

**VIVEKANANDA'S CONCEPT OF
UNIVERSAL RELIGION – AN APPRAISAL**

THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT
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**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
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2001

DECLARATION

I, Nirmala N., hereby declare that the thesis entitled "Vivekananda's Concept of Universal Religion - An Appraisal" submitted to the University of Calicut for the award of the degree of Ph.D. in Philosophy has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, associateship, fellowship or other similar title or recognition.

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C E R T I F I C A T E

This is to certify that the thesis entitled "**Vivekananda's Concept of Universal Religion – An Appraisal**" is a record of the original study and research carried out by Smt. **Nirmala, N.**, Research Scholar, Department of Philosophy, University of Calicut, under my guidance and supervision, and submitted to the University of Calicut for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Philosophy.

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INTRODUCTION

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INTRODUCTION

The great significant feature of modern age is its crying demand for a harmonious synthesis of the spiritual culture of India with the modern materialistic thought of the west. The demand is growing deeper day by day with the advance of the material sciences without a moral or spiritual basis leading to the total annihilation of mankind. Though the scientific achievements appear to be quite astonishing, it does result in an increasing poverty in the realm of higher human as well as spiritual values. Modern life is full of problems. Communalism, religious fundamentalism, regionalism, exploitation, crimes and violence, corruption, and ideological conflicts are some of the important challenges to secular India. All these problems are different symptoms of one and the same crisis, and this crisis is essentially a spiritual one. The solution to the problems of human existence is possible only through constant practice of religion rather than mere intellectual speculation. There are variety of religious experiences, but no substantial growth in the awareness of fundamental unity among them. The world has grown into a big family as a result of the improved communication and it is impossible for man to confine himself to the small island of his own culture and tradition and without recognizing the significance of other cultures. All the great religions have infinite wisdom and beauty to share. Instead of

trying to increase the number of followers, religions should create an environment in which one may wisely accept the noble ideas of any religion. They should unite and emerge as a role model by creating a classless society and as a corrective force by transcending the barriers of distinctions. The urgent need is to practice one's own religion till it becomes part and parcel of his life. Vivekananda's mode of approach to various religions of the world is entirely different, fundamentally universal in nature, which is suited to a multi-racial and multi-religious society like that of India. His philosophical reinterpretation of the religion of Vedanta is highly suited to modern era, which reconciles with all the modern challenges.

Many attempts have been made by many outstanding scholars to expose the life and teachings of Swami Vivekananda from different perspectives. The present work is an attempt to study the Concept of Universal Religion with a view to bring about its value and importance in the transformation of man into divine. The term 'Universal' is used to indicate the universality of Supreme Reality or Truth. Religious experience is a kind of inner experience in which the distinction between subject and object completely disappears and the individual self realizes in itself the Universal Self. The idea of universal religion is based on the fundamental idea that there is divinity in man and the synthetic vision of the immense potentialities inherent in the human soul. The practical realization of this

divinity is religion, which elevates man to the supreme position of God. Vivekananda's message gives mankind a warning against the neglect of spirituality and the undue importance of materialism. Universal religion is not only the synthesis of the essential truths of all religions, but also the realization of the fact that religions of the world preach the same truth in different ways. It is different from the idea of faith in any particular religion for the whole mankind. No particular religion can ever claim to be a Universal Religion because it never contains the whole truth. At the same time, it is meaningless if we keep it apart from the basic truths of particular religions. The aim of the work is to point out the fact that the core truth of all religions leads to the same goal. Religions are only the steps towards the Truth and cannot be identified with the end. Universal Religion implies the idea of spiritual unity and harmony of all existence, which is the end, that is the idea of non-duality (Advaita). It embraces within itself all forms of worships and philosophies from blind faith and esoteric exercises to the common activities of life. It holds that every faith is true, however brute and low it is. It offers unity in the midst of diversities. Its catholicity assimilates whatever may be good in other religious faiths. The different religions form the different stages in the process of attaining perfection. It is free from all dogmatism, sectarianism, narrow mindedness and conservatism. It is not a new religion, but a practical way to approach the ultimate goal in life. It is

the struggle to realize the spirit of one's own religion and the underlying bond of unity among other religions. The bond of unity is spiritual, which gives rise to the synthetic vision, universal love and harmony as its special characteristics.

Vivekananda's Concept of Universal Religion owes its origin to the Vedas and the Vedānta, which constitutes the accumulated spiritual wisdom of the Vedic sages and Upanishadic seers. It is a quest for the realization of Eternal Truth. It maintains that Reality is Infinite, it has many aspects, and can be manifested itself in many ways. His Practical-Vedānta or Neo-Vedānta is the process of man making into action. It synthesizes both the theory and practice and hence it is a way of life. Man by practicing religion progresses from lesser truth to greater truth. Everything that stands for oneness is truth. The universal principles of tolerance and acceptance enable him to reach nearer to the truth, peace and harmony. Religion shows a new approach to solve the problems in life, how to attain freedom from the bonds of imperfections, and how to attain the Infinite Bliss. Human birth provides the individual soul the opportunity to attain liberation and freedom from the cycle of births and deaths for which it is necessary to limit its material and earthly activities and channel its final way towards spiritual yearning and emancipation from ignorance. Universal Religion opens its gates to every individual and admits that nobody is born with this or that religion. It is

broad and large enough to admit even a hardcore atheist. The Universal Religion states that an atheist is one who does not believe in himself. It appeals to all not only by its force of thought, but also by its majesty of spiritual motivation. The universalization of the message of such a versatile personality is a necessity of our times. In Vivekananda we have a model of a spiritual teacher to inspire and imitate, who totally dedicated his life to the service of the poor. His life continues to inspire us, and will inspire generations to come. His powerful thoughts continue to be relevant in the pluralistic religious situations of today. It will be relevant forever, by virtue of being founded on humanism for the good of humanity.

