IN GANDHI'S ARK

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Dedicated to
my granddaughters,
Adya, Tia and Tishya
for bringing
so much happiness
to my life.

Contents

Foreword

To write of Gandhi who has largely disappeared from our hearts and minds in India is a whimsical enterprise. He merely survives in imagery, in print, clay, marble or currency.

Therefore, I cannot think of anything else but Yukio Mishima on History.

'Take the times we live in, this school, this society, – I feel alien to them all.' 'But,' he continued, 'let me ask you this: what happens after a hundred years? Without us having any say in the matter, all our ideas will be lumped together under the heading, "The Thought of the Age".'

'To live in the midst of an era is to be oblivious to its style. You and I must be immersed in some style of living or other, but we're like goldfish swimming around in a bowl without ever noticing it.

In a few decades, people will see you and the people you despise as one and the same, a single entity... this is the easiest way to establish the essence of our era – to take the lowest common denominator. And you and I have no way of escaping the verdict, no way to prove that we didn't share the discredited views of our contemporaries. And what standard will history apply to that outlook? Those who come after us will seize upon the most primitive and popular credos of our day. You see every era has been characterized solely in terms of such idiocies.'

Kiyoaki said: 'well that's history... no matter what we think, or hope for, or feel – all that has not the slightest bearing on the course of history.'

'That's it exactly. Europeans believe that a man like Napoleon can impose his will on history. We Japanese think the same of

the men who brought about the Meiji Restoration. But is that really true? Does history ever obey the will of men?'

Honda: 'Say that I want to alter the course of history. I devote all my energies and resources to this end. Say I possess the prestige and authority to bring this about. None of this would ensure that history proceeded according to my wishes. Then, perhaps a hundred, two hundred, even three hundred years later, history might veer abruptly to take a course that was consonant with my vision and ideals – without my having had anything to do with it.'

Kiyoaki: 'But there is such a thing as the time being ripe for everything, isn't there? Your vision's time would finally have come, that's all. And perhaps even after your death, your will would serve as an invisible guideline, unknown to anyone, that would help bring about what you wanted to accomplish in your lifetime. Maybe if someone like you had never lived, history would never have taken such a turn....'

Honda: 'And so, if society turned out as I wanted it to after a hundred years, you'd call that an accomplishment? Whose accomplishment?'

'That of your will.'

'You're joking. I'd be dead.'

'Well, can't you say that it's the will of history then?'

Honda: 'So history has a will, eh? It's always dangerous to try to personify history. As far as I'm concerned, history has no will of its own and, furthermore, it hasn't the least concern for mine either. And all the so-called accomplishments of history prove it. They're no sooner achieved than they begin to crumble away. History is a record of destruction. One must always make room for the next ephemeral crystal. For history, to build and to destroy are one and the same thing.'

'No one can say for certain, but I will say this much: any will has as its essence the desire to influence history. I'm not saying that human desires affect history, only that they try to. Then, too, some forms of will are bound up with destiny, even though this concept is anathema to the will.'

'But in the long run, all human will is doomed to frustration. It's a matter of course that things turn out contrary to your intentions. And what conclusion does a Westerner draw from this? He says: "My will was the sole rational force involved. Failure came about by chance." Without the concept of chance, you see, the Western philosophy of free will could never have arisen. Chance is the crucial refuge of the will.... The westerner has no other way of rationalizing the repeated setbacks and frustrations that he must endure. I think that this concept of chance, of a gamble, is the very substance of the God of Europeans, and so they have a deity whose characteristics are derived from that refuge so vital to free will, namely chance – the only sort of God who would inspire the freedom of human will.'

'But what would happen if we were to deny the existence of chance completely? ...you'd be destroying all refuge of free will...you undermine the props under the concept of the will.

Then, the God of Inevitability stares down through the chasm.

Then, there's only one way to participate in history, and that's to have no will at all – to function solely as a shining, beautiful atom, eternal and unchanging. No one should look for any other meaning in human existence.'[1]

[1] Yukio Mishima, *Spring Snow*, p. 95.

Introduction

In studying Gandhi what is needed is an absence of a teleological relationship between the past and the present. My own exercise in this text is to try and re-create a conversation with him. Some of his ideas may have little resonance, but others are full of the will to be heard.

Gandhi was born and brought up in his own times like everyone is. He did not belong to a westernized and Anglicized family or environment as many Indians of his age, or even older, were.

The practices and beliefs that were part of his formative years were Gujarati and Hindu Vaishnavism. With years of struggle against many 'ills' and 'evils' as he characterized many of the practices he saw in society which he had grown up with he became a trenchant critic of such societal norms.

On the other hand the levels of his tolerance and acceptance for all those he met and beliefs he encountered in his life were amazing for his upbringing.

Travel and living abroad in England and South Africa definitely influenced him but his own war against himself was critical in his transformation. This is not to say that he completely erased and wiped out all of his past as his autobiography makes crystal clear. Nevertheless, no man or woman in public life in India has acknowledged and truthfully written about his whims and foibles, as also his weaknesses and human frailties as he did day after day, week after week in his bulletins and weeklies and speeches.

Certainly, he could have changed many other aspects of his life and personality. It would, however, be crass to speak of his being less 'evolved' and 'progressive' as many contemporary voices do today.

When we look at the past of many of our families, our parents and grandparents, we acknowledge their continued conservatism in many aspects. Even 'revolutionary' and 'radical' political leaders renowned for their anti-imperialist nationalism retained some elements of their upbringing. And yet, we do not curse and demonize them as Gandhi has been cursed and demonized by many self-proclaimed 'evolved' and 'radical' persons today.

To some extent, the vitriol against Gandhi is an angry reaction to his deification by those who exploited his name and world-wide fame for their own purposes and power. Moreover, the conversion of the man into a caricature, a stone statue of 'holiness' and 'religiousity' and almost a deity of Hinduism has done grievous harm to his historicity and humanity. 'People want the non-human, the Super-human, the Great Man as their leader....'[2]

The many journalists, politicians, artists and poets who made the journey to India to meet him found a person open to all religions or even lack of religion. The Christian friends of Gandhi bear witness to his catholicity and complete openness towards all religions.

This book is an attempt towards revealing a small segment of his life that most people are unaware of and, need to appreciate.

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[2] Simone de Beauvoir, Force of Circumstance, 1952–1962. Paragon House, New York, 1992.

CHAPTER 1

Religious Crossings: Gandhi and his Christian Friends

During the 1920s to the 1940s, a fairly large number of western men and women were drawn to India or Gandhi or to both. Some were members of movements which shared an aversion to industrial civilization and to the loss of humanity in personal relationships that resulted from increased materialism. Others felt nostalgia for a pre-capitalist society and some were committed socialists. They ranged from pacifists, advocates of women's rights, and enthusiasts who had rediscovered nature and the care of the body through natural therapy.

There were founders of rural communes where new social relations could be experimented with, proto-ecologists, and many small movements against industrial activity that destroyed the earth. Some of their inspiration came from Thoreau and Emerson who were pioneer thinkers and leaders in simple living. Gandhi himself had been deeply influenced by their writings.

Gandhi's body, photographed a thousand times inspired famous world photographers such as Cartier-Bresson and Margaret Bourke-White. Gandhi's minimal clothing as a way of identifying with the poor was striking to the western imagination. With images of the Christ and Saint Francis of Assisi dominant in the mind of the West Gandhi was equated with them. For instance, Romain Rolland's biography of Gandhi.[3]

As a matter of fact, the portrait of a Christ like Gandhi was first seen in Gandhi's biography written by Reverend Joseph

[3] Romain Rolland, *Mahatma Gandhi* (1923).

Doke, an English Baptist clergyman sympathetic to the cause of Indians in South Africa.[4]

Doke presented his encounter with Gandhi as a true spiritual experience and compared him to Jesus. After Doke, a Unitarian pastor, John Haynes Holmes, played a role in furthering this comparison. Holmes was a leading figure of Liberal Protestantism in the United States. He delivered a sermon in the Unitarian Church in New York in 1921 and said: 'When I think of Gandhi, I think of Jesus Christ. He lives his life; he speaks his word; he suffers, strives and will someday nobly die for his, for his kingdom upon earth.'[5]

Holmes saw in Gandhi almost a saviour, a new messiah. Throughout his life he was an active propagandist of Gandhi's ideas in the U.S.A.

However, it was Romain Rolland's biography of Gandhi which had the greatest impact. It was published in 1923 when Rolland's prestige was at its peak and it gave Gandhi's ideas a world presence. It was translated into many languages and had several reprints. Rolland's searing critique of the great butchery of the 1914-18 war made him the keeper of the conscience of the world in the West. His writing was thus, enormously influential.

Rolland likened Gandhi to Saint Francis of Assisi and drew a picture of Gandhi embodying Christ like simplicity. Comparing Gandhi with Tolstoy, Rolland wrote that Tolstoy was Christian by his will, while Gandhi was Christian by nature, in the universal sense.

In the context of the European intelligentsia's overwhelming preoccupation with peace in the post-war churning of ideas and minds steeped in Biblical references, Gandhi as a Messiah and Christ-like figure became a prominent motif throughout Anglo-Saxon Protestant Christendom, particularly in the United States.

Fewer Catholics were sympathetic to Gandhi but a prominent

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[4] J.J. Doke, *M.K. Gandhi: An Indian Patriot in South Africa* (1909).

[5] *Sermons of John Haynes Holmes*, edited by H.T. Mazumdar (Ahmedabad, 1982).

follower was Lanza del Vasto, a French citizen of Italian origin who became the main propagator of Gandhi-ism in France. His narration of his encounter with Gandhi in 1936, sold 200,000 copies at the time of the German occupation of France – a very high figure for the period.[6] On Gandhi's assassination, at a meeting of his French following, Lanza del Vasto observed that they ought to seek ground for hope in the tragedy and compared him to Jesus Christ. Both men died violent deaths, as befits men of non-violence.

The French Journal *Espirit*, the vehicle of circles of 'Progressive Catholicism' in France gathered French admirers of Gandhi and enlarged his appeal.

In England where he was anathema to the English ruling class, his supporters and admirers were mostly Quakers and generally Protestants. Several committed Christians of deep faith, and belonging to various denominations, also had fairly close relations with Gandhi in England, South Africa and India. Their friendships were cordial despite differences in their understanding on matters of belief and religion. But none were closer to Gandhi and in the eyes of the colonial authorities, as notoriously supportive of Indian nationalism as Charles Freer Andrews and Verrier Elwin. Both came to India as missionaries, both were from middle class England and that same Oxford and Cambridge educated elite that provided the bulk of the imperial administrators.

Religious Boundaries and Crossings

C.F. Andrews was a missionary and an Anglican clergyman. He was active in nationalist activities and in writing on Indian nationalism besides being a close friend of Gandhi. That however is the extent of common knowledge regarding Andrews. Thus, only those who have read of Gandhi and his close friendship with Andrews know more about their relationship.

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[6] J.J. Lanza del Vasto, *Pelerinage aux Sources*, Paris, 1943. For all references to Lanza del Vasto see Claude Markovits, *The Un-Gandhian Gandhi*.

Similarly, Verrier Elwin, a friend and follower of Gandhi was a missionary who decided to throw in his lot with the Indians fighting for freedom and with the Gandhian movement. He was involved in political activity in support of nationalists in India before moving on to work among the tribes of central and later north-eastern India. He is even less familiar than Charlie Andrews to Indian scholars of history.

As my focus is on the religious crossings and boundaries between Gandhi and these two missionary friends of his, I intend to bypass nationalism and political activity unless it has a bearing on their discussions on religious issues. I will also not go into what Gandhi really meant or said differently from time to time. What is germane to the discussion, are the differences and agreements between the friends on issues of religion and how they understood each other in the first place. It is thus, that we can discern the religious boundaries between them and the crossings to each others' faiths.

Charlie and Mohan

Let me first explain why this account of Gandhi and Andrews is titled Charlie and Mohan. It is a little known fact that in all their correspondence both men addressed each other by first names. The letters they exchanged were to 'Dearest Mohan' and 'My very dear Charlie' and were signed off 'with deepest love Mohan' and 'your most loving Charlie'.

More significantly, throughout his life the only person who called Gandhi Mohan was Charlie Andrews. In his book, *Mahatma Gandhi: His Life and Ideas,* Andrews gives us what he terms as Gandhi's 'most recent definition of his own Hindu faith. But before that he authoritatively wrote of the Aryans and the ancient caste system and so on clearly based on the given scholarship of the day as also the popular beliefs and self-projections that many Hindu interlocutors imparted to him. Thus, many shibboleths of the time were repeated and not by him alone.

The essentialisation of 'Hinduism' was common to a range of commentators from Pandit William Jones to Sarvepalli Radhakrishna, from T.S. Elliot to Somerset Maugham. All inherited the ideas current in the nineteenth century with what was known as the 'discovery of Hinduism' by the western scholars. There were laudatory commentaries such as Jones or derogatory treatises written by scholarly missionaries. Both were essentialisations of a religion that sparked off either wholesale adoption of the 'glories' of Hinduism or angry apologias as the case may be.

This essentialisation was not only a function of assumptions and intellectual constructs but, on the part of many Indians, it was the result of deep-rooted anxiety that sought authenticity. This was the case with the Arya Samaj in whose Gurukul near Haridwar Charlie and Sushil Rudra (the son of the Christian Principal of St. Stephen College) spent time trying to dialogue with members of the Arya Samaj.

There were also questions such as: who is a real Hindu, real Christian, a real Muslim that were a corollary to this search for the authentic self as was the case with Gandhi. (In the twentieth century we have had the modern religion of 'Marxianity' asking similar questions of authenticity: who is a real Marxist?)

Gandhi on his part had continuous discussion with not only Charlie but a wide spectrum of people belonging to various religions on who was a real Hindu, Muslim or Christian. In today's world, when we discuss 'really existing socialism' we counter-pose it to the theory and original conceptions to which socialists would claim allegiance. Likewise for Gandhi what was 'real' was the original theory that was claimed by the exponents of the faith and the falsity lay in adherents of a corrupted belief system. This was in his view true of all faiths though he refused to comment overmuch on other than what was known as 'Hinduism'. Existing Hindu practices in many spheres of belief were condemned but considered later day distortions from pristine beliefs to which he strove to live up to. Thus, his faith was upheld by him as superior to his critical faculties. He became

the 'real' Hindu against the 'fallen' ones though he believed in very little of what was being practiced by the majority of his professed Hindu compatriots.

In a talk that he delivered to the Christian missionaries in July 1925,[7] Gandhi claimed that: 'Hinduism *as I know it* entirely satisfies my soul, fills my whole being, and I find solace in the *Bhagwad Gita* and *Upanishads* that I miss even in the Sermon on the Mount. Not that I do not prize the ideal presented therein; not that some of the precious teachings in the Sermon on the Mount have not left a deep impression upon me; but I must confess to you that when doubt haunts me, when disappointments stare me in the face, and when I see not one ray of light on the horizon, I turn to the *Bhagwad Gita* and find a verse to comfort me; and I immediately begin to smile in the midst of overwhelming sorrow. My life has been full of external tragedies, and if they have not left any visible and indelible effect on me, I owe it to the teachings of the *Bhagwad Gita*.' And yet most commentators have remarked upon how Gandhi's version of the *Gita* was too sharp a departure from orthodox Hindu thinking and practice of the time.[8] In any case, Gandhi's own introduction to the Gita *had* been in English when he read Edwin Arnold's *The Song* Celestial in London as a young man.

He told his audience that he, 'did not stop studying the Bible and the commentaries and other books on Christianity that my friends placed in my hands; but I said to myself that if I was to find my satisfaction through *reasoning* I must study the scriptures of other religions also and make my choice.' The critical word here is 'reasoning' as opposed to the emotional cocoon of home, family and culture which had the resources to as he said satisfy his soul and fill his whole being.

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[7] M.K. Gandhi, *Address Delivered to the Christian Missionaries*, YWCA, Calcutta, July 28, 1925. (Quoted by C.F. Andrews, *Mahatma Gandhi: His Life and Ideas*, Jaico Publishing House, 2009, p. 40, first published in 1930.)

[8] Marc Edmund Jones, *Gandhi Lives*, David McKay Co., Philadelphia, 1948, p. 147.

He went on to say that he turned to the Koran, tried to understand Judaism and studied Zoroastrianism and then 'I came to the conclusion that all religions were right, and every one of them imperfect because they were interpreted with our poor intellects, sometimes with our poor hearts, misinterpreted.' In all religions I found to my grief that there were various and even contradictory interpretations of some texts, and I said to myself, 'Not these things for me. If I want the satisfaction for my soul I must feel my way.'[9]

This appeal to feeling, to emotion, to the heart according to Gandhi came to him with great force in his early studies of the Bible. It seized him immediately when he read the passage: 'Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all other things will be added to you.' He felt that to act up to the spirit of this passage was to do the moral scavenger's work, so as to clean and purify one's heart, and then Jesus and in fact any other great teacher would occupy one's heart. 'The culture of the mind', he held 'must be subservient to the culture of the heart'.[10]

Gandhi's definition of his own Hindu faith as quoted in Andrews was as follows (and I quote verbatim):

I call myself a Sanatani Hindu because

1. I believe in the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Puranas, and all that goes by the name of Hindu scriptures, and therefore in Avataras (divine incarnations) and rebirth.
2. I believe in Varnashrama Dharma in a sense strictly Vedic, but not in its present popular and crude
4. I do not disbelieve in 'idol-worship'.
5. I believe implicitly in the Hindu aphorism that no one truly knows the scriptures who has not attained perfection in Innocence (Ahimsa), Truth (Satya),

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid., M.K. Gandhi, Address at a Christian College, Colombo, titled 'The Place of Jesus', p. 56.

and Self-control (Brahmacharya), and who has not renounced all acquisition or possession of wealth.

6. I believe, along with every Hindu, in God and His Oneness, in rebirth and salvation.

The big difference between Andrews and Gandhi would have to be on the question of the caste system. Charlie Andrews was appalled at the conditions of life of the poor and 'low' castes. His experience of ministering to impoverished workers in London had convinced him it was only through the poor that he could redeem himself as a Christian. Both Gandhi and he shared this engagement with the poor and helpless but the issue of working to abolish the caste system saw their conceptual differences emerge.

For Andrews the abolition of caste divisions was an urgent duty of all who served God through ministering to the poor. For Gandhi caste in its distorted form was to be opposed but he put forward the pristine purity of the original concept which he interpreted as a division of labour. The obvious contradiction in his hereditary argument was in his own life: he had not followed any such hereditary principle himself. Moreover it was galling for all those who prided themselves on their modernist perspectives, education and lifestyles to accept this kind of Varna argument. Added to this modernity was the radicalism of some young nationalists such as Nehru who were to later express severe criticism of this kind of discourse and distance themselves from it.

However, there were no leaders of the Indian National Congress including Jawaharlal Nehru who saw the urgency of a campaign for social reform and anti-caste movements. In fact Nehru expressed annoyance at Gandhi's 'Harijan' movement and the campaigns for temple-entry as diverting the anti-imperialist movement.

Andrews on the other hand, much before he met or discussed the issue with Gandhi, was preoccupied with the 'social question' that needed to be addressed in India.[11] Clearly,

[11] M. Sykes, CFA's comment on Naoroji, p. 66.

Andrew's staunch support of nationalist politics that led him to attending the Congress session at Calcutta was frustrated by the Congress utter neglect of caste issues.

Andrews, as a member of the Cambridge Brotherhood, had mobilized his Christian colleagues and students who were a small minority in St. Stephen's at the time to work among the Chamar and Chuhra castes around their neighbourhood on a regular basis. When some Hindu students joined his initiative Andrews felt the task of nursing the sick was the best route to breaking caste. This work had convinced him of its immense value. Years later when Gandhi launched his anti-Untouchability movement Andrews was his chief supporter.[12]

However, just as Andrews position on racism was that it was a 'Christian problem' and it was for Christians to make reparation and fight the racists within the fold, Gandhi also maintained that caste inequities generally but 'untouchability' in particular was a problem for caste Hindus and the battle within had to be waged by Hindus themselves. The intervention of the missionary was not the way to move forward as Hindus would be antagonistic even if they sympathised with the motive of service and condemned caste taboos. This attitude of Gandhi's was reinforced by what Sushil Rudra, the Indian Christian Principal of St. Stephen's had discussed with Andrews when Rudra launched his National Missionary Society.

Charlie was metaphorically baptized into acceptance of the complexity of Indian problems in the first few years of his stay in St. Stephen's.[13] And yet, he was a man of a different cast of mind: Utopian and idealistic as some would have called him, but *above* all painfully sincere. His ideas were iconoclastic: his first book *North India (1906)* was constructed around the theme of interracial friendship in the life of the missionary. His second book The *Rennaissance in India (1912)* was a sympathetic survey of contemporary Hindu and Muslim reform movements (his editor edited out some of the sympathy). The generally

[12] Ibid, pp. 67-68.

[13] Ibid, pp. 62-63.

hostile reaction in the mission community to Andrews' writings became explosive when he wrote a series of articles advocating interracial marriage among Christians.[14]

Andrews befriended and became close to Sadhu Sundar Singh, whom he projected as the model for a Christian ministry in India so as to encourage an 'authentic Indian theology'. He also published extracts from the writings of Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya that were barely known at the time.[15]

There was thus, not only a proclivity towards the appreciation of an 'Indian theology' and the aspiration to promote an 'Indian Church' on Andrews part but also a Gandhi-like concern to carry large numbers of people towards a new vision. In 1907, Bishop Whitehead initiated a debate about the missionary significance of Colleges like St. Stephens which admitted the children of elite Indians and had a minority of Christians belonging to poor families. Andrews argued that though they produced few conversions, they provided opportunities to influence 'the educated classes' in the shaping of the emerging nation. A 'Church of the poor' would be, in his view, a vital but later priority.[16] Andrews found strong support among the educated and independently minded Indian Christians, chief among whom was Sushil Rudra who was appointed the Principal of St' Stephen's in 1907. Several of the younger missionaries were inspired and encouraged by Andrews' ideas (though, unlike him, they were not active in support of Indian nationalism) were in favour of Rudra's appointment.

Andrew's role as an activist in the Indian national movement invited the annoyance and disapproval of the majority of missionaries and North Indian Christians as well at the time. It is only post-colonial Christianity that has characterized his life as exemplary. Confronted with widespread criticism of his friendships and involvements, and his own increasing discomfort at the Churches' close identification with imperial

[14] Dan O'Connor, op. cit. p. 104.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid.

power, Andrews decided to resign from his missionary appointment. He threw in his lot with the nationalists, seeing this as an opportunity to bear a Christian witness within the 'political nation'.[17] His views were expressed forcefully and decisively: there was a contradiction between 'European racial arrogance' and 'the vision of Christ, the meek and lowly Son of Man', he said. He concluded that 'the West' was in a state of virtual apostasy, worshipping only 'Money and Race', while the meek and lowly Christ was outside the Church among the little group of Indian passive resisters fresh from prison. In a sermon in Lahore Cathedral in 1914 he openly declared his decision to disengage from the Church with its imperial associations and spoke of his vision of a coming Church of the Poor. He then resigned from the SPG.[18] He was to return to his calling in the Church towards the end of his life.

Andrews worked very hard to liaise between British officialdom, both in England and India, and Gandhi and the other Congress leaders. And that he was listened to is clear, from the confidence with which he wrote of his mediatory role to Gandhi on various issues. For instance, in a letter to Gandhi as he was on his way to England he wrote: 'There is only one single anxiety that I have still – that Muhammadan question, – but I am convinced even that will be settled. When I get to England I shall put sheer terror into the Colonial Office: but I do not think a veto will be needed. People understand this time and everyone I have spoken with agrees with your proposal.'[19]

Gandhi and Christianity

Describing his mother's character, Gandhi highlighted her family background of the Pranami sect – a sect that combined the teachings of Islam and Hinduism and enjoined equal reverence

[17] Ibid., p. 105.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Andrews to Gandhi, February 26, 1914, Sabarmati Archives, Image 005943-0001.

for the Koran and Hindu scriptures. She was unaffected by religious prejudice of any kind, she was saintly and devout, led an austere life with an endless chain of fasts and other forms of self-denial.[20] Clearly, this description carried within it all the ideals that Gandhi was to uphold later for himself. They left an indelible, mark on his head and heart and a sense of moral consciousness without any apparent religiosity.

Quite the dandy as an Indian student in London, Gandhi was not preoccupied with any religious thoughts and affiliations but a painful desire to impress and merge with high society. In fact, he was an agnostic verging on atheism as he was to remark later.

Sachchidanand Sinha gives us a description of Gandhi from this time:[21]

> He was wearing a high silk top hat burnished bright, a Gladstonian collar, stiff and starched; a rather flashy tie displaying almost all the colours of the rainbow under which there was a fine striped silk shirt. He wore as his outer clothes a morning coat, a double-breasted vest, and dark striped trousers to match and not only patent leather boots but spats over them.

His mind was awakened to religious ideas after he befriended a couple of theosophists. With them he read Edwin Arnold's *The Song Celestial*. This was his first exposure to the *Bhagavad Gita*.

Gandhi's first biographer, Reverend Joseph Doke, was the Pastor of the Baptist church in Johannesburg. His book on Gandhi titled *An Indian Patriot in South Africa* has a chapter on Gandhi's religious views. Doke writes 'Mr. Gandhi's religious views, and his place in the theological world, have naturally been a subject of much discussion here. A few days ago I was told that "he is a Buddhist". Not long since, a newspaper described

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[20] Pyarelal, Mahatma Gandhi: The Early Phase, Ahmedabad, 1965, p. 180.

[21] Quoted in B.R. Nanda, Mahatma Gandhi: A Biography, New Delhi, 1968.

him as "a Christian Mohameddan" an extraordinary mixture indeed. Others imagine that he worships idols, and would be quite prepared to find a shrine in his office, or discover the trunk of Gunputty (sic) projecting from among his books. Not a few believed him to be a theosophist. I question whether any system of religion can absolutely hold him. His views are too closely allied to Christianity to be entirely Hindu; and too deeply saturated with Hinduism to be called Christian, while his sympathies are so wide and catholic, that one would imagine he has reached a point where the formulae of sects are meaningless.'[22]

Sonja Schlesin, who had been Gandhi's Secretary in his law office in Johannesburg, received a letter from him in 1927 that was rather revelatory of his ongoing religious explorations. He wrote 'I quite agree with you that karma and the cross may well go together. If you have followed the pages of *Young India* you must have noticed that last year I read the New Testament every Saturday to the students of our National College. I did stumble over the words "without a cause"[23] and in explaining it I simply rejected the thing as redundant. But I was agreeably surprised on turning to Moffat's and Weymouth's translations which I had by me to make the discovery that you made. In reading all religious works, I have learnt one thing. Never to take them literally, but to understand the drift and catch the drift also by means of what is to me an infallible canon of interpretation, and reject those which cannot stand the test of Truth and Ahimsa. I know that even in spite of this canon of interpretation difficulties do arise; but they are solved if one has patience and if one has a living faith in God.'[24]

Of course, Gandhi's God was one of his own making and he was quoted as maintaining that: 'Now and then God is

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[22] Joseph J. Doke, M.K.Gandhi, *An Indian Patriot in South Africa*, Akhil Bharat Sarva Seva Sangh Prakashan, Rajghat, Varanasi (U.P.) p. 142 First published in 1909 by The London Indian Chronicle.

[23] St. Mathew verse: 22.

[24] George Paxton, *Sonja Schlesin: Gandhi's South African Secretary*, Pax Books, Glasgow, Scotland, 2006, p. 35.

incarnated on earth to redeem the world. His incarnation need not necessarily be in human form.... He may be manifest in an abstract principle or in an ideal which uplifts the world...His latest incarnation is in the 'Gospel of Swadeshi'.[25]

The Campaign against 'Untouchability'

The Reverend Stanley Jones, an American missionary, asked Gandhi: 'Why do you restrict the movement to the removal of untouchability only? Why not do away with the caste system altogether?' Stanley Jones commented that in his answers Gandhi would at times come close to practically abandoning it but then would return to defending an underlying conception of castes as *varnasharam*, as so many trade guilds, and as a social institution quoting W.W. Hunter the colonial official and anthropologist.[26]

Jones remarked: 'It seemed that he was defending caste but in his heart of hearts I do not think he believes in caste. It is a pity that he has to be a politician at the very moment of his dealing with this great human problem. I wish he could face the matter without the necessity of bringing caste Hinduism along with him.' Dr. Ambedkar was present during the conversation and Jones concluded that: 'I think Dr. Ambedkar is right about the matter and that Gandhiji in the end will come to the position that caste itself must go.'[27]

Andrews was present during this meeting and this was certainly one area where Charlie despite his great love and personal bond with Mohan felt much closer to the position of Jones.Gandhi's Fasts and Andrews' reactions revealed his inner feelings.

Gandhi's great fast of 21 days in 1924 was against the ongoing civil war that was going on between Hindus and Muslims in parts of India. Andrews was by Gandhi's side during

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[25] Quoted by D.B.Kalelkar, *Gospel of Swadeshi*, Madras, 1922, p. 19.

[26] Marc Edmund Jones, op.cit. p. 64.

[27] Ibid., p. 67.

the three weeks of what is known as the Delhi Fast and in fact, was constantly in the room where Gandhi lay. Andrews saw the event as the method of the Cross truly working when the fomenters of strife and massacre got together to create amity. As he broke his fast Gandhi asked Charlie to sing the Christian hymn 'As I survey the wondrous Cross'. Andrews told his friends repeatedly that he had come into direct contact with the efficacy of the method of the Cross at this time.[28]

However, when Gandhi undertook fasts 'unto death' in 1932 and 1939 Andrews was strongly opposed to them. He described them as 'morally repulsive'. The fast in 1932 that Gandhi began while in prison was in his own words to bring the caste Hindu and 'untouchable' leaders to an agreement in their attitude to the communal franchise that the government had imposed. Charlie was frank in his opposition to the fast as 'an unwarrantable use of moral compulsion which was not truly "non-violent" in conception. It could just as easily be used by reactionaries to force through a reactionary policy.'[29]

Andrews had participated whole-heartedly and tirelessly in the campaign against 'Untouchability' that Gandhi had launched in 1920. He and Gandhi shared the conviction that the Non-cooperation movement against foreign rule would be illogical and hypocritical so long as 'Harijans' were humiliated and despised by their own countrymen.

Till he met Gandhi in 1906, Andrews was critical of Dadabhai Naoroji's presidential speech at the Calcutta session of the Indian National Congress for ignoring social issues. Andrews' criticism was on the utter neglect by the political class of the social divisions and in-egalitarianism which he said were 'the real crux of self-government'. In 1920, he again linked these two themes in a letter to the *Indian Daily News* with an endorsement from Gandhi who wrote that 'the devil of untouchability' must

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[28] Ibid., p. 75.

[29] D.L. Clark, 'C.F. Andrews: Deenbandhu, A Life Sketch', *The Vishvabharati Quarterly, Andrews Number*, Editor: Sisirkumar Ghose, Vol.36, Numbers 1 to 4, 1970-1971, p. 41.

be fought with the same ardour as the struggle against foreign rule, and that *Swaraj* must never be bought 'at the cost of the depressed classes'.[30]

Nevertheless, Andrews felt that as an Englishman there were Indian practices which he could neither accept nor condone, and he never hesitated to say so. As a Christian, he argued he regarded the material world as intrinsically 'good'; it was the work of a loving Creator and intended for human use and enjoyment. He challenged Gandhi's views on celibacy and the 'purification' and spiritual effect of fasting. This drew from Gandhi the affectionate retort, 'You are very English in that!'[31]

He could not tolerate social injustice and the deprivation of the 'untouchables' which truthfully in his eyes was of greater significance and figured much larger than the Independence movement itself. To Andrews, the removal of 'Untouchability' was the touchstone by which to judge the sincerity of the nationalists. If this crying evil, he held, could not be removed from the national life by India's own people, he had no further interest in Independence for its own sake, and he went so far as to remind Gandhi himself of this basic essential.[32]

Andrews in the true spirit of an all-out reformer, saw caste as the heart of the problem in India. Both he and Gandhi agreed that political freedom and economic regeneration must be accompanied by the abolition of caste distinctions. But where Gandhi saw caste as the problem of 'Hindu India' which Hindus themselves had to redeem and make reparation for, in Andrews mind 'Independence can never be won if the millions of the untouchables remain still in subjection...India cannot be India to you, the India of your dreams, and of my dreams also, if she does not give *Swaraj* to her own depressed classes.'[33]

The primacy for the abolition of caste that Andrews put forward can be juxtaposed with the nuanced approach that

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[30] Chaturvedi and Sykes, op cit. p. 45.

[31] Clark in the Andrews Number, op cit., p. 48.

[32] Ibid., p. 49.

[33] Chaturvedi and Sykes, p. 166.

Gandhi offered as explanation to his friend. The sense of Gandhi's position was the necessity to take along not only all the active nationalists but also the wider Hindu society. As Stanley Jones had remarked that it was a pity that Gandhi had to be a politician while confronting the caste problem.

Andrews could see the conundrum and thus, reconciled himself to Gandhi's role as a political leader alongside his campaigns and agenda for reform. Interestingly, it was Andrews who met with the Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald and tirelessly pursued other key figures in the India Office in London to get the government to give up the communal award for depressed classes. He successfully extracted a promise from the government that if an agreement could be reached in India over the Harijan question, London would accept it. This cleared the way for the 'Poona Pact', and its acceptance by the government that followed; and Gandhi was able to break his fast. Andrew's biographers write, 'It is very possible that nothing but the intensity of Andrew's planned, sustained, and concentrated work saved Gandhi's life.'[34]

When Andrews first came to India and began teaching at St Stephen's College, he and Sushil Rudra, the Principal with whom he had established a deep and close friendship jointly transformed the College. They not only erased its foreignness and introduced Indian themes for study but abolished the separate hostels that had been established for Christian students. Abolishing social difference was his passion.

The personal bond and closeness that existed between Andrews and Gandhi emerges beautifully in a letter Andrews wrote from aboard the *S.S. Britain*. He had just said goodbye to Gandhi, regretting greatly that he had been kept so busy that he did not get enough time with him and cherishing the days they had spent together. Andrews wrote: 'It was so like you to be occupied in dear acts of service for my voyage up till the last, taking from me every burden, and "spoiling" me dreadfully with un-numbered acts of love! When I looked back afterwards and

[34] Ibid., p. 261.

thought of it all, and unpacked the things you had so carefully packed with your own hands, it all came back to me – your great love and devotion; and then as the sea-sickness came on I lay back and thought of it all – this new gift in my life which God had given me; and it made me so happy, Mohan, even when I was in utter physical misery, – just to think of it and remember it! There is something so utterly unmerited – a sense of utter unworthiness, – when love, true love, is given: and yet that very sense makes the joy and the wonder of it all the greater. I didn't quite know how much you had learnt to love me till that morning when you put your hand on my shoulder and spoke of the loneliness that there would be to you when I was gone....'

'On my side the overwhelming pressure of things to be done; I could hardly withdraw my mind from them even for a moment. And so my love for you (which was crying out for utterance) had to be suppressed up to that last minute on board. Then at last, the flood of personal love and the memory of you and all you had been to me came over me... and now I am longing and wondering how long it will be till we meet again at Bolpur.'[35]

The perspective of Zen Buddhism on doing basic work teaches that routine work is valuable in and of itself. Humbling yourself is a path to self-improvement in the Buddhist tradition. Any task undertaken mindfully can be a powerful form of meditation. No work is menial. As the famous Buddhist parable tells us, just by polishing a brick you cannot turn it into a mirror so doing Zazen day and night while sitting in one place cannot turn you into a Buddha.

It was this thought that was also at the core of Gandhi's philosophy. To make one's own cotton yarn and teach others to do the same and wear only home-spun clothes was a testament to his understanding of religion. His basic practice and teaching demonstrated the acquiring of spiritual power and strength through simplicity and finding nobility through work. This was

[35] Andrews to Gandhi, 26 February 1914, Sabarmati Archives, Image 005943-0001.

probably the reason why Tagore told Charlie Andrews that Gandhi was 'more a Buddhist than a Hindu'.

Gandhi would often speak like a self-help Guru: 'men often become what they believe themselves to be. If I believe I cannot do something it makes me incapable of doing it. But when I believe I can, then I acquire the ability to do it even if I didn't have it in the beginning.'

There are those who dismiss Gandhi with the Nietzcheian condemnation of the 'Christian value system and perspective' both during Gandhi's time and in our own contemporary world. Powerlessness became 'goodness' and 'humility', submission to people one hated 'obedience', claiming hatred was a defilement of the self and in Nietzche's phrase, 'not-being-able-to-take-revenge' turned into 'forgiveness'. Nietzche insisted that every feeling of weakness was overlaid with a sanctifying name, and made to seem 'a voluntary achievement, something wanted, chosen, a deed, an accomplishment'.[36]

A common thread perhaps in the concept of inner strength can be seen in the perspectives of Gandhi and Aurobindo. The concept of '*Shakti*', to be generated for transformation of the world, is always translated as 'divine power'. This leads to confusion as 'divine' is mostly understood as 'Godly'. However, for Gandhi, as for Aurobindo, the energy that is concentrated in the Self (in Aurobindo's *Brahm*), is *Shakti*. It is 'divine' in the same sense as a poet describes a sunset as 'divine'. It is therefore, better to use the term *Shakti* for their exhortations to develop inner strength as describing the force of Energy that pervades the Universe, including our Self.

