finding in it the fundamental tenet of his religion and in its transcendental humanism the reason why he said all religions are equal will help us to appreciate this great Indian of all times and make us less inclined to uninformed criticism of the Mahatma, especially when millions quote him as an excuse for religious indifferentism and thus blunt the edge of the religious quest. In the Introduction to the autobiography, he spoke about his own religious quest, saying, "But I worship God as Truth only. I have not yet found him, but I am seeking after him. I am prepared to sacrifice the things dearest to me in pursuit of this quest. Even if the sacrifice demanded be my very life, I hope I may be prepared to give it."<sup>113</sup> The quest was carried out with great earnestness. Did he not know that God Himself had taken hold of him through this ultimate concern and was leading him through unknown ways for his own sake and for the sake of his country? In their journey towards an indeterminate finality, men and women have the experience of events in the very depths of their conscious selves and among peoples, magnitude of which they are incapable of immediately grasping, for behind the happenings there are only vague intimations of the Unknown. Of this upward ascend of man in order to win untarnished authenticity, self-realisation or self-transcendence, Lonergan writes in *Insight* as follows :

"In brief, there is a dimension to human experience that takes man beyond the domesticated, familiar, common sphere, in which a spade is just a spade. In correspondence with that strange dynamic component of sensitive living, there is the openness of inquiry and reflection and the paradoxical 'known unknown' of unanswered questions. Such directed but, in a sense, indeterminate dynamism is what we have called finality. But



whither finality heads, is a question that receives countless answers, pragmatic or conceptual, naturalistic, humanistic, or religious, enthusiastically positive or militantly negative"<sup>14</sup>

Certain events within the seekers and in history are commensurate to God's power, but not proportionate to the wisdom and knowledge of man or woman. It is presumption for the subjects of these events to try to assign adequate causes and give a true and systematic account of all those facts of the inner life and of the twists and turns of human history itself by leaving out the gradual unfolding of an unknown design in human destiny, which men of good will may gradually find less and less dark and puzzling. Bereft of certain divine dispensations and providence, the relatively free, creative and responsible social beings that human beings are remain mostly mystified about the objective, genuine sources and directions of the conscious unfolding. They experience certain inner events and are witnesses to the happenings, but they are in no way able and competent systematically to objectify the subject and the subject's experiences. The ordinary intellectual striving fails as a matter of fact to fathom systematically the depths of the dynamic state of being in love with God with its antecedents and consequences, because such an understanding is possible only with the explicit self-knowledge arising from the personal appropriation of one's own rational and religious self-consciousness in its subjection to God's own liberating and illuminating operation in personal history, which is but part of the wider general religious history. Languages, cultures and religions differ; the formulations of the inner experiences differ accordingly not in a superficial manner but radically, because the difficulties in coming to grips with self-consciousness, especially of those favoured with divine love, are at the root of many an insurmountable problem of systematic understanding and of the manner of formulation and communication. Notions and ideas about faith in God differ radically, because the intellectual grasp of the dynamic and transcending human subject, for example, differs radically. Beside the search for understanding, there are also fights from understanding. Authenticity is often mixed with unauthenticity. We have understood that authenticity is the achievement of self-transcendence. Anyone who is striving for self-transcendence in life is aware of personal

shortcomings, just as Gandhi was in his confession to his father. We must admit with Lonergan, who points out that

“...self-transcendence is so radically and so completely the inner dynamism of human reality that one cannot but be aware when one is moving towards it, and on the other hand, one cannot but feel constrained to conceal the fact one is evading the abiding imperative of what it is to be human.”<sup>115</sup>

The inner dynamism reveals, however feeble the revelation might be at times, the abiding imperative to every man and woman: “Be self-transcendent,” or “Strive after authenticity.” It is an invitation always to go beyond by reaching out for what is true and good and genuinely valuable in order to act and live accordingly.