Vivekananda's famous Chicago address contains the essence of his spiritual message to the world. The spiritual regeneration of the whole mankind is the scope of his message. The true nature of man is not the body; he is a Spirit or Self, living in a body. To be Man first, then God is the core of his teachings. The idea of Infinite God is hidden in the finite man. The essence of Universal religion lies in the realization of this Infinite, the real God behind the divine manifestations. It is the God with in the Self that is propelling one to seek for Him, to realize Him. The search for some thing external is a mistake. At the end of all searches here and there, in temples and churches, in earth and in heaven, man reaches where he started, to his own Self. Vivekananda recognizes the service of the poor and downtrodden

as the worship of God. He emphasizes the fact that renunciation without service is meaningless and service without renunciation is lifeless. Service without any selfish motive leads man to the realization of God.

The present work comprises six chapters. Chapter I is an attempt to trace the evolution of the Concept of Universal Religion in the socio-cultural and the philosophical background of Modern Indian Renaissance thinkers. The colonial subjugation came as a challenge to the tradition bound Indian society and Bengal was the first province to respond to this challenge. The spread of British power all over India created tremendous impact on Indian life so much so that it generated forces for the regeneration of the country in the second half of the nineteenth century. Chapter 1 also discloses Vivekananda's mission, his teaching and its significance and relevance in the modern age. The method adopted for elucidating the gradual development of the Concept of Universal Religion is historical, and the descriptive and analytical method is used for interpreting his ideas.

Chapter 2 is an attempt to study and analyze the concept of religion from the western and Indian points of view. The different modern scientific approaches to religion are enough to throw light upon the nature and development of religious consciousness from embryonic stage to the highly developed one. The cultural and intellectual renaissance witnessed during the period of colonial domination in the nineteenth century came to a stage

of maturity and fruition in the thoughts of modern Indian thinkers of twentieth century. The most prominent Indian thinkers are Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Rabindranath Tagore, Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, Sri Aurobindo and Dr.Radhakrishnan. They reinterpret Vedānta and reveal to mankind the essential truths of the past in a new form and with a new orientation. They have given immense importance to the development of man's ethical and social nature and to the cultivation of the secular values along with the spiritual values. They all believe in a religion that is above all denominational religions, which is universal and embraces the whole of humanity.

Chapter 3 describes the nature of religion with special reference to the royal contribution of Vivekananda with a view to generate a new holistic awareness of religion, which fosters peaceful co-existence of everything in the universe. Religion is not a bundle of blind belief and superstitious rituals. It is the philosophy of the harmony of life, an integral experience that gives great spiritual satisfaction. He gives logical and scientific explanation to his ideal of harmony through the process of reconciling conflicting concepts and faiths. It is the realization of spirituality or Universal Soul in man, which we often neglect in our mundane and egoistic worldly pursuits. The more spiritual a man the more universal he is. The test of spirituality is the ability to realize unity of mankind. His religion is realistic, rationalistic

and humanistic in its essence and is expressed in the service to the poor. In the field of religion and its philosophical implications he adopts a humanistic dimension, that is, religion is for man and not man for religion. God, world, matter, and spirit are all convertible terms. All these dualities arise on account of ignorance or our limited ways of apprehension. The universal outlook based on the spiritual unity of all existence is the solution to the religious and moral bankruptcy of the modern scientific age.

Chapter 4 discusses various paths to self-realization, Moksha or freedom from bondages. The four aspects- philosophy, mysticism, emotion and work are equally present in the idea of perfect man. The ideal of religion is to become harmoniously balanced in all these four aspects, which could be attained only by yoga or union. Karma-Yoga, Bhakti-Yoga, Jnana-Yoga and Raja-Yoga are not completely exclusive of each other, in fact, in certain respects they overlap. Vivekananda gives equal emphasis to all these paths in view of the fact that men differ in their temperaments, dispositions and capacities. He allows man the freedom to choose the path he likes. If one follows any of these paths with determination and sincerity, he will be able to reach the goal.

Chapter 5 is devoted to describe the nature of Universal Religion. In addition to this, an effort is also made to examine the common elements shared by all religions, which constitute their essence in order to focus the

attention of all towards the realization of the ideal of Universal Religion. What is more essential is to uncover the true spirit and unity underlying the different religions. Diversity is the sign of life and it must be there. This diversity may seem to create obstacles in fostering peace, happiness and prosperity in the world. Yet, in reality, it is this diversity that brings richness and beauty to the world and to human life. Unity in diversity is the beauty of life- just as a bouquet made of flowers of different colours is more beautiful than a bouquet of flowers that are exactly the same. By emphasizing the importance of the basic spiritual truth underlying all creation with its corollary, namely, the non - dualism of Reality, which implies the underlying unity and goodness in all religions, Vivekananda resolves the conflicts among the various religions.