[36] Every Indian is familiar with the saying 'mazboori ka naam Mahatma Gandhi'; a pithy critique of Gandhian concepts of forgiveness, non-violence, and love as weaknesses in the idiom of Nietzhche's castigation of Christianity.

CHAPTER 2

Charlie Andrews and Gandhi

An autobiographical picture is never an isolated photograph; it is always a commentary.

– Vergilius Ferm

There are a few things perhaps more difficult to accomplish than to put oneself in sympathetic touch with a religion which is not one's own by birth-inheritance. The effort that has to be made is far more sustained than that of understanding a poem in a foreign tongue. There is a strangeness about every mood and tone of worship, as well as in the words of the sacred texts of Scripture and the revealed doctrines held to be orthodox.

– C.F. Andrews

Charlie Andrews and Mohandas Gandhi lived in an age so convulsed with rapid transitions materially, as well as in thought and practice. Besides, the storm and stress of a new world they found themselves out of sync with, they experienced the maelstrom of religious thought and action as well. Their respective confessional accounts of religious doubt, ferment and transformative spirituality transcended the theological and religious boundaries of their time.

They both contended in their own ways with the missionary enterprise of old, substituting it with their own 'new missionary' project; religion interpreted as an expression of the total culture, the rapprochement of Eastern and Western thought, classic Catholicity of sentiment and attitude in conflict with

the proclaimed elements of modernism. In sum, both men were engaged with a religious quest in an age of transition.

The friendship between Andrews and Gandhi was premised upon each remaining loyal to his own tradition, living their own faith, seeking to put it into practice, thus, laying the basis for mutual respect. Both men had a common interest in exploring each other's religion: Gandhi had been interested in Christian thought and Andrews in Hindu thought before they came together. They prefigured later day calls to dialogue by the great religions of the world. They had had many friends of other faiths before they befriended each other. But their friendship produced a deep realization of the inner diversity of different religious 'traditions' that were as a rule banded together in assertions of orthodoxy and monolithic tendencies. They were both equally critical of some aspects of their own tradition and appreciative of the other's.

Many in India, were familiarized to Christian thought by Gandhi's frequent quotation of the New Testament and the Christian Gospels. And the exemplary friendship between Andrews and Gandhi underscored the universal elements and values embedded in the 'religions' that they evolved for themselves transcending race, geography and history. The common thread of belief that tied the two friends together was their belief that people had to limit worldly ambition while conserving religion through the active pursuit of 'godly' religious ambition.[37] Both Andrews and Gandhi sought to demonstrate in their living practice how religion could function in a creative manner to erase their worldly competiveness. This was in contrast to the hostility of those who castigated Gandhi as anti-Hindu or accused Andrews of betraying Christianity.

Andrews wrote: 'The Hindu religion has been the greatest of all influences in shaping Gandhi's ideas and actions... His mother's influence as a devout and gentle Hindu saint, perpetually returns to his mind and conscience, making the fragrance of ancient Hindu texts so sweet that nothing else in

[37] M.K. Gandhi, *Indian Home Rule*, 1956, p. 30.

the world can compare with them, to his own imagination, in beauty and truth and sweetness.'[38] While Andrews' own source of faith, absolute devotion and commitment was Jesus Christ.

For Charlie Andrews, the source of his inspiration from which he drew his spiritual energy to engage in ceaseless and dynamic activity, was Jesus Christ. 'Only through the power of the spirit of Christ can the evils of the world be overcome,' was the bedrock of his faith. He writes, 'Simkovitch's remarkable essay, called "Towards the Understanding of Jesus", first opened my eyes'. Since reading that essay I have found the same thought which he there represents, worked out in many different ways, especially by the Quakers in their own ministry of reconciliation. In his stark simplicity, Mahatma Gandhi has taught me, more than any other living person, to face up to the true significance of the Sermon on the Mount – *not as an unpractical ideal, but as the most practical of methods of overcoming evil in this world*. Twenty-four years of entirely unbroken friendship has made me able to understand and appreciate his greatness.'[39]

They saw great beauty in each other's faith *in* the sense and form in which each practised it and that was considered by their orthodoxies as inauthentic at best and blasphemous at worst. It was not of course an unquestioned, uncritical acceptance of everything the other believed: Andrews description of Gandhi's 'fasts unto death' in 1932 and 1939 as 'morally repulsive' and Gandhi's critique of Andrews' faith in the Trinity were examples of disagreement despite love and trust in their relationship.

Andrews wrote of their first meeting in South Africa as a meeting of hearts: 'Our hearts met the first moment we saw one another and they have been united by the strongest ties ever since. To be with him was an inspiration that awakened all that was best in me and gave me a high courage, enkindled and

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[38] C.F. Andrews, *Mahatma Gandhi's Ideas*, Macmillan, New York, 1930, p. 60.

[39] See *Andrews' Religion* in this volume; also his full exposition of his beliefs in *What I Owe to Christ*.

enlightened by his own.'[40] Gandhi reciprocated the sentiment: 'Nobody, probably, knew Charlie Andrews as I did. When we met in South Africa we simply met as brothers and remained as such to the end. It was not a friendship between an Englishman and an Indian. It was an unbreakable bond between two seekers and servants.' Seekers of God and servants of humanity.[41]

Writing of their deep bond, Andrews said: 'Springing from a common concern for the poor and the downtrodden and the common faith in the ultimate power and reality of love, it had stood the test of much vehement disagreement over particular methods and policies and the long separation had only drawn closer the bonds of confidence and trust.'[42] Andrews enthusiastically hailed Gandhi's enunciation of *ahimsa* and *satyagraha* as born of a similar spirit as his own Christian inspiration: 'He put us Christians to shame; and his example had ever since set me seriously thinking. What he called *satyagraha* or Truth force was absolute Christian....'[43]

Explaining further what he implied by 'Christian' he wrote: 'What it means to be a Christian: not the expression of an outward creed, but rather the living of an inner life....I say this with a new emphasis. For I myself had formerly a narrow outlook, and I have been learning at last – painfully, eagerly, wistfully learning -to look first at the life rather than the creed. And as my outlook has widened I have found Christ in strange, unlooked for places, far beyond the boundary of sect or dogma, of Church or Chapel, of any formal definition of man's devising or of man's exclusive pride.'[44]

Gandhi's personality, in the midst of struggles in South Africa, appeared to Andrews as: 'so entirely "Hindu" and yet so "supremely Christian".' Many 'colour-ridden Christians'

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[40] Ibid.

[41] *Harijan*, April 19, 1940.

[42] B. Chaturvedi and Marjorie Sykes, *C.F. Andrews*, p. 199.

[43] C.F. Andrews, *What I Owe to Christ*, p. 250.

[44] C.F. Andrews, *Christ and Human Need*, pp. 86-87 (emphasis added).

in South Africa who 'brought racialism within the Christian Church' condemned Gandhi because he did not belong to the 'white race' said Andrews and determined to fight them by full support to Gandhi. He was an advocate of spiritual faith versus doctrine and saw 'the spiritual beauty which underlies Indian life'.[45]

Gandhi's adherence to the principle of 'living religiously', that was deeply imprinted on his heart by Tolstoy's *The Kingdom of God is Within You* with its teaching that the Sermon on the Mount was a sufficient guide to life, found an echo in Andrews' heart. He wrote: 'Whatever the West may say concerning the unpractical character of Christ's teaching, especially in the Sermon on the Mount, in India this is not felt to be true... in India there are those in villages who literally "take not anxious thought for the morrow" and pay no heed to food and raiment. They know from a long tradition the pathway of renunciation, and delight in following that road....'[46] Gandhi had always accepted, since his days in London and South Africa, an un-dogmatic Christianity, true to the spirit of Jesus: 'The Cross undoubtedly makes a universal appeal, the moment you give it an universal meaning in the place of the narrow one that is often heard at the ordinary meetings.' Moreover, said Gandhi, the Cross was not something to be believed in and subscribed to as a dogma but as something to be lived and borne in life and experience.[47]

Andrews was convinced of Gandhi's dominant motive being 'religious' even when he was engaged in political and social movements. Andrews' absolute commitment to Gandhi's struggles for independence and social reforms was due to his conviction that they both were moved by 'vital religious principles...(and) Independence, complete and perfect independence for India is

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[45] C.F. Andrews, *What I Owe To Christ*, pp. 228, 233.

[46] C.F. Andrews, *The Inner Life*, Hodder and Stoughton, 1939, pp. 29-30.

[47] C.F. Andrews, *Mahatma Gandhi's Ideas*, p. 250; Young India, November 24, 1927.

a religious principle with me because I am a Christian.'[48] That was no barrier between the friends: 'In all my intimate talks with Mahatma Gandhi, amid many divergences and shades of contrast, I have never felt that there was any difference between us with regard to this ultimate belief. To both of us this belief in God is as certain and immediate as our own personal existence.'[49]

Much before he admired Gandhi 'the Hindu', Andrews was, according to himself, driven as a Christian seeker after truth to confront 'the new religious atmosphere, as it came streaming in on every side'[50] when he arrived in India. From a missionary perspective, Andrews moved into observation of the religious life of the Hindus from close quarters. An enthusiastic personality led him to a study of the various forms of Hinduism and he wrote *The True India* – considered by many – almost a defence of Hindu beliefs. He defended himself against other missionaries by asserting that he had 'lived among the Hindus and witnessed the deep sincerity of their religious life'. He continued: 'My own personal experience has been that in every part of the problem of existence, the final mystery of God, the inner discipline of the soul have a larger place in the thoughts of living men and women than anywhere else in the world. There is also a greater readiness on the part of some at least to abandon everything that man holds dear in search of the inner truth, when the voice within commands. Religion reigns supreme.'[51]

Andrews considered it his 'Christian duty' to recognise the 'noble elements' in Hinduism: 'As we wish the East to appreciate us, so we ought to seek with all our hearts to appreciate the East. Surely this is the Golden Rule....'[52] While he was eager to discover 'the spiritual insights which quickened the Hindus

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[48] Chaturvedi and Sykes, *C.F. Andrews*, p. 166.

[49] C.F. Andrews, *Mahatma Gandhi's Ideas*, p. 34.

[50] CFA, *What I Owe to Christ*, pp. 140-1.

[51] CFA, *The True India*, pp. 69, 30.

[52] Ibid., p. 23.

down the ages' he was equally sensitive to, what he and Gandhi argued, 'the evils that had crept into Hinduism.' Andrews could see clearly how easy it was for many Protestant missionaries to 'pass harsh judgement on Hindus as immoral because of their genuine hatred for all forms of idol-worship and certain rituals and practices.' He wanted to present the religion of the Hindus 'in the proper perspective' unlike 'those foreigners who after a cold-weather visit to India went back to the West to exaggerate in glaring colours these evils before the world with no sense of proportion and with no presentation of the other side of the picture.'[53]

Andrews declared that as his own religious life emerged out of a 'spiritual experience', he could fathom the religious tradition of the Hindu: 'When I went deep into the heart of India, I found the whole emphasis to be laid on the realization of God inwardly and spiritually within the soul. There was no less awe than in the West, but it was of amore inward character. This, when fully grasped, brought me nearer to St. John's Gospel than the ordinary Western teaching. It meant that not only Christ could say "I and my Father are One", but that we as God's children, in all reverence could say this also.' Further, he asserted that: 'The East regards the Eternal Divine Spirit Paramatman – moving within the soul of man as spaceless and timeless, yet He ever uses "time" and "space" as a garment of self-reveal-ment. He is un-manifest, yet he is mirrored by the pure in heart in the depth of the human spirit.'[54]

Andrews' enthusiasm could easily be dismissed as the product of a simplistic credulous mind. Also, his friendship with reformist Hindus influenced him in the eyes of Christian missionaries. Of course, close friends as they were, Gandhi and Tagore were great influences, but Andrews was and remained a devout Christian, though unorthodox just as his friends were unorthodox Hindus.

The approach he maintained was of a 'keen and sympathetic

[53] Ibid., pp. 16-30.

[54] CFA, *What I Owe To Christ*, pp. 139-40.

observation to appreciate the abundant spiritual heritage of the Hindus.' This task he sought to accomplish through the universal perspective on the history of religions. His study of the history of the Church, he said, made him aware that: 'Every religion had its period of growth and decline; periods of stagnation as well as regeneration. The Christendom of Pope Alexander VI and Caesar Borgia was wicked beyond all human belief and countenanced such utterly revolting customs as the burning alive of innocent people and the hideous tortures of the Inquisition. But just as the Christian Church underwent a reformation, so Hinduism today, owing to its great powers of revival is reforming itself from within.'[55]

Andrews was greatly inspired by Gandhi's movements for the removal of untouchability, for temple-entry. In fact, much before he befriended Gandhi and Tagore, he was a great supporter of the efforts of the Arya Samaj, Brahma Samaj, Ramakrishna Mission and other such reformist organizations and hailed them as movements of regeneration of Hinduism. He spent a lot of his time in conversation with Munshi Ram, the leader of aggressive Hinduism towards whom even a man like Gandhi was antipathetic, and claimed him as a dear friend. Andrews' perspective at that time, however, had been to underscore the commitment of the Arya Samaj to fight against the caste system and see it as moving closer towards remedying the social evils of Hinduism.[56] Munshi Ram's revivalist agenda was ignored by Andrews as mere dross in the gold of the former's character; 'he sought to reach out and emphasize and strengthen truth in his friend.' He believed that in the face of his affection 'the adherents of indigenous systems would gradually purge the evils and elevate the good practices...'[57]

Despite hostility towards Andrews' views in Christian circles and the antagonism of fellow Christian missionaries he was one of the earliest exponents of the method of directing

[55] Ibid., p. 26.

[56] See Jordens.

[57] J.S. Hoyland, C.F. Andrews, Minister of Reconciliation, p. 25.

attention to the best in other religious traditions: 'Christ is the reason of whom every race of men partakes; and those who live according to reason are really "Christians", even though they may be "atheists". Such were Socrates and Heraclitus among Greeks and others like them.... So whatever has been spoken well by any man, really belongs to Christians.'[58] This approach, he clearly stated, was to strive towards the 'Witness of God' in the non-Christian traditions: the 'true' Christian Andrews believed would be 'prepared to sit quietly at the feet of the leaders of India, and to learn from them in such a fashion that whilst learning he would also teach.'[59] As a result of this attitude of Andrews many Christians doubted his 'Christianity'. When he was accused of heresy and challenged to declare himself, he kept silent, but wrote to a non-Christian friend: 'If my deeds are not Christian no words will make me so.'[60]

Andrews was fascinated by the manner in which Indians responded to his own kinship and explication of the Gospel of St. John because of its 'deep mystical note' and similarity to *bhakti*. 'The world's great religious literature,' he wrote, 'has now been opened up to our gaze, and we find that this inner vision and these supreme moments of exaltation are not confined within the boundaries of Christendom. It is impossible, for instance, to read the vital spiritual experiences told by men and women in India, especially the religious folk-songs of the peasant mystics, without coming to that conclusion.'[61] Andrews importuned the missionaries: 'We have to recognize the same larger truth in our own day, in those deeply Eastern religious lands where the Father has been seeking His true worshippers all down the centuries. We must not limit our thoughts as though we ourselves alone were the objects of the love of the Universal Father of mankind.'[62]

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[58] CFA, *The True India*, p. 192.

[59] J. S. Hoyland, p. 20.

[60] Chaturvedi and Sykes, p. 104.

[61] CFA, *The True India*, p. 103.

[62] Ibid.

It is easy to see how and where Andrews and Gandhi discovered their unity of spirit that was expressed in a constant love and concern for each other when Andrews' writings proclaimed the catholicity of spirit that Gandhi craved.

Wrote Andrews: "God who rejoices in the praise of 'everything that hath breath' never intended us to be uniform in our higher spiritual things. Can we dream for a moment that our Heavenly Father would wish His children to praise Him according to a uniform plan when they seek to 'worship Him in Spirit and Truth?' 'God is a Spirit', said Jesus to the women of Samaria, 'and they that worship Him must worship Him in Spirit and Truth.' For, Jesus looked round on the multitude and cried, 'not by mere profession of God's name shall man find acceptance, but rather by living in His Spirit. And He will welcome, at the last, those who never knew Him at all and never called Him "Lord" but were ready humbly to do the will of God and to serve the least of his brethren.'[63]

Both Andrews and Gandhi thus, upheld the conviction that a truly sincere religious life did not separate people but brought them together.

Andrews, clearly, was chiefly in dialogue with the missionaries during the time he was writing *The True India*. He advocated the 'Christian duty' to recognise and 'experience the presence of the spirit of God, His radiant presence among men who are not Christians....' He advised the missionaries: 'If Christianity is to succeed, it must not come forward as an antagonist and a rival to the great religious strivings of the past, it must come as a helper and fulfiller. There must no longer be the desire to capture converts from Hinduism, but to come to her aid in the time of need and trouble, and to help her in the fulfilment of duties she has long neglected.'[64] Later, this method and approach was to become the rationale of the 'Rethinking Christianity' group in India.

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[63] Ibid.

[64] Chaturvedi and Sykes, *C.F. Andrews*, pp. 63, 311.

Under the influence of Gandhi, but pre-eminently due to Tagore – 'my Guru' – as Andrews called him, he begun to emphasize that: 'God had left Himself nowhere without witness' and that "the truth revealed to Hindus should be precious to Christians." He "believed with St. John that the Divine Logos 'lighteth every man".' Thus, Christ would be reinterpreted by studying the way in which 'in diverse parts and manners' that Logos illuminated the sages of India: 'My own ardent Christian faith is well known, and I long to share the joy of it with others. At the same time, in Christ's own teaching and in that of St. Paul I find it repeatedly written that the true Christian must pay tender regard to all that is pure and noble and lovely and of good report, wherever it may be found.... It is in the light of this teaching from my own scriptures that I have felt the inner compulsion to bear witness on behalf of what is true in Hinduism....'[65]

Andrews continued: 'Since I have learnt to know Christ afresh in this Eastern setting, it has been easy for me to point out the weakness of the portraiture, when his character has been depicted with only western ideals to draw from as though these comprehended the "fullness of Christ".... Christ has been not less central but more central and universal; not less divine to me, but more so, because more universally human. I can see Him as the pattern of all that is best in Asia as well as in Europe.'[66] Rather dramatically, Andrews wrote of how: 'The scales fell from my eyes, and I saw with a thrill of joy how all outer names and titles – all man-made institutions – were superseded in the light of one supreme test, love of God and love of man.'[67]

Both Andrews and Gandhi shared a deep commitment to the message of Jesus and the Gospel that enjoined upon them not to preach and teach with words but to live the life of love and service. Their lives had to be their message. However, there were openly stated differences between them on the issue of religious

[65] The True India, p. 192.

[66] CFA, *What I Owe To Christ*, pp. 136-137.

[67] Chaturvedi and Sykes, *C.F. Andrews*, p. 311.

conversion. Though Andrews was faithful to the belief that conversion from one religion to another was an 'inner spiritual' and not an 'outer organizational change of allegiance', he nevertheless, upheld seeking baptism in the Christian Church: 'I have longed above all else to make known what Christ Himself has made known to me. But that is rather through sharing with one another the joy of a religious experience than by imposing on anyone a religious dogma....'[68]

Andrews' account of his own 'conversion' as a youth of nineteen was not very different from Gandhi's 'conversion' from an ambitious young lawyer to a Ruskinian-Tolstoyan man. Andrews described how his father who was a Christian Minister talked to him of following the same religious vocation. Already sensitive to his own 'weaknesses', he tells us of his 'sense of sinfulness and unworthiness' became more intense after his conversation with his father. One evening, alone in his room, 'In the usual formal way, I had knelt down for a few moments at the bedside to say my evening prayer, when,... the strong conviction of sin and impurity came upon me with such over-powering strength that every shred of false convention was torn aside and I knew myself as I really was.... It was agonizing, alarming and unexpected, ...an anguish of spirit.'[69] The 'struggle' with himself 'went on, long into the night. At last a new and wonderful sense of peace and forgiveness came stealing into my life at its very centre, and the tears rushed out....' He continues: 'The chain of evil habit was broken' and 'I knew at that time without any doubt that Christ was my Saviour and Redeemer, and that His love had won my heart forever.'[70]

Andrews' turmoil and sense of 'sinfulness' – whatever his sins – resonate strongly with a similar account given to us by Gandhi in his autobiography.[71]

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[68] Ibid., p. 310.

[69] C.F. Andrews, *What I Owe To Christ*, pp. 39-40.

[70] Ibid.

[71] M.K. Gandhi, Autobiography, p. 13. The reference is to the well known account of Gandhi when he left his father who was critical and was on his deathbed to be with his wife.

Gandhi also had his own 'conversion', though not at that time, when his life was transformed through his encounter with the writings of Ruskin, Thoreau and Tolstoy. The metamorphosis he underwent in South Africa was no less a 'conversion'. The significant difference between him and Andrews was that Gandhi's was an intellectual conversion while the former's conversion was religious. This was where their difference lay. Gandhi was firmly opposed to 'religious conversion' of the kind that the Christian missions preached, for the inner transformation was complicated by 'external factors'.

At the end of an intense discussion between the two friends Andrews wrote to Gandhi: 'Your talk on religion yesterday distressed me, for its formula *All religions are equal,* did not seem to correspond with history or my own experience. Your declaration that a man should always remain in the faith in which he was born appeared to me not in consonance with such a dynamic subject as religion.'[72] Andrews agreed with Gandhi that conversion could not be acceptable for other than spiritual and intellectual reasons but he argued that there were times when such a change of faith was justified and necessary.

'Of course, if conversion means a denial of any living truth in one's own religion, then we must have nothing to do with it. But it is rather the discovery of a new and glorious truth for which one would sacrifice one's whole life. It does mean also, very often, passing from one relationship to another, and this should never be done lightly. But if the new fellowship embodies the glorious new truth in such a way as to make it more living and cogent than the old out worn truth, then I would say to the individual: "Go Forward".'

Christ is to me the unique way whereby I have come to God, and have found God, and I cannot help telling others about it whenever I can do so without any compulsion or undue influence. I honour Paul the Apostle when he says, 'Necessity is laid upon me. Woe is me if I preach not the Gospel.' I feel that the message that came into the world to proclaim is the most

[72] Chaturvedi and Sykes, p. 310.

complete and the most inspiring that was ever given to man. That is why I am a Christian. At the same time, I fully expect my friend Abdul Ghaffar Khan to make known the message of the Prophet, which is to him a living truth which he cannot keep to himself.

'I don't think it follows that we shall always be fighting as to whose "Gospel" is superior. There are clear-cut distinctions between Christians, Hindus and Muslims which cannot be today over-passed. But there is a precious element of goodness which we can all hold in common. St. Paul says: "Whatever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely and of good report... think on those things and the God of peace shall be with you." That seems to me to be a fine way towards peace in religion, without any compromise, syncretism or toning down of vital distinctions.'[73]

Andrews in 1910 had looked forward to a victory of the Christian faith in India and had written: 'The final victory of the Christian faith in India depends upon the spiritual power manifested in bringing about the union of the English and the Indian, as Christians; the union of the Brahmin and the Pariah, as Christians; the union of Hindu and Musalman, as Christians. Then and only then will the heart of India respond fully to the Christian message....'[74] Despite this early perspective Andrews was, a Christian admirer of his wrote, 'already at that time, thinking of Christianity primarily in the terms of spiritual power rather than ritualistic, organizational or social cohesion.'[75] However, his friendships with men like Gokhale, Swami Shraddhanand, and above all Gandhi and Tagore, made him extremely critical of the traditional Christian views of other religions. He denounced the 'battle-field analogies' and 'conquering attitude to other religions'. As his biographers put

[73] Ibid.

[74] Ibid., p. 63; The biographers quote from Andrews book *India in Transition*.

[75] Matthew P. John, Rector, Serampore College, in *The Visvabharati Quarterly*, p. 19.

it, 'India drove him to seek a new integration of theology and religious experience.'[76]

With his close contacts with Muslims and Hindus whose 'goodness and spirituality' he proclaimed his understanding of 'the right relationship between different religions' was rethought. On the one hand, he recognised the need for Church membership and spoke of: 'the growth of a roving unattached Christianity which does not recognise the primary Christian duty of Church membership at all' as a pressing danger in India.[77] On the other hand, he also conceived of an 'all-comprehensive Christianity', that would be 'larger far than the church of the baptised'. Andrews believed that: 'Christ, the Divine Head of Humanity, in whom all the races of mankind are gathered into One – these are the great truths which we must express in act as well as creed, if we are to meet the Hindu challenge. We may believe that the Internal Word was the Light of the Buddha and Tulsidas in their measure, even as He was, in so much greater a degree, the Light of Hebrew prophets. There are multitudes who have never heard the name of Christ, and yet have this light within them leading them to the Father.'[78]

The depth and simplicity of Andrews' faith and personal loyalty to Christ was not a barrier to his emotional bonds and perhaps the closest of all his relationships with Gandhi and Tagore. Andrews' lifelong loyalty and love for the two men, 'brother Gandhi' and 'guru Rabi', who for all their catholicity of thought were self-professed 'Hindus', thus, provides us with the key to his personality. Andrews opposed the idea put forward by Gandhi that he felt no need to believe in the historicity of Christ and that Jesus was for him one of the greatest spiritual teachers of mankind. He wrote with great humility that 'the harmonising tendency within Hinduism is infinitely to be preferred to the harsh bigotry of exclusiveness which Christians themselves have

[76] Chaturvedi and Sykes, p. 60.

[77] Chaturvedi and Sykes, p. 64.

[78] CFA, The Renaissance in India; Quoted in M.M. Thomas, The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance, pp. 275-6.

not seldom practised.'[79] However, Andrews said, for him God was manifest in Christ; God was incarnate in Christ: 'What the equation was which made God and Christ one in my innermost and deepest thoughts *I could not have explained at that time, nor could I give a logical explanation of it today* ... in Christ God Himself has become human and personal and real; His love has become human and personal also.'[80] Interestingly, this was exactly how Gandhi described his own emotional attachment to Hindu religion.[81]

Early in his career as a missionary, in 1911, Andrews addressed a Convention of Religions where he said: 'I am here as a Christian to tell you about the Lord I serve... the God Who is Love and so came Himself into the world. That is why we can never, we Christians, put our Lord on a level with any other prophet.'[82] In 1933, there were no comparisons with other prophets but nevertheless the commitment was unchanged. In his work *Christ in the Silence* he wrote that 'the Cross and Resurrection show Christ as the final answer to all our questionings because in his own isolation, He has gone deepest of all and has come through triumphant over sin and death.'[83] At the International Missionary Conference, Tambaram, in 1938, Andrews reiterated that after all the years 'spent in the East... Christ has become not less central but more central and universal. However, one has to go further – to the Cross itself.'[84]

Andrews' concept of Christ as the Divine Head of Humanity was not an intellectual theory but an emotional response: "One morning', says a reminiscence of Andrews', 'lying on a chair on the verandah, I saw in front of me the face of a man in a vision.

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[79] CFA, 'The Hindu View of Christ', in *International Review of Missions*, Vol. 28, 1939, p. 263.

[80] CFA, *What I Owe to Christ*, pp. 43-44. Emphasis added.

[81] C.F. Andrews, *Mahatma Gandhi's Ideas*.

[82] Chaturvedi and Sykes, p. 74.

[83] CFA, Christ in the Silence, p. 254.

[84] Quoted in Matthew P. John, *The Visvabharati Quarterly*, Andrews Number, p. 265.

It was that poor runaway coolie I had seen in Natal. As I was looking the face seemed to change in front of me and appeared as the face of Jesus Christ.' He expressed his emotion in a poem written in 1915 in which the indentured coolie crouched, back and arms scarred, like a hunted thing: 'All within me surged towards him/ while the tears rushed. Then a change/Through his eyes I saw Thy glorious face.'[85]

For Andrews, religion was nothing but the love of Christ – perhaps as for Gandhi, religion was nothing but Ram-Nam. The emotional charge in Andrews' religion is apparent: 'An experience has happened to me so frequently in India that I have no longer come to look upon it as anything strange or unaccountable. I can only describe it in the following manner. Continually, when I meet with new faces or am present at some new situation, the consciousness of the presence of Christ is borne upon me irresistibly. If I may dare to express what happens, it is as if I saw Christ in the faces of those I met or felt His presence in the midst.'[86] Thus, Andrews' God was a personal God and not an evangelical one; and though the ambiguity in simultaneously upholding the concept of church membership and the concept of a 'universally human' Christ that he saw in 'all that is best in Asia as well as Europe was ironed away.' Eventually, he agreed with Gandhi, one had to posit reverence for other religions and those who devoutly follow them. Additionally, Andrews 'recognised them as brothers in Christ'. His 'love for God' and 'love for my fellow-men become inseparably one.'[87]

Gandhi, on the other hand, had a rather intellectual conception of harmony between religions through the path of mutual respect and non-interference in the spiritual life of various individuals and communities: 'Mutual respect for one another's religion is inherent in a peaceful society. Free impact

[85] CFA, *The Indentured Coolie*, written at Simla, 1915. Quoted by Chaturvedi and Sykes.

[86] CFA, *What I Owe to Christ*, p. 79.

[87] CFA, *Christ in the Silence*, p. 81.

of ideas is impossible on any other condition.'[88] And in this context, Gandhi advised staying with the religion of one's birth and reforming it. In fact, Andrews recorded how during a time of crisis in his life when he left the Cambridge Mission Brotherhood, and some months later renounced the Anglican orders, Gandhi encouraged him, and regarded him as a true minister of Christ in the wider sphere of Christian service.[89]

There was an obviously different cultural and philosophical mindset, besides the more dispassionate personality of Gandhi as against the highly emotional Andrews that separated the manner in which Gandhi and Andrews would speak of religion and its expression in individuals. First, the acknowledgement by Andrews of the cultural difference, though expressed in the essential categories of East and West, had a core of observation rather than theory: the East's Paramatman, he said, 'is unmanifest, yet He is mirrored by the pure inheart in the depth of the human spirit. He is invisible, yet he is visible in great human souls. He is formless, yet He takes form in man.... But the West generally has believed in a transcendent rather than immanent God.'[90]

Gandhi's firm conviction that one had to remain within the religion of one's birth was rooted in a cultural argument: he maintained that the principal religions of the world were conditioned and moulded by specific historical, geographical and cultural milieu. The spirit of a people expressed itself in unique forms that were reflected in their religious experiences and ways of worship. Cultural differences were organic to individuals and communities and, thus, when he spoke of religions being equal he implied their being equally dear to those who profess them, not to all peoples regardless of differences. Nor did he want, he said, some sort of synthesis by adding together the best elements of different religious traditions. In fact, it was

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[88] *Young India*, December 22, 1927.

[89] CFA, What I Owe To Christ, p. 128.

[90] CFA, What I Owe To Christ, pp. 139-40.

desirable, according to him, to establish harmonious relations between different cultural and religious traditions by grasping the distinctive message of any religion. Establishing fellowship between and co-operation of diverse faiths was truly possible, in his view, by different belief systems entering into respectful and fruitful relationships with one another.[91]

Their imagery would at times be different-the result of different cultural moorings perhaps, but the spirit was united. In the 'many mansions' of the Father's house, declared Andrews, there was ample room for all – a Kabir or a Guru Nanak: 'The father's love for his children is broader than the measure of man's mind (for) did not Christ say "They shall come from the East and from the West and from the North and from the South and sit down in the kingdom of God."'[92]

For Gandhi, religion was like 'his own mother' who nourished and cherished his life and thus, aroused his greatest reverence. This Hinduism, 'was not an uncritical faith, an inheritance from ancestors but an intellectually appealing religion for him.' The Hinduism he proclaimed as his belief was 'a living organism liable to growth and decay'.[93] Though he had said that he was a *Sanatani* as he believed in the *Vedas, Upanishads*, and *Puranas* that went under the name of Hindu scriptures, he believed he was not restricted to any of them; even belief in the Vedas was secondary to direct experience. They were all different interpretations of the experience of the Divine, or different versions of the Truth and did not insist on uniformity of thought.

'The chief value of Hinduism,' Gandhi wrote, 'lies in holding the actual belief that all life (not only human beings but all sentient beings) is one, i.e. all life coming from one universal source call it Allah, God or *Parameshvara*... This unity of life is a peculiarity of Hinduism which confines salvation not only

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[91] *Harijan*, January 28, 1938.

[92] Chaturvedi and Sykes, C.F. Andrews, pp. 311-12.

[93] *Young India*, April 8, 1926.

to human beings alone, but says that it is possible for all God's creatures.'[94]

'I should reject it to be (Hinduism), if I found it inconsistent with my moral sense or my spiritual growth. On examination, I have found it to be the most tolerant of all religions known to me. Its freedom from dogma makes a forcible appeal to me in as much as it gives to the votary the largest scope for self-expression. not being an exclusive religion, it enables followers of that faith not merely to respect other religions, but it also enables them to admire and assimilate whatever may be good in other faiths.'[95]

Clearly, the wide spectrum of creeds and cults ranging from 'animism' to monism and monotheism that he encountered in the country, without any uniformity of thought or belief, helped Gandhi to formulate his appreciation for 'Hinduism as a living organism liable to growth and decay.' To his mind, he felt the faith left him free to draw inspiration from any source in his spiritual quest, gave him the right to interpret the ideologies within the tradition, referring to them as different visions of Truth and he quoted the *Bhagwad-Gita*: 'When one sees Me everywhere and everything in Me, I am never lost to him and he is never lost to me.' He was not an eclectic, Gandhi declared, but he upheld a 'broad faith – a faith based on broadest toleration of another's faith – while being firmly rooted in his own religious tradition.' It was by welcoming the enlightenment that came from another's viewpoint, and from freedom of thought and worship and a will towards mutual understanding that one could achieve the harmony he desired. The word he used was *sambhava* – its meaning in Gujarati being *sympathy:* 'I do not aim at fusion. Each religion has its contribution to make to human evolution.'[96] Of course, Gandhi said, 'I have nowhere said I believe in every word of any scriptures in the world; but it

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[94] *Harijan*, December 26, 1936.

[95] *Harijan*, January 30, 1937.

[96] *Harijan*, December 26, 1936.

is no business of mine to criticize the scriptures of other faiths, or to point out their defects.... But it is both my right and duty to point out the defects in Hinduism in order to purify it....'[97]

Gandhi's interpretation, among others, of the *Bhagwad-Gita* is well-known; the annihilation of enemies was presented as the destruction and rooting out of the enemy of desire and the cultivation of dispassion. The metaphysics of this annihilation was the establishment of 'order' replacing 'disorder' within the heart and mind, and thus, in life itself. Charlie Andrews saw the parallel to this metaphysical interpretation in Christianity; when Christ said: 'Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace but a sword.' For Andrews, the 'sword' was the 'Gospel, the sword of the spirit, the word of God.'[98]

Andrews and Gandhi were completely at one on the principles of faith and belief in their lives and on the path towards establishing peace among religions; both believed competitive religiosity was an obstacle to 'Truth' and 'irreligion' was directly related to materialism or 'modern man'. Interestingly, all 'true and good Christians' such as a Tolstoy, a Holmes or an Andrews, in their own eyes as well as in Gandhi's, appreciated Gandhi's views as an indictment of 'modern civilization' that led to a 'turning away from God'.[99] Religion was a vital element in the lives of both men; but both could also be called 'ministers of reconciliation'.[100]

Their intellectual understanding of each other's positions despite some differences was born of their belief in what they called 'true human fellowship' that marginalized outer forms of worship, rites and rituals, while promoting ethical behaviour and values. The main plank of their relationship was their common belief in being present among the poor and the needy, the sick

[97] *Harijan*, March 13, 1937.

[98] J.S. Hoyland, op. cit.

[99] M.K. Gandhi, *From Yeravada Mandir*, Navjivan Press, 3rd edition, pp. 42-43.

[100] Minister of Reconciliation, Booklet in Rabindra Bhavan Library (No date). This was the title of a book on C.F. Andrews.

and the afflicted – the road of the Cross for both of them. As Andrews wrote: 'Jesus has many lovers of His Kingdom but few bearers of His Cross.' And Gandhi was seen by him as having put the Cross in politics: 'He put us Christians to shame; and his example had ever since set me seriously thinking. What he called *satyagraha* or Truth force was absolutely Christian....'[101]

Both fought for reform and reinterpretation of their respective religious traditions and stood firm on the ground of universal thought and inner freedom. And both were denounced for their iconoclasm by the 'devout' of their compatriots in faith. While Gandhi became a 'Hindu' of his own making – charged with Christian, Islamic and Buddhist proclivities, Charlie Andrews' mysticism grew into the persona of a transcendent 'Indian Christian Bhakta'.[102] The source spring of Andrews'life trajectory was Jesus Christ and this religious loyalty led him to characterize Gandhi as "so entirely "Hindu" and yet so "supremely Christian".'[103]

Andrews summed up their relationship and the 'close bonds of confidence and trust' between him and Gandhi as 'Springing from a common concern for the poor and the downtrodden and the common faith in the ultimate power and reality of love, our friendship stood the test of much vehement disagreement over particular methods and policies....'[104] Most importantly, what united their lives was that both believed all religion was meaningless without service of the poor and suffering. Andrews' service was 'for the sake of Christ, the suffering of God and the sin of man and atonement – the true meaning of the Cross.' His service was 'a commission from God'.[105]

Gandhi shared Andrews' spirit if not its letter: 'Though I cannot claim to be a Christian in the sectarian sense of the term,

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[101] C.F. Andrews, *What I Owe to Christ*, p. 250.

[102] Stanley Jones, *Gandhi, An Interpretation*, See footnote 107 for details

[103] C.F. Andrews, Ibid., p. 228; also, Mahatma Gandhi's Ideas.

