
UNIT 1 GANDHIAN CONCEPT OF GOD

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

The basic objective of this unit is to give a brief idea about the notion of God in Gandhian thought. The influences that shaped his idea of God are dealt in brief in the beginning of the unit. Gandhi's theism as well as the influences of Advaita Philosophy are mentioned. How Gandhi related God to Truth is also explained in this unit. Different proofs for the existence of God as given by Gandhi are also provided. Finally, Gandhian views of the way to God and his explanation for the existence of evil in the world are included. By the end of this unit, you will be able to

- to have an understanding of the influences that shaped Gandhian concept of God,
- know about Gandhi's theism though he was an Advaitin to some extent;
- understand about Gandhi's transition from God is Truth to Truth is God;
- to have a basic knowledge about the different proofs put forward by Gandhi for the existence of God
- comprehend about the Gandhian views on liberation and the existence of evil in the world.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The basic conviction of Gandhi is that there is one reality-that is God, which is nothing else but Truth. His religious ideas are derived from that conviction. If Truth is God sincere pursuit of Truth is religion. Religion is ordinarily defined as devotion to some higher power or principle. Gandhi is not against such a description of religion. He only qualifies it further by saying that, that higher principle being Truth, devotion to Truth or God is religion. Again, Gandhi could not find God apart from humanity. Therefore he believed that one could reach God by service to man. Hence he dedicated his entire life to the cause of the human race. In this unit, we are dealing with the Gandhian concept of God which he considers to be the devotion to Truth.

1.2 GANDHIAN CONCEPT OF GOD

As a multi-faceted thinker, Mahatma Gandhi gave a new world-view for reconstruction of new society. His thinking was not confined to any one aspect of human being. His conceptualization about human being and their relationship with the society involved many philosophical concepts. Gandhi cannot be regarded as originating any new system of philosophy or any new religion in the academic sense of the term. He learned simply the principles or eternal truths from the greatest traditional philosophical and religious teachers of the world. But Gandhi's contribution lies in the fact that he tried to assimilate in his own way the teachings that appealed to him and to apply these not only in his personal life but also to the social, political and economic problems of the day.

1.3 INFLUENCES THAT SHAPED GANDHI'S IDEA OF GOD

It is true that Gandhi's thought has originality and freshness about it. But it carries on it the stamp of a number of influences. His family belonged to the traditional theistic faith called *Vaishnavism* which believed that salvation could be attained by devotion to God and service to humanity. Being brought up in a *Vaishnava* household, *Ahimsa* (Non-violence) was in his blood. At a very early age, Gandhi had studied the Gita and the Ramayana. Gita was the main source of inspiration for him and he referred to the Gita as his mother. For him, it was a book par excellence for the knowledge of Truth. Gandhi strongly appreciated and he himself practiced the doctrine of '*anasakti*' as advocated by the Gita in all aspects of his life.

Jainism and Buddhism had a profound influence on the life and thought of Mahatma Gandhi. Jaina influence was clearly visible in his conception of *satyagraha* and practice of non-violence. Similarly his respect for other religions could be attributed to the teachings of *Anekanta Vada*. Gandhi refers to this in his writings. Like Buddha, Gandhi also recognized the futility of caste distinctions, rites, rituals and dogmas. Gandhi was moved by the emphasis on morality by Buddhism. He was also deeply impressed by the teachings of Buddhist philosophy which preached universal love, non-injury to living beings, sacrifice and renunciation for the sake of promoting the welfare of all. Buddha stressed on purity of means which in turn influenced Gandhi who constantly maintained that there is indissoluble relationship between pure means and noble end.

Gandhi had great respect for the teachings of Jesus Christ also. According to him, the cross is the symbol of sacrifice and *satyagraha* stands for supreme sacrifice. It infuses the spirit to suffer and

to overcome any dangerous situation. Thus *satyagraha* can be taken to be the practical application of the teachings of the Christ. Like Christ, Gandhi was also concerned with the individual's inner purity and perfection. Gandhi was also influenced by the Islamic teachings to a great extent. He learnt the message of universal brotherhood from it. He accepted Quran's faith in a Supreme God. God is infinite Power and Truth. According to Gandhi, Mohammed taught the religious principle of toleration, the brotherhood of man and absolute self surrender to God. Thus, we see that Gandhi was greatly influenced by the religious heritage of India and he borrowed considerably from Hinduism, Jainism Buddhism, Christianity and Islam. In his notion of God also we see a thorough influence of all these religions.

1.4 GANDHI'S THEISM

Even though it is difficult to reduce Gandhi's philosophy of God to any accepted philosophical models, it can be said to some extent that his theistic beliefs were more or less of the *Vaishnava* type. His early initiation into the *Vaishnava* cult and the influence of the family atmosphere in which he grew, implanted on his mind the rudiments of the idea of a theistic God. *Vaishnava* thinkers conceive God in a theistic manner and as such, God becomes a personal God. Gandhi's philosophy of God is also strictly theistic in character and he feels that God is not merely for the satisfaction of reason or intellectual curiosity, but also for providing strength and solace. According to Gandhi, faith in God must enable an individual to be in peace with the world and it is possible only where an inter-personal relationship is possible and when God is conceived as a person. Gandhi was deeply impressed by the life and practices of the saints of the *Bhakti*-cult, and, therefore, it was not difficult for him to arrive at the conception of a personal God. He was helped in arriving at this notion of God by his studies of the Bible and Quran also.

The nuclear element of Gandhi's thoughts and activities was his belief in God. His idea of God is largely the product of the Hindu conception of God. God, according to him, is the vital force which is all pervading and all embracing. God is vast and boundless as an ocean and it is therefore impossible for man to imagine what He is like. Man can only conceive God within the limitations of his own mind. According to Gandhi, God is invisible, beyond the reach of the human eye. In his opinion, Ram, Rahim, God or Krishna are all attempts on the part of man to name that invisible force which is the greatest of all forces. Man can describe God in his own way, in accordance with his belief and understanding of reality.

Though in accordance with the traditional *Vaishnavism* Gandhi shows his leaning towards *Visitadvaita*, at other times he appears to be an *advaitin* like Sankara, believing that everything this world as the manifestation of one ultimate principle or reality. The Supreme reality, according to him, is the non-dual *Brahman*, and here Gandhi declares himself to be an *Advaitin*. He, like Sankara, says that nothing exists except Truth which Sankara calls *Brahman*. Again for Gandhi the primary connotation of the term 'God' is not personal. He describes God as the essence, pure consciousness, as force, as truth, goodness and love. God, according to him is undefined power pervading all life, the spirit, and the indefinable, formless and nameless. These descriptions point out to the idea of impersonal ultimate Reality or Absolute like the *Brahman* of Sankara.

At the same time, Gandhi also mentions that God is personal to those who feel his presence and embodied to those who need his touch. God is personal in the sense that He is approachable to man and is in close relation with him. Gandhi is not much concerned whether the devotee conceives God as personal or impersonal, so long as he is true to his devotion. For Gandhi, the best way to describe God's power would be to call it Truth or *Satya*, which is derived from 'sat', which means being or to exist. Here he wants to say that God in reality is formless. But he assumes forms of a person for the good of his devotees. Hence he says that God is that indescribable entity which is unknowable but can be experienced. He is the source of light and life but transcends all. For those who need his presence, He is a personal God.

Again, according to Gandhi, it is not very important to know the attributes of God. They may be many and varied. All those attributes are parts of God. He is the law and the law giver at the same time. He is also truth, love, ethics and morality. He is the source of light and life and a million other things. He is the greatest living force or law that governs the whole universe or the entire human life.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your Answers.

1) What are the major influences that shaped the Gandhian Concept of God?

2) 'The Hindu tradition has created in Gandhi settled notions about Reality.' – Discuss/How did

1.5 GOD AS TRUTH

In Gandhi, we find the age old teaching of the Upanishad that God is 'sat' or Truth. In saying that God is Truth, it does not mean 'is truthful'. Truth here is conceived not as a mere attribute of God. But since it is derived from 'sat' which means 'being or is' nothing exists in reality except truth. Therefore the more truthful we are, the nearer we are to God. This concept of God as Truth, although not a new invention, is a somewhat unique approach to the meaning of God.

Gandhi considers devotion to truth to be the only reason for our existence. Truth should be the very breath of our life. There should be truth in thought, word and action and one who has realized it becomes perfect, as all knowledge is included in it. He often used to quote a Sanskrit verse '*satya nasti paramo dharma*' which said that there is no religion higher than truth. He repeatedly asserted that all his activities whether, social, political or humanitarian is directed to the end of the search of Truth. In his autobiography he claimed "My uniform experience has convinced me that there is no other God higher than Truth". Gandhi's assertion that God is Truth carries with it a great value in religions and practical life. As the object of devotion is Truth, the end for which we should strive for is Truth. This will help us to create a sort of universal brotherhood in respect of religion. It can do away with the rivalries in the religious field to a great extent because worship of Truth can unify persons belonging to different castes, creeds and religions. The theistic current of Gandhi's thought meets with a difficulty when God and Truth are sought to be identified with each. Truth is an impersonal principle and God as conceived by Gandhi is a person. Let us see how Gandhi has found a solution to this problem.

1.6 TRUTH AS GOD

Gandhi was aware of this difficulty and therefore he tried to make his own stand point clear. He, instead of asserting the previous statement 'God is Truth' came to assert 'Truth is God'. There were very strong reasons for bringing about this change. One reason for this change is that the word Truth is not as ambiguous as the word God. Nobody understands exactly the same thing by the word 'God'. God may be pantheistic, monotheistic or polytheistic. But, the word 'Truth' is always clear in its significance. Again, there is yet another reason for suggesting the change. It is possible to rationally doubt, or even to deny, the existence of God. But it is self contradictory to attempt to deny Truth. Gandhi realized that reason can raise arguments against the possibility of God's existence. But it cannot reject Truth. There are many skeptics and unbelievers of the God. But even they cannot deny Truth. Truth is the only factor which is completely universal and comprehensive and it provides a common platform for both the theist and atheist. This led Gandhi to assert the primacy of Truth. He said "My uniform experience has convinced me that there is no other God than Truth..." According to him, blind religious notions about God have done immense damage to mankind and therefore he shifted the emphasis from God to Truth.

In the initial stages of his experiments, Mahatma Gandhi was a firm believer in the ultimacy of God. Later he came in association with many sincere and thoughtful persons who honestly believed that the traditional idea of God was open to criticisms on account of its being a defective notion. But, even their rejection of God was based on a sincere desire to know the Truth. So Gandhi realized that reason could reject anything but not Truth. Truth appeared to him as the only force that could unify even conflicting ideas and ideals. This led to day that "if at all possible for human tongue to give the fullest description of God... then we must say that God is Truth... But I went a step further and said Truth is God". There are certain interesting implications of Gandhi's assertion that Truth is God. These implications have both pragmatic and religious value. Here it is asserted that the object of worship is not God but Truth. This can very well become a basis for a really universal religion as worship of Truth can bring the whole world together as a whole.

Gandhi combines the logical as well as metaphysical meaning of the word Truth and then identify Truth with God. Here Truth is not the relative truth of our conception but the Absolute Truth, the eternal principle that is God. Reality according to Gandhi is Truth and Truth is Reality. Man's ideal is to achieve God through Truth and non-violence. But he cannot achieve perfect Truth. Gandhi considered that man is a finite being but God is infinite or the Absolute Truth which he strives to know. The only way to find God, he believed, is to see Him in His creations. One may therefore, strive to find God or the Absolute Truth through the service of humanity. Service of God and service of humanity are therefore one and the same. The greatnesses of man depend on the extent of service one does to others. It is impossible for man to know or realize the whole truth or the Absolute Truth, which is God.

Gandhi was of opinion that even though man cannot achieve perfect Truth, he should always try to achieve it more and more. Even if one can achieve relative truth he should be satisfied because the more he achieve it, the nearer he is to reality. Faith in God or Truth with a purity of soul is all that is required for reaching the full spiritual height that is possible for a man to attain. To Gandhi, God or Truth is an all pervasive presence or existence in the midst of which man has to learn to live and move about, though it is a very difficult task. But that is the only worth while way to be pursued by one who aspires after spiritual and moral elevation.

As a great force for liberation of man, Truth as Gandhi asserts, ought to be a permanent living force of humans. All goodness, all sincerity, all purpose, all welfare of humanity are based on it. Therefore, the freedom of fullness of man entirely depends on how one is justified and dedicated to it. Thus, Truth, raised ultimately to the position of God, constitutes the central theme in Gandhian philosophy upon which the whole of his socio-political and economic philosophy is based.

1.7 PROOFS FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

Mahatma Gandhi who was brought up in a *Vaishanava* family adopts the theistic views and believes that God is the creator and also the ruler of the Universe. Gandhi believed that a belief in God is essentially a matter of faith. He was convinced that God can be known only in a state of inner realization, that God's knowledge can only be revealed to an individual in some sincere and sacred inner experience. Even so, at time, Gandhi does talk about evidences of God's existence. The causal proof is based on the view that everything has a cause. Logically, the entire cosmos depends on the ultimate cause which is God. Gandhi says "If we exist, if our parents and their parents have existed then it is proper to believe in the parent of the whole creation". God is thus conceived as the 'parent' of the whole universe.

At various places Gandhi talks of the order and the harmony of the universe. He also says that there is a Law governing the universe. Then he argues that the order, harmony and the law cannot be explained unless an intelligent Law-giver is presupposed and says that it is God. One can find the traces of teleological proof for God's existence here. It is based on the observation that there is an underlying unity and purpose, adjustment and order in the cosmos. It is governed

by some law and is moving towards some purpose or goal. Mahatma Gandhi observes “That there is orderliness in the universe, there is an unalterable law governing everything and every being that exists or lives. It is not a blind law, for no blind law can govern the conduct of living beings. That law then which governs all life is God”

But Mahatma Gandhi attaches great importance to the moral proof. In fact, Gandhi values this proof very much and very frequently makes a reference to this. According to him the so called voice of conscience is God’s command and direct intimation to man. He seems to be convinced that the voice of conscience carries dependable testimony for God’s existence. If moral conscience is accepted as a command then we have to accept the source of this command and this is God. Conscience, according to him, represents the Divine in man. It sanctions the good and condemns the bad. One is constrained to feel the obedience of the dictates of this voice is one’s duty. Gandhi clearly says, “I have no special revelation of God’s will. My firm belief is that He reveals himself daily to every human being but we shut our eyes to the ‘still small voice’

Then, at times, Gandhi also made a reference to a kind of proof that can be called ‘pragmatic proof’. Gandhi believes that a belief in God’s existence is necessary because God satisfies a very important aspect of our life. If we survey our life we find that over and above the wants and needs of every day existence, we do have an urge of a different kind which cannot be satisfied with the usual materialistic fulfillments of life, and which demands a spiritual satisfaction. We clearly realize that we are in need of a supreme object of love, by having a faith in which, we can derive strength, solace, peace and even happiness. This supreme object of love is nothing, but God.

Thus, Mahatma Gandhi offers a number of proofs for the existence of God. But above all faith, Gandhi believes, precedes all evidence. There is no argument to convince one who does not have faith in God. Faith transcends reason. Thus, it is apparent that, according to Gandhi, God not only transcends senses, but also defies rational proofs. God is a matter of inner realization and faith.

1.8 GOD AND EVIL

The existence of evil in the world is a fact which cannot be denied. It is difficult for a theist to accept evil along with the goodness of God. Hence Gandhi offers his own explanation with regard to the problem of evil and defined it as good or truth misplaced. He also said that if there is good there must also be evil just as where there is light there must be darkness. Gandhi explained that evils, sins etc are due to the wrong acts of man who are endowed with free will. Gandhi seems to have been influenced by traditional Hindu explanation which gives explanation for evils, sins and sufferings is karma and ignorance. Man suffers because of his own bad action which is due to ignorance about the truth of this universe, God and himself. Gandhi also believed that evils of the world are inspired by some unknown good motives, and not due to any evil intention of God who is all good, all just and all merciful. We have to recognize evil as something permitted by God in the world. Gandhi recognizes that there is a constant struggle

between the evil forces and the forces of good in any society. This means that there shall be evil in the non-violent society also and it will be the duty of every individual to fight against it. In this way, society will gain strength from the existence of evil and not be weakened by it.

1.9 THE WAY TO GOD

Gandhi's ultimate spiritual goal is *moksa* or salvation which means freedom from the cycle of births and deaths. He himself confessed that his utmost desire was to merge himself in the Absolute. The body persists because of egoism. The utter extinction of this egoism therefore leads to *moksa*. This is the basic teaching of Indian philosophy and religion. Gandhi believed in the necessity for ceaseless effort in this spiritual endeavor. This also requires grace of God. With regard to the three paths leading to God-*jnana*, *bhakti*, and *karma*, Gandhi laid more emphasis on *bhakti* and *karma*, of devotion and complete self surrender to God. Here we see that he was influenced by *Bhagavad-Gita*. According to him, God is ready to forgive even the most dreadful sinner if he surrenders himself with the greatest devotion at the feet of God. He also relies on *karma* in the form of selfless service of the poor as a way to supreme God realization. He believed that to serve the poor was to serve the God. Thus we see that Gandhi realized the fact that *karma* and *bhakti* are complementary to one another. He was successful in creating a mutual connection among the different paths leading to the realization of God.