Human development has inbuilt stages; cultures too have levels of development and, unfortunately, of decadence too. Worldviews differ specifically. We may approach the difficulties of true understanding from the point of view of the depth of the human subject and his experience:

“To say that this dynamic state (of being in love in an unrestricted fashion, i.e., of being in love with God) is conscious is not to say that it is known. For consciousness is just experience, but knowledge is a compound of experience, understanding and judging. Because the dynamic state is conscious without being known, it is an experience of mystery. Because it is being in love, the mystery is not merely attractive but fascinating; to it one belongs; by it one is possessed. Because it is unmeasured love, the mystery evokes awe. Of itself, then, inasmuch as it is conscious without being known, the gift of God’s love is an experience of the holy, of Rudolf Otto’s *mysterium fascinans et tremendum*. It is what Paul Tillich named a being grasped by ultimate concern.”<sup>116</sup>

Human beings are not the full-fledged individual creators of what they are to be personally in society, but only co-creators within societies and history itself. There is no doubt that the Mahatma could not possibly account adequately for all the inner and outer events, which led him on. His knowledge, therefore, was naturally of one who was a seeker, a sincere seeker after personal authenticity, and it was so by his own admission. His humility is unbounded before the Ultimate Unknown as he worked diligently and waited patiently for sufficient awareness and knowledge to dawn in a continuous self-sacrificing self-surrender.

## CONCLUSION

India has suffered from the lack of equality and social justice as the Kothari Report on Education affirms, and the social reformers proclaim.<sup>117</sup> The movements of the Dalits are the unmistakable signs of the times. Multitudes of her people have lived in inequality and bondage in the caste-ridden societies. They were denied even the basic human dignity, which is the foundation of social virtues and of enlightened societies. It is impossible to affirm without doing violence to one's own conscience that all men and women, the citizens and the would-be citizens, of India are held and treated as equal despite the fact that they are declared to be equal before law irrespective of their religion. There is no equality in practice. In order to obviate the evils and regain the dignity of the individual, it is more profitable for an Indian to study *An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiments with Truth* than the French Revolution and the philosophy of Marx, as the same Report seems to advocate.<sup>118</sup> For, Gandhi awakened the conscience of India and helped her to regain self-respect, freedom, autonomy and dignity. I believe that his greatest contribution to Indian culture and India's search for self-realization lies in his Transcendental Ahimsa with its doctrine of the inviolability of the human conscience and the dignity and equality of the human person, no matter whether he is a Dalit or Brahmin, an Indian or an Englishman, Black or White, theist or atheist, Adivasi or settler, Christian or Hindu, Jew or Muslim. It is the distinctive humanism of Ahimsa that prompted the founding fathers of Indian Democracy to opt for the emergence of a nation with a secular ethos. Religious liberty guaranteed in the Constitution of India is based solidly on Ahimsa as preached by the Mahatma. The liberation from the yoke of the foreign rule was the first step, which could be taken only after decades of striving for independence. The next step was to be the formal declarations of human dignity, freedom and equality as enshrined in the Constitution. If Babasaheb Ambedkar was the leading light in its formulation, he had the experiences of a personal nature and of the wider world, which he grasped critically in the contemporary Indian multireligious society with its inbuilt caricatures of human dignity and equality. The dialogue of the men and women of good will in a multi-religious and multicultural society is the unfortunately belated third step of the utmost importance for the people to come together in

mutual understanding and for the purpose of building an enlightened and progressive modern nation.