[104] Chaturvedi and Sykes, *C.F. Andrews*, p. 199.

[105] Ibid., p. 74.

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. And I know there are hundreds of Christians who believe likewise. Jesus lived and died in vain if he did not teach us to regulate the whole of life by the eternal law of love.'[106] Gandhi's love for Andrews was rooted in their agreement on 'practical religious ideals'; as Gandhi said, each was 'essentially a seeker and a servant'. They were seekers of God through becoming servants of humanity: 'I had made the religion of service my own as I felt that God could be realized only through service... I had gone to South Africa for travel, for finding an escape from Kathiawar intrigues and for gaining a livelihood. But as I have said I found myself in search of God and striving for self-realization... I began to realise more and more the infinite possibilities of universal love.'[107]

For this transformation in his life Gandhi recorded his gratitude to his Christian associations and friends in London and South Africa. He was forever thankful to their stimulation of his religious quest, through religious discussions and reading books they recommended. Even back in India he maintained close friendship with many Christian missionaries he had known earlier or met during the course of his political and social movements. One such missionary was the American Dr. Stanley Jones who established the Sat Tal Ashram.[108] Along with many other Christians in the world, and missionaries such as Charlie Andrews and Verrier Elwin in India, Jones also believed that Gandhi's movements were in truth Christian, a reviving and re-interpretation of the Cross. Wrote Dr. Stanley Jones: 'Never in human history has so much light been shed on the Cross as has been shed through this one man, and that man not even called Christian. Had not our Christianity been so vitiated and overlain by our identification with unchristian attitudes and policies in

[106] S.K. George, Gandhi's Challenge to Christianity, p. 26.

[107] M.K. Gandhi, Autobiography, pp. 197-8.

[108] For more on Dr. Jones and the Sat Tal Ashram see Shashi Joshi, *Mission, Religion and Caste*.

public and private life, we would have seen at once the kinship between Gandhi's method and the Cross. Non-Christians saw it instinctively.'[109]

Of course, Gandhi related Christian teaching to his own 'Hindu' beliefs. He saw in the Cross an explication of the concept of Ahimsa – a term he interpreted not merely as the practice of non-violence but as love and charity in thought and deed. This was Gandhi's salute to Christian ethics as he understood them. He related the implications of the Cross and the Kingdom of God – his Ram Rajya – to the need for reform in a religion degenerated over time. He spoke openly and consistently of the corruption and degradation that has crept into Hindu practice: 'What we see today is not pure Hinduism but often a parody of it.'[110] He did not flinch, however, from joining the missionaries in their criticism on discriminatory Hindu practices such as untouchability and rigid caste divisions that fostered extreme injustice. Never did Gandhi deny or refuse to recognise the truth of the criticism of the caste-system by the missionaries. S.K. George, one of the first to review Andrews' biography by Marjorie Sykes and Pandit Benarsidas Chaturvedi,[111] quoted the author of *Saints and Revolutionaries* who said that the 'ideal man would be a sceptical saint and a revolutionary too'.[112] One could in all fairness characterize both, Charlie and Mohan, as

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[109] Stanley Jones, Gandhi: An Interpretation, p. 105.

[110] *Young India*: November 24, 1927.

[111] Marjorie Sykes and Benarsidas Chaturvedi, Charles Freer Andrews: A Narrative. With a Foreword by M.K. Gandhi. George Allen and Unwin. Marjorie Sykes was the first Rector of the *Dinbandhu Bhavana*, established in Santiniketan as a memorial to Andrews, who was hailed as the great 'Friend of India' in the memorial. Pandit Benarsidas Chaturvedi was Andrews' co-worker in the cause of Indians abroad and had himself brought out a biography of Andrews in Hindi, based on personal reminiscences that he persuaded Andrews to dictate to him.

[112] S.K. George, 'C.F. Andrews: Saint and Revolutionary', in *The Visvabharati Quarterly*, Volume XV, Part III. He was quoting from Olaf Stapledon's *Saints and Revolutionaries*.

'sceptical saints' and revolutionaries in their own right. They were sceptics in matters of organized religion and doctrinal orthodoxies and dogmatic thought. But in their public life, whether it was political activity or reform of social structures and practices, they were lifelong revolutionaries.

Andrews was a 'Faithful Apostle of Christ' whose Christianity was often questioned. Gandhi professed his '*Sanatani Hindu Dharma*' that barely any practising *Sanatani* Hindu recognized or accepted. Gandhi was described even by Andrews as a Hindu without any inverts in writing of him, despite knowing him closely and aware of how orthodox 'Hindus' saw him as an iconoclast, often as a betrayer of the 'Hindus'. They thought of each other respectively as Christian and Hindu in the true spirit of their faith and those who differed from them were viewed as falling short of the high ethical-moral precepts they extracted from their religion.

CHAPTER 3

Gandhi's Religion

'A truly new and truly original book would be one which made people love old truths.' [113]

Studying, writing, speaking of Gandhi is not so much about Gandhi the person but, as in his own claims, the receiving and transmitting of 'old truths'. These truths did not follow any prescription whether scriptural, textual or ritualistic. They were an original amalgam of principles and precepts gleaned from a whole range of resources, religious, philosophical, spiritual, and cultural.

Most often, Gandhi preferred to use the term '*Dharma*' for religion. This *Dharma* was composed of ethical moral lessons. Even when he held up a scriptural text for emulation such as the *Bhagwad Gita*, his interpretation of it was uniquely his own. In this interpretation he gave centrality to the practice of non-violence. He insisted that his religion was to seek '*moksha*' in trying to show the real nature of non-violence.[114] That was why, he said, Doke's biography of him described him as a pathfinder. An infinite capacity for suffering was part of this *dharma* of non-violence.

Gandhi's approach to religion and religious values was Aristotelian in the sense that the object of his reflections on these themes was not purely theoretical in intention. The object of his religious inquiries was to know how to become good and the right way of performing actions. Gandhi's forays into religious

[113] Vauvenargues: Reflections and Maxims, Translation by F.G. Stevens, 1940.

[114] Letter to Maganlal, in T.K. Mahadevan, Dvija – A Prophet Unheard, East-West Press, New Delhi, 1977, p. 105.

texts and his writings on the subject could be characterized as non-theological philosophy in the spirit of Tolstoy.

As Thoreau observed: 'How many a man has dated a new era in his life from the reading of a book.' This was as true of Gandhi as any other person. Thoreau's observation truly describes Gandhi's self-stated encounter with Ruskin's *Unto this last* and Tolstoy's *The Kingdom of God is Within You*.

The influence of thinkers in Europe and America that had the most influence upon him were those characterized as 'romantics' – significant participants in the thought of the nineteenth century 'romantic revolution'. Gandhi was drawn to the Romantics' (that included many committed though unorthodox Christians among them) thought that discredited Empiricisms and Rationalism's claims to the superiority of scientific and engineering advances and unprecedented technological progress. In the Scientific and Industrial Revolutions, the Romantics saw the worst facets of Empiricism and Rationalism. They condemned the claims to this 'progress' as serving humanity. They argued that most often noble aspirations were lost in materialism, the mechanization of society and its ghastly consequence of exploitation of people who were seen as cogs in a machine.

A major resource of his 'religion' was the 'wisdom of the sages of old who so regulated society as to limit the material condition of the people. Therein, lies salvation.'[115] The sages of India were not the sole repositories of salvation, for 'modern civilization imbued by a spirit of selfishness and materialism is a negation of Christianity.' Modern civilization, violence, and destruction of religion and morality were an integrated whole in Gandhi's conception and no religion could be separated from this crisis of civilization in which the soul could not be saved.[116]

Gandhi was especially sensitive to the ways in which different systems of thought interacted with one another. His exposure to many shades of Christian thought, both in England and in India, helped him to formulate many of his own positions.

[115] Op. cit., p. 119.

[116] Op. cit., pp. 116, 123.

His fundamental belief was, in a nutshell, often expressed as a surpassing of the intelligible in order to attain 'the One': a mystical approach that he shared with Charlie Andrews and Verrier Elwin.

Many of Gandhi's thoughts or statements on religion appeared to be day-to-day personal reflections, more in the nature of exhortations to himself, a dialogue with himself: the soul could discipline judgement, desire and inclination or impulse. The spiritual training of the 'Self' that depended on oneself meant one could choose to judge or not to judge in a particular way, choose to desire or not to desire, to will or not to will: a stoic position if anything. Much of Gandhi's practices more than any words upheld the goal to influence his own self, to produce an effect in himself. All through his life Gandhi employed various means to transform himself, to acquire a certain inner state of freedom and peace. His conversations and discussions with many colleagues or confidantes ended in advice to act little by little on one's spirit, like a cure, almost a medical treatment. The sum of all his religion was the formation of one's 'person' and the transformation of the soul – the metamorphosis of one's personality through adopting a way of life. It was necessary to constantly exercise a lived ethics, a code of conduct that had not only a moral value, but an existential value. Elwin's portrait of Gandhi as the 'Socrates on the banks of the Sabarmati' was reminiscent for him of the Socratic dialogues that were in service to Socrates' way of living and way of dying. On par with a lived ethics was a lived logic that consisted in not giving one's consent to what was false or doubtful in one's moral universe – the only rationale was 'Satya'.[117]

Why was a Socratic like figure, as Gandhi appeared to Elwin, important and attractive to him? Socrates, we know, exercised a widespread influence of great significance in the entire Western

[117] The comparison was natural for Elwin who was a student of philosophy and familiar with the Socratic Dialogues. See Taylor, A.V., *Varia Socratica*, Oxford 1911; Spiegelberg, H., *The Socratic Enigma*, New York 1964.

tradition. As portrayed by his famous student Plato, Socrates was a mediator between the transcendent ideal of wisdom and concrete human reality. The existential Socratic project appealed to the individual. It was interrogation, questioning, and stepping back to take a look at oneself. He became the epitome of consciousness. What men found appealing in Socrates was his love for and aspiration toward the perfection of being. Through Socrates, they found the path toward their own perfection. When Charlie said that he fell in love with Gandhi on their first meeting, Gandhi's aspiration toward perfection is what resonated with his own striving. Gandhi was certainly not perfect in any sense but a call to possible perfectibility – the projection of his own nostalgia for a higher form of life. Posterity's fascination for Gandhi's life is also partly due to this nostalgia as it is because of his attitude in the face of death. More specifically, one could also say its source is the almost 'semi-voluntary' nature of his death – his last days spent almost wishing for death.

Gandhi was seen by so many of his friends and followers as the living call to awaken our moral consciousness. The form of the call was not preaching the moral life but struggling to achieve it in his own practice. Gandhi was his own interlocutor, examining his own conscience and paying attention to knowing his own heart. A dialogic conversation with oneself – doing battl with oneself – was the practical exercise he recommended to all. This confrontation with the Self was training oneself to die to one's individuality and passions – challenging the tyranny of desire. This could not be attained without a rupture from conventional life in the world, a tearing away from the everyday life of most people. It was à la Tolstoy, Gandhi's conversion, a total transformation of his vision, lifestyle and behaviour.

The essential element emphasised by Gandhi was thus, the disciplining of judgements, desires and inclinations based upon a choice of life, a wish to live in such and such a way with all the concrete consequences it implied in everyday life. For him, the goal of all discourse was actions; the goal was

to live a choice with which to 'cure' oneself of one's 'illnesses' by teaching us a radically new way of life. The goal was the purification of the soul, its separation as far as possible from the body, and its gathering itself together within itself hoping to lead to the actualization of the divine in the human through inner transformation. Thus, Gandhi demanded of himself and others, an existential choice, to radically change the direction of one's life: through one's moral conduct, by truthfully speaking one's mind, by choosing to eat or dress in a particular way, and by one's attitude with respect to wealth and to conventional values.[118]

The critical basis for inner transformation was dialogue with oneself, the examination of one's conscience, the order of action and of daily behaviour like the mastery of oneself. One of the earliest inspirations for making inner transformation the key to outer change was Gandhi's great admiration for Thoreau's *Walden* which detailed his decision to live in the woods that was a decidedly philosophical act. Above all the transformative thought and acts Gandhi encountered in Tolstoy's writing moulded his experimental lifestyle from his South African days. The evolution of Gandhi's philosophical choices of living and being were later in India to be conditioned by the Indian environment and the popularly accessible texts such as the Bhagwad.

Acutely conscious of the differences vigorously argued by different religions Gandhi separated the ritual, cultural and spiritual aspects of various belief-systems. In his Ashrams, as in his life, he eschewed all rituals-no temple-going, lighting of lamps or religious fasts. The rituals in the Ashrams were, prominently, cleaning and sanitation, vegetable-gardening, carding and spinning and weaving, dairy-farming, cooking etc., besides the morning and evening all-faith prayers and collective songs and recitations from the scriptures of all religions. His

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[118] See for similarity the spiritual practices enjoined by Plotinus and Socrates in Plato, *Apologia Socratis*, Tanslated by H. Tredennick, in *Collected Dialogues*, Hamilton and Cairns.

fasts, as we know, were against injustice, violence, oppression, and for the individual and collective freedom of people.

Culture, he believed, was a matter of heritage and environment and he maintained his own practices were born of the practices he inherited from his mother and the environment in which he found himself. It was, therefore, as a spiritual universalist that Gandhi professed a unity of human values which were shared between all faiths and peoples. The pointed allegiance to 'Truth' was, for Gandhi, the experience of an eternal and unchanging truth of universal limitlessness. The intensely personal experiences of divine faith that Gandhi, Charlie, and Elwin shared were the basis of what could be termed 'Religious Crossings'.

The title of Socrates that Elwin gave to Gandhi was the recognition of the philosophical underpinning of the latter's living practice, just as in antiquity the Greeks who were neither scholars, professors, nor 'authors' (when compared to Elwin's own near professorial authoring of anthropological texts) were honoured as philosophers because of their way of life.

Elwin's portrait of Gandhi however, is not one dimensional. His description of Gandhi as a 'merry king' is reminiscent of Socrates again as the man who loved life. Nietzche depicts the jesting life-loving Socrates as possessing a joyful kind of seriousness and that 'wisdom full of roguishness' that constitutes the finest state of the human soul.'[119]

Elwin and Charlie were often told by Gandhi that he appreciated and accepted so much of the teachings of Jesus in particular and Christians in general, but that he could neither understand nor accept the Church's emphasis on the Trinity. Perhaps, the literalism with which many explained the Trinitarian concept to Gandhi was the bone of contention. Augustine's rendering of the order of the divine persons in the Trinity: the Father as the principle of being, the Son as Intellect and the Holy

[119] *Friedrich Nietzche: Human, All Too Human, A Book for Free Spirits*, Texts in German Philosophy, Translated by R.J. Hollingdale, Cambridge 1986.

Spirit as Love would have been perfectly acceptable to Gandhi. In Augustine's words: 'These trinities occur within us and *are* within us...'[120] It was in the triple act of remembering God, knowing God, and loving God that the soul discovered itself to be the image of the Trinity.

There were numerous Christian missionaries who engaged with Gandhi and many were his life-long friends. But, it was not the men of power in the established churches but persons such as Andrews and Elwin who drew so close to his own practices. Gandhi's admiration for their selfless service, facing challenges with courage in difficult times, identifying with the people and strenuous work in villages and remote areas, united them in a common project besides their basic commitment to anti-colonialism.

Gandhi, 'The Hindu'

He (Gandhi) told me very simply: 'I want to find God. And because I want to find God, I have to find God along with other people. I don't believe I can find God alone. If I did, I would be running to the Himalayas to find God in some cave there, but since I believe that nobody can find God alone, I have to work with people.'[121]

'Man's ultimate aim is the realization of God, and all his activities, social, religious, have to be guided by the ultimate aim of the vision of God. The immediate service of all human beings becomes a necessary part of the endeavour, simply because the only way to find God is to see Him in His creation and be one with it. This can only be done by the service of all. I am a part

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[120] Augustine, *The City of God*, Book 8, chapter 4; *On the Trinity* (Editor, J.P. Migne, Paris).

[121] Francis Watson and Maurice Brown, editors, *Talking of Gandhiji*, Four programmes for Radio first broadcast by the British Broadcasting Corporation, Orient Longman, 1957, p. 99. Maurice Frydman was a Polish born engineer who spent several periods in Gandhi's *ashram*, helped to design cottage-industry appliances and was active in the constructive programme started by Gandhi.

and parcel of the whole and I cannot find Him apart from the rest of humanity. My countrymen are my nearest neighbours. They have become so helpless, so resource less, so inert that I must concentrate myself on serving them. If I could persuade myself that I could find Him in a Himalayan cave I would proceed there immediately; but I know that I cannot find Him apart from humanity.'[122]

Every person who knew Gandhi well spoke of his 'essential faith' that carried him through all circumstances. Nirmal Bose saw Gandhi sitting in the house owned by a Muslim that he had chosen to stay in Calcutta. After rioters broke in and devastated it Gandhi laughingly, said to the stricken Bose, 'Your people, the Bengalis, are an extremely gentle people ... They could as well have killed me, but they are so decent that they (only) broke all the furniture, ...all the glass panes...'

Nehru called this 'extreme fearlessness' Gandhi's greatest gift and even his own agnosticism allowed Nehru to recognise that it was rooted in a faith that 'many of us don't possess'.

Muriel Lester recounted, that during a walk with her and Pierre Ceresole, Gandhi, who 'was the most unsentimental man who ever lived, and very unemotional in his actions,' dramatically acted out something he was saying, first time I've ever seen him do that. And he said: 'You know I have no strength at all of my own. All my strength comes from God. Look at me!' And he stopped there on the path by us – and he looked down, stretched out his hands and looked down at his little meagre figure – and we of course looked also – short and small. He said: 'Look at me. I have no power of my own at all. It is a continuous astonishment to me. I tell you a mere boy could knock me over with a blow of his fist. All my strength is God. If the whole world were against me, if the whole world denied it, I would know it was true. I would stand alone.'

In his own words and voice recorded around that time he defined his faith thus: 'I do dimly perceive that whilst everything

[122] MK Gandhi, *Harijan*, March 27, 1936, p. 16.

around me is ever changing, ever dying, there is underlying all that change a living power that is changeless, that holds all together, that creates, dissolves and recreates.'[123]

In his autobiography, Gandhi wanted to narrate his experiments in the spiritual field from which he said he had derived his power to work in the political field. His use of the term 'power' here implies the cultivation of moral strength and determination through spiritual practices. For Gandhi, his experiments were spiritual, or rather moral; for the 'the essence of religion was "morality".' And the observance of morality was possible only when we attain mastery over our minds and passions.[124]

Gandhi claimed no perfection for his spiritual experiments, so did not the scientist he observed as well: 'A scientist who, though he conducts his experiments with the utmost accuracy, forethought and minuteness, never claims any finality about his conclusions, but keeps an open mind regarding them.'[125] Putting his spiritual exercises on a par with scientific experiments he challenged the accepted wisdom of contra-posing science to the spiritual or to religion per se.

Gandhi's 'spiritual' experiments were conducted with 'deep self-introspection', having 'searched myself through and through, and examined and analysed every psychological situation. Yet, I am far from claiming any finality or infallibility about my conclusions.' His gold standard test for those conclusions that appeared 'to be absolutely correct' was the basing of action upon them: action that could 'satisfy my reason and my heart'. The 'practical applications' of 'the principles of conduct' were the reason and rationality of all his experiments he asserted. But, all

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[123] Ibid., p. 37. Muriel Lester was influenced by Tolstoy's writings, was a pacifist and interned as a war-resister in World War II. She stayed with Gandhi in 1926 at Sabarmati Ashram, attended the 1927 Gauhati Session of the Indian National Congress, and was Gandhi's hostess at Kingsley Hall in 1931.

[124] Tridip Suhrud, 'Reading Gandhiji in two Tongues', *IIAS Review*, p. 14.

[125] M.K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography*, p. xiii.

moral principles were subsumed within the 'Eternal Principle' of 'Absolute Truth' the sovereign principle. He chose to call it 'God' – 'but I worship God as Truth only.' Clearly, the eternal principle transcends what he describes as the 'innumerable definitions of God'. Of course, as long as he did not arrive at this Absolute Truth 'so long must I hold by the relative truth as I have conceived it.' One hears the echo of the scientist all too clearly in his formulations.[126]

To keep to what Gandhi calls the path of truth that is 'straight and narrow and sharp as the razor's edge' as conceived by himself opens the possibility and admissibility in his discourse of other kinds of conceptions regarding truth. His maxim of going forward on the path conceived by himself and according to his own light were the hallmarks of 'Reason' and 'Rationality'. This was why the experiments were not to be regarded as 'authoritative' but as 'illustrations', in the light of which everyone may carry on his own experiments according to his own inclinations and capacity.[127]

Gandhi's advice is to shed arrogance, if one desires even a glimpse of truth and advocates the innocence of a child and a humility 'humbler than dust'. The proof or evidence of this attitude for the seeker after truth was 'abundantly clear in the dialogue between Vasishtha and Vishvamitra. Christianity and Islam also amply bear it out.' As Gandhi puts it: 'The instruments for the quest of truth are as simple as they are difficult. They may appear quite impossible to an arrogant person, and quite possible to an innocent child. The seeker after truth should be humbler than the dust.'[128]

The life of the intellect is distinct from the life of emotion however, one may strive to merge them together in an organic whole. Thus, many of Gandhi's beliefs, spiritual goals and moral codes were part of his emotional world that was structured during his childhood and early youth. Writing with

[126] Ibid.

[127] Ibid., p. xiv, emphasis added.

[128] Ibid., p. xix.

heightened emotion he speaks of the inspirational texts that he encountered during his high school days. The first was *Shravana Pitribhakti Nataka*, a play about Shravana's intense devotion to his parents. Seeing the pictures shown by an itinerant showman, of the hero carrying his blind parents on slings across his shoulders. The book and picture 'left an indelible impression on my mind' he says and he vowed to emulate the example. That perhaps was the single most important reason for his psychological self-flagellation for not being present during his father's last moments, instead being with his wife. It was probably also a major contributing factor for his later-day vows of celibacy.

The other source of his moral inspiration was a play, *Harishchandra*, the protagonist of which 'captured my heart. To follow truth and to go through all the ordeals Harishchandra went through was the one ideal it inspired in me... both Harishchandra and Shravana are living realities for me...' Clearly, a heroic life in the genre of saintliness moulded Gandhi's sensibility and the space within his heart. Later in South Africa, he translated Plato's Defence of Socrates. Looking for historical figures who had sacrificed their lives for the sake of truth Gandhi found that Socrates was a natural choice and he presented him as a 'great *Satyagrahi*', and 'a great soul' whose words had 'the qualities of an elixir'.[129]

The selfless devotion and service that was the moral of the stories along with being brave and austere, was an article of faith for Gandhi all his life. And this was an important basis for his relationship with both Charlie Andrews and Verrier Elwin who saw Gandhi as an epitome of the Christian spirit. Both missionaries also responded to his translation of *Ahimsa* into the Christian term Love. *Ahimsa*, which was always rendered into English as non-violence, was for Gandhi not to be used in the narrow sense of non killing which was a negative attribute. *Ahimsa* as a positive, philosophic notion must resonate with the

[129] *CWMG*, Vol. 8, p. 247.

teachings of all major religions of the world.[130] In the course of Gandhi's agitations in South Africa, Laurence Housman had also declared that: 'Mr. Gandhi's method is the Christian method.'[131]

Gandhi's deep familiarity with popular epics such as the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, especially the former, as a growing boy culturally structured his psyche. That led to his complete devotion to 'Ram'. Though he, like Kabir, worshipped a *Nirguna* or formless God, he nevertheless called him 'Ram' – an easily accessible name to most of his people.

It is worth emphasising that Gandhi was fairly innocent of any Vedic, theological or Hindu philosophical reading or familiarity. On his own admission he sought to model himself on what he saw as the truly religious personal piety and honesty of his parents, especially, the living faith and devotional character of his mother. The emotional and intellectual roots of the religion he forged for himself partly in the readings of his South African days and the rest was made from popular Hindu literature and devotional hymns. An early acquaintance with the discourses of his father's Jain, Parsi and Muslim friends imparted a catholicity to his religious sensibility.

'The Hindu Christian?'

The debate on who is a Hindu and what is Hinduism is an old one that effectively began in colonial India. It engaged the English officials, the scholars dubbed 'orientalists' such as 'Pandit' William Jones, and the missionaries who consulted so-called 'Shastric experts' as well as with the 'Reformers' among the English speaking colonial intelligentsia. The first to employ the terms 'Hindu' and 'Hinduism' was Charles Grant followed by William Ward, among the Englishmen. The first Indian to

[130] See Tridip Suhrud, 'Reading Gandhiji in two Tongues', *IIAS Review*, p. 16. Suhrud tells us how Gandhi by employing the term Atmakatha, which in Gujarati and Hindi translates as 'the story of the soul', was close to autobiography in its origins as a Christian practice.

[131] Laurence Housman, Speech at Selly Oak Seminary, Birmingham. Press clipping, dated March 16, Tribune, Lahore, Sabarmati Archive.

use them in his debates and discussions was Rammohan Roy. In the census returned in 1921, large numbers of people did not identify themselves as 'Hindu'.

In South Africa, Gandhi had an extended exchange in the newspapers on the 'Hindoo Coolie'. Gandhi addressed an 'Open Letter' to the members of both Houses of Parliament in Britain regarding the position of the Indians in Natal. In reference to the Indians he posed the question: 'Is their treatment in accordance with the best British traditions, or with the principles of justice and morality, or with the principles of Christianity?' It appears Gandhi had held forth on India being the cradle of civilization, its Brahman scholars having mastered the principles of astronomy. In answer, he was bombarded with the fact of the insanitary, uncultured Indian who 'no matter how rich he may be, lived like a pariah refusing to conform to the customs of the country.... He sleeps under his counter... herds in crowded and filthy tenements and sleeps on or alongside of the vegetables his customers are to eat on the following day....' The reason for the 'despicable and disgusting behaviour of the Hindus' and the pivot on which the whole question turns was 'the evil from within' that is the caste system. 'Until the caste system of the Hindu is abolished the lower classes must remain a servile race unless they abandon their religion. No one is better alive to this fact than Mr. Gandhi himself. If his own countrymen have condemned themselves to a menial lot, ...how can he expect us to help them?'[132] Thus, the issue of ill-treatment turned into an issue of religion and culture.

An interesting exchange between a Rev. M. Wells Branch of the Lucknow Christian School of Commerce, and Gandhi needs to be quoted at length. Rev. Wells Branch wrote to Gandhi in May 1919: 'I have read with a great deal of interest your statements concerning the power of love and truth to bring about social and political transformations. This teaching is so eminently Biblical and finds its embodiment so completely in the

[132] Copy of Debate in the Natal Mercury, dated 7-11-1915, Sabarmati Archives, Serial No. 212.

life and personality of Jesus Christ, that I have been induced to write and ask you the following questions:

1. What part do you think Christianity (not necessarily the western form of it) will play in the future development of India?
2. Is the modern movement in India the result of Christian teaching, or does it emanate from other religions?
3. What is your personal attitude towards Jesus Christ as (i) a teacher (2) an incarnation (3) the World's Saviour?

It is my personal opinion that India will yet show to the world the meaning of a real Christian faith...the need of the present time is for His secret followers of which there are thousands in India, to come out into the open and declare their allegiance to Him.'

Gandhi's reply was as follows: 'I think that some of the principles of Christianity are bound to leave their impress upon the future development of India. If by the modern movement you mean the agitation for reforms it is the result of modern civilization and modern education. If by the modern movement you mean *Satyagraha* it is an extended application of the ancient teaching. I do not think that either has anything to do with Christian teaching.'

'I believe that Jesus Christ was one of the greatest teachers of the world. I consider him an incarnation in the Hindu sense of term (*Avatar*). I do not believe him to be the World Saviour in the sense in which orthodox Christianity understands the expression, but he was a saviour in the same sense as Buddha, Zoroaster, Mohammad, and many other teachers were. In other words, I do not believe in the exclusive divinity of Jesus. The Sermon on the mount leaves a deep impression on my mind when I read it. I do believe with you that the real meaning of the teachings of Jesus will be delivered from India. I have moved among thousands upon thousands of Indians, but I have not found any secret follower of Jesus. This does not mean that there are not secret followers of his in India. But there could not be many. However, I entirely subscribe to your opinion

that such followers should come out in the open and declare their faith.'[133]

Reading between the lines of this apparently transparent answer it is possible to sense a wary skirting of the missionary focus and search for a self-fulfilling prophecy. Gandhi had a very long and intense association with Christians of many denominations and varying personalities. However, in England and a little less in South Africa there had been a sincere and very open attitude towards discussing religion with them. This openness was also a feature of Gandhi's discussions with Charlie Andrews. In this exchange with Rev. Branch on the other hand, there is an extremely cautious but frank wording of his position that seeks to deny any virtuous claims and assertions of credit for transformation on the part of missionaries in India.

Gandhi was to first read the 'Hindu' texts such as the *Gita* in English in London at the prompting of the theosophists. He has also variously been accused of being anti-Hindu, half a Christian (sometimes even full), and at the very least a man who encouraged the missionaries with his close friendships with them. On the other side, he has been labelled a conservative, even reactionary Hindu. In his autobiography, the title he chose for a discussion of his experience in London during his second year is 'Acquaintance with Religions'. Naturally, he recorded, 'with my meagre knowledge of my own religion' he did not want to belong to any religious body and refused the invitations of both, the Theosophists and Christians. Though Madame Blavatsky's *Key to Theosophy* stimulated his desire to read books on Hinduism he found it difficult to read the Old Testament. The Book of Genesis especially 'sent me to sleep'. But the New Testament, especially the Sermon on the Mount 'went straight to my heart. I compared it with the *Gita*. My young mind tried to unify the teaching of the *Gita*, the Light of Asia and the Sermon on the Mount, a renunciation was the highest form of religion appealed to me greatly.'[134]

[133] Ibid.

[134] M.K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography*, p. 64.

Gandhi was like any intellectual who gets inspired to study religion as an ideological construct through reading and studying the religious texts. He had a proclivity towards 'the comparative study of religions', and that became the title of a chapter in his autobiography. He not only read the books of various religions and about their religious preceptors, prophets and messiahs but evaluated them comparatively as his own account of one discussion tells us. 'Christian friends had whetted my appetite for knowledge (of religion), which had become almost insatiable, and they would not leave me in peace, even if I desired to be indifferent.' In Durban, he was close to a two Christian families. One was Spencer Walton, the head of the South African General Mission and his wife. He almost became a member of their family and he admired them greatly and met them frequently. Gandhi tells us: 'I liked the attitude of this couple. We knew the fundamental differences between us. Any amount of discussion could not efface them. Yet even differences prove helpful, where there are tolerance, charity and truth.'[135]

The second Christian family he was in contact with suggested he attend their Wesleyan church every Sunday, which he did. He did not find the sermons inspiring, but was invited to dinner on Sundays when they would discuss religious subjects. Once they began to compare the life of Jesus with that of the Buddha. Gandhi had been rereading Arnold's *Light of Asia*.

'"Look at Gautama's compassion!" said I. "It was not confined to mankind, it was extended to all living beings. Does not one's heart overflow with love to think of the lamb joyously perched on his shoulders? One fails to notice this love for all living beings in the life of Jesus."' His hostess, he writes was a good and simple woman, but somewhat narrow minded, and the comparison pained her. Soon his contact with the family ended.[136]

Gandhi began his 'comparative study of religions', reading and discussing with friends and acquaintances. He acknowledged

[135] M.K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography*, pp. 146-148.

[136] Ibid., p. 148.

to his friend, a lay preacher named Baker, that though 'I am a Hindu by birth... I do not know much of Hinduism, and I know less of other religions. In fact, I do not know where I am, and what is and should be my belief. I intend to make a careful study of my own religion and, as far as I can, of other religions as well.'[137]

Baker was also one of the Directors of the South Africa General Mission and having built a church at his own expense, delivered sermons there regularly. He invited Gandhi to lunch time prayer meetings with some co-workers to 'pray for peace and light'. Gandhi went to the prayer and kneeled down like the rest to pray. He met other members with whom he carried on extended discussions. He received many Christian books from them and received invitations to tea every Sunday. During this time, Gandhi was certainly open to the idea of conversion as a spiritual right and duty if one was convinced and committed to a particular religion. However, the test would be the meaning it would open for his spirit and the impact the religious ideas gave to his life. For, as he put it, 'How was I to understand Christianity in its proper perspective without thoroughly knowing my own religion? I could come to only one conclusion: I should make a dispassionate study of all that came to me, and deal with Mr. Baker's group as God might guide me; I should not think of embracing another religion before I had fully understood my own.'[138]

A close relationship developed between Gandhi and a Quaker named Coates. At tea every Sunday, Gandhi would give Coates his religious diary and discuss with him the books he had read and his impression of them. Gandhi described Coates as 'a frank-hearted staunch young man' who 'walked in the fear of God. His heart was pure and he believed in the possibility of self-purification.' They would go out for walks together and visit his other Christian friends. However, the point at which their agreement faltered was Gandhi's inability to accept that

[137] Ibid., p. 111.

[138] Ibid., p. 112.

Jesus was the only incarnation of God and the mediator between God and man.[139]

Coates attempted to convince Gandhi that the *Tulsi*-beads around his neck were a symbol of superstition and should be removed. The beads were a gift from Gandhi's mother and his reply to Coates' was revealing of his position against dogma. Asked if he believed in its sacredness Gandhi said 'I do not know its mysterious significance. *I do not think I should come to harm if I did not wear it*. But I cannot without sufficient reason, give up a necklace that she put round my neck out of love and in the conviction that it would be conducive to my welfare. *When, with the passage of time, it wears away and breaks of its own accord, I shall have no desire to get a new one*. But this necklace cannot be broken.'[140]

Coates, who had great affection for him, according to Gandhi, 'wanted to convince me that no matter whether there was some truth in other religions, salvation was impossible for me unless I accepted Christianity which represented *the* truth....'[141] Any dogmatic truth-claim was unacceptable to Gandhi and Coates, of course, could not appreciate Gandhi's questioning of the accepted interpretation of the Bible.[142] Gandhi's emphatic denial of anything such as *the* truth in his discussions with Christian friends, in later years, led him to constantly qualify his own concept of truth as *my truth*. Gandhi's 'religious ferment', as he puts it, had begun.

The impact Christianity had had on *Gandhi* was not negligible. He apparently appreciated the Convention of Protestant Christians that he attended with Baker, as events for self-purification and religious revival, in an atmosphere of religious exaltation. 'The Convention', says Gandhi, 'was an assemblage of devout Christians. I was delighted at their faith.'

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[139] Ibid., p. 114.

[140] Ibid., p. 114, emphasis added.

[141] Ibid., emphasis in original.

[142] Ibid., p. 116.

The hymns at the gathering were 'very sweet' and left in him the habit of listening to hymns through his later life. Moreover, Baker's abiding faith in the efficacy of prayer and his conviction that God could not but listen to prayer fervently offered was close to Gandhi's own heart. Writes Gandhi: 'I listened to his discourse on the efficacy of prayer with unbiased attention, and assured him that nothing could prevent me from embracing Christianity, should I feel the call. I had no hesitation in giving him this assurance, as I had long since taught myself to follow the inner voice.'[143]

This inner voice, the call of his conscience, was impressed and attracted by the devout of all religions. Prayer and sincere faith for emotional and spiritual peace henceforth became his unchanging maxim. And yet, reason had to reign supreme in all matters including religion. The belief that redemption was possible only through Christ appeared to Gandhi as a 'metaphorical truth' but he could not accept it literally. 'If God could have sons, all of us were His sons. If Jesus was like God, or God himself, then all men were like God and could be God himself.'[144] The answer to all the doctrinal riddles in Gandhi's mind was: all should strive to be like Christ.

Gandhi's cultural beliefs as opposed to religious, rather doctrinal rationality were expressed in his distinction between the historical Jesus and the Christ of Salvation in the church. 'I could accept Jesus as a martyr, an embodiment of sacrifice, and a divine teacher, but not as the most perfect man ever born. His death on the Cross was a great example to the world, but that there was anything like a mysterious or miraculous virtue in it my heart could not accept. The pious lives of Christians did not give me anything that the lives of men of other faiths had failed to give.'[145]

Thus, if I could not accept Christianity either as a perfect, or the greatest religion, neither was I convinced of Hinduism

[143] Ibid., pp. 125-126.

[144] Ibid., p. 126.

[145] Ibid.

being such. Hindu defects were pressingly visible to me. If untouchability could be a part of Hinduism, it could but be a rotten part or an excrescence. I could not understand the *raison d'etre* of a multitude of sects and castes. What was the meaning of saying that the *Vedas* were the inspired word of God? If they were inspired, why not also the *Bible* and the *Koran*?[146] On the one hand he felt that Hindus had a great record of sacrificing comfort and material happiness when practicing austerities. This was probably an experiential understanding derived from his mother's austere practices. On the other hand, his readings in Islam and Christianity, Hindu texts and Christian Non-conformism led him to try and find some emotional resonance between different religious beliefs and extracting a universal thread from them.[147]

However, everything Coates had given Gandhi to read paled into insignificance when compared to Tolstoy's deeply Christian and yet iconoclastic *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*. That book, says Gandhi, '...overwhelmed me. It left an abiding impression on me. The independent thinking, profound morality, and the truthfulness of this book,' won his heart completely.

He duly recorded that, 'Though I took a path my Christian friends had not intended for me, I have remained forever indebted to them for the religious quest that they awakened in me. I shall always cherish the memory of their contact.'[148]

From the outset, Gandhi tended to make a difference between 'faith' and the concept of 'God'. As part of his cultural

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[146] Ibid., p. 127.

