

# An Atheist with Gandhi

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**Gora**

**(Goparaju Ramchandra Rao)**

## PUBLISHER'S NOTE

The author of this booklet, Shri G. Rao wrote to us through Shri Mashruwala, whether we would be willing to publish it. As he says in his "Offering of Thanks" the booklet is "primarily a factual account of my (Shri Rao's) conversations with Gandhiji on the atheistic view of life" and it also contains "some of my reflections on the conversations". Such accounts of conversations with Gandhiji, important as they are by themselves, make very interesting reading and give us a true insight into the life and personality of Gandhiji. Therefore, such accounts are always welcome and we readily publish this one. We need not say that along with the account of the conversations which he gives us, the opinions and observations that he makes are his own. As the reader will readily feel through its pages, it has all along the ring of a sincere seeker who wishes to realize himself as an a-theist and he thus shows a religious spirit which is the essence of a good life. Under various religious labels what we are truly called upon to profess and proclaim is a life of truth and goodness on earth. It is this broad-based view of life that Gandhiji stood for; and hence he had no hesitation in saying for himself that he was a Hindu, a Mussalman, a Sikh, a Parsi, etc. If, as Shri Kishorlalbai says, atheism is also a creed among many others, -- and there is all logic in saying so -- would not Gandhiji as well have said that he was an atheist as well, provided it meant a life of truth and goodness and devoted service to the whole of God's or No-God's creation? Did he not say about Charles Bradlaugh that, notwithstanding his non-belief in God, he was a man of noble character and a truly religious man? And he was a great atheist. Creedal religions -- and atheism, too, is a creed -- unhappily have till now divided the human family. Gandhiji's main work in this sphere was to show that, limited as man is, he may perhaps have to live in these creedal compartments; but they are no unsurmountable barriers or boundaries within his essential unity and oneness in spirit. As the Bible says, there are many mansions in God's great house; but the house is one. Or as the Sanskrit *shloka* says,

आकाशात् पतितं तोयं यथा गच्छति सागरसू ।  
सर्वदेवनमस्कारः केशवं प्रति गच्छति ॥

(Just as all the water falling from the sky goes to the sea, so the homage paid to all the various gods ultimately reaches *Keshava*, the Supreme God.)

Caged as we all are in our own exclusive pride of limited truths, we can see the whole truth only if we live the truth as we see it, and such humble and sincere pursuit only can lead us to the whole Truth. The kindly light of such spirit of truth only can lead us to the whole Truth in which we live and have our entire being. We hope this book will help the reader to appreciate this great

catholicity of approach to God and view of life to which Gandhiji bore testimony all through his long life devoted to serve God through His creatures.

4-4-1951

## OFFERING OF THANKS

This book has one serious drawback. Though it is primarily a factual account of my conversations with Gandhiji on the atheistic view of life, it contains also some of my reflections on the conversations; but it sadly misses Gandhiji's observations.

To make up for the defect to the greatest extent possible, I approached Shri K. G. Mashruwala with a request to write the introduction to the book and to add his comments on the contents. I was aware that the Editorship of the *Harijan* barely leaves him time to spare for such a task. And any demand on the little leisure he has is but cruel in view of the rest which his delicate health requires. Yet I had no alternative; Shri Mashruwala is the best person to interpret Gandhiji.

It was so good of Shri Mashruwala to have readily agreed to my request with the only proviso that he would take his own time to write down the introduction. He did it within two months. I express my deep sense of gratitude and thankfulness to him.

I also thank Shri M. Siva Kamayya who was my colleague when I was a college lecturer. At my request he went through the manuscript of the book and with his suggestions he helped me to fill in most of the gaps in the sequence that a book of this kind is likely to have.

I will be thankful to the readers for their unreserved comments on the book. They will help the cause of atheism in its service to humanity.

C. Ramachandra Rao  
25-11-1950  
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S. India

## Introduction

### I

Shri Goparaju Ramachandra Rao (hereafter, for brevity, referred to by his nickname Gora\*) is an earnest social worker of Andhra. He has made the cause of Harijans his own and identified himself with them in a manner few are capable of. He is a Brahmin, brought up in an orthodox joint Hindu family, consisting of aged parents, brothers, sisters, and his own assemblage of wife and children. He was never rich and has become poorer since, because he holds heterodox views about God, *Karma* and other principles of Hinduism. It cost him his lecturership in a college. Then he has taken the unusual course of marrying his daughter to a Harijan youth. This has made him socially boycotted by many of his kinsmen and friends of the Brahman and *savarna* Hindu society. His own parents, sisters, and his wife's relations dislike his heterodoxy and extreme zeal for social reform, and some of them too boycotted him for a time. But he loves them, understands their limitations, and he and his wife and children suffer the ostracism patiently and without resentment. This has reconciled some of them considerably, though not yet fully.

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\*Note: Coined from the initial syllables of his name, and by which his close associates know him.

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He is a believer in Gandhiji's philosophy and constructive programme, except in one important respect. He does not share Gandhiji's faith in God -- far less a "living" faith in God. Not only does he not share this belief, he shows a great zeal in propagating its opposite. This has made him somewhat unacceptable even in the Gandhian circle.

Gora made his first attempt to contact Gandhiji in 1930. But he tried to approach him through atheism. And even Gandhiji could not appreciate it, and did not respond to his approaches quickly. For a long time he did not feel inclined to give him an interview. But though he called himself an atheist, Gora was young and earnest, and like all young men a hero-worshipper. He adored Gandhiji immensely. If he had been also an adorer of God, one could say that he adored Gandhiji next to God. But, this expression cannot be used for him, since, so far as he could, he had dismissed God. Can it be said, then, that he adored Gandhiji as next to none? Perhaps not. For, though he had dismissed God, God's throne was not demolished and Gora had installed the doctrine of Free will of Man and Principles of Social Morals on that throne. He would forsake anything in the world, even Gandhiji, rather than his faith in the

doctrine of Free will and Principles of Ethics. So, his adoration of Gandhiji was like that of most young and devout hero-worshippers of that period, only next to their own first creed.

To come back. In spite of lack of encouragement, Gora did not give up his attempt of coming into intimate contact with Gandhiji. Ultimately, after 14 years of waiting he succeeded in doing so in the last week of November, 1944. As Gandhiji died in January, 1948, this book is for practical purposes, a story of personal contacts and correspondence with Gandhiji during a period of less than four years. But, short as the period is, it is very interesting both as a story and a study. It is the account of a period, when the relationship between the two was in the stage of a particular metamorphosis. It related how from a stranger, rather unwelcome, Gora became to Gandhiji a close and dear member of his "Family" and Gandhiji, too, grew in his eyes from a great national leader into a personal relation, almost a master, ever increasing in moral stature and, therefore, becoming more and more adorable. Of course, as in the case of all missionaries, his zeal to convert Gandhiji to his own views persisted. It was the curious phenomenon of one, who with the devotion of a disciple and the filiation of a son, desired to convert another, whom he would rather follow as a master and respect as a father, into his own disciple! Not that such phenomena are altogether unknown. But they are rare.

A great part of the book is a discussion between Gandhiji and the author on Theism and Atheism. Gora desires me to discuss this subject in my own way in this introduction. I have done so in the next section. But I think that in order to follow it better, it would be more helpful to the reader to defer reading the second section until he has finished the main text.

The reader must have observed that in his very first meeting with the author, Gandhiji found that though Gora loved to call himself an atheist, he was a sincere and serious-minded man. He was, what might be called, 'a man of God'. Indeed, he resented being considered 'godless', and insisted in distinguishing between atheism and godlessness.

This looks puzzling and self-contradictory. Gora tries to overcome the contradiction by saying that "Godlessness is negative; it merely denies the existence of God. Atheism is positive.... It means self-confidence and free will." It is, I believe, a meaning given to this word by Gora himself, and not easily knowable from its structure.

Generally, people who speak of God and of topics connected with or concerning God are considered mystics. The reason is that they use a very mysterious word. In ordinary science, people use words, which are exact or are given an exact meaning by appropriate definitions. Not so, the word *God*.

Gora introduced himself to Gandhiji by seeking his definite meaning of the word *God*. At that time, Gandhiji wrote "God is beyond human comprehension." This answer is in accordance with the famous texts of the *Upanishads*,

नेति नेति ॥

(*Not this, not this* -- beyond all that is cognizable); or

यतो वाचो निघतन्ते अप्राप्य सह ॥

(From which, along with the mind, words turn back). Ordinarily, this should lead one to expect that if God was beyond human (rather, mental) comprehension, there should be very little literature about Him. The seer should say simply, "I *feel* the presence of Something, which I am unable to comprehend and express. I have given the name *God* to it. I feel that I am insoluble from It. But I can say nothing more about It." But this is not what writers and seers usually do. In spite of the above affirmation, attempts are made to explain God in terms of something known to man in a positive manner. Thus, God has been called *Sat* (Being), *Chit* (Awareness). *Ananda* (Bliss and Satiety), *Satya* (Truth), *Shiva* (Good and Holy), *Sundara* (Beautiful), *Prema* (Love), *Shiva* Lord, Father, Mother, Judge, Dispenser of fruit (*Karma-Phala-Pradata*), Immortal (*Amrita*), Perpetual (*Sanatana*), Endless (*Ananta*), Merciful, Will, Power, Action, the ultimate 'I' of every being and so on. Moreover, every teacher shows preference for one or two of such explanatory terms to the rest, and emphasizes that aspect to a greater. The result is that the Incomprehensible God is brought into the realm of Comprehensible terms, and the unlimited and inexpressible One takes a limited, concrete and fairly

understood meaning in the minds of his followers. Thus as many forms of God and theories about His relation to individuals and the universe are created as the number of great teachers. This leads to "labelled religions" -- establishment of sects and factions with their various systems about the right way of leading life and viewing the world.

