

22. Advaitism and God

[In answer to a friend's question, Gandhiji wrote:]

I am an *advaitist* and yet I can support *dvaitism* (dualism). The world is changing every moment, and is therefore unreal, it has no permanent existence. But though it is constantly changing, it has a something about it which persists and it is therefore to that extent real. I have therefore no objection to calling it real and unreal, and thus being called an *anekantavadi* or a *syaduadi*. But my *syadvada* is not the *syadvada* of the learned, it is peculiarly my own. I cannot engage in a debate with them. It has been my experience that I am always true from my point of view, and am often wrong from the point of view of my honest critics. I know that we are both right from our respective points of view. And this knowledge saves me from attributing motives to my opponents or critics. The seven blind men who gave seven different descriptions of the elephant were all right from their respective points of view, and wrong from the point of view of one another, and right and wrong from the point of view of the man who knew the elephant. I very much like this doctrine of the manyness of reality. It is this doctrine that has taught me to judge a Mussulman from his own standpoint and a Christian from his. Formerly I used to resent the ignorance of my opponents. Today I can love them because I am gifted with the eye to see myself as others see me and vice versa. I want to take the whole world in the embrace of my love. My *anekantavada* is the result of the twin doctrine of *satya* and *ahimsa*.

I talk of God exactly as I believe Him to be. I believe Him to be creative as well as non-creative. This too is the result of my acceptance of the doctrine of the manyness of reality. From the platform of the Jains I prove the non-creative aspect of God, and from that of Ramanuja the creative aspect. As a matter of fact we are all thinking of the Unthinkable, describing the Indescribable, seeking to know the Unknown, and that is why our speech falters, is inadequate and even often contradictory. That is why the *Vedas* describe *Brahman* as 'not this', 'not this'. But if He or It is not this, He or It is. If we exist, if our parents and their parents have existed, then it is proper to believe in the Parent of the whole creation. If He is not, we are nowhere. And that is why all of us with one voice call one God differently as *Paramatma*, *Ishwara*, Shiva, Vishnu, Rama, Allah, *Khuda*, Dada Hormuzda, Jehova, God, and an infinite variety of names. He is one and yet many; He is smaller than an atom, and bigger than the Himalayas. He is contained even in a drop of the ocean, and yet not even the seven seas can compass Him. Reason is powerless to know Him. He is beyond the reach or grasp of reason. But I need not labour the point. Faith is essential in this matter. My logic can make and unmake innumerable hypotheses. An atheist might floor me in a debate. But my faith runs so very much faster than my reason that I can challenge the whole world and say, 'God is, was and ever shall be.'

But those who want to deny His existence are at liberty to do so. He is merciful and compassionate. He is not an earthly king needing an army to make us accept His sway. He allows us freedom, and yet His compassion commands obedience to His will. But if any one of us disdain to bow to His will, He says: 'So be it. My sun will shine no less for thee, my clouds will rain no less for thee. I need not force thee to accept my sway.' Of such a God let the ignorant dispute the existence. I am one of the millions of wise men who believe in Him and am never tired of bowing to Him and singing His glory.

Young India, 21 January 1926

23. God Is

There is an indefinable mysterious Power that pervades everything. I feel it, though I do not see it. It is this unseen Power which makes itself felt and yet defies all proof, because it is so unlike all that I perceive through my senses. It transcends the senses.

But it is impossible to reason out the existence of God to a limited extent. Even in ordinary affairs we know that people do not know who rules or why, and how he rules. And yet they know that there is a power that certainly rules. In my tour last year in Mysore I met many poor villagers and I found upon inquiry that they did not know who ruled Mysore. They simply said some god ruled it. If the knowledge of these poor people was so limited about their ruler I who am infinitely lesser than God, than they than their ruler, need not be surprised if I do not realize the presence of God the King of kings. Nevertheless I do feel as the poor villagers felt about Mysore that there is orderliness in the Universe, there is an unalterable Law governing everything and every being that exists or lives. It is not a blind law; for no blind law can govern the conduct of living beings, and thanks to the marvellous researches of Sir J. C. Bose, it can now be proved that even matter is life. That Law then which governs all life is God. Law and the Lawgiver are one. I may not deny the Law or the Law-giver, because I know so little about It or Him. Even as my denial or ignorance of the existence of an earthly power will avail me nothing, so will not my denial of God and His Law liberate me from its operation; whereas humble and mute acceptance of divine authority makes life's journey easier even as the acceptance of earthly rule makes life under it easier.

I do dimly perceive that whilst everything around me is ever changing, ever dying, there is underlying all that change a living power that is changeless, that holds all together, that creates, dissolves and recreates. That informing power or spirit is God. And since nothing else I see merely through the senses can or will persist, He alone is.

And is this power benevolent or malevolent? I see it is purely benevolent. For I can see that in the midst of death life persists, in the midst of untruth truth persists, in the midst of darkness light persists. Hence I gather that God is Life, Truth, Light. He is Love. He is the Supreme Good.

But He is no God who merely satisfies the intellect, if He ever does. God to be God must rule the heart and transform it. He must express Himself in every smallest act of His votary. This can only be done through a definite realization more real than the five senses can ever produce. Sense perceptions can be, often are, false and deceptive, however real they may appear to us. Where there is realization outside the senses it is infallible. It is proved not by extraneous evidence but in the transformed conduct and character of those who have felt the real presence of God within.

Such testimony is to be found in the experiences of an unbroken line of prophets and sages in all countries and climes; To reject this evidence is to deny myself.

This realization is preceded by an immovable faith. He who would in his own person test the fact of "God's presence can do so by a living faith. And since faith itself cannot be proved by extraneous evidence, the safest course is to believe in the moral government of the world and therefore in the

supremacy of the moral law, the law of truth and love. Exercise of faith will be the safest where there is a clear determination summarily to reject all that is contrary to Truth and Love.

I cannot account for the existence of evil by any rational method. To want to do so is to be coequal with God. I am therefore humble enough to recognize evil as such. And I call God long suffering and patient precisely because He permits evil in the world. I know that He has no evil. He is the author of it and yet untouched by it.

I know too that I shall never know God if I do not wrestle with and against evil even at the cost of life itself. I am fortified in the belief by my own humble and limited experience. The purer I try to become, the nearer I feel to be to God. How much more should I be, when my faith is not a mere apology as it is today but has become as immovable as the Himalayas and as white and bright as the snows on their peaks? Meanwhile I invite the correspondent to pray with Newman who sang from experience:

Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom,

Lead Thou me on:

The night is dark and I am far from home,

Lead Thou me on.

Keep Thou my feet, I do not ask to see

The distant scene; one step enough for me.

Young India, 11 October 1928

24. Letter from Europe

[Replying to a question asked of him at a meeting in Switzerland on his way back from the Round Table Conference in London, Gandhiji said:]

You have asked me why I consider that God is Truth. In my early youth I was taught to repeat what in Hindu scriptures are known as one thousand names of God. But these one thousand names of God were by no means exhaustive. We believe—and I think it is the truth—that God has as many names as there are creatures and, therefore, we also say that God is nameless and since God has many forms we also consider Him formless, and since He speaks to us through many tongues we consider Him to be speechless and so on. And so when I came to study Islam I found that Islam too had many names for God. I would say with those who say God is Love, God is Love. But deep down in me I used to say that though God may be love, God is Truth, above all. If it is possible for the human tongue to give the fullest description of God, I have come to the conclusion that for myself, God is Truth. But two years ago I went a step further and said that Truth is God. You will see the fine distinction between the two statements, viz. that God is Truth and Truth is God. And I came to that conclusion after a continuous and relentless search after Truth which began nearly fifty years ago. I then found that the nearest approach to Truth was through love. But I also found that love has many meanings in the English language at least and that human love in the sense of passion could become a degrading thing also. I found too that love in the sense of *ahimsa* had only a limited number of votaries in the world. But I never found a double meaning in connection with truth and even atheists had not demurred to the necessity or power of truth. But in their passion for discovering truth the atheists have not hesitated to deny the very existence of God—from their own point of view rightly. And it was because of this reasoning that I saw that rather than say that God is Truth I should say that Truth is God, I recall the name of Charles Bradlaugh who delighted to call himself an atheist, but knowing as I do something of him, I would never regard him as an atheist. I would call him a God-fearing man, though I know that he would reject the claim. His face would redden if I would say "Mr. Bradlaugh, you are a truth-fearing man, and so a God-fearing man." I would automatically disarm his criticism by saying that Truth is God, as I have disarmed criticisms of many a young man. Add to this the great difficulty that millions have taken the name of God and in His name committed nameless atrocities. Not that scientists very often do not commit cruelties in the name of truth. I know how in the name of truth and science inhuman cruelties are perpetrated on animals when men perform vivisection. There are thus a number of difficulties in the way, no matter how you describe God. But the human mind is a limited thing, and you have to labour under limitations when you think of a being or entity who is beyond the power of man to grasp.