To Gandhi, *jivan mukti* or *mukti* while one is still alive is impossibility. A man can attain only '*videhamukti*' or deliverance after death. The cravings of the senses die away only when we cease to exist in the body. The yogi, according to Gandhi, is one who has controlled his mind and is completely free from all desires. Gandhi also asserts that a man of unceasing love is a perfectly enlightened man. By *moksa*, he means liberation from impure thoughts and weakness that are manifested in the form of violence. Thus, the ultimate objective of life that Gandhi aspired to, was achieving the liberation of soul from violence in thought, word and deed that might have enveloped it. Once that covering was removed, the soul or the Divine spark in him would shine in the fullest glory of Truth. The self then would begin to realize the vision of God. Gandhi thus emphasized that the more truthful we are, the nearer we are to God. He thus wanted to show us that the way to God is through the commitment to truth.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your Answers.

1) What is the difference between 'God is Truth' and 'Truth is God' in Gandhian philosophy.?

-----2) What was Gandhi's explanation with regard to the problem of Evil?

1.10 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we are dealing with the Gandhian concept of God. In the formation of his concept of God, Gandhi was influenced by a number of religious thoughts. They are dealt in brief. Though *Vaishnava* tradition in which Gandhi was brought up formulated a concept of personal God in Gandhi, he was equally impressed by the *Advaita* tradition also. Hence he defines God as Absolute Truth. 'God is Truth', goes the familiar saying, but Gandhi gave the statement an unusual twist. He argued that it is more correct to say 'Truth is God' and insisted that the distinction between the two statements is significant. This is also given with due emphasis in the unit. The proofs for the existence of God as given by Gandhi are given as the next topic in the unit. This is followed by Gandhi's explanation with regard to the problem of evil. The unit is concluded by a brief look into Gandhian conception of way to God or liberation. According to him, it can be attained through commitment to Truth.

1.11 KEY WORDS

- Theism** : Belief in a God or Gods especially as creator of the world
- Attribute** : Characteristic quality
- Anekantavada**: Jaina theory of Reality
- Vaishnavism** : Hindu tradition which considers Vishnu as the Supreme Deity
- Advaita** : The doctrine of the Vedanta school associated with Shankara
- Brahman** : The Absolute Reality or the supreme God-head without qualities or attributes
- Jivanmukta** : One who has realized the self, even while living in this body

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UNIT 2 ROLE OF REASON AND FAITH

Contents

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2.0 OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this unit is shed light on the intricate problem regarding Faith and Reason in Gandhian philosophy of religion. Generally by 'reason' is meant the act or faculty of reflecting, thinking and making inferences by which we arrive at a judgment or solution. On the contrary, faith generally, means believing something to be true and being convinced of it not because one's own reason has arrived at it but because one relies upon the credibility of another. In other words, Reason one's attempt at arriving at the truth by one's own thinking, while in Faith the testimony of someone else is taken to be sufficient for being convinced of the truth of something.

Both Reason and Faith are considered to be valid sources of knowledge. But on what grounds? What is the relative merits of the two methods of arriving at truth? These are the questions of importance for epistemology. The same questions are raised much more in philosophy of religion. Gandhi also, in his philosophy of religion, validates both Reason and Faith as authentic sources of religious experiences.

To estimate Gandhi's validation of these sources, first it may be necessary for you to get at least fairly historical overview of the concepts as developed in the classical philosophical traditions. In the light of that background then it may be easy for you to take up Gandhi's views on Reason and Faith, each separately for consideration. Finally, we will discuss the relative merits of the two. So by the end of the Unit you will be able to

- Clearly define what reason is and faith is
 - Understand what Gandhi has to say on the role of Reason and Faith in religious matters
 - Determine the relative merits of Reason and Faith in the Gandhian perspective
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2.1 INTRODUCTION

Even in our day-to-day experiences both Reason and Faith play a vital role. Not only do we reason out by ourselves in order to arrive at the correct truths in life but we also heavily depend upon the trustworthiness of people and believe the truth of many things on their testimony. This is much more applicable in matters of religion. It has been a matter of interest among

philosophers and theologians to discuss about the relative merits of each and explain the interrelationship of both. For, religious truths are usually said to be backed up by some kind of divine authority. They are usually presented in the literary forms of narrative, parable, or discourse, the truth of which people are supposed to just believe. But, rational beings as we are, normally it is not a blind faith that is expected of us. So most religions allow and even encourage some kind of rational examination of their beliefs.

The key philosophical issue regarding the problem of faith and reason is to work out how the authority of Faith and the authority of Reason interrelate in the process of justifying a religious belief, or establishing a matter of faith as a matter of truth. Gandhi, being a profound thinker and a religious man, he too has dealt with both Reason and Faith quite exhaustively. It is instructive to consider Gandhi's serious considerations of each separately and the relative roles played by them in human civilization.

2.2 CONCEPT CLARIFICATION

Reason

The word 'reason', derived from the French word '*raison*', which itself from the Latin word '*ratio*' refers to the distinctive ability of human mind to predict effects as based upon presumed causes. It is this ability which makes human beings different from the other beings. According to the ancient Greek philosophy Reason was the unique power for the pride and glory of the human beings so they defined human being as a rational being.

In medieval period greater importance was given to Faith as a source of knowledge than the role of Reason. According to St. Anselm for instance, Reason is not to pass judgment on the content of Faith but to find its meaning and give an explanation of its content. But Francis Bacon, the father of modern scientific logic, considered reason as something supported by observation about the world outside.

Thus there grew a conflict between the approach of medieval philosophy and spirit of renaissance. Hence Rene Descartes emphasized the use of Reason as a distinct tool of philosophical enquiry to free philosophy from religious dogmatism on one hand and empirical arrogance on the other. As a culmination of this trend as it were, Emmanuel Kant replaced revelation by Reason as the primary authority. He also made the same Reason the prime source of ensuring one's own freedom.

To sum up,

Reason may be defined as the human capacity for knowledge, with a threefold aspects:

- (1) On the theoretical level there is the intellectual capacity to understand all that exists in some theoretical framework and in a holistic manner. It may be called **Pure Reason**
- (2) At the practical level, there is the capacity to grasp what one ought to do and what one ought not to do, thereby impelling the will to do the good and refrain from doing evil. This is identified as **Practical Reason** and is used in ethical and legal perspective.

- (3) Apart from these two, there is also the human capacity for empirical investigation, thereby acquiring scientific knowledge of the world outside, it may be called **Scientific Reason.**

Faith

The word 'faith', derived from the Latin '*fides*', meant an active assent to the truth claims of another person, relying upon trustworthiness of that person. So faith is based not on the intrinsic evidence: mediate or immediate, but on the authority of another. In ordinary experience, Faith involves a kind of attitude of trust or assent, an act of will or a commitment on the part of the believer. Religious faith involves some kind of an implicit or explicit reference to a transcendent source. The basis for religious faith usually is understood to come from the authority of supernatural revelation.

However Faith is said to be rational if the one on whom one believes is already known to be competent and trustworthy. Faith has been considered as authentic and certain source of knowledge though it's not a compelling one. Faith is, therefore, the human capacity to believe in the truth of something which may not necessarily be rationally empirically verifiable by one's own reasoning capacity, but solely relying upon the trustworthiness of another witness. Every act of faith has two aspects: cognitive and volitional. It is cognitive in so far as it is affirmation of truth and it is volitional in as much as it is act of trust.

The relation between Faith and Reason

It has been a question of epistemological importance to discuss the relative merits of Faith and Reason. Both are inbuilt in the process of acquiring knowledge even in everyday life. It is true that human beings, in as much as self-conscious beings, are known to be distinct by their intellectual power of reasoning. However, Faith also plays an important role in acquiring ordinary knowledge, because every day-to-day truth is not acquired through objective personal verification, but is believed to be true.

Faith, as an act of the will, is indispensable for scientific knowledge too, because in every advance from sense data to perception, or from hypothesis to its observational verification or in inventing a machine, there must be not only an insight but also a sustained effort of the will to carry the process through to completion. In short then faith and reason are inter-twined sources of knowledge. Many philosophers and scientists like Karl R. Popper have acknowledged that faith as trust is fundamental to scientific knowledge.

The intertwining relationship of Faith and Reason can be seen much more in religious knowledge. In every theological reflection reason is playing an essential role because it applies an appropriate relational framework of thought to interpret the testimony of faith or revelation. Thus the early Fathers of the Church chose platonic philosophy and the scholastic philosophers of Medieval Age chose the Aristotelian philosophy. The contemporary Hermeneutics depends on the existential analysis of Heidegger as the rational framework in which God's word would be theological understood. Especially when we deal with transcendent beliefs regarding human nature, its destiny, good and evil, God's existence or non-existence, we are made aware of the limitation of reason and of the need to go beyond the empirical verification. These transcendent beliefs themselves are aides for human beings to attain transcendence. This trait of transcendence

which is a defining human characteristic is a constituent part of human search for a reasonable vision that will make sense of human life, giving it the dignity that belongs to it.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) What is your understanding of Reason, now, ?

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2) How is faith different from reason as a source of knowledge?

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3) How are Reason and Faith intertwined with each other in acquiring scientific knowledge?

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2.3 ROLE OF REASON IN GANDHI'S THOUGHT

Gandhi, like Rousseau, thought that modern civilization with its inducement to ambition and rivalry has stifled the human self. It deploys reason in the service of deception so much that conscience either connives at collective crimes or is extinguished by external powers. It transmutes reason into cunningness and induces people to change the wants into needs and crave for material happiness only. Thus modern human being is perverted; human dignity is undermined and even depraved by many strategies of hypocrisy. All this is possible only because the faculty of reason is itself ambiguous in its nature.

Gandhi establishes the ambiguity of reason by taking some concrete cases. Those who indulge in drink and free love put forward some reason or other to support their evil acts. Why? Because their reason is blurred. On such occasions, it actually follows instincts. In the midst of temptations, Gandhi says, reason is a poor criterion. It can clearly be said that it is immoral to drink liquors except as medicine. Similarly, it can be proved by cold reason that it is absolutely wrong to see any women lustfully other than one's wife. However counter arguments have been advanced to support alcoholism and adultery. By way of promoting eating, drinking, sexual immorality etc., one may argue that these functions are as natural as other functions of the body hence it is our duty to develop those animal faculties to fulfillment. So according to them virtue and vice are figment human imagination, rather than absolute need of morality.

This only shows how reason can be abused. In the same way counter arguments have been advanced against the very existence of God – the sum of all that **is**. This ambiguity of reason can be resolved only by faith. So faith according to Gandhi is that which transcends reason and it is this which has been the only Rock of Ages. “My faith has saved me and is still saving me from pitfall. It has never betrayed me. It has never known to betray anyone”. Coming to their specific argument, Gandhi argues thus: If we were to put humans in the same category as the brutes, the above said functions may be considered natural. However, the human beings and the animals are two different species. Not everything that is natural to the brute can be natural to humans. Progress is characteristic of human alone not of the beasts. Reason, the power of discrimination, belongs to the human species alone; humans do not live by bread alone as the brute does. The humans use their reason to worship God and to know him and regard the attainment of that knowledge and the *summum bonum* (supreme good) of life. To those people whose end and aim is realization of God or knowledge of God, even the function of eating or drinking can be natural only within limits. They will be considered as necessary solely for sustaining the body and not for the sake of enjoyment. So restraint and renunciation have always been the watchwords in respect of these functions. Therefore, it is not the duty of humans to develop all the functions to perfection or fulfillment but their duty is to develop Godward faculties to perfection and to suppress those of contrary tendency. We have within us both good and bad desires our duty is to cultivate the good desires and to suppress the bad ones. If we fail therein we should remain brutes though born as human beings. All religions have declared human birth as a rare privilege – a state of probation if we are found wanting, according to Hinduism, we should have to be reborn as beasts.

Hence it is clear that one has to use the power of reason with great responsibility. And there is a necessity to train this faculty of reason. This faculty in the children is no doubt, asleep but we should gently coax it and awaken it and teach children habits of discipline so that their, reason being freed from the control of their senses, would become their guide right from childhood in this connection Gandhi advocates the five *Maha vratas* as a necessary equipment's to train the reason: *Ahimsa* (Non-violence), *Satya* (Truth), *Asteya* (Non-stealing), *Aparigraha* (Non-possession), *Bramacharya* (celibacy). For the reason to be proper guide to conduct the senses it has to be pure and obedient the senses must be brought to control and subjected to the severest discipline so that they will be willing instruments at the hands of reason instead of reason being their helpless slave

Such a trained reason, according to Gandhi is a supreme criterion for deciding even the value of scriptures. The *sastras* are there only to supplement reason and not to supplant it. They would never be pleaded to defend injustice or untruth “That which is opposed to the fundamental principles of morality, to trained reason, cannot be claimed as *sastras*, no matter how ancient it maybe. Elsewhere he said I would reject all scriptural authority if in conflict with sober reason or dictates of the heart” Gandhi would not regard as revelation the collection of verses under one cover as *smrtis*. He rejects as interpolation everything in *Smrtis* or other scriptures that is inconsistent with truth, non-violence, or other fundamental or universal principles of ethics ” I exercise my judgment about every scriptures, I cannot let a scriptural text supersede my reason they are inspired but suffer from a process of double distillation: 1) They come from a human prophet 2) through commentaries of interpreters. Nothing is directly from God, so cannot surrender my reason while I subscribe to revelation.

2.4 ROLE OF FAITH IN GANDHI'S THOUGHT

Gandhi was very concerned about the lack of faith among the educated youth of his time. In an address to the students' community of Mysore, once, Gandhi confessed to a deep sense of sorrow that faith was gradually disappearing in the student world. "When I suggest to a Hindu boy to have recourse to Ramanama he stares at me and wonders who Rama may be. When I ask a Mussalman boy to read the Koran and fear God, he confesses his inability to read the Koran and Allah is a mere lip-profession". As against such a situation, Gandhi upheld that the first step to a true education is a pure heart. If the education we get turned them away from God, he said "how it is going to help you and how you are going to help the world?"

There are subjects where reason cannot take us far. We have to accept things on faith. Faith does not contradict reason but transcends it. It is a kind of sixth sense, which works in cases, which are not within the preview of reason, faith is like the Himalayas which cannot possibly change. No storm can possibly remove them from their foundation. So also, faith is something that is stable and is able to solve many problems, not suppressing the reason but sanctifying it.

Faith is necessary even in everyday life. It is a requirement also for the scientist though they claim that whatever they say can be verified, yet one must have a living faith to follow the ways which they prescribe for realizing those facts. On the basis of their experimental method they do think there is nothing apart from the body and the material. From this they even they conclude faith in God is unnecessary for the progress of humanity. For such people even the weightiest argument is of no avail. You cannot make a person listen to finest music and appreciate it if he has stuffed his ears. So also, you cannot convince about an existence of living God someone who is not ready to be convinced. However, I have a living faith in a living God even as I have a living faith in many things that scientist tell me. The scientists say that their truth can be verified if one follows the ways prescribed by them for realizing those facts. This is precisely what *rishis* and the prophets also speak. Anybody who follows the path they have trodden can realize God. Unfortunately, we don't want to follow the paths nor do we take the testimony of eye-witnesses.

Fortunately, the vast majority of people do have living faith in a living God they cannot argue about it. And they will not. For them "God is". Are all the scriptures of the world old women tales of superstitions? Is the testimony of the prophets or *rishis* simply to be rejected? Is the testimony Chaitanya, Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Tukaram, Dnyadeva, Ramdas, Nanak, kabir, Devendranath Tagore, Vivekanand, all modern men as well educated as the tallest among the living ones? This belief in God has to be based on faith which transcends reason

Human nature is distinguished only by the soul, the image of God. It is special creation only to the extent it is distinct from the rest of creature. Human nature is fully realized only when it ceases to be beastly or brutal. One may say human is first animal and human only afterwards the so called soul is figment of imagination but Gandhi's retort is as follows "A species is differentiated from the rest from its special characteristic. A horse is not a first animal and horse after he shares something in common with other animal but he does not shed horsiness yet remain animal. If its special virtue is lost its general status is also lost similarly if a man lost his status as man and began to grow a tail and walk on all fours, and lost the use of his reason he would have lost the status of man and also as that of animal neither the other animals will claim him as theirs so man will be classed as animals so long as he retains his humanity.

To this some people may react by referring to the Australian savages. In their ancestors time they were just like animals they had no communication except through gestures. They had no art, no literature and no science. Even now animal passions are lurking in the so called civilized people.

Our ethical code is a thin layer only. However Gandhi says that the Australian savage was fundamentally different from the brute because the brute will always remain brute while the savage had the capacity to develop the fullest height attainable. It is natural for the brute to be brutal but it will be resented by us if that adjective is applied to us, ethics requires the humans to our kingship with apes and other animals precisely because of it, it imposes a unilateral obligation upon us: Because we alone are made in the image of God. It is fact that some of us do not recognize this status. But it makes no difference except that they don't get the benefit of the status just like a lion brought up in the company of the sheep may not know its status and so does not receive its benefit yet it belongs to it. The moment it recognizes it, it begins to exercise its power over the sheep in contrast no sheep masquerading as a lion can ever attain the status of a lion to prove that man is made in the image of God it is not necessary to show that all men admittedly exhibit that image in their own persons. The great religious teachers have exhibited the image of God in their person and that is good enough.