[147] Ibid., p. 128. Gandhi tells us of a few books he read such as, Sale's translation of the Koran as well as other books on Islam; Edward Maitland with whom Gandhi corresponded for a prolonged period sent him The Perfect Way, a book he had written in collaboration with Anna Kingsford; he also sent The New Interpretation of the Bible; Raychandbhai, Gandhi's spiritually evolved friend, sent Panchikaran, Maniratnamala, Mumukshu Prakaran of Yogavasistha, Harbhadra Suri's Shaddarshana Samuchchaya, etc.

[148] Ibid.

upbringing he prayed daily to seek 'God's' protection especially when faced by temptation or counter arguments to his own beliefs and vows. Engaged in a vigorous defence of his eating habits with a friend in London during his studies he recounted: 'Daily I would pray for God's protection and get it. *Not that I had any idea of God. It was faith that was at work*...'[149]

In another incident, Gandhi recounts how he was 'moved to lust' by a woman in Portsmouth and escaping falling prey to it by the voice of God coming through his friend. The most interesting formulations he makes are precisely on this difference between faith and religion. He writes: 'Though I had acquired a nodding acquaintance with Hinduism and other religions of the world, I should have known that it would not be enough to save me in my trials... It was in England that I first discovered the futility of mere religious knowledge. A knowledge of religion, as distinguished from experience, seems but a chaff in such moments of trial... I did not then know the essence of religion or of God, and how He works in us. Only vaguely I understood that God had saved me on that occasion. When every hope is gone, "when helpers fail and comforts flee," I find that help arrives somehow, from I know not where. Supplication, worship, prayer are no superstition; they are acts more real than the acts of eating, drinking, sitting or walking. If, therefore we achieve that purity of the heart when it is "emptied of all but love", if we keep all the chords in proper tune, they "trembling pass in music out of sight"... I have not the slightest doubt that prayer is an unfailing means of cleansing the heart of passions. But it must be combined with the utmost humility.'[150] The Christian refrain and idiom runs through this narrative. But more importantly, it underlines the act of faith over doctrine.

Andrews also advanced the theory in his '*The Renaissance in India*', that 'modern Hinduism' which was propounded by Gandhi approximated to Christian thought in many ways.[151]

[149] Ibid., p. 43, emphasis added.

[150] Ibid., pp. 66-67.

[151] C.F. Andrews, *Christ and Human Need*, p. 8.

According to Andrews, the Christian concept of 'the Word made flesh' was a fundamental philosophical tenet for Gandhi. In the lexicon of 'practical religion' that both the friends upheld, the way they would interpret it was in the maxim: all metaphysical 'Truth' was to be practiced through a practical moral life in the service of people.

As Gandhi was later to say: 'I have simply tried in my own way to apply the eternal truths to our daily life and problems...I have nothing new to teach the world. Truth and non-violence are as old as the hills. All I have done is to try experiments in both on as vast a scale as I could do.'[152] It was always impossible for any of his contemporaries as it is for those who analyse his thought, to disentangle Gandhi's religion or philosophical position from his concept of morality. Religion and philosophy were not separate for Gandhi, his religious principles and metaphysical concepts are identical. The ethical and the metaphysical are not divided, they are united in the supreme value of 'Truth': 'Truth is the substance of morality.'[153]

The logic or rationale of Gandhi's thought was transparent: if 'truth' cannot be attained without strict non-violence, the metaphysical and religious ideal of 'truth' is nothing but the leading of a non-violent way of life in every respect, and which is the practical expression of morality: 'To me God is Truth and Love; God is ethics and morality. God is fearlessness.'[154] 'My religion,' declared Gandhi, 'is "Truth", and *ahimsa* is the only way to its realization.'[155] *Ahimsa* was non-violence and love, and thus the way of truth, and therefore a moral life.His faith in the all-embracing character of morality that is truth, that is non-violence, that is love for all was asserted over all claims to a 'religious life'. He would, he said, '...reject any religious doctrine that does not appeal to reason and is in conflict with

[152] *Harijan*, 28 March, 1936.

[153] M.K. Gandhi, *Ethical Religion*, trans. B. Rama Iyer and S. Ganesan, Navajivan Publishing House, 1968, pp. 23-24.

[154] *Young India*, 17 April, 1937, p. 87.

[155] *Harijan*, 30 April, 1938, p. 99

morality.'[156] Religion that takes no account of practical life and its problems and does not help to solve them is no religion. 'For me God and Truth are convertible terms, and if anyone told me that God was a god of untruth or god of torture, I would decline to worship him.'[157]

The pursuit of truthful living and compassion for all was moral, that is the pursuit of the right action. The 'inner voice' that is one's conscience was decisive in this path. But if one was to 'do evil' and follow untruthful paths in the name of the inner voice then there was only one final test: Anyone who acts according to his 'inner voice' for the love of his neighbour, and not for self-love can be rightly called moral.[158]

In the prevalent social order that was seen as 'Hindu', with its practices of what Gandhi described as the 'evils' of society, his battle against Untouchability was the primary *satyagraha* he undertook against 'Hinduism'. The infamous work of Katherine Mayo that so riled the 'Hindus', namely, *Mother India*, is usually cited in the context of Gandhi calling it 'a drain inspector's report'. However, Mayo also described Gandhi's 'unflagging warfare on Untouchability'. Gandhi had reprinted a Brahman pundit's statement justifying the practice in *Young India,* denouncing such persons. Mayo also quoted Rushbrook Williams, on how there were myriad defenders of Untouchability among orthodox Hindus and few cared to follow Gandhi. In fact, in January 1926, a mass meeting of Hindus was held in Bombay to protest against Gandhi's 'heresy' in attacking Untouchability. One speaker was supposed to have suggested the lynching of 'heretics' who 'threaten the disruption of Hindu society', and affirmed that Hindus were 'prepared to sacrifice their lives for the Hindu religion in order to preserve its ancient purity.'[159]

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[156] *Young India*, 21 July, 1920, p. 4.

[157] Ibid., 18 June, 1925, p. 214.

[158] *Ethical Religion*, op. cit., p. 10.

[159] Katherine Mayo, *Mother India*, pp. 166-167.

'You saw,' said Gandhi 'the squabble that arose over it' (his campaign against caste discrimination), 'in the Hindu Mahasabha. The "Untouchables" are treated as if less than beasts. Untouchability for me is more insufferable than British rule. If Hinduism hugs Untouchability then Hinduism is dead and gone.'[160] However, much of Gandhi's 'Hinduness' is extracted by critics from his discourse on the 'ancient school system' or the 'peasant's' or 'village's' morality and simple economy. This won him no appreciation from other Hindu leaders. Lajpat Rai had dismissed any talk of 'good old days' and a 'self-contained life', as 'soft sentimentality'. What was required, Lajpat Rai said, was that, 'The country must be up to the level of the most modern countries... in thought and life.'[161] This attitude and conviction was representative of all national leaders who could be regarded as 'Hindu' in India and Gandhi stood out as a sore thumb amongst them. He was certainly not a representative Hindu.

More, Gandhi's preoccupation with the cow's welfare has been characterised as a Hindu obsession, a symbol of his Hinduism, but it was Gandhi who denounced Hindus for their attacks on Muslims for the *Kurbani* of cows. He wrote: 'We forget that a hundred times the number of cows killed for *Kurbani* are killed for purposes of trade....(and) the cows are almost all owned by Hindus.' He repeatedly attacked existing practices against the exploitation of cows giving no quarter to their Hindu owners. Quoting, what he termed 'illuminative extracts' from a report of the Indian Industrial Committee, he remarked on the 'commercial slaughter' of cows. Witnesses showed that among those who sold cows to slaughter-houses included, Brahmans and Hindus, reported Gandhi.[162]

Gandhi quoted another authority on the cruelty to the cow by Hindus in the manufacture of a highly valued dye known as *peuri*: 'By feeding the cow only on mango leaves, with no other

[160] Katherine Mayo, Interview with Mr. Gandhi.

[161] Lala Lajpat Rai, *The Problem of National Education in India*, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1920, pp. 79-80.

[162] *Young India*, November 26, 1925, p. 216; December 27, 1925.

form of feed nor even water to drink, the animal passes in the form of urine a dye which is sold at high rates in the bazaar. The animal so treated does not last long and dies in agony.'[163] Equally, perhaps even more, cruel was the practice of *phuka* common in most parts of India, Gandhi reported. This was the method of thrusting a stick into the vagina of the cow to produce irritation, by which process the quantity and prolonged period of milk production of cows was secured. Fifty percent of cows in dairy sheds were subjected to this process. *Young India* also printed an '*Englishman's Protest*' against the method.[164]

Throughout 1925 and 1926 Gandhi ran a veritable campaign against his 'Hindu brethren', in *Young India*, on many more such vicious practices, describing the gory details of the cruelty involved. In conclusion he mourned: 'We will pose as protectors of the cow, and quarrel with Mussalmans in her sacred name, the net result being that her last condition is worse than the first.' Again: 'In spite of our boasted spirituality, we are still sadly backward in point of humanity and kindness to the lower animals.' Gandhi's voice on these issues was a cry in the wilderness, rueing the lack of compassion and support from the Hindus.[165] In sum, Gandhi wrote: 'In a country where the cow is an object of worship there should be no cattle problems at all. But our cow worship has resolved itself into an ignorant fanaticism.'[166]

In 1906, while trying to get an inexpensive English home to board and lodge someone whom he described as 'a valued friend' who was doing some study at the British Museum, Gandhi wrote: 'He is a missionary belonging to the Arya Samaj of the Punjab. The Samaj is to Hinduism what Protestantism is to Catholicism. The missionary friend is under a vow of poverty and his talents are devoted to the work of education combined

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[163] *Young India*, May 6, 1926, pp. 166-67.

[164] Ibid.

[165] Ibid., May 6, 1926, 167; August 26, 1926, p. 303.

[166] Ibid., February 26, 1925.

with religion.' In later years, in India, he was sharply critical of the Arya Samaj mainly because of their hostility towards Muslims. He stirred up their hornet's nest after a public attack on them.[167] For himself as we know he claimed the label of a *Sanatan* Hindu.

When Henry Polak was deputed to go to India during Gandhi's negotiations in London, there was a letter in the *Yorkshire Daily Observer* that Gandhi quoted in a letter to Polak. It said: 'the Indian leaders have despatched one of their white sympathisers to India in the hope thereby of awakening the attention the attention of the Indian people to their sufferings (in the Transvaal). The gentleman is an English Jew; an attorney by profession: in thought and habit a Hindu....' Gandhi remarks: '*From one point of view, what a libel that you should be considered in thought and habit a Hindu*. What would Kallenbach say to this? *And yet from another standpoint it is undoubtedly a compliment*.'[168] His propensity for humour did not stop at the gates of religion.

Gandhi, writing from Bombay to a friend after a rare visit to a music concert acclaimed the impact it had on people including himself: 'Last night I went to the Indian Music Society. What splendid enthusiasts these men are. It was a real revelation to me. I learnt to appreciate the true religiousness of music and how philosophical it is. To see men going into raptures over melodies that I could not hear and fineness that I could not distinguish, made me realise how many things in heaven and earth there are that I don't know anything about.'[169] Thus, inspired and moved by the epiphany in the concert hall, the self-acknowledged tone deaf Gandhi was to introduce hymn singing at his *ashram* prayer meetings all through his life and to emphasize

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[167] Gandhi to Mrs. Spencer Walton, 16th November 1906. Sabarmati Archives, SN. 4580.

[168] Gandhi to Henry Polak, 6th August 1909. Sabarmati Archives, SN. 4981. Emphasis added.

[169] Gandhi in a letter dated 10th September 1909, Bombay, Sabarmati Archives, SN. 5061.

to visitors how the music enhanced spiritual communion with the Supreme.

Gandhi's definition of his own Hindu faith, as he explained to Andrews, was as follows:

'I call myself a Sanatani Hindu because:

1. I believe in the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, the *Puranas*, and all that goes by the name of Hindu scriptures, and therefore in *Avataras* (divine incarnations) and rebirth.
2. I believe in *Varnashrama Dharma* in a sense strictly Vedic, but not in its present popular and crude sense.
4. I do not disbelieve in "idol-worship".
5. I believe implicitly in the Hindu aphorism that no one truly knows the scriptures who has not attained perfection in Innocence (Ahimsa), Truth (Satya), and Self-control (Brahmacharya), and who has not renounced all acquisition or possession of wealth.
6. I believe, along with every Hindu, in God and His Oneness , in rebirth and salvation.'[170]

Gandhi inhabited a universe of discourse in which the thoughts and beliefs of various religions was reflected. He drew upon a variety of sources within the Indic tradition. In the process he brought about profound transformations in the religion that he claimed as his own – Hinduism. Moreover, the texts of the Hindus such as the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads* and the *Puranas*, and all other inspirational scriptures, he declared as part of his belief system and embraced them as his tradition. These texts were not only appropriations that imbued a sense of pride and belonging to Gandhi as part of his sense of the history of 'his people' but were also a part of his imagination, just as they were of so many of his countrymen.

Gandhi's constant and lifelong efforts to nurture conciliation between different religions, especially between Hindus and Muslims is well known. In this striving he often appears to

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[170] *CWMG*, Vol. 25, p. 180. Also see Andrews-Gandhi correspondence, Rabindra Bhavan, Shantiniketan.

be the inheritor of the poet Kabir's transcendent approach to religious conflict. The difference, of course, was that Kabir was a hard-hitting observer of religious confrontations and himself had little sympathy for organized religions. Gandhi, on the other hand, took the claims to piety and greatness of the religious groups concerned at face value, and worked to shame them into living according to the finest ideals of their religion and to promote universalism. This attitude was shared by Gandhi and the Tagores, and the latter were pivotal in Charlie Andrews' understanding of Hinduism as well as the inspiration he drew from their orthopraxy.

Gandhi declared: 'If I know Hinduism at all, it is essentially inclusive and ever-growing and ever-responsive. It gives the freest scope to imagination, speculation and reason.'[171] This conception of a Hinduism as tolerant and inclusive was a truism that prevailed for a host of reasons from scholarship to cultural identity and Gandhi was certainly implicated in it. There is always a hegemonic cultural discourse that permeates the imagination of nations and the essentialism of the constructs of their pasts are not interrogated. More so when the persons involved in the exercise are not scholars but practitioners of an inspiring creation called the future of a national collective. Undoubtedly, the long and complex history of pluralism in India was not mythical despite recurrent intolerance and exclusion. The assertion of the positive trends of the past were marshalled in the struggle to create the ideal of the future.

The ideas 'about both *dharma* and *moksha* had been in the air for centuries' and 'made major headway since the early *Upanishads*', but 'they were brought into direct confrontation with each other, in the *Bhagavad Gita*.'[172] This reveals the cause of Gandhi's intense love and loyalty to the *Gita* with its discussion of *dharma, moksha and bhakti* – all the constituents of his religious philosophy. The passionately

[171] *CWMG*, vol. 25, 178.

[172] Wendy Doniger, *The Hindus: An Alternative History*, Penguin Viking 2009, p. 282.

powerful sentiment against war despite the many arguments rationalizing violence, and the healing vision of possible peace, is the most striking feature of the philosophy that Gandhi extrapolated from the *Gita*. The grammar of love, worship and devotion that Gandhi expounded was in his mind the heart of the *Gita*, never mind its interpretative use by the votaries of justified violence.

The appeal of the *Upanishads* would naturally be greater for Gandhi as they 'took the Vedic depiction of the natural and social orders as determined by power and violence and reversed it in a 180-degree turn toward nonviolence.'[173] Gandhi, as mentioned, did not agree with the translation of *ahimsa* as non-violence and instead translated it with the Christian term 'love'. He was not a blinkered idealist and remarked: 'Indeed the very word non-violence, a negative word, means that it is an effort to abandon the violence that is inevitable in life.'[174] Though there existed a rich tradition of non-violence in the *Jaina* and *Vaishnava* traditions, Gandhi's commentary on the *Gita* says, 'It may be freely admitted that the *Gita* was not written to establish *ahimsa*... But if the *Gita* believed in *ahimsa* or it was included in desirelessness, why did the author adopt a warlike illustration? When the *Gita* was written, although people believed in *ahimsa*, wars were not only not taboo, but no one observed the contradiction between them and *ahimsa*.'[175]

Gandhi's essay on the *Gita* was fundamentally about renunciation – the giving up of material objects, sensory objects, desire itself; asceticism was only the final frontier in the battle against sensuality. The *Upanishads*, often referred to as the *Vedanta*, that is, the end of the *Veda*. The rebirths and re-deaths from which the Hindu tradition sought *moksha*, and that were described in detail in the *Upanishads*, formed the bedrock for Gandhi's veneration of their message. Above

[173] Ibid., p. 193.

[174] R.K. Prabhu and U.R. Rao, eds., *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*, Navajivan Publishing House, 1968, pp. 265-99.

[175] M.K. Gandhi, *The Message of the Gita*, CWMG, Vol. 25, p. 171.

all else, it was the philosophy of renunciation and religious disciplines to control the self that found the cord in Gandhi's psyche. The *Vedas*'s imagery of the recklessly driven chariot of the senses was due to excessive attachments. In the *Upanishads*, the intellect/charioteer reins in the senses/horses that pull the chariot of the mind.[176] Equally important for Gandhi was the *Upanishads*' emphasis on a more personal religious experience. Gandhi's strong sense of individualism as a lone seeker of truth was in tune with such a focus on the self. Concentration on the inner life and its perfection of the soul, casting off the imperfect body, and purification of the self were seen as only possible through the discipline of renunciation. This was the corollary of the 'understanding of the equation of *atman* and *brahman*' as a call to action: You must change your life.[177] And Gandhi did dramatically change his life. The *Upanishads*' emphases on non-violence and vegetarianism were also in tune with Gandhi's moral grammar, in politics as in social life.

These elements of the Hindu tradition that Gandhi acknowledged in his life were confirmation of his earlier positions on renunciation, self-discipline, purification of the mind and perfection of the soul that he had evolved under the influence of thinkers such as, primarily, Tolstoy, Emerson, Thoreau, and Ruskin. Many of the thinkers he encountered intellectually, had an acquaintance with the 'neo-Vedantins as well as with German idealists who had been reading the *Upanishads* (originally through Persian, Muslim translations), making these ideas more attractive.'[178]

Of course, Gandhi used the current terms of Hindu and Hinduism, as we do today despite several objections to its usage. However, the fact that he called himself a '*Sanatani*' Hindu makes clear that he saw no homogeneous, singular belief system or ensemble of practice. He revelled in the multiplicity of spiritual paths available in the Indic cultural milieu, without

[176] Wendy Doniger, *The Hindus*, 2009, op. cit., p. 142.

[177] Ibid.

[178] Ibid., pp. 626-27.

a single book or a single prophet. A recent work holds that the Hindus till today 'are truly a rainbow people with different colours (*varnas* in Sanskrit, the word that also designates "class"), drawing upon not only a wide range of texts, from the many unwritten traditions... (and) upon the many ways in which a single text has been read over the centuries.....' Equally, there continue to exist a range of rainbow-hued religious practices. 'Ideas about all the major issues – vegetarianism, nonviolence, even caste itself – are subjects of a debate, not a dogma. There is no Hindu canon.'[179] This characterization of the Hindus is hardly new as Jawaharlal Nehru in 1946, quoted Havell in *The Discovery of India*: 'In India, religion is hardly a dogma, but a working hypothesis of human conduct adapted to different stages of spiritual development and different conditions of life.'[180] Gandhi along with several Indian political leaders and reformers were in tune with this description and used the term Hindu as the available category for this multiplicity of belief and practice.

Louis Renou said, 'But religion, a concept that can be defined by no one word, is co-extensive in India with the whole of human activities; the term *dharma* embraces normal attitudes, human justice, merit, rights and duties. There is no balance[181] between immanence and transcendence, between the supreme (but impersonal) god and the personal (but polymorphous, subject to *karman*, non-autonomous) divinity. The piety of Indians... is canalized in almost immutable customs. There are rites, not dogmas, speculation, but little theology. Early Buddhism resonates with the agnosticism of certain *Upanishads*, in the syncretism of the *Gita*, the impersonalism of the *Advaita*.'[182]

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[179] Ibid., p. 25.

[180] Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, Oxford University Press, p. 250.

[181] Perhaps the better term is 'no polarity' rather than 'balance'.

[182] Louis Renou, 'Gandhi and Indian Civilization', in Sisir Kumar Ghose, (Ed.), *The Visvabharati Quarterly*, Gandhi Number, Vol. 35, Nos. 1-4, 1971, pp. 54-55.

The blanket terms that enveloped the numerous communities of India, with their multifarious differences in ritual and practices, were a contribution of the colonial anthropologists.

The British employed the term 'Hindu' for all cultural and religious elements and features found in the cultures and religions of India that were 'not Muslim, not Christian, not Jewish, or hence, not Western.'[183] Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, defined Hinduism as the belief 'that truth was many-sided and different views contained different aspects of truth which no one could fully express.'[184] They are called 'non-definitions' quite rightly as the act of sharply defining a collective Hindu identity was alien to most Indians.

Discussing Gandhi's aspiration to act in the name of a moral order, Louis Renou wrote, that it was not ancient India that one ought to look at for Gandhi's exemplars and his claim to be a Hindu and a practitioner of Hinduism. 'Great spiritual leaders... like Sankara or Ramanuja, who directed religious propaganda, never pretended to play a political role. The Buddha resolutely set himself above temporal values....' He continues, 'We must look for Gandhi's forerunners in the leaders of sects, the countless men who "cleared paths" and "opened up ways"... men, coming from all social and spiritual strata, gathering communities about them, adopting new gospels, sometimes trying to make their way in the social or political field by means which they invariably claimed to derive from those gospels. Such are Basava in the twelfth century with the Lingayats, Ramananda and Kabir in the fifteenth century, Nanak, the founder of the Sikhs, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. But what these men viewed in terms of the locality and of the needs of the sect, Gandhi conceived for India as a whole.'[185]

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[183] Robert Erik Frykenberg, 'The Emergence of Modern Hinduism', in Sontheimer and Kulke, eds. *Hinduism Reconsidered*, Delhi, Manohar, 1989, p.31. See Doniger, op. cit. p. 27.

[184] Doniger, p. 27.

[185] Louis Renou, 'Gandhi and Indian Civilization', in Sisir Kumar Ghose, (Ed.), *The Visvabharati Quarterly*, Gandhi Number, Vol. 35, Nos. 1–4, 1971, pp. 51–53.

Instead of looking at history for tracing Gandhi's religio-spiritual lineage, Renou commends the great works of literature such as the 'Buddhist and Jain doctrines, the teachings of the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads*, the dialectics of the *Vedanta*, the *Laws of Manu*, the discourses of the *Great Epic*, a whole treasure-house of gnomic maxims running in a continuous line from the Buddhist *Sutras* to *Tukaram, Vamana* and *Ramakrishna*.' It is not as if Gandhi was aware of all these threads and 'he was far from possessing a wide culture, but tradition is within the reach of all in a country where everything, even to one of a non-religious turn of mind, as he claims to have been in his youth, inevitably conjures up the twin concepts of myth and ritual. He read the *Gita*, he reflected on the *Upanishads*, and he knew enough Sanskrit to follow in the original such relatively easy and popular texts as these are.'[186]

This cultural milieu was to impact the much younger Jawaharlal Nehru who along with so many other Indians claimed a more or less 'scientific' attitude 'with something of the easy optimism of the nineteenth and early twentieth century.' However, 'the environment in which I have grown up takes the soul (or rather the *atma*) and a future life, the *Karma* theory of cause and effect, and reincarnation for granted. I have been affected by this and so, in a sense I am favourably disposed towards these assumptions. I have been attracted towards the *Advaita* (non-dualist) philosophy of the *Vedanta*.'[187] The *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad Gita*, likewise, had 'a compelling reality about them, a permanence which time and space could not touch.'[188]

Renou saw the trajectory of Gandhi's moral principles as located, in howsoever transformed and revolutionary forms, in what he described as Indian civilization. This civilizational impact Renou analysed as having expounded 'the themes of existence on a plane of human values, adopting an ethical

[186] Ibid.

[187] J.L. Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, pp. 25-28.

[188] Ibid., p. 77.

system which brings contrasting forces into play and combining it with a diffused process of divinization.' *Satyagraha*, 'the hold upon truth' (or holding fast to truth), or 'obstinate efforts towards the true', in Renou's understanding, is a reversion to the ancient notion of *satya*, which denoted both moral truth and reality (what should be, is, the norm is the real, the normative dharma is also the dharma of experience) even ritual exactitude, after it took the place of another symbol, *rita*, 'the ordering of the cosmos and ordering of the being'. Their very ambiguity, Renou says, when used by Gandhi, became 'magic forces'. *Ahimsa*, for example, in Gandhi's lexicon, was not so much 'non-violence' as 'action based on the refusal to do harm'. *Abhaya*, another old term in speculation, in Gandhi's hands means not so much 'non-fear' as the active state which lies beyond fear.

Very convincingly, Renou argues, 'Gandhi bade the Indian masses prostrated by long servitude not to "cease to suffer" but to "cease to fear". Gandhi is the inheritor of the *Bhagavad-Gita*. When the author of the *Gita* begins speaking in his own name, the poem exalts asceticism, self-knowledge, the virtues and methods which lead to "deliverance", to culminate in a sort of theophany. This manner of integrating act and thought, of thinking in terms of the act, of renouncing in the midst of action, is the essence of Gandhi's effort.'[189]

Gandhi himself, however, perceived the evolution of his ideas, his principles and practices, his experiments, invariably as the culmination of thought and reflection, the call of his conscience (his 'inner voice'), his absorption of ideas and theories from various sources, all together whetted on the touchstone of Reason. In another context, that of his practice of *brahmacharya* and his experiment (*prayog*) of having his grand-daughter sleep in his bed at Noakhali, Gandhi maintained: 'I go beyond the orthodox view as we know it. My definition does not admit of

[189] Louis Renou, 'Gandhi and Indian Civilization', in Sisir Kumar Ghose, (Ed.), *The Visvabharati Quarterly*, Gandhi Number, Vol. 35, Nos. 1-4, 1971, pp. 63-64.

laxity. I do not call that *brahmacharya* that means not to touch a woman. What I do today is nothing new for me. Without the vow in England as a student, I freely mixed with women and yet I called myself a *brahmachari*...'[190]

[190] M.K. Gandhi, Nirmal Kumar Bose, 'My Days with Gandhi', Orient Longman, 1953, pp. 109-110.

CHAPTER 4

Andrew's Religion

Charlie Andrews and Mohandas Gandhi lived in an age so convulsed with rapid transitions materially, as well as in thought and practice. Besides the storm and stress of a new world they found themselves out of sync with, they experienced the maelstrom of religious thought and action as well. Their respective confessional accounts of religious doubt, ferment and transformative spirituality transcended the theological and religious boundaries of their time.

They both contended in their own ways with the missionary enterprise of old, substituting it with their own 'new missionary' project; religion interpreted as an expression of the total culture, the rapprochement of Eastern and Western thought, classic Catholicity of sentiment and attitude in conflict with the proclaimed elements of modernism. In sum, both men were engaged with a religious quest in an age of transition.

Despite great inner happiness and renewed spiritual vision after his ordination, Andrews' intellectual doubts remained. 'The recitation, in a Christian act of worship, of the imprecatory *Psalms*, calling down vengeance on enemies, who were not only hated, but cursed, became intolerable to me. The Athanasian Creed with its damnatory clauses was an even greater stumbling block. The thirty-nine articles, to which I had subscribed, began also to trouble me; ...I began more and more to realize that the only solution of all my intellectual troubles was to get back to the simplicity of the Gospel in my daily life.'[191]

[191] C.F. Andrews, 'A Pilgrim's Progress', in *Religion in Transition*, Contributions of S. Radhakrishnan, C.F. Andrews, George A. Coe, Alfred Loisy, James H. Leuba, Edwin D. Starbuck, edited by Vergilius Ferm, George Allen & Unwin Ltd, London, 1937, p. 73.

Andrews continued, 'But in India still more fundamental problems of the mind came before me for solution. The Virgin Birth of Christ, as a literal and historical fact, and also the resurrection of Christ's body from the grave, had long ago become matters of doubt questioning to me on the historical side, and I had studied every scrap of evidence concerning them. In the end I had decided to suspend my judgement... But it was one thing to hold these matters in suspense for a while in England; it was quite a different thing being called upon to teach them in a new country, such as India, where a young church was beginning to spring up.'[192]

It was on meeting the American missionary, Samuel Stokes, who was living a Franciscan life along with Sadhu Sundar Singh, a Christian Sadhu at Kotgarh in the mountains beyond Shimla, that Andrews says: 'It was in this atmosphere of the glorious mountains, with their snows reaching up into the blue sky, that the narrowness of my former religious faith was made clear to me, and the decision was slowly formed within me to seek a wider sphere of work.'[193] Sadhu Sundar Singh, Andrews says, '...had a love for Christ so ardent that my own love was kindled by it. I found in him, also, one who had not ceased to reverence that which was pure and noble and of good report in his old religious faith. He felt that he had received the consummation of it all in his Lord and Master, Jesus Christ.'[194] Finally, Gokhale asked Andrews to go and help Gandhi in his struggle in South Africa and he met Gandhi. 'This experience in South Africa (of the battle against Government injustice to Indian labour)... widened my outlook upon life and gave me a new world vision of the Christian faith. ...and at last it was clear to me that I ought no longer to exercise my full Orders in the Anglican ministry under a bishop's licence.'[195]

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[192] Ibid., p. 74.

[193] Ibid., p. 75.

[194] Ibid.

[195] Ibid., p. 77

The incident that triggered the final break from his church, he recalled, was Rabindranath Tagore's invitation to Andrews to help him in his educational work in Santiniketan. Tagore accepted that Andrews would continue his religious duties while working at Santiniketan. Andrews writes: 'But when Trinity Sunday came and I was faced with the recital of the Athanasian Creed, I suddenly found that I could not repeat it, with its damnatory clauses. It came home to me with a shock that I could not lead an Indian Christian congregation in the recitation and go back light heartedly to Santiniketan as if nothing had happened. So, I omitted the Creed altogether. But at once I recognized that I was playing a coward's part in thus trifling with my conscience. When I returned and saw the pure face of the poet Rabindranath looking into my own, I knew at once that I had been living a life of untruth. Thus, the inner struggle that had gone on for so many years, had suddenly come to an end.'[196]

Andrews wrote that, 'The dynamic quality I found in the two friends who gradually became the formative influences in my thinking life – the poet Rabindranath Tagore, and Mahatma Gandhi ... brought to me quite unconsciously, but very intimately, a fuller interpretation of what the message of Christ actually means in the modern world. In the great struggle for Indian freedom their voices have been prophetic... This leads me directly to the second point where I had to correct many of my previous ideas. While I had never consciously held the narrow view that the rest of God's world, outside the boundaries of Christendom, was lying in "heathen darkness", I had not at all realized before the beauty of the lives of those in India who had been true seekers after God. With this new vision I began to see Christ in these saintly men and women whom I met both in Islam and in the Hindu religion... Mere proselytizing which Christ himself clearly abhorred, went out of my mind and "sharing" took place.'[197]

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[196] Ibid., p. 78; quoted from his *What I Owe To Christ*, Chapter xvi.

[197] Ibid., pp. 81-82.

Both the political and religious old 'imperialist' outlook became abhorrent to Andrews now. Now he was convinced that 'India has much to teach... I can say with deep conviction that I have learnt more about Christ's Cross of suffering during the years of my life spent in the East than I was able to do while I lived in Europe. For it has slowly, but marvellously, become clear to me that there are vast reserves of spiritual power for good stored up by Divine Providence in human hearts ... these resources are abundant in the East.'[198]

Andrews' mental make-up and his striving in thought and faith towards what he considered a 'truly' Christian endeavour are apparent in his essay titled '*The Relation of Christianity to the Conflict between Capital and Labour.*'[199] Interestingly, he parallels the thought and faith that Gandhi had evolved through his observation of Western society, his study of religious texts and interaction with multiple denominations of Christians. Both men share their critique of the industrial west and are extremely nostalgic for pre-industrial values and ethics that they think are shattered in the unleashing of 'modernity'.

Andrews wrote: 'In the present industrial disorder the perplexities are greatest and the needs sorest. Many who have their eyes dazzled by an increase of wealth cannot see the cruelty of self-seeking... A life principle is needed, simple enough to be applied to every circumstance and strong enough to rouse the fire of intense conviction. Its appeal must be commanding and overpowering, if indolence is to be conquered and selfishness quelled.'[200]

For Andrews, naturally, this life principle was the Christian message, 'The message of the Incarnation (that) met halfway the inner workings in the minds of labouring men which had long been struggling for utterance. It spoke of the intrinsic value of

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[198] Ibid., p. 88.

[199] C.F. Andrews, *The Relation of Christianity to the Conflict between Capital and Labour*. Andrews received the Burney Prize at Cambridge in 1894 for this essay.

[200] Ibid., pp. 1-2.

every human life...it spoke of social duty and mutual service, for Christ himself was pleading in the weakest of His brethren; it spoke of an ideal of society, for 'when one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; it spoke of the nobility of common labour, for Christ had been the carpenter of Nazareth....'[201]

Going back into the history of Europe, Andrews spoke of how, 'The sense of dignity of work and service which our Lord brought home to men in parable and precept,' was lost during the Middle Ages; the age of slavery, when work was degraded and manual labour was made 'a thing too mean and vulgar for freeborn men'. It was the long discipline of the monastic life of active service, continued through the darkest ages of the western world that alone preserved the dignity of work for future ages... The Order of St. Benedict spent their days in quiet work and prayer. To them, in that noblest of monastic sentences, work itself was prayer.[202] This sentiment for the dignity of labour and the intense admiration of the beauty of monastic life were fundamentally constitutive of Gandhi and Andrews' inner worlds.

Of course, the organization of the trade-unions with militancy that did not stop short of violence, were 'modern evils', nevertheless, 'by the very greatness of the labour struggle, men learnt to realize their common brotherhood, suffering bravely together in the hour of trial. They began to look at the wider social problems, and to regard society as an organism with a corporate life. On every side old voices from the Bible came to mind with new and vivid meaning – "Am I my brother's keeper?"; "Man shall not live by bread alone"; "No man liveth to himself"; "All ye are brethren".'[203] It is these voices in the Bible that Gandhi responded to with his heart and soul and that united him with Andrews.

Andrews' denunciation of the developments that had occurred in the Europe and America also resonate with Gandhi's

[201] Ibid., p. 3.

[202] Ibid., p. 16.

[203] Ibid.

critique of the modern West. Andrews drew a parallel between the monstrous expansion of the Roman Empire and its sensual greed with the modern day western capitalist monopolies and its worship of the twin gods of private enterprise and unlimited competition. 'This modern age has witnessed giant industries, rapid communication, universal commerce (and) have torn asunder the bonds of ancient custom, and created a framework of society more massive and imperial than the Roman sway. The world empire of commercial greed stands facing the tiny empire of devoted lives.'[204]

'It is not easy for those who have never been abroad to grasp the vastness of the injustice that has been inflicted on mankind by this exploitation of the weak... When the whole sum of human wrong is added up, in America, in Africa and in the East, the greed for gold which possessed the Christian nations like an insatiable lust has brought the wholesale destruction of millions of lives of men, women and little children.'[205]

Again his voice and Gandhi's echo each other when Andrews draws attention to the oppressive quality of the western expansion rebounding on the West itself: 'Upon the Christian people of Europe themselves, its reflex action must be remembered... The iniquities of these ages of plunder have re-barbarized the spirit of the Anglo-Saxons...' With a voice that rang with righteous anger against the 'predatory exploitation of the age in which we live... because it has been regarded as a necessary link in the industrial machinery which regulates Western society...' Andrews concluded, 'The more the whole subject is studied, the more it is apparent that modern capitalism is intimately bound up with imperialistic aims...'[206]

The Marxian tenor of Andrews' writing here merged with his enshrinement of Jesus' teachings and produced what I have called in another place, the phenomenon of 'Marxianity'. As a man of faith whose life-spring was the religious life, Andrews

[204] Ibid., pp. 4-5.

[205] C.F. Andrews, *Christ and Human Need*, p. 73.

[206] Ibid., pp. 74, 82.

took recourse to the words of Jesus, 'Ye cannot serve God and Mammon'. The spiritual impossibility of serving both were inflexible words that every great saint and prophet had repeated. Both, Andrews' and Gandhi's inner lives were touched by the austere Gospel, austere because it meant sacrifice at every turn-sacrifice of ease, comfort, even life itself.

The encounter with other religions than Christianity began when Andrews arrived in India. He began to engage with them and visited Arya Samaj Gurukul. Then came Shantiniketan.

The discussion on religion between Andrews and Gandhi is extensively revealed in their correspondence. A letter to Gandhi from Andrews needs to be quoted at length: Andrews said, 'I have been thinking much and long, and I must try to write something in a book or magazine for some of the thoughts are important. What has been exercising me most has been that very question of the organic development of religion. I see my way clear as never before; and I want and expect to find something in the way of simplification... my ignorance is colossal; but I have been in touch with *life,* and religion is not dry bones and skeletons; and so I may be able from this side to help with a new idea where thousands have been working. My theory would be something like this – that from the very first dawn of history there were dim instincts with regard to all the fundamental facts of religion running through the whole human race witnessed in the persistent voice of conscience, in the instinct of a spirit world, in the worship of ancestors and all the dim legends of creation. But that which was merely latent and unexpressed in the races became marvellously developed and expressed in the two great races which possessed religious *genius* – the Semitic and the Indo-Aryan. The *mother* source of inspiration was India, and from her the spiritual life radiated over the countless millions of the East and touched the West at different points. In the vision of India lay also the all the age-long memories and traditions of the past, a great reservoir of all the spiritual instincts of mankind, and she spread them like fertilizing and life-giving waters with a lavish hand' (you mustn't mind mixed metaphors!).