# NOTES

1. *India as a Secular State*, by Donald Eugene Smith, Princeton University Press at Princeton, New Jersey, 1963, p.493. Cf. also *The Concept of The Secular State in India*, by Ved Prakash Luthera, Oxford University Press, 1964, pp. 146-47. The author is emphatic in his statement that India is not a Secular State in the technical sense of the term, secular. However, he agrees that in India "It (secularism) proclaims that it lays stress on the universality of spiritual values which may be attained by a variety of ways" (*ibid.* p. 155).
2. *Rgveda*, 1.164.46c.
3. *A History of Indian Philosophy* (abbr. HIP.) by Surendranath Dasgupta, Cambridge University Press, 1932, vol.1, p.125, fn.2.
4. *See Indian Idealism*, by Surendranath Dasgupta, Cambridge, at the University Press, 1933, pp.99,105.
5. Cf. HIP., vol.1, p.210.
6. *Ibid.*, p.200. The different ways of writing the word, Ahimsā, in the following pages do not show any significant difference in meaning. It is only a matter of transliteration.
7. *Ibid.*, p.175.
8. *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, ed., R.C. Majumdar, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 2<sup>nd</sup> Print, 1967, vol.6, p.571.
9. *Ibid.*, p.572.
10. *Indian, A Short Cultural History* (abbr. ISCH.), by H.G. Rawlinson, Publisher, Frederick A. Praeger, New York, 4<sup>th</sup> Print, 197, p.309.
11. *Ibid.*, pp.309f.
12. *Loc. cit.*
13. Cf. *Asia and Western Dominance*, by K.M. Panikkar, George Allen and

- Unwin Ltd., London, 1965, p.240.
14. *Ibid.*, p.279.
  15. *Cf. ISCH.*, p.410.
  16. *Hinduism*, by R.C. Zaener, Oxford University Press, 1966, p.152.
  17. *All Religions Are True*, (abbr.ART), by M.K. Gandhi, ed., Anand T. Hingorani, Pearl Publications Private Ltd., 1962, p.17.
  18. *Conquest of Violence, The Gandhian Philosophy of Conflict* (abbr. CV. ), by Joan V. Bondurant, University of California Press, revised ed. 1967, p.152. One is reminded of the famous lines from Kalidasa's *Mālavikāgnimitram*, which run as follows:  
*Purāṇamityeva na sādhu sarvaṃ na cāpi kāvyam navamityavadyam/  
santaḥ parīkṣyānyatarad bhajante mūḍh parapratyayaneyabudhiḥ//*  
“Not everything is good just because it is ancient ; nor, again, is a poem censurable just because it is new. The wise take to one or the other after examining it ; the ignorant person has a mind that can be led by the ideas of the others.”
  19. *Loc. cit.*
  20. *An Autobiography or The Story of my Experiments with Truth* (abbr. *An Autobiography*), by M.K. Gandhi, trans., Mahadev Desai, Navjeevan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., reprint, 1945, p.615.
  21. *Non-Violent Resistance* (abbr.NR.), by M.K. Gandhi. ed., Bharatan Kummara, Schocken Books, New York, 1957, p.176.
  22. *An Autobiography*, p.47.
  23. *Ibid.*, p.197.
  24. *Ibid.*, p.207.
  25. *Ibid.*, pp.50f.
  26. *An Autobiography*, p.615.
  27. NR, p.357.
  28. *Cf. Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (abbr. *Insight*), by Bernard J.F. Lonergan, Longmans, Green and Co, London, revised ed., 1958, (reprint, Harper & Row, Publishers, New York, 1978), p.599.

29. *An Autobiography*, Introduction, p.5.
30. *Ibid.*, p.413.
31. *The Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi* (abbr.PMG), by Dharendra Mohan Dutta, The University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1961, p.41.
32. *The Gospel of Selfless Action OR The Gītā According to Gandhi*, (abbr. TGSA). Translation of the original Gujarati, with an additional introduction and commentary, by Mahadev Desai, Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 4th impression, 1956, pp.128f. The book contains the entire translation of the Bhagavadgita by Gandhi, the original of which is in Gujarati, Gandhi's own mother tongue. The word, *Anāsaktiyoga*, is pronounced as *Anāsaktiyoga*.

*Anāsaktiyoga: The Message of the Gītā*, is the subtitle of Gandhi's own introduction (pp.125-134), which is followed by his translation of the XVIII Discourses, which comprise the *Gītā*. Gandhi's thought is similar to that of St. Thomas' "omnia appetunt Deum," ("all things seek God," *De Veritate*, question 2, at 2) and "omnia intendunt assimilari Deo" ("all things intend (i.e., have the tendency) to be similar to God," *Contra Gentiles*, 3, corpus 19), especially when it is applied to human beings.