Worship of God in the sense of acknowledging a power above and beyond us is as natural as our possession of lungs or the fact of blood circulation. Ignorant people may not acknowledge it but it is a fact. So also some people may not accept the existence of God but that does not make it false some others may worship god in crude forms bowing before the stone but Gold is gold even in its crudest form it only needs refinement so also the worship of ordinary people

Any search is possible only with some workable solution if we grant nothing we will find nothing in the case of religious search also people, since the beginning of the world have proceeded upon the assumption that if we are the God is, and that if God is not there, we are not there thus the belief in God is co-existence with the human kind such a faith in the existence of God is treated as a fact more definite than the sun is. This living faith has solved the largest number of puzzles of life it has alleviated our misery it sustains us in life it is our one solace in death. The very search for truth becomes interesting and worthwhile because of this faith. We embark upon the search because we believe that there is truth and that it can be found by diligence search and meticulous observance of the well-known and well-tried rules of the search there is no record in the history of the failure of such search even the atheist who have pretended to disbelieve in God have believed in truth the trick they have performed is that of giving God another, not a new name his name are the legion. Truth is the crown of them all.

Faith in God if it is of any worth implies the believer to resign oneself to God's will, and not be anxious about the future. If we have faith in God, we simply would not come to know beforehand how He may dispose of us. It is enough for us to hold ourselves perfectly in readiness for whatever happens. We are not allowed to know what tomorrow has in store for us and our best conceived plans have a knack very often of going awry. The highest wisdom, therefore, is never to worry about the future; but to resign ourselves entirely to His will. In this quotation it is clear that Gandhi gives an emphasis on faith and considers it as more important than the ordinary reason, which is in fact limited, and therefore calls for the role of faith. If we have faith in God we simply would not care to know beforehand how He may dispose of us. It is enough for us to hold ourselves perfectly in readiness for whatever happens. We are not allowed to know what tomorrow has in store for us and our best conceived plans have a knack very often of going awry. The highest wisdom, therefore, is never to worry about the future but to resign ourselves entirely to His Will.

Especially for a *Satyagrahi*, Gandhi made living faith as crucial. "There is no other strength for a *satyagrahi* but that of his unflinching faith in God. He has no other stay but God. One who has

other stay or depends on other help cannot offer *satyagrahi*. He may be a passive resister, non-cooperator and so on but not a *satyagrahi*. That faith is of little value which can flourish only in fair weather in order to be of any value it has to survive the severest trials. The month before the inauguration of Civil Disobedience campaign the Satyagraha Ashram was put into severe trial. The test came in the form of epidemic of small pox. It carried away three promising children of the Ashram. Gandhi of all persons had to go through heart searching: whether to vaccinate the inmates, which he had been against it because he had considered it as harmful in the end, little short of taking beef. He had instead tried only hydropathy and earth treatment with success in numerous cases. But that month seemed to fail. Does this mean that I must therefore lose faith in the treatment and faith in God? Or will I preserve in my faith? Finally, Gandhi said openly in the prayer meeting: I want you to understand that this epidemic is not a scourge, but a trial and preparation to chain us more strongly and firmly to faith in God. It is as clear to me as daylight that life and death are but phases of the same thing, the reverse and obverse of the same coin. What is life worth without trials which are salt of life? What is Ramayana but a record of trials, privations and penances of Rama and Sita. I want you all to treasure death and suffering more than life and to appreciate their cleansing and purifying character.

Here again Gandhi relies upon the faith of great people who had stood the trial. The greatest men of the world have always stood alone. Zoroaster, Buddha, Jesus, Mohammed. In his flight Prophet Mohammed was accompanied by his faithful companion Abu Bakr. As they were chased by numerous enemies, at one point Abu Bakr exclaimed to the Prophet: "I am trembling to think of our fate. Look at the number of the enemies. What shall we two do against these heavy odds?" Without a moment's reflection the Prophet rebuked him "No Abu Bakr, We are three, for God is with us". Citing the invincible faith of Vibhisan and Prahlad, Gandhi to student community of Rhastriya Vidyapith at Banara: "I want you to have that same living faith in yourselves and God"

By this Gandhi did not mean that all should believe in the God that he believed in. He readily granted to others thus: "May be your definition of God is different from mine, but your belief in that God might 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 the strength that comes from God. Only in his strength we are strong. And only those who can cast their cares and their fears on that Immeasurable Power have faith in God." Taking the allegory of the elephant king, Gajendra and the alligator Grahya as an example, Gandhi said: The moral of the story is that God never fails his devotees in the hour of trial. The condition is that there must be a living faith in and the uttermost reliance on Him. The test of faith is that having done our duty we must be prepared to welcome whatever He may send—joy as well as sorrow, good luck as well as bad.... If mishaps do come he will not bewail his fate but bear it with an undisturbed peace of mind and joyous resignation to His will. It was only when the tip of his trunk left above water, he invoked God. And God too heard his prayers and helped him. So Gandhi could powerfully say: "When I am weak, then I am strong"

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) Why does Gandhi think that reason is ambiguous and how can it be trained?

.....

2) Why does Gandhi say reason is supreme authority in judging the shastras?

3) How does Gandhi establish faith as a sure means of knowledge?

4) What are the ways by which one can test the faith ?

2.5 RELATIVE MERITS OF EACH

Some have held that Faith and Reason are two separate sources in conflict with each other over certain propositions or methodologies. In this conflict which is to prevail over the other? Regarding this there has been disagreement among philosophers. John Locke held that though faith and reason have “strict” distinct provinces, faith must be in accord with reason. Faith cannot convince us of something which contradicts our knowledge. But propositions of faith are, nonetheless, understood to be “above reason.”

But others like Kierkegaard would prioritize faith even to the point of making it irrational. While dealing with ‘leap of faith’ (the act of believing in or accepting something intangible or unprovable, or without empirical evidence), Kierkegaard stressed that the core part of the leap of faith, is the leap. Using the famous story of Adam and Eve, he says, Adam's leap signifies a change from one quality to another, mainly the quality of possessing no sin to the quality of possessing sin. Kierkegaard maintains that the transition from one quality to another can take place only by a “leap”. This leap is thus associated with “blind faith”. Nevertheless, given the conception of a God who unconditionally accepts humans and that faith itself is a gift from God, one reaches the highest moral position when a person realizes this and, no longer depends upon oneself, but takes the leap of faith into the arms of a loving God.

The second of philosophers have maintained Faith and Reason are two distinct sources, having no conflict at all between the two. Neither will produce contradictory or contrary claims which

are competing over those of the other. If at all there arises a conflict between their claims then, then they say that that conflict is only apparent, and it should be resolved on the side of faith if the claim in question is a religious or theological. It should be resolved on the side of reason when the disputed claim is with regard to empirical or logical matters.

There are still other philosophers, most notably the logical positivists, who have denied the very existence of a separate area of thought or human existence rightly governed by faith. According to them, only those ideas and statements that are accessible to thorough verification by reason are meaningful. This position of the contemporary philosophers has presented a challenge to religious thinkers to explain how the admittedly non-rational or trans-rational matters of religion can be said to hold meaningful cognitive content.

One significant reaction against logical positivism stemmed from Ludwig Wittgenstein. He argued that there is something unique about the linguistic framework of religious believers. Their language makes little sense to outsiders. So they need to share in their form of life in order to understand the way the various concepts function in their language games. The various language games form a kind of “family resemblance.”

So according to Wittgenstein those who demand an impartial way of assessing the truth value of a religious claim are asking for something impossible. Science and religion are just two different types of language games. This demand to take on an internal perspective in order to assess religious beliefs commits Wittgenstein to a form of incompatibilism between Faith and Reason. Though this entails that religious beliefs are essentially groundless, one can point out that in everyday life too there are such countless beliefs as the belief in the permanence of our objects of perception, in the uniformity of nature, and even in our knowledge of our own intentions. Wittgenstein claimed that proofs for God’s existence have little to do with actual belief in God. They neither show us God in the way a sense impression shows us an object, nor do they give rise to conjectures about him. Experiences, thoughts—life can force this concept on us. He did think that life itself could “educate” us about God’s existence.

Taking the clue from this, Hick argues for the importance of rational certainty in faith. He posits that there are as many types of grounds for rational certainty as there are kinds of objects of knowledge. He claims that religious beliefs share several crucial features with any empirical claim: they are propositional; they are objects of assent; an agent can have dispositions to act upon them; and we feel convictions for them when they are challenged. Nonetheless, Hick realizes that there are important ways in which sense beliefs and religious beliefs are distinct: sense perception is coercive, while religious perception is not; sense perception is universal, while religious is not; and sense perception is highly coherent within space and time, while religious awareness among different individuals is not. In fact, it may in fact be rational for a person who has not had experiences that compel belief to withhold belief in God.

From these similarities and differences between faith-claims and claims of reason, Hick concludes that religious faith is the non-inferential and improvable basic interpretation either of a moral or religious “situational significance” in human experience. Faith is not the result of logical reasoning, but rather a profession that God “as a living being” has entered into the believer’s experience. This act of faith situates itself in the person’s material and social environment. Religious faith interprets reality in terms of the divine presence within the believer’s human experience. Although the person of faith may be unable to prove or explain this divine presence, his or her religious belief still acquire the status of knowledge similar to that of

scientific and moral claims. Thus even if one could prove God's existence, this fact alone would be a form of knowledge neither necessary nor sufficient for one's faith. It would at best only force a notional assent. Believers live by not by confirmed hypotheses, but by an intense, coercive, indubitable experience of the divine.

Now, Gandhi speaks of faith as flowing from the transcendental trait that is essential part of human nature. It is constituent dimension of human nature. Unless we exercise it and bring to completion, the so-called human has the danger of degrading to a level far below the level of animal passions. However, Gandhi assigns Reason its due role. He even gives a supreme authority to Reason as far as it has a role in assessing the moral dimension of the religion, and even in deciding the truth-value of what went in the name of Revelation. At the same time, Gandhi accepted the ambiguous character of human reason, as it is caught between the animal instincts and the image of God. As such reason cannot be relied upon as a defining characteristic of being human. So he emphasized the need for reason to go beyond itself and give room for transcending to the realm of faith. He also equally stressed the need of training Reason and controlling it. In bringing out the transcendental dimension to fulfillment, only Faith has a role to play and reason has to play a role that is subservient to faith and supportive of faith. In this, Gandhi has made room for faith to realize the human transcendence.

Conclusion

Both Faith and Reason are two authentic sources of human knowledge. With the emergence of self-consciousness in the human species, the faculty of Reason begins to operate especially in determining the choices. However, we cannot reason out all things on earth, nor wait to start to act until we have reasoned securely for the choice of a particular action. There is another faculty called Faith. It is the precondition of all systematic knowing, purposive doing and transcendent living. Gandhi accepted validity of both each in its respective fields and each penetrating into each other's, and complementing each other.

Gandhi set great value upon reason's drive to attain goals, which render people's lives ever more worthy. Even in the realm of religion, Gandhi sees Reason as very helpful to purify mythological notions of God and the superstitious elements of religions and reject interpolations of scriptures. In this, he sees that Reason could contribute to the understanding of divine Revelation. Religion therefore need not entertain any fear of Reason, but should seek out Reason and have trust in it.

But at the same time Gandhi equally emphasized that Faith could build upon the Reason and brings it to fulfillment, by shedding light on the possible abuses from Reason and could free it from its fragility and limitations. But he was clear about the patent inadequacy of perspectives in which the ephemeral is affirmed as a value and the possibility of discovering the real meaning of life is cast into doubt. That is why, the modern civilization, according to Gandhi, stumbles through life to the very edge of the abyss without knowing where it is going. It is satisfied with preferring quick success to the toil of patient enquiry into what makes life worth living, no longer looking to transcendent dimensions of human existence. It is there Gandhi to openly and boldly points out the misdirection of the modern civilization and corrects it by giving due importance to Faith, without at the same time ignoring the importance due to Reason.

2.6 LET US SUM UP

I. 1. After clarifying the precise meanings of Reason and Faith, we tried to assess the relative authority of Faith and the authority of Reason and examine whether they interrelate in the process of justifying a religious belief, or establishing a matter of faith as a matter of truth.

Reason is specifically a human faculty of reflecting, thinking and making inferences by which we arrive at a judgment or solution. This power can be distinguished in three distinct ways: (1) Purely from a theoretical standpoint, it is **Pure Reason** (the intellectual capacity to understand all that exists in some theoretical framework and in a holistic manner). (2) From the practical point of view or in the ethical and legal perspectives it is called **Practical Reason** (the capacity to grasp what one ought to do and what one ought not to do, thereby impelling the will to do the good and refrain from doing evil). (3) From the angle of empirical investigation it is **Scientific Reason** is the capacity for acquiring scientific knowledge of the world outside.

Faith is the human capacity to believe in the truth of something which may not necessarily be rationally or empirically verifiable by one's own reasoning capacity, but solely relying upon the trustworthiness of another witness. It is distinct from reason in this that it arrives at the truth by relying upon the credibility of another. One's own reasoning power is not exercised directly on the arriving at the truth. Faith plays an important role not only in everyday life and in scientific inquiry, but more in the matters of religion.

3. Very often science boasts of its verification method as superior to religious method of faith. However, Faith, as an act of the will, is indispensable even for scientific knowledge. Every advance from sense data to perception, or from hypothesis to verification there must be not only an insight but also a sustained effort of the will to carry the process through to completion. Thus faith and reason are inter-twined sources of knowledge

II. 1. Reason is ambiguous, and can easily be lured and abused by the animal appetites in human beings. For example it can be proved by reason that drinking is evil or that it is wrong to see any women lustfully other than one's wife. However, counter arguments have been advanced to support alcoholism and adultery. This ambiguity of reason can be resolved only by faith. So faith according to Gandhi is that which transcends reason. It is this which has been the only Rock of Ages. All the great prophets, sages and founders of religions have based themselves on Faith much more than Reason.

There is already inbuilt mechanism in us namely conscience with the help of which we can use reason with responsibility, controlling it from support the animal instincts. We have within us both good and bad desires our duty is to cultivate the good desires and to suppress the bad ones. If we fail therein we should remain brutes though born as human beings. All religions have declared human birth as a rare privilege –a state of probation. If we want to successfully come out of the probation, then we the need to train Reason and discipline it. In this connection, Gandhi's emphasizes on practice of *vratas*.

2. Gandhi assigns to the trained Reason a supreme role in deciding passage of scriptures to be true or merely an interpolation. For revelation that the scriptures are said to have is first received through human media only. Further it has been commented upon. So, anything that is passed through the human medium is bound to be imperfect. So Reason has to be applied any passage to see whether immorality is taught in any passage. If so, it must be rejected as interpolation.

3. There are many things in our day to day life which we take only on faith. This itself is a sure means of obtaining knowledge. Even in science faith is used as a means, Gandhi says. For the

scientists say that their truth can be verified if one follows the ways prescribed by them for realizing those facts. In parallel lines Gandhi argues that Faith is nothing but following the path trodden by *rishis* and the prophets, and thereby realizing God. Further, to have a living faith implies that the believer resigns oneself to God's will, without being worried about whatever happens. Citing the invincible faith of testimony Zoraster, Buddha, Jesus, Mohammed, Chaitanya, Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Tukaram, Dnyadeva, Ramdas, Nanak, kabir, Devendranath Tagore, Vivekanand Vibhisan and Prahlad, Gandhi affirms the role of faith in resigning oneself on God and thereby attaining the desired Perfection, Transcendence or going beyond the imperfections of self and transience of life.

2.7 KEY WORDS

Reason, the three kinds of Reason, Faith, Ambiguous role of Reason, Training of Reason, Vratas, Living faith, Rshis and Prophets, leap of faith, Logical positivism, the language games, transcendence,

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UNIT 3 RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE AND ASHRAM LIFE

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- 3.0 Objectives
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3.0 OBJECTIVES

Undoubtedly Gandhi's whole life and work was fundamentally spiritual. One reason for his spiritual outlook was the religious atmosphere in which he was brought up at home. Another important reason is the religious experience he cherished all through his life. Above all, his Ashram life played a key role in the making of his religious experience. That in turn prepared him to involve himself in his various political activities in a saintly way. It is of supreme significance for you to identify what his religious experience is, and specify the role ashram life in Gandhi's life and mission. So this Unit will help you

- To understand the different stages of his religious experience
 - To grasp the core aspect of that religious experience
 - To know the role of his ashram life in his religious experience
 - To appreciate the value of the vows of his ashram life
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3.1 INTRODUCTION

Gandhi was deeply a religious person, showing keen on spiritual pursuit. The many liberation-struggles he undertook in South Africa as well as in India were steered by his spiritual outlook only. Even the reform programmes he initiated in the Indian society before the Independence were all guided by his spiritual ideas and ideals. The spiritual vision of life will be clear from his words found in the Introduction of his *Autobiography*: "What I want to achieve – what I have been pinning and striving to achieve these thirty years – is self-realization, to see God face to face, to attain 'Moksha', I live and move and have my being, in the pursuit of this goal. All that I do by way of speaking and writing, and all my ventures in the political field are directed to this end."

However, Gandhi's religious experience was not a single and specific experience that occurred at one moment of life. It was rather a life-long experience that permeated into all aspects of life: family, profession, politics, policies, programme etc. He had a scientific bent of mind so as to experiment anything that came on his way. He would not simply accept any events or experiences without assessing each one of them. Whatever he studied about religion, say about God, religion, plurality of religions etc. was all put to test by Gandhi in his life. Whatever he learnt from various kinds of Holy Scriptures was put into practice. The sole aim of all these experiments was to transform his life and of improve the life of humanity, to see God face to face.