I agree with Gora that labelled religions fail ultimately in bringing and binding people together, which Religion is expected to do. But how are the labels to be abolished? No founder of any great religion desired to found a sect confined to a few people only. He claimed to deliver his message to the whole world. But every one of them has become the distinguishing mark of one or more labels.

Atheism is a reaction against this. But it, too, is a similar process from the opposite. It also develops into one or more labelled sects, as good or as bad as any of the former groups.

It seems we can make conversions, that is, bring about a change of labels, discard some old ones and create new ones; but we cannot found an unlabelled Religion, which every one will accept. Our minds are too small for that as yet. If we are wise, we can only meet together with that object and succeed in doing so to some extent, provided we do not try to explain God or *Atma* in the language of comprehensible terms.

But to return to atheism. The rationalist and the scientist, (or one who regards himself to be so), sees the contradiction involved in the above teachings, and the sectarian conflicts arising out of them. He for one does not feel the 'presence of that Something' of which the Seer speaks with so much confidence. He examines every substance and every form of energy most minutely but fails to find there the presence of God. He isolates every knowable property of every object, and at the end finds that there is no remainder, and concludes that 'God is nowhere'. And, on account of the manner of his training, he does not miss Him in his everyday life. He, therefore, refuses to accept the personal testimony of the seer as satisfactory, dismisses it, at its best, as an illusion and, at its worst, as a deliberate lie invented with ulterior motives. He declares himself an atheist. He thinks that he can cut the Gordian knot of religious and social conflicts, irrational traditions, customs and modes of thinking, indifference to obvious social duties, inertia, etc., if this great illusion created by the word *God* is dispelled once for all, by explaining to the people that no such thing as God exists. His message is, "Forget God; forget that there is some mysterious Intelligent Being, Who has planned this Universe and the course of humanity and your part in it, and that you are like a mere piece on His chessboard moved from one square to another by Him. Do this and you will



realize that you are a free individual, master of your own destiny, that all religious and social customs, habits of life and ideas regarding what is proper and improper are made by men like you and me according to our perfect or imperfect intelligence."

As I view it, I think that our Gora sails in the same boat as those who speak of God. The theist, on account of his own psychic limitations, is unable to comprehend God as *neti* (abstract) and settles down again and again to some *iti* (limited, concrete) idea in the name of God. Even after declaring that God is beyond human comprehension, Gandhiji, too, settled down first to the comprehensible *iti* (limited) idea, 'God is Truth'. Later, he converted this proposition into 'Truth is God' and regarded that as a better or more correct form of expression. The converted formula seemed to satisfy non-theists, atheists, agnostics also. It allowed him to give an equal place to them in his Congress of All Religions. Atheists, provided they accepted Truth as the Supreme End, had an equal place in his *Sarva-dharma-samabhava* (equal regard for all religions), with theists. But, whether you say God is Truth or Truth is God, in both cases the term *Truth* is chosen because of its greater comprehensibility. So, too, when you say God is Love, or *Ananda* (Bliss) and so on. Man has some definite and generally accepted ideas about Truth, Love, Bliss, Holiness etc. and some concrete form is always present before his mind, when he thinks of these terms. Not so if he were to say, simply, God is God, or use synonyms like *Om*, Allah, Jehovah, Theos, etc. These terms are taken as indicating nothing definite beyond referring to some indescribably, great, powerful and mysterious force.

Not satisfied with either the incomprehensible term *God* (Theos), or any of the usual comprehensible ideas about It, Gora chooses the term Not-God (*Atheos*) to express his approach towards the Root Principle. He thinks that that word is easier to understand and comprehend. It is free from all mysticism.

But this, too, is an illusion. At the very first interview with Gandhiji, the author had to explain that the word is not what its negative form suggests. He also denied that it is equivalent to 'Godlessness' or un-moral suggestions. Since the word is not clear in itself, he has to define it by saying, "Atheism means self-confidence and free will." Paraphrased, it means, "*Atheos* (Not-God) is self-confidence and free will in man, as opposed to *Theos* (God), which is, in his terminology, the feeling of diffidence and helplessness."

The first question that arises on this interpretation is, are all atheists agreed upon this definition of atheism? I am afraid that there will be found as much

difference of opinion about the positive contents of the word *atheism* as there is about God.

Moreover, it is impossible for a theist to put the same content in the term *God*. Thus, he might say "God is Self-confidence and Free will in man", or in short "God is Soul-force", or conversely, "Self-confidence and Free will is God." Dependence, slavishness belongs to Matter, *atheos*, not-God. The controversy is similar to the one referred to in the *Upanishad*, whether the world started from *Sat* (some thing in existence *ab initio*) or from *asat* (nothing).

One of the questions which I put to Gora was:

"What do you mean by free will? Do you simply suggest freedom to act without inhibitions of religious taboos and beliefs?"

Gora answered: Free will is much more than to act without inhibition of religious taboos and beliefs. Just as love and hate are together in the emotional make-up of mankind, so also the feeling of independence, that is free will, and the feeling of dependence, that is slavishness, are together in every one.

"By free will man feels he is *free* to think, to speak and to act; by slavishness man feels that he is *made* to think, to speak and to act. Theism is the manifestation of the slavishness in man, because theistic outlook subordinates human life to the divine will or universal order by laying down the principle that we are playthings in the hands of Providence. Conversely, atheism is the manifestation of the free will in man."

But as said above, it is possible for a theist to attribute slavishness to atheism, and freedom to theism, and to quote freely from the *Upanishads* in support of his proposition. For instance, the *Chhandogyopanishad* (8-7-i), says:

य आत्मा अपहताट्मा विजरो विमृत्युः विशो  
अविजिघत्सो अपिपासः सत्यकामः सत्यसकल्पः  
स अन्वेष्टव्यः, स विजिज्ञासितव्यः, स सवश्चि  
लोकान् आप्नोति, सवश्चि कामान्, यस् यस्  
आत्मानम् अनुविद्य विजानाति अिति ह  
प्रजापतिर् उवाच.

"One should seek the *Atma* which is devoid of evil, old age, death, sorrow (or failure), and hunger and thirst, possessed of the capacity to realize the

fulfilment of a desire and a will. One should have a very keen desire to understand this *Atma*. One who understands and thereafter fully knows the *Atma* attains mastery over all the *lokas* (spheres) and all the desires."

Thus it is possible to derive from one's faith in God all that strength, will, and spirit of independence, for which Gora would demand faith in atheism.

There are two sets of mistakes which all those who discuss God or no-God, allow themselves to slip into. The first is that the questioner begins to discuss the existence or non-existence of God, before he knows what he himself is. This is attempting an impossible feat. Until one thoroughly understands, knows, realizes, what one's own being in essence is, all speculation about God is futile. It may be possible to understand the mechanical construction and working of the atom-bomb without any idea of the essential structure of an atom, but it is not possible to understand God until one knows the Self.

The first question which I put to Gora was:

"What is the ultimate reality of yourself?"

Gora replied:

"One thing of which I am most certain is my own existence. Death puts an end to my existence inasmuch as I am not with equal certainty, aware of existence beyond death. During sleep also I am not aware of my existence; but unlike the condition of death, on waking up I become aware of my existence again.

"I love to continue. So the ultimate reality of myself is my unceasing effort to ward off death. Death is not inevitable. When the synthesis of protoplasm is made possible, we shall be able to control not only death but old age and disease also."

To put it briefly, according to Gora, the ultimate essence of the Self (to avoid the use of the word *Atma*) is *the desire and effort to live for ever*. The difference between the teaching of the *Upanishad* and Gora's proposition is that the former definitely lays down that the Self is without wear and death (

विजरः विमृत्युः

), and the latter that it is the goal of the Self, but it is not yet an achieved reality. It will be seen that when Gora speaks of non-achievement, he thinks in terms of the body. The will to immortality with the underlying faith that it is achievable is presupposed and put forth by him as a postulate. Indeed,

according to Gora, it is something more than mere Faith; it is a definitely established fact that (unless destroyed by external forces) the protoplasm is essentially an immortal physical organism, and what needs to be done is only its extended application so that that immortality might become available to the entire colony of the cells known as the human body. If it can be achieved in case of one organism, it is potentially true of all, though every one may not be able to do so factually. Thus, according to Gora, the tiny protoplasm is the representative deathless Self. He has stopped there. He does not enquire how that chemical compound of carbon, hydrogen, oxygen, nitrogen, etc. gets charged with the desire and power to continue to exist, multiply, expand, from complicated colonies, etc., and so my submission is that as long as the knowledge of the self is vague, there will remain uncertainty not only about the nature of God, but also about His existence. There are so many systems, like the *Sankhya*, the Jaina, and the Buddhist, which have their theories of the Self, but which either do not accept God or are doubtful or claim indifference about Him. The attitude towards God changes progressively with one's advance in the understanding of the Self. So, one who wishes to be clear about God must first be clear about the nature of one's own being.