And then we have another thing in Hindu philosophy, viz. God alone is and nothing else exists, and the same truth you find emphasized and exemplified in the *Kalma* of Islam. There you find it clearly stated—that God alone is and nothing else exists. In fact the Sanskrit word for Truth is a word which literally means that which exists—*Sat*. For these and several other reasons that I can give you I have come to the conclusion that the definition, 'Truth is God', gives me the greatest satisfaction. And when you want to find Truth as God the only inevitable means is Love, i.e. non-violence, and since I

believe that ultimately the means and the end are convertible terms, I could not hesitate to say that God is Love.

'What then is Truth?'

A difficult question, (said Gandhiji), but I have solved it for myself by saying that it is what the voice within tells you. How, then, you ask, different people think of different and contrary truths? Well, seeing that the human mind works through innumerable media and that the evolution of the human mind is not the same for all, it follows that what may be truth for one may be untruth for another, and hence those who have made these experiments have come to the conclusion that there are certain conditions to be observed in making those experiments. Just as for conducting scientific experiments there is an indispensable scientific course of instruction, in the same way strict preliminary discipline is necessary to qualify a person to make experiments in the spiritual realm. Everyone should, therefore, realize his limitations before he speaks of his inner voice. Therefore we have the belief based upon experience, that those who would make individual search after truth as God, must go through several vows, as for instance, the vow of truth, the vow of *brahmacharya* (purity)—for you cannot possibly divide your love for Truth and God with anything else— the vow of non-violence, of poverty and non-possession. Unless you impose on yourselves the five vows you may not embark on the experiment at all. There are several other conditions prescribed, but I must not take you through all of them. Suffice it to say that those who have made these experiments know that it is not proper for everyone to claim to hear the voice of conscience, and it is because we have at the present moment everybody claiming the right of conscience without going through any discipline whatsoever and there is so much untruth being delivered to a bewildered world, all that I can, in true humility, present to you is that truth is not to be found by anybody who has not got an abundant sense of humility. If you would swim on the bosom of the ocean of Truth you must reduce yourself to a zero. Further than this I cannot go along this fascinating path.

Young India, 31 December 1931

25. Approach Temples in Faith

[During the course of his speech delivered at Trivandrum in connection with Travancore Temple Entry Proclamation Celebrations, Gandhiji said:]

In the days of my youth I went to many temples with the faith and devotion with which my parents had fired me. But of late years I have not been visiting temples, and ever since I have been engaged in anti-untouchability work, I have refrained from going to temples unless they were open to every one called untouchable. So what I saw this morning at the temple dawned upon me with the same newness with which it must have dawned upon so many *avarna* Hindus who must have gone to the temple after the Proclamation. In imagination my mind travelled back to the pre-historic centuries when temples began to convey the message of God in stone and metal. I saw quite clearly that the priest who was interpreting each figure in his own choice Hindi did not want to tell me that each of those figures was God. But without giving me that particular interpretation he made me realize that these temples were so many bridges between the Unseen, Invisible and Indefinable God and ourselves who are infinitesimal drops in the Infinite Ocean. We the human family are not all philosophers. We are of the earth very earthy, and we are not satisfied with contemplating the Invisible God. Somehow or other we want something which we can touch, something which we can see, something before which we can kneel down. It does not matter whether it is a book, or an empty stone building, or a stone building inhabited by numerous figures. A book will satisfy some, an empty building will satisfy some others, and many others will not be satisfied unless they see something inhabiting these empty buildings. Then I ask you to approach these temples not as if they represented a body of superstitions. If you will approach these temples with faith in them, you will know that each time you visit them you will come away from them purified, and with your faith more and more in the living God.

Harijan, 23 January 1937

26. The Meaning of the Gita

A friend puts forward the following poser:

The controversy about the teaching of the Gita— whether it is *himsa* (violence) or *ahimsa* (non-violence)—will, it seems, go on for a long time. It is one thing what meaning we read in the *Gita*, or rather we want to read in the *Gita*; it is another what meaning is furnished by an unbiased reading of it. The question, therefore, does not present much difficulty to one who implicitly accepts *ahimsa* as the eternal principle of life. He will say that the *Gita* is acceptable to him only if it teaches *ahimsa*. A grand book like the *Gita* could, for him, inculcate nothing grander than the eternal religious principle of *ahimsa*. If it did not it would cease to be his unerring guide. It would still be worthy of his high regard, but not an infallible authority. In the first chapter we find Arjuna laying down his weapons, under the influence of *ahimsa*, and ready to die at the hands of the Kauravas. He conjures up a vision of the disaster and the sin involved in *himsa*. He is overcome with ennui and in fear and trembling exclaims: 'Oh what a mighty sin we are up to!'

Shri Krishna catches him in that mood and tells him: 'Enough of this high philosophy; No one kills .or is killed. The soul is immortal and the body must perish. Fight then the fight that has come to thee as a matter of duty. Victory or defeat is no concern of thine. Acquit thyself of thy task.' In the eleventh chapter the Lord presents a panoramic vision of the Universe and says: 'I am *Kala*, the Destroyer of the worlds, the Ancient of Days; I am here engaged in My task of destruction of the worlds. Kill thou those already killed by Me. Give not thyself up to grief.'

Himsa and *ahimsa* are equal before God. But for man what is God's message? Is it this: 'Fight; for thou art sure to foil thy enemies in the field'? If the *Gita* teaches *ahimsa* the first and the eleventh chapters are not consistent with the rest, at any rate do not support the *ahimsa* theory. I wish you could find time to resolve my doubt. The question put is eternal and every one who has studied the *Gita* must needs find out his own solution. And although I am going to offer mine, I know that ultimately one is guided not by the intellect but by the heart. The heart accepts a conclusion for which the intellect subsequently finds the reasoning. Argument follows conviction. Man often finds reasons in support of whatever he does or wants to do.

I shall therefore appreciate the position of those who are unable to accept my interpretation of the *Gita*. All I need do is to indicate how I reached my meaning, and what canons of interpretation I have followed in arriving at it. Mine is but to fight for my meaning, no matter whether I win or lose.

My first acquaintance with the *Gita* was in 1889, when I was almost twenty. I had not then much of an inkling of the principle of *ahimsa*. One of the lines of the Gujarati poet, Shamalbhatta, had taught me the principle of winning even the enemy with love, and that teaching had gone deep into me. But I had not deduced the eternal principle of non-violence from it. It did not, for instance, cover all animal life. I had, before this, tasted meat whilst in India. I thought it a duty to kill venomous reptiles like the snake. It is my conviction today that even venomous creatures may not be killed] by a believer in *ahimsa*. I believed in those days in preparing ourselves for a fight with the English. I often'

repeated a Gujarati poet's famous doggerel: 'What wonder if Britain rules!' etc. My meat-eating was as a first step to qualify myself for the fight with the English. Such was my position before I proceeded to England, 5 and there I escaped meat-eating etc. because of my determination to follow unto death the promises I had given to my mother. My love for truth has saved me from many a pitfall.