Thus, he developed a constantly evolving set of beliefs and principles that guided his behavior not only in his personal and family life but also in all his social and political activities. When Gandhi happened to go to South Africa, he was touched by the deepest sorrow of the Indian laborers. He became so restless that he plunged into action to remove the injustice they were suffering the colour discrimination by the British. Gandhi's heart was burning with such a living flame of God's love that he decided to light up not only the hearts of the oppressed but also the heart the oppressors. Hence, he discovered a very new way of fighting for justice, which he called Satyagraha. It is the same method that he would use later during the freedom struggle to get not only the political independence but also bring about socio-economic reforms in India.

Gandhi was thus able to apply the soul-force to the removal of all sorts of problems at the political, social and economics because he had already realized a personal synthesis of all that he had learnt about religion, religions with all aspects of life. But Gandhi was able to arrive at such a profound synthesis only because many factors of his early life had prepared him for it. Unless you know those factors, you will not be in a position to understand the unique religious experience of Gandhi. Further, of course you will have to analyse the specific features of that religious experience which Gandhi manifested in later part of life. Apart from these two broad phases of his religious experience, it is also important to study the significance of his Ashram life separately.

3.2 GANDHI'S RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE IN ITS PREPARATORY PHASE

In this section, you are going to analyze the various factors that were at work in the making of Gandhi's religious experience. First, it was his family background contributed to the religious experience of the later Mahatma. Gandhi's father Kaba Gandhi was the Prime Minister of the state of Porbandar, one of the small princely states of Kathiawad in Gujarath. He was known for uprightness of character and strict impartiality of administration. So there prevailed in his home an atmosphere of discipline. The mother, Putlibai, was a pious and devout woman. Going to the temple was one of her daily duties. She would not think of taking her meals without her daily prayers. She was known for ascetic practices of faith, too. She would take the hardest vows and adhere to them unflinchingly. For instance during the four months period of rainy season she would vow to herself not to take meals without worshiping the sun-god and having a *darshan* of his. Sometimes for days the sun may not appear. In addition, she would go fasting on all those days. The sons would stand outside the house to see whether the sun appears. When it appeared, they would call out the mother. By the time, she came, if the sun was hidden by clouds again, she would simply say: "May be, Lord does not want me to eat today". Thus, the boy Mohandas grew in a religious atmosphere. He understood the meaning of prayer, self-control, and discipline.

Besides there were two plays which left an indelible mark on the young boy. Once he happened to watch the play "Shravana Pitribhakti Nataka". He was so much impressed by Shravana's sacrificial devotion towards his blind parents that Gandhi developed a great attachment to parents. Thus he imbibed many of their good qualities of the parents unconsciously. Another play that influenced him very much was the Harichandra Story. After watching the play of Harichandra, he asked himself: "Why should not all be truthful like him? He thought about it day and night. Finally as for himself, he decided he would always play the role of Harichandra. His one ideal was to follow the path truth and go through all the ordeals Harichandra went through. Thus there arose gradually but definitely a quest for truth, and ardent desire to see the role of the Spirit within self.

There were quite a few painful things that the boy had to face in his early life but each event taught him a great lesson which enabled him to understand life better. One such painful thing was that he got into a bad friendship with a fellow student. In fact his elder brother, his mother and wife warned him about him. But Gandhi assured them that he would change him into good by his friendship with him. He never knew that “one takes in vice far more readily than virtue”. In his company, he took to meat-eating. His argument was English men were strong because they eat meat. Therefore, he thought that it was his duty, as patriot, to become strong through meat-eating. But, since his family was practicing vegetarian orthodox culture, his friend helped him to eat meat secretly. However, Gandhi could not continue the practice for long because whenever he took mutton outside he was not inclined to take his meals at home. When his mother asked for the reason, he had to lie to her that he was not hungry or that he had some indigestion problems. However, it was very painful for him to deceive his mother in that way.

Another painful experience was the habit of smoking. It all began with his wonder how his uncle could emit clouds out of his lips. He would pick up the stumps of cigarettes thrown away by him and imitate him secretly. Then he began smoking with his friend. Not satisfied, he stole from the servant's pocket money to buy more. On another occasion, Gandhi stole to pay off the debt of his brother by chipping off a bit of gold armlet of another brother. All this resulted in a lot of prick of conscience in the tender boy. On the other hand, he and his friend thought that their freedom was curtailed by the varied restrictions imposed by the elders. They felt that they could not do anything of their own choice. So they even attempted at suicide. However, even to do it they needed a lot of courage. So Gandhi went to a temple nearly first to pray and then drink the poisonous juice.

Nevertheless, there he was moved by an inner voice that if he made confession of his sins to his father, things would be all right. He too responded to that call positively. He made a sincere confession to his father, by writing everything, along with the promise never to commit a sin again. Having read this, his father burst into tears and forgave Gandhi unconditionally. This not only changed Gandhi completely but also became the foundation for his later discovery of the path of truth and nonviolence. He understood that truth is the essence of nonviolence.

Apart from these factors that contributed to his religious upbringing, the young boy was in a sense prepared for an interreligious experience too. They belonged to Vaishnavite family which was open to Saivism, as well as to Jainism and Buddhism. He kept a very open household in terms of religion. Men of many religious traditions Jain monks used to visit his house and even have meals in their house. His father had some Muslim and Parsi friends with whom he engaged himself in dialogue on religious topics. In addition, the boy, as he was nursing the father would be listening to them all. He gained a good knowledge of all these religions except Christianity. These things combined inculcated in the young Gandhi a tolerance for all faiths. He would respect them all as seekers after truth, all in their own ways. The Jain tradition was particularly strong in the area, and its emphasis on *ahimsa* (doing no harm) and its doctrine of *anekantavada* the many-sidedness of truth became very important to Gandhi later in life.

The only religion that he learned to think poorly of, during his youth, was Christianity. Once he happened to hear some Christians missionaries who preached in a street corner, abused Hindus and their gods. He also heard a rumor in the town that a well known Hindu after conversion to Christianity, had to eat beef, drink liquor and wear European costumes and had already abused Hindu gods and customs. All these things created in him a dislike for Christianity. However, he changed his opinions when he went to London for his barrister studies. Gandhi's real contact with Christianity began in England during his law studies in 1888, where he was introduced to

various books including the Bible by a good Christian from Manchester. As he was reading the Bible he did not come across any passage that advocated meat eating and drinking. Gandhi read the whole of the Bible. He could not relish reading the Old Testament but the New Testament produced a different impression, which lasted till his death.

This contact with Christianity was much deepened in South Africa. He had to work with Muslims. In fact he went there on a contract to work for the Muslim's firm only. Thus in his friendship with good Muslims, he came to know about Islam. At the same time Gandhi came in contact with many excellent Christians who also influenced him to get converted to their religions. At one point, Gandhi thought of even embracing another religion. 'But to which religion?' was the question he was unable to settle, easily. He consulted certain Jain merchant by name Rai Chandbai who, Gandhi thought, was a highly spiritually enlightened person. He wrote to him about his dilemma. He wrote to Gandhi whether he had really studied about his own religion and whether there was anything, it could not be fulfilled. In addition, he had sent several books on Hinduism. He began to study them all deeply. Because of a deeper study he, finally arrived at certain conclusion regarding what religion means and religions are.

Gandhi's basic insight on the meaning of religion is this: Religion is really that which changes our very nature, by binding us indissolubly to the truth within. It goes on purifying us and making us perfect. Religion 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 the true correspondence between the Maker and itself. It enables one to strive after Truth. It makes us follow morality, at its minimum, but really, it trains us to go through a self-purification process in thought, word and action.

So according to Gandhi the core of religion is morality. He said that true religion and true morality are bound up with each other. Morality is the essence of religion. When morality incarnates itself in a living person it becomes religion, because, it binds, it holds, it sustains him in hours of trial. Religion is to morality what water is to the seed that is sown in the soil. Gandhi would even say that religion and morality are identical. A religion is religion only because it has evolved out of a person or persons who realized the Truth and because it continues to teach fundamental morality to its followers and to provide them with means for self-purification.

As regards religious plurality, Gandhi realized that it is a human necessity arising out of the differences in temperaments of the person of the Attainment. When he grasps the Truth, and explains it to his followers, he will be able to do it only in the language he knows, using the cultural moulds and according to the climatic conditions of the place and historical contexts of the peoples. Further, it is explained and interpreted by commentators; it would have its own accretions added to the original truth. Thus every religion is imperfect while being true as well. There is no one religion, which is all-true. Nor is any one religion, which is all-false. There is no question of superiority / inferiority between religions.

Every religion is valid to its own followers in as much as it fulfills the felt need of humanity, but every religion also has the obligation to move from imperfection to perfection constantly. And that they are all fundamentally the same. Moreover, that his own native religion was not only as good as any other religion, but even more helpful because of the hereditary influences and congenial atmosphere. In other words, he became clear that there was no need of conversion in the accepted sense of the term. Thus he became confirmed Hindu by convictions.

3.3 RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE IN ITS MATURITY

After taking his decision to remain a Hindu, Gandhi stuck up to it, until the end of his life. He remained a Hindu. He even openly confessed his devotion and attachment to Hinduism. "I can no more describe my feeling for Hinduism than for my own wife. She moves me as no other woman in the world can". Not that he was not aware of its faults. Even so he felt for and about Hinduism with all its faults and limitations. Nothing else elated him so much as the music of the *Gita* or the *Ramayana* of Tulsidas.

That did not mean that Gandhi's religious experience was restricted to the sources of Hinduism only. His was a highly personal synthesis of diverse elements to which his reading of the Bible and contact with Christians had contributed substantially. His contact with good Christians during the most impressionable years of his life in London had such a long lasting effect on his personality. "The spirit of the Sermon on the Mount competes almost on equal terms with the *Bhagavad Gita* for the domination of my heart," he said in 1916. Later in 1920, he said, "Christ's Sermon on the Mount fills me with bliss even today. Its sweet verses have even today the power to quench my agony of the soul." He had many intimate friends from all religions but especially from Christianity. Mr. Paul, a Roman Catholic, a court interpreter, Mr. Subhan Godgrey, then a teacher under the Protestant Mission. Rev. Joseph D Doke, a Baptist minister, who had sympathetic outlook on Gandhi's Passive Resistance movement, and who became Gandhiji's first biographer, Mr. A W Baker who, besides being an attorney, was a staunch lay preacher. He had Gandhi to attend for a prayer meeting in Mr. Baker's office during lunch break attending the prayer meeting for some time. There he met many Christians. One of them was Plymouth Brethren. Rev. C.F Andrews was another Christian to whom Gandhi developed a lasting friendship, who called him 'Charlie'. They met towards the end of the passive resistance struggle in Natal. Their friendship grew with mutual admiration and affection, and lasted until the sudden death of Andrew's in 1942. Gandhi learnt some favorites Christian hymns: 'Lead Kindly Light', 'When I Survey the Wondrous Cross', 'nearer my God to Thee', 'Abide with Me', and 'Rock of Ages'.

Gandhi was not only convinced of the fact that his reading of other sacred books had enriched him, but also others would be equally enriched likewise. So he held that "it is the duty of every cultured man or woman to read sympathetically the Scriptures of the world. If we are to respect others' religions as we would have them to respect our own, a friendly study of the world's religions is a sacred duty. As he had to work with people of different religions, he began to cultivate interreligious collaboration not only for pragmatic reasons but also at the very fundamental level of religious experience. That in turn enabled him to develop deep trans-religious experience as well as formulate a trans-religious concept of God, spirituality. Thus, Gandhi derived inspiration from both Hindu and Christian traditions, without being exclusively dominated by either of the two. Gandhi's study of Christianity had influenced his idea about God, soul and nature. For Gandhi, however, this knowledge was the goal of the quest rather than its beginning. His religious conviction grew not through study and reflection but under compulsion of action. He went to the scripture to seek guidance whenever he was in his moral and ethical perplexities and accepted from them only so much as helped him to see his path in life.

Gandhi was critical of certain features of Christianity as practiced in the West, which, he thought, were denial of the true spirit of Jesus. He could not accept the view that Christianity was the only true religion or that the Bible was the only true revelation. He could not accept the narrow understanding of Jesus as the only begotten son, unique savior etc. He criticized the humanitarian work of missionaries as baits for conversion. He condemned the conversion of

Harijans in particular. However, Gandhi maintained that conversion in the sense of self-purification and self-realization was vital for every religious community.

Gandhi had a deep reverence for Jesus Christ. He was indeed the unfailing inspiration for humankind and a supreme exemplar of *satyagraha*. Jesus' teaching on the universal love, and forgiveness even of the enemies were the core of human progress. Especially the Kingdom of God appealed to him in a very great deal. On the personal side, the ideal of Kingdom of God inspired him to work for it as a means of personal salvation. So Gandhi said, I am not fighting for any earthly kingdom. "For me the road of salvation lays through incessant toil in the service of my country and humanity. Gandhi was very much touched by Jesus' words: "It profited nothing if one gained the whole world and lost his soul". Therefore, he attached importance to soul, as the governing principle of human nature and the hallmark of the truth of human beings. To live up to the dictates of the indwelling spirit was indeed the 'truth' of human beings at the personal level.

On the social side, Gandhi viewed 'the kingdom of God' as the ideal society based upon justice even unto this last. He did not believe that his spirituality consisted in simply in turning away from poverty, misery, ignorance but in fully facing the unjust structures that produced them and fighting against them. Moreover, even in fighting against them, Gandhi thought, one has to use love as the main principle, pray for those whom one fights against, and transform the existing customs, institutions and making them into true vehicle of love. In fact, the Sermon on the Mount awakened in Gandhi the value of Passive Resistance. Though I cannot claim to be a Christian in the sectarian sense of the term, the example of Jesus' suffering is a factor in the composition of my undying faith in non-violence which rules all my actions – worldly or temporal... Jesus lived and dies in vain if he did not teach us to regulate the whole of life by the eternal law of love." It is the potency and practicability of the method of the cross that Gandhi demonstrated in his Satyagraha method. In addition, he made it into such an irresistible political instrument for obtaining social justice that even the most unscrupulous enemy had to reckon with it a great soul force of love.

Even as Gandhi appreciated the truth in other religions, and learn from it, yet he also related those truths to his own Hindu basics. He saw in the Cross an explication of the Hindu concept of Ahimsa. It was simply a negative concept of non-killing or non-violence, but positively love. That love, according to Gandhi, was to be shown even to the enemies because he too is created in the image of God, and is possessing soul-dimension, which indeed constitutes the truth of human being. Gandhi began to see this truth dimension of the humans in terms of the Hindu terminology *satya* which itself derived from 'Sat' the principle of Being, the one all-embracing Ground of Being, either in the form of personal God, *Ishwara*, or the eternal Law that governs the whole of the cosmos. In this perspective, then, it was easy for Gandhi to reject such evils of caste system, Untouchability, gender discrimination, the passive understanding of *karma* theory, leading to fatalism, as simply degradations of the true religious spirit. Whatever contradicted morality and purity was to be rejected although a *sastra* may sanction it.

Gandhi loved to be called a Hindu. He had to even stake his claim that he was a Sanatani Hindu, because he believed in the Vedas, Upanishads, *Puranas*. He even wrote a commentary on *Gita* like any major reformer. He believed in *Varnashrama dharma* of the pure type, not in the popular and degraded form. He believed in the protection of the cow in its much larger sense of itself being the symbol of ecological one-ness, became an able reformer of Hinduism. However, he did not observe the Hindu ceremonials or holy days. He rarely visited temple except for courtesy. However, he did not disbelieve in idol worship. Gandhi did not consider that religion

was to be practiced on a mountain top in a cave of the Himalaya, or in the banks of the river Ganges, but as it manifest itself in all the actions of humans in society. Though he accepted the value of such props as idol worship and going to temple object for those people who find them useful, he was himself not keen on using them.

Gandhi was trying to be *karmayogi*, as described in the *Gita*. Accordingly he was keen on performing all the good works in the spirit of sacrifice to the 'God of humanity' particularly serving the *Daridranarayana*, the God of the poor and the downtrodden, without attachment, without hankering after the desired results and with equanimity. The core of religion consists in morality. Religion and Morality for Gandhi were interchangeable terms. Similarly, God and Truth in the sense of moral law are interchangeable. Therefore, he could easily convert the usual understanding 'God is truth' into his own formulation 'Truth is God'. The basic principles of this morality were truth and non-violence. These two principals were elaborated into eleven principles. Which we will see later section in this Unit itself.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

- 1) Did Gandhi have any religious experience at all? If so, specify what sort of religious experience it was?

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- 2) What were the factors that contributed to Gandhi's religious experience?

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- 3) The core of Gandhi's religious experience?

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- 4) How does Gandhi distinguish religion and religions?

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3.4 THE ASHRAM LIFE: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

By 'ashram' in the Hindu tradition is meant 'a house where a true Guru is living and teaching God-seekers seeking spiritual advice and help'. It is a simple community-living, oriented to spiritual discipline and God-realization. But Ashram, as founded by Gandhi, meant a residential work centre for those who have dedicated themselves for an integral life of *satyagraha*, and were totally committed to the principles of non-violence as a creed.

Right from the beginning of his public ministry that he started in South Africa, he had been living an ashram life. For, besides the members of his family, there were Gandhi's friends and fellow workers who were living with him and whose relation with him was spiritual from the first or became such later on. This went on unconsciously for quite some time. However in the course of time Gandhi founded formally four types of Ashrams.