33. *An Autobiography*, p. 171.
34. *Cf. TGSA.*, p.129.
35. *Ibid.*, p.130.
36. *A Third Collection*, Papers by Bernard J.F. Lonergan, S.J., Frederick E. Crowe, S.J., Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1985, p.92.
37. *NR.*, p.109.
38. *PMG.*, p.45.
39. *Loc.cit.*
40. *CV.*, p.152.
41. *ISCH.*, p.414.
42. The Bhagavadgītā (or *Gītā*), 3.35:

*śreyān svadharṃo viguṇaḥ paradharṃāt sv anīṣṭhitāt /*  
*svadharṃe nidhanam śreyaḥ paradharṃo bhayāvahaḥ //*

The translation is from TGSA., p. 188. The book contains the entire translation of the Bhagavadgītā by Gandhi, the original of which is in Gujarati, Gandhi's own mother tongue.

43. TGSA., p.127.

44. *Ibid.*, pp.133f.

45. Accordingly, two of the most important texts of the *Gītā* for Gandhi undoubtedly are,

*karmany evādhikāras te mā phaleṣu kadācana /  
mā karmaphalahetur bhūr mā te sango stv akarmaṇī//  
yogasthaḥ kuru karmāṇi saṃgaṃ tyaktvā dhanamjaya /  
siddhy asiddhyoḥ samo bhūtvā samatvaṃ yoga ucyate //* (*Gītā*, 2.47f.)

"Action alone is thy province, never the fruits thereof ; let not thy motive be the fruit of action, nor shouldst thou desire to avoid action. "

"Act thou, O Dhananjaya, without attachment, steadfast in *Yoga*, even-minded in success and failure. Even-mindedness is *Yoga*." (Gandhi's trans. of Discourse II, vv. 47-8, pp.161f.)

Desai's comment on the same verse in TGSA, p.162 reads,

"Gandhiji explained the verse (2.47)" in another connection:

"There should be no selfish purpose behind our actions. And to be detached from the fruits of actions is not to be ignorant of them or to disregard or disown them. To be detached is never to abandon action, because the contemplated result may not follow. On the contrary, it is proof of the immovable faith in the certainty of the contemplated result following in due course (*Young India*, 15-3-28.)"

46. *Gandhi Life and Thought*, by J.B. Kripalani, Government of India Publications Division(place and year?), p.338.

47. Cf. NR., 109; PMG., p.49.

48. NR., p.135.

49. *Ibid.*, p.176.

50. ART., p.128.

51. HIP., vol.1, p.199.



52. *Ibid.*, p.200. The two words are the Bengali equivalents of *anuvrata* and *mahāvratā*.
53. *Cf. loc. cit.* The ancient text of *Manusmṛti* defines *dharma* somewhat similarly, although the definition is more comprehensive:  
*ahiṃsā satyam asteyaṃ śaucam indriyanigrahaḥ /  
etaṃ sāmāsikaṃ dharmaṃ cāturvarṇye bravīṃ manuḥ*// (*Manusmṛti*, 10.63)
54. *A Cultural History of India*, ed.A.L.Basham, Clarendon Press, Oxford, London, 1995,ch. IX, *Jainism*, by A.N.Upadhye,p.106.
55. *NR.*,p.161.
56. *Ibid.*,221.Cf.e.g.,1 Cor.,13.7.
57. *PMG.*,p.35
58. Gandhi says in his *Autobiography*, Introduction , p.5, "...the essence of religion is morality." *Cf. also* pp.50f.
59. *An Autobiography*, p.615.
60. *PMG.*, p.35.See fn.51 above.
61. *An Autobiography*, p.557. In his own words, the context of his remorse is as follows:  