Now whilst in England my contact with two English friends made me read the *Gita*. I say 'made me read', because it was not of my own desire that I read it. But when these two friends asked me to read the *Gita* with them, I was ashamed of my ignorance. The knowledge of my total ignorance of my scriptures pained me. Pride, I think, was at the bottom of this feeling. My knowledge of Sanskrit was not enough to enable me to understand all the verses of the *Gita* unaided. The friends, of course, were quite innocent of Sanskrit. They placed before me Sir Edwin Arnold's magnificent rendering of the *Gita*. I devoured the contents from cover to cover and was entranced by it. The last nineteen verses of the second chapter have since been inscribed on the tablet of my heart. They contain for me all knowledge. The truths they teach are the 'eternal verities'. There is reasoning in them but they represent realized knowledge.

I have since read many translations and many commentaries, have argued and reasoned to my heart's content but the impression that the first reading gave me has never been effaced. Those verses are the key to the interpretation of the *Gita*. I would even advise rejection of the verses that may seem to be in conflict with them. But a humble student need reject nothing. He will simply say: 'It is the limitation of my own intellect that I cannot resolve this inconsistency. I might be able to do so in the time to come.' That is how he will plead with himself and with others.

A prayerful study and experience are essential for a correct interpretation of the scriptures. The injunction that a *shudra* may not study the scriptures is not entirely without meaning. A *shudra* means a spiritually uncultured, ignorant man. He is more likely than not to misinterpret the *Vedas* and other scriptures. Every one cannot solve an algebraical equation. Some preliminary study is a *sine qua non*. How ill would the grand truth 'I am *Brahman*' lie in the mouth of a man steeped in sin! To what ignoble purposes would he turn it! What a distortion it would suffer at his hands!

A man therefore who would interpret the scriptures must have the spiritual discipline. He must practise the *yamas* and *niyamas*—the eternal guides of conduct. A superficial practice thereof is useless. The *shastras* have enjoined the necessity of a *guru*. But a *guru* being rare in these days, a study of modern books inculcating *bhakti* has been suggested by the sages. Those who are lacking in *bhakti*, lacking in faith, are ill-qualified to interpret the scriptures. The learned may draw an elaborately learned interpretation out of them, but that will not be the true interpretation. Only the experienced will arrive at the true interpretation of the scriptures.

But even for the inexperienced there are certain canons. That interpretation is not true which conflicts With Truth. To one who doubts even Truth, the scriptures have no meaning. No one can contend with him. There is danger for the man who has failed to find *ahimsa* in the scriptures, but he is not doomed. Truth—*Sat*— is positive; non-violence is negative. Truth stands for the fact, non-violence negatives the fact. And yet nonviolence is the highest religion. Truth is self-evident; non-violence is its maturest fruit. It is contained in Truth, but as it is not self-evident a man may seek to interpret the *shastras*, without accepting it. But his acceptance of Truth is sure to lead him to the acceptance of non-violence.

Renunciation of the flesh is essential for realizing Truth. The sage who realized Truth found non-violence out of the violence raging all about him and said: Violence is unreal, non-violence is real. Realization of Truth is impossible without non-violence. *Brahmacharya* (celibacy), *asteya* (non-stealing), *aparigraha* (non-possession) are means to achieve *ahimsa*. *Ahimsa* is the soul of Truth. Man is mere animal without it. A seeker after Truth will realize all this in his search for Truth and he will then have no difficulty in the interpretation of the *shastras*.

Another canon of interpretation is to scan not the letter but to examine the spirit. Tulsidas's *Ramayana* is a notable book because it is informed with the spirit of purity, pity and piety. There is a verse in it which brackets drums, *shudras*, fools and women together as fit to be beaten. A man who cites that verse to beat his wife is doomed to perdition. Rama did not only not beat his wife, but never even sought to displease her. Tulsidas simply inserted in his poem a proverb current in his days, little dreaming that there would be brutes justifying beating of their wives on the authority of the verse. But assuming that Tulsidas himself followed a custom which was prevalent in his days and beat his wife, what then? The beating was still wrong. But the *Ramayana* was not written to justify beating of wives by their husbands. It was written to depict Rama, the perfect man, and Sita the ideal wife, and Bharata the ideal of a devoted brother. Any justification incidentally met with therein of vicious customs should therefore be rejected. Tulsidas did not write his priceless epic to teach geography, and any wrong geography that we happen to come across in *Ramayana* should be summarily rejected.

Let us examine the *Gita* in the light of these observations. Self-realization and its means is the theme of the *Gita*, the fight between two armies being but the occasion to expound the theme. You might, if you like, say that the Poet himself was not against war or violence and hence he did not hesitate to press the occasion of a war into service. But a reading of the *Mahabharata* has given me an altogether different impression. The poet Vyasa has demonstrated the futility of war by means of that epic of wonderful beauty. What, he asks, if the Kauravas were vanquished? And what if the Pandavas won? How many were left of the victors and what was their lot? What an end Mother Kunti came to? And where are the Yadawas today?

Where the description of the fight and justification of violence are not the subject-matter of the epic, it is quite wrong to emphasize those aspects. And if it is difficult to reconcile certain verses with the teaching of non-violence, it is far more difficult to set the whole of the *Gita* in the framework of violence.

The poet when he writes is not conscious of all the interpretations his composition is capable of. The beauty of poetry is that the creation transcends the poet. The Truth that he reaches in the highest flights of his fancy is often not to be met with in his life. The life story of many a poet thus belies his poetry. That the central teaching of the *Gita* is not *himsa* but *ahimsa* is amply demonstrated by the subject begun in the second chapter and summarized in the concluding 18th chapter. The treatment in the other chapters also supports the position. *Himsa* is impossible without anger, without attachment, without hatred, and the *Gita* strives to carry us to the state beyond *sattwa*, *rajas* and *tamas*, a state that excludes anger, hatred etc. But I can even now picture to my mind Arjuna's eyes red with anger every time he drew the bow to the end of his ear.

It was not in a spirit of *ahimsa* that Arjuna refused' to go to battle. He had fought many a battle before. Only this time he was overcome with false pity. He fought shy of killing his own kith and kin.

Arjuna never discussed the problem of killing his kith and kin. Arjuna never discussed the problem of killing as such. He did not say he would kill no one, even if he regarded him as wicked. Shri Krishna knows every one's innermost thoughts and he saw through the temporary infatuation of Arjuna. He therefore told him: "Thou hast already done the killing. Thou canst not all at once argue thyself into non-violence. Finish what thou hast already begun.' If a passenger going in a Scotch Express gets suddenly sick of travelling and jumps out of it, he is guilty of suicide. He has not learnt the futility of travelling or travelling by a railway train. Similar was the case with Arjuna. Non-violent Krishna could give Arjuna no other advice. But to say that the *Gita* teaches violence or justifies war, because advice to kill was given a particular occasion, is as wrong as to say that *himsa* is the law of life, because a certain amount of it is inevitable in daily life. To one who reads the spirit of the *Gita*, it teaches the secret of non-violence, the secret of realizing the self through the physical body.

And who are Dhritarashtra and Yudhishtira and Arjuna? Who is Krishna? Were they all historical characters? And does the *Gita* describe them as such? Is it true that Arjuna suddenly stops in the midst of the fight and puts the question to Krishna, and Krishna repeats the whole of the *Gita* before him? And which is that *Gita*—the *Gita* that Arjuna forgot after having exclaimed that his infatuation was gone and which he requested Krishna to sing again, but which he could not, and which therefore he gave in the form of *Anugita*?

I regard Duryodhana and his party as the baser impulses in man, and Arjuna and his party as the higher impulses. The field of battle is our own body. An eternal battle is going on between the two camps and the Poet Seer has vividly described it. Krishna is the Dweller within, ever whispering in a pure heart. Like the watch the heart needs the winding of purity, or the Dweller ceases to speak.