1. Phoenix Settlement

When Gandhi in South Africa read Ruskin's *Unto This Last*, in 1904, he was so much impressed by the contents of the book that he decided to live with the workers of *Indian Opinion* as members of his family. He purchased 100 acres of land and founded Phoenix Settlement. Neither he nor others called it an ashram. It had a religious basis, but the visible object was purity of body and mind as well as economic equality. The coworkers would live as family men and have children. This was the first step.

In 1906, when he launched out formally the Satyagraha, movement, he made it clear that it was based on religion and implied an unshakable faith in the God of Truth. Here religion did not mean the narrow and sectarian sense, but as that which acts as a link between different religions and realizes their essential unity. Gandhi says that he learnt from experience that *brahmacharya* was a sine qua non for a life devoted to service. From that time onward Gandhi looked upon Phoenix deliberately as a religious institution. Thus it was progressing as an ashram though he did not call it by that name. This went on till 1911.

2. Tolstoy Farm

In 1911 as a part of the Satyagraha movement, Gandhi and his coworkers felt the need of an ashram where *Satyagrahi* families could live and lead a religious life. Gandhi's close friend a German architect by name Kallenbach who was also very religious minded, and who was living a sort of ashram life, leading a comparatively a simple life purchased a farm of 1,100 acres for settling the *satyagrahi* families. The whole institution was managed from a religious point of view. Among the settlers there were Hindus, Mussalmans, Christians and Parsis. And each was staunch in his own faith. Yet they had never quarreled with one another. They respected one another's religion and tried to help everybody to follow his own faith and thus to make spiritual progress. Even this institution was not called Ashram but as Tolstoy Farm. They both were followers of Tolstoy, trying to practice his doctrines.

In 1912, when the Tolstoy Farm was closed, the farmers were sent to Phoenix, which was no longer meant for the Indian Opinion workers only. As at Tolstoy Farm, here also Gandhi established a common kitchen which some joined, while others had private kitchen. But congregational prayers in the evening was introduced. And the final Satyagraha campaign in 1913 was started by the inmates of Phoenix Settlement. And the struggle ended successfully in 1914. And it was decided that all settlers who wanted to go to India should be enabled to go there.

3. Satyagraha Ashram

According to the decision taken early, Gandhi on his return to India early in 1915, came with a view to establish an ashram life so as to continue the communal life commenced in South Africa. And as Gandhi toured all parts of India for a year, he was invited by several cities to establish the ashram in their neighbourhood with a promise of assistance. Finally Ahmedabad was selected. That was the fourth and the last step. With full discussion and correspondence with friends, finally he decided to call the institution Satyagraha Ashram, because his life was devoted to the quest of truth, and he was wanting to live and if need be die in the pursuit of the same with as many fellow pilgrims as he could get. It was on May 25, 1915 the Satyagraha Ashram was

established in a rented house at Kochrab because of the volunteering help to finance it. Later on account of his unwavering attitude to Removal of Untouchability, he had to vacate it all of a sudden, relying only on the Providence. And God too was kind to the Ashramites. They moved to banks of the Sabarmati River in Ahmedabad, where the ashram life became stable and steady, destined to steer the destiny of the nation.

The ashram life at the beginning consisted of hand weaving as the main industry, and carpentry as accessory to it. No servants were engaged. So cooking, sanitation, fetching water everything was attended to by the Ashramites. Truth and other observances were obligatory. Eradication of Untouchability, emancipation of women from the age old discrimination, Respect of religions, vegetarianism not only as a means of control of palate but also as a mark of identification with the poor and as the experimenting on the best way of perfect health.

In fine, the Ashram set out to remedy what it thought were defects in our national life from the religious, economic and political standpoints. It may not have embarked on all possible activities that Gandhi thought of. However, Gandhi did not go in search of new spheres of activity, but if any activity naturally suggested itself to our minds, he should go in for it without accounting the cost. Gandhi was also keen on managing with what funds were placed at his disposal by friends without any special effort in collection. These were certainly 2 limitations of the Ashram.

However, these two limitations sprang from the religious attitude Gandhi. As such therefore they reveal the religious experience of the Ashram life too. It implies a strong faith in God, i.e. doing everything in dependence upon and under the inspiration of God, conducting such activities as are sent by God with such resources as God places at his disposal. God never lets us see that He Himself does anything. He achieves His aims through men inspired by Him. When help was received from unexpected quarters or from friends without our asking for it, his faith led him to believe that it was sent by God. Similarly when some activity came to them unsought Gandhi thought it was a Godsend. Not to take it up would have been sheer cowardice, laziness or the like.

Similarly Gandhi applied the same principle to coworkers, material resources and to activities. We may have the funds and know how they were to be used, but we can do nothing in the absence of coworkers. They too should come unsought. Gandhi and other Ashramites did not merely imagine but had a living faith that the Ashram was God's. If therefore He wished to make the Ashram His instrument as regards any activity, it was for Him to place the requisite men and munitions at the Ashram's disposal. Phoenix Settlement, Tolstoy Farm and Sabarmathi Ashram have all been conducted more or less according to these principles consciously or unconsciously.

4. Sevagram

The last of the Ashram that Gandhi founded was *Sevagram* Ashram. When Gandhi was 67 years, he reached the village called Shegaon, near about 8 km from Wardha on the 30th April, 1936, remained here for about five to six days. He called the villagers and sought their permission to settle down here. He had no intention to keep anybody with him except his wife Kasturba. However slowly pressure of work necessitated permission to more colleagues until *Sevagram* Ashram also became a full-fledged institution. Seth Jamnalal Bajaj of Wardha, a disciple of Mahatma Gandhi, made available to the ashram about 300 acres of land in the outskirts of the village when barely 1,000 people lived. The small homes which were built in the ashram for Gandhi and Kasturba, and his followers were similar to the typical village homes. The ashram employed some Harijans in the common kitchen to break the caste barrier. It was in the year 1940 that he renamed the village as '*sevagram*'. In Hindi it meant "A village for service".

With meticulous planning different huts were built. Meera Ben, formerly called Miss Madelene Slade, daughter of an English admiral, who had become the disciple of Gandhi, was already settled in *Sevagram* before Gandhi. She herself built a hut for herself. Gandhiji's hut, now known as *Adi Niwas* was to be built, not more than Rs.500/, and with material available to serve food to inmates and then used to take his meals. Gandhi lived in one corner of the hut built. When the number of residents in the *Adi Nivas* increased, Gandhiji and Kasturba shifted to live in Meeraben's hut. Meeraben constructed one more hut on the eastern side for herself. However, later on she left this hut also for Gandhiji's office and shifted to a nearby village. These huts are known today as 'Bapu kuti' and 'Bapu's office'.

Kasturba had to live in Bapu Kutu in the midst of so many men. Looking to her difficulty, a new hut was constructed for her. Kasturba lived in this new hut with a few inmates and sometimes with occasional women guests. This hut is known as '*Ba Kutu*'. The roof of this hut is covered with bamboos, mats and country mud-tiles. The walls are neatly plastered with white earth. Meeraben had decorated the walls with folk art symbols like Oum, palm tree, peacock and the Charkha symbolising God, nature, living beings and human activity. The windows and doors are also made of bamboos and decorated with local designs. The village craftsmen prepare the palm tree mats, which are spread on the floor. The bamboo almirah hanging by the wall is a specialty. There is one shelf made of bamboo for keeping articles.

He used to sit on simple palm leaf mats. His office was also nearby. Next to him, his secretary Mahadev Desai or Pyarelal or someone else who would assist him used to sit. The visitors also had to sit on the ground. In Gandhiji's office hut a telephone installed at behest of the then Viceroy of is also displayed. Gandhiji's correspondence went on increasing. Naturally, one Secretariat committee was formed to help him. Mahadev Desai was its chief. Others were Pyarelalji and Rajkumari Amrit Kaur. More people used to help whenever needed. Replies to all the letters were invariably sent, sometimes in detail and sometimes in very brief, according to the importance and of the time.

Prayer was essential for Gandhi's religious experience. Morning and evening prayers became a part of life in *Sevagram*. The place for community prayer should not be expensive. It should be such that it is freely accessible to all. So Gandhiji created one open space under the sky surrounded by bamboo lining. To keep the place dry and free of mud during the rainy season, it is paved with stones and spread over thick sand. Even today evening prayers are held here daily. After the prayer Gandhiji used to speak his thoughts on the Ashram problems or on some burning problem facing the country, or answer questions.

Another important hut was Parchure Kutu. There was a social worker & Sanskrit Pandit, by name Parchure, but he was somehow afflicted with leprosy disease. In those days people used to shun leprosy patients. Therefore, Parchure was thinking of committing suicide. He came to Gandhiji. Gandhiji himself started nursing and cleaning his wounds. It is in this hut where Gandhiji served the leprosy affected Parchure. Under Gandhiji's instructions Shri Manoharji Diwan devoted his whole life to this cause. He started an institution to serve leprosy patients near Sevagram viz. Dattapur village. Parchure then shifted to Dattapur and lived there till his death.

Then you have Mahadev Kuti: Mahadev Desai was Secretary & very close to Gandhiji. He lived with family near Bapu Kutu in a hut called 'Mahadev Kutu'. Mahadevbhai had good command on English and Gujarati languages. He had a pious character. He died on 15th August, 1942 while in prison with Gandhiji at the Agakhan Palace in Pune. His absence was deeply felt by Gandhiji. There was another hut, called 'Kishore Kutu'. Kishorebhai Mashruwala was scholar and studied Gandhian thought. He acted as a Secretary to Gandhiji for sometime. He was suffering from

asthma. Therefore, the hut built for him is more comfortable and free from wetness during rainy season.

3.5 ASHRAM LIFE IN THE RULES

Ashram life of Gandhi was governed by Eleven Vows as a basis of the Ashram Life. Gandhi had formulated them already when he started formally the Satyagraha Ashram in Sabarmathi. Afterwards when he was in Yerawda Jail, Pune, he had been sending week after week explanations of each vow, as a sort of weekly exhortation to his ashramites. All those explanations have been compiled into a booklet called *From Yerwda Mandir*. For details you may read that book. But here some of the salient points may be mentioned.

1. Truth (*Satya*)

Ashram owed its very existence to the pursuit and the attempted practice of Truth. Devotion to this Truth was the sole justification for its existence. So Gandhi said to the Asrahamites: All our activities should be centred in Truth. without Truth it is impossible to observe any principles or rules in life. Generally speaking, observation of the law of Truth is understood merely to mean that we must speak the truth. But Gandhi understands the word *Satya* or Truth in a much wider sense. There should be Truth in thought, Truth in speech, and Truth in action. It should be practiced with single-minded devotion (*abhyasa*) and indifference to all other interests in life (*vairagya*.)

Even in spite of such devotion, what appears as truth to one person may often appear as untruth to another person. But that need not worry the seeker. Where there is honest effort, it will be realized that what appear to be different truths are like the countless and apparently different leaves of the same tree. God Himself appears to different individuals in different aspects. Yet He is one. Hence there is nothing wrong in every man following Truth according to his lights. Indeed it is his duty to do so. Even if there is a mistake on the part of any one so following Truth, it will be automatically set right, when there is only *tapas* — self-suffering, and no trace of self-interest, there is no problem. It is this that Gandhi succinctly put in the distinction between Absolute Truth and the Relative Truth.

2. Non-violence (*Ahimsa*)

Ahimsa is not simply abstaining from inflicting injury on others. Not to hurt any living thing is no doubt a part of ahimsa. But it is its least expression. More than that, it implies abstaining from every evil thought, from undue haste, from lying, from hatred, from wishing ill to anybody. Positively it is love for all.

Such a wider meaning of ahimsa flows from the meaning of truth itself. Given the distinction between Absolute Truth, Gandhi now says, it is impossible for us to realize perfect Truth, to see face to face Truth which is eternal so long as we are imprisoned in this mortal frame of this ephemeral body. If we regard even those who do harm to us as our kith and kin, we will make them to realize the kinship, only by voluntarily taking suffering on ourselves for vindicating what we perceive as truth, rather than punishing others for holding a different perception of truth. This is exactly what is called the path of ahimsa. It may entail continuous suffering and the cultivating of endless patience. But if we persevere in this path of self-suffering, the enemy is bound in the end to turn away from his evil ways. Our peace of mind increases in spite of suffering; we become braver and more enterprising; we understand more clearly the difference between what is everlasting and what is not; we learn how to distinguish between what is our duty and what is not. Our pride melts away, and we become humble. Our worldly attachment diminishes, and the evil within us diminishes from day to day.

It is true that it is impossible to have a total non-violence. In the place where we stand there are millions of micro-organisms to whom the place belongs, and who are hurt by our presence there. So what is required is to give up all attachment to our body. Our body does not belong to us. While it lasts, we must use it as a trust handed over to our charge. Treating in this way the things of the flesh, we may one day expect to become free from the burden of the body. Realizing the limitations of the flesh, we must strive day by day towards the ideal with what strength we have in us.

3. Chastity (*Brahmacharya*)

Granted that realization of Truth requires utter selflessness, then self-gratification through marriage is untenable for one who wants to pursue after Truth. Granted that Ahimsa means Universal Love, it is impossible to fulfill the vow if a man gives his love to one woman, or a woman to one man. As a faithful wife must be prepared to sacrifice her all for the sake of her husband, and a faithful husband for the sake of his wife, it is clear that such persons cannot rise to the height of Universal Love, or look upon all humankind as kith and kin. Hence, one who would obey the law of ahimsa cannot marry, not to speak of gratification outside the marital bond.

Then the question may arise cannot people who are already married attain Truth and Nonviolence? Gandhi suggests a way out for them. If they think of each other as brother and sister, they are freed for universal service. Their love becomes free from the impurity of lust and so grows stronger. The thought of all the women in the world as his sisters, mothers or daughters will at once ennoble a man and snap his chains.

Brahmacharya must be observed in thought, word and deed. If one controls his body, but is nursing evil thoughts in his mind, it is not only a vain effort but also harmful to suppress the body. So while the body is subject to our control, we must put forth a constant endeavour to bring the mind under control. Again, Brahmacharya does not mean for Gandhi mere control of animal passion, but control of all the organs of sense. He who attempts to control only one organ, and allows all the others free play, is bound to find his effort futile. To hear suggestive stories with the ears, to see suggestive sights with the eyes, to taste stimulating food with the tongue, to touch exciting things with the hands, and then at the same time to expect to control the only remaining organ is like putting one's hands in the fire, and expecting to escape being burnt. Perhaps the palate is the chief culprit to be controlled. That is why Gandhi made control of the palate as a separate vow. Gandhi reiterates it by the root meaning of brahmacharya. If the whole (charya) 'course of conduct' is to be adapted to 'the search of Brahma', i.e. Truth, then control of all the senses, not merely sexual aspect, is necessary for fulfilling this vow.

4. Control of Palate

Control of the palate is very closely connected with the observance of *brahmacharya*. Gandhi elevated it to the rank of an independent observance in the Satyagraha Ashram though it is not included in the traditional list of Mahavratas. For, he says that he found from experience that the observance of celibacy becomes comparatively easy, if one acquires mastery over the palate. . Food has to be taken as we take medicine. Just as medicine is taken whether it is palatable or not, and in too small a dose. So too food must be taken not for its pleasant taste, neither in large quantities. Even putting salt in one's food, in order to increase the taste or modify its flavor was forbidden for the ashramites. So the ashram gave up many things that people we have been enjoying, as they are not needed for nutrition. One must resolutely avoid that food which gives mere pleasures. The Ashram kitchen cooked only such food as helps us to keep the body a fit instrument for service

Parents, out of false affection, give their children a variety of foods, ruin their constitutions, and create in them artificial tastes. When they grow up, they have diseased bodies and perverted tastes. The evil consequences of this early indulgence dog us at every step; we waste much money and fall an easy prey to the medicine man. The body is injured every time that one over-eats, and the injury can be partially repaired only by fasting.

5. Non-Stealing

Ordinarily we think of theft only as taking things belonging to another without his knowledge and his permission. But Gandhi says that it is theft to take anything belonging to another without his permission, even if it be with his knowledge. It is equally theft to take something from another even with his permission if we have no real need of it. Gandhi's meaning of stealing goes much further so as to cover it as theft to take even what belongs to ourselves, if not really needed. If a father, for example, eats something secretly, keeping his children in the dark about it, more than necessary, and just for the sake of taste, he is according to Gandhi committing the act of stealing.

We are not always aware of our real 'needs, and most of us improperly multiply our wants, and thus unconsciously make thieves of ourselves. If we devote some thought to the subject, we shall find that we can get rid of quite a number of our wants. One who follows the observance of Non-stealing will bring about a progressive reduction of his own wants. Much of the distressing poverty in this world has arisen out of breaches of the principle of Non-stealing.

Apart from the external or physical theft, Gandhi points to another kind of theft subtler and far more degrading to the human spirit. It is theft mentally to desire acquisition of anything belonging to others, or to cast a greedy eye on it, or if one egotistically claims to have originated some good idea, which, really speaking, did not originate with him.