'Then there was the Semitic line – much narrower, much more specialized, much intenser in its very narrowness. It touched all those older Semitic and semi-Semitic civilizations-Egypt, Babylon, etc. – it also touched the Western world and for three centuries had felt the impact of Greece and later of Rome : it had been profoundly affected also by the Zoroastrian thought of ancient Persia. Then there came Christ: India the mother had been stretching out her arms westward... through a thousand unknown channels her beautiful life had been revealed as a dim vision to the West; her beautiful thoughts had been caught up by this earnest seeker after truth (Plato, I have no doubt had come in touch with them, as also the writer of the Fourth Gospel) that had already germinated. But Christ came and something far greater took place – he *lived* them – in the very midst of that Semitic-Western world.

'All the distinctiveness of Christ separating him utterly from the Old Testament and St. Paul comes from this Indian mother source. He was the child of the saints of the Old Testament – he had their blood running in his veins: but, beside and beyond this, he had the inestimable spiritual heritage of India herself, the Mother – not perhaps as fully or as wholly, as the Buddha for it was balanced in him by other qualities and inspirations, but this was the *new fact* in the religious history of the world; this made the new step in advance which we are only slowly comprehending. He was the child of East and West in one. The West has never understood this clearly. It has only taken its own side of him. The East has been revolted by the Western presentation. But there he stands and we of this generation can understand him.

'I wonder if in any way your thought goes with mine along this road? To me it will mean a lonely pilgrimage, for it means giving up claims for the Christian position which everyone in the West whom I know and love, from my Father downward, could not conceive of doing. They will regard me a heretic of the most dangerous kind, led away by my pro-Indian ties and infatuation. But what I yearn to know is whether at all this has been the

accumulating idea of the best *Indian* thought that I have been unconsciously imbibing or whether it does not go far enough to meet your own mind and that of others. Somehow raising this question here does not bring pain as the thought of what it means to my father does. We have not yet learnt true tolerance in the West. In India I could feel that you would love me all the more, even if I did not reach your own position, provided only you were certain that I was struggling towards the truth and not shirking the task. But I want your criticism where you think I am right and where wrong.'[207]

Gandhi had apparently given Andrews some books: 'The books you gave me! I cannot tell you what a treasure they have been. I could hardly have chosen better for just this critical moment in my mental history.' Among them, were Fielding Hall's '*The Soul of a People*' which Andrews thought 'extraordinarily good', though his other writing was 'feeble in comparison' and the patronizing air comes painfully into his last book and the word 'native'. The fiery denouncer of racism was upset by the slightest nuance. The other book Andrews appreciates is *Lafendis Hearn* which had, with 'a noble soul', brought out 'the glory of Buddhism' in Japan. However, 'Buddhism itself went back to its roots in Hinduism. It was the pre-Buddhist religion of India which was the *mother* religion that made Buddhism itself able so easily and naturally to blend with ancestor worship- Confucian and Shinto alike – and to give them a *soul*; the religion I mean of the *Vedas* and *Upanishads*. What Buddhism did was to give these earlier truths a *personal inspiration* and emotion which made them spread and grow.'[208]

The valorisation of 'Hinduism' and the panegyric to the 'Hindu' did not prevent Andrews from employing the typical stereotypes of the Japanese and Chinese current in the western

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[207] Andrews to Gandhi, Letter, 26 February, 1914, Sabarmati Archives, Serial Number 5943, Images 005943-0001 to 0008.

[208] Ibid., Image 005943-0010. Repository, Rabindra Bhawan, Shantiniketan.

world. 'This religious wave from India was only very partially successful in changing *character* in China and Japan. The Japanese on certain sides remains the vindictive barbarian, the Chinese the practical man of the world. That which we see in Christianity and the West is here seen also. The West remains still untamed by the meek and lowly Christ. How racial *character* does cling and hang on and reappear!'[209]

Andrews' denunciation of Western racism did not do away with cultural slippages on racial character.

On his way back to India from England, a letter written by Andrews from aboard The Caledonian, told Gandhi on how he, Andrews, had spent ten days with Gokhale, Gandhi's mentor, and how he had poured out 'all my religious doubts and difficulties to Mr. Gokhale. He had seen how I had been charged with heresy in the English papers and was eager to know all about it. I was able to speak to him as freely as I spoke to you and I showed him some of my letters to Rabindranath. He was deeply interested in the last one – a copy of which I will enclose with this letter though it is very rough and incomplete. He had studied the Buddhist movement and could see at once the point I made with reference to its effect on Christianity.'[210]

In another letter to Gandhi, Andrews bared his soul and asked for his love and prayers: 'I shall be passing through a grievous time I expect, with regard to questions about my religious faith and Christian position. That attack on me in the English newspapers for my "Hindu" proclivities goes on. The Head of the Mission in Delhi, Mr. Allnutt, has now written to me to define my Christian position...in writing. *That* I am going absolutely to refuse! The days of the Inquisition are over: and as I am leaving the Mission there is no obligation of any kind for me to do so. Susil (Sushil Rudra, close friend and Principal of St. Stephens) writes me to take no step whatever till I have

[209] Ibid.

[210] Ibid., letter of 5 April, Image 5956-0001. Repository, Rabindra Bhawan, Shantiniketan

seen him... I am afraid there has been a great deal of talk and possibly of scandal. This does not make me disturbed or anxious, because the true *Shanti* is beyond such things as these. If they would charge me with not being a Christian I would plead guilty at once! But... the missionaries are probably saying, that on every side they hear the report that I am going to become a "Hindu" and if I go to Bolpur (the site of Rabindranath Tagore's Shantiniketan) and resign the Delhi Mission this will be universally believed, etc. This is clearly what is coming, and so what I shall need above all is perfect truth and simplicity – not be freaked one way or the other by what people say – but to act simply and truly and honestly. This is I know what you would tell me. You must have faced the very same position a hundred times and it is the silence of deeds that talks.

'One thing further I may not have made clear to you – my position to the Bishop for I am a padre and I am not contemplating giving up my clergymen's orders as I am giving up the missionary society stipend and work. My idea is that I could take charge of a little congregation of Bengali Christians who are without a pastor at Burdwan. I could do this without any proselytism at all simply as an expression of my own Christian life. One thing is perfectly clear, the call to me to follow Christ, simply and truly His summons to Bolpur which has come to me. If the men in authority take away my clergyman's orders away from me, I must all the more closely follow, Christ himself and keep charity and *shanti*.

'This in conclusion – you do not know what a priceless gift you gave me when you made me take that work on Tolstoy among my other books. It is not very well written... but Tolstoy himself stands out clearly above all, and his great, true, simple soul can be seen... and in a plane infinitely lower, I have been going through a part of Tolstoy's experience and I have drawn nearer to him and to his spirit. I suppose I have read the work through some twenty or thirty times during these two voyages. I have lived and moved and had my being in it...something which has definitely marked and stamped my life. And it has brought

me nearer to you yourself Mohan, for I can see your spirit in reading about his.'[211]

There were of course elements in Gandhi's thinking such as the taking of vows and what he probably saw as part of his 'religion' inherited from his mother, that were irritating to Andrews. Gandhi would often interpret his vows as aids to remaining true to his words and principles. With the backdrop of the agitation against the Rowlatt Bills and the Non-cooperation Movement, in a letter to Gandhi Andrews began on a solemn note: 'My dearest Mohan, today is Good Friday and I am sitting in solitude and wishing to send you something that I have been pondering over for many days. It is a criticism... it is a condemnation of your whole attitude of "taking vows". This position which has become such a ruling force with you appears to me to have a strength of its own, but not that of the highest truth.

'I turn again and again to the Sermon on the Mount and I think I can understand better Christ's words – Swear not at all... Let your communication be "yea, yea" and "nay, nay" for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.' And I can understand better also why he lays such stress on making provision only for the day because 'sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.' This attitude of Christ seems to tell me, what your experience has also shown me, – that it is not good to fill one's own life by vows which pledge the future.

'There is one striking passage which used to trouble me a good deal, in St. John VII where Jesus is reported to have said, "I go not up to this feast" and then to have changed his mind quite suddenly and to have gone. The difficulty of the narrative was so great in early time that the copyists altered the text, inserting the word "yet" – "I go not yet up to this feast." But I can see now that Christ kept himself free to change his mind when the situation itself altered.

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[211] Ibid., Letter of 13 April, Images 05960-07-08-09-10-11-12. Repository, Rabindra Bhawan, Shantiniketan. He rejected the book repeatedly 'because it was American' but took it to please Gandhi

'I believe the story of Rama has done harm in India by over emphasising this matter of vow keeping at all costs. There is a marvellous passage in the *Mahabharata* which rises higher than the *Ramayana* in this respect. Somaka has actually sacrificed his son at the command of the *Brahman* Ritvik, in order to keep his own *Kshatriya* vow. After death King Dharma is ready to let Somaka off, but he goes down to Hell of his own free choice. "No" he says to Dharma "I must suffer in hell for this."

'To encourage immature and growing people – who have not thought the matter out- to take vows – that seems to be something which society should condemn. It has taken me a long time to see the weakness of this vow taking position. Even when I was with you in South Africa I did not see it clearly.... It comes to this, I think. Verbal consistency may be only a lower form of truth, not the truth itself. It may even overshadow the truth and obscure it. For life is always a growth into something new and unexpected and original, and a vow never to do this or that, may mean a self-mutilation, a refusal to do something new. For life flows on and if we stand against its current we get drowned. It is by our response to the new and unexpected in life that we are judged, not by uniformity to our own self-appointed standard.'[212]

A strong echo of Andrews' discussions with Rabindranath Tagore resonates in this letter. Clearly, his thoughts evolved in interaction with the Tagores with his own search for support in the Bible. 'There are two stories in the Bible which always revolted me. In one there is the story of Jepthah who vowed to sacrifice the first thing that met him on his return and in consequence had to sacrifice his own daughter! The other is the story of a band of forty men who took a vow not to eat or drink till Paul was dead. We don't read what became of them – only Paul did not die. I fully agree that your vow to the Ahmedabad strikers was nobler than this... all the same I have not been

[212] Letter of 1918 or 1919 from Cawnpore. Image 006547-0001-0002-0003. Repository, Rabindra Bhawan, Shantiniketan.

able to go all the way with it. And now again I am filled with doubts about the fundamental principle of vow-taking itself and the getting of other people in thousands to take the vow. And I am still more filled with doubting when I find that you are contemplating still more vows, – vows of *Swadeshi*, etc.'[213]

Andrews' explanation of his state of mind in the past as well as the present reveals dramatically the friction of individual personalities and, at times, the rough edges in his relationship with Gandhi. This friction is completely absent in Andrews' relationship with Rabindranath Tagore. Also, Andrews was now wholly committed to the vision of Tagore and Shantiniketan that sought to cultivate the minds, bodies, and sensibilities of the young and kept them at a remove from active politics. Their lack of maturity and awareness of the choices they could make would be overcome in Andrews' opinion only when they had received the education that Shantiniketan was trying to impart. His own experiences during his youth that he ascribed to his immaturity became the standard by which he reacted to Gandhi's mobilization of young students.

'You can judge from my own experience,' Andrews told Gandhi, 'when I was twenty years old I belonged to the Waringite Sect and I was forced by a kind of moral obligation to take a vow to be faithful to that Sect. I had to break this vow in about three years time, and it caused me the most painful separation from my Father. Yet again, I was induced (without really thinking out the matter fully) to take a second vow – that of the priesthood in the Anglican Church. This I had to break after some twenty years. And again I cannot tell you what misery it gave me. I feel certain that the extreme vacillation, which you have so often noticed in me, has been due to these false steps which I was almost morally forced to take at the very crowning time of my youth. Though the intention of society was no doubt kindly, yet I have something akin to indignation against it for forcing me into such positions when I was immature.'[214]

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[213] Ibid., Image 006547-0004. Repository, Rabindra Bhawan, Shantiniketan.

[214] Ibid., Image 006547-0001. Repository, Rabindra Bhawan, Shantiniketan.

'I know,' wrote Andrews to Gandhi, 'that I have been weak in the past in not having told you all this quite plainly. But that is my own weakness – the feminine side in me which is so strong and makes me wish too much to please those whom I intensely love. Do you remember, at Matheran how you asked Mahadev to show me Sarojini Naidu's letter in which she said that she would rather that you died than broke your vows? I tried my hardest to put myself in her mind and to think with her cordially – just as you so clearly did yourself; but I could not do so try as hard as I could. On the contrary, the more I have thought of it, the more it has revolted me – that position of hers.

'I know you will tell me that the South African Settlement could not have come about without vows – that it was the vow that held men fast and made you irresistible. I might accept that as your verdict – just as I did accept your Ahmedabad vow of self-starvation – and yet doubt whether the same thing should be tried again and again. I would say to you with the same breath "never again". Here then my dearest Mohan is my love letter to you.'[215]

In his letter, Andrews passionately argued the issue of individual freedom and choice. A sensitive soul that acquired serenity in Shantiniketan and in the company of the Tagores, Andrews was full of emotion and reacted in his subjectivity. Almost light heartedly he posted a riposte to 'Mohan': 'You will see why the Poet and I never take vows because we are always breaking them.'

Gandhi was a man who was persistently trying to steel himself into a lack of emotionalism in the pursuit of his 'Truth'. Nothing could come in the way of this journey of self-mastery, neither the tears of his wife nor the frustrations of his sons and followers. He demanded that all emulate his attitude of overcoming passion and emotion in thought and ideas. Andrews was calling for greater sensitivity to life and the self, while Gandhi ordained an overcoming of the self and existential obstacles. Andrews appeared unable to take responsibility for the decisions

[215] Ibid., Image 006547-0004. Repository, Rabindra Bhawan, Shantiniketan.

and actions of his youth and held something outside of his self and inner being as responsible. Gandhi had struggled against his own self to discover the path of his own 'Truth' and demanded that all should struggle likewise. Of course, he would argue with Andrews, no one could have coerced him to do anything that was not housed within his own mind and heart, and therefore, to discover one's own weaknesses and act upon them was his striving.

With the withdrawal of the Non-cooperation Movement, Andrews felt vindicated to an extent and wrote to 'My dearest Mahadev': 'I have been so much more happy, in these days, when I have felt the tide of the merely popular and clamorous India turning against Bapu. I was quite certain it would do so when he took the bravest step of all, of courting misunderstanding by not going forward when violence had so widely broke out and expressing so openly his own regret. It was like what Mr. Gokhale told me on one unforgettable night in London when he was speaking of the struggles of his own life, how he had deliberately apologised when he found himself not backed up by authentic evidence in his early political life and was put down as a coward and a traitor. He referred to the *Gita* as his ideal – the *nishkama karma*. And what is even dearer to remember is how Gurudev himself was just in this very way slandered and maligned when he turned back from the *Swadeshi* Movement in Bengal after he had found it being used as an instrument of oppression. The whole story is told in *'Ghare Bahire'* which has been translated in the *Modern Review*. And so dearest Mahadev, I was supremely happy at Bapu's greatest of all moral victories for the Truth.'[216]

And yet, Andrews criticised Gandhi for 'leaving out of sight the almost proved evidence that there were terrible provocations from the side of the government, especially the police.' Though his feeling that perhaps there were 'some aspects of *Satyagraha* I do not understand and cannot yet follow' was nearer the truth as not reacting to government provocations was the *sine qua*

[216] Ibid., Image 006573-04-5. Repository, Rabindra Bhawan, Shantiniketan.

non of Satyagraha according to Gandhi. 'My mind is confused and I do not understand Bapu... in the end he will convince my reason, or else be convinced by me.'[217] Of course, much later, Andrews was to write some of the best analysis and evaluations of Gandhi-led mass movements.

[217] Ibid., Image 006573-06-7, and image no. 006794-0000. Repository, Rabindra Bhawan, Shantiniketan

CHAPTER 5

Verrier Elwin, India and Gandhi

Verrier Elwin was born and brought up in a deeply religious home in England. His father was a missionary to West Africa, where he was appointed principal of Fourah Bay College in Sierra Leone and later as Bishop. His father was thus not with the family through Elwin's childhood and his mother brought up the children consisting of a sister and brother besides him. His memory of his father was epitomized by a couple of beatings delivered to Elwin which produced a lifelong resentment to authority.[218] In any case, his father died in Africa of yellow fever when Elwin was only seven so even the few encounters with him ceased. It was in circumstances of extreme hardship that his mother could bring up her three small children with Elwin, the eldest of the three.

His mother was a pious evangelical and from her he learned his Christian faith, in the more conventional sense. She was, wrote Elwin, 'Witty and well-read, she liked all the right things, poetry, music and art, but unfortunately her fundamental interest was in a form of religion that was the negation of all of them.' He continued, 'I was filled by my uncles with conventional Imperialist ideas and by my mother with the belief that there was nothing, nothing in the world, to compare with the joy of leading souls to Jesus.'[219] With sharp humour he recalled that his mother had a messianic belief in the Second Coming and the family could not go 'to a theatre, cinema, circus or other place

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[218] Dan O'Connor, *A Liberating Force and a Friend*, 1996, NEHU, Shillong, p. 1.

[219] *The Tribal World of Verrier Elwin: An Autobiography* (hereafter VE Auto) Oxford University Press, 1964, p. 11.

of entertainment, for it would have been rather embarrassing if Jesus had arrived in the middle of the programme.'[220]

Elwin was essentially a scholar by temperament, a man of literature and poetry. It was at Oxford that he moved away from the evangelical pietism of his mother and discovered Christian mysticism, developing a strong interest in the mystical tradition that flourished in 14th century English Christianity. He found himself turning to Anglican-Catholicism: 'The Catholic religion lays stress on a spiritual ideal which is known as reparation. Ever since my Oxford days, I had been haunted by a sense that I had no natural right to a life of comfort and culture when millions of my brothers and sisters were dying of hunger… I wanted to go to a very poor village and to offer my love and penitence, a life-long act of penitential love and reparation.'[221] This 'new path in "religion"' he said was significant for his decision to join the Christa Seva Sangha, a Christian *ashram* that was started by Jack Winslow. Winslow, initially an English missionary sent by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel to Western India, was influenced by the *ashrams* set up by Gandhi, and sought to emulate him.

Winslow was distressed by racial inequality and deeply inspired by Gandhi. He was also an ardent admirer of C.F. Andrews who was famously known as Gandhi's brother. Andrews was sympathetic to eastern religions and Winslow himself wrote of: 'Hinduism, with its astonishing richness of spiritual and cultural heritage' and he felt that Christianity could only bring it 'to a richer completion'.[222] Winslow thus left the SPG and established the Christa Seva Sangh in 1920 with a group of Maharashtrian Christians in Poona to 'affirm perfect equality and fellowship' and to remove Christianity's "western disguise' and develop its 'true Indian expression'. Father Jack, as Winslow was known, felt the message of Christ might reach

[220] Ibid., pp. 9-12.

[221] Dan O'Connor, op cit., p. 2.

[222] J.C. Winslow, *The Indian Mystic: Some Thoughts on India's Contribution to Christianity*, London, 1926, pp. 7-9.

the hearts of Indians more meaningfully if Christians explored the possibilities of what he termed 'the re-orientalisation' of the Christian religion. He remarked that many Hindus admired Christ but loathed a church that clothed itself in English rites and English customs. In this the Sikh-Christian mystic, Sadhu Sundar Singh was the exemplar when he warned that if the water of life was offered in a Western cup, India would not drink it.

The life-style at the *ashram* of the Sangh in Poona was inspired by the *ashram* ideal of Hindus and Gandhi's Sabarmati *ashram*. The members of the *ashram* wore *khadi*, and ate vegetarian food with their fingers. They ate, slept and prayed on the floor, and used Indian motifs in their chapel and in their homes. Aspects of Indian tradition were incorporated in the building of their chapel, in its representations of Christ and its forms of worship such as Marathi hymns and sermons in verse form, the *bhajan* and *kirtan*. The life-style at the *ashram* was truly monastic – the white and brown brothers shared tiny individual cells partitioned by gunny cloth slung across a wire; a cotton mattress and an open bookshelf were the only pieces of furniture. Gandhi's Quaker friend and host when in London, Muriel Lester remarked that the Christian *ashram* sought to make the lives of the missionaries as simple and transparent as Gandhi's, and blotted out distinctions of race and caste in the joy of serving Christ.[223]

Elwin stayed in the Christa Seva Sangh from 1927 till 1932. During his life there he wrote a series of books sympathetically comparing western Christian spiritual classics with the Bhakti tradition of India. He viewed the Bhakti tradition as a reflection of 'a democratic mind' that was 'open to all who are humble' and was not 'a system of intellectual abstractions free only to a religious aristocracy'.[224] Elwin focussed upon finding parallels between the mystical traditions of medieval Christianity and Hinduism – in the spirit of inter-religious dialogue. He produced two books on this preoccupation: one studied an anonymous

[223] Muriel Lester, *My Host the Hindu*, London 1931, pp. 128-9.

[224] Verrier Elwin, *Christian Dhyana*, Madras, 1930, p. 52.

fourteenth-century English mystic whose work was titled *'The Cloud of Unknowing'*, a book which, according to Elwin, "might have been written by some Christian *Sadhu*. It interpreted the holy books in the vernacular just as the Marathi Bhakti poets Tukaram and Ramdas interpreted the *sastras*. It was almost a Christian Yoga, he wrote, a commentary similar to the old Indian debate between the virtues of *bhakti* and *jnana*, love and knowledge.[225] Elwin called his own study of this book *Christian Dhyana*.

A second book he wrote while pursuing a new theological vision was on Richard Rolle, a theologian he felt could be called the initiator of 'the Bhakti Movement in fifteenth century England'. With his love for music and song Rolle was 'already an Oriental: he feels with Chaitanya and Kabir the rhythm of the Universe'.[226] It is easy to see how this process of thought would have brought Elwin spiritually close to Gandhi whose Jesus-focussed appreciation of Christianity fused with *Vaishnav bhakti*.

The Inter-Religious Fellowship, at whose meeting Elwin met Gandhi, asked him to write a book called *Studies in the Gospels* as part of a series in which studies of the *Koran* and C. Rajagopalachari's study of the *Bhagavad-Gita* appeared at the same time. Elwin's book was exceptional in the genre of such commentaries because he 'illustrated many of the gospel-passages by quotations from such liberal Hindu writers as Keshab Chandra Sen, Ram Mohan Roy and others'.[227]

There can be two ways of understanding Elwin's passage to India. One is to look at Elwin as a heterodox member of the missionary movement from the west who came to India as a man of faith, identified with the people with whom he lived, became a stern critic of empire, spent a lifetime with the marginalized sections of society and gradually lost his religion

[225] Ibid.

[226] Verrier Elwin, *Richard Rolle: A Christian Sanyasi*, Madras 1930, pp. 29, 67-73.

[227] VE Auto., p. 45.

(but not his Christian motivation and vision of Jesus at the Cross) and his nationality by birth. Writing of his decision to come to India in his autobiography he attributed it to the desire to make 'reparation' for all the money his family had made out of India: 'they went there to get what they could; it is high time that somebody goes there to give instead of to get, to serve with the poorest people instead of ruling them, to become one with the country that we had helped to dominate and subdue.'[228]

The other way to see what may be called his escape to India is to see him as a rebel and adventurous soul, hating convention, inspired by the radical and revolutionary and the different; interested in poetry, music and art, seeking above all to escape from the evangelical atmosphere at home and his mother who would force him into the coveted career in the Church of England and the 'genteel inanities of conventional religion', that 'set of dead, schematic rules', that 'series of many formal syllogisms'. He was to describe his father, Bishop E.H. Elwin's Evangelical Anglicanism as 'one of the dullest types of religion in the world'.[229]

As he wrote to a friend of his own reasons for leaving for India: 'It would greatly ease the situation at home. Mother has been wonderful, but we have had a few dreadful scenes, and I can see how deeply she feels it all.'[230] The reference was clearly to her great turmoil at his Anglo-Catholic proclivities. Moreover, he continued, going to India was a way 'to test both the missionary and religious vocation, not committing me for more than two years.' In the third place came his religious doubts: 'It will enable me to settle down in a Liberal Catholic atmosphere. My mind is by no means settled; and I so dislike externals, etc., that, if I stayed in England, I should fear one of two things – either a reaction away from organized religion altogether, or the acceptance of all these things on

[228] VE Auto, p. 36.

[229] Ibid., p. 2.

[230] Quoted in Ramachandra Guha, *Savaging the Civilized*, Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 29.

authority, and I doubt if the authority of the C. of E. would be sufficient.'[231]

Elwin was a remarkable man of many parts – a Christian theologian, not of the established Church but of ecumenical catholicity, writing on inter-faith symbiosis and dialogue and a mystic worshipper of the divine in nature; the untrained anthropologist of India's 'tribes' and their marginalized people; for a short but very intense spell a Gandhian, a political activist and ashramite; an Englishman by birth and sensibility but an Indian by choice that was dictated by life itself. Not to forget, Elwin was also a novelist and a libertarian with intellectual and aesthetic views that were in sync with India's first Prime Minister which led him to the position of advisor to the government of Independent India on 'tribal' affairs. After a quarter of a century in the forest of hardship, and living 'on the discomfort', Elwin could look back at a life of honour and fame: Doctor of Science of Oxford University, Fellow of the National Institute of Sciences of India, Fellow of the Royal Anthropological Society, Advisor for Tribal Affairs in the North-East Frontier Agency, Indian citizenship accompanied by the Padma Bhushan.

But now to go to Elwin and Gandhi's encounter and long-term relationship.

Elwin was uneasy with the sheltered life of the Christa Seva Sangh and he pointed out how 'Contemplation in the great Catholic mystics… favours action'.[232] His sense of restlessness that had brought him so far from home overwhelmed him: 'I found myself in the great city of Poona even more divorced from reality than I had been in Oxford… I could not see in the Gospels anything to suggest that religion consisted in arguing with elderly Brahmins about the nature of matter and the character of the Absolute.'[233]

It was Elwin's association with Gandhi during these early years in India that at first seemed to provide a way forward into

[231] Ibid.

[232] Verrier Elwin, *Richard Rolle*, Madras, 1930, p. 3.

[233] Circular Letters, *Epiphany*, 1934.

an active and practical life of reparation. He first met Gandhi only two months after arriving in India. He happened to attend the Annual Conference of the Bombay Branch of the Inter-Religious Fellowship. This was a body, mostly of intellectuals, that met periodically in Bombay for non-denominational prayers and had decided to invite adherents of all religions to Gandhi's *ashram* at Sabarmati for its Annual Convention. It was at Gandhi's *ashram* thus that Elwin was to first meet the man who aroused rather mixed emotions in him.

In his autobiography written many years later he was to recall that first meeting in lyrical prose: 'Gandhi walked in almost unearthly dignity and beauty. That was the first thing that struck me about him – his beauty, and the inner spiritual power that transformed his frail body and filled the entire place with kindliness and love. The impact of those few days at Sabarmati was extraordinary. It was as if I had suddenly been reborn as an Indian on Indian soil. Everything fell into place so naturally that I did not, I think, realise at first how very serious was the new attitude I adopted or what the consequences would be.'[234]

Nevertheless, he was theologically dismayed by Gandhi's position on 'all religions are true and all have some error in them'. A part of Elwin's problem with this approach was the account that he read of Gandhi's disputes with Christians in South Africa. In a letter to an Oxford friend, written in May 1928, shortly after his first visit to Sabarmati, Elwin wrote of his first impressions of both Gandhi and Andrews whom he also met for the first time in India: 'You ask me about Andrews and Gandhi.' Andrews is without question the most Christ-like man I have ever known; far more so than the *Sadhu*, far more deeply human, far more centrally Catholic. It was Andrew's grandly central position that so struck me: he has gone all round the circumference, and yet he dwells at the core. It is an astonishing thing. How his priesthood has clung to him! I never doubted he was a priest. How reverently he speaks of the Blessed

[234] VE Auto, p. 42.

Sacrament. He has had a unique call: he has obeyed it; and he has succeeded. His mind is more built up on the gospels than the devoutest Keswickite. The words of Christ colour all his talk. I have seen quite a lot of him, shared his room, had several long talks, watched him both in the ascetic's cell and the millionaire's drawing room, and my own feeling is that he is a saint. He is the only liberal of whom I could say that.

'Gandhiji is not really a patch on him. If Gandhiji were a Christian, it might be different. Gandhi impressed me also as a saint, with a saint's heroism, a saint's joy, and a saint's love; but somewhat of the faddist, and intellectually singularly unsound. He is a born leader of conduct, but not of thought. His religious position struck me as deeply unsatisfactory (and you know how liberal I am to Hinduism in general; I admire it immensely). But Gandhiji's outlook (as for instance that all religions are true) strikes me as neither genuinely Eastern or Hindu, nor genuinely modern in the best sense of the word. It is an amalgam of Ruskin, Tolstoi, Emerson and that gang – a type which I never understood nor liked. But when I think of Bapu, as we call him, the light of his life, his courtesy, his joy, his charm, his prayerfulness, his self-control, his peace, his sway over his noble splendid followers, I can only bow in reverence. Cut off his head, and I would mark him alpha plus. But his mind is far behind his life, as his politics lag miles behind his religion. But how can I judge these great ones: I am broken by my own pettiness of soul.'[235]

Elwin was both attracted to and ruefully wry about Gandhi, and his 'amazing company of crank disciples'. He writes: 'During these years my association with the Christa Seva Sangh was gradually waning, and I paid a number of visits to the Sabarmati *ashram*.' On one long stay he was given the full treatment of Gandhian life, not only its bare food and early rising, but the rather strict timing at every step in the day: 'It was exactly like being back at school again. I went in terror of being late: Gandhi compared the events of the day to a railway train – if you arrive

[235] Quoted in Dan O'Connor, op. cit., p. 9.

late at the station, you miss the train; if you arrive late for a meal, you miss the meal. The discipline was very strict. There was a roll-call at the morning and evening prayers, and in the evening we had to say how much yarn we had spun during the day.'[236]

Elwin told Gandhi that he simply could not say prayers at 4.20 in the morning unless he had a cup of tea; and Mirabehn was asked to provide him with the healing brew. The food, of course, was mainly *chapattis*, boiled vegetables with minimal salt, milk and some fruit – an extremely healthy diet but one that would take getting used to. Elwin recalled: 'Bapu once told me that he found Control of the Palate the most difficult of the vows for, he confessed, in a rather shy whisper, he loved good food.'[237]

The food was certainly a challenge; Elwin's description of a 'steaming hell-brew served up in a great bucket for lunch' says it all. His humour helped him to take it for some time as his piece titled: '*Thoughts of a Gourmet on being confronted with an Ashram meal*' delightfully informs us. It reads:

'O food inedible, we eat thee
O drink incredible, we greet thee.
Meal indigestible, we bless thee.
O naughty swear word, we suppress thee.'

The *ashram* timetable was equally daunting. While Elwin also complained ruefully of the lack of culture: the library was open only once a week, there was very little interest in art, and music was loved not for its own sake but rather for what it could do for the morning prayers.[238]

However, Elwin seems to have enjoyed the spinning and carding classes in the weaving shed at Sabarmati: he writes, 'I enjoyed my experiences… It was all very new to me, this body-labour, but it was enthralling, the triumph of drawing a perfect

[236] VE Auto. p. 53.

[237] Ibid.

[238] Circular Letter, 'The Visitation', 1931.

thread of even count, the excitement of seeing the white fleecy cloud of cotton rise up under the twanging carding-bow, the struggle with the complex processes of weaving, and the pleasure of watching the cloth grow beneath one's hand. I wish now that I had kept it up. It would have been as soothing as cigars.' This entire passage evokes an image of Elwin characterised by one of his friends as the capacity to discover 'the cosmic through the comic'.[239]

Elwin's own desire to live a simple life of service to the poorest people drew him towards Gandhi: 'Bapu himself set the pace. He adopted manual labour and filled his life with ceaseless toil. He reduced his food to the smallest quantity possible. His clothing was that of the poorest peasant. I once had the honour of washing his famous loincloth and I was able to see how the very minimum of cloth was used, even the ends being cut away to provide handkerchiefs. He wrote his countless letters on tiny scraps of paper, used with rigid economy. For him simplicity of living was a religious adventure, an act of worship.' Elwin was inspired and wrote rather poetically: 'Bapu's asceticism is of the open air. See him asleep beneath the stars, restful and calm. I associate him with growing flowers, fresh fruit, the wide and open river, the prayer before the morning star has risen, the walk in the unsullied air of dawn.'[240]

A hilarious account of one visit at an unearthly hour in the morning when Gandhi was in Bombay was published by Elwin in the Christa Seva Sangh Review: 'We… stepped through a door, and found ourselves on a broad roof, on the bare floor of which were several mattresses. It was Bapu's open-air bedroom: there was Mahadev Desai sleepily getting out of bed: and there was Bapu himself cleaning his teeth! What was I to do? The occasion I felt demanded ceremony, obeisance: I longed to kiss his feet. But I have not yet quenched my wretched sense of humour. You can't touch the feet even of the greatest man in the world if he has a twig in his mouth and is holding a spittoon. So I made a

[239] VE Auto., pp. 54, 111.

[240] VE Auto., p. 54.

deep but rather stupid bow, and Bapu, removing his twig, gave me one of those perfect radiant smiles which make a man his friend and follower forever.'[241]

It appears that the humour and gaiety of Gandhi and his entourage warmed Elwin towards him and he drew a marvellously attractive portrait of the man as another issue of the *CSS Review* bears witness: 'I suppose I should put first what seems to strike everyone, his wonderful charm and gaiety. He is a perfect companion, a brilliant conversationalist; his talk has a lucidity and authority though it is never dogmatic. He is full of laughter… His talk is spiced with wit, but never marred by unkindness. This humorous, tolerant, genial attitude to life infects all his followers. I have sometimes been asked by English friends whether "Indians have any sense of humour". I wish they could have lived for a time among the wits gathered at the court of this "Merry Monarch". Instead of a band of sinister revolutionaries plotting the destruction of their enemies, I found a brotherhood of men with the hearts of children. Outside an Oxford Senior Common Room I don't know where I have met such a fund of stories, such a genial humanity.'[242]

In a more serious vein he recounted being with Gandhi while he awaited arrest: 'Bapu slept like a child committed to his Father's hands.' And a few days later, taking part in the prayers outside Gandhi's empty cottage at Sabarmati, Elwin bore an emotional witness: 'I thought of the hidden life – in Nazareth, in Yeravada jail – its beauty, its power.'[243] The same Elwin who had complained that Gandhi's mind lagged far behind his life now likened him to Jesus. Clearly, the impact that Gandhi had had on Elwin was profound and he became the worshipful son to Gandhi's Bapu. As Gandhi wrote to him: 'My dearest son, Son you have become of your own choice. I have accepted the responsible position. And son you shall remain to the end of

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[241] Christa Seva Sangh Review, June 1931.

[242] Ibid., August 1931.

[243] VE Auto., p. 66.

time. The tie between you and me is much thicker and tougher than blood. It is the burning love of Truth at any cost.'[244]

Encouraged by C.F. Andrews, Elwin was soon engaged in direct political activity. Living at Sabarmati *ashram*, he began travelling with the Congress leaders and was given various political assignments. Ever the scholar he wrote extensively on Gandhi and Indian freedom. Under his influence the Christa Seva Sangh became a lively centre of pro-nationalist activity, a rather unusual role for a missionary institution. Elwin, left in charge of the CSS while Jack Winslow went home on leave, came into his own: 'I hoisted the revolutionary tricolour over the *ashram* (of the CSS) on the plea that since the Anglican Cathedral in Bombay flew the Union Jack from its spire there was no reason why we should not fly the flag of India.'

The real crisis in the Christa Seva Sangh came when Elwin asked Reginald Reynolds to give a lecture in the *Ashram* hall. Reynolds – with his flaxen hair and khaki shorts – was a follower and an emissary of Gandhi's, chosen to deliver one of Gandhi's famous letters to the Viceroy. As Elwin was to write in his autobiography: 'At that time Reginald, like myself, suffered from the unpardonable crime of youth. Nothing he said could be correct: nothing he did could be proper, because he was young. I asked him to give a lecture in the *ashram* of the CSS on the Gandhian philosophy.' Elwin also invited Subhash Chandra Bose. At the end of 1930 he accepted Sardar Vallabhai Patel's invitation to visit Gujarat and make an enquiry into police repression of the No-Tax campaign that had been started there. 'After this I was chased by the police and shadowed by chaplains of the Establishment.'[245]

Most of what Elwin wrote on Gandhi was between the years 1931 and 1932. Two of his books were very close to the sort of writing C.F. Andrews was doing at the time. In Elwin's own words: 'The most important was a joint book by Winslow and myself called *The Dawn of Indian Freedom* which had a

[244] Ibid., p. 56.