Not that actual physical battle is out of the question. To those who are innocent of non-violence, the *Gita* does not teach a lesson of despair. He who fears, who saves his skin, who yields to his passions, must fight the physical battle whether he will or no; but that is not his *dharma*. *Dharma* is one and one only. *Ahimsa* means *moksha*, and *moksha* is the realization of Truth. There is no room here for cowardice. *Himsa* will go on eternally in this strange world. The *Gita* shows the way out of it. But it also shows that escape out of cowardice and despair is not the way. Better far than cowardice is killing and being killed in battle.

If the meaning of the verses quoted by the correspondent is not still clear, I must confess my inability to make it so. Is it agreed that that the Almighty God is the Creator, Protector and Destroyer and ought to be such? And if He creates, He has undoubtedly the right to destroy. And yet He does not destroy because He does not create. His law is that whatever is born must die, and in that lies His mercy. His laws are immutable. Where should we all be if He changed them capriciously?

Young India, 12 November 1925

27. Krishna Janmashtami

[The following is a summary of a speech delivered by Gandhiji at Arsikere in Mysore State:]

We do not know what Shri Krishna's life means for us, we do not read the *Gita*, we make no attempt to teach it to our children. The *Gita* is such a transcendental book that men of every creed, age and clime may read it with respect, and find in it the principles of their respective religions. If we thought of Krishna on every *Janmashtami* day and read the *Gita* and resolved to follow its teachings, we should not be in our present sorry plight. Shri Krishna served the people all his life, he was a real servant of the people. He could have led the hosts at Kurukshetra, but he preferred to be Arjuna's charioteer. His whole life was one unbroken *Gita* of *karma*. He refused proud Duryodhana's sweets and preferred humble Vidura's spinach. As a child he was a cowherd and we still know him by the name of Gopala. But we, his worshippers, have neglected the cow today, the Adi-Karnatakas slaughter cows and eat beef, and our infants and invalids have to go without cow's milk. Krishna knew no sleep or idleness. He kept sleepless vigil of the world, we his posterity have become indolent and forgotten the use of our hands. In the *Bhagawadgita* Lord Krishna has shown the path of *bhakti*— which means the path of *karma*. Lokamanya Tilak has shown that whether we desire to be *bhaktas* or *jnanis*, *karma* is the only way; but the *karma* should not be for self but for others. Action for one's own self binds, action for the sake of others delivers from bondage. What can be the altruistic action which can be universally done, by Hindus, Mussulmans, Christians, by men, women and children? I have tried to demonstrate that spinning alone is that sacrificial act, for that alone can make us do something in God's name, something for the poorest, something that can infuse activity in their idle limbs. Lord Krishna has also taught that to be a true *bhakta* we should make no difference between a *brahmana* and a scavenger. If that is true there can be no place for untouchability in Hinduism. If you are still hugging that superstition you can cleanse yourself by getting rid of it on this the sacred day of Krishna's birth. He who swears by the *Gita* may know no distinction between Hindu and Mussulman, for Lord Krishna has declared that he who adores God in a true spirit by whatsoever name adores Him. The path of *bhakti*, *karma*, love as expounded in the *Gita*, leaves no room for the despising of man by man.

Young India, 1 September 1927

28. The Message of the Gita

1. Even in 1888-89, when I first became acquainted with the *Gita*, I felt that it was not a historical work, but that under the guise of physical warfare, it described the duel that perpetually went on in the hearts of mankind, and that physical warfare was brought in merely to make the description of the internal duel more alluring. This preliminary intuition became more confirmed on a closer study of religion and the *Gita*. A study of the *Mahabharata* gave it added confirmation. I do not regard the *Mahabharata* as a historical work in the accepted sense. The *Adiparva* contains powerful evidence in support of my opinion. By ascribing to the chief actors superhuman or subhuman origins, the great Vyasa made short work of the history of kings and their peoples. The persons therein described may be historical, but the author of the *Mahabharata* has used them merely to drive home his religious theme.
2. The author of the *Mahabharata* has not established the necessity of physical warfare; on the contrary he has proved its futility. He has made the victors shed tears of sorrow and repentance, and has left them nothing but a legacy of miseries.
3. In this great work the *Gita* is the crown. Its second chapter, instead of teaching the rules of physical warfare, tells us how a perfected man is to be known. In the characteristics of the perfected man of the *Gita*, I do not see any to correspond to physical warfare. Its whole design is inconsistent with the rules of conduct governing the relations between warring parties.
4. Krishna of the *Gita* is perfection and right knowledge personified; but the picture is imaginary. That does not mean that Krishna, the adored of his people, never lived. But perfection is imagined. The idea of a perfect incarnation is an after growth.
5. In Hinduism, incarnation is ascribed to one who has performed some extraordinary service of mankind. All embodied life is in reality an incarnation of God, but it is not usual to consider every living being an incarnation. Future generations pay this homage to one who, in his own generation, has been extraordinarily religious in his conduct. I can see nothing wrong in this procedure; it takes nothing from God's greatness, and there is no violence done to Truth. There is an Urdu saying which means, "Adam is not God but he is a spark of the Divine." And therefore he who is the most religiously behaved has most of the divine spark in him. It is in accordance with this train of thought that Krishna enjoys, in Hinduism, the status of the most perfect incarnation.
6. This belief in incarnation is a testimony of man's lofty spiritual ambition. Man is not at peace with himself till he has become like unto God. The endeavour to reach this state is the supreme, the only ambition worth having. And this is self-realization. This self-realization is the subject of the *Gita*, as it is of all scriptures. But its author surely did not write it to establish that doctrine. The object of the *Gita* appears to me to be that of showing the most excellent way to attain self-realization. That which is to be found, more or less clearly, spread out here and there in Hindu religious books, has been brought out in the clearest possible language in the *Gita* even at the risk of repetition.

7. That matchless remedy is renunciation of the fruits of action.
8. This is the centre round which the *Gita* is woven. This renunciation is the central sun, round which devotion, knowledge and the rest revolve like planets. The body has been likened to a prison. There must be action where there is body. Not one embodied being is exempted from labour. And yet all religions proclaim that it is possible for man, by treating the body as the temple of God, to attain freedom. Every action is tainted, be it ever so trivial. How can the body be made the temple of God? In other words how can one be free from action, i.e. from the taint of sin? "By desireless action; by renouncing the fruits of action; by dedicating all activities to God, i.e. by surrendering oneself to Him body and soul."
9. But desirelessness or renunciation does not come for the mere talking about it. It is not attained by an intellectual feat. It is attainable only by a constant heart-churn. Right knowledge is necessary for attaining renunciation. Learned men possess a knowledge of a kind. They may recite the *Vedas* from memory, yet they may be steeped in self-indulgence. In order that knowledge may not run riot, the author of the *Gita* has insisted on devotion accompanying it and has given it the first place. Knowledge without devotion will be like a misfire. Therefore, says the *Gita*, "Have devotion, and knowledge will follow." This devotion is not mere lip-worship, it is a wrestling with death. Hence the *Gita's* assessment of the devotee's qualities is similar to that of the sage's.
10. Thus the devotion required by the *Gita* is no softhearted effusiveness. It certainly is not blind faith. The devotion of the *Gita* has the least to do with externals. A devotee may use, if he likes, rosaries, forehead marks, make offerings, but these things are no test of his devotion. He is the devotee who is jealous of none, who is a fount of mercy, who is without egotism, who is selfless, who treats alike cold and heat, happiness and misery, who is ever forgiving, who is always contented, whose resolutions are firm, who has dedicated mind and soul to God, who causes no dread, who is not afraid of others, who is free from exultation, sorrow and fear, who is pure, who is versed in action and yet remains unaffected by it, who renounces all fruit, good or bad, who treats friend and foe alike, who is untouched by respect or disrespect, who is not puffed up by praise, who does not go under when people speak ill of him, who loves silence and" solitude, who has a disciplined reason. Such devotion is inconsistent with the existence at the same time of strong attachments.
11. We thus see, that to be a real devotee is to realize oneself. Self-realization is not something apart. One rupee can purchase for us poison or nectar, but knowledge or devotion cannot buy us either salvation or bondage. These are not media of exchange. They are themselves the thing we want. In other words if the means and the end are not identical, they are almost so. The extreme of means is salvation. Salvation of the *Gita* is perfect peace.
12. But such knowledge and devotion, to be true, have to stand the test of renunciation of fruits of action. Mere knowledge of right and wrong will not make one fit for salvation. According to common notions, a mere learned man will pass as a *pandit*. He need not perform any service. He will regard it as bondage even to lift a little *lota*. Where one test of knowledge is non-liability for service, there is no room for such mundane work as the lifting of a *lota*.
13. Or take *bhakti*. The popular notion of *bhakti* is soft-heartedness, telling beads and the like and disdaining to do even a loving service, lest the telling of beads etc. might be interrupted. This

bhakta therefore leaves the rosary only for eating, drinking and the like, never for grinding corn or nursing patients.