This is not easy. It does not require to be taken on faith. But if a questioner does not want to take it on the word of others, he must forsake every other pursuit of life and concentrate upon it night and day until he comes to an unmistakable conclusion. If he has no patience or time for that, he must accept the testimony of those who have done so, even as he does in other spheres of science. He relies upon expert doctors for his ailments, expert lawyers for his rights and liabilities, expert technicians for his machines and large undertakings, and upon professors for the various theories of science. We accept the velocity of light as 186,000 miles per second on the authority of a book-text on physics. How many of us have ever tried to test its truth? 186,000 is a rough figure; the exact velocity is some odd miles more and lately doubts have been expressed about the exact figure. But we, laymen, do not bother with the details. We are quite satisfied with 186,000 and would not feel elated or depressed to learn tomorrow that the real figure was a few thousand more or less than 186,000. For our imagination is hardly able to comprehend in a concrete manner the difference between velocities of even 86,000 and 186,000 per second. Similarly we accept on the authority of physicians that potassium cyanide is a deadly poison to man. How many of us have tried to test its truth? But, for that, do we regard ourselves to be putting blind faith in the physicists and the physicians? No. Because we know that, if we are keen about it, the propositions can be verified by us by actual experiment. So, too, the truth about God and of the Self as preliminary to it, is verifiable, provided there is a

diligent pursuit of it. If we have not the diligence or the capacity for it, who is to blame? The *Gita* says:

ध्यानेनात्मनि पश्यन्ति केचिदात्मानमात्मना ।  
अन्य सांख्येन योगेन कर्मयोगेन चापरे ॥  
अन्ये त्वेवमजान्तः श्रुत्वाऽन्येभ्य अपासते ।  
तेपि चातितरन्त्येय मृत्युं श्रुतिपरायणाः ॥  
(१३-२४, २५.)

"Some people come to know the Self, through the Self, within themselves by Concentration. Some do it through the *Sankhya* method, others do it by the method of *Karma yoga*. Others, not knowing such methods, hear it from others and believe it. They too conquer death by their faith."

It will be seen that the question of the condition after death also remains a matter of doubt and speculation, until one is clear about the Self.

But we try to come to a decision about God, Death and *Karma*, before we are able to decide what we ourselves are. This is impossible. Shri Raman Maharshi rightly used to emphasize the quest of "Who am I?", before every philosophical query. Until this is clear, every explanation is a theory, a hypothesis. Both those who positively assert re-birth or rise from the grave on the day of judgement and those who, like Gora, positively deny it enter into the realm of hypotheses and speculations about matters which they have no means of proving and which hinge upon the right decision of the nature of the Self.\*

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\*NOTE: One of the questions I put to Ramachandra Rao was as follows:

"When you attack faith in *Karma*, I take it that you do not accept re-birth. Am I right?" He answered: "Yes. I do not accept re-birth. Soul, which is a presupposition of the theory of re-birth is as much a false hypothesis as god is."

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The second mistake, which follows from the inadequate understanding of the Self, is the attempt to bring within comprehensible terms one who, though directly cognizable, is even after cognition incapable of being expressed in the

language of cognizable terms. This is not true only of *Atma*, and God. It is true of several other experiences also. You know what is sweet; you can give a list of sweet things; but you cannot define it exactly. You know what is anger or love; you can describe and paint vividly various moods and degrees of anger and love; but you cannot define these passions in an exact language. It is possible to give a list of sweet things or raise pictures of love and anger, because these are, after all, objects cognizable by the mind. The Self, and necessarily therefore God, is beyond the comprehension of mind, being the force behind and at the root of the mind and not in front or arising out of it.

And still, philosophers, seers and devotees produce books after books discussing God, and trying to analyze Him, dissect Him, confine Him into a few or many cognizable terms, clothe Him with names, forms and attributes, create places or abode for Him, identify Him with some astronomical object, nature's phenomenon, or some great historical or mythological person. No one seems satisfied with such simple and frank statements as, "I am, God is, I am not outside of God. I may be able perhaps to speculate about smaller matter accurately, but I cannot speculate anything about myself or about God, His Will, if any, His plans, if any, and the method of their execution, if any."

Let us consider this subject in another manner. The peculiarity of every comprehensible attribute is that it is suggestive of an equally comprehensible opposite attitude. They always go in pairs; e.g. truth and falsehood; knowledge and ignorance; happiness and pain; love and hate, great and small, beautiful and ugly, good and evil; strong and weak, fulness and void (vacuum); *sura* and *asura*; and so on.

But there is no comprehensible opposite of an incomprehensible term. Thus if you make of God a comprehensible Being (such as holy, majestic, good, just etc.), you have its opposite in Satan. But when you know God as an incomprehensible yet real existence, it has no opposite. The attempt to coin an opposite term becomes equally incomprehensible. Real non-existence, *asat*, not-God, a-theos is as incomprehensible as God. The comprehensible a-theos, not-God of Gora is as good or as bad as the comprehensible God. As I have shown above, it is equally possible to speak of God as free will (soul-force) as of not-God.

For this reason, *Advaita Vedanta* explains the terms *sat*, *chit*, and *ananda*, though positive in form, double negative in content. It says *Brahma* is called *sat*, *chit*, and *ananda* in order only to signify that It is not *asat* (nonexistent), *a-chit* (ignorance), *anananda* (despair and sorrow). These terms are not meant to

convey that *Brahma* is a condition of existence in which there is consciousness and joy, in the sense these terms are understood by men.

Gora attributes his strength of will and the success he has been able to achieve in his field of service to his atheistic approach and appeal to atheism.

He thinks that he has been able to make a better appeal to both the intelligent and the ignorant against the several moral, social, economic, and political evils of our day by this method than by appealing to them in the name of God or a religion.

Gandhiji worked all through his life and achieved his successes, as every one knows, on account of his intense faith in God. He declared that Satyagraha was impossible of full practice without a living faith in God. On finding that the word *God* created some difficulties in the modernized mind, he substituted it by the word *Truth*. But Truth or God, he never abandoned his path of devotion -- *bhakti*. He would have sworn that he attributed all his success to his faith in and appeal to God.

Indeed, believers in God and the various religions and religious dogmas which go with these, have been frequently known to uphold, encourage and perpetuate all sorts of social and other evils, even to the extent of war, massacre, slavery, gambling, drunkenness and debauchery. And there are hundreds of people, who declare faith in God, offer regular prayers and worship to Him, and recite His name continuously. And yet there are many among them whose life is very impure, selfish, and violent. There is no evil deed which they might not commit.

On the other hand, there are atheists, (and the Jains and the Buddhists might also claim to be included among them), who deny God, but who lead and constantly endeavour to lead a very righteous and moral life, and a life of service and self-sacrifice. And when they work among the people, the people forget whether they are theists or atheists, but look to their sincerity, moral character, spirit of service and sacrifice, and accept their leadership and guidance. Jawaharlal is not a theist, and makes no mention of God or the Soul in any of his speeches. But his popularity is next to none. Sandar was a theist, and many a time devoutly spoke of Him, and he too was equally popular.

In the same way Gora might believe that he is able to work among the masses better because of his appeal to and conviction about atheism. I feel that it is an illusory belief. The people look into the heart of Gora and not into his words. And they think that whatever may be his religious creed, here is a righteous man, a devout and godly person, a friend of the poor and the down-trodden,

one who will suffer hardships for them, and stand by them in their difficulties. He is essentially a man of religion, and a man of God. But he chooses the name atheism for his creed, and calls his God, *Atheos* -- Not-God.

Let him. This is an intellectual appendix of his career. It is, at best, of secondary importance. Of great and practical importance is his living faith in living and dying for what he believes to be right, good and just, and in accordance with the highest principles of social and personal morality. When once the course of right conduct is decided, he cannot be swerved from it from considerations of personal discomfort, prides, prejudices and customs of society or the likes and dislikes of kinsmen. It is this essential religiousness in him which, I believe, is the key to his success.

His atheistic doctrines might change with the advancement of thought and experience, or might get more firmly set in course of time. This depends upon several factors. But as long as he retains a loving heart, exemplary moral character and courage, both in personal and public life, and a life of service and sacrifice, his name will be found in the list of God's own devotees. For his sake, *deva* will assume the name *adeva*.

K. G. Mashruwala



## Chapter I An Explanation

Gandhiji lived a full life. So he spoke with knowledge and experience on subjects as varied as life itself. But his views on atheism are little known, perhaps, because no avowed atheist went sufficiently close to him.

I am an atheist and I had the privilege of close association with him for four years. We talked together about atheism several times during this period and I know his views on atheism to the extent to which they were revealed in our talks.

We discussed atheism on such occasions mainly to understand each other in relation to it and with no intention to publish the conversations. So there is no written record of our talks. However, he fixed February, 1948, for us to meet in Sevagram Ashram for almost ten days, for half-an-hour every day, to give clear shape to our thoughts and views on atheism. Had we met accordingly, much of what I am writing now, and perhaps more, might have appeared over our joint signatures. But that was not to be.

Since his assassination, I hesitated all these days to publish Gandhiji's views on atheism, as I understood them, lest I should be taken to put into his mouth statements which he did not make. I have no testimony for the truth of what I write here now except my good faith and the corroboration of my friends with whom I was discussing my talks with Gandhiji from time to time as they were taking place. I now venture to publish them, for what they are worth, so that they may not be lost altogether.

Except for the three letters from Gandhiji, the book consists of gists of my conversations with him which I reproduce from memory. All these conversations were carried on in English and I have a sufficiently vivid recollection of the talks because I received them as lessons and imprinted them on my heart.

## Chapter II

### Contact Through Correspondence

My first contact with Gandhiji was through correspondence, some time early in the year 1930. I addressed a very short letter to him at Sabarmati Ashram. It consisted of only two sentences:

"You use the word god. May I know its meaning and how far the meaning is consistent with the practice of life?"

Gandhiji replied:

"God is beyond human comprehension."

Of course the reply did not satisfy me. How can anything that one talks of be beyond his comprehension? As the Salt Satyagraha Movement started just then, I could not carry on further correspondence with him on the subject.

I was a college lecturer till 1940 when I had to give up that profession because a ban was imposed on me for expressing my views on atheism. Soon after I went to the villages and engaged myself in adult education and the removal of untouchability. Atheism provided the background for my work.