"For although I had only the milk of the cow and the she-buffalo in mind when I took the vow, by natural implication it covered the milk of all animals. Not could it be right for me to use milk at all, so long as I held that milk is not the natural diet of man. Yet knowing all this I agreed to take goat's milk. The will to live proved stronger than the devotion to truth, and for once the votary of truth compromised his sacred ideal by his eagerness to take up the Satyagraha fight. The memory of this action even now rankles in my breast and fills me with remorse, and I am constantly thinking how to give up goat's milk. But I cannot yet free myself from that subtlest of temptations, to desire to serve, which still holds me. "*(Ibid.*, p.557)
62. *Ibid.*, p.337..
63. *Ibid.*, pp.302f.
64. *Ibid.*, pp.40f..
65. *An Autobiography*, p.503.
66. *Ibid.*, p.504.

67. *Method in Theology*, by Bernard J.F. Lonergan, S.J., Herder and Herder, New York, 1972, p.55.
68. *PMG.*, p.35., *Young India*, 31 Dec., 1931.
69. *NR.*, pp. 364f., *Harijan*, 3 June, 1939.
70. *Loc.cit.*
71. *Cf.NR.*, pp.169f.
72. Quoted from *Gandhi In India, In His Own Words*, Ed. Martin Green, University Press of New England, Hanover and London, 1987, p.238. The mention of the phrase, "confession of the wretched experience," occurs on p.237.
73. *An Autobiography*, p. 37.
74. *Gandhi's Truth: On the Origins of Militant Non-violence*, by Erik H. Erikson, W. W. Norton and Company,
75. *NR.*, pp.180f.
76. *Loc.cit.*, *Harijan*, 30 March, 1940.
77. *An Autobiography*, p.338.
78. *Cf. NR.*, p.221., *Young India*, 20 Feb., 1930.
79. *NR.*, p.387., *Harijan*, 13 April, 1940.
80. *PMG.*, p.76.
81. *Cf. NR.*, pp. 88,233f.
82. *NR.*, p.88.
83. *Ibid.*, p.135.
84. *An Autobiography*, p.615.
85. *Cf. An Autobiography*, p.615.
86. *NR.*, p.357.
87. *PMG.*, p.45.
88. *Loc. cit.*
89. It was Rabindranath Tagore who called Gandhi for the first time Mahatma Gandhi.
90. *Religion of Man* is the title of one of Tagore's books.

91. ART., p.231.
92. NR., p.135.
93. ART., p.127.
94. PMG., p.49.
95. ART., p.129., *Young India*, 29 May, 1924.
96. NR., p.387., *Harijan*, 13 April, 1940.
97. NR., pp.383f.
98. PMG., p.49.
99. *An Autobiography*, p.428.
100. PMG., p.49.
101. ART., p.128.
102. *Method in Theology*, p.109. See *The History of Religions*, ed., M. Eliade and J. Kitagawa, Chicago University Press, Chicago, 1959, pp.142-153.
103. *Ibid.*, p.7.
104. PMG., p.45.
105. ART., p.45.
106. *Ibid.*, p.74.
107. *Ibid.*, p.4.
108. NR., p.357.
109. ART., p.128.
110. *World Religions and World Peace*, ed., Homer A. Jack, The International Inter-Religious Symposium on Peace, 1968, Preface.
111. *A Tagore Reader*, ed., Amiya Chakravarty, Beacon Press Boston, 1967, p.271.
112. Cf. Gal., 5.14; Rom., 13.9; I John, 3.11; Lev., 29.18.
113. *An Autobiography*, Introduction p. 6.
114. Cf. *Insight*, p.54. See also *ibid.*, pp.472f.
115. *A Third Collection*, pp.133-34.
116. *Method in Theology*, p. 106.

117. *Report of the Education Commission 1964-66: Education and National Development*, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Educ., Govt. of India Press, New Delhi, First Ed., 1966, p.20.
118. *Loc. cit.* The Report also speaks rightly of the importance of Ahimsā, cf. *ibid.*, p.22.