14. But the Gita says: "No one has attained his goal without action. Even men like Janaka attained salvation through action. If even I were lazily to cease working, the world would perish. How much more necessary then for the people at large to engage in action?"
15. While on the one hand it is beyond dispute that all action binds, on the other hand it is equally true that all living beings have to do some work whether they will or no. Here all activity, whether mental or physical, is to be included in the term action. Then how is one to be free from the bondage of action, even though he may be acting? The manner in which the *Gita* has solved the problem is, to my knowledge, unique. The *Gita* says: "Do your allotted work but renounce its fruit—be detached and work—have no desire for reward and work." This is the unmistakable teaching of the *Gita*. He who gives up action falls. He who gives up only the reward rises. But renunciation of fruit in no way means indifference to the result. In regard to every action one must know the result that is expected to follow, the means there to, and the capacity for it. He, who, being thus equipped, is without desire for the result, and is yet wholly engrossed in the due fulfilment of the task before him, is said to have renounced the fruits of his action.
16. Again, let no one consider renunciation to mean want of fruit for the renouncer. The *Gita* reading does not warrant such a meaning. Renunciation means absence of hankering after fruit. As a matter of fact, he who renounces reaps a thousandfold. The renunciation of the *Gita* is the acid test of faith. He who is ever brooding over result often loses nerve in the performance of his duty. He becomes impatient and then gives vent to anger and begins to do unworthy things; he jumps from action to action, never remaining faithful to any. He who broods over results is like a man given to objects of senses; he is ever distracted, he says goodbye to all scruples, everything is right in his estimation and he therefore resorts to means fair and foul to attain, his end.
17. From the bitter experiences of desire for fruit the author of the *Gita* discovered the path of renunciation of fruit, and put it before the world in most convincing manner. The common belief is that religion is always opposed to material good. "One cannot act religiously in mercantile and such other matters. There is no place for religion in such pursuits; religion is only for attainment of salvation," we hear many wordly-wise people say. In my opinion the author of the *Gita* has dispelled this delusion. He has drawn no line of demarcation between salvation and wordly pursuits. On the contrary, he has shown that religion must rule even our worldly pursuits. I have felt that the *Gita* teaches us that what cannot be followed out in day- to-day practice cannot be called religion. Thus, according to the *Gita*, all acts that are incapable of being performed without attachment are taboo. This golden rule saves mankind from many a pitfall. According to this interpretation murder, lying, dissoluteness and the like must be regarded as sinful and therefore taboo. Man's life then becomes simple, and from that simpleness springs peace.
18. Thinking along these lines, I have felt that in trying to enforce in one's life the central teaching of the *Gita*, one is bound to follow truth and *ahimsa*. When there is no desire for fruit, there is no temptation for untruth or *himsa*. Take any instance of untruth or violence, and it will be found that at its back was the desire to attain the cherished end. But it may be freely admitted that the *Gita* was not written to establish *ahimsa*. It was an accepted and primary duty even before the *Gita* age. The *Gita* had to deliver the message of renunciation of fruit. This is clearly brought out as early as the second chapter.

19. But if the *Gita* believed in *ahimsa* or it was included in desirelessness, why did the author take a warlike illustration? When the *Gita* was written, although people believed in *ahimsa*, wars were not only not taboo, but nobody observed the contradiction between them and *ahimsa*.
20. In assessing the implications of renunciation of fruit, we are not required to probe the mind of the author of the *Gita* as to his limitations of *ahimsa* and the like. Because a poet puts a particular truth before the world, it does not necessarily follow that he has known or worked out all its great consequences, or that having done so, he is able always to express them fully. In this perhaps lies the greatness of the poem and the poet. A poet's meaning is limitless. Like man, the meaning of great writings suffers evolution. On examining the history of languages, we notice that the meaning of important words has changed or expanded. This is true of the *Gita*. The author has himself extended the meanings of some of the current words. We are able to discover this even on a superficial examination. It is possible, that in the age prior to that of the *Gita*, offering of animals in sacrifice was permissible. But there is not a trace of it in the sacrifice in the *Gita* sense. In the *Gita* continuous concentration on God is the king of sacrifices. The third chapter seems to show that sacrifice chiefly means body-labour for service. The third and the fourth chapters read together will give us other meanings for sacrifice but never animal-sacrifice. Similarly has the meaning of the word *sannyasa* undergone, in the *Gita*, a transformation. The *sannyasa* of the *Gita* will not tolerate complete cessation of all activity. The *sannyasa* of the *Gita* is all work and yet no work. Thus the author of the *Gita* by extending meanings of words has taught us to imitate him. Let it be granted, that according to the letter of the *Gita* it is possible to say that warfare is consistent with renunciation of fruit. But after 40 years' unremitting endeavour fully to enforce the teaching of the *Gita* in my own life, I have, in all humility, felt that perfect renunciation is impossible without perfect observance of *ahimsa* in every shape and form.
21. The *Gita* is not an aphoristic work; it is a great religious poem. The deeper you dive into it, the richer the meanings you get. It being meant for the people at large, there is pleasing repetition. With every age the important words will carry new and expanding meanings. But its central teaching will never vary. The seeker is at liberty to extract from this treasure any meaning he likes so as to enable him to enforce in his life the central teaching.
22. Nor is the *Gita* a collection of Do's and Don'ts. What is lawful for one may be unlawful for another. What may be permissible at one time, or in one place, may not be so at another time, and in another place. Desire for fruit is the only universal prohibition. Desirelessness is obligatory.
23. The *Gita* has sung the praises of knowledge, but it is beyond the mere intellect; it is essentially addressed to the heart and capable of being understood by the heart. Therefore the *Gita* is not for those who have no faith. The author makes Krishna say:
- Do not entrust this treasure to him who is without sacrifice, without devotion, without the desire for this teaching and who denies Me. On the other hand those who will give this precious treasure to My devotees will by the fact of this service assuredly reach Me. And those who, being free from malice, will with faith absorb this teaching, shall, having attained freedom, live where people of true merit go after death.

Young India, 6 August 1931

29. From Yeravda Mandir

[The following are the two discourses sent by Gandhiji to members of his Ashram at Sabarmati, from Yeravda Jail:]

I

I run to my Mother *Gita* whenever I find myself in difficulties and up to now she has never failed to comfort me. It is possible that those, who are getting comfort from the *Gita*, may get greater help, and see I something altogether new, if they come to know the I way in which I understand it from day to day.

This day I feel like giving a summary of the twelfth I I chapter. It is *Bhaktiyoga* — realization of God through I devotion. At the time of marriage we ask the bridal couple to learn this chapter by heart and meditate upon it, as one of the five sacrifices to be performed. Without devotion, action and knowledge are cold and dry, and may even become shackles. So, with the heart full of love, let us approach this meditation on the *Gita*.