After one year of village work, that is in September, 1941, I wrote a letter to Gandhiji to Sevagram narrating my antecedents and said:

For one year I have tackled the problem of untouchability with the atheistic outlook. I have a few co-workers who agree with me in the atheistic approach. The atheistic approach mainly consists in the non-recognition of sectarian labels like Hindus, Muslims and Christians.. We take man as man. Thus by discarding the labels and mixing up people in the general stream of humanity, we hope to remove untouchability also.

Our programme of work so far has been confined to systematic and periodical cosmopolitan dinners in which the guests pay for their fare which is always simple and cheap. The dinner is open to all and about forty to fifty guests, drawn from all castes including 'untouchables', take part in the dinner. The persons vary from time to time.

In the village atmosphere where caste restrictions continue to be rigid, open cosmopolitan dinners are not easy to accomplish. Yet we succeed, because we find that the atheistic attitude brings definite cosmopolitan

outlook in its wake. The positive cosmopolitan outlook pushes out all sectarianism including untouchability.

The results of one year's work encourage us to proceed along the same lines. Before we do so, we desire to seek your advice. All of us have great regard for your wisdom and experience. We want to be told and warned of the possible pitfalls, if any, that lie in the way of our atheistic approach. In the light of your advice, we are prepared to revise our outlook and programme. If you like, I will go to Sevagram for a personal talk with you.

Gandhiji replied from Sevagram:

11-9-'41

Sevagram,  
Via Wardha,  
C.P.

Dear Friend,

Atheism is a denial of self. No one has succeeded in its propagation. Such success as you have attained is due to your sincere work among the people round you. I am sorry I cannot invite you to come here. I have no time to spare for talks.

Yours sincerely,

M. K. GANDHI

My co-workers and I yearned for close contact with Gandhiji, as we considered him the touchstone of public life. But the reply denied to us the opportunity.

Further the reply showed how much misunderstanding surrounded atheism. To us atheism is not a denial of the self; on the other hand, it is the fullest assertion of the self. Yet, instead of complaining that the meaning of atheism has not been properly understood, it is the duty of those who have taken up the cause of atheism, to clear the misunderstanding and to show what actually atheism is. So we decided to carry on the work in our own way. Nevertheless we hoped that, if we went earnestly about our work, some day we should attract the attention of Gandhiji, for he always valued earnest work.

And that day was not far off.

## Chapter III

### I Go To Sevagram

Then came the 1942 'Quit India' movement. My co-workers and I were frequently in gaol till 1944. Among us was a young man, Shri D. Ramaswamy, who had been in Sevagram Ashram before he joined us in 1942. Soon after Gandhiji's release in 1944, Shri Ramaswamy again went to Sevagram Ashram. In rendering an account of his work to Gandhiji, he had occasion to describe the atheistic approach to the problem of untouchability -- a work with which he was intimately associated during the two years he was with us in the village of Mudunur.

The following is the authorized gist of Shri Ramaswamy's conversation with Gandhiji as noted down by Shri Pyarelal, Gandhiji's secretary:

#### **Faith in God and Constructive Work**

The programme laid before the country by Gandhiji, i.e. the constructive programme, is not a new thing. He has always held that countrywide execution of the fifteen-fold programme in its entirety means independence for the people of India. He has often said that he is not a politician. He is essentially a man of religion and a social reformer, and to the extent political factors have come in his way he has been unwillingly drawn into the political sphere. Politics divorced from religion or social reform have no use for him.

Execution of the fifteen-fold programme means re-organization of the village life and evolution of non-violent society. Purged of communal disharmony and washed of the sin of untouchability, the 7,00,000 [sic] villages in India, healthy, self-sufficient and literate, cannot be kept in subjection. the task is tremendous. the majority of our people are attracted by political meetings, processions and the like; but quiet labour in the villages is too insipid for them. The following discourse that Gandhiji had with a young graduate will be of some use to workers faced with such a predicament.

This young fellow saw Gandhiji at Sevagram the other day in order to present him with a report of his work and seek his help and guidance. He told Gandhiji that he had a cosmopolitan outlook and did not believe in God. Gandhiji was pleased with his report. "Re-organization of the villages is a very intricate problem," he said, "but if we can find even half a dozen workers of the right type, we can solve it in due time. The time factor is important, but given the right start the thing will grow like a

snow ball. You have heard of Booker T. Washington. We have to product better workers even than im in order to achieve our object."

"As for you," he continued, "your ambition will be fulfilled if, beside your ability and enthusiasm, you introduce something else in your life, i.e., a living faith in God. Then all insipidity will vanish. A cosmopolitan outlook is a necessity but it can never be a substitute for God. God is there, but our conception of God is limited by our mental horizon and by our physical environment. For instance when you read the Bible, you find that the God of the Hebrews was quite different from the God of Jesus Christ. You are dissatisfied with the prevalent idea about God, for the simple reason that those who profess belief in God do not present a living God in their own lives.

"Unless you have a living faith in God to sustain you, when failure stares you in the face there is disappointment for you. You may develop a revulsion for the work that you have taken up. You may begin to feel that after all what Dr. Ambedkar said was the right thing and you made a mistake in rejecting the high posts which you had been offered. My advice to you is that you should not leave this Ashram till you have found God. In spite of my limitless failings I am a seeker after Truth and so are my companions in this place. The Ashram, apart from its inhabitants, the sum total of energy that it represents, the principles for which it stands, may enable you to know God to the extent that you may be able to say 'God is', just as you can say 'Truth is'."

"I can say that in the sense that Truth is the antithesis of false-hood," replied the young friend.

"That is good enough," said Gandhiji. "The seers have described God as

नेति नेति <sup>८७</sup>

(Not this, Not this). Truth will elude you. The sum total of all that is true is Truth. But you can't sum up all that is true. Like most of those who have had Western education, you have got an analytical mind. But there are things that can't be analysed. God who can be analysed by my poor intellect won't satisfy me. Therefore I do not try to analyse Him. I go behind the relative to the absolute and I get my peace of mind."

*Friend:* "I have carefully gone through your writings in the *Harijan* and *Young India*. Your way of life appeals to me very much. It offers scope

for the exercise of individual will. The idea of God introduces a determinism and that limits man. It interferes with his free will."

*Gandhiji:* "Is there such a thing as free will? Where is it? We are mere playthings in the hands of Providence."

*Friend:* "What is the relationship between God and man, between Truth and God?"

*Gandhiji:* "I used to say 'God is Truth.' That did not completely satisfy me. So I said 'Truth is God.' He and His law are not different. God's law is God Himself. To interpret it man has to resort to intense prayer and merge himself in God. Each one will interpret the same in his or her own way. As for the relationship between man and God, man does not become man by virtue of having two hands. He becomes man by becoming a tabernacle of God."

*Friend:* "When my idea of God itself is not clear, your talk of man becoming a tabernacle of God makes things still more confusing..."

*Gandhiji:* "Yet it is the true conception. Unless we have the realization that the body is the house of God, we are less than men. And where is the difficulty or confusion in conceiving Truth as God? You will concede that we are not tabernacles of Untruth: we are of Truth."

After a moment of silence, Gandhiji continued, "Every one who wants to live a true life has to face difficulties in life, some which appear insurmountable. At that time it is faith in God that is Truth alone, that will sustain you. The fellow-feeling which makes you feel miserable because of your brother's misery is godliness. You may call yourself an atheist, but so long as you feel akin with mankind you accept God in practice. I remember of clergymen who came to the funeral of the great atheist Bradlaugh. They said they had come to pay their homage because he was a godly man.

"If you go back with a living faith in God, in Truth, I have no doubt that your work will flourish. You should feel dissatisfied with everything until you have found Him and you will find Him," he concluded.

The friend has decided to stay at the Ashram for some time at least and he is trying to find God through labour for the service of his fellow beings.

From the above conversation it is clear that Shri Ramaswamy just presented the atheistic outlook to Gandhiji. Gandhiji's reaction conformed to the common meaning of atheism, namely that atheism is something incapable of and even contrary to goodness and goodwill. This is evident in his remark, 'The fellow-feeling which makes you feel miserable because of your brother's misery is godliness.' the remark suggested that fellow-feeling was the outcome of godliness, and conversely that those who had no belief in god could have no fellow-feeling either. This is the way in which atheism is now understood and the first reaction of Gandhiji to Shri Ramaswamy's presentation of atheism conformed to this kind of understanding of atheism.

During the conversation Shri Ramaswamy had occasions to refer to his association with me. Then Gandhiji wanted to know me. I was invited to Sevagram Ashram. I went there in the last week of November, 1944.

## Chapter IV

### My First Interview With Gandhiji

Shri Ramaswamy who was continuing his stay in the Ashram, was the first to receive me at Sevagram. He introduced me to Shri Pyarelal, Gandhiji's secretary, and to the other *ashramites*. He acquainted me with the details of his conversation with Gandhiji on atheism, reported in the last chapter. He told me that Gandhiji desired to know me.

Gandhiji was particularly busy those days with the many deputations that waited upon him. So it was two days before an interview with Gandhiji could be fixed for me. The time for the interview was Gandhiji's evening walk.

On the appointed evening I waited outside Gandhiji's hut. Just at 5-30 p.m. Gandhiji came out of his hut for the usual walk. I was introduced to him. He greeted me with a broad smile and the first question, "What shall I talk to a godless man?"

We both laughed heartily and I replied, "Bapuji, I am not a godless man, I am an atheist." Then the conversation continued as we walked together.

*Gandhiji*: How do you differentiate between godlessness and atheism?

*I*: Godlessness is negative. It merely denies the existence of god. Atheism is positive. It asserts the condition that results from the denial of god.

*G*: You say that atheism is positive?