The last chapter contains conclusion with a brief sketch of the crisis and transformation due to the advancement of science and technology and solution to the various factors that are responsible for the disintegration of human life. Such an evaluation of the modern world is necessary to reveal the importance of the realization of the true spirit of religion. The crisis can be solved only by striking the light of true knowledge within the individual and by developing the moral and religious values. Reformation of the society is possible only by the transformation of the individual. The Concept of Universal Religion stands in agreement with the old adage: 'It is better to

light a lamp than to curse the darkness.' Every individual has the inherent divine power and the potential to attain enlightenment. Only a spiritual leader like Vivekananda can efface his ignorance, bestow knowledge of oneness and thus illumine the hearts of every one, dispelling the dark ness of hatred and conflict that has overshadowed today's world.

This study is mainly based on the original works of Swami Vivekananda. The nine volumes of the Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda are quite outstanding both in quantity and the depth of its message.

INDIAN RENAISSANCE - A HISTORICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS

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CHAPTER 1

INDIAN RENAISSANCE - A HISTORICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS

1.1. General Background

A brief analysis of the conditions of the period before Indian Renaissance reveals the fact that it was passing through a socio-cultural and philosophical crisis of grave consequence, especially with the western invasion. It is regarded as really a period of darkness in which the spirit of Indian heritage and culture was threatened with destruction by the transgression of western ideas and values. Under the western influence, the young generation questioned all traditional beliefs, conduct and character, and glorified everything western. They developed an attitude of contempt and disregard towards the great spiritual and cultural traditions of our country. Religion as revelation or dogmas or superstitions had not appealed to the believer in science. The foundation of Ancient Indian religious tradition was Varnasramadharmā. The four-fold order of the Hindu society includes Brāhmanās, Kṣatriyās, Vaisyas, and śūdras. The Brāhmānas, the sole intermediary between God and individual, enjoyed the highest status in the hierarchical system of castes and the monopoly over the study and interpretation of Hindu scriptures and sacred texts. Religion came under

the complete domination of the corrupt priestly class who tried to keep the downtrodden lower classes in ignorance and with false hopes of rewarding after-life. The lower classes were always subjected to humiliation and exploitation by the higher classes. Hinduism was in a moribund state. It was characterized either by extreme asceticism or by excessive ritualism. The real spirit behind the religion was always overshadowed by the evil practices. The social evils like child marriage, untouchability, sati, general degradation of women and the division of people into endless castes and sub-castes weakened the whole human society. Bigotry, intolerance, mass ignorance and communal rivalry shattered the entire structure of the country, as a result, mutual hatred and discontent sustained in the social life of the individual. In the beginning, the British Government was very cautious not to upset the social traditions of India. They adopted the policy of non-interference in social affairs, simultaneously the Christian missionaries propagated their religion against the Hindu religious spirit and social order of the society. They not only criticized and defamed Hinduism, but also tried to convert people in large number into their fold by various means. Referring to this situation, D. S. Sharma observes: " the zealous missionaries.... never failed to point their finger of scorn at our religious and social institutions."¹ Religious reformation became necessary at this time

because the social and cultural development of the individual was mainly based on the religious principles.

1.2. Origin and Development of the Indian Renaissance movements

Indian Renaissance movement originated in Bengal during the latter half of the nineteenth century. This period is generally considered as the dawn of a golden era in the history of India because of the presence of a galaxy of great men like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Keshab Chandra Sen, Dayananda Saraswathi, Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Vivekananda. They were born in response to the compulsions of extra ordinary circumstances of the times and therefore a historical necessity.

The main objective of Indian Renaissance movement was to face the challenge posed by the importation of western ideas and values on Indian culture and social outlook. It has contributed to the revival and restoration of lost individuality, the re-construction of faith in man in the light of secularized view of life. It tried to modernize Hinduism by discarding the irrational rituals, false doctrines, and monopolistic priest craft. The movement has universal rather than sectarian outlook. The aim was the emancipation of the whole humanity from worldly miseries and the radical divine transformation of life.

The pioneers of Indian Renaissance, being conscious of the social, political and religious degradation of Indian culture, are forced to interpret the inestimable value of the glorious Indian tradition and its practical significance in daily life. Respecting the religious sentiment of the people, they declared that they were not ready to reject the authority of the scriptures. They wanted to reinstate Vedānta in a correct way in the light of scientific knowledge and changed conditions in order to achieve harmony between present and past and to meet the new requirements of the modern era. Under the influence of western education they became conscious of individual freedom and a sense of human dignity. Inspired by the ideas and values, both religious and secular, they reacted against the social evils in life. Collecting evidences from classical Sanskrit texts, they claimed that these practices of Hindu society were only later developments and that they had no sanction of the śāstrās. They spread a new light of renaissance in all spheres of life- in politics, religion, literature, education, industries and social reorganization, which paved the way for removing the darkness of the ages.

The advancement of English education and scientific knowledge exercised a fruitful influence in stimulating the process of social renaissance. Meanwhile the Christian missionaries undertook humanitarian works for the welfare of the entire humanity irrespective of caste, creed, age, sex and

the economic and social status. They started educational institutions for educating girls as well as boys belonging to the lower and untouchable castes. The rise of new renaissance caused a wave of reforming activities first in Bengal and then throughout the country.