[245] Ibid., pp. 47-8.

foreword by Archbishop Temple.' Temple was Elwin's friend and by then the Archbishop of York. The book had Elwin's long chapters on a study of Gandhi and the principles of *Satyagraha*. The Introduction of the book argued their approach was not purely political, but concerned with 'the great moral and spiritual issues underlying recent political events' as 'the religion of the Incarnation is bound to claim the whole of human life as its province'.[246]

An over hundred page-booklet titled *Truth About India* – which the publishers changed rather cynically in Elwin's view to *Truth About India – Can We Get It?* was the fulfilment of a promise made to Gandhi. Elwin explained that he was present at the arrest of Gandhi on 4th January 1932, and that Gandhi asked him to tell his 'own countrymen' of Gandhi's love for them. Earlier he had published a piece in the *Modern Review* on 'Mahatma Gandhi and William Wordsworth' bringing together the loves of his past and present.[247] An extended long essay published in three parts was on *Mahatma Gandhi's Philosophy of Truth*, drawing upon his work on Christian mysticism in relation to Indian religious experience. Elwin called this an exercise in 'mystical theology' and observed: 'It is, as though, we have heard the voice of Plato on the banks of the Sabarmati.'[248] He was to receive encouragement and endorsement in his spiritual closeness to Gandhi from a group of Italian Sisters in a Franciscan convent not far from Assisi. The Sisters followed the rule of complete poverty and had an intense sympathy for Gandhi and India.

His essay titled *Calvary Satyagraha* was a more explicitly theological exploration and appeared in the *Christa Seva Sangh Review* as did his account of *Ten Days with Mahatma Gandhi* which he had spent at the Swaraj *Ashram* at Bardoli during the

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[246] The Dawn of Indian Freedom, London, 1931, p. 15.

[247] *Modern Review*, February 1931.

[248] Ibid., August, September and October 1933.

Bardoli peasant *satyagraha*.[249] He also wrote a very insightful pamphlet, based on his experience during the *Satyagraha* Movement on *Religious and Cultural Aspects of Khadi*. Acharya Kripalani who wrote the foreword remarked that Elwin had elaborated upon what is given in the form of *sutras* in Gandhi's writings and related them to a key Christian text on the service of the poor. Also published as *Christ and Satyagraha*, the work was according to Elwin 'a sort of guidebook for the Christian revolutionary; it united the Fathers of the Church and the religious teachers of modern times to provethe right and duty of Christians to overthrow a foreign or despotic government.'[250] Another work was a study titled *Mahatma Gandhi's Philosophy of Truth*, which appeared in the *Modern Review*. In this, he 'first surveyed historically those Western mystics who had thought of religion primarily in terms of Truth, from Plato and Plotinus to the present day, and then made a detailed study of Gandhi's own philosophy', which he summarized as follows:

'The identification of the Ultimate reality with Truth is very old, and Mahatma Gandhi is original not so much in speaking of Truth as in speaking of practically nothing else. His conception of Truth is metaphysical, mystical and moral; there is no aspect of it which is not real to him. It has been his special task to bring this lofty philosophical idea down to earth, to introduce it as a working principle into the lives of ordinary people, to direct its austere moral challenge upon world politics, to exalt it as a practical basis of business and personal relations and to work out with great exactness what is implied in the quest for its realization.'[251]

Given the contempt with which the imperial authorities looked upon an organization such as the Christa Seva Sangh, Elwin's writings and even more his activities on behalf of the Congress not to speak of his relationship with Gandhi, excited paranoia in the Home Department. On a visit to England to

[249] Christa Seva Sangh Review, July and August 1931.

[250] VE Auto., p. 77.

[251] Ibid., p. 78.

see his mother who was very ill, the British authorities refused to renew his passport and allow him re-entry into India unless he signed an undertaking to eschew all political connections. Initially, neither Gandhi nor Andrews approved of his giving any such assurance. Elwin, however, felt that his newly begun work among the Gond tribe of central India was what he desired to go back to and thus gave the undertaking required of him. He wrote to a friend, 'It is luminously clear to me that in regard to withdrawal from the political battle, I am following a true light.' This was true. While he was always extremely critical of imperialism and the capitalism which lay behind it, he was not a politician as such, and this was clearly the right path for him.[252]

As Elwin's enthusiasm for the limited objectives of the Christa Seva Sangh gradually waned he had been drawn to Gandhi's work among the 'untouchables'. 'I have been feeling an insistent urge to a life of closer identification with the poor, and to give myself to work for them,' he wrote to some friends. The 'poor' at this time he explained, meant the 'untouchables'; he was still not aware of the tribal world.[253] He was, however, dissuaded from this plan by Vallabhai Patel who said: 'The untouchables are not your problem. They are the sin of the Hindus who must make reparation to them.' Patel also pointed out that Gujarat, where he thought of going, was already full of social workers and missionaries, and 'I would find it very difficult to establish myself in a clear field. This I should find among the tribal people.' 'Why don't you come to the Central Provinces,' he said, and do something for a tribe which is almost entirely neglected both by national workers and by missionaries?[254]

Thus, with the help and companionship of his friend, Shamrao Hivale, Elwin moved to the Central Provinces where they were to devote the next twenty years in living and working with and for tribal communities, mainly the Gonds. 'Twenty years – fraught with deprivation and suffering', as Hivale

[252] Dan O'Connor, op. cit., p. 5.

[253] Ibid., p. 14.

[254] VE Auto., p. 58.

was to later write in his biography of Elwin.[255] Hivale was a Christian from Sholapur who was a member of the Christa Seva Sangh with Elwin, and was passionately devoted to the politics of Gandhi and the songs of Tukaram. 'Our idea', says Elwin, 'was that we would live together in a small ashram in a Gond Village. We would identify ourselves with the positive aspects of the national movement. We would continue to be members of the Church, and would draw up a Rule of Franciscan living. We would not, however, do any missionary work or preaching, and we would not aim at any kind of conversion. Our *ashram* would be open to people of any faith or of none.'[256] The mix of Franciscan and Gandhian principles were thus concretized in this vision of serving the poor. It was during these twenty years in the remote hills and forests of Central India that Elwin devoted himself not only to caring for the poor tribes but to the study of the people he was serving. He published numerous monographs on their life, social customs, culture and religion that came to be regarded as the definitive works on their subject.

It was at this stage that Elwin ran into trouble with the church, being refused a licence to function as a priest by the local Anglican bishop for opposing the policy of conversion of the tribals and for refusing to repeat an Oath of Allegiance to the King-Emperor. The Oath would have forced him to denounce Gandhi and the Congress and Elwin decided to resign his membership of the Anglican Church but 'with the utmost sorrow and regret'. By a strange coincidence, C.F. Andrews, the other rebel Anglican missionary who was, if anything, even closer to Gandhi than Elwin was, returned to his priestly ministry at the altar just three days before Elwin signed his Deed of Relinquishment.[257]

The encounter Elwin had with the Bishop is described vividly by him in his autobiography: 'The Bishop arrived in Karanjia,

[255] S. Hivale, Scholar Gypsy: A Study of Verrier Elwin, Bombay, 1946, p. 10.

[256] VE Auto., p. 59.

[257] Dan O'Connor, Unpublished Paper.

with two CMS missionaries, and since we had no chairs, they had to sit on the floor, rather uncomfortably with their boots on. The Bishop could not, he said, have anything to do with us, if we had anything to do with the Mahatma and his followers.' Gandhi was the great enemy of Christ in modern India: C.F. Andrews was contemptuously dismissed as a recreant priest'; Congress was doing 'devil's work…The Bishop even took exception to *khadi*'. Elwin tried explaining his status of dissenter who always had before him the figure of Jesus, 'who was certainly regarded by his contemporaries as a dangerous revolutionary in every sphere of life.'

Soon after the Bishop wrote Elwin a letter as follows:

> '…Because I love the Gonds I am not keen that…they should be the people who should provide any part of the "million lives" and "the rivers of blood" that the Mahatma says he is willing to expend in the attainment of his political aims. Those aims appear to be the re-establishment of some form of the Vedic religion and culture in India… you have repeatedly told me that your sympathies are with Mahatma Gandhi and the Congress party, i.e. definitely Hindu and opposed to the spread of Christianity and that you put their political ideas above your duties as a priest to preach Christ.'[258]

The general opinion in clerical as well as administrative circles that prevailed at the time was that Elwin the missionary had reneged on his religion and that he was a 'renegade' as one missionary stated to his face. Elwin offers in his autobiography the philosophical trajectory of his intellectual development: the story of his temperamental and intellectual attitude. Under the influence of mystical literature, he recounts, he began to think of religion not as a matter of '*converting your neighbour to your own theological opinions, but as the quest of the soul for spiritual realities.… It is thus incorrect to say that I came to India as a missionary and then changed my mind. I was never a missionary*

[258] VE Auto., pp. 89-91.

in the ordinary sense. I joined the Christa Seva Sangh because I understood that its main interests were scholarship, mysticism, reparation rather than evangelism.… Father Winslow frequently made contradictory statements. He would tell Hindus of his horror of proselytization; he would then explain to Christians the necessity for conversion.'

'When I first went to Karanjia I was still thinking in terms of the Christian religion and my idea of reparation was a typically Christian one. But even then I did not have the least desire to preach my religion to anyone, still less to convert the Gonds to Christianity. It was enough that I should try to interpret life in Christian terms. This was partly due to… my studies in mysticism, partly due to the influence of Gandhi and my growing knowledge of other religions and reverence for them. Although I have never accepted the facile doctrine that all religions are the same, I did not feel it was my business to judge between them and to advocate one at the expense of others.… even some of my more liberal friends continued to send me kindly rebukes… Father Winslow for example held the view that, although the spiritual and intelligent Hindu might well be left alone…it was necessary, when dealing with the tribal people and the untouchables, to bring them right inside the Christian community and the Church.

'No less a person than C.F. Andrews wrote to me several times in a rather similar strain: 'while what you say is undoubtedly true about primitive people, there are hidden savageries which are unclean and diabolical…these may not actually exist among Gonds…. It would be difficult to over-estimate the freedom from these primitive terrors wherewith Christ has set us free. And I cannot at all agree with Bapu that these forms of "religion" which are really evil in their essence, are not to be condemned, and those who practise them are not to be converted.… I am writing all this out because I myself have gone to the utmost limits of toleration, bordering on weakness, and I can see the same danger in your case… while you will help the Gonds by revealing to us all their most beautiful characteristics, you will

be doing no good at all to them or to us if you over idealise them as I tended to over-idealise Hinduism at one time… Have you not gone too far in following Bapu about "conversion"?'[259]

Elwin concluded this history of his conflict with the Church with a sardonic comment: 'I am afraid Andrews' reproaches fell on deaf ears… My experience in Gandhi's ashram made it impossible to believe in an exclusive form of Christianity and …once you take the exclusiveness out of Christianity a great deal has to go with it. After several years of painful struggle about the relations of Church and State on one side and my own theological beliefs on the other, everything suddenly and quite naturally fell away from me and I was free.'[260]

Years later, Elwin was to write: 'What a lot of time I wasted during my undergraduate days on religion! …But religion was very exciting then and it did, I suppose, provide an alternative interest, taking the place of bridge or racing.'[261] The levity hid great unease with established and institutional religion early on in his life. After the formal break with the Church in 1935, Elwin's sense of freedom was in effect from the institution and not from his faith and motivation according to his friends. As he remarked at the time of his expulsion from the Church, 'Christ flowers in joy in the midnight of the heart' retaining his concentration on Jesus. The love for the poor and dispossessed which first brought him to the forest continued to inspire him to the end. He continued to assure his family and friends that his fundamental faith had not altered and he did subsequently arrange to get his children baptized. But, it is equally true that he spoke of liberation after the break and he talked to a friend about his atheism.[262]

In his later years when he was appointed the expert on North-East affairs by Nehru, he was attracted by the Buddhism of some

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[259] Ibid., p. 112.

[260] Ibid., pp. 95-99.

[261] Ibid., p. 28.

[262] Dan O'Connor, p. 9.

of the hill tribes. He noted with admiration 'the influence of the compassionate Lord Buddha on the ordinary man'.[263] Towards the last days of his life he had a Buddhist shrine in the guest room at Shillong, where he put up his friend Arthur Koestler. He wrote to Koestler that he got 'a good deal of consolation' from praying there. Buddhism, he said, 'does not seem to be much good as a social gospel but certainly as a psychological cure for anxiety, desire and anger I find it very effective. Moreover, when he died almost two months later, Elwin was cremated in Shillong amidst the chanting of Buddhist hymns.'[264] He may not have been a Buddhist but his relationship with the Buddhists of the North-East ensured praying at his funeral and asking for a portion of his ashes for safe keeping at the Gompa in Mankhota, for a future memorial asked for by the tribals of the valley.[265]

The quest for a faith that would have meaning for him, or even atheism, did not at all mean moving away from his emotional relationship with Gandhi. When he had settled down to work among the tribes with Gandhi's complete support, the physical distance and non-political nature of his anthropological writings did give him a clearer perspective on this relationship: 'I feel perfectly one of Bapu's family, all the closer now that I am no longer a blind follower, but preserve my independent judgement. I disagree, as Charlie does, deeply on certain points. Bapu knows that, but of course it makes no difference. No, there is no estrangement, not a single shadow across our unity.'[266]

Of course, there was at one level a tendency for Elwin to swing from one extreme to another in his responses to Gandhi. From regarding Gandhi as theologically backward, 'his mind miles behind his life' he began to consider him the Unacknowledged Christ of Hinduism: 'the campaign initiated by Mahatma Gandhi, both in its method and spirit, is more

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[263] Verrier Elwin, Art of the North-East Frontier of India, Shillong, 1959.

[264] Quoted in Ramchandra Guha, op. cit., p. 299.

[265] Ibid., pp. 301, 319.

[266] Dan O'Connor, Unpublished Paper.

in accordance with the mind of Christ than any other similar campaign that the world has ever seen.'[267] In a letter to Gandhi he spoke of spinning the whole of Good Friday and how it had been a real 'experience of purification'. He wrote that even the *charkha* – which he must not have appreciated earlier – he knew now to be a 'dual symbol of our union with the poor and with God.'[268] In the same month he had, in a public lecture, declared himself to be 'Gandhi's Christian disciple'.

The relationship between the two encompassed personal issues, for example, Elwin's crisis of a love affair while still intent on a celibate life. Gandhi played the role of counsellor par excellence with innumerable followers and Elwin was no exception. In the tone of a father to a bewildered son he advised and yet left Elwin to make the final decision: 'You will accept of my suggestions only that which finds an echo in your heart'; Gandhi signed off, 'With deepest love, Bapu'. Gandhi's affection for Elwin was never in doubt as when he described him as 'in certain circumstances, … soft, gentle, yielding, unsteady,' but then added, 'It is enough for me to know, as I do know, that you regard no sacrifice too great for the pursuit of truth. You have demonstrated that brilliantly.' This was in response to Elwin having been told that Gandhi had called him '*naram*' and asking Gandhi what that meant. Writing to Elwin's sister Gandhi said, 'I always feel Verrier's spirit near me.'[269] Perhaps, implying, that Elwin's flesh was weak.

The frankness of their religious discussion was evident when Elwin asked Gandhi why he didn't write a commentary on the Gospel, as he had studied it so deeply, Gandhi replied: 'Hindus do not all accept my interpretation of my own religion, and I would not care to force on Christians my views on Christianity.'[270] It was then that Gandhi told him that the best way to serve

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[267] Elwin Christ and Satyagraha.

[268] *Young India*, 21 May 1931.

[269] Ibid.

[270] M.K. Gandhi, *CW*.

one's religion was by being a better Christian, Hindu, Muslim or Buddhist. When Elwin had heard this earlier he was rather sceptical, but slowly accepted the theological tolerance of the idea which directly led to his opposition to conversion of the tribes amongst whom he spent his life.

However, Elwin had differences with Gandhi once he began living with the tribal people, adopting their life and marrying a tribal girl. As he recalled in his autobiography, 'I suffered a great disillusion when I discovered that the *khadi* programme was not suitable for our tribes… spinning, for very poor people and in places where cotton did not grow, seemed to me artificial and uneconomic.' Then, there were, 'Gandhi's emphatic views on Prohibition (which I considered damaging to the tribes), his philosophy of sex-relations, especially as exaggerated by some of his followers (which I considered damaging to everybody), and what seemed to me a certain distortion of values – the excessive emphasis on diet, for example, further separated me from him.'[271] When Nehru appointed him advisor for tribal affairs in the North-East, he was asked to write a small book on Gandhi which would appeal to the tribal people. In his view the existing writing on Gandhi tended 'to put off or puzzle the tribal reader'.[272] Elwin was rather pleased with Nehru's declaration in 1949, that prohibition should not be introduced in tribal areas: 'you will break up their lives if you suddenly introduce it.'

As early as his Sabarmati days, he had been rather put off by the strictest chastity enjoined both within and outside marriage that he found very unreal: 'The *ashram* was an interesting experiment in co-monasticism: how far it worked I would not like to say.' Looking back many years later, he felt 'that there was far too much stress on celibacy… and this put a great strain on their nerves. Sexual irregularities were treated with a severity out of all proportion. On one occasion I was present when Bapu held an inquisition on an unhappy young couple…'[273] Elwin had

[271] VE Auto., p. 85.

[272] Ibid., p. 240.

[273] Ibid., p. 55.

at one point almost decided to get married and wrote to Gandhi about it: 'You will be disappointed that we do not feel able at the moment to practice celibacy after marriage … we have not sufficient intellectual conviction … of its wisdom in our own case to enable us to carry it out. I had hoped to be an ascetic, but you yourself have warned me that I must recognise my physical limitations.'[274]

Gandhi's reply was not inquisitorial with him and yet it did foster guilt in one who was internally divided: 'I am not thinking of superiority of celibacy over marriage. I am thinking of what you had intended, almost pledged yourself to be. But I know that you had to be true to yourself and appear as you were.' Gandhi went on to give his blessings to the marriage which never actually came off but he added his clinching lines after that: 'If you decide not to marry, your love of truth will transmute your desire for exclusive marriage into the universal marriage with Truth.'[275]

The letter had its desired effect and Verrier's response was contrite yet tortured: he wrote that he and the woman concerned had had 'a month of the purest happiness' in expectation of the union but now realized 'to follow this course would be for us a descent from the highest ideal; it would make very difficult the practice of poverty; the coming of children might cut short our service in India; and it would tend to concentrate our love on one another instead of releasing it for the world. St Francis' message of poverty and your ideal of *brahmacharya* have made war on our dream of married life and conquered it.'[276]

Once Elwin had lived among people who he felt were liberated from the ills of 'civilization' then it became impossible for him to return to his earlier enthusiasms and beliefs. He revelled in the tribes' extensive mythology, and was lyrical about their dance and song, their 'poetry, simple and symbolic, it is a poetry of earth and sky, of forest, hill and river, of the changing

[274] Elwin to Gandhi, 12 February 1933.

[275] Ibid., p. 56.

[276] Elwin to Gandhi, letters of 27 February 1933 and 18 March 1933.

seasons and the varied passions of men, a poetry of love, naked and unashamed, unchecked by any inhibition or restraint… They often dance all night until, lost in a rapture of movement, they surprise the secret of the Lila, the ecstasy of creation, that ancient zest in the glory of which God made all things.'[277] For the first time in his life Elwin saw a celebration of Being in the midst of poverty and disease. As his colleague and friend in the North-East, put it: 'It became an evocation of Elwin's mud-hut philosophy that freedom of spirit is the most precious of possessions and simplicity of heart man's greatest treasure.'[278]

During the forties Elwin's links with Gandhi weakened and he allowed the differences between them to keep them apart. Of course, busy looking after the ashram he and Hivale had set up in the forest and with his stream of anthropological writings besides journalism to economically support his family and work, there was hardly the time for regular contact. In any case since the thirties, Elwin felt that Gandhi agreed with other Congressmen that the *ashram* he had established in Karanjia was a waste of time, and that it would be better if he were 'to go about making speeches on their behalf'.[279]

There is a hidden anger that surfaces in such remarks. The followers of Gandhi who quite disliked Elwin were equally loathed by him, as 'busy bodies', proponents of 'uplifting' and 'reforming' the tribes with their welfare work. Whereas his 'Philosophy of Love'[280] asserted the message of working through the tribe's own institutions, in a spirit of love and respect, and not 'presume to pontificate to them by imposing upon them a way of life utterly alien to their traditions and inherent mores'.[281] He continued, 'love will approach tribal religion with the same respect that it gives to the great historical religions.' He had

[277] VE Auto., p. 104.

[278] Nari K. Rustomji, Verrier Elwin and India's North-Eastern Borderlands, Elwin Lecture, 1986, NEHU, Shillong.

[279] Elwin, Circular Letter, 28 July 1933.

[280] Elwin, Vallabhai Patel Memorial Lectures delivered in 1961.

[281] Nari Rustomji, op. cit., p. 21.

himself participated in all the tribal ceremonies, particularly the funerary rites and sacrifices to heal the sick, and received the ministrations of *shamans* in his own sickness. He found himself dreaming of their gods and the 'knowledge of the people gradually sank in until it was a part of me… There comes a moment when everything falls into place and you suddenly see the life of a people as a harmonious whole and understand how it works. And with understanding comes the desire to help.'[282]

Most importantly, Elwin with his appointment as Deputy Director of the Anthropological Survey of India in 1946, and his move to Calcutta, found a new circle of friends and comrades who were very far from his earlier life. It almost seemed to inaugurate a rebirth. Just the list of friends he so warmly related to speak for itself: the painter Jamini Roy, the poet Sudhin Datta, the editor Lindsay Emmerson, the dancer Ragini Devi, the photographer Sunil Janah, the geologist John Auden (brother of the poet), and the general secretary of the Communist Party, P.C. Joshi.

Eventually, as Elwin put it: 'Like everybody else I take from Gandhi's teachings those ideas which appeal to me and ignore the rest. There are a lot of things I have never been able to accept in Gandhism, particularly its Puritan aspect, but there were at the same time many other things of great inspiration... And I shall never lose the memory of that wonderful personality, at once warm and luminous, or the affection he gave me even when I least deserved it….'[283]

[282] VE Auto., pp. 347-9.

[283] VE Auto., p. 340.

CHAPTER 6

Gandhi, the West, and Christianity

The West gave Gandhi religion. In the India of his youth the overwhelming aspiration of most upper class and caste Indians with an English education was to be secular and 'modern'. The colonial Indian turned away from Indian ways and sought to emulate western ideas and lifestyles and Gandhi was no exception.

Even though Gandhi described his annoyance at a missionary he encountered as a youth, who had attacked the faith of Indians, he was not a religious person by any means. He was neither ritualistic nor doctrinal in terms of reading scriptures. His first contact with two theosophists, the brothers Bertram and Archibald Keightley who read Edwin Arnold's verse translation of the *Gita* and asked the hapless Gandhi to help with the Sanskrit translation is well known. 'I felt ashamed,' he wrote in his autobiography as he had read neither the Sanskrit nor even the Gujarati versions. And he began to read *The Song Celestial* in London.[284]

Bipin Chandra Pal, the Bengali nationalist wrote of the impact that the theosophical society had on many Indians: 'Our people had hitherto felt perpetually humiliated at the sense of their degradation. This new message, coming from the representatives of the most advanced peoples in the modern world, the inheritors of the most advanced culture and civilization the world has yet known, at once raised us in our own estimation and created a self-confidence in us… instead of apologising for our current and medieval ideas and institutions and seeking to reform and

[284] Gandhi, Autobiography, p. 50.

reconstruct these after modern European ideals, boldly stood up in defence of them.' This of course, led to a movement of Hindu religious revival and social reaction in India.[285]

This, however, was not the trajectory of Gandhi's thought: he went to the theosophical society to listen to Annie Besant with his two English theosophist friends who impressed on him her oratorical skills, 'the best among the living women orators in the world.' But, writes Gandhi: 'Not much impression was created on my mind then.' What remained in his mind were not the words of theosophical beliefs and arguments but Besant's riposte to those who charged her with inconsistency. She said, Gandhi tells us, 'that she would be quite satisfied to have the epitaph written on her tomb that she had lived for truth and she died for truth.'[286] This became Gandhi's own refrain for the rest of his life.

Gandhi also read Mme. Blavatsky's works, and commented on her *A Key to Theosophy* as stimulating in him the desire to read books on Hinduism for his notion of the religion had been fostered by the criticism of missionaries who dismissed it as rife with superstition. Though he appreciated their message of brotherhood, he said: 'I had no sympathy for its (Blavatsky's book's) search for occult powers.' Moreover, Gandhi was not a proponent of, in Bipin Chandra Pal's words, a 'revival of Hinduism'. There was no element of unreasoning 'pride' and indiscriminate 'defence' of the Indian past in the evolution of his thought. As there was no unquestioning acceptance of what was called 'Hinduism' by Gandhi, the theosophists, the lively group of Westerners who were its members provoked him to serious thought and religious searching.

What kind of 'Hinduism' could he relate to, in what way could he be a Hindu, and where was his empathy with Christians such as Edward Maitland and Anna Kingsford to fit in with his developing religious understanding? Maitland and

[285] Pal, Bipin C., *Memories of My Life and Times*, I (Calcutta, 1932), p. 425.

[286] *CWMG*, XVI, p. 201.

Kingsford organized the Esoteric Christian Union, of which Gandhi became a member and corresponded with Maitland extensively until the latter's death. He read the books they sent him, *The Perfect Way* and *The New Gospel of Interpretation*. He found in them support for his own kind of Hinduism that was a 'modern' belief system. He discovered in the Esoteric Christians the belief that true religious belief lies not 'in the sepulchre of historical tradition, but in man's own mind and heart; its appeal was not to the senses but to the soul.'[287] This interpretation, with its stress on Christian mysticism, foregoing its claims to exclusive truth, was certainly not considered close to their beliefs by orthodox Christians. But this was closest to Gandhi's sense of the religious. He was, later in life, to stress precisely these elements of spirituality and the soul, and the mind and heart as against the historical and physical in Hindu beliefs as well.

The impression Maitland's books made on Gandhi can be gauged by the fact that he advertised them in the Newspapers when he was in Durban, signing off as M.K. Gandhi, *Agent for the Esoteric Union and the London Vegetarian Society*.[288]

The letter to the editor that accompanied the advertisements was revealing of the formation of Gandhi's religious philosophy and needs to be quoted fully. He wrote: 'The system of thought expounded by the books advertised is not, by any means, a new system but a recovery of the old, presented in a form acceptable to the modern mind. It is moreover, a system of religion which teaches universality and is based on eternal verities and not on phenomena or historical facts merely. In that system, there is no reviling Mohamed or Buddha in order to prove the superiority of Jesus. On the other hand, it reconciles the other religions with Christianity which, in the opinion of the authors, is nothing but one mode (among many) of presentation of the same eternal truth.' The fundamental, eternal verities that Gandhi spoke of

[287] Kingsford, Anna, and Edward Maitland, *The Perfect Way* (London, 1909), p. iv.

[288] Hunt, *Gandhi in London*, p. 36.

here were to become his panacea for spiritual development as against 'present day materialism' and 'modern civilization'.[289]

Gandhi's catholicity of spirit was rooted in a natural inclination towards universal thought to which was added his exposure to the range of ideas that contributed to the evolution of a uniquely personal philosophy. With his exposure to Christianity and Theosophy a period of turbulence in his beliefs ensued. Though he did not develop an interest in the theological issues that were then being discussed in England, such as evolution, higher criticism or the social gospel, nor did he show much involvement in the theosophical society. He was more in tune with the significant group of English vegetarians, many of whom were also theosophists. However, it was their vegetarianism that fascinated him as he sloughed off the discourse of Indian (Gujarati) weakness due to their non-meat eating, that he had been part of in India.

Gandhi's 'Dear London… the land of philosophers and poets' that he sang a panegyric to, was quoted by Rev. Doke in his biography of Gandhi in 1909. Gandhi said to him: 'even now, next to India, I would rather live in London than in any other place in the world.'[290] The admiration, even love for England was still alive in the early days in South Africa. He had adopted the English lifestyle and his Anglicization was reflected in day to day additions such as English crockery and utensils and to the family meals he incorporated oatmeal, porridge, cocoa, besides his European dress. The faddist diets and innovative habits were also learnt from his English friends. In any case, experimentation was his life-long commitment and these were a common feature of English life in his days there.

The habit of listing friendly supporters and mobilising them for a cause; the importance of the Press (he advised Indian students to religiously read newspapers while boiling milk to save time); and learning how campaigns were run in

[289] *CWMG*, I, pp. 168, 169, 192.

[290] Doke, Joseph J., *M.K. Gandhi: An Indian Patriot in South Africa*, London, 1909, p. 32.

the press and public life were all lessons he seriously learnt in London. Consequently, when he sent Mansukhlal H. Nazar, who later became the first editor of Gandhi's *Indian Opinion*, as representative of the Natal Indians to the conference on imperial affairs in 1897, he handed him a list of people to contact.

It included Sir William W. Hunter, a former Indian official and currently the India editor of the influential and conservative, *Times*. Hunter had supported the Natal Indians in his columns for many years; Dadabhai Naoroji, the first Indian in Parliament from the Liberal party; Sir Mukherjee a member of Parliament for the Conservative party; and the British Committee of the Indian National Congress whose chairman was Sir William Wedderburn. It was a list that gave an insight into Gandhi's conception of the way in which political resources could be mobilized in the Indian cause at that time. It also revealed his insight into power politics and circles of influence. Gandhi also listed the editors of practically all the London papers, both Liberal and Conservative, and a wide range of Liberal and Conservative Members of Parliament. 'Gandhi was seeking support from the most eminent members of the Establishment he could approach, not from his old vegetarian and theosophist friends with their cranky and radical image. He had a more realistic perception of where power lay in London, and sent Nazar directly to it.'[291] The fact of startling interest is that Gandhi did not know these persons personally except for Naoroji, Pincott and Hatch (M.P.).

Clearly, Gandhi maintained no ideological barriers in mobilising people and approached the political goals confronting him with the attitude of starting in a small and stable way. These were the typically English traits he had encountered among his many Christian friends involved in various social causes. Through this process he first matured as a community leader in South Africa before moving on to the political national stage in India.

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[291] Hunt, James D., *Gandhi in London* (New Delhi, Promilla and Co., 1978), pp. 42-43.

Another important feature of the early politics he learnt from England was his practice of pragmatic consistency – he believed justice was on the side of the Boers but expressed his loyalty to Britain by organizing an Indian ambulance corps for the British army. He conducted a single pointed politics expressing faith in the professed British cause of fighting the Boer War so as to remove discriminatory treatment of British Indians. But the tide of racism among white residents of South Africa propelled him to seek support from the band of English Theosophists in the country.

His friend and colleague at Phoenix, Henry Polak revealed his disapproval of Gandhi's participation in the Boer war when he wrote: 'Mr. Gandhi… must have had searchings of conscience as to the propriety of his allying himself, even in that merciful capacity (of taking care of the otherwise neglected Zulu wounded) with those capable of such acts of revolting and inexcusable brutality.'[292]

A slow but decisive change in the political and spiritual sphere became noticeable in Gandhi from 1906. He established his first newspaper, set up Phoenix Farm (a Tolstoyan ashram). He was perhaps already aware of Tolstoyan farms in Russia, and was later to visit one in Britain in 1909 – the Tolstoyan community of Purleigh in Essex. Gandhi also took his vow of chastity in 1906 in tandem with his growing 'Ethical Hinduism' in the same spirit as his new commitment to Ethical Christianity. Ethical societies as a matter of fact appealed both to Jews and Christians and were an emerging movement in Europe and America. Their members felt that the old language of theology was irrelevant to modern concerns. His friends and colleagues in South Africa, the Polak couple Henry and Millie Graham, the former from a Jewish family and the latter from a Christian background, were attracted to the South Place Ethical Society in London. They were probably the ones who introduced Gandhi to the activities of the Ethical societies. His own conviction, that

[292] Henry S.L. Polak, in *Speeches and Writings of M.K. Gandhi* (Madras, 1919), p. xii.

the core of religion was its ethics, inspired him to contact the Secretary of the International Committee of the Union of Ethical Societies in London. Its Corresponding Secretary, Miss Florence Winterbottom, became Gandhi's lifelong supporter and friend.[293]

Ethical Hinduism

The intellectual inception of an 'Ethical Hinduism' is perhaps the best concept one can employ to understand what was happening in Gandhi's mind as he tried to evolve his position on a range of issues. Of course, he did not at this point of time in South Africa claim to be a *Sanatani* or any other type of 'Hindu'. And yet, his later day definition of his own Hindu beliefs were only the culmination of his thought process that was forming in the first decade of the twentieth century.

In a speech given to Europeans of a Johannesburg suburb he contrasted 'body force' with 'soul force'. The epitome of soul force he held out for them were Jesus, Daniel, Socrates and Tolstoy (interestingly, there is no saint or thinker from the Indian sub-continent that he refers to). Soul force demanded immense courage of conviction and determination and could never be converted into physical violence as it worked only in the realm of the spirit. At this meeting, the question answer session heard the Bengali nationalist, Bipin Chandra Pal, questioning the efficacy of soul force alone. It had to be backed by physical force, Pal maintained, and thus turned Gandhi's exposition of the concept into a tactical policy. Gandhi answered simply that Bipin Chandra Pal's concept would not merit the name of soul force if it would coexist with physical backing.[294]

At a meeting of the Union of Ethical Societies Gandhi spoke on 'The Ethics of Passive Resistance'. The core of his talk was the juxtaposition between violence that brutalises and non-violence that fosters soul force. The concept of *Satyagraha*, he said, developed the type of character that nurtured 'self-

[293] Hunt, *Gandhi in London*, p. 100.

[294] *CWMG*, IX, pp. 474, 243f.

restraint, unselfishness, patience, gentleness, these are the flowers that spring beneath the feet of those who accept, but refuse to impose, suffering.'[295]

This was an alternative and radical opposition to the prevailing Indian opinion abroad that spoke in the language of armed rebellion whether from the ideological Left or the Right. Both, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, brother of Ganesh Savarkar who was transported for life to the Andaman Islands and Virendranath Chattopadhyaya, brother of Gandhi's supporter Sarojini Naidu, were equally militant exponents of violent movements. As Gandhi said, 'I have met practically no one who believes that India can ever become free without resort to violence.'[296] Savarkar prepared the statement that Dhingra was to make after he assassinated Curzon-Wylie. It proclaimed: 'The only lesson required for India at present is to learn how to die, and the only way to teach it is by dying ourselves. Therefore, I die, glorying in my martyrdom.'[297]

The Leftist Virendranath Chattopadhyaya who eventually moved to Moscow, wrote a letter to *The Times* supporting Savarkar. Gandhi would agree that Indians 'must learn to die' but he averred, 'not to kill'. The assassination was a source of great sorrow to Gandhi who was deeply disturbed by it. His public confrontation with Savarkar occurred at a dinner on the occasion of *Vijaya Dashami*, the *Dussera* festival, at an Indian restaurant in London. B.C. Pal was in the chair and both Gandhi and Savarkar were invited to speak. The field of their encounter, naturally, was the *Ramayana*, the celebration of *Rama*'s victory over *Ravan* and the rescue of his queen *Sita*.

According to Hunt the dialogue between Gandhi and Savarkar was 'in code'; both spoke in the language of religious mythology. Savarkar called attention to the fierce and avenging aspect of *Durga* and emphasized that *Rama* established his ideal kingdom (*Ram Raj*) only after slaying *Ravan*, the symbol

[295] *CWMG*, IX, p. 471.

[296] *CWMG*, IX, p. 509.

[297] Hunt, *Gandhi in London*, p. 134.

of oppression and injustice.[298] Gandhi, on the other hand, emphasized the fasting of *Navratri (Roza)* before *Rama*'s victory over *Ravan* indicating the purifying element in the self. While Savarkar valorised the violent slaying of *Ravan* by *Durga*, implying that nonviolence would be ineffectual without physical force, Gandhi spoke of *Sita*, the pure, long-suffering one.

This confrontation was not just a political position on the Indian path to freedom. It was a slow unfolding of Gandhi's 'Ethical Hinduism' and his reading of the epics that prefigured his interpretation of the *Mahabharata* and *Bhagwad Gita*. A most significant aspect of Gandhi's speech at this historic dinner was his projection of the epic hero *Ram* as an historical figure and thus someone who could be honoured by all Indians as a hero and become a figure for unifying people. He focused on the personal qualities of the leading characters: their sacrifice, suffering and austerity. It was these qualities that he would identify as the key to being a *satyagrahi* striving for the victory of Truth over Falsehood.[299]

Learning from the Women's Suffrage Movement

Another significant formative experience for Gandhi was his encounter with the women's suffrage movement. Soon after he arrived in London in 1906, the Women's Social and Political Union led by Mrs. Emmaline Pankhurst demonstrated in the lobby of the House of Commons. The women confronted Parliament with their demand for a women's suffrage bill. Eleven women were arrested and on their refusal to pay any fines, all were sentenced to three months in prison. Their spirited and courageous fight continued in prison when placed in the second division as common criminals they demanded to be moved to the first division as political prisoners. Some of the women whose health was endangered due to harsh conditions in prison had

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[298] Ibid., 136; Dhananjay Keer, Mahatma Gandhi: Political Saint and Unarmed Prophet (Bombay 1973), p. 165.

[299] *CWMG*, IX, p. 498.

to be released. Others refused special privileges when they were offered while their supporters outside continued the fight and were also arrested. Eventually, all were released after serving only a third of the sentence.