*I*: Yes. In positive terms atheism means self-confidence and free will. Atheism is not negative in meaning though it is negative in form. Look at the words: *non-co-operation*, *non-violence*, *ahimsa*. They have positive connotations, though they are negative in form. To express an idea that is unfamiliar, we often use the negative of a negative. For instance 'fearlessness' for 'courage'.

*G*: You are talking of words.

*I*: Atheism bears a positive significance in the practice of life. Belief in god implies subordination of man to the divine will. In Hindu thought man's life is subordinated to *karma* or fate. In general, theism is the manifestation of the feeling of slavishness in man. Conversely, atheism is the manifestation of the feeling of freedom in man. Thus theism and atheism are opposite and they represent the opposite feelings, namely, dependence and independence respectively.



G: You are too theoretical. I am not so intellectual. Go to professors and discuss.

The remark pulled me up. I realized that Gandhiji's bent of mind was primarily practical. So I adjusted myself and said:

I: If atheism were only theoretical, I would not have cared for it, nor wasted your time. We have practical programmes based upon the atheistic outlook.

G: Ah, ah, I know that, so I am talking to you. Tell me what you are doing among the villagers.

I: We conduct cosmopolitan dinners regularly on every full-moon night. We have selected the full-moon day for the dinner because we get moonlight and there is no need of lamplights. For the dinner the invitation is open to all who pay one anna towards the cost of their fare. One anna per head is sufficient in a village, because, the menu is very simple, we get fuel and vegetables free and we collect buttermilk from the villagers. At the cosmopolitan dinners we care more for eating together than for eating full or well. The venue of the dinner is changed every time, a common place in the *Harijanwada* or a friend's house in the village. Normally forty to fifty guests drawn from different castes partake in the dinner. A host is selected every time and the guests pay him their annas at least a day in advance of the full-moon. The host holds himself responsible for the arrangements in connection with that dinner. The balance of money, if any, is credited to the next month.

Some of us do not attend public functions and wedding celebrations unless they include cosmopolitan dinners. Besides cosmopolitan dinners, we hold night literacy classes in *Harijanwadads* and adult education classes for the general public of the village. The adult education mainly consists of newspaper reading, map pointing and explanation. Everywhere we encourage cosmopolitan habits. Social mixing is not an easy affair especially in the villages now. It becomes more difficult when Harijans are brought into the picture.

G: Yes, I know that. But you could carry on this programme without atheism.

I: My method is atheism. I find that the atheistic outlook provides a favourable background for cosmopolitan practices. Acceptance of atheism at once pulls down caste and religious barriers between man and man. There is no longer a Hindu, a Muslim or a Christian. All are human beings. Further, the atheistic outlook puts man on his legs. There is neither divine will nor fate to control his actions. The release of free will awakens Harijans and the depressed classes from the stupor of inferiority into which they were pressed all these ages when

they were made to believe that they were fated to be untouchables. So I find the atheistic outlook helpful for my work. After all it is man that created god to make society moral and to silence restless inquisitiveness about the how and the why of natural phenomena. Of course god was useful though a falsehood. But like all falsehoods, belief in god also gave rise to many evils in course of time and today it is not only useless but harmful to human progress. So I take to the propagation of atheism as an aid to my work. The results justify my choice.

Bapuji listened to me patiently and in the end said stiffly, "I should fast even because atheism is spreading."

I: I will fast against your fast. (I answered at once.)

G: You will fast? (Gandhiji said looking straight into my face.)

I: Yes, Bapuji; but why should you fast? Tell me how atheism is wrong and I will change.

G: I see, your conviction in atheism is deep. (Gandhiji said slowly.) I bowed.

G: The present conduct of people is giving room for the spread of atheism. (Gandhiji said reflectively.)

By then we had walked and conversed together for about twenty minutes. Gandhiji looked at me thoughtfully. There was a pause.

Shri Pyarelal who was all the while walking behind us and talking with others, joined Gandhiji and said that he wanted to tell Gandhiji something in private. Immediately those who were walking with us stepped aside a few paces. I too said *Namaste* to Gandhiji and was leaving him when he told me amidst laughter, "You can remain; privacy will not be disturbed as you do not understand Hindustani." All of us enjoyed the joke. Thereby Gandhiji perhaps suggested that I should pick up Hindustani.

With folded hands I took leave of Bapuji. He smiled and said that he would fix up for me another interview with him very soon. I retired to my room in the Ashram and thought over the talk with Gandhiji. Two things became apparent to me.

First, Gandhiji was pre-eminently a practical man. He judged theories and ideologies by the results they yielded in practice. Indeed that is a safe method to settle differences.

Secondly, Gandhiji had the same views and prejudices against atheism as the common man. But in his characteristic way he clothed them with courtesy, when he remarked that the present conduct of people gave room for the spread of atheism. Evidently he thought that atheism had developed in reaction to the misbehaviour of god-believers and that better conduct on their part would render atheism unnecessary. But I felt differently. The theistic outlook is fundamentally defective and it is bound to corrupt social behaviour. The misdeeds of the theists are neither whims nor forced by circumstances but the direct consequences of their theistic outlook. So the call for atheism is not out of disgust for the present conduct of people who profess the theistic faith, but out of a desire for a better way of life. The conduct of people cannot be improved unless the atheistic outlook is adopted. Atheism and theism represent opposite forms of behaviour and each is positive in its own way.

All this I wanted to make plain to Bapuji at the next interview.

## Chapter V

### My Second Interview

After three days, Shri Pyarelal informed me that I could meet Bapuji that evening for half an hour at 4 o'clock.

I knew that Bapuji was very particular about punctuality. So I stepped into his apartment exactly at 4 o'clock by my watch. Bapuji who had just finished talking to an interviewer, looked at me and then at his watch and said to me smilingly, "You are half a minute too soon!"

"I am sorry, it is 4 o'clock by my watch," I replied stepping back.

"No, no, come in," Bapuji said, "watches may disagree, but let us not." It was a good joke.

He pointed out a seat to me and before I said anything to him, he started with a volley of questions. Each question required not more than a few words in answer from me. Within that half an hour he put me somewhere about what seemed to me a hundred questions. They related to minute details of my daily life, habits and the reactions of the villagers to my programmes. He inquired closely into my needs and difficulties and the help I had to meet them. He wanted to know the varied aspects of my relations -- with my parents, sisters and brothers and cousins and relatives far and near. He was particular on questions that referred to my wife and to my children and their education and their health. Now and then he would say, "I wanted to know....", wait for a moment or two and then he would put the question to me.

The series of questions revealed not only what intimate knowledge he had of the devious ways and practical difficulties of workers but how well he prepared himself to tackle me during that half an hour.

Toward the end he asked me whether I could stay longer in the Ashram. But on that occasion I had not gone to the Ashram prepared for a longer stay than a week. So I had to take leave of him with the promise of another visit to the Ashram in the near future.

I left the Ashram the next day deeply impressed with the immense interest that Bapuji took in me and my work. I was particularly happy to find that I could make Gandhiji take interest in my atheism, the cause which I represented.

During the week I was in the Ashram I visited frequently the adjoining village of Sevagram where experiments were carried on in village work under the

guidance of Gandhiji. I also gained the acquaintance of the *ashramites* and the sister institutions, namely the Talimi Sangh, the Charkha Sangh, the Goseva Sangh, the Dawakhana, Gopuri and Gram Udyog Sangh.

I was not attending the prayers, of course, and none seemed to mind my absence, though prayers in the early morning hours and towards the evening time formed important items of the Ashram routine. My friend, Shri Ramaswamy, was not attending either. Shri Bhansali, an old inmate of the Ashram, also was not attending the prayers; he was not an atheist, though.

Thus ended the first phase of my personal contact with Gandhiji in the cause of atheism. It opened the way for further attempts at closer understanding.

## Chapter VI

### I Go To Sevagram Again

In January 1945, the Talimi Sangh convened a Basic Education Conference at Sevagram. I was invited to it. I wanted to take advantage of my journey to the conference by staying at Sevagram in continuation and fulfilling my promise to go to the Ashram again. I wrote to Gandhiji and he approved of my idea. So in January, 1945, I was in the Ashram again.

Now, I was not a guest; I was admitted as an inmate of the Ashram. I was entrusted with the routine duties of the Ashram like latrine-cleaning, earth-work, vegetable-cutting and flour-grinding. Because I had been a teacher for some time, I was also entrusted with the teaching of science to the nurses of the dawakhana (Ashram Hospital).

I was partaking in all the activities of the Ashram, except the prayers, and was trying to understand Gandhiji from the life therein. Out of the several object lessons that the Ashram life provided, three incidents impressed me particularly.

A doctor who had evolved a new system of medicine came to Bapuji for his blessings. The learned doctor's therapy was based upon an elaborate theory and he wanted to explain it to Bapuji. A five-minute interview was granted to the doctor after three days of waiting. But the doctor returned from the interview before the five minutes were over. On inquiry, the doctor told me that Bapuji pleaded lack of time to understand his theory of medicine in detail and so requested the doctor straightway to prove the efficacy of his system by treating a chronic patient who was ailing in the Ashram then.

The incident showed me how Gandhiji judged theories by their practical results.

Another time a gentleman was granted a ten-minute interview. It was a silent interview in which Bapuji wrote out his answers on a slate. I too was present at the interview.

The interviewer eloquently explained his problem to Bapuji for seven minutes and sought Bapuji's advice in the end. Bapu wrote the reply: "The fact you talked so long on the problem shows you have not understood the problem."

The gentleman was dumbfounded. Bapuji wrote again: "A worker goes straight to the practical difficulty."

The gentleman felt humble and said meekly, "I have difficulties, Bapuji."

Bapu wrote in reply: "Go and work. Work solves your difficulties."