1.2.1. Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Brahma-Samaj

Raja Ram Mohan Roy was the leading figure in the awakening of modern India. He has rightly been described as the father of Indian Renaissance. Deeply devoted to the work of religious and social reform, he founded the Brahma-Samaj in 1828 as a protest against certain orthodox beliefs, unnecessary rituals and superstitions of Hinduism such as idol worship, polygamy, child marriage, enforced widowhood and social ostracism of those who crossed the black water. The character of Indian resurgence was social and moral rather than political. His greatest contribution was the abolition of sati-system, the cruel practice of burning the Hindu widow on the funeral pyre of her dead husband. He justified his views by the light of reason and humanitarian principles. He accepted the Upanishads as his authority and declared the fact that man can realize the spiritual goal of his life by means of meditation of the divine and not by sacrificial rituals. His aim was to promote monotheistic worship and adoration of the One Eternal Immutable God with the abolition of cast

consciousness and recognition of equality of women. No doubt, that the Brahmo-Samaj is firmly rooted in the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Brahma-Sūtrās. But at the same time, it is ready to break with the tradition. As a universalist, he stands for the solidarity of religions. He advocated a rational approach to religions based on the comparative study of the scriptures of other religions with a view to discover the fundamental unity of all religions. He showed how the essential values of the great Indian heritage were to be preserved and how the non-essentials were to be discarded. His conclusion is that there are successive stages of growth and degeneration of each particular religion and consequently falsehood is common to all religion without distinction. He has adopted the process of elimination of the crude stages of each religion, which is essential for the survival of religions and for the social progress. According to him, the Universal Religion can be formed by the assimilation of the common truths of Hinduism, Islam, Christianity and other faiths. The creed he has formed is called Neo-Theo-philanthropy, a new love of God and Man.

1.2.2. Keshab Chandra Sen and New Brahmoism

New Brahmoism is a movement started by a new set of radicals from the fold of Brahmoism under the leadership of Brahmananda Keshab Chandra Sen with the aim to modernize the Hindu society. The new group

championed not only female education, widow remarriage, temperance and monogamy but also inter-caste marriage implying formal renunciation of caste and other unorthodox practices. According to him, every religion as represented by its central essence is true but it does not contain the whole truth, which has to be viewed only from an eclectic standpoint. Influenced by the spirit of Christianity, he introduced Christian rituals of baptism and western methods in his New Brahmoism, as a result, he alienated himself from the main Samaj and from the Hindu society. There is a popular saying that this "Brahmoism is Christianity minus Christ."² He has selected from each religion what he considered its essence, both theoretical and practical. His religion of The New Dispensation is based on the collation of all these partial truths.

1.2.3. Dayananda Saraswathi and Arya Samaj

The life and mission of Dayananda Saraswathi was socio-religious in nature. He founded Arya Samaj in 1875 with the main aim to reform the Hindu society by improving the status of women by education and widow remarriage. "The Arya Samaj", says Jawaharlal Nehru, "was a reaction to Islam and Christianity, particularly the former. It was a crusading and reforming movement from within as well as a defensive organization for protection against external attacks."³ Realizing the necessity of the

reformation of Hindu religion, he turned back to the Vedas for reforming Hinduism. He interpreted the teachings of Vedas as the sources of true knowledge for all and infallible. He called them as the One Universal Religion that contained the first and last word of God. His inspiring personality with his burning zeal for truth and reason shook the whole nation from its dogmatic slumber. As a revivalist, he preached Unity of God-head and tried to restore the monotheism of the Vedic religion in place of the multiplicity of Gods and Goddesses. At the same time, he denounced many prevalent degenerated practices like idol worship, blind superstition, hypocrisy and casteism, which are not in conformity with the Vedic precepts. He encouraged proselytization into Hinduism and thus became a defender of everything Hindu, against what it considered as the encroachments of other faiths. According to Dayananda Saraswathi, truth, acquisition of rational knowledge, and the performance of righteous deeds are the means to achieve at salvation, the final goal of life. The process of reconstruction could be possible only through the revival of the Vedic culture and civilization. He emphasized Truth and Self-sacrifice as the basis of his humanism. He wrote a book called, 'Satyārtha Prakāsha' in 1875. It is known as the Bible of the Arya Samaj. It contains a criticism of Islam, Christianity, Jainism and Buddhism, and seeks to prove the superiority of Vedic Hinduism to all other religions. Through this book, he made an

attempt to show that other religions had their shortcomings and that the Vedic religion advocated a scheme of the division of society into four classes based on character and not on birth. Truth, self-sacrifice, knowledge of the Vedas and cleanliness are the qualities that could help a sudra to enter into a higher class. Likewise, untruth, ignorance of the Vedas and uncleanness could degrade a person belonging to a higher class to a lower class. He declared that there is an inherent right for all people to study the Vedas. Instead of trying to justify the Hindu faith from the criticism of Christian and Muslim missionaries, he obliged them to defend their own position. He stressed the need of understanding the real spirit of religion against its conflicting interpretations.