For Gandhi, this was at one level a confirmation of his own thinking on the way struggles ought to be waged and on another level an inspiration to conceiving women's active participation in his proposed political campaign in South Africa. His complete fascination with the women's movement was apparent in his article in Gujarati titled '*Deeds Better than Words*' for *Indian Opinion:* 'It is no wonder that a people which produces such daughters and mothers should hold the sceptre. Today the whole country is laughing at them, and they have only a few people on their side. But undaunted, these women work on steadfast in their cause. They are bound to succeed and gain their franchise, for the simple reason that deeds are better than words. Even those who laughed at them would be left wondering. If even women display such courage, will the Transvaal Indians fail in their duty and be afraid of gaol? Or would they rather consider gaol a palace and readily go there? When that time comes, India's bonds will snap of themselves.'[300]

Gandhi regularly sent news reports on the women's struggle for his paper recording the courage and spirited words of many women. He quoted Mrs. Cobden Sanderson, who refused special treatment in prison: 'No matter how I suffer, I shall seek no favour from you. I am in gaol for my own and my sister's rights, and I will live like a common prisoner until the franchise is granted.'[301] This experience was to resonate in all his prison going in later years. As James Hunt tells us, Gandhi was citing the women's movement more than a year before he discovered Thoreau's '*Civil Disobedience*'. He used their example frequently, especially in his Gujarati columns for *Indian Opinion.* The suffragettes left a deep and lasting impact upon Gandhi.

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[300] *CWMG*, VI, p. 30.

[301] Ibid., p. 31.

The ecumenical attitude grew on Gandhi in London and South Africa.

Gandhi had for two decades the experience of living among the British outside of India in England and South Africa. His years in London – just less than three years as a student, and then fifty-five weeks in additional visits from the age of eighteen to sixty-two – provided him the opportunity to know the English urban middle classes among whom he lived. He studied them thoughtfully, often mused on their 'admirable' and 'lesser' qualities. He eventually achieved 'an astonishing empathetic knowledge of the English way of life.'[302]

The middle class friends and associates of Gandhi were in good communication with others in their society both up and down the social ladder. Muriel Lester, the daughter of a businessman, gave him entry to the poor of London. His dearest friend in Britain and in India, Charlie Andrews, the son of a Non-conformist clergyman, a Cambridge graduate and an Anglican priest brought Gandhi in touch with mill owners, the bishops and university people. Non-conformists provided a meeting ground where many supporters for Gandhi's cause could be rallied. 'It was the middle class, the keeper of the "Non-conformist conscience", that was his special London.'[303]

Around 1902, there were legal and other professional men, some civil servants, men of business, wholesale traders and large retailers, the Non-conformist bodies – Presbyterians, Congregationalists and Wesleyans, with Unitarians and the Society of Friends, and a few of the Baptist congregations with social standing who together took the lead of the Church of England. This class and its religious affinities were wide ranging and Gandhi learnt from all, especially the Non-conformist church with a reputation for conscientious and impartial service, as he

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[302] Woodcock, George, *Mohandas Gandhi* (New York, 1971), p. 114.

[303] Hunt, James D., *Gandhi in London* (New Delhi, Promilla and Co., 1978), p. 227.

sought to develop his own independent thinking and separate the dogma from the heart of religion.[304]

The experience of English life enabled his much admired ability in writing and speaking in their language and by living in English homes he acquired an insight into English manners and mores. Gandhi was a 'secularized seeker after modernity' in his days as a student. One obstacle was the non-availability of vegetarian food easily for which he had to tramp up and down the streets of London to discover. Thus, his preoccupation with vegetarianism and membership of vegetarian societies so mocked at by his critics became a feature of his early stay there. The well known promise to his mother to eschew meats and drink apart, his tastes were clearly on the side of vegetarianism despite his brief and surreptitious enjoyment of mutton in his school in India. In his '*Guide to London*' for other young compatriots making their way to it he expressed his own attitude by describing his instructions as intended for 'an ordinary Indian who is not over-scrupulous in his religious views and not much of a believer in caste restrictions.'[305]

Vegetarianism was not a literal dietary choice but part of an ensemble of philosophical positions. The London Vegetarian Society of which Gandhi became an active member launched *The Vegetarian*, a weekly paper that proclaimed it was 'A Paper for the promotion of Humanity, Purity, Temperance, Health, Wealth, and Happiness.' It affiliated twelve other vegetarian societies to form a Vegetarian Federal Union. The president of the society, A.F. Hills, a wealthy industrialist provided financial support and spoke tirelessly for the cause. He cited the scriptures and identified vegetarianism with spirituality and the Christian gospel. Simplicity and purity of life which included wholesome vegetarian food was the foundation of righteousness. *The Vegetarian* was not a 'narrow promulgation of the principles of

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[304] Charles Booth in Martin David, A Sociology of English Religion (London, 1967), p. 31.

[305] *CWMG*, I, p. 93.

dietetic reform. It would only lay the foundations for progressing towards the final redemption of the world, the real salvation.' In an eloquent essay that appeared fortuitously on the very day Gandhi landed in London Hills wrote: 'When he who is impure has learned to loathe the sensual sins which war against the soul, when he has learned to love that heavenly chastity which is the sign and seal of God's abiding presence, then for him the process of Salvation is begun – for in the body he has begun to know God.' Gandhi's position in later years, his philosophy of self-control and purification echoed the evangelistic movement led by Hills.[306]

It was not as if Hills was a crank espousing vegetarianism; the roster was an impressive one with Tolstoy, Thoreau, Henry Salt and Edward Carpenter as its votaries. It was only a move towards a life of extreme simplicity that was allied to the ideas of William Morris and John Ruskin, and other critics of the urban, industrial civilization of Britain. They were all to gather later under the banner of the Tolstoyan movement.[307]

Gandhi's contacts with some of the forces of criticism, renewal and change in Western civilization were to be a dynamic encounter with ideas that left a lifelong impact. The movement for women's suffrage, Tolstoyan critics of industrial society, the Ethical Society and the vegetarians and exponents of simple life were an exciting stimulus to Gandhi's mind. There was so much to interact with and reflect upon: Stanton Coit, the leader of the Ethical Society lectured on the 'Moral Personality'. Gandhi was clearly very stimulated by William Macintyre Salter's book published as *Ethical Religion* in 1889. He translated a shorter edition into Gujarati and it appeared in his Indian Opinion in eight instalments. In the introduction Stanton Coit held that it was compatible with all the great religions and offered an alliance to all those who wanted to strengthen the ethical basis of their own religion whatever it may be.

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[306] Hunt, *Gandhi in London*, p. 23.

[307] Ibid.

Gandhi's own introduction in Gujarati needs to be substantially quoted: 'A Society has been founded which has shown, after an investigation of all religions, that not only do all of them teach morality but they are based for the most part on ethical principles; that it is one's duty to obey the law of ethics whether or not one professes a religion; and that men who would not obey them could no good either to themselves or to others, in this world or the next. The object of these societies is to influence those who have been led to look down upon all religions because of the prevailing hypocrisy. They find out the fundamentals of all religions, discuss and write about the ethical principles common to them and live up to them. This creed they call Ethical Religion. It is not among the aims of these societies to criticize any religion. Men professing all religions can, and do, join these societies. The advantage of such a society is that members adhere to their own faith more strictly and pay greater attention to its moral teaching.' According to James Hunt, Gandhi's involvement with this society would grow deeper in the following years.[308]

The International Union of Ethical Societies, the Universal Races Congress, and a host of English reformers he came into touch with provided an intellectual adventure that shaped his own creativity and set him on the path of evolving a unique but shared vision. The blend he ultimately created and lived by had numerous threads from various sources.

Gandhi's diatribe against industrialization and urbanization had an experiential basis besides a philosophical one. In London in 1931 for the Round Table Conference, his choice of residence at Muriel Lester's Kingsley Hall so as to be among the British poor rather than with the other delegates in the fashionable West End. The choice was made despite the opposition from Henry Polak and Charlie Andrews who thought it an inconvenient place to stay and too far from the conference venue. Gandhi's decision was clearly based on his wish to identify with the poor of London particularly because Kingsley Hall resonated with

[308] *CWMG*, VI, 274; Hunt, *Gandhi in London*, p. 101.

all his cherished beliefs. It had been established by a group of zealous pacifists who dedicated themselves to creating a disciplined community of prayer, service, and voluntary poverty: a 'Christian Ashram' in the eyes of Gandhi. Volunteers gave whole time service; ignored barriers of creed, class and nation, served in unity, cooking or organizing, cleaning or teaching, scrubbing or praying.[309] Gandhi felt at home in the dedicated poverty of this fellowship, and wrote in the guest book: 'Love surrounded me here.'[310] The self-styled revolutionaries of the Indian and British Anti-Imperialist League of course marched past Kingsley Hall and denounced him as 'the cunning agent of the Indian Princes, landlords, and capitalists'.[311]

However, the place was also an illustration of Gandhi's rueful experience of industrial Britain's grime and impoverishment of the lower classes: it was in the midst of the depressing slums of the East End, among the rotting row houses, the smelly gas works and soap factories. Often he and Miss Lester would take a morning walk along the canals that were veritable sewers through miles of dreary workmen's homes and industrial acres. The little houses were rat infested, damp and overcrowded. This was his reality in England.[312] The vehement rejection of industrialisation and panegyrics to peasant life were the logical end of this experience.

On the other hand, R.C. Dutt's *Economic History of India* had shown him how Indian poverty had increased due to the deliberate destruction of indigenous village industry and handicrafts to favour English industries, among other factors. This was close to Gandhi's conception of India's woe: 'When I read Mr. Dutt's *Economic History of India*, I wept; as I think of it again my heart sickens. It is machinery that has impoverished

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[309] Lester, Muriel, *Entertaining Gandhi* (London, 1932), p. 2.

[310] Ibid., 68f.

[311] *Manchester Guardian*, Sept. 2, 1931, p. 9. Quoted by Hunt, *Gandhi in London*, p. 216.

[312] Hunt, *Gandhi in London*, pp. 198, 206, 216, 239.

India.'[313] To recreate in India, what he had seen of the Britain of the poor, while the rich lived in unpolluted environs was anathema to him, his sensibility was revolted by it.

The astonishing event of his being cheered by the workers when he visited the unemployed mill workers of Lancashire during one of the darkest years of the Great Depression, with unprecedented levels of unemployment in the mills could only be appreciated by those who believed in his truthfulness. It was Charlie Andrews, sensitive to the poor, who organised the trip. Charlie of course expected Gandhi to be convinced of the distress of the workers and call off his boycott of foreign cloth.

Gandhi, however, disagreed as for him it was not a tactical policy but part of his philosophical understanding of industrial life. He said to Charlie: 'I can say with perfect detachment though I am immersed in the Indian turmoil that the way you suggest is not the way to help Lancashire. If it was wrong at any time for Lancashire to impose its cloth upon India by hook or crook (with which Charlie was in perfect agreement) it is wrong also today…. The remedy for unemployment in England is not thoughtless generosity of India but a complete realization by England of the awfulness of exploitation of people, violently brought under subjection by her, and consequent radical changes in her conception of the standard of life and a return to simplicity.'[314] Gandhi's vision was one in which the conflict of interest between support for India and the economic welfare of British workers could be resolved if they together adopted a new life of greater simplicity instead of hurting each other.

Gandhi could not forget that India was unimaginably worse off than even the poor in England. Walking in the East End which he said he loved because the people in the street 'give me such friendly greetings. I have seen a tremendous change in social conditions since I was in London forty years ago. The poverty in London is nothing to what it is in India. I go down the streets here and I see outside each house a bottle of milk,

[313] *CWMG*, IX, p. 241.

[314] *CWMG*, XLVII, p. 47.

and inside the door is a strip of carpet, perhaps a piano in the sitting room… It is perhaps not an exaggeration to say that the poor in London have as high a standard of living as the rich in India.'[315]

Everywhere Gandhi went in England he explained that while Britain had 3,000,000 unemployed, India had 300,000,000 villagers idle half of every year. The average Indian income was a tenth of what the British unemployed worker received from the dole. If England faced unemployment, India experienced starvation. He consistently pointed out that India caused only a fraction of Lancashire's troubles, and focused instead on the worldwide economic crisis which was integral to capitalism. Of course, he was touched by human suffering, and declared that if only India would receive self-government he would advocate a special partnership with England in which each would adjust to the other's needs.[316]

The visionary in him also had a pragmatic solution meanwhile: he suggested to a friend that Lancashire find other employment for its workers if the cotton mills could not provide it.[317] He also advocated an English *Satyagraha* of a sort when he suggested that the unemployed refuse government aid: 'Tell your unemployed friends to refuse the dole as an insult, and to come out on the streets with their wives and children, and starve in public. If they had the courage to do that, your government would give way in a week, and do the right thing by them.'[318]

Despite the fact that Britain pronounced Gandhi as a disruptive rebel, leading a 'disloyal' movement that appealed to mass emotion, there were enough friends and supporters – a wide range of British moderates and non-violent radicals

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[315] *CWMG*, XLVIII, p. 25.

[316] *CWMG*, XLVIII, p. 76.

[317] *CWMG*, XLVII, p. 15.

[318] Shukla, Chandrashankar, ed. *Incidents of Gandhiji's Life*, Bombay, 1949.

to sustain him and whom he never forgot. Among those who waited to receive him at Folkestone on the English side of channel when his train arrived from Boulogne were: the playwright Laurence Housman, chairman of the reception committee, A. Fenner Brockway, Member of Parliament and Chairman of the Independent Labour Party, Dean Hewlett Johnson of Canterbury, the young Quaker Reginald Reynolds who lived and worked in Gandhi's *Ashram* for some time, and the Rev. John Haynes Holmes of New York.

There was a plurality of groups supportive of him and Indian nationalism: The Indian and International Gandhi Reception Committee, The Commonwealth of India League, The Friend's Indian Affairs Committee, The Indian National Congress League and the Gandhi Society. The Friends of India, a group of pacifists led by Quakers such as Laurence Housman and Reginald Reynolds supported Indian self-determination and campaigned for Gandhi's movement as a moral equivalent for war.[319]

A broader organization that could bring together the various groups was formed as the India Conciliation Group and included Agatha Harrison, (with a background in welfare work on which subject she had lectured at the London School of Economics, and had been a researcher for the Royal Commission on Labour in India in 1929), Maude Royden (who was the director of the Guildhouse and Franciscan Society), Muriel Lester, and seven churchmen including besides Andrews, Dean Hewlett Johnson of Canterbury and Bishop Bell of Chichester. Agatha Harrison became the Secretary to the Group. The committee had members also from the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and the National Peace council. The leading suffragette, Emmaline Pethick-Lawrence also joined. A large number from the Society of Friends, a religious body that supported Gandhi, was primarily involved by the missionary John S. Hoyland, the

[319] *India Bulletin I*, I (February 1932). Quoted by Hunt, *Gandhi in London*, p. 219.

author of *The Cross Moves East: A Study in the Significance of Gandhi's 'Satyagraha'*.[320]

Cross-fertilization of Ideas

Gandhi's interaction with Christian churchmen and missionaries was one of the great examples of a catholicity of spirit in a self-proclaimed Hindu. With the Quakers of course he had deep and lasting relationship. He observed their work amongst the unemployed and poor, learnt from it and shared his own ideas with them. The close working relationship with them was enhanced by their common interest in peace. Some among the Quakers were unhappy at Gandhi's mixing politics with religion and did not want to associate their society's name with Gandhi despite being committed to support Indian nationalism. For instance, the Quaker Horace Alexander, who had joined the missionary John Hoyland to support the Indian cause, had visited India in 1928 and stayed at Gandhi's *Satyagraha Ashram*. In 1930 he had visited again as part of the Quaker Society of Friends. However Alexander's father-in-law John W. Graham published anti-Gandhi letters.[321] Nevertheless, the Society under the leadership of Carl Heath was an important part of the India Conciliation Group.

Woodbrooke College in Birmingham was a centre for the Friend's Indian Affairs Committee that was established in 1930. It was appointed by their permanent Meeting for Sufferings: a watching committee engaged in monitoring the grievances of Indian people.

Horace Alexander was an active member and a lecturer in international affairs at Woodbrooke. Perhaps having learnt the prayer model from Gandhi's *Ashram*, he proposed that the

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[320] Published in London 1931. Other books by Quakers writing on Gandhi and his movement were, Horace G. Alexander, *The Indian Ferment* (London, 1929), Carl Heath, *Gandhi* (London, 1932).

[321] *Manchester Guardian*, October 15, 1931. Quoted in Hunt, *Gandhi in London*, p. 221.

Society might unite Hindus and Muslims in prayer, employing the Quaker mode of silent worship to overcome differences of language and faith. These prayer services that were a series of meetings for silent prayer were the hallmark of the Quakers and surely impressed Gandhi when he first encountered them during his stay in London as a student and later introduced them in his ashram. Hindus, Muslims, Christians of many persuasions, British and Indians, all met to pray for unity and a common purpose in complete silence. This communion in meditative silence was the most heart-fulfilling for Gandhi whose dearest wish was to arouse such a response in both Indians and Englishmen in London. With the crisis of the thirties moving toward war, 'Quakers in England and in America found in Satyagraha a deeper dimension to their own peace witness, and experimented with its application in a wide range of situations, both domestic and international.'[322]

A prime reason for the empathy between so many Christians in England and Gandhi was their commonly held belief that their yawned a gulf between the power and policy of government and their 'religious pretensions and political ideals and their actual practice as imperialists.'[323] Gandhi's strong affinity for earnest Nonconformist Christians and the evangelical spirit of reforming humankind and its lifestyle that the vegetarians and Theosophists exhibited taught him much. He admired the sense of idealism and correctness, the 'moral rectitude' and the 'Nonconformist conscience' of so many of his British associates. But he also warned against the darker side of rectitude: 'Perhaps there is no nation on earth equal to the British in the capacity for self-deception.' He greatly valued his meetings with the academics and learned clergy of Oxford and Cambridge and Eton, Gandhi said, and he could 'not easily forget the communions at Canterbury [with Dean Hewlett Johnson], Chichester [with Bishop George Bell]… They gave me

[322] Ibid., p. 222

[323] Woodcock, George, *Who Killed the British Empire?* (New York, 1974), p. 330.

an insight into the working of the British mind which I could have got through no other means.'[324]

Watching Gandhi being 'sifted and cross-questioned' for three hours by a group that included the Master of Balliol, Gilbert Murray, Sir Michael Sadler and P.C. Lyon, Edward Thompson remarked: 'It was a reasonably exacting ordeal, yet not for one moment was he rattled or at a loss. The conviction came to me, that not since Socrates has the world seen his equal for absolute self-control and composure; and once or twice, putting myself in place of men who had to confront that invincible calm and imperturbability, I thought I understood why the Athenians made the "the martyr-sophist" drink the hemlock.'[325]

Gandhi in his earlier sojourn to England from South Africa in 1906 had even acknowledged the major assistance he received from The East India Association, an organization composed largely of retired British officials from India (then called 'Anglo-Indians'), at that time. Their help was valued as a means to enter official circles so as to bring imperial pressure on the Transvaal legislature against which he was struggling then. Of course then, he said now in 1931, 'I prided myself on being, and being called, a British subject. I have ceased for many years to call myself aBritish subject; I would far rather be called a rebel than a subject.'[326]

From his letter of thanks in 1906 that was published in *The Times* maintaining that 'The lesson we have drawn is that we may rely upon the British sense of fair play and justice...'[327] to his visit to England in 1909 when he denounced the Transvaal government for cutting at the root of elementary equality and purveying a 'dangerous, immoral and pestilent doctrine' the rebel was constituted. Ever ready to thank and extract virtues from his opponents Gandhi would single-mindedly focus on

[324] *CWMG*, XLVIII, pp. 433, 435.

[325] Radhakrishnan, S., ed., *Mahatma Gandhi: Essays and Reflections*, London, 1956, p. 287.

[326] *CWMG*, XLVIII, p. 17.

[327] *CWMG*, VI, p. 251.

principle and honour for all in the Empire. The only justification for the people of India to remain in the Empire was the principle of equality and an abstract principle of rightness. Ever ready to appreciate the long drawn battle for rights without losing patience Gandhi said: 'We know that the theoretical equality of a very limited type that we are fighting for is of no immediate good. That is all the greater reason for putting forth the best that is in us ... we are presenting the Indian motherland with a disciplined army of the future; an army that will able to give a good account of itself against any amount of brute force that is matched against it.'[328]

This army learnt some more lessons, both positive and negative, from the increasingly militant suffrage movement when Gandhi visited Britain again in 1909. Sentenced to prison to stay with criminals the women went on hunger strike and had to be released within a few days. When the hunger strikers were presented to the public at a mass meeting, Gandhi was in the audience. His excitement with the events was palpably expressed in his long article describing the bravery of the hunger strikers and praising the organizational skill and fundraising ability of the Women's Social and Political Union: 'The systematic way in which they set about their work and their skill deserve the highest commendation. When we consider the suffering and the courage of these women, how can the Indian *satyagrahi* stand comparison with them?'[329]

Gandhi met the women leaders and attended their meetings at the great Royal Albert Hall and the St. James's Hall. On this occasion he also met with the leader Emmaline Pankhurst, who with her daughters had gone to prison many times. She was a votary of maximum militancy and had often broken ties with more moderate comrades. His initial admiration for her appeared to have overlooked the stone-throwing and window-breaking incidents that had also occurred during the campaign.[330]

[328] *CWMG*, IX, 463f.

[329] *CWMG*, IX, p. 421.

[330] *CWMG*, IX, pp. 325, 374.

However, Gandhi was soon to criticize the increasingly violent forms the movement was veering towards. When several women broke the windows of Prime Minister Asquith's home and another group threw slates when the Prime Minister was speaking in public, Gandhi warned against such tactics: 'Some of these ladies have grown impatient... All this is absurd... If the British women mean to fight in the spirit of *Satyagraha*, they cannot adopt tactics like those (disturbing meetings, spoiling of ballots in a bye-election, and violent resistance in a jail cell). There is no room for impatience in *Satyagraha*. If demoralized by suffering, they take to extreme measures and resort to violence, they will lose whatever sympathy they have and set the people against themselves... For a certainty, they will suffer a set-back now.'[331] In any case the women would make no ethical advance Gandhi wrote in Gujarati: 'If the women win power through violent means that will give us no reason to believe that administration under them will register any great improvement.'[332]

Gandhi's enthusiasm for the women's movement faced disappointment but also heightened awareness of pitfalls that would confront his own campaigns. His reaction to violence in his first non-cooperation movement in India was definitely conditioned by his experience of the suffragettes struggle. Though he at first he saw the violent activities as a sign of indiscipline in the ranks he soon concluded that the women were not *satyagrahis* and had failed in upholding the principle. It was not a question of being effective but principled: the English respected violence and the women might succeed, but they would not go far in transforming social relations.[333]

Just as he forecast, the setback occurred with a split in the movement and a more moderate group was formed under Mrs. Charlotte French Despard. Calling itself The Women's Freedom

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[331] *CWMG*, IX, pp. 402, 433.

[332] Ibid., p. 448.

[333] Ibid., p. 449.

League, it carried out civil disobedience but avoided violence and damaging of property. As Gandhi had cautioned, the majority of women were not in favour of violence and the League effectively mounted a non-violent vigil outside Parliament and their pickets remained on station from July through October. When the House met through the night to debate the Budget, the women kept their posts. By the end of September they celebrated their 10,000th hour of picketing. Gandhi was greatly impressed and described all this in his report from London to his Gujarati readers.[334] The large-scale picketing by women in the Indian movements he led was certainly inspired by his memories of the scenes he witnessed in London.

Gandhi said: 'I had long talks,' with Mrs. Despard in London and admire her greatly, and much appreciate her advocacy of 'spiritual resistance'.[335] She appeared to have so many personal qualities that Gandhi could himself identify with, almost an ideal *satyagrahi*. She was a pacifist, worked in the slums of south London and became a Poor Law Guardian, established clubs for workers and boys and one of the first child welfare centres in the country. She lived among the poor, wore simple clothing and was deeply religious, a vegetarian and a Theosophist. With all her qualities of spirituality and simplicity she was a dedicated political activist and a spirited rebel. A socialist, she had been a founding member of the movement but had split with the Pankhursts over issues of authority and democracy in the movement. She conducted a vigorous campaign of tax refusal and the government seized and sold her furniture which her admirers had to buy back from the auction rooms. The organized expression of her campaign was The Women's Tax Resistance League.[336] Despite the failure of her organization to sustain a completely non-violent struggle – Gandhi reproached it for at least one act of spoiling ballots – Gandhi recounted

[334] Hunt, *Gandhi in London*, p. 140.

[335] Polak, Millie Graham, *Mr. Gandhi: The Man*, London, 1931, p. 121.

[336] Hunt, *Gandhi in London*, pp. 140-41.

his great admiration of her to Millie Polak who quoted him in her memoir of him. More significantly, the influence of so many aspects of her life resonated in his own life in later years.

Inspired by the self projection of the suffragettes as passive resisters Gandhi himself used the term passive resistance to denote *Satyagraha* in the initial years. His own English translation of *Hind Swaraj* used the term passive resistance. However,it has been observed that, as Gandhi later went into the historical incidents associated with passive resistance he realised that it was seen as the 'weapon of the weak'. This was the characterization of the struggle of the Transvaal Indians he led, that was made by a newspaper in Johannesburg. He now saw that 'in the English social and political history passive resistance was associated with the opposition of numerically weaker and disenfranchised people.' Also, he examined the way the non-conformist Christians and women in the suffragette movement employed passive resistance. The non-conformist Christians would eschew the use of force under all circumstances while the suffragists were not averse to violent methods on principle. He emphasized the difference between his own *Satyagraha* and passive resistance henceforth. They were now seen as antagonistic forces: 'In *Satyagraha* there is not the remotest idea of injuring the opponent. *Satyagraha* postulates the conquest of the adversary by suffering in one's own person.' On this conviction, Gandhi challenged the widely held description of Jesus as 'the prince of passive resisters'. He wrote: 'Jesus Christ indeed has been acclaimed as the prince of passive resisters but I submit that in that case passive resistance must mean *Satyagraha,* and *Satyagraha* alone.'[337]

The Satyagrahi of South Africa

As Gandhi experienced the reality of British deception after his apparently successful deputation of 1906 he began to

[337] Tridip Suhrud, 'Reading Gandhiji in Two Tongues', Summerhill, *IIAS Review*, Vol. XIV, Nos. 1-2, 2008.

focus on new sources of strength for the fight ahead. The 'fine qualities of Englishmen' and their 'civilization' began to recede from his imagination. John Ruskin and Phoenix farm became the intellectual markers of the future. In his personal life the discipline of self-restraint and increasing emphasis on body-labour became new sources of strength. 'Indian civilization' beckoned as confidence and a sense of owing his origins was strengthened.

The moral arguments of Ruskin had inspired the setting up of Phoenix and his critique of commercialism and industrialism now evolved into Gandhi's argument against industry and arms for India: 'Just as we cannot achieve real *swarajya* by following the path of evil – that is by killing the British – so also it will not be possible for us to achieve it by establishing big factories in India. Accumulation of gold and silver will not bring *swarajya*. This has been convincingly proved by Ruskin.'[338]

One of the most misunderstood of Gandhi's formulations is that on Civilizations and their attributes in the 'East' and 'West'.[339] When he described the destructive, disruptive and goalless activity of the 'West' he spoke of the 'modern', in the sense of industrialized economy and society, and the contemporary experience of his stay in the west. The 'East' appeared the opposite of the 'horrors' of the 'West' as he saw them because they were pre-modern and therefore to be preferred. In this project of denouncing and rejecting the 'modern west', he was in tune with many writers from whom he had actually first absorbed the language of the 'evils of modernity'. It is highly debatable to term his writing on this theme as part of the 'Hindu Renaissance' or any sort of 'cultural nationalism'.[340]

A period of great spiritual turbulence and mental churning had generated his ideas on 'This Crazy Civilization' – that

[338] Ibid., p. 144.

[339] Ghanshyam Shah, *A Moralist's Outcry Against Globalisation*, paper presented at IIAS in 2012 Shah sets up a binary of spiritualist and materialist philosophy. See p. 18.

[340] See Hunt for this label in *Gandhi in London*, pp. 144-145.

was a critique not of western civilization as such but 'modern' civilization. This critical difference becomes apparent in that section of *Hind Swaraj* that has been often reprinted as '*Gandhi's Creed*'. The hiatus between the excitement of London over the flight across the English Channel and his own commitment to fighting the misery and destitution of the labouring poor in South Africa and India only heightened his distaste for the 'west': 'The more experience I have of meeting the so-called big men or even men who are really great, the more disgusted I feel after every such meeting.'[341]

This disgust with 'Western Civilization' was present within the West and Gandhi was in close contact with many who critiqued it and were struggling to mobilise forces against it. Besides his conversations with the leaders of the movement for women's suffrage he was in constant discussion with groups who were critics of industrial civilization and who sought to establish new social relations through the ethical societies and the preservation of nature by advocating vegetarianism and the simple life. Gandhi's intellectual encounter with Edward Carpenter's *Civilization: Its Cause and Cure* that argued for a return to nature and community of human life, was a transformative experience. The restoration of 'wholeness' to persons and life, and the inability of medical science to treat disease as it focused on symptoms and not the cause-the breakdown of unity, community and purpose of human beings in the modern world, became Gandhi's position all through his life. However, he criticised Carpenter for not following through the cure for the ills of the time: 'The cure suggested by him is good, but I note that he is afraid of his own logic, naturally because he is not certain of his ground. No man in my opinion will be able to give an accurate forecast of the future and describe a proper cure, unless he has seen the heart of India. Now you know in what direction my thoughts are driving me.'[342]

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[341] *CWMG*, IX, 313.

[342] Gandhi to Henry Polak, 8th September 1909, Sabarmati Archives, SN. 5056.

He was similarly influenced by G.K. Chesterton's very provocative dismissal of Indian nationalists who were not 'Indian' but clones of the 'West', leading Gandhi to question: 'May it not be... that we have been endeavouring to destroy what the Indian people have carefully nurtured through thousands of years?' As Hunt points out Gandhi was disturbed by the ideology of Shyamji Krishnaverma and Savarkar who merged violent extremism of political thought with social and cultural westernization as the panacea for India's future. Chesterton's attack on Indian nationalism as cast in the mould of Herbert Spencer rang a bell in Gandhi's mind, for Spencer was the thinker who was the guiding spirit of Shyamji Krishnavarma and his followers at India House.[343]

John Ruskin's Unto This Last altered the course of his life in a definitive way and he says he came under the 'magic spell of the book'. Reading it was a sort of epiphany that comes to those who are already moving along a path and waiting for the revelation to home in. There was an'instantaneous and practical' transformation in his life. He moved to a farm, and established a community there that was to live by bread-labour. Ruskin became an important part of Gandhi's dialogue with the west. With the help of Ruskin he sought to establish that the quest for the material and physical had no sanction from divine law and was but a western construct which Ruskin had critiqued. He agreed with Ruskin that one could not pursue happiness in violation of the moral law.

Gandhi wrote: 'We in India are much given nowadays to imitation of the West. We do grant that it is necessary to imitate the West in certain respects. At the same time there is no doubt that many western ideas are wrong.'[344]

Ruskin's book was filled with Biblical allusions and the very title of his book, *Unto The Last* was derived from Christ's parable of the Vineyard; where a man paid equal wages to all labourers regardless of the time they had spent working in his vineyard. On

[343] Hunt, *Gandhi in London*, pp. 150-1.

[344] *CWMG*, Vol. 8, p. 317.

being asked why he did so, he replied: 'I will give unto this last, even as unto thee.'[345] As Suhrud points out, the philosophical meaning that both Ruskin and Gandhi derived from this parable was that the relationship between the employer and employee should not be one of profit or advantage but of justice.[346] The evolution of Gandhi's economic thinking and his later-day ideas of 'Trusteeship' were based on this. Ruskin, along with Thoreau, were his biggest allies in the civilizational dialogue he carried on with the west. Modern Western civilization was for him as for them, characterized by the desire to increase bodily comfort and a search for meaning and fulfilment in physical pursuits. This civilization was for him irreligious, a satanic civilization. It lacked in Thoreau's meaning of the term, the Christian idea of love and compassion or what he called 'love-force'.[347]

Above all, of course, it was Leo Tolstoy whose deep impact made Gandhi opt for an alternative life of the mind as well as the body (The spiritual life of Gandhi and its relation with *The Kingdom of God is Within You* is taken up elsewhere). The impact was shared with Gandhi by all of Gandhi's English friends-an entire generation bore Tolstoy's influence. Undoubtedly, these influences were not impacting a blank slate but arousing a response and becoming further confirmation of Gandhi's own intellectual and moral predilections. He utilized the arguments of European writers but turned several of their pragmatic criticisms into moral and normative positions. The result was Gandhi's impassioned work, *Hind Swaraj* or *Indian Home Rule*.

Hind Swaraj

Gandhi's growing understanding of colonial authority as inseparable from modern civilization, both as intrinsically violent was the catalyst for his writing Hind Swaraj. In this

[345] Mathew, xx. 1-4.

[346] Tridip Suhrud, 'Reading Gandhiji in Two Tongues', Summerhill, *IIAS Review*, p. 13.

[347] Ibid., pp. 14-15.

text he worked out this insight offering not only a scathing critique of modern western civilization but proposing an alternate civilizational model based on an ethics of restraint and compassion.

This book's argument was captured best in the sixteen propositions[348] that revealed Gandhi's conclusions after his great mental churning that was marked by turbulence leading to certain deep-rooted convictions. Importantly, these propositions were very much in tune with English and other western critics of modern civilization. They were a product of his encounters with the dissent in the West that combined with his own comfort zone of childhood influences and familial upbringing. The components of his thought that he ascribed to his 'Hinduness' were in many instances shared with men such as Vivekanand, Rabindranath Tagore, or even the Theosophists.

However he was distanced from them by his refusal to counterpose and essentialize the 'spiritual east' to the 'materialist west' or to combine, as they did, the 'spirituality of the east' with the material 'achievements' of the west. For, he wrote, 'There is no such thing as Western or European civilization, but there is a modern civilization, which is purely material.' Naturally, therefore, 'There is no impassable barrier between East and West.' Clearly alluding to his friends and others who were dissenters from this modern, industrial civilization, he wrote that, 'The people of Europe, before they were touched by modern civilization, had much in common with the people of the East... and even today, Europeans who are not touched by modern civilization are far better able to mix with the Indians than the offspring of that civilization.' Therefore, it figured, that it was not the British people or western civilization that was ruling India, 'but it is modern civilization, through its railways, telegraphs, telephones, and almost every invention which has been claimed to be a triumph of civilization.'[349]

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[348] Hunt, op. cit.

[349] *CWMG*, IX, 479.

Gandhi asserted that 'There seem to be many in England today who think likewise', especially, as regards the 'true wisdom in the sages of old', and 'the so-called upper classes have to learn to live consciously and religiously and deliberately the simple peasant life, knowing it to be a life giving true happiness.' This position was based upon a simple truth: 'Increase of material comforts, it may generally be laid down, does not in any way whatsoever conduce to moral growth.'[350] The ultimate truth for Gandhi was not the accomplishments of the West but the mode of life which is moral, which teaches self-control and to master the self. This was not an Indian 'spiritualist' or *Swami* talking, but an intellectual who had a universal agenda. He advised Englishmen to listen to their own critics of modern civilization and follow the scriptures of their own religion. His was not a programme for Indians alone, though India was the arena for his political movements. It was a voice that sought to address the world.

As Gandhi declared in his preface to the first publication of *Hind Swaraj*, which was in Gujarati, 'These views are mine and yet not mine. They are mine because I hope to act according to them. They are almost a part of my being. But, yet, they are not mine, because I lay no claim to originality. They have been formed after reading several books. That which I dimly felt, received support from these books.'

'The views I venture to place before the reader are, needless to say, held by many Indians not touched by what is known as civilization, but I ask the reader to believe me when I tell him that they are also held by thousands of Europeans. Those who wish to dive deep, and have time, may read certain books themselves.'[351]

In the English edition he appended a bibliography of twenty books, pamphlets or essays. All were western publications, including two Indian economists. The list did not have any writings considered 'traditional Indian writings'

[350] Ibid.; also *Gandhi to Polak*, October 14, 1909.

[351] *CWMG*, X, 7.

or any published in Indian languages. As Hunt remarks, it is a bibliography that seeks to establish western support for the propositions about civilization that Gandhi set forth. The list is headed by Tolstoy, whom Gandhi acknowledged as his chief western teacher, and the first six titles are Tolstoy's writings. Then comes John Ruskin followed by Henry David Thoreau. Plato's classic dialogues on *The Defence and Death of Socrates*, an exemplar of commitment to truth, that had already been translated into Gujarati in 1908 by Gandhi was of course listed.

Giuseppe Mazzini's essay *The Duties of Man* was included as an example of correct principles implemented wrongly, as the Italian model of liberation by armed force was to be rejected. Five other selections were books or essays on the failure of modern civilization in the west, with strong Tolstoyan influence. The list does reveal, as Hunt writes, the extent to which Gandhi's mind had been stirred by his encounter with the West.[352]

However, despite the insight he brings to the subject, there are some observations Hunt makes that are questionable. For instance, to use terms such as 'moderate' and 'conservative' to describe Gandhi's rejection of the advocacy of terrorism and armed force, to labelling Shyamji Krishnavarma and Savarkar as 'radicals', ring false today. This was, of course, the European assumption, which was equally rejected by Gandhi. The apparently utopian, unrealistic, 'fairy-tale' of asking the British to remain in India as servants of the people was not an argument of pragmatism or 'realpolitik'. It was an internally consistent working out of Gandhi's assumptions that were neither 'western' nor 'eastern'. They were consistently moral and normative and therefore appear utopian to all who begin with the premise of 'the world as it is' and not as one wants to 'strive to make it', which was the burden of Gandhi's efforts.