Arjuna asks of the Lord: "Which is the better of the two, the devotee who worships the Manifest or the one who worships the Unmanifest?" The Lord says in reply: j "Those who meditate on the Manifest in full faith, and lose themselves in Me, those faithful ones are My devotees. But those who worship the Unmanifest, and who, in order to do so, restrain all their senses, look upon and serve all alike, regarding none as high or low, those also realize Me."

So it cannot be affirmed that one is superior to the other. But it may be counted as impossible for an embodied being fully to comprehend and adore the Unmanifest. The Unmanifest is attributeless, and is I beyond the reach of human vision. Therefore all embodied beings, consciously or unconsciously, are devotees of the Manifest.

"So," saith the Lord, "let thy mind be merged in My Universal Body, which has form. Offer thy all at His feet. But if thou canst not do this, practise the restraint of the passions of thy mind. By observing *yama* and *niyama* with the help of *pranayama*, *asana* and other practices, bring the mind under control. If thou canst not do thus, then perform all thy works with this in mind: that whatever work thou undertakest, that thou dost for My sake. Thus thy worldly infatuations and attachments will fade away, and gradually thou wilt become stainless and pure. The fountain of love will rise in thee. But if thou canst not do even this, then renounce the fruit of all thy actions; yearn no more after the fruits of thy work. Ever do that work which falls to thy lot. Man cannot be master over the fruits of his work. The fruit of work appears only after causes have combined to form it. Therefore be thou only the instrument. Do not regard as superior or inferior any of these four methods which I have shown unto thee. Whatever, in them, is suitable for thee, that make thou use of in thy practice of devotion.

"It seems that the path of hearing, meditating and comprehending, may be easier than the path of *yama*, *niyama*, *pranayama* and *asana*, to which I have referred; easier than that may be

concentration and worship; and again easier than concentration may be renunciation of the fruits of works. The same method cannot be equally easy for every one; some may have to turn for help to all these methods. They are certainly intermixed. In any case thou wishest to be a devotee. Achieve that goal by whatever method thou canst. My part is simply to tell thee whom to count a true devotee. A devotee hates no one; bears no grudge against any one; befriends all creatures; is merciful to all. To accomplish this he eliminates all personal attachments; his ego is dissolved and he becomes as nothing; for him grief and happiness are one; he forgives those who trespass against himself, as he hungers for forgiveness from the world for his own faults; he dwells in contentment; he is firm in his good resolves; he surrenders to Me his mind, his intellect, his all. He never causes in other beings trouble or fear, himself knowing no trouble or fear through others My devotee is free from joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain. He has no desires, he is pure, skilful and wise. He has renounced all ambitious undertakings. He stands by his resolves, renouncing their good or bad fruit; he remains unconcerned. Such a one knows not enemies or friends, is beyond honour or disgrace.

"In peace and silence, contented with whatever may come his way, he lives inwardly as if alone, and always remains calm no matter what may be going around him. One who lives in this manner, full of faith, he is My 'beloved devotee'."

Young India, 13 November 1930

30. Gita Reciters

The readers of the *Harijan* know what the *Gita* means to me. I have always regarded the learning by heart of such books as the *Gita* a very desirable thing. But I was never able to learn all the chapters of the *Gita* by heart myself though I made several attempts at it. I know I am very stupid at memorizing. So whenever I meet any one who knows the *Gita* by heart, he or she commands my respect. I have already met two such during the Tamilnad tour—a gentleman at Madura and a lady at Devakotta. The gentleman at Madura is a merchant unknown to fame; and the lady is Parvatibai, a daughter of the late Justice Sadashiva Iyer, who during his lifetime instituted an annual prize for the person who could best recite the *Gita* from memory. I would like, however, the reciters to realize that the mere recitation is not an end in itself. It should be an aid to the contemplation and assimilation of the meaning and the message of the *Gita*. By patience even a parrot can be taught to recite it by heart. But he would be no wiser for the recitation. The reciter of the *Gita* should be what its author expects him to be — a *yogi* in its broad sense. It demands from its votaries balance in every thought, word and deed and a perfect correspondence between the three. He whose speech and action do not accord with his thoughts is a humbug or a hypocrite.

Harijan, 2 February 1934

31. The Gita Ideal

[Addressing the inmates of the Sabarmati Ashram, Gandhiji said:]

I am a devotee of the *Gita* and a firm believer in the inexorable law of *karma*. Even the least little tripping or stumbling is not without its cause and I have wondered why one who has tried to follow the *Gita* in thought, word and deed should have any ailment. The doctors have assured me that this trouble of high blood-pressure is entirely the result of mental strain and worry. If that is true, it is likely that I have been unnecessarily worrying myself, unnecessarily fretting and secretly harbouring passions like anger, lust, etc. The fact that any event or incident should disturb my mental equilibrium, in spite of my serious efforts, means not that the *Gita* ideal is defective but that my devotion to it is defective. The *Gita* ideal is true for all time, my understanding of it and observance of it is full of flaws.

Harijan, 29 February 1936

The goal ever recedes from us. The greater the progress, the greater the recognition of our unworthiness. Satisfaction lies in the effort, not in the attainment. Full effort is full victory.

Young India, 9 March 1922

32. Non-Violence

When a person claims to be non-violent, he is expected not to be angry with one who has injured him. He will not wish him harm; he will wish him well; he will not swear at him; he will not cause him any physical hurt. He will put up with all the injury to which he is subjected by the wrongdoer. Thus non-violence is complete innocence. Complete non-violence is complete absence of ill-will against all that lives. It therefore embraces even sub-human life not excluding noxious insects or beasts. They have not been created to feed our destructive propensities. If we only knew the mind of the Creator, we should find their proper place in His creation. Non-violence is therefore in its active form goodwill towards all life. It is pure love. I read it in the Hindu Scriptures, in the Bible, in the Quran.

Non-violence is a perfect state. It is a goal towards which all mankind moves naturally though unconsciously. Man does not become divine when he personifies innocence in himself. Only then does he become truly man. In our present state we are partly men and partly beasts and in our ignorance and even arrogance say that we truly fulfil the purpose of our species, when we deliver blow for blow and develop the measure of anger required for the purpose. We pretend to believe that retaliation is the law of our being, whereas in every scripture we find that retaliation is nowhere obligatory but only permissible. It is restraint that is obligatory. Retaliation is indulgence requiring elaborate regulating. Restraint is the law of our being. For, highest perfection is unattainable without highest restraint. Suffering is thus the badge of the human tribe.

33. Hindu-Muslim Tension Its Causes and Cure

My claim to Hinduism has been rejected by some, because I believe and advocate non-violence in its extreme form. They say that I am a Christian in disguise. I have been even seriously told that I am distorting the meaning of the *Gita*, when I ascribe to that great poem the teaching of unadulterated non-violence. Some of my Hindu friends tell me that killing is a duty enjoined by the *Gita* under certain circumstances. A very learned *shastri* only the other day scornfully rejected my interpretation of the *Gita* and said that there was no warrant for the opinion held by some commentators that the *Gita* represented the eternal duel between the forces of evil and good, and inculcated the duty of eradicating evil within us without hesitation, without tenderness.

I state these opinions against non-violence in detail, because it is necessary to understand them, if we would understand the solution I have to offer.

What I see around me today is, therefore, a reaction against the spread of non-violence. I feel the wave of violence coming. The Hindu-Muslim tension is an acute phase of this tiredness.

I must be dismissed out of consideration. My religion is a matter solely between my Maker and myself. If I am a Hindu, I cannot cease to be one even though I may be disowned by the whole of the Hindu population. I do however suggest that non-violence is the end of all religions.