1.2.4. Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Neo- Vedānta

The universal and synthetic attitude to religion seems to be developed since the advent of Ramakrishna Paramahansa, one of the greatest saints of modern India. He has a unique personality with full divine manifestation. He derived wisdom neither from any book or scripture, nor from any prophet, but directly from the eternal fountainhead of all knowledge and wisdom. He is revered and recognized by all as the prophet of universalism and harmony of religions. In his view, realization of God is considered to be the ultimate goal of human life. He experienced God as the

nameless, formless, transcendental Absolute and that the entire diversity of appearance that we call nature was nothing but a manifestation of the same Impersonal God. He realized through a multitude of spiritual visions that the same Impersonal God does appear as Personal God before the pure minds of earnest devotees. Standing on the basis of his rich and varied spiritual experience, he declared that all creeds, Hindu, Islamic, Christian or of any other denomination, based on monism, qualified monism or dualism, are so many distinct paths leading to the same goal, namely the realization of God. He states as follows: "God can be realized through all paths. All religions are true. The important thing is to reach the roof. You can reach it by stone stairs or by wooden stairs or by bamboo steps or by a rope."⁴ He approached different religions not as a scholar but as a devotee. By realizing the great truths of different religions, he demonstrated in practice that there is nothing but unity and that all men are the children of the same Reality whether it is called by different names. His faith in the fundamental realization of unity that exists among religions has universal importance. His spirit of finding out unity in the world of diversity is clearly evident in his own words: "Exactly as water can exist in a liquid, solid and invisible form." again, "As water is called by different names, in different languages, so different religions called God by different names Hari, Siva, Allah, Christ etc., but all denote the same God."⁵ He would be a Hindu with the Hindu, a

Muslim with the Muslim, and a Christian with the Christian in order to experience the whole truth of each religion. Religions do not consist in knowing but in doing and following it constantly. Ramakrishna explains this fact with an illustration that "Some have heard of milk, others have seen it, still others have tasted it. But the point is to absorb it in our blood and bones and to make it a part of the body."⁶ They are only the means for the enlightenment and glorification of all mankind. His philosophical and religious convictions are found in his sermons. Mahatma Gandhi expresses the essential practical character of Ramakrishna's thought and his personal vision of Truth as follows: "The story of Ramakrishna Paramahansa's life is a story of religion in practice...His sayings are pages from the Book of Life."⁷

Vivekananda can be understood only in the light of the realizations of his Master, Ramakrishna Paramahansa. Unlike other great prophets of religions, he did not create a new religion of his own. According to him, each religion gives ample scope and opportunity to realize God. Therefore conversion from one religion to another is not a means to it. Emphasizing the futility of changing one's own religion Ramakrishna says: "Every man should follow his own religion. A Christian should follow Christianity; a Mohammedan should follow Mohammedanism and so on. For the Hindus the ancient path, the path of the Aryan Rishis, is the

best.”⁸He re-established the ancient truths of Hinduism in his own experience and at the same time believed that all religions are true.

1.3. Vivekananda's Life and Mission

In the Bhagavad-Gītā, the Infinite Reality is described to be incarnated from age to age when evil is rampant and righteousness is in danger of extinction. He comes down to earth in human form in order to re-establish truth and spiritual order.⁹ The birth of Vivekananda, like his Master Ramakrishna Paramahansa, is probably the fulfillment of the Lord's promise to mankind. Vivekananda maintains that all the great prophets of the world religions as the incarnations of Infinite God and are the “ fairest flowers of human life.”¹⁰

Narendranath Dutta, or Swami Vivekananda as he became known to the world later, was born into a well-to-do Kshatriya family of Calcutta on Monday, January 12, 1863 as the son of a well-known lawyer, Vishwanath Dutta, and a very intelligent and pious lady, Bhuvaneshwari Devi. His father often had scholarly discussions with his clients and friends on politics, religion and society. He would allow Narendranath to join in these discussions and to express his views on the topics under discussion, and even to suggest arguments in support of his stand. Naren learnt the two great Indian Epics, the Rāmāyana and the Mahābharata, and Purānās from

his mother, Bhuvaneshwari Devi. He also inherited her memory among other good qualities and in fact, owed much to her as she wove the pattern of his divine life. He acquired all-round in sports, namely, boxing and wrestling, swimming and riding and a mastery of philosophy and poetry. Naren's boy hood was largely like that of any high-spirited, dynamic and healthy young boy, who showed immense curiosity about the world around him. Unlike other boys of his age, he practiced meditation. This power to concentrate gave him prodigious memory and the capacity for reading and remembrance. About his memory and grasping power he himself says: "I could understand an author without reading every line of his book . . . I could follow the whole trend of a writer's argument by merely reading a few lines, though the author himself tried to explain the subject in five or more pages."¹¹

As a student of philosophy, the question of faith in God very much haunted his mind. He looked to persons who could say that they had seen God, but found none. He wanted to meet a person who could talk about God with the authority of personal experience of God. In 1881, however, he happened to meet with Ramakrishna Paramahansa and asked him straight away if he had seen God. He said he had, and if Naren so wished, he could even show God to him. His question was satisfactorily answered for the first time and from that moment he realized the fact that

Ramakrishana was an extra-ordinary man. Ramakrishna had, from the very first meeting, found in Naren all those qualities, which were necessary to spread his message all over the world. Gradually he led him into the spiritual realm by easy stages and at last to the highest realm of inward experience. Three days before his death, he had handed over all his spiritual wealth to Naren and reminded him that he was born to accomplish great things in the world.