Again, Hunt refers to Gandhi's 'cultural argument' which is not 'cultural' in the sense of essentializing 'western' or 'English culture' versus the 'Indian'. The sixteen propositions, which

[352] James Hunt, *Gandhi in London*, pp. 165–172.

form the core of *Hind Swaraj* and were published repeatedly as '*Gandhi's Creed*'[353] were, actually, clear and definite testimony to an anti-essentialist position. The first three unambiguously defined the west in its contemporary form, that is, the 'modern west', while the 'east' was seen as pre-modern and pre-industrial. The fifth and sixth make clear Gandhi's view that the 'east' would become the 'west' if it adopted 'modern civilization'. The seventh is Gandhi's prescription for a new global order. Not, proposition eight says, as the 'modern global system' that was incipient but as the ninth argued, it was for the creation of a new 'moral world order'. The tenth, eleventh and twelfth, despite their seeming tirade against medicines and hospitals did not imply that they produced the disease but that they did not promote lifestyles to prevent it. Gandhi's lifelong preoccupation with lifestyles that included psychological, mental, moral and ethical attitudes is well known. The thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth propositions that enjoined Indians and Europeans to unlearn 'modern' colonial social and cultural life, to de-school and de-colonize the mind and spirit by rejecting the material products of colonization. If Socrates, Daniel and the 'modern' thinker, Tolstoy had decolonized his mind, Gandhi appeared to say, then all persons, 'certainly Englishmen' and Indians who were conditioned by the 'modern west' could also do so, as many were trying to do in the West. The last, sixteenth point was made in the above context when he spoke of the wisdom of the sages. These men of wisdom were not of India alone, as his many references to Socrates and Daniel and Tolstoy as his teachers, showed.

Hunt's characterization of Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* as an affirmation of 'traditional civilization' actually employs an obfuscatory term. If, as Hunt says, Gandhi rejected features of 'tradition' that were commonly seen as defining the structure of traditional life, then what he was retaining with the term 'dharma' was the philosophical premise of collective good and inter-dependency rather than any 'Hindu conception of a sacred

[353] Ibid., p. 173.

social order.'[354] Hunt recognises the 'modernized tradition' in normative, moral terms that Gandhi is affirming and trying to foster among Indians. Therefore the use of the category of '*dharma*' does not carry the historical detritus of that 'ancient Hindu conception' that Hunt refers to.

Thus, while rejecting an uncritical trust in 'modernity', Gandhi is 'modern' when he speaks of a new spirit that must purge social evils that are historical. He is here interpreting 'modernity' as 'new spirit', 'reason', 'rationality' through the prism of that which is ennobling and enabling towards a clean good life for the individual and society. In the process he turned the concepts of 'reason and rationality' from the prevailing 'modern' discourse into life-giving and nurturing principles. These principles he derived from 'all men are brothers', and "how much land (or food, or money, or industrial invention) does a man need? For Gandhi it was the positing of 'Eternal Reason' against the 'Universal Unreason' that he thought prevailed in modernity.

Apropos *Hind Swaraj*[355] Gandhi formulated a duality within and not outside of the human being which was then extrapolated to a larger duality in the world to which human beings responded. He spoke of modern civilization (the *Ravana*) and the Renunciatory (the emblematic *Ram*, the *tapas acharya*) philosophy of the world, the two who dwelt within our hearts,

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[354] Hunt, Ibid., 162.

[355] Ghanshyam Shah critiques Gandhi for not abandoning the language of Varnashram and counterposes him to Jyotibha Phule who spoke against caste. Shah conflates varnashram with the caste system here. (Ghanshyam Shah, Presentation on Gandhi, at the IIAS, Shimla.) As a matter of fact, Jyotibha Phule was a classic case of social inversion, employing terms used by the upper castes in a positive light and claiming originally high status for the 'lower' which had been lost due to their marginalization by 'Aryan rule'. (Romila Thapar, Invoking the Past: The Uses of History in South Asia.) For other critics of Gandhi see Stephen Hay, Asian Ideas of East and West, Cambridge-Harvard University Press, 1970 and Susan Bayley, 'Caste and Race in colonial Ethnography of India' in Peter Robb, The Concept of Race in S. Asia.

locked in combat. The struggle for freedom for humans – the *Swarajya* – was between these two dwellers: 'The one binds us to make us really free (through self-control, creating the sovereign self), the other (the siren of modernity) only appears to free us so as to bind us tight within its grip.'[356]

Contemporary sociological and ecological literature on consumption and technological practices in the world today, and the near paralysis that results in the absence of technology almost parallels the critique launched by Gandhi in *Hind Swaraj*. He maintained in this text that Western modernity despite having brought greater freedom for many people was nevertheless tarnished by its misuse. The core of modern civilization was that 'people living it make bodily (or material welfare) the sole object of life'. What was lacking was sustained ethica respnsibility, responsiveness and unselfish striving involving self-transformation: 'This civilization takes note of neither morality (niti) nor religion (dharma)....' He saw Western civilization at odds with the teachings of all the religions of the world which 'try to teach us that we should remain passive about worldly pursuits and active about ethical spiritual pursuits... (Also) performance of duty and observance of morality(niti) are convertible terms.'[357]

Nevertheless, the constant caricaturing of Gandhi's antipathy to industrial societies and technology that made human labour redundant, as an anti-modern and medievalist attitude, lives on till today. Gandhi's *'Discovery of India'* long before Nehru's tour of history, was made by railway for over a year. Gandhi was no Luddite as his deep and abiding interest in agricultural and irrigation machinery showed. It was the destruction of peasants and villages due to the focus on industrial cities in the West that was the object of his critique in *Hind Swaraj*.

As Nelson Mandela said Gandhi was not against science and technology, 'but he places priority on the right to work and

[356] *Hind Swaraj Centenary Edition of Hind Swaraj*, Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 130; also see CWMG 31, p. 399, n. 4.

[357] *Hind Swaraj*, pp. 42-43, 67.

opposes mechanization to the extent that it usurps this right... He seeks to keep the individual in control of his tools, to maintain an interdependent love relation between the two.... Above all, he seeks to ... restore morality to the productive process.[358] Hind Swaraj was seen by many as a classic of anti-imperialist literature, a handbook of struggle for oppressed and colonized people around the world.

Hannah Arendt wrote that 'One of the most persistent trends in modern philosophy since Descartes has been an exclusive concern with the Self, as distinguished from the soul or person or man in general, an attempt to reduce all experiences, with the world as well as with other human beings, to experiences between man and himself. World alienation, and not self-alienation as Marx thought, has been the hallmark of the modern age.'[359]

Gandhi would have agreed completely as he repeatedly said he had no sympathy for the isolated Guru or Spiritualist and believed he could find his God living and acting among people and not in a cave or on a mountain peak.

Apropos Arendt's vita activa (the active life) which falls short of Gandhian concepts of self-rule and self-transcendence, Charles Taylor adds to the removal of external obstacles to liberty and freedom the removal of 'emotional fetters' and 'transformation of human inclinations.'[360]

Why did Gandhi despite his complete commitment to all faiths and total allegiance to equality express views that are often interpreted as evidence of his bad faith on religion, caste and gender? For instance, his positions on Hinduism, *Varnashram*,

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[358] Nelson Mandela (www.mkgandhi.org).

[359] Hannah Arendt, 'The Human Condition: A Study of the Central Dilemmas Facing Modern Man'. University of Chicago Press, 1958, pp. 230-231.

[360] Charles Taylor, 'What's Wrong with Negative Liberty?' in Alan Ryan, ed. *The Idea of Freedom: Essays in Honour of Isiah Berlin*, OUP, 1979. Also see, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, Harvard University Press, 1992 and Philosophical Arguments, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995.

marriage and women in general are castigated as regressive and conservative.

There was in Gandhi a sense of inheriting a culture and value system from his forefathers. Equally, there was a clear eyed endeavour to rectify society's deficiencies in the light of his evolving modern sensibility. The prejudices of Indian society and its social and familial mores were part of his original being in common with most Indians of his time. Gradually he moved towards progressive views and transformed his attitudes. He enjoined upon all Indians a similar effort as his own lifelong project of self-transformation.

Gandhi's critics such as Shah accuse him of assigning primacy to 'inner' or 'spiritual' transformation as if he was a Russian anarchist. Bakunin said of the Russian peasants, that they prioritized spiritualism rather than organized action. To say this becomes luduicrous about a man who led one of the major mass movements of the world.

Clearly, Gandhi was, his daring and radical beliefs on the same issues notwithstanding, a child of his time, a product of the climate of opinion of family and social culture within which he had been born and evolved as much a child of Reason and Rationality. Underpinning this reality was his overwhelming focus on a united struggle against the colonial rule. To forge a unity of classes, castes and religions, he often refused to take radical stands that could jeopardize the unity and adopted the stance of compromise between rival positions.

On economic, feminist, and caste issues he papered over the cracks and insisted on postponing contentions to a future Independent India when no colonial intervention could skew the pitch. This did permit many already existing power relations to remain unchallenged by the Gandhi-led movement. He individually posed many challenges to prevailing attitudes and beliefs but nevertheless would not countenance political activism on issues that threatened to split his following in the anti-colonial struggle.

The accusation against Gandhi as having imported a Hindu ideology into the politics of India for which we are told we merely need to look at his *Hind Swaraj* or *Swarajya* is also made by Ghanshyam Shah amongst others. Shah charges Gandhi with being a votary of the East-West binary. It is misplaced criticism as Gandhi's critique in Hind Swaraj was of the 'modern west' or 'industrial west' and not the 'West' as a generic, essentialized category. [361]

[361] Ghanshyam Shah, op. cit. Shah's paper begins with two epigraphs where he quotes Sant Ravidas and Karl Marx. Both are a protest at the absence of soul in a heartless world and resonate with Gandhi's writings on modern society. The pathos and disenchantment is shared especially with Ravidas. It is also resonant with Chaplin's film *Modern Times*.

CHAPTER 7

Uneasy Friendships: Tolstoy, Tagore and Gandhi

Tolstoy was acknowledged by Gandhi as his great teacher. A comparison between the perennial critiques of Gandhi with the fate that Tolstoy met with in Russia is salutary. The Russians have wrestled over Tolstoy from during his lifetime until the present. Intellectuals in Russia charged the Russian Orthodox Church with blacklisting Tolstoy, one of the most beloved figures in Russian history. The church on its part accused Tolstoy of helping to facilitate the rise of the Bolsheviks and excommunicated him.

With the publication of *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy's fame led him to being described as Russia's second Tsar. Tolstoy used this fame to expose and berate the church, the police, the army, and to denounce as immoral, all private property and all forms of violence. It was this radical philosophy that had led Lenin to hail Tolstoy as 'the mirror of the Russian Revolution' while completely ignoring his pacifism and belief in God.

Gandhi, on his part, has been consistently criticised for facilitating the rise of religiosity and Hinduism in the freedom struggle. This charge was first made by M.N. Roy the well known Indian communist in Lenin's Russia. It was repeated by most Indian communists and Marxist political leaders and members of Communist Parties in Europe. Likewise, historians with allegiance to Marxism repeated this characterisation of Gandhi as the leader responsible for imbuing the Indian national movement with a religious colour and Hinduism. From M.N. Roy to Rajani Palme Dutt, the leader of the Communist Party

of Great Britain and English historian of the Indian movement against British imperialism, to Sumit Sarkar and some other historians in India, this has been a popular charge against Gandhi.

On the other hand, a comparison between Gandhi and Tagore both of whom were extremely lonely on their first visits to British Isles, reveals remarkable differences. While Gandhi had treated his sojourn to England as a process of learning and transforming himself, Tagore closed in upon himself. The doer and the thinker, the spiritualist and the aesthete, despite empathy and admiration for each other responded in very different ways to their loneliness in a foreign land. Their loneliness spurred them to responses that were born of their vastly differing personalities and talents.

Tagore in his first autobiographical writing remembered a 'cruel' London wrapped in a mantle of cold loneliness. Knowing no one who lived nearby and unfamiliar with the city, he would sit for days at the window of his scantily furnished room, 'gazing at the grey, wintry outside world'. He described the view from the window in words that could apply to his inner world: 'There was a frown on its countenance; the sky was turbid, lacking lustre like a dead man's eye; everything seemed turned in upon itself, shunned by the rest of the world.'[362]

Ralph Waldo Emerson, distinguished 'religion' from the 'spiritual' in the nineteenth century. Gandhi uses the term 'religion' with such catholicity and ambiguity at the same time that he could be seen as a 'spiritualist' rather than a 'religieuise'.

The ecumenical attitude that grew on Gandhi in London and South Africa remained with him all his life. Gandhi's 'Hinduism' was a medley of beliefs with hardly any social practice of the rituals or ceremonies associated with the practitioners. Everything that was practiced in his Ashrams was invented and choreographed by him. He never entered temples or prayed to any deities. Kashi Vishvanath where he was taken by his hosts

[362] Kakkar, 'Mad and Divine, Spirit and Psyche in the Modern World', Penguin Viking 2008, pp. 128-148.

in Benaras was the sole exception from which he returned pronouncing criticism of its dirty, unhygienic interior.

Perhaps his constant assertions of being a 'Sanatani Hindu' were impelled by Hindu critiques of his beliefs and actions. More importantly, the propaganda of his being a hidden or not so hidden Christian also prompted constant assertions of his Sanatani Hindu beliefs.

Both Gandhi and Tagore shared Henry David Thoreau's sensibility as it was expressed in Thoreau's remark: 'I find it wholesome to be alone for the greater part of the time.' Their sentiments were shared with Thoreau due to their life experiences and thinking.

They, of course, approached their respective aloneness in different registers. Tagore was closer in his aesthetic to Thoreau's search for existential salvation and sublimation, and in seeking to discover the true self through nature. Gandhi was inspired in applying Thoreau's political assumptions in practice.

The three major influences on his thought that Gandhi considered as inspirational were the writings of John Ruskin, Thoreau and Lev Tolstoy. In 1942, Gandhi wrote an 'Open Letter' to the American people saying that: 'You have given me a teacher in Thoreau who furnished me through his essay the duty of civil disobedience.' Gandhi's emphasis on individual conscience as the guide to action resonated powerfully with Thoreau's declaration that: 'The only obligation which I have is to do at my time what I think is right.' This fundamental position is indistinguishable from Gandhi's assertion that the refusal to pay taxes that were unjust was in accord with his 'inner voice'. In Thoreau's case the refusal to pay the poll tax and in Gandhi's movement that refused to pay a tax on salt were guided by this obligation to do what they felt was right. Both placed a pre-eminent emphasis on the spiritual and moral force that impelled them towards standing against injustice.

What would have brought Gandhi into great personal affection for Thoreau's thinking was the latter's admiration for the *Bhagwad Gita*. As Thoreau put it: 'The New Testament

is remarkable for its pure morality and the best of the Hindu scriptures (Gita) for its pure intellectuality.' Thoreau wrote that he daily read the Bhagwad Gita at Walden Pond: 'In the morning, I bathe my intellect in the stupendous and cosmic philosophy of the Bhagwad Gita.' Gandhi's reliance on the Gita for almost all his spiritual needs and his great admiration and citation of the New Testament is well known. Thoreau continued, that he also read the *Vedas* partially and Rammohan Roy's translation of the *Sam Veda*. Besides, his reading at Walden included translations of the *Vishnu Purana, Shakuntala*, and so on. He expressed a deep attraction to the Universalism of Upanishadic thought.

The attachment of Gandhi to his Hindu heritage was combined with his deep love for the New Testament, especially The Sermon On The Mount, as he never tired of repeating. His love for Christian hymns, St. Paul's discourse on Compassion, and his friendships with Christian missionaries often earned him the epithet of being a 'hidden Christian'. Yet, Tagore found in Gandhi's personality and thought a strong impress of Buddhism. On his own part Tagore wrote poetically in his essay Tapoban (in English translation 'The Message of the Forest', of how 'the voice in the Vedic tongue' inspired him.[363]

The moral possibilities of the Mahayana Sutralamkara contained in Maitri (Love), Karuna (Compassion), Equanimity (Mudita) and the Impartial (Upeksha), appeared to be strongly mirrored in Gandhi's teachings. This impression was supported by the efforts of followers of Gandhi who often styled Gandhi Vachana (Sayings) on the Buddha Vachana, Sayings or Wisdom Texts. Neither of the Vachanas could have any contradiction with the New Testament.

Tagore's friendships with Christians like Sister Nivedita, Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya,and Charlie Andrews were a common thread between him and Gandhi.[364]

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[363] Uma Das Gupta and Anandarup Ray, Essay on Rabindranath Tagore, www.parabas.com

[364] Ibid, p. 4.

Gandhi's singular reply to all questions of comparative religion and the polygenic nature of religious texts was always the same: all differences were ephemeral when placed against the basic rationale of all religion: How to live with others or the Other. The regulative concepts of all religions were concretized in their ideals while the constitutive concepts were embodied in their practice. The concepts – ideals and the practice – must move towards each other, towards praxis, to answer the basic question of human co-existence. In the ultimate analysis, Gandhi upheld a rational scrutiny of all sacerdotal texts. The hermeneutics of thought and the hermeneutics of dialogue were the pre-condition to any answer to religious difference.

Religious pluralism had the resources necessary for accommodating the needs of both religion and civic nationalism. It was, as Anthony Parel says, an original work of modern Indian philosophy. In Hind Swaraj, his definition of India and Indians, responded 'in advance both to Savarkar's Hindutva: Who is a Hindu? and to the separatists' theory of India as two nations.'[365]

Tagore's collaboration with Auden on the poem *Dancing Girl's Prayer*, and his visit to Japan revealed aspects of his personality that were distinct from Gandhi's.

Tagore went to Japan on what he himself saw as a 'missionary' expedition to revive a common spirit of 'Eastern Spiritualism'. He drew upon the prevailing civilisational discourse especially on race. This was not unusual. As colonized subjects, the sense of powerlessness led to assertions of civilizational greatness. It was clearly an argument of cultural defence. However the question is did Tagore and Gandhi eulogise Indian greatness? They asked

[365] The history of the two texts in Gujarati and English and their import is discussed by Tridip Suhrud in 'Reading *Hind Swarajya/Swaraj in two languages*' Paper presented at Seminar on Centenary of Hind Swaraj, 2009. He makes an important point on this being the only work that Gandhi himself chose to translate into English. More, he reads the Gujarati text as a bilingual text in which Gandhi conceived and thought in English and expressed it in Gujarati.

Indians to mine the religious teachings of their ancestors and practice ethical moral values that lay therein.

The view of the person that emerged from Erikson's writings on psychoanalysis, psychology of religion and the founding of a new discipline he called 'psychohistory', was that an individual should be characterized not so much by what he represses or denies but by all the contradictions in himself he is able to *unify.*

At a seminar, Erikson contributed a note on Tagore following a discussion on the poet's childhood. He began with the remark that a biography 'must abandon the attempt to find any but the crudest of "causes" or "beginnings". A man's reminiscences are retrospective selections, tendentious and often self-contradictory. If one adds to this the biographer's selections, one sees that biographee and biographer "conspire" to offer the public image and to suppress any but involuntary cues to the psychology involved. They seem to fear, wrongly in Erikson's opinion, that psychological insight would undermine the magic of a person's image, as if "greatness" and common humanity are opposed to each other.'[366]

This observation is equally true of Tagore's and Gandhi's biographies as of the biography of their relationship with each other. Lellyveld's biography of Gandhi roused so much anger and opposition precisely due to the proclivity of biographers to eschew the inner psychological conflicts of great men and women. The theme of unity 'in Tagore's inner life was seen as a search for bringing together what are normally regarded as opposites: human-divine, male-female, home-world'. In Erikson's words: 'Tagore reasserted the traditional inclusion in the Indian identity of the feminine and the maternal, the sensual and the experiential, the receptive and the transcendental in human life.'[367] This could equally be said of Gandhi and Charlie Andrews, the common friend of both Tagore and Gandhi, received the maternal care of both men.

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[366] Ibid.

[367] Ibid.. pp. 156-57.

Erikson drew attention to Tagore's appearance that appeared to be 'above the sexes': 'he combined feminine shyness with a tall, masculine body. His beard was patriarchal but his robes veiled some mysteriously pregnant body. Gandhi was tolerant of this flamboyant appearance: he understood that it marked Tagore's role in India and the world: for in a country smitten by the necessity to stand up against a conqueror's idol (namely, the masculinity of the British beefeaters) and in a world about to surrender to a combination of technological superman and nationalist bullies, Tagore reasserted the traditional inclusion in the Indian identity of the feminine and the maternal....'[368]

Many of the great problems Gandhi and Tagore thought about are still with us. The 'conversation between Gandhi and Tagore on three significant issues – the presence of God in the human world, the modern state and the nature of liberalism as a political theory' were of great concern then as now. In his dissent from Gandhi's political movement Tagore wrote: 'I know your teaching is to fight against evil by the help of the good. But such a fight is for heroes and not for men led by impulses of the moment. Evil on one side naturally begets evil on the other, injustices leading to violence and insult to vengefulness.' However, Tagore's poetry beautifully depicted the central moral ideal of Gandhi's movement:

- The victory in defeat, of the power hidden in
- The frailness of beauty, of the dignity of pain
- That accepts hurt, but disdains to return it.[369]

Charlie Andrews was 'deeply intimate' to both Gandhi and Tagore, and Gandhi considered Andrews a 'pure force' who must be a part of the new India. This was the 'idea of India' that Tagore wrote to Charlie Andrews about in a letter.[370]

In substance, Kaviraj brings out the sharp conflict of the two men's personae: Gandhi speaks of 'the real and religious

[368] Ibid., p. 157.

[369] Sudipta Kaviraj, Gandhi and Tagore. Typescript from the author, p. 3.

[370] Ibid.

character' of the movement of Indian Nationalism that was 'altering the meaning of old terms, nationalism and patriotism and extending their scope.' Tagore on the other hand saw the movement as an 'excited crowd ... where I am pushed from behind, pressed from all sides'. He found in the noise of the non-co-operation movement a 'congregated menace of negations', that 'in its passive moral form was asceticism, and in its active moral form is violence.'[371]

Tagore, Andrews, Shradddhananda and Gandhi were at one time or another friends and admirers of each others' work and each appreciated some aspects of the others' lives. Their differences and disagreements however were often sharp and irreconcilable.

1. Politically, Gandhi aroused misgivings in the other three, especially on the issue of non-co-operation and boycott of foreign cloth besides his willingness to meet and negotiate with the colonial officials.
2. While Tagore, Shraddhananda and Andrews were very intransigent on the question of 'untouchability' and how to deal with it, demanding a root and branch remedy, Gandhi was an advocate of gradual persuasion of Hindu society and leading by example, in the early years. Later, however, he expressed his disillusion with the lack of genuine change in Hindu attitudes.

   On the other hand, the impulse behind Shraddhananda's radical programme on untouchability was the desire to unify the Hindus in the footsteps of his inspiration Swami

   Dayanand's 'Sangathan' against other religious communities. In the long run, Shraddhananda could not get the support of the majority of Hindus for fighting untouchability and the 'Sangathan' he envisaged with the untouchables integrated with all other castes never materialized. Gandhi's vision, on the other hand, sought

[371] Ibid.

to forge a universally unified 'human family', but he also failed to receive the support of more than a few in his endeavour to eradicate caste discrimination.

3. Both Andrews and Gandhi were dismayed at a lot of missionary propaganda against various Hindu beliefs. They sought to evolve a universal perspective on religions and faiths. Tagore was in consonance with their ideas. As opposed to that, Shraddhananda focused upon the 'cause of Hindu religion'. However, whereas Gandhi and Shraddhananda shared their disapproval of religious conversions, Andrews did not.
4. What brought Andrews, Gandhi and Shraddha close to each other was that theyshared a profoundly religious and devotional persona.

Christianity impacted almost every educated Indian to a lesser or greater degree. On Gandhi and Shraddhananda the impact was powerful; very positive on the former and rather negative on the latter. Of course, Gandhi had the good fortune of friends and admirers from various Christian denominations and worked with them closely in London and South Africa. Con Christians in India. Moreover he had the exemplary Christian in Andrews beside him as friend and brother.

As a young man, Shraddha had grave doubts about temple and idol worship and for a brief period went through a 'crisis of faith'. Influenced by a Catholic priest, he attended Church and decided to prepare himself for baptism. It was only after his encounter with Dayanand Sarasvati that he was converted to the ideology of the Arya Samaj. The struggle by Shraddhananda to meet the challenge and appeal of Christianity, especially to the untouchable, was cast in the language of the missionaries when he spoke of the 'salvation of the community' and of the 'Vedic Church'.[372] Moreover, his advice to the members of the Arya Samaj was that they should 'cultivate the grace of faith, and bear the cross'. Shraddha saw himself as a defender of the Hindu

[372] Jordens, *Shraddhanand*, 6, 10, 38.

faith as interpreted by Dayanand.[373] And yet, Shraddhananda and Charlie Andrews struck up a deep friendship and wrote extensively to each other. When the Viceroy Hardinge inquired from Andrews about his fondness for Shraddhananda Andrews quoted Shraddhananda's assertion 'If you asked me to put my head on the block and be beheaded if I were wrong I would joyfully and gladly take up the challenge.'[374]

This was in direct contrast to Gandhi who despite his tolerant attitude towards 'the hasty and easily ruffled' Shraddha, was a staunch critic of the Arya Samaj and its guru, Dayanand. The latter, said Gandhi, 'had tried to make narrow one of the most tolerant and liberal of the faiths on the face of the earth.'[375] Nevertheless, Shraddhananda's friendship with Andrews brought the former into contact with Rabindranath Tagore and Gandhi.

As far as the category of *Varnavyavastha* was concerned, both Shraddha and Gandhi appeared to agree that it was a 'system of classes' and not hierarchical castes. This was obviously an exercise in interpretation on their part. They both spoke of eliminating caste and the revival of the ancient *varnadharma*. Where they diverged was on the question of the origin of the prevailing caste system and the way to address the problem.

For Gandhi, the distortions were to be erased by a reformist and 'correct' reading of the indigenous system which had been historically degraded by its practitioners. Shraddha pointed to the Muslim incursions as responsible for the disintegration of the 'ideal Vedic commonwealth' which Dayanand had seen as resulting from the Mahabharata war. While the Arya Samaj and Shraddha saw themselves giving 'battle to Christianity and Islam' with the campaign of 'reclamation' through *shuddhi* to bring converted Muslims and Christians into the 'Hindu fold'. Gandhi held the Arya Samaj and Shraddhanand as creators of distrust

[373] Ibid., 88.

[374] Ibid., 91.

[375] *CWMG*, Vol. XXIV, Allahabad, 1967, 145; *Young India*, 29 May 1925.

among Muslims especially and pushing a narrow outlook with pugnacious quarrelling with other faiths. He also saw Shraddha as obsessed with the 'Muslim threat', almost accusing him of being the cause of Hindu-Muslim tension as 'he inherits the traditions of the Arya Samaj.'[376] Gandhi's statements, published in Young India, were widely quoted and discussed in the papers, and the Arya Samaj was incensed. Shraddha's annoyance with Gandhi was clear from a wire he sent to a leader of the Swaraj Party: 'His (Gandhi's tirade against the Arya Samaj has set the Muslims at daily wild attacks on their devoted heads and if Muslim Fanaticism breaks out at Baqrid, Mahatmaji will be responsible.'[377]

The apparent overlap on the question of Untouchability between Gandhi and Shraddha was superficial as their fundamental visions were radically different. Shraddha was as actively opposed to caste discrimination and Untouchability as was Gandhi and wrote passionately against it: 'The sin of Untouchability among Hindus is a mark of shame on the forehead of the Hindu nation. People who oppress a section of their own community, reducing them to slavery, do not have any right to complain about the oppressive measures of foreign rulers.'[378]

However, while Gandhi's plea was for a normative morality that ought to guide the Hindus in their fight against caste oppression, Shraddha stressed that the specific reason for Hindus was the threat from other religions such as Islam and Christianity and to place a check on Hindu downfall: 'If all Untouchables became Muslims than these will become equal to the Hindus, and at the time of independence, they will not depend on the Hindus, but will be able to stand on their own legs.'[379]

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[376] Ibid., XXIV, pp. 136–154.

[377] Jordens, Shraddhananda, 147.

[378] Ibid., 143.

[379] Ibid., 144.

Shraddha's urging of Hindus towards 'reclaiming their strayed brethren' was a frustrating exercise for him and he failed to mobilise the Hindu Mahasabha in his efforts against Untouchability. The grand Hindu Sangathan he envisaged did not materialise. Gandhi who went about leading by example and was a votary of slow persuasion was also disappointed though he fared somewhat better in his campaign. The conservatism of Hindu society was not easy to penetrate.

Gandhi held that all religions believe in an essence – an essential aspect of belief and commitment. But the 'Divine' in the iconic gesture – the *mudra* – of the open right hand with palm facing outwards can be seen in the representations of Gautama Buddha and in many cathedrals, of the Virgin Mary as also representations of the Sikh Guru Nanak. The *Mudra* is interpreted as symbolic of the reassurance: 'Do not Fear'. For, worldly suffering is the common trajectory of human lives.

Verrier Elwin, in sharp contrast to Charlie Andrews, rarely theorized on religion or discussed its finer points. Rather irreverent and closer to being a romantic adventurer, explorer, anthropologist he was a man of literary tastes. He left the Gandhian fold after some years for the tribal areas where he served the tribes of neglected, marginal people. Eventually, he gave up organized religion and left the Christian fold.

Epilogue

The philosopher Pierre Hadot said '... one can give, as it were, absolute value to every instant of life, as banal and humble as it may be. The thought of death was leading me to the exercise of concentration on the present recommended by both the Epicureans and the Stoics.'[380]

The focus on the immediate practical moment that Gandhi practised as part of his spiritual exercises can view him as a philosopher in Hadot's sense of philosophy as a way of life. Anyone who *lived* as a philosopher, even without writing or teaching was called a philosopher by the ancient philosophers of Greece. For them philosophy was not the construction of a system but a choice of life.

The ancients admired Socrates for his life and his death more than for his doctrine, which was not written and was immediately captured and modified by those who used his name.[381]

This is a close approximation to the manner in which Verrier Elwin interpretted Gandhi when he named him 'the Socrates of Sabarmati'. Perhaps he was the closest to understanding and appreciating the spiritual exercises that were underpinned by

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[380] Pierre Hadot, The Present Alone is Our Happiness. Conversations with Jeannie Carlier and Arnold I Davidson. Stanford University Press, California, 2009, p. 163. Hadot made this comment apropos what Saint Aloysius Gonzaga said as a child when asked what he would do if he were told that he was going to die in an hour. Gonzaga answered that he would continue to play ball. In Hadot's view this answer was in tune with what Plato had remarked: 'Philosophy is an exercise in dying.'

[381] Ibid., p. xii.

Gandhi's 'philosophy' or Gandhi's 'choice of life' even though he did not share his choice.[382]

In Gandhi's teachings and formulations there was no new theoretical discourse which is the signature of conventional philosophy, in the domain of 'doing philosophy' so to say. Gandhi's dialogues with his audiences or listeners were experiences of thought or in other words an exercise in 'how to think'.

Of course, just as the inconsistencies in the thought of ancient philosophers such as Aristotle, Augustine or Plato are the result of their addressing a specific audience or listener, so are Gandhi's inconsistencies. Their common object was 'to persuade, transform, or produce a "formative effect" – in short to persuade the listener...'[383]

Hadot shows the importance of a specific discourse in ancient philosophy and in the practise of the ancient philosophers from Socrates to Plotinus. This discourse was grounded on the theme of overcoming the partial and biased self and of keeping the awareness of our belonging to the human community ever present when we act.[384] It was in this sense that Elwin Verrier referred to Gandhi as Socrates on the banks of the Sabarmati.

For the overcoming of the partial and biased self and the evolution of a universal perspective conceives of the unity of the human community: As Hadot puts it 'a heroic leap that brings us from a limited perspective to a universal perspective or from a self that sees only its own interest to a self open to other humans and to the universe.'[385]

Plato's formulation: 'To do philosophy is to exercise dying' is explicated by Hadot as 'to separate oneself from the body, from the order of the senses and the selfish point of view it implies. The Socratic discourse aims primarily at bringing the disciple to lead a spiritual life...moving beyond inferior reasoning...to rise

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[382] See the chapter on Verrier Elwin.

[383] Pierre Hadot, op.cit., p. xi.

[384] Pierre Hadot, op.cit., p. xiii

[385] Ibid.

toward pure thought and the love of truth. To teach the disciples a method with which to orient themselves, both in thought and in life.'[386]

This is indeed the heritage of Socrates that Verrier has in mind vis-á-vis Gandhi.

The philosophical way of life is for the ancients, Hadot explains, quite simply one's behaviour in everyday life: to apply to oneself the principles decreed for all. The concepts of auterity and moral rigour for example were practised by the Stoics in their everyday life. You were always to determine your attitude to conform to your ideal.

One could easily say of Gandhi what Hadot says of the Stoics: 'Nothing is more opposed to the cult of profit, which progressively destroys humanity, than this Stoic morality that requires of everyone absolute loyalty, transparence, and disinterestedness.'[387]

Socrates is the model philosopher who did not separate himself from the world, but in fact entered it and gave the lead to the everyday life of others. Socrates' real philosophy was the practise of everyday life, as was Gandhi's.

Gandhi could have invited the charge of egoism for 'It is sure that there is a permanent danger of egoism in the efforts one makes to perfect oneself.'[388] The philosophers of antiquity apart from teaching philosophical discourse emphasized the philosophical life that corresponds to the community of institutional life that unites master and disciple and implies a certain genre of life – a spiritual direction, an examination of conscience, and exercises of meditation. It also corresponds to the right way to live as a citizen in one's city.

Philosophical discourse on the other hand 'quickly becomes purely theoretical and no longer has the force necessary to motivate the individual to live her or his philosophy. As Thoreau said "We have philosophy professors, but no philosophers." The

[386] Ibid., p. 88.

[387] Ibid., p. 101.

[388] Ibid., p. 107.

philosophers of the world, in Kant's words, are those who are not interested only in pure speculation but are capable of being attentive to what interests everyone, that is, finally, topractice.'[389]

As Kant says, the questions that interest everybody are 'ultimately practical. Even the interest of speculative reason is only completed in practical use.'[390]

The true goal of both material and spiritual life for Gandhi was 'virtuous action', the strength to live a life of justice. The implication is that in order to live justly, one needs to know oneself to the full and act upon that knowledge. The knowledge of the 'Self' had to guide, in the ethic and politic consideration, the end of well-doing and not of well-knowing only. Thus, his experiments with both life and 'Truth'.

Gandhi was an eclectic thinker and a practitioner of the philosophy of life. He sought to reconcile the perspective of mode of life, of the lived exercise into a philosophy of his own that was often an amalgam of his own understanding of Indian tradition and those elements of Christian belief that became historically ascetic and mystic, recuperating and Christianizing the spiritual exercises and certain themes from philosophy. Charlie Andrews was precisely such a Christian and thus he and Gandhi drew close to each other with openness and joy while they continued to debate the propriety of missionary conversions. The admiration in which each held the other was born of their courageous life choices and practices for, 'The passage from discourse to life is a truly perilous leap that it is difficult to decide to make...it is easier to speak than to do.'[391]

Lucretius and Kierkegaard emphasized the qualities that we see men such as Charlie Andrews and Gandhi aspired to: the love of humanity, the audacity of their cosmic vision, and their free beings as they achieve freedom from fear, and as no troubles agitate the peace of their souls. These were the ancient

[389] Ibid., pp. 110-111.

[390] Kant, 'The Critique of Pure Reason', Translators E. Gilson and E. Gibelin, Paris: Vrin 1971.

[391] Hadot, op.cit., pp. 117-118.

philosophers' models which as Kant said with sorrow were normative but 'A philosopher corresponding to this model does not exist anymore than a true Christian really exists.'[392]

Gandhi was the first to admit that he strove to live up to the norm but frequently failed. Nevertheless, as against the dyad of 'Power – Knowledge' there is the powerful argument of 'Power and Wisdom'.[393] The professional philosopher may meditate on the generalized misery in the world and often suffer in her or his powerlessness to reform anything. However, the Kantian 'philosopher of the world' says Hadot, does not suffer powerlessness in the striving to act well and act out the concern without hatred or pity; to evoke the scandal of oppressions of various kinds and the sufferings of those around him; to lead a philosophical life, full of imperfections and of efforts, and guided by the transcendent Wittgensteinian ideal of wisdom.[394]

When Verrier Elwin named Gandhi Socrates on the banks of the Sabarmati he could see the parallels in their philosophical temper. The idea of an 'inward eye' is present in a crucial passage in the Phaedo, in which Socrates tries to explain to his companions why death does not frighten him. His friends, knowing full well that they may be talking with him for the last time – it is on the day when Socrates will be asked to drink the famous cup of poison – are dumbfounded. However, Socrates convince them of the powerful truth in which the soul can free itself from the body's prison and finally embark on its journey towards absolute wisdom. 'If we are ever to know anything absolutely,' Socrates suggests, 'we must be free from the body and must behold the actual realities with the eye of the soul alone.'[395]

[392] Ibid., op. cit., p. 118. Lectures on the Philosophical Encyclopedia.

[393] Georges Friedman, La Puissance et la Sagesse, Paris: Gallimard, 1952.

[394] Hadot. op.cit. pp. 119-120.

[395] Plato, Phaedo, English translation by Harold North Fowler, London and Cambridge. MA: William Heinemann and Harvard University Press, 1960, p. 231.

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