6. Non-possession

Non-possession is allied to Non-stealing. It demands one not to have private property; nor storing things for the future. God never creates more than what is strictly needed for the moment. If therefore we repose faith in His providence, we should rest assured, that He will give us every day our daily bread, meaning everything that we require. The rich having superfluous store of things which they do not need is indeed the cause of the millions starving to death for want of sustenance. If each retained possession only of what he needed, no one would be in want, and all would live in contentment. So the rich should take the initiative in dispossession with a view to a universal diffusion of the spirit of contentment. If only they keep their own property within moderate limits, the starving will easily be fed.

Perfect fulfillment of the ideal of Non-possession requires that man should, like the birds, have no roof over his head, no clothing and no stock of food for the morrow. Gandhi agrees that it is impossible for ordinary seekers to follow it. But we must keep the ideal constantly in view, and in the light thereof, critically examine our possessions, and try to reduce them. This alone promotes real happiness and contentment, and increases the capacity for service. Civilization, in the real sense of the term, consists in the deliberate and voluntary reduction of wants, not in their multiplication. If we possess things the necessity for which cannot be proved then you tempt our neighbours to thief.

In the opinion of Gandhi our body too is a possession. So the best way of observing the vow of non-possession is to have a total renunciation of it by using the body for the purposes of service. We eat and drink, sleep and wake, for service alone.

The vow of Non-possession is to be practiced not only with reference to things. But it is applicable to thoughts, as well. So we need not fill our brain with useless knowledge, thoughts which turn us away from God, or do not turn us towards Him.

7. Fearlessness

Gandhi during his long tours throughout India understood that people were seized with a paralyzing fear. Political situation also was a main reason for such a fear. So to remove it from the heart of the people he included Fearlessness also as a vow. It primarily meant freedom from all external fear, fear of disease, bodily injury and death, of dispossession, of losing one's nearest and dearest, of losing reputation or giving offence, and so on. The easiest way to be fearless is to cultivate non-attachment to body. And he set the example of Harishchandra. Just he did, the seeker after Truth should be ready to sacrifice his all in the quest of Truth. Then fearlessness will automatically flow.

Fearlessness means only giving up all external fears. But we must rightly fear the internal foes like the animal passion and anger. Once we have conquered these traitors within the camp, the external fears will automatically vanish. All fears revolve round the body as the centre. So the best way to cultivate fearlessness is to get rid of attachment for the body, and attachment for wealth, for family and for the body. Wealth, family and body will be there, just the same; we have only to change our attitude towards them. All these are not ours, but God's. Nothing whatever in this world is ours. So you may 'enjoy the things of the earth, but by renouncing them.'

8. Removal of Untouchability

Untouchability, meaning pollution by the touch of certain persons by reason of their birth is an excrescence of Hinduism. It is wrong to treat certain human beings as untouchables from birth. A mother may be 'untouchable' so long as she has not washed her hands after cleaning up her child's mess. But Bhangis, Dhedhs, Chamars are involved in cleaning work and so for that reason they are not to be contemptuously looked down. They must only be taught to bathe after their cleaning work. Hence it is the bounden duty of every Hindu to combat it. Every Hindu, therefore, who considers it a sin, should atone for it by associating with untouchables in a spirit of love and service, deeming himself purified by such acts, redressing their grievances, helping them patiently to overcome ignorance and other evils due to the slavery of ages, and inspiring other Hindus to do likewise.

9. Bread Labour

First by quoting sacred writings like the *Gita* and the Bible, Gandhi brings out the need of sweating to eat. Then he says reason also leads to the same conclusion. A millionaire cannot carry on for long, and will soon get tired of his life, if he rolls in his bed all day long, and is even helped to his food. He therefore induces hunger by exercise, and helps himself to the food he eats. Now, why should not that exercise be in some shape or form of productive. That is precisely Bread labour. No one asks the cultivator to take breathing exercise or to work his muscles. And more than nine tenths of humanity lives by tilling the soil. How much happier, and more peaceful would the world become, if the remaining tenth followed the example of the overwhelming majority at least to the extent of labouring enough for their food!

If such people begin to work, then many hardships, connected with agriculture, would be easily redressed. Again unpleasant distinctions of rank would be abolished. The world-wide conflict between capital and labour will be resolved. The rich would still be there, but they would deem themselves only trustees of their property and would use it mainly in the public interest.

Bread labour need not be related with agriculture alone. Those who are not in a position to take to it, can therefore spin or weave, or take up carpentry or smithery. Every one must be his own scavenger. Evacuation is as necessary as eating; and the best thing would be for every one to dispose of his own waste. Scavenging, thus intelligently taken up, will help one to a true appreciation of the equality of man.

10. Equality of Religions

It is an important virtue to be practiced in a multi-religious society, like India. It only means a follower of a religion should be able to respect the other religions as useful to its followers. You will learn more about this vow in the next unit.

11. Swadeshi

Swadeshi simply means dedicating oneself to the service of his immediate neighbours. This does not mean disservice to those who are far away, but rather the contrary. 'As with the individual, so with the universe' is an unfailing principle, which we would do well to lay to heart. On the other hand, a man who allows himself to be lured by 'the distant scene,' and runs to the ends of the earth for service, is not only foiled in his ambition, but also fails in his duty towards his neighbours. Take a concrete instance. In the particular place where I live, I have certain persons as my neighbours, some relations and dependents. Naturally, they all feel, as they have a right to, that they have a claim on me, and look to me for help and support. Suppose now I leave them all at once, and set out to serve people in a distant place. My decision would throw my little world of neighbours and dependents out of gear, while my gratuitous knight-errantry would, more likely than not, disturb the atmosphere in the new place.

There may be an occasion for a votary of *Swadeshi* to sacrifice his family at the altar of universal service. Such an act of willing immolation will then constitute the highest service rendered to the family. "Whosoever saveth his life shall lose it, and whosoever loseth his life for the Lord's sake shall find it" holds good for the family group no less than for the individual. Take another instance. Supposing there is an out-break of plague in my village, and in trying to serve the victims of the epidemic, I, my wife and children and all the rest of my family are wiped out of existence; then in inducing those dearest and nearest to join me, I will not have acted as the destroyer of my family, but on the contrary as its truest friend. In *Swadeshi* there is no room for selfishness; or if there is selfishness in it, it is of the highest type, which is not different from the highest altruism. *Swadeshi* in its purest form is the acme of universal service.

It was by following this line of argument, that Gandhi hit upon *Khadi* as the necessary application to Indian society. the teeming millions of India and the crores of our semi-starved countrymen can live by the universalizing of *Khadi* or the spinning-wheel alone. Let no one suppose, that the practice of *Swadeshi* through *Khadi* would harm the foreign or Indian mill-owners. Wearing *Khadi* is the first indispensable step. One should not stop with wearing *Khadi*. One must carefully study one's environment, and try to help his neighbours wherever possible, by giving preference to local manufactures, even if they are of an inferior grade or dearer in price than things manufactured elsewhere without of course nurturing hatred to Multi National Corporations.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) Explain the meaning of Ashram and how does its contribute to religious life?

.....

2) Mention the major ashrams founded by Gandhi?

.....

3) State the most basic of Gandhi's vows ?

.....

4) Specify the most important vow for the Indian society to bring about a classless society?

.....

Conclusion

From the foregoing it is clear Gandhi had a deep religious consciousness with far reaching consequences on one's transformation and transformation of society and of environment. It is high time that we realized the importance of Gandhi's religious experience and made it our own. The ashram life may be too big an ideal for us.

But if we can set that as an ideal and try our best to go nearer and nearer to it, we may be able to find an alternative to the malaise of today's civilization. The people who are in the mad rush today, increasing their wants senselessly suppose that they are enhancing their importance and real knowledge. A day will come when they will exclaim, "What have we been doing?" Also the many civilizations have risen one after another, flourished, declined and disappeared and in spite of their big boast of human progress If the moral height of humankind hasn't increased even an inch, then we cannot but exclaim: To what end all this? What's the purpose? This is the basic question Jesus, Buddha, Prophet Mohammed raised and gave answers each in his own way. In our times, Gandhi has asked the same question and tried to put his answer in the form of ashram life. Shall we at least set our eyes on that ideal and desire to strive after it in our own limited way?

3.6 LET US SUM UP

I.1. Gandhi was deeply a religious person. His religious experience did not consist in a single and specific experience that occurred at one moment of life but in a life-long experience that permeated into all aspects of life. He had a scientific bent of mind to experiment everything that came on his way. He made a personal synthesis of all that he had learnt from his rich contact with many religions and applied to all aspects of life.

2. The many factors of his early life that had prepared him for the personal synthesis were his family background, which was filled with religious atmosphere of his own native religion. The traditional stories had a profound impact on him. Some painful experiences also led him to make a sincere confession to his father, with the promise never to commit a sin again. Beside, the

multi-religious atmosphere at home trained the boy to develop a sense of toleration to other religions. Moreover, his close contacts with Christians in London and in South Africa and his work with Muslims made him know and appreciate those faiths. Moreover his deeper study of various religions, he undertook to resolve the issue of his own conversion, made him arrive at certain conclusion about what religions means and what religious plurality is.

3. Gandhi defines religion as that which changes one's very nature, which binds one indissolubly to the truth within and become perfect. It enables one to strive after Truth, minimum to follow morality, but really to go through a self-purification process in thought, word and action. Religious plurality arises out of human necessity, on account of the differences in temperamental factors, genetic and other subjective factors of the person of the Attainment. Again, the attained person could grasps the Truth and explains it to his followers, only in the language he knows, using the cultural moulds and according to the climatic conditions of the place and historical contexts of the peoples. Further, commentators while interpreting the Truth, would have added their own accretions to the original truth. Thus every religion is imperfect while being true as well.

4. The core of religion is basically morality, while at the same time it binds, holds, and sustains people in hours of trial. When morality incarnates itself in a living person it becomes religion. On account of his Attainment others follow him, striving after the same ideal, practicing what he practiced (cult), explaining his ideal as well as his practices (creed), and stabilizing the pursuit by a set of laws of living (code), this becomes religion. Religion is to morality what water is to the seed that is sown in the soil. True religion and true morality are bound up with each other. Gandhi would even say that religion and morality are identical.

II..1. Ashram in the Hindu tradition means a house where a true Guru is living and teaching God-seekers seeking spiritual advice and help. It is a simple community-living, oriented to spiritual discipline and God-realization. But Gandhi's Ashram meant a residential work centre for those who have dedicated themselves for an integral life of satyagraha, and were totally committed to the principles of non-violence as a creed. They contribute to the richness of religious experience through practice of vows, unflinchingly.

2. The Pheonix Settlement, The Tolstoy Farm, Satyagraha Ashram, and Sevagram are the four Ashrams founded by Gandhi at the four important phases of his public life.

3. Observance of Truth is the most basic vows of Gandhi's ashram. It was the sole justification for its existence. Without Truth it is impossible to observe any principles or rules in life. As against the general understanding Gandhi meant by truth not simply that we must speak the truth, but to follow Truth in thought, Truth in speech, and Truth in action.

Gandhi distinguishes between Absolute Truth (God, in Himself) and Relative Truth (God appearing to different individuals in different aspects). There is nothing wrong in everyone following Truth according to one's lights. Indeed it is his duty to do so. So even if there is a mistake on the part of any one so following Truth, it will be automatically set right, when there is only tapas — self-suffering, and no trace of self-interest, there is no problem.

4. Untouchability, meaning pollution by the touch of certain persons from birth, is according to Gandhi, an 'excrement of Hinduism' and a 'blot on Hinduism'. Just because Bhangis, Dhedhs, Chamars are involved in cleaning work they cannot be treated as untouchables. A mother may be 'untouchable' so long as she has not washed her hands after cleaning up her child's mess. So also they must be taught to bathe after their cleaning work. Hence it is the bounden duty of every Hindu to combat it, and should even atone for the sin. So he considered Removal of Untouchability as the vow, most necessary for Indian society.

3.7 KEY WORDS

“Shravana Pitribhakti, Harichandra Story, confession of his sins , Anekantavada, Rai Chandbai, Essence of Religion, Plurality of religions, ‘Lead Kindly Light’ Supreme exemplar of Satyagraha, ‘the kingdom of God’ Sanatani Hindu, Daridranarayana, ashram, Unto This Last, Tolstoy Farm, Sabarmathi Ashram, Sevagram, Adi Nivas, Meera ben, Parchure Kutti, From Yerwda Mandir, Abhyasa, Vairagya, Tapas, Brahmacharya

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UNIT 4 RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE AND RELIGIOUS HARMONY

Contents

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
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- 4.3 Religious Tolerance in India: A Historical Overview
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4.0 OBJECTIVES

Tolerance is willingness to accept or allow a thing which one may not agree with, or even disapproves of. It is ability to suffer or endure something without being harmed. As distinguished from 'toleration', the act of putting up with something that one may not agree with or disapproves of, 'tolerance' is an attitude of mind to bear or permit something which one does not approve of. This attitude is applicable only to the one who is in a position of disallowing it, but still refrains from doing it.

Religious tolerance is no more than the willingness of the adherents of a dominant religion to accept or allow other religions to exist, although they disagree with those religious beliefs and practices, look upon them with disapproval as inferior, mistaken or harmful. In the case of individuals, religious tolerance generally means bearing with other people's religious practices, although one may not approve of it. It does not imply that one need to believe that other religions are equally true. It only means that one puts up with the fact that others have the right to hold their beliefs and practice in the way they do. Within a nation or ethnic group, it is acceptance of the right for others to hold beliefs that differ from the dominant religion, worship freely according to these beliefs and even attempt to peacefully convince others to convert to that faith.

However, real religious harmony will be brought about in a nation only when people realize that 'Truth is One but the Paths are Many,' that the goal of all religions is essentially the same despite their differences in worship-forms, belief-systems, and lifestyles. Further, the people must realize that we can foster an attitude of open dialogue and mutual exchange of ideas, practices and patterns of lifestyles, rather than imposing one's beliefs on others by force.

Of these two kinds of attitudes, namely religious tolerance and religious harmony, it is harmony between faiths that Gandhi wanted to establish in India rather than simply religious tolerance. In this unit then you are expected to learn

- To have broad Sketch of the Religions in India
- To overview the religious tolerance of Indian religions
- To validate the grounds for religious harmony

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Indian history as well as its social fabric is indeed unique in the world. This is only land, perhaps in the whole of world, whose history goes back to thousands of years before the Christ and yet has survived the onslaughts of time. While many of its contemporary civilizations like the Assyrian, Babylonian and Roman have died out in, the Indian culture has managed not only to survive the ravages of time but also to flourish. Another point of its uniqueness is the multi religious and multicultural ethos which has not only been tolerated but also maintained with a constitutional safeguarded.

Religion plays a major role in the Indian way of life. A wide variety of Indian religious customs and rituals are not only just performed in the country but also they constitute organization of the social life of the people in the country. Moreover, religion helps people to transmit their values from one generation to another, and influences the way they interact with the natural environment. It gives purpose and meaning to life, giving thereby the people of India a scope to prosper together. It is a matter of great importance to understand how despite the variety of religions, they are able to be active and vibrant in the day to day life of its adherents, forming the warp and woof the ordinary life of the people, and organizing their life peacefully and in harmony. It is significant to know that the national life of the Indian nation, even after the Partition, did not choose the religion of the majority as the national religion. It is not merely tolerance of religions but harmony between faiths that is visualized in the Constitution of India. And that vision, except for a few communal frenzy cropping up now and then, has been kept up by and large unimpaired till date.

The one who is greatly responsible for creating that vision of religious harmony is certainly Gandhi. Here it must be noted that Gandhi was not motivated by political expediency. But it was as a matter of policy, and a voluntary choice that Gandhi worked for establishing in India religious harmony rather than merely religious tolerance. It is that specific contribution by Gandhi that forms subject of inquiry in this Unit.

To understand and appreciate Gandhi's blueprint for such a religious harmony, it may be necessary for you first to have at least broad sketch of the variety of religions that exist in India. Next, it will be useful to have at least a historical overview of the interactions with one another during their long history of nearly five thousand years. In the light of these background-materials, then, you will be in a position to gauge the grounds Gandhi gives for validating the religious harmony, not merely religious tolerance.

4.2 RELIGIONS IN INDIA

There is probably no other land in the world which has more diversity of religious and sects than in India. Apart from having sheltered all the sematic religions, India was also the birthplace of four great religions (Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism) and has been an important home to one of oldest religions of the world (Zoroastrianism). Its unique merit lies not merely in accommodating these religions in its social fabric, but also in assimilating and absorbing many of the features and waving them all into a synthetic culture.

Hinduism is the most predominant of religion of India. It is not a single religion founded by one specific prophet or sage nor is it based upon a single book. It is actually a family of religions and

cultures within whose umbrella numerous sects of religions began to flourish and are still flourishing with some common traits binding them into a cluster. The most common of such traits are

- belief in a single supreme Godhead that is present in everything,
- belief in other gods who are aspects of that supreme God,
- belief that the soul repeatedly goes through a cycle of rebirths,
- belief in Karma, a force that determines the quality of each birth, depending on how well one behaved in a past life.

Most of the Hindus worship at home and have a shrine there or a sacred corner in a small house. Though Hindu temples are the focus of religious life, yet there is not a strong tradition of congregational worship. Traditionally Hinduism was not known for seeking to convert people, although some modern Hindu sects now do seek converts.