The ten minutes were over and Bapuji turned away his face.

Bapuji could be stern in his admonitions.

\* \* \*

One day I wanted to dissect a frog to demonstrate the phenomenon of heart-beat to the nurses' class which I was teaching. The nurses objected to the dissection on the ground that it went against the principle of non-violence (*ahimsa*). The matter was referred to Bapuji and he replied, "Dissect the frog, if that is the only way to explain the heart-beat." And I dissected a frog.

Evidently Bapuji's conception of *ahimsa* was different from what it was often supposed to be.

Thus I was living and learning in the Ashram. What handicap I had on account of my meagre knowledge of Hindustani was made good by the special attention the *ashramites* paid to me. I was on the whole happy in the Ashram.

Yet the wonder grew in me why Bapuji had not called me to talk about atheism. It looked as though he avoided any reference to atheism in his dealings with me at that time. But, strangely enough, he asked me to call my wife, my children and my co-workers to the Ashram. It was a privilege for any one to be invited to the Ashram. So some significance was read into this call and it became plain later on.

I intimated Bapuji's desire to my village centre. My wife, children and co-workers came to the Ashram in batches. During the few days they stayed in the Ashram they engaged themselves in all the routine work except the prayers.

In spite of his talking hours being limited, Bapuji talked in the morning for ten minutes with every batch of my co-workers that came to the Ashram. Though my friends were ill-conversant with Hindustani or English, Bapuji enjoyed their broken expressions and tried to know from them about their work in the village and their reactions to Ashram life.

In this way I lived in the Ashram for three months and at last Bapuji called me for a talk.

## Chapter VII

### A Long Interview

Soon after 4 a.m. on the 30th of March, 1945, Shri Prabhakar, an *ashramite*, woke me up from bed and informed me that Bapuji would talk to me at 5 a.m. after the morning prayers. A feeling of joy rushed on me as the long awaited hour had come. I got ready with feelings of great hope and anxious expectation. I was to talk to a great theist on a subject buried deep in gross misconceptions and vile slander. What would he ask me? How should I present the case for atheism? How to remove the prejudice against atheism? These were my anxious thoughts. But I felt atheism was right. I had long looked forward for an opportunity to vindicate the cause of atheism. Now that I got the opportunity, I was happy. With such mixed feelings I went to Bapu's cottage at that early morning hour.

Bapuji lay stretched full length on his low bed in the open air beside his cottage. I greeted him. He beckoned me to sit by his bed. I did. The situation was encouraging. I felt like sitting by the side of my father to consult him closely on a domestic affair.

"Now, you tell me, why do you want atheism?" Bapuji asked me in a calm and affectionate voice.

I was struck by the tone as well as by the nature of the question. It was not the usual question: What is atheism? or what is the use of atheism? Such questions call forth only academic answers. 'Why do you want atheism?' had something remarkably human and practical about it. It was Bapu-like. To my recollection, in all my numerous discussions on atheism, no one had put the question to me in that form. But, instead of taking me by surprise on account of its singularity, the question touched my heart and I poured out my heart.

I began: "I was in Calcutta last year. I saw the famine-stricken destitutes walking heavily on the pavements. Here and there some of them dropped dead in the streets. They died beside the marts and stalls which exhibited their sweets and fruits for sale. Suppose there was a hungry dog or a bull in the same situation. Would he die of hunger? No. Beat him, scold him, he would persist in his attempts to pounce upon the shop, somehow eat the sweets and fruits and satisfy his hunger. Why did not the destitute do the same? I do not think they were afraid of the policeman. The destitutes were there in hundreds and thousands. No concerted action was required of them. If a fraction of their number had fallen upon the shops, all the policemen in Calcutta put together could not have stopped them. Even confinement in a gaol with its poor diet would have been preferable to death due to starvation. Why, then, the



destitutes did not feel desperate and loot the shops? Were all the destitutes abject cowards without exception? Or had all of them such a high sense of civic responsibility as to be unwilling to disturb law and order? No. They were all simple, normal folk with no knowledge of civic rights and duties. Had they known their civic rights and duties in the least, there would have been no Bengal famine at all.

"Looking at the other side, were all the shop-keepers so cruel as to allow their fellow-men to die of dire hunger before their own eyes? No. On the other hand they shed tears of pity and contributed liberally and ran the gruel kitchens for the destitutes. They recited hymns of ethics every day.

"If the destitute is not cowardly and if the shopman is not cruel, why did so many people die of hunger? I think the reason is their philosophy of life.

"Both the destitute and the shop-keeper are votaries of the same philosophy of life. Each one said to himself: 'It is my fate, that is his fate; God made me like this, God made him like that.' On account of the commonness of their philosophy, there was no change in their relationship, though some ate their fill and many starved to death. The destitute's faith in that philosophy made his behaviour different from the animals.

"What I have said with regard to the Bengal famine applies also to the relationship between the untouchables and the caste Hindus, between the dark-skinned and the white-skinned. The same philosophy rules all these relationships.

"What is the result of following that philosophy of life? Man has become worse than the animal. Instead of living well, he is dying ill. His strength to resist evil is very much weakened. The pleasures of the few are built upon the bones of the many. This is really the unhappy fact in spite of our moral professions and pious wishes for the happiness of all humanity. This philosophy of life based upon belief in God and fate -- this theistic philosophy -- I hold responsible for defeating our efforts at ethical life and idealism. It cannot securely preserve the balance of unequal social relations any longer, because the pains of the flesh have begun to revolt against that philosophy. Hate and war are already replacing love and peace.

"I want ethics to rule and idealism to grow. That can be achieved only when belief in god and fate is done away with and consequently the theistic philosophy of life is changed. In positive terms, I want atheism, so that man shall cease to depend on god and stand firmly on his own legs. In such a man a healthy social outlook will grow, because atheism finds no justification for the

economic and social inequalities between man and man. The inequalities have been kept so far by the acquiescence of the mass of theists rather than by any force of arms. When the belief in god goes and when man begins to stand on his own legs, all humanity becomes one and equal, because not only do men resemble much more than they differ but fellow-feeling smoothens the differences.

"I cannot remove god, if god were the truth. But it is not so. God is a falsehood conceived by man. Like many falsehoods, it was, in the past, useful to some extent. But like all falsehoods, it polluted life in the long run. So belief in god can go and it must go now in order to wash off corruption and to increase morality in mankind.

"I want atheism to make man self-confident and to establish social and economic equalities non-violently. Tell me, Bapu, where am I wrong?"

Bapuji listened to my long explanation patiently. Then he sat up in the bed and said slowly, "Yes, I see an ideal in your talk. I can neither say that my theism is right nor your atheism is wrong. We are seekers after truth. We change whenever we find ourselves in the wrong. I changed like that many times in my life. I see you are a worker. You are not a fanatic. You will change whenever you find yourself in the wrong. There is no harm as long as you are not fanatical. Whether you are in the right or I am in the right, results will prove. Then I may go your way or you may come my way; or both of us may go a third way. So go ahead with your work. I will help you, though your method is against mine."

I felt overwhelmed by his magnanimity. I requested, "You are encouraging me, Bapu. I want to be warned of the possible pitfalls in my way, so that I may benefit by your wisdom and experience and minimize my mistakes."

Bapuji replied, "It is not a mistake to commit a mistake, for no one commits a mistake knowing it to be one. But it is a mistake not to correct the mistake after knowing it to be one. If you are afraid of committing a mistake, you are afraid of doing anything at all. You will correct your mistakes whenever you find them."

He told me he was pleased with the conduct of my co-workers. He had called them to the Ashram to see how I influenced my associates. That revealed to me why he was giving special attention to the batches of my co-workers while he seemed indifferent to me for the past three months.

Then he inquired into my conception of morality. I replied, "I do what I say and I say what I do -- that is my definition of moral behaviour. There is no room for secrecy. All behaviour is moral that is open."

"Exactly," said Bapuji, "I would put it, 'secrecy is sin'. You are an atheist. You fight shy of the term *sin*." He described to me some of his hard experiences in trying to live openly.

He asked me whether I use a latrine in my village centre. Speaking on the problem of sanitation he said, "At Haradwar I wanted to sit on the banks of the Ganga. But I found no clean spot there. Untouchability and soil-pollution are the two shameless sins of us in India."

In another part of the conversation he said, "I wonder why workers are anxious to get a name. In South Africa I drudged for five years in kitchens and latrines."

I asked him, what time I should approach him for consultation. He readily replied, "You are a member of my family. Come to me any time you find me not engaged with others."

We conversed together on the whole for seventy minutes. There was no time limit imposed. It was a heart-to-heart talk. The topics were varied and often related to personal opinions and experiences. Throughout the conversation I was feeling that I was getting closer and closer to Bapu.

Some of his words rang in my ears ever afterwards. "I can neither say that my theism is right nor your atheism is wrong.... I will help you though your method is against mine," showed me the length Bapuji went in courtesy and toleration. Again, "If you are afraid to commit a mistake, you are afraid to do anything at all," struck as a remarkably practical suggestion and a call to bold action. Recollection of the conversation enabled me to improve my behaviour in several respects.

I think, Bapuji also reflected deeply on some points in our conversation. His gestures and pauses during the conversation gave me that impression. Perhaps, in the atheism that I was presenting, he recognized positive aspects different from the mere negations contained in the common conception of godlessness. Whatever it may be, one thing is certain. His later conversations and correspondence with me show that he began to understand me and my atheism.

Bapuji left for Bombay the next day. I returned to my village.

## Chapter VIII

### My Daughter's Marriage

My contact and conversation with Gandhiji not only confirmed me in atheism but turned my thoughts more towards practical programmes. Hitherto, for the removal of untouchability, my programme had consisted of only cosmopolitan dinners. I thought I should go a step further. There should be inter-marriages. Only inter-marriages will efface the differences of caste, creed, and colour.