After the death of his master on 16th August 1886, Naren took up the leadership of the great mission, which the master had assigned for him in his mind. He traveled all over India as a Parivrajaka, from Himalayas to Cape Comorin, in order to know the cultural, social and economic conditions of India. He impressed the people by his way of life, genuine love and sympathy for all. Through it he obtained the direct experience of the misery of the downtrodden masses, dreadful social injustice, poverty and social backwardness of the people of India. He acquired the unique knowledge of "the great Book of Life revealed to him what all the books in the libraries could not have done."¹² He realized the great truth that it is futile to preach religion among the poor without trying to remove their poverty and their sufferings. He also realized the cultural and spiritual wealth, traditional strength and assimilative power of India.

The most outstanding mission in his life is to revitalize Hinduism or Sanatana Dharma, the religion developed out of the Vedas and the Upanishads. He considers the term 'Hinduism' in its wider sense, as a religion that leads mankind to the path of everlasting peace, love, and freedom. Hinduism is not a mere religion or a creed with superstitious practices. It is mainly concerned with certain fundamental spiritual laws for the righteous conduct of human beings in all spheres of activity. It is a way of life, a safe guideline for practical life. Being conscious of the spiritual poverty of the west and the neglect of material factors by the East, his aim was to reveal the universality of Hinduism not only to the East but also to the West. It is clear when he declares: "I have a message to the West as Buddha had a message to the East."¹³ It is to bind the people together to exchange ideas and enrich their respective cultures with new knowledge. The spiritual resurgence of the whole mankind is the scope of his message.

Vivekananda founded the Ramakrishna Matt and Mission in 1896 to propagate the teaching of his Master Ramakrishna Paramahansa. It was based on the dictum 'Ātmanomokṣārtham Jagaddhitāyaça', for the salvation of one's own soul and the welfare of the world. He was deeply influenced by his Master Ramakrishna Paramahansa, which culminated in the spiritual

transformation of his entire personality and marked out a turning point in his life. He describes this experience as follows: "The touch at once gave rise to a novel experience within me. With my eyes open I saw that the walls, and every thing in the room, whirled rapidly and vanished into naught, and the whole universe together with my individuality was about to merge in an all- encompassing mysterious void!"¹⁴ His central ideas spring from the influence of Ramakrishna paramahansa. In the words of Swami Nikhilananda: "It was his Master who taught him the divinity of the soul, the non-duality of the God-head, the unity of existence and one more thing- that is universality or harmony of all religions."¹⁵ He was also influenced and inspired by the cultural and human values preserved in the scriptures of the three main religions, namely, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. He emphasized that the realization of human values as the central principle of all religions. His life and teaching may be described as a source of inspiration and stimulus for the contemporary modern thinkers like Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore, Jawaharlal Nehru and Radhakrishnan.

He is generally regarded as a great soul, a spiritual luminary of a very high order. He was a man of great philosophical wisdom and social action, "who put his heart and soul into the words he uttered."¹⁶ Though he was deeply rooted in the past, he was fully conscious of the social, economic

and political conditions of his own age. He practiced what he preached, Vedānta, with unshakable conviction and missionary zeal. He devoted his time to built the gulf between the East and the West, the ancient tradition of monasticism and the western tradition of materialism, by adopting a synthetic approach. He combined the Ancient Indian spiritualism with the intense practical philosophy of social service in order to create a new order suited to the needs of modern man. He tried hard to root out poverty, class privileges, weaknesses, untouchability and other social evils of life with the aim to establish a casteless, classless society. For him, the idea of privilege is an obstruction to the realization of the spiritual oneness in mankind. He declares as follows: "We must give up the idea of privilege, then will religion come. Before that there is no religion at all."¹⁷ He revolutionized traditional Vedānta in order to liberate the noble ideas in it from the clutches of few, who monopolized it. He reconstructed it in a simple, concrete and practical form, which helped the common masses to know the secret of the sacred texts. For centuries, Karma-sannyāsa or complete renunciation with its implication that jnana alone is the means of Moksha or Self -realization, which is possible only for a few enlightened ones. Vivekananda clearly indicates the harmony between the fourfold ways of spiritual disciplines in action, love, knowledge, and meditation. All these paths are considered as necessary steps to Moksha at different stages of spiritual evolution. He has

also stressed the importance of the material values as well as personal, social and moral values of mundane world for the welfare of the all mankind. For him, religion is an integral and all-comprehensive philosophy of life and existence. It takes the whole man into consideration with all his physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual aspects. The purpose of human life and religion is one and the same. It is the higher evolution of man and not stagnation in animality. Here, human development and moksha are inseparably related to each other.