Jainism was very ancient religion of India. It claims a lineage of 24 enlightened beings (*Thirthankaras*). Only the last two of them could be historically traced: Parsva (9th century BCE) and Mahavira (6th century BCE). Of these two, it is Mahavira about whom more reliable data are available and hence is said to be the founder of the religion as it is known today. Like Buddhism, Jainism also arose in opposition to the sacrificial Vedic religion, and the Brahmin domination. It does not advocate belief in God or gods to whom we need to pray. It does not accept role of priestly class in society. It empowers its followers to be spiritually self-reliant. Its key idea is 'everyone is maker of one's own destiny' and to be 'conqueror of self'. The word "Jaina" is derived from the root word *ji* meaning to conquer.

Jainism, along with Buddhism, spread throughout India during the period of the Magadha Empire. Jainism has declined since the 12th century in many regions, but continues to be an influential religion in Gujarat, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Karnataka. Though a miniscule minority who practice this faith, it remains a powerfully influential religion even today. Jainism is the most tolerant of religions. Its unique theory of *Anekantavada* emphasizing the many-sided-ness of reality, is very conducive to tolerance of different points of views. Thus all prejudices are allowed to subside and attitude of accommodation is promoted even with people of conflicting points of views. This necessarily leads to pursuit of non-violence.

Buddhism is religio-philosophical tradition, founded by Gautama Buddha in the year around 500 before Christ. Buddha, before enlightenment was a prince called Siddharta. 'Buddha' means 'one who has woken up' and the one who awakens others to the knowledge of the world as it truly is. The misery or suffering is universally felt by the people because they live asleep, never knowing or seeing life as it really is. Once they are awakened to the real cause of suffering in one's desire or attachment, and walk in the eight fold path, they are sure to find release from suffering.

Buddhism is known for its concrete techniques of the release, non-dogmatic and rational approach, not concerned so much about the metaphysical realities like God or soul, but emphasizing the present and giving opportunity for personal transformation. Still more is appealing is its teaching of universal compassion for the suffering of beings and for the benefit and welfare of all beings.

Buddhism does not actively look for converts, but it is thoroughly welcoming to those who do want to convert. Buddhism can coexist with other faiths.

Sikhism

Sikhism is the youngest of the world's four great monotheistic religions. It began as a relatively neutral faith system that proposed to include the best practices of Hinduism and Islam. The formation of its specific character owes to Guru Nanak in the Punjab state in Northwest India, in the 15th Century and nine other Gurus who succeeded him, one after another. The word "Sikh" in Punjabi means "disciple". Sikhs are disciples of the Gurus. Guru Nanak, the first Guru, started the new tradition, though his devotion to almighty God. The last of the 10 Gurus, Guru Gobind Singh gave the final shape to the tradition, by instituting the khalsa, extolling the heroism of five men of excellent moral qualities, spiritual fervor and baptizing them and conferring guruship them as a community, along with the holy Guru Granth. Since then the Khalsa implies the collective, spiritually-directed will of the community guided by the Guru Granth Sahib.

He is to lead his life according to the Guru's teaching and is to respect but not practise or participate in non-Sikh religious rites or ceremonies, especially abandoning the caste system. All Sikhs were taught to treat all in the community as equals; no distinction was to be made between the different professions or station in life. Sikh men are particularly easy to identify because the Five Ks: 1. *Kesh* (full beard and uncut hair) 2. *Kanga* (a small comb) 3. *Kaccha* – warrior short trousers, denoting chastity. 4. *Kara* (steel bangle as a sign of restraint and bondage to the Guru). 5. *Kirpan* (a sword as a symbol of dignity, power and courage).

The Sikhs attend a religious service once a week at a Gurdwara (temple) place of worship. Sikhism does not have priests, but most gurdwaras will have a Granthi, or a learned man who is skilled in reading the scriptures. The Adi Granth, the Sikh scripture is considered to be the present day embodiment of the Sikh Guru, and so is called the Guru Granth Sahib is treated with the same respect and devotion as would have been given to a human Guru. Sikhism does not actively look for converts, but it welcomes those who want to get converted to it.

Judaism

There had been different Jewish communities arriving in India at different times. The Bene Israel community which lived in the villages of west Maharashtra and Cochin Jews of Kerala were the first to arrive in India probably shortly after the fall of Jerusalem in the eighth century BCE. Then Bne Menashe Jews who settled themselves in East India, in Calcutta seem to have arrived from China and Myanmar (Burma). The 'Baghdadi Jews' was a collective name given to those Jews who had come from Arab countries and Iran in the late 18th century, and those who came from Iraq and Syria in the 19th century because of persecution over there. They had enriched the Indian culture with their own traits. The Synagogue of Cochin Jews is there to see in Mattenchery in Kerala even today.

Zoroasterianism

The descendants of the disciples of an Iranian Prophet Zoroaster (1400 BCE) left Iran and sought a new land of religious freedom and settled in North West India around the tenth century during the Muslim persecution. And they were known as Parsis (Persians). Their main centre in India today is Mumbai . The Parsis believe in a good God Ahura Mazda, who is opposed to and will

ultimately defeat evil, Angra Mainyu. . They are fire worshipers. The essential feature of their religion is physical and moral purity. They are known as have been commercially the most enterprising people and the most highly educated, industrious and prosperous They are known for their accommodative and peace loving nature.

Islam

Islam has been present in South India and Sind, through the settlement of Muslim Arab traders, much before the invasions that came from other Muslim countries via the more warlike north-western routes, Even with regard to the Northern Islam, it is wrong to think that it has always indulged in forced conversions. As regards the many conversions that took place through force also, Islam never interfered with India's multi-religious spectrum. Even when the Muslim rule was reigning supreme in the major portion of the Subcontinent for nearly six centuries, the local communities of various religions were not interfered. They all were allowed to retain their identity as it is evident from the survival of the different calendars that are respectively associated with Buddhism, Jainism, Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism as well as Islam.

From around the fourteenth century there arose an altogether new trend, thanks to Hindu Bhakti and Muslim Sufi traditions. The theme of interreligious tolerance was a persistent theme in the poetry of Kabir, Dadu, Raidasa, Sena, Mira Bai and others, a circle of preacher-poets in whose name many sects were founded later all in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

With Akbar the Great the spirit of interreligious harmony got royal sponsorship from the state. In the late sixteenth century he arranged for meetings between adherents of different faiths, including Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Parsees, Jains, Jews and even atheists. Thereby Akbar made interreligious dialogue a respectable thing, central to participatory governance. He even made it a rule that 'the pursuit of reason' rather than 'reliance on faith-tradition' would be followed as the criterion to address difficult problems of social harmony. His pluralist commitment is clear from the fact that he filled his court with non-Muslim intellectuals and artists. Not only did Akbar personally championed the pluralist ideals of religions, but he also made state-tolerance of religious differences a top priority of his reign. He implemented the policy of religious neutrality that 'no one would be legally interfered with on account of religion'. Further by enunciating that 'anyone would be free to go over to a religion that pleases him'

Now, the Muslim population is about 9%, the second largest population. Though there may be a fundamentalist trends among a few Muslims as in any other religion and there is no reason why their patriotism must be suspected. Even when the option was there to move and have their living to Pakistan, the Indian Muslims have made an option to be in India secularist nation. And this itself is to be taken as a proof of their patriotism and their readiness to accommodate with pluralist ethos of India

Christianity

Christian faith is said to have come to India already by the fourth century. But in the 16th century a huge number of Christian settlements was created by the Portuguese rule in Goa. The British, in the beginning their rule, were opposed to the missionaries' entry to India. However after a prolonged debate for years in the English Parliament, a missionary clause was passed in the Charter Act of 1813, after which India witnessed an influx of missionaries. In the name of reform they encouraged conversion from local religion to Christianity. Thus in 19th century

many mass conversion movements took place. Even then the growth of Christianity has been minimal amounting to 2.3 % of Indian population now.

However the Christian influence on the overall reform of India as well as on nation building is uncontestable specially in fields of education, health services, and selfless and self-sacrificing service to the poor. Even today 90% of the beneficiaries in almost every educational institution are from other communities. Similarly it was the Missionaries' social works that actually set the developmental trend first in Indian society.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1). Distinguish between 'religious tolerance' and 'religious harmony'

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2). What is the uniqueness of India in respect of religions? Indicate the contribution Gandhi made in the contemporary times.

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3). Mention a few common traits of the ancient Indian religions

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4.) State the contributions of those religions that were born elsewhere to the social fabric of India?

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4.3 RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE IN INDIA: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

In the case of India religious tolerance was almost an essential part of the cultural history in the vast Subcontinent. Most historians accept that the Indo Aryans who had gradually settled themselves in the North-West of the Subcontinent during a span of nearly a millennium (between 1500 BC and 800 BC) developed a common cultural life with local variations of which the most advanced was based upon the teachings of Vedas. The Vedic culture which was simple and nature-bound began to grow into a complex structure of elaborate religious rites, philosophical

faith, and intricate legal and social systems. It was dynamic enough to spread towards the East and to bring even the South under its sphere of influence.

The Vedic culture would have made a sway of the whole subcontinent, but for certain factors. The over-emphasis on the rites and ascetic practices by the Brhamans was too impractical. The philosophical approach of the Upanishads was too abstract to appeal to ordinary people, and its social structure was too rigorous and un-equal to be accepted by all the people with an equal appeal. The rise of Buddhism and Jainism that struck at the roots of the caste system, moderated the rigour of asceticism, ritualism proved to be more of a reaction to traditional Hindu culture became a corrective to Hindu excessiveness.

Perhaps thanks to their influence there arose a reconstructed Hinduism with the Bhagawad Gita as its spiritual and moral basis and the two Epics as the emotional and the Puranas as its imaginative, and the Dhrma Shastras of Manu as the legal bases and the six systems as the abstract and philosophic bases. The multi-pronged emphasis of the reconstructed Hinduism, with its demands for the minimum of common religious belief and practice, allowing complete cultural autonomy to the different local people in such things as dress, food, language, and mores and manners, could easily make a countrywide appeal to all sorts of people, races and language.

The Islamic contacts that started in the 8th century A.D. through mainly trade were smooth with the South India and Sind. However the intrusion of Muslim rulers in the North West, towards the end of 9th century, posed politically many a hostile challenge between 1206 and 1526. However, at the secular level there resulted a synthetic Indian cultural renaissance, creating "Indo-Muslim" fusion of cultures, through lasting syncretic monuments in architecture, music, literature and clothing. It is surmised that the Urdu language (literally meaning "horde" or mass in various Turkic dialects) was born during this period as a result of the intermingling of the local speakers of Sanskritic Prakrits with immigrants speaking Persian, Turkic and Arabic under the Muslim rulers. At the religious level, though there arose religious tolerance, mainly on account of the preaching of Hindu Bhakti movement as well as the Muslim Sufism. The political policy of the early Moghul Emperors, especially that of Akbar the Great was conducive to the emergence of religious tolerance. However the cultural fusion was limited to the urban centres, and did not penetrate into villages where the Indian populace had concentrated.

With the advent of the Europeans in general, and the British in particular, the modern western culture became a formidable challenge to the Indian culture(s). With their assumed superiority of their culture, they downgraded the 'natives' as racially, intellectually and culturally and religiously inferior to themselves. As a reaction to this onslaught of modern civilization, there arose several reformers from both Hindus and Muslims. The Arya Samaj, Brahmo Samaj, the Prarthana Samaj, and the Servants of Indian Society among the Hindus.

Among the Indian Muslims, there arose some great men who realized the need of Muslims acquiring education and scientific temper of modernity. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan (1817-1898) pioneered modern education for the Muslim community in India by opening the Aligarh a school, which later became the Muhammedan Anglo-Oriental College, still later developed into the Aligarh Muslim University. The British rulers found it an opportunity to woo the Muslim elite and to stem the tide of the Indian National Congress. This institution played, much against

the founder's views, a crucial role in the Partition of India. However, after the Partition, this university is known for its secular and scientific learning.

Likewise the reforms wrought by Badruddin Tyabji (Tyab Ali) the third President of the Indian National Congress, was the first to create a secular political consciousness. This he did without abating a jot of his zeal' for the advancement of the backward Muslims; and it was most remarkable that he succeeded in obtaining widespread non-Muslim co-operation for it. Badruddin's all-pervasive intellectual and personal distinction enabled him to exert considerable influence for worthy causes on the more enlightened Englishmen, without loss of personal or national dignity. He was not only, as Mahatma Gandhi wrote, "a decisive factor in the deliberations of the Congress". It is through his influence that the Muslim participation in the freedom movement became large and nationally he was a pioneer in making it the Indian ideal, counteracting the Two-Nation theory.

The main aim of all these reformers was reformation of religious and social life of the natives, either falling back on the glorious past, and thereby affirming the superiority of the Indian ancient culture, or by injecting modern ideas into the mind of the people and reinterpreting the past in the light of the modern ideas. In this process their approach consisted in making a distinction between the religious and the secular on the one hand, and on the other hand they accused the religion of the rulers as equally in need of reform and even going to the extent of treating them as untouchables, so that there is nothing to learn from those religions, while however they were ready to take on the modern ideas and incorporate them into the socio, economic fabric of Indian culture, and political fields. There were some other sections of extremist approach who hated the English rulers both in their political and religious and were keen on liberating themselves from their bondage through violence and arson.

However it was to the credit of Gandhi to have worked for a basic unity in the diversity of cultural life as the foundation for a common nationhood. As opposed to all these different approaches that Gandhi tried to reconstruct the cultural life of India. At the political level Gandhi brought about a synthesis between the elitists' Congress and the teeming millions, by changing into it into a mass based organization. More importantly at the religio-cultural level Gandhi brought about a wonderful synthesis between the liberal modernists like Rammohun Roy, Mahadev Govind Ranade, and Gopala Krishna Gokhale and the Hindu extremist like Lokmanya Tilak and steered a mid-path. This contribution that Gandhi made at the religio-cultural level was very significant.

What Gandhi envisaged was a common culture as the basis of Indian nationhood in which people of all religions will be not only not in conflict with one another but also each religion will be respecting one another, and will be working for the common task of enriching humanity. The principal feature of the Indian nationhood will be secular in character, not in the western sense of putting aside the religious influences from the state, but imbuing politics with a spirit of deep religiousness, expressing itself in equal respect for each one of the religions, that are present in India. No one religion will be accepted as the official, state religion but all religions would be allowed to flourish freely in their own respective spheres. It implies that it is no more tolerance of religious but religious harmony that was aimed at by Gandhi.

To bring about religious harmony in India, Gandhi thought, the first and foremost requirement was Hindu-Muslim unity. That is why, in his Charter of Reforms (*Constructive Programmes*) he listed Communal Unity as the most basic one. It was indeed a crucial question how to find the common ground on which the two largest communities in the country, the Hindus and the Muslims, can meet in order to live fraternally together and work for the common good of the country which is identical with their common good. Once the Hindu Muslim unity was established, unity with all other communities could be further strengthened. Gandhi never found any serious differences between the Hindus and the other minority communities like the Christians, the Sikhs and the Parsis. That is why Gandhi turned to the question of Hindu-Muslim unity. Hindu –Muslim unity means not unity only between Hindus and Muslims but between all those who call India their homes no matter to what faith they belong.

Already in his South African stay he had realized that the two communities had strong prejudices against each other and there were hardly any relations between them. However, he realized that it was providential that he went to South Africa under a contract to work with Muslim friends of his brother. “I really served Hindus through Muslims whose employee I was. Hindu Muslim unity was part of my very being”. On his return to India, when Gandhi involved himself Hindu-Muslim unity, he found it more difficult than in South Africa, because the prejudices between the two communities here had aggravated into a feeling of hostility.

Even then he was fully involved in the issue not as a political expedient to win the freedom for India but a spiritual exercise for the realization of the supreme end of Truth through the unfailing means of Ahimsa. The problem of Hindu-Muslim unity in India was a challenge to his faith in Ahimsa ideal. He openly said: “It would be on the question of Hindu-Muslim unity that my Ahimsa would be put to the severest test”. Thus it is clear that Gandhi’s earnest desire and ceaseless effort for Hindu-Muslim unity did not originally spring from a political motive but religious one. If it was merely political, he would have been quite content to bring about a patched-up truce, an *ad hoc* alliance between the two communities directed against the common enemy’s rule. But what Gandhi was aiming was nothing less than true and lasting friendship, a union of hearts. “It cannot be based upon mutual fear. It must be a partnership between equals each respecting the religion of others.”

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

- 1) Delineate the accommodating nature of the ancient Indo Aryan culture and Examine the major obstacles for universal acceptance.

- 2) Was not Muslim rule suppressive of the local culture?

- 3) What was the specific approach of earlier reformers Modern Indian

4). In what way Gandhi proved different from other Modern Indian reformers

5). Why was Hindu-Muslim Unity was the most important for establishing religious harmony in India?

4.4 RELIGIOUS HARMONY

Gandhi's basic conviction about the nature of the religion is that every religion constituted a revelation of truth, in as much as it is supplying a felt-need in the spiritual progress of humanity. Each of them embodies a common motivating force, namely the desire to uplift the human life and give it purpose. This is illustrated the fact of saints in each religions, persons of Attainment, Realization and Perfection. He compared the basic unity of the different religions as the vital sap of the tree which maintains the different branches and the leaves.