My atheistic outlook does not recognize differences of caste or creed. But that is not enough. Those labels are extant in society at large. I should take them as they are and mix them up in marriage alliances. So I discussed my idea with my wife and with my eldest daughter (Manorama). They accepted my programme. My daughter agreed to marry an 'untouchable'.

I informed Bapuji of the decision of my family and of the atheistic way of thinking that led to the decision. The following is a translation into English of his reply in Hindustani:

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Sodepur, 16-1-'46

Bhai Ramachandra Rao

I have your letter. I like it. I am also glad that you have resolved to marry Manorama to a Harijan. But your inference in favor of atheism is not correct; or as I believe, your atheism takes the shape of theism.

I am prepared to get the marriage performed in the Sevagram Ashram; and I shall keep the same ceremony as I did for Tendulkar and the priest who will perform the ceremony under my supervision will be a Harijan. You are welcome to make any suggestions in this respect. One more thing -- Manorama is 17 years old, perhaps I remember her also. I suggest that she should wait for at least two years. If your idea is that the ceremony might be performed now, but the girl should stay with the husband, on attaining the age of 19, my advice is that you should perform the marriage when she becomes fit to stay with her husband. In the meantime they should get themselves trained in such other things as they should know. At least they might learn Hindustani in both the scripts; *and the charkha with the ancillary processes.*

## BAPU'S BLESSINGS

(The body of the letter is in the hand of Shri Kanu Gandhi; the portion in italics is in Bapu's own handwriting.)

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The next month Bapuji came to Madras to preside over the Jubilee Celebrations of the Hindustani Prechar Sabha. I met him at Madras for elucidation of the points raised in his letter.

I expressed my thankfulness to Bapuji for agreeing to celebrate my daughter's marriage in the Ashram. I also saw the desirability of postponing, according to his suggestion, of the solemnization for two years and of training up my son-in-law (Arjun Rao) during those two years in the Ashram. Regarding the details, I said, "Perhaps, in the course of the marriage ceremony, you will invoke divine blessings for the couple, or say the words: 'in the name of God'. My daughter and my son-in-law are atheistically minded. They will not be parties to such implied belief in god.

*Gandhiji:* In the case of your daughter's marriage, I will say 'in the name of Truth' instead of 'in the name of God'. Atheists also respect truth.

*I:* Yes. Atheists regard truthfulness as a social necessity. Truth binds man to man in association. Without truth there can be no social organization.

*G:* Not only that. Truth means existence; the existence of that we know and of that we do not know. The sum total of all existence is absolute truth or the Truth. (Gandhiji spoke at length on the subject of the absolute truth.)

*I:* I think, truth is only relative to human experience. The concept of the absolute truth which is beyond human experience is but a hypothesis formulated by man for the convenience of his thought process. Any absolute, like the infinite, is only an imaginary something.

*G:* The concepts of truth may differ. But all admit and respect truth. That truth I call God. For sometime I was saying, 'God is Truth,' but that did not satisfy me. So now I say, 'Truth is God.'

*I:* If truth is god, then why don't you say 'Satyam ... ' instead of 'Raghupati Raghava'? 'Raghupati Raghava' conveys to others a meaning very different from what it conveys to you.

G: Do you think I am superstitious? I am a super-atheist.

There was visible emphasis in these words.

I felt that this matter must be thrashed out fully some time. But that was not the proper occasion for it. The topic before us was the form of my daughter's marriage and I thought I had better confine myself to it just then.

As it was agreed that in the form of the ceremony there would be mention of 'truth' instead of 'god', I passed on to the next point.

I: While I was in the Ashram, I was not attending the prayers. But my stay in the Ashram has been hitherto short and broken. Now Arjun Rao will be in the Ashram for two years. There must be a clear understanding about the discipline. What shall be his position in relation to attendance at the prayers, Bapu?

G: Let him attend the prayers as a matter of discipline of the Ashram. But let him not recite the verses if he does not believe in them.

I was very much impressed by his spirit of accomodation. He showed me by example how to give practical shape to principles.

He continued, "Suppose in the two years that Arjun Rao sits regularly at the prayers, he turns towards theism?"

I: I will be very happy, Bapu. I do not want any one to be an atheist with closed mind. He should be an atheist out of conviction. If he takes to theism out of conviction, I welcome such a change in him.

G: Oh, yes. I know you are not a fanatic. Instead of Arjun Rao taking to theism, it looks as if both of you will carry this old man into your camp! (He returned the complement and laughed heartily. His large-heartedness was evident at every turn.)

In February, 1946, Arjun Rao accompanied Gandhiji to Sevagram. There he stayed for two years. He was attending the prayers but he was not reciting the verses.

Towards the end of 1947, Bapuji intimated to me that the marriage would be performed in April 1948. But he was assassinated in January 1948. The *ashramites* who knew the details of Bapuji's promise, solemnized the marriage of my daughter, Manorama, with Arjun Rao in the Ashram on 13-3-'48. All

references to god were scrupulously avoided in the form of that ceremony. Thus Bapuji's promise was fulfilled and my atheistic requirements too were fully respected.

Pandit Sundarlal, speaking at the marriage function, revealed to the guests a particular remark that Bapuji made to him when they both had met at Delhi at the time of a communal riot. Bapuji wished the communities turned atheists, if that served to stop communal hatred and riots. This remark illustrated again that Bapuji evaluated principles not so much by their intellectual or sentimental content as by their practical results. He was not averse to atheism if it tended to civilize humanity.

## Chapter IX The Difference

Did not Bapuji tell me in his conversation on 30-3'45, 'I will help you, though your method is against mine'? All the adjustments he made and all the accommodation he showed in order to celebrate my daughter's marriage in the Ashram were to me proof positive that he helped me. At the same time he pointed out to me equally clearly, that our methods differed. The following correspondence illustrates this fact.

Sometime in March 1946 or so, I read in the news columns that Bapuji wanted his camp at Bombay to be arranged in the huts of Harijans. He followed up the decision in Delhi also where he stayed in the Harijan Mandir.

His decision had considerable significance in view of the inhuman segregation imposed upon the Harijans in India. So I immediately wrote my congratulations to him and said:

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I and my co-workers have been trying this method of residing and eating with the Harijans for the last five or six years. Our experience proves that it is an efficient method to remove the social isolation of the untouchables. But our work is spreading slowly. If a man like Bapuji took it up, as he did at Bombay, it is bound to gain wide publicity and attract more workers to the method.

In this connection, another suggestion might be considered. Side by side with the mixing up, an attempt also might be made to discourage the use of labels of caste and creed which raise imaginary barriers between man and man. Not only should the practice of untouchability go, but the Harijan should not be allowed to continue a Harijan; he should be united with the general stream of humanity. Similarly, the Hindu and Muslim differences might be solved by discarding the labels. Such an attempt will no longer keep the form of communal harmony, but it would lead to the growth of one humanity. Communal harmony presupposes the existence of communities. In one humanity no communities exist. Though a powerful personality like Gandhiji might harmonize communities for a while, when the personal influence weakened, the communities would clash again. So a permanent solution of communal differences is the growth of one-humanity outlook rather than communal harmony.



The growth of one humanity requires the rejection of communal labels. Perhaps even the rejection of the labels of religion would involve a change of the belief in god, for every denominational label is associated with faith in a particular form of god. But, though every religion talked only of one god, in practice, however, belief in god always is a falsehood. So atheism is the most suitable attitude for the establishment of one humanity.

In order to set up happy human relations, communal harmony is the utmost limit to which the theistic mind can be stretched inasmuch as belief in god has to be somehow preserved. But communal harmony is beset with definite drawbacks. So the desirability of atheism as the best means to establish one humanity and thereby to lay strong foundations for permanent peace in human relations might be considered.

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My letter to Bapuji brought the following reply:

Harijan Mandir New Delhi, 9-4-'46

Dear Ramachandra Rao,

I have your letter. Though there is a resemblance between your thought and practice and mine superficially, I must own that yours is far superior to mine. Having made that admission let me emphasize the fact that deep down there is a fundamental difference between you and me and, therefore, your thought and mine. For you consciously ignore God. Equally consciously, probably more progressively, I rely upon God. Therefore your complaint is hasty. You will be better able to judge if you survive me and vice versa.

Do not think of passing any time with me whilst I am wandering. I may be said to be not wandering when I am in Sevagram. Therefore come to me whenever I am there.

Yours,

BAPU

The letter clearly pointed out the differences between Bapuji's approach and mine. But what does the difference matter? Work and results resolve the differences.

There was an episode associated with the above letter. It was written in another hand and Bapuji signed the letter. The letter was closed at first with 'Yours sincerely'; but when Bapuji signed it, he scored out 'sincerely' and left 'Yours' to stand. I did not understand why 'sincerely' was scored out and so I wrote to Bapuji:

Mudunur, 2-5-'46

Bapuji,

Herewith your letter to me dated 9-4-'46. The scoring out of the word *sincerely* is puzzling to me. I am at a loss to understand its significance. Pray do tell me.

Yours sincerely,

G. RAMACHANDRA RAO

I got the following reply from Bapuji's secretary, Shrimati Amrit Kaur:

Bhai Ramachandra Raoji,

Pujya Bapuji has received your letter. 'Yours sincerely' is too formal; therefore the word was struck out. What else could there be in it?

I am returning Bapuji's letter.

Yours,

AMRIT KAUR  
Simla, 7-5-'46

I felt I was getting closer to Bapuji than I had realized. Experiences at Delhi made it plain to me.