But I have never presented to India that extreme form of non-violence, if only because I do not regard myself fit enough to redeliver that ancient message. Though my intellect has fully understood and grasped it, it has not as yet become part of my whole being. My strength lies in my asking people to do nothing that I have not tried repeatedly in my own life. I am then asking my countrymen today to adopt non-violence as their final creed, only for the purpose of regulating the relations between the different races, and for the purpose of attaining Swaraj. Hindus and Mussulmans, Christians, Sikhs and Parsis must not settle their differences by resort to violence, and the means for the attainment of Swaraj must be non-violent. This I venture to place before India, not as a weapon of the weak, but of the strong. Hindus and Mussulmans prate about no compulsion in religion. What is it but compulsion, if Hindus will kill a Mussulman for saving a cow? It is like wanting to convert a Mussulman to Hinduism by force. And similarly what is it but compulsion, if Mussulmans seek to prevent by force Hindus from playing music before mosques? Virtue lies in being absorbed in one's prayers in the presence of din and noise. We shall both be voted irreligious savages by posterity if we continue to make a futile attempt to compel one another to respect our religious wishes. Again, a nation of three hundred million people should be ashamed to have to resort to force to bring to book one hundred thousand Englishmen. To convert them, or, if you will, even to drive them out of the country, we need, not force of arms, but force of will. If we have not the latter, we shall never get the former. If we develop the force of will we shall find that we do not need the force of arms.

Acceptance of non-violence, therefore, for the purposes mentioned by me, is the most natural and the most necessary condition of our national existence. It will teach us to husband our corporate

physical strength for a better purpose, instead of dissipating it, as now, in a useless fratricidal strife, in which each party is exhausted after the effort. And every armed rebellion must be an insane act unless it is backed by the nation. But almost any item of non-co-operation fully backed by the nation can achieve the aim without shedding a single drop of blood.

Young India, 29 May 1924

34. No Conversion Permissible

The English press cuttings contain among many delightful items the news that Miss Slade, known in the Ashram as Mirabai, has embraced Hinduism. I may say that she has not. I hope that she is a better Christian than when four years ago she came to the Ashram. She is not a girl of tender age. She is past thirty and has travelled all alone in Egypt, Persia and Europe befriending trees and animals. I have had the privilege of having under me Mussulman, Parsi and Christian minors. Never was Hinduism put before them for their acceptance. They were encouraged and induced to respect and read their own scriptures. It is with pleasure that I can recall instances of men and women, boys and girls having been induced to know and love their faiths better than they did before if they were also encouraged to study the other faiths with sympathy and respect. We have in the Ashram today several faiths represented. No proselytizing is practised or permitted. We recognize that all these faiths are true and divinely inspired, and all have suffered through the necessarily imperfect handling of imperfect men. Miss Slade bears not a Hindu name but an Indian name. And this was done at her instance and for convenience.

Young India, 20 February 1

35. Equality of Religions

There is in Hinduism room enough for Jesus, as there is for Mohammed, Zoroaster and Moses. For me the different religions are beautiful flowers from the same garden, or they are branches of the same majestic tree. Therefore they are equally true, though being received and interpreted through human instruments equally imperfect. It is impossible for me to reconcile myself to the idea of conversion after the style that goes on in India and elsewhere today. It is an error which is perhaps the greatest impediment to the world's progress; towards peace. "Warring creeds" is a blasphemous expression. And it fitly describes the state of things in India, the mother, as I believe her to be, of Religion or religions. If she is truly the mother, the motherhood is on trial. Why should a Christian want to convert a Hindu to Christianity and vice versa? Why should he not be satisfied if the Hindu is a good or godly man? If the morals of a man are a matter of no concern, the form of worship in a particular manner in a church, a mosque or a temple is an empty formula; it may even be a hindrance to individual or social growth, and insistences on a particular form or repetition of a credo may be a potent cause of violent quarrels leading to bloodshed and ending in utter disbelief in Religion, i.e. God Himself.

Harijan, 30 January 1937

36. Equality of Religions

C.F. Andrews: "What would you say to a man who after considerable thought and prayer said that he could not have his peace and salvation except by becoming a Christian?"

Gandhiji: "I would say if a non-Christian (say a Hindu) came to a Christian and made that statement, he should ask him to become a good Hindu rather than find goodness in change of faith."

C.F.A.: "I cannot in this go the whole length with you, though you know my own position. I discarded the position that there is no salvation except through Christ long ago. But supposing the Oxford Group Movement people changed the life of your son, and he felt like being converted, what would you say?"

Gandhiji: "I would say that the Oxford Group may change the lives of as many as they like, but not their religion. They can draw their attention to the best in their respective religions and change their lives by asking them to live according to them. There came to me a man, the son of *brahmana* parents, who said his reading of your book had led him to embrace Christianity. I asked him if he thought that the religion of his forefathers was wrong. He said, 'No.' Then I said: 'Is there any difficulty about your accepting the Bible as one of the great religious books of the world and Christ as one of the great teachers?' I said to him that you had never through your books asked Indians to take up the Bible and embrace Christianity, and that he had misread your book—unless of course your position is like that of the late M. Mahomed Ali's, viz. that 'a believing Mussulman, however bad his life, is better than a good Hindu'."

C.F.A.: "I do not accept M. Mahomed Ali's position at all. But, I do say that if a person really needs a change of faith I should not stand in his way."

Gandhiji: "But don't you see that you do not even give him a chance? You do not even cross-examine him. Supposing a Christian came to me and said he was captivated by a reading of the *Bhagawata* and so wanted to declare himself a Hindu, I should say him: 'No. What the *Bhagawata* offers the Bible also offers. You have not yet made the attempt to find it out. Make the attempt and be a good Christian.'"

C.F.A.: "I don't know. If someone earnestly says that he will become a good Christian, I should say, 'You may become one', though you know that I have in my own life strongly dissuaded ardent enthusiasts who came to me. I said to them, 'Certainly not on *my* account will you do anything of the kind.' But human nature does require a concrete faith."

Gandhiji: "If a person wants to believe in the Bible let him say so, but why should he discard his own religion? This proselytization will mean no peace in the world. Religion is a very personal matter. We should by living the life according to our lights share the best with one another, thus adding to the sum total of human effort to reach God."

"Consider," continued Gandhiji, "whether you are going to accept the position of mutual toleration or of equality of all religions. My position is that all the great religions are fundamentally equal. We must have innate respect for other religions as we have for our own. Mind you, not mutual toleration, but equal respect."

Harijan, 28 November 1936

37. Attitude of Christian Missions to Hinduism

My fear is that though Christian friends nowadays do not say or admit that Hindu religion is untrue, they must harbour in the breasts the belief that Hinduism is an error and that Christianity as they believe it is the only true religion. Without some such thing it is not possible to understand, much less to appreciate, the C.M.S. appeal¹ from which I reproduced in these columns some revealing extracts the other day. One could understand the attack on untouchability and many other errors that have crept into Hindu life. And if they would help us to get rid of the admitted abuses and purify our religion, they would do helpful constructive work which would be gratefully accepted. But so far as one can understand the present effort, it is to uproot Hinduism from-very foundation and replace it by another faith. It is like an attempt to destroy a house which though badly in want of repair appears to the dweller quite decent and habitable. No wonder he welcomes those who show him how to repair it and even offer to do so themselves. But he would most decidedly resist those who sought to destroy that house that had served well with him and his ancestors for ages, unless he, the dweller, was convinced that the house was beyond repair and unfit for human habitation. If the Christian world entertains that opinion about the Hindu house, 'Parliament of Religions' and 'International Fellowship' are empty phrases. For both the terms presuppose equality of status, a common platform. There cannot be a common platform as between inferiors and superiors, or the enlightened and unenlightened, the regenerate and the unregenerate, the high-born and the low-born, the caste-man and the outcaste. My comparison may be defective, may even sound offensive. My reasoning may be unsound. But my proposition stands.

Harijan, 13 March 1937

¹ The appeal issued by the Church Missionary Society of England, die extracts wherefrom were reproduced in the *Harijan* issue of 26 December 1936.