Though his teaching is essentially spiritualistic, its foundation, on the other hand, is rationalistic. His exhortation is categorical in nature. It is evident when he asserts: "Begin with disbelief. Analyze, test, prove everything, and then take it."¹⁸ There is no question of any blind belief, superstitions, and performance of rituals based on the authority of persons and scriptures. Therefore, it is acceptable even to the modern scientific man. He examines the nature of Reality or Truth, God, nature, and man in order to establish the harmonious relationship between them. He interprets facts both from the rational and supra rational level of existence. The divine-human relationship is mystical because it is the experience of the whole man to the whole Reality. It is a matter of immediate experience or direct intuition in which he turns inwards and loses himself in Reality. Vivekananda describes it as follows: "It is a vision, an inspiration, a plunge

into the unknown and unknowable, making the unknowable more than known, for it can never be 'known'.¹⁹ It is the transformation of one's personality into the plane of Universal Spirit. There is an element of mystic trance, which is universal in character in the religious urge of man, but the presence of this element does not make his religion unscientific. His mission is to reconcile faith with reason by separating all irrational elements from religion. In the words of Romain Rolland: "He of all modern men achieved the highest equilibrium between the diverse forces of thought, and was one of the first to sign a treaty of peace between the two forces eternally warring within us, the forces of reason and of faith."²⁰ Being conscious of the attitude of the modern mind, he allows persons to use their reasoning faculties and conceive God in the light of their thinking.

According to Vivekananda, the word 'faith' in its wider sense, means faith in oneself. It is faith in the inherent infinite potentialities within man. This faith in oneself is considered as the first essential pre-requisite for the faith in God. He declares as follows: "The great thing is to have faith in oneself, even before faith in God; but the difficulty seems to be that we are losing faith in ourselves day by day."²¹ This faith in God is possible only with the realization of God within us or with the knowledge of the real Spirit. Wherever there is true faith, there is right knowledge, which enables one to reduce the distance between man and man, man and nature, and finally

even between God and man. Faith in oneself indicates faith in all because all are one and the same. He has quoted the Upanishadic description of men as "Children of immortal bliss."²² It implies the highest expression of the nature of man. It is significant since it is sufficient to inculcate self-confidence and self-respect in man. This faith in oneself forms the foundation of his religious philosophy. It is also an inevitable condition for achieving the social, economic and political aspirations of humanity.

He has interpreted social, economic and political ideals in terms of spiritualism. Since the man is divine in nature, there is scope for freedom and equality. Freedom signifies selfless service, the spirit of social equality. The freedom in the social, economic and political spheres are indispensable for the spiritual liberation of man. It also promotes harmony and mutual goodwill. His religion is consistent with the three fundamental democratic values of liberty, equality and fraternity. Liberty means freedom, the unlimited freedom of the spirit from bondage. Equality is the logical corollary of the idea that there is underlying oneness and sameness in all. Fraternity is the manifestation of the Universal Brotherhood in the world.

Another outstanding mission in his life is Man-making, the regeneration of man as man through a silent spiritual revolution in the world at large. It is based on the fundamental idea that there is divinity in

man and the synthetic vision of the immense potentialities inherent in the human soul. The practical realization of this divinity is religion, which signifies spiritual freedom. He declares his ideal as follows: "To preach unto mankind their divinity and how to make it manifest in every movement of life."²³ In the light of this truth, Vivekananda aimed to bring about a radical psychological and spiritual transformation in man.

1.4. Vivekananda's Teaching - Characteristic Features

The entire teaching of Vivekananda is based on the central truth of Vedanta, the realization of the essential identity between Brahman and Atman. The meaning is that the individual consciousness or atman and the Universal Consciousness or Brahman is basically one and the same. The similar idea is embodied in the Mahavākhyas - Aham Brahma Āsmi, Tat Tvam Asi, Sarvam Khalu idam Brahma etc. All these assertions indicate the message of the unity of macrocosm and microcosm. Brahman, the first principle of universe, is known through atman, the inner self of man. The keynote of his teaching is the reconciliation of the two worlds, the inner spiritual world and the outer external world into one. He stresses strongly the idea of spiritual oneness of whole existence, that is to say, the idea of non-duality (Advaita).

The secret of the charm and power of the Universal Religion lies in the non-dual philosophy of oneness of all existence. Its origin can be traced back to the most Ancient Rig Vedic utterance: "Ekam sad viprā bahudhā vadanti."²⁴ (The Supreme Being is One learned men call it by different names). It implies the glorious vision of the One in the many. Truth is one, but it is manifested many forms by more who have experienced it. Though the soul of religions is one, it is expressed in multitude forms. Therefore, it is not a new phenomenon. It is as old as the Vedas and Upanishads, the great undying spiritual heritage of India. It is the reconstruction and re-establishment of the truth contained in the scriptural texts for the universal application of humanity.

A careful analysis reveals the fact that it is the combination of two terms, 'universal' and 'religion'. In philosophy, the term 'universal' is used in contrast with 'particular'. It is applied to those underlying abstract properties common to all the particulars of a certain class or kind. Moral and social values such as humanity, virtue, and justice are all universals in this sense. They are not limited to any particular space and time and are therefore indivisible, unchangeable and immortal. Particulars are concrete individuals or objects of reference with a particular position in space and time. For Heraclitus, particulars are real since he accepts change or momentariness of this universe. They are observed as many, changeable

and mortal. Plato ascribes real existence to the universals while particulars are unreal. But he does not mention the exact relation of universals to particular sensible things. For Aristotle, the universal exists only in the individual thing and is just its essential or intelligible character.