I was in Delhi towards the end of 1946, attached to the A. I. C. C. office as a Congress organizer. I had occasions to go to Bhangi Colony (Harijan Mandir) where Gandhiji camped at that time. I had some short talks with him on the atheistic approach.

Once he asked me for my programme to remove untouchability.

*I:* Regular cosmopolitan dinners on a mass scale like the foreign cloth bonfires of 1920.

*Gandhiji:* Would cosmopolitan dinners be sufficient to catch the imagination of the people?

*I:* Then, inter-marriages. Now that we have nationalists and Congressmen in the interim Government, arrangements may be made to announce every inter-marriage by a Government notification. Also every inter-marriage should be granted a present of Rs. 500 by the Government. Every child up to the third-born of such wedlock should be paid a quarterly subsidy of Rs. 50 for two years.

*G:* Why do you propose the money-subsidy? Will not the publicity be sufficient?

*I:* At present the ostracism of inter-marriages often takes the shape of economic sanctions by the society. People who appreciated the principle of inter-marriages are often unable to put the principle into practice, because they are afraid to face the economic pressures that follow close on the heels of inter-marriages. As long as the economic system remains what it is today, such pressure is a real hardship. So while the law and the Government notification protect the couple from social harassment, the money subsidy saves the inter-marriages from economic sabotage. This policy of the Government may be necessary only for a term of five or ten years during which period the movement will take root and will grow on popular support later on.

*G:* That is well. But it does not preserve the sanctity of marriage. It reduces marriage to prostitution, and alliance for the consideration of money.

*I:* Today marriages confined to the limits of caste and the practice of dowry are no better. The system of Government subsidy to inter-marriages will at least serve the purpose of removing social isolations, even though it may not be free from the other evils of pecuniary considerations attaching to the existing system. Money considerations cannot be removed until there is a change in the economic order. We may look at the marriage alliance now from the social point of view. Did not the totalitarian States subsidize large families and compel even nuns to get married when those States required increase in population? Those States subsidized marriages as a part of the war effort. We will subsidize inter-marriages for the removal of social isolations. The sanctity of marriage lies in its contribution to social welfare.

G: You are an atheist! (Bapuji said significantly.)

Another time Bapuji surprised me by telling me, "You have tried atheism sufficiently long. Now, you give up the term *atheism*. It does not help your work."

I: I am very well aware that the term *atheism* is a condemned word. The oxford dictionary gives 'godlessness' as the meaning of atheism and 'wickedness' as one of the meanings of 'godlessness'. I know, Bapu, what odium is attached to the term *atheism*. Yet I have taken it up deliberately, because it is the only work that inspires full self-confidence and complete social outlook in man. I regard that atheism represents the progressive tendencies in civilization. So far as I have not laid before you the several aspects of atheism as I see them. I am waiting for you to give me time. I want also to put my thoughts into a book form.

G: I will go through the manuscript of your book. Come to me when I go to Sevagram next. We will have sufficient time to talk about your thoughts. (Bapuji replied endearingly.)

Another day it was time for Bapuji's evening walk when I went to the Bhangi colony. Visitors lined up his path on either side. I usually avoid the crowd on such occasions. I stood a few yards away from the path. Bapuji came out of his residence and went a few paces along the path. Then he turned his steps towards where I was standing. I wondered why he was coming that way. He came close to me and asked, "Do you want to talk to me?"

"No, Bapu." I replied rather astonished. "I have nothing to talk to you now. I will come to you when I want your advice."

"Yes," he smiled and said, "I will live longer if people spare my breath like you."

He returned to the path and went along.

In spite of the difference that he emphasized, Bapuji kept me close to his heart. He told me in his letters and also in his conversations that he would have time to speak with me at leisure whenever he was at Sevagram. He asked me to go and stay there with him for about ten days when he proposed to discuss the several aspects of atheism for half an hour every day. With this prospect before me, I was content to make my conversations with him then short and topical rather than full and deep.

## Chapter X Gandhi's God

The assassination of Gandhiji meant a terrible loss to civilization; it is as much a loss to atheism. I was eagerly looking forward to the opportunity to discuss atheism with him at length. I was already close to him. The discussion would have taken me closer. This I say with confidence because of my experience with him. He had not been averse to my atheism nor did his god scare me away. He appreciated a principle far more for its efficacy than for its mere academic or intellectual considerations. His primary concern was humanity. On account of this deep concern, he could proclaim boldly: "I can neither say my theism is right, nor your atheism is wrong." He was not a fanatic to quarrel about method, nor was he a poet to praise the ideal; but he was a prophet who perceived the direction. He never denounced anything that contributed the commonweal; on the other hand, he helped it, in spite of the wide divergence between its method and his. His conception of god, as well as his estimation of atheism appear to me to be based on this essentially humanitarian consideration.

Besides, he was pre-eminently a practical man. As a practical man, he took any situation as it obtained with all its paradoxes. He never sat down to scan and to sift its contradictions intellectually; but he moved the whole situation towards the ideal of happiness for all mankind. He condemned nothing beforehand lest a good cause should be lost by bad judgement. He only let things drop when they could not bear the strain of progress. Practice was his test of fitness. He subordinated intellectual and sentimental considerations to practical purposes. He tested a system of medicine by the cure it effected; he tested the advocate of a cause by the work he turned out; he allowed me to dissect a frog when it served a practical purpose.

This attitude and method of Gandhiji can be seen in his answers to questions at the meeting of the Harijan Sevak Sangh held on 14-8-1945. When he first undertook to remove untouchability, the problem of *varna-dharma* (caste system) was also there. It was easy to see intellectually, even then, that caste ought to go root and branch if untouchability was to be completely eradicated. But as a practical proposition, caste was not the immediate problem then. The problem was only the removal of untouchability. So he allowed caste to continue, though personally he observed no caste even then. Thus the work of the removal of untouchability progressed through the early stage leaving the contradictions of the caste system untouched, and, therefore, without the complication of opposition from those who would resist the abolition of caste. When the stage had come where he found caste was a serious hindrance for

further progress, Gandhiji said that caste ought to go root and branch and proposed not only inter-dining but inter-marriages as the means. A mere intellectual might read inconsistency in Gandhiji's tolerance of caste earlier and his denunciation of it later. But to a practical man of non-violent creed these are stages of progress and not principles of contradiction.

Likewise, he found belief in god of the 'Raghupati Raghava' type widespread when he took up the cause of Indian Independence. He allowed the belief, which he too shared in his own way, to continue as long as it did not impede the Indian Independence movement. He even invoked the blessings of god in the congress pledge. But when it was objected to, he readily admitted: "So far as the conscientious objection is concerned, the mention of God may be removed if required from the Congress pledge of which I am proud to think I was the author. Had such an objection been raised at the time, I would have yielded at once." (*Young India*, 5-3-'25).

To quote another instance: In 1946, the Indian National Congress was still in the wilderness. Gandhiji suggested a form of the pledge suitable for the Independence Day (January 26) of that year. In this form also there was a reference to god. The form was published. In a conversation I drew the attention of Shri Prabhakar to it and pointed out that though I liked to take that pledge, I could not do it in full on account of the reference to god in it. Shri Prabhakar took the matter to the notice of Bapuji and he wrote to him in reply: "I seek for the fulfilment of my pledge the assistance of that which we may or may not call divine but we all feel within us. He (referring to me) can have the above as an alternative. All true atheists know that there is some power within them."

Of course, the outlook of the atheist is quite different from what Gandhiji evidently took it to be when he stated, "all atheists know that there is some power within them." Really, atheism is the manifestation of the free will in man. The hypotheses of "some power which we may or may not call divine", subordinates human life to that power and thereby leads to theism again. So the alternative which Bapuji gave to the Congress pledge, did not satisfy the principles of atheism.

Apart from the consideration whether the alternative which was offered by Gandhiji to the congress pledge was theistic or atheistic in nature, it was noteworthy that he moved from 'God' to 'some power which may or may not be divine' in order to accommodate me. So, I think, what was important to him was not so much the concept of god, but how far the belief or non-belief in god contributed to the commonweal. It was, perhaps, with this view that he agreed

to drop the mention of god from the form of my daughter's marriage; he allowed my son-in-law to sit at the prayers without reciting the verses; he called himself a super-atheist and he wished the communities took to atheism if that 'served to stop communal hatred and riot'.

From 'Raghupati Raghava' to atheism might seem a wide leap. But to Bapuji who was pre-eminently a practical humanitarian, it was simple to negotiate where and when he felt the interests of humanity needed it. Within my knowledge, there was visible change in his attitude towards atheism between 1941 and 1948. In his letter to me dated 11-9-'41, he said, "Atheism is a denial of self. No one has succeeded in its propagation." But by 1946, while stating emphatically the difference between him and me, he was willing to leave to the future to judge whether the theistic or the atheistic thought was better. In 1948, he agreed to perform the marriage of my daughter dropping out the reference to god from the form of the ceremony.

Thus Bapuji's mind was "ever growing, ever moving forward". (*Harijan*, 28-7-'48). He was moving humanity and he was moving with humanity. He started with a humanity that believed in god of the 'Raghupati Raghava' type. As he pushed forward, he passed through the stages of 'God is Truth' and 'Truth is God'. He never allowed old forms to hamper the progress. If he felt that the progress of humanity required leaving god altogether, I am sure, he was not the man to hesitate.

He recognized that theism and atheism are two kinds of outlooks on life. He followed the theistic thought, of course, and progressed along. Whether atheistic thought would lead to progress farther than the theistic was what he doubted, and he said so in his letter dated 9-4-'46. It is now left to the atheists to work and to clear in practical life the doubt that Gandhiji expressed.

Bapu is no more to help our work, but his way of work is there to guide us.