38. Equality of Religions

Mr. Keithahn who was here the other day was not quite sure what was at the back of Gandhiji's mind when he said that all religions were not only true but equal. Scientifically, he felt, it was hardly correct to say that all religions are equal. People would make comparisons between animists and theists. "I would say," said Mr. Keithahn, "it is no use comparing religions. They are different ways. Do you think we can explain the thing in different terms?"

"You are right when you say that it is impossible to compare them. But the deduction from it is that they are equal. All men are born free and equal, but one is much stronger or weaker than another physically and mentally. Therefore, superficially there is no equality between the two. But there is an essential equality. In our nakedness God is not going to think of me as Gandhi and you as Keithahn. And what are we in this mighty universe? We are less than atoms, and as between atoms there is no use asking which is smaller and which is bigger. Inherently we are equal. The differences of race and skin, of mind and body, and of climate and nation are transitory. In the same way, essentially, all religions are equal. If you read the Quran, you must read it with the eye of the Muslim; if you read the Bible, you must read it with the eye of the Christian; if you read the *Gita* you must read it with the eye of a Hindu. Where is the use of scanning details and then holding up a religion to ridicule? Take the very first chapter of Genesis or of Matthew. We read a long pedigree and then at the end we are told Jesus was born of a virgin. You come up against a blind wall. But I must read it all with the eye of a Christian."

"Then," said Mr. Keithahn, "even in our Bible, there is the question of Moses and Jesus. We must hold them to be equal?"

"Yes," said Gandhiji. "All prophets are equal. It is a horizontal plain."

"If we think in terms of Einstein's Relativity all are equal. But I cannot happily express the equality."

"That is why I say they are equally true and equally imperfect. The finer the line you draw, the nearer it approaches Euclid's true straight line, but it never is the true straight line. The tree of Religion is the same, there is not that physical equality between the branches. They are all growing, and the person who belongs to the growing branch must not gloat over it and say, 'Mine is the superior one.' None is superior, none is inferior, to the other."

Harijan, 13 March 1937

39. Gandhiji and the Suppressed Classes

I have always claimed to be a *Sanatani* Hindu. It is not that I am quite innocent of the scriptures. I am not a profound scholar of Sanskrit. I have read the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads* only in translation. Naturally therefore mine is not a scholarly study of them. My knowledge of them is in no way profound, but I have studied them as I should do as a Hindu and I claim to have grasped their true spirit. By the time I had reached the age of 21, I had studied other religions also.

There was a time when I was wavering between Hinduism and Christianity. When I recovered my balance of mind, I felt that to me salvation was possible only through the Hindu religion and my faith in Hinduism grew deeper and more enlightened.

But even then I believed that untouchability was no part of Hinduism; and that, if it was, such Hinduism was not for me.

True, Hinduism does not regard untouchability as a sin. I do not want to enter into any controversy regarding the interpretation of the *shastras*. It might be difficult for me to establish my point by quoting authorities from the *Bhagwata* or the *Manusmriti*. But I claim to have understood the spirit of Hinduism. Hinduism has sinned in giving sanction to untouchability. It has degraded us, made us the pariahs, of the Empire. Even the Mussulmans caught the sinful contagion from us, and in South Africa, in East Africa and in Canada the Mussulmans no less than the Hindus came to be regarded as pariahs. All this evil has resulted from the sin of untouchability.

Young India, 27 April 1921

40. The Sin of Untouchability

Untouchability is not a sanction of religion, it is a device of Satan. The devil has always quoted scriptures. But scriptures cannot transcend reason and truth. They are intended to purify reason and illuminate truth. I am not going to burn a spotless horse because the *Vedas* are reported to have advised, tolerated, or sanctioned the sacrifice. For me the *Vedas* are divine and unwritten. 'The letter killeth.' It is the spirit that giveth the light. And the spirit of the *Vedas* is purity, truth, innocence, chastity, humility, simplicity, forgiveness, godliness, and all that makes a man or woman noble and brave. There is neither nobility nor bravery in treating the great and uncomplaining scavengers of the nation as worse than dogs to be despised and spat upon.

Young India, 19 January 1921

41. Weekly Letter

My views on untouchability are not the product of my Western education. I had formed them long before I went to England, and long before I studied the scriptures, and in an atmosphere which was by no means favourable to those views. For I was born in an orthodox Vaishnava family and yet ever since I reached the year of discretion I have firmly held my uncompromising views in the matter, which later comparative study of Hinduism and experience have only confirmed. How in face of the fact that no scriptural text mentions a fifth *varna*, and in face of the express injunction of the *Gita* to regard a *brahmana* and a *bhangi* as equals, we persist in maintaining this deep blot on Hinduism, I cannot understand. Regarding a *brahmana* and a *bhangi* as equals does not mean that you will not accord to a true *brahmana* the reverence that is due to him, but that the *brahmana* and the *bhangi* are equally entitled to our service, that we accord to the *bhangi* the same rights of sending his children to public schools, of visiting public temples, of the use of public wells, etc., on the same basis as these rights are enjoyed by any other Hindu.

Young India, 17 February 1927

42. The Thousand Headed Monster

A correspondent asks: "Do you think that sins of touch and sight are of Vedic origin?"

Though I cannot speak with authority based on first-hand knowledge, I have full confidence in the purity of the *Vedas*, and therefore have no hesitation in asserting that the sins of touch and sight have no support in the *Vedas*. I would however add, that no matter what is credited with *Vedic* origin if it is repugnant to the moral sense, it must be summarily rejected as contrary to the spirit of the *Vedas*, and perhaps what is more, as contrary to fundamental ethics.

The next four questions may be condensed as follows:

"Dont you think that the *karmakanda* is based upon a knowledge of the laws of magnetism, and that the rules regarding touch and sight, birth pollution and death pollution are intended for the purification of the mind?"

In so far as they are so intended, they have a certain relative value; but the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, the *Puranas* and all the other *shastras* as also the other religions of the world proclaim in no uncertain terms, that purification of the mind is an inward process, and that the magnetism produced by the inter-action of physical bodies is nothing compared to the other subtle magnetism of mind upon mind, and the outward purificatory rites become soul-destroying, when they result in making man arrogate to himself superiority over fellow human beings and in making him treat them virtually as beasts or even less.

Rules have to appeal to reason and must never be allowed to crush the spirit within. The rules about untouchability have been demonstrated and can be demonstrated to be injurious to the growth of the spirit, and they are wholly contrary to all that is best and noblest in Hinduism.

Young India, 3 October 1929

43. Dr. Ambedkar's Indictment

The readers will recall the fact that Dr. Ambedkar was to have presided last May at the annual conference of the Jat-Pat-Torak Mandal of Lahore. But the conference itself was cancelled because Dr. Ambedkar's address was found by the Reception Committee to be unacceptable.

Dr. Ambedkar was not going to be beaten by the Reception Committee. He has answered their rejection of him by publishing the address at his own expense. He has priced it at 8 annas. I would suggest a reduction to 2 annas or at least 4 annas.

No reformer can ignore the address. The orthodox will gain by reading it. This is not to say that the address is not open to objection. It has to be read if only because it is open to serious objection. Dr. Ambedkar is a challenge to Hinduism. Brought up as a Hindu, educated by a Hindu potentate, he has become so disgusted with the so-called *savarna* Hindus for the treatment that he and his have received at their hands that he proposes to leave not only them but the very religion that is his and their common heritage. He has transferred to that religion his disgust against a part of its professors.

But this is not to be wondered at. After all one can only judge a system or an institution by the conduct of its representatives. What is more, Dr. Ambedkar found that the vast majority of *savarna* Hindus had not only conducted themselves inhumanly against those of their fellow religionists whom they classed as untouchables, but they had based their conduct on the authority of their scriptures, and when he began to search, then he had found ample warrant for their belief in untouchability and all its implications. The author of the address has quoted chapter and verse in proof of his threefold indictment—inhuman conduct itself, the unabashed justification for it on the part of the perpetrators, and the subsequent discovery that the justification was warranted by their scriptures.

Harijan, 11 July 1936