Vivekananda used the term 'universal' to denote the universality of the Ultimate Reality or Truth or to emphasize its all-inclusive and dynamic character. Religion stands for that which is 'Universal' which includes all the particulars. At the same time it remains free from the association of all the particulars. Reality is all-inclusive since it includes all and excludes nothing from it. It explains the particular through the general and moves on to the universal. Whatever exists in this earth, and whatever we discover in the future are also included in it. It is dynamic, active and self-manifesting which expresses itself in its continuous manifestation in several directions. It is the source of all cosmic existence and is the One Reality. It is not confined to any particular nation or race or individual or group or sect or tribe. It is the fundamental principle of unity of existence, which contains within it the harmony of all religious faiths and philosophies of the world.

The striking feature of his religion is that it cannot be identified with mere idol worship and blind adherence to rites, dogmas, myths and

ceremonial practices. He states that there is no need to criticize the different form of religions since they all belong to the same Universal Truth. According to him, the different forms of religious faiths and practices, from the lowest fetishism to the highest philosophy of absolutism are nothing but the various efforts of the human mind to realize the Truth. They are merely the methods to protect the soul in its right path. He describes it as follows: "A sapling must be hedged about for protection, but when it becomes a tree, a hedge would be a hindrance."²⁵ It indicates that the belief in rites and ceremonies is a stumbling block in the path of spiritual freedom.

The supreme knowledge is the knowledge of the Ultimate Truth or Reality, which is superior to any particular partial truths of religions. Each particular religion represents only partial truth, not the whole truth. The contradictory opinions among different religions are due to the insistence on these partial truths. Vivekananda points out that the photographs of a church taken from different angles look differently but represent the same church. Similarly, though the different religions give different descriptions of Truth from different angles, they are all descriptions of the same Truth. Consequently the great religions of the world are not contradictory but supplementary to each other. They are merely the means, but not the end. Truth or Reality is the end in life. According to him, Religion is man's journey from truth to truth, from lower

truth to higher truth. He expresses his viewpoint as follows: "Man is not travelling from error to truth but from truth to truth, from lower to higher truth."²⁶ He believes that the religious urge remained deep-rooted in every human being until a very high level of spiritual unfoldment was reached.

Vivekananda declares that his religion is the search after this Truth. It is beyond the sacred scriptures like Vedas, Bible, and the Koran, the spiritual revelations to the world. These scriptures are written in human languages, which are inadequate to express super sensuous experience. They describe certain spiritual truth, but are not yet the whole Truth, which transcends human comprehension. In the words of Vivekananda: "The Bible, the Vedas, the Koran, and all other sacred books are but so many pages, and an infinite number of pages remain yet to be unfolded."²⁷ The founders, prophets and messengers of all the religions of the world declared that they had an experience of super sensuous state. The realization of this super sensuous experience is the basis of all the religions. The nature of such experience is trans-empirical and trans-rational.

The appearance of Vivekananda on the world scenario at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893 may be considered as a landmark as it marked out the turning point not only of inter-religious understanding and universal brotherhood, but also the proper understanding of the true

spirit of religions. It also signified the death - knell of fanaticism, bigotry and sectarianism of all kinds in the name of religion. The New York Herald spoke of Vivekananda as follows: "He is undoubtedly the greatest figure in the parliament of religions. After hearing him we feel how foolish it is to send missionaries to this learned nation."²⁸ Almost all world religions were represented and their respective religious leaders had arrived fully prepared to establish their own credentials and supremacy of their faith and beliefs. The universal Religion of Vivekananda is really a call for unity among great religions. It is not only the synthesis of the elements taken from all the religions of the world, but also the realization of the fact that religions of the world preach the same Truth in different ways. The different religions of the world are different pathways to the common spiritual goal. They are like the pearls strung harmoniously upon God's necklace. The passage cited by sister Nivedita in this context is significant. "All these are threaded upon Me, as pearls upon a string."²⁹ It indicates that there is an underlying thread of unity in the form of God that is running through all these religions. Realization of this fact is essential for the smooth running of great religions.

Despite his universal spiritual outlook, he was a humanist in its true sense. His message is not against the material development of the man. But it gives mankind a warning against the threat of excessive materialism. Opposition to material surfeit does not mean neglecting the improvement of

the basic needs of man's life. Such advancement is necessary for the physical and mental development of man, which is an essential preparation for the spiritual evolution. He even crossed the ocean with the hope of getting material aid for the poor and down-trodden brothers and sisters. He argues that there is no use of talking about religion to a starving man. He has expressed his love for the poor in a letter to his friend as follows: "I do not believe in a God or religion which cannot wipe the widow's tears or bring a piece of bread to the orphan's mouth."³⁰ His religious humanism is based on the realization of the fact that the service to man is service to God itself. Religion is not confined to gods and goddesses, temples, churches and the holy places. It is the creed of the poor, which leads to the identification of humanity with divinity. Human body is the temple in which God dwells irrespective of caste, creed or religion. The living God is not outside, but resides in all beings, both inanimate and animate. It advocates sacrifice of man in favour of every body and everything.

The gospel of Vivekananda proclaims the infinite spiritual dimension of the true nature of man as divine. Human birth is considered as a rare and precious privilege attained because of good deeds performed in several births. It is of great significance as it marks a turning point in the long process of transmigration that a soul undergoes