At the same time Gandhi emphasized the diversity of religions, too. There is only one God, therefore in theory, there should be only one religion. However when God is revealed to human beings it would become necessarily many and different. Depending upon the different temperaments of human beings and climatic conditions, God will always be differently perceived. Again as the one unalloyed Truth, beyond all speech, passes through human medium, becomes conditioned, limited, and imperfect for no other reason than the human instrumentality involved in receiving and expressing Truth. What was grasped and expressed by the humans that are already imperfect, are interpreted by other humans who are equally imperfect. Thus no one can claim that one's own expression or interpretation of the ultimate truth is the right one. Everybody is right from one's own stand point. But it is impossible that everybody is wrong. In other words, "all religions are true, and equally imperfect too. They are more or less true." Perfection is the exclusive attribute of God and whatever passes through the human touch becomes imperfect. That all religions have the Truth is proved by the fact of saints, the exemplars of Attainment and Perfection. That the religions are imperfect is proved by the fact of many accretions and the superstitions that have grown in each religion.

This basic position of Gandhi regarding the nature of religion and religions has many far reaching consequences. They may be listed out in the form of following principles. They will explain the Gandhi's vision of Religious Harmony.

1. Tolerance

Granted that every religion has the Truth, no religion can claim superiority over any other. The one Truth is always seen in fragments, and different angles of vision. Therefore each one has to show an attitude of toleration of the view point of others, although one may not always understand other's view point. Even among the most conscientious people, there will be enough room for honest differences of opinion in matters of religion, precisely because they are concerned with the Ultimate Concern. The minimum of the expected rule of conduct in any civilized society is mutual tolerance.

Here, tolerance does not mean indifference towards one's own faith, but it gives us a spiritual insight which is far from fanaticism. Knowing the true nature of religion and religions, one breaks down the barriers between faith and faith. By cultivating tolerance for other faiths, one may get a truer understanding of one's own faith. Certainly tolerance does not mean tolerating evil, false or wrong faiths. In the context of the principal faiths of the world, it only means accepting common fundamentals found in all religions.

2. Respect for Other Faiths:

Tolerance may imply a gratuitous assumption of the superiority of one's own position and the inferiority of the others'. On the contrary, if one accepted that each faith has the glimpse of the Truth, in its own way, supplying the felt need of the humanity, just in the same way as my religion has supplied the same to me, then I should be able to respect it even though it is not mine. It means, acceptance of the basic unity among religions, as outlined by Gandhi, namely that the sum total of a faith with its particular frame work of cult, creed and code is as good and helpful to its followers as the sum total of another faith to its own followers to attain perfection within its own frame work. It is not a stance of compromise in a multi religious society, but it is a fundamental verifiable truth about religions, through the great saints produced by all the principal faiths.

This is further reiterated by Gandhi through his own experience. When he read the sacred books of different faiths for his own satisfaction, with an attitude of equimindedness towards them all, he said he became sufficiently familiar with Christianity, Islam, Zoroastrianism, Judaism and Hinduism. In reading these texts, he had the slightest desire to criticize any of those religions merely because they were not my own, but read each sacred book in a spirit of reverence, and found the same fundamental morality in each.

The acceptance of the doctrine of Equality of Religions does not abolish the distinction between religion and irreligion. We do not propose to cultivate toleration for irreligion. That being so, some people might object, that there would be no room left for equimindedness, if everyone took his own decision as to what was religion and what was irreligion. If we follow the law of Love, we shall not bear any hatred towards the irreligious brother. On the contrary, we shall love him, and therefore either we shall bring him to see the error of his ways, or he will point out our error, or each will tolerate the other's difference of opinion. If the other party does not observe the law of love, he may be violent to us. If however we cherish real love for him, it will overcome his bitterness in the end. All obstacles in our path will vanish, if only we observe the golden rule, that we must not be impatient with those whom we may consider to be in error, but must be prepared, if need be, to suffer in our own person

3. Equimindedness:

If one accepts that the attitude of respect, far beyond tolerance, it becomes a necessary requirement for true followers of religions to show equal respect and reverence for the followers of other religions also. "We must have innate respect for other religions as we have for our own. Mind you not mutual toleration, but equal respect." It is this attitude Gandhi, expresses it as

equimindedness to all religions. "I believe in *sarva dharma sama bava*." Gandhi does agree that there would be some things one does not understand. But he it is a mistake hastily to imagine, that anything that we cannot understand is necessarily wrong. Falling back upon his own experience, Gandhi says: "Some things which I did not understand first have since become as clear as daylight. Equimindedness helps us to solve many difficulties and even when we criticize anything, we express ourselves with a humility and a courtesy, which leave no sting behind them

4. Diversity Not Overlooked:

Just because Gandhi emphasized the unity of religions, as a consequence of which the respect of religions and attitude of equimindedness, it does not mean that he ignored the actual diversity of religions. To have equal regard for religions did not mean for Gandhi to adopt other's view as one's own. It only means one tries to understand other's view point, the light in which others look upon the religion. Further it means that we should not emphasis too much on the points of differences so as to instigate hatred among one another but it only means that we should emphasis the points of agreement rather than the diversity. But in no way Gandhi deluded the differences of religions. Here he was quite different from the common attitude of the Hindu populous that all religions are rivers going to the oceans. The popular way of understanding these statements may lead to the indifferentism of religions, in the sense that everything is considered as one and the same. As against such a popular view, Gandhi, while emphasizing the unity of religions, would equally emphasis the unique points of each religion. Therefore for him the diversity of religions are to be equally taken note of.

5. Defects of Religions Not Ignored :

While Gandhi acknowledges the presence of truth in every great religion, he is equally conscious of the numerous defects and degradations of all religions. When he expects people to cultivate the attitude of respect for other religions, he does not imply that we should be blind to the faults of other religions. He only expects the followers of each religion to be alive to the defects of their own faith and make an attempt to overcome those defects first and foremost, at the instance of their encounter with other religions. "Seeing that it takes all my resources in trying to bring my practice to the level of my faith and in preaching the same to my co-religion is, I do not dream of preaching to the followers of other faiths." Gandhi finds the maxim involved in such a conduct: judge not lest you be judged.

6. Irreligion not to be condoned

The acceptance of the doctrine of Equality of Religions does not abolish the distinction between religion and irreligion. We do not propose to cultivate toleration for irreligion. If so, it may be asked, where would be any room left for equimindedness, if everyone took his own decision as to what was religion and what was irreligion? To such an objection Gandhi says: "If we follow the law of Love, we shall not bear any hatred towards the irreligious brother. On the contrary, we shall love him, and therefore either we shall bring him to see the error of his ways, or he will point out our error, or each will tolerate the other's difference of opinion. If the other party does not observe the law of love, he may be violent to us. If however we cherish real love for him, it will overcome his bitterness in the end. All obstacles in our path will vanish, if only we observe the golden rule, that we must not be impatient with those whom we may consider to be in error, but must be prepared, if need be, to suffer in our own person

7. Every Religion to Grow:

Granted that every religion is bound to be imperfect, it follows that every religion is always subjected to a process of growth. Since the truth or God, conceived by us, is bound to be imperfect and pluralistic, there is always a need to re-interpret, re-new and re-juvenate. In this

respect, then every religion is bound to constantly grow from imperfection to perfection from less perfection to greater perfection, from untruth to truth and from periphery to the center. In this aspect also Gandhi's affirmation of equality of religions is different from the popular understanding of equality of religions expressed in such statements as 'all religions are paths to God or all are rivers flowing to the ocean.'

8. Learning from one another:

Gandhi, while emphasizing the need of every religion to grow from imperfection to perfection, he also suggested some means for such a growth. One of the principal suggestions is that when a religion encounters other religions, you should be ready to learn from the noble elements of other religions rather than criticizing other religions and condemning them. In fact it should enrich itself by blending into it all the acceptable features of other faiths. In fact such a thing is even a matter of duty, which each religion to discharge according to Gandhi. Otherwise it is fanaticism to imagine that you cannot accept anything from other faiths.

9. Reverential Study of Other Scriptures:

One of the best ways to learn from other religions according to Gandhi is a reverential study of others' scriptures. Once he remarked: "I have recommended to my Christian friend a prayerful and sympathetic study of others' scriptures of the world." Likewise he also told the Hindus: "your lives will be incomplete unless you reverently study the teachings of Jesus." Giving his own example, Gandhi says: "When I was turning over the pages of the sacred books of different faiths for my own satisfaction, I became sufficiently familiar for my purpose with Christianity, Islam, Zoroastrianism, Judaism and Hinduism... Refreshing my memory of those days, I do not find I ever had the slightest desire to criticize any of those religions merely because they were not my own, but read each sacred book in a spirit of reverence, and found the same fundamental morality in each.

10. Complementarity of Religions

Thus according to Gandhi, each faith would prove complementary to other, provided that the followers of each religion were not indifferent to their religion, but rather tried to live seriously their own faith commitment, while at the same time take seriously the truth value of other faiths as well. In fact all the important faiths were held by Gandhi to be complementary to one another, in no case to be exclusive. We may not have fully understood the true meaning of the interdependence and inter-relation of different faiths, may be because we are too indifferent representatives of our own faiths. If only we became seriously genuine seekers of truth, by following our respective faiths, we would have already seen interdependence and interrelation of various faiths.

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) What are Gandhi's views regarding nature of religion and religions?

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2) Elucidate the meaning of "Equality of Religions"

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 3) How could religions grow and be complementary to one another

Conclusion

In short then, a real interreligious harmony would emerge in a multi religious society when its members realize the basic unity of the various religions as well as the importance of the diversity and the need to promote a spirit of equimindedness to one another and the need to learn from one another and to be complementary to one another. What is unique of Gandhi is that establishes all these as part of his quest for Truth. Synthesizing two models of God – theistic God and impersonal Absolute – Gandhi speaks of God both as personal and as absolute Truth. It is with reference to that Absolute Truth that he validates all religions as equal paths to truth and calls for more positive love and respect towards all than just religious tolerance.

4.5 LET US SUM UP

1.1. While 'Religious tolerance' is no more than the willingness of the adherents of a dominant religion to accept or allow other religions to exist, although they disagree with those religious beliefs and practices, look upon them with disapproval as inferior, mistaken or harmful, 'Religious harmony' implies that each religion accepts and respects the other religions on the basis of this realization 'Truth is One but the Paths are Many,' and acceptance of the fact that the goal of all religions is essentially the same despite their differences in worship-forms, belief-systems, and lifestyles.

2. Religion plays a major role in the Indian way of life. It is a matter of uniqueness that despite the variety of religions, they are able to be active and vibrant in the day to day life of its adherents, forming the warp and woof of the ordinary life of the people, and organizing their life peacefully and in harmony. Already from the ancient times India has been promoting or at least tolerating diversity of religions. Apart from having sheltered all the sematic religions, India was also the birthplace of four great religions (Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism) and has been an important home to one of oldest religions of the world (Zoroastrianism). Its unique merit lies not merely in accommodating these religions in its social fabric, but also in assimilating and absorbing many of the features and waving them all into a synthetic whole. But it is to the credit of Gandhi that he was greatly responsible for creating that vision of religious harmony in the Indian Republic. Here it must be noted that Gandhi was not motivated by political expediency. But it was as a matter of policy, and a voluntary choice that Gandhi worked for establishing in India religious harmony rather than merely religious tolerance.

3. Already Hinduism, the most predominant of religion of India, is a family of religions and cultures within whose umbrella numerous sects of religions began to flourish and are still flourishing with some common traits binding them into a cluster. Although Jainism and Buddhism grew s independent religious yet, they all share some kind of umbrella with the following features. The most common of such traits are belief in the supremacy of human being

with a transcendental element within, that the soul, purity of soul in itself but polluted by the karmic particles, belief in Karma, a force that determines the quality of each birth, depending on how well one behaved in a past life. repeatedly goes through a cycle of rebirths, and the emphasis on human effort with or without the grace of God.

3. Islam never interfered with India's multi-religious spectrum. Even when the Muslim rule was reigning supreme in the major portion of the Subcontinent for nearly six centuries, the local communities of various religions were not interfered, but rather they all were allowed to retain their identity as it is evident from the survival of the different calendars have been continuing to exist. Especially during the rule Akbar the Great, interreligious dialogue became a respectable thing, 'the pursuit of reason' was made the criterion to address difficult problems of social harmony rather than 'reliance on faith-tradition'. His pluralist commitment is clear from the fact that he filled his court with non-Muslim intellectuals and artists. As regards Christianity, the influence it has exerted on the overall reform of India as well as on nation building is uncontestable especially in fields of education, health services, and selfless and self-sacrificing service to the poor. Even today 90% of the beneficiaries in almost every educational institution are from other communities. Similarly it was the Missionaries' social works that actually set the developmental trend first in Indian society.

II.1. The Vedic culture was dynamic enough to accommodate with the local culture and spread towards the East and even the South. However the factors that impeded its growth were: over-emphasis on the rites and ascetic practices, the too abstract approach of the Upanishads, and the too rigorous social structure to be accepted by all the people with an equal appeal. However with the rise of Buddhism and Jainism that struck at the roots of the caste system, moderated the rigour of asceticism, ritualism, the ancient Hinduism began to reconstruct itself with its demands for the minimum of common religious belief and practice, allowing complete cultural autonomy to the different local people in such things as dress, food, language, and mores and manners, could easily make a countrywide appeal to all sorts of people, races and language. This is how the ancient Hindu culture became the most tolerant religion.

2. Though Muslims posed politically many a hostile challenge between 1206 and 1526, at the secular level there resulted a synthetic Indian cultural renaissance, creating "Indo-Muslim" fusion of cultures, through lasting syncretic monuments in architecture, music, literature and clothing. The Urdu language (literally meaning "horde" or mass in various Turkic dialects) was born during this period as a result of the intermingling of the local speakers of Sanskrit Prakrits with immigrants speaking Persian, Turkic and Arabic under the Muslim rulers. At the religious level, though there arose religious tolerance, mainly on account of the preaching of Hindu Bhakti movement as well as the Muslim Sufism. The political policy of the early Moghul Emperors, especially that of Akbar the Great was conducive to the emergence of religious tolerance.

3. As a reaction to this onslaught of modern civilization, there arose several reformers from both Hindus and Muslims. Among the Hindus the Arya Samaj, Brahmo Samaj, the Prarthana Samaj, and the Servants of Indian Society. Among the Indian Muslims, there arose some great men Sir Syed Ahmad Khan. Likewise the reforms wrought by Badruddin Tyabji (Tyab Ali) who realized the need of Muslims acquiring education and scientific temper of modernity. The approach of the early reformers consisted in making a distinction between the religious and the secular, in accusing the religion of the British rulers as boastful and forcibly imposing on the local etc, while however they were ready to take on the modern ideas and incorporate them into

to the socio, economic fabric of Indian culture, and political fields. The extremists hated the English rulers both in their political and religious and worked for liberation through violence and arson.

4. The uniqueness of Gandhi is that he differed both from the earlier reformers as well as the extremists. What Gandhi envisaged was a common culture as the basis of Indian nationhood in which people of all religions will be not only not in conflict with one another but also each religion will be respecting one another, and will be working for the common task of enriching humanity. The principal feature of the Indian nationhood will be secular in character, not in the western sense of putting aside the religious influences from the state, but imbuing politics with a spirit of deep religiousness, expressing itself in equal respect for each one of the religions, that are present in India. No one religion will be accepted as the official, state religion but all religions would be allowed to flourish freely in their own respective spheres. To put it differently, it is no more tolerance of religious but religious harmony that was aimed at by Gandhi.

5. The Hindus and the Muslims were not only two largest communities in the country, but also they were more antagonistic with one another. Once the Hindu-Muslim unity was established, unity with all other communities could be further strengthened. Gandhi never found any serious differences between the Hindus and the other minority communities like the Christians, the Sikhs and the Parsis. That is why Gandhi turned to the question of Hindu-Muslim unity.

III.1. About the nature of the religion, Gandhi said that every religion is a revelation of truth, in as much as it is supplying a felt-need in the spiritual progress of humanity, embodies a common motivating force, namely the desire to uplift the human life and give it purpose, as illustrated by certain persons of Attainment, Realization and Perfection.

However when God is revealed to human beings it would become necessarily many and different depending upon the different temperaments of human beings and climatic conditions. Again the one unalloyed Truth, beyond all speech, when passes through human medium, becomes conditioned, limited, and imperfect humans, for no other reason than the human instrumentality involved in receiving, expressing, and interpreting it. In other words, "all religions are true, and equally imperfect too. They are more or less true."

2. Equality of religions simply means the basic unity among religions, namely that the sum total of a faith with its particular frame work of cult, creed and code is as good and helpful to its followers as the sum total of another faith to its own followers to attain perfection within its own frame work. Each religion has the Truth as is proved by the fact of saints in religions, and is equally imperfect in the sense that the Truth is received, expressed through the imperfect medium of human language and is interpreted by further imperfect humans.

3. Granted that every religion is imperfect, there is always a need to re-interpret, re-new and re-juvenate, is bound to constantly grow from imperfection to perfection, from less perfection to greater perfection, from untruth to truth and from periphery to the center. This growth can be accelerated by learning from one another, through reverential study of the Holy Scriptures of other religions, and adopting the acceptable features of other religions, and never approaching other religion with a critical outlook as much as on one's own religion.

4.6 KEY WORDS

Toleration, Tolerance, Harmony, Karma, Thirthankaras, Anekantavada, Buddha, Sikh, AdiGranth, Gurudwara, Ahura Mazda, Angra Mainyu, Dharma Shahstras, Urdu, Constructive

Programmes, Communal Unity, Unity of Religions, Plurality of Religions, Equality of Religions, Equimindedness, Complementarity of Religions

4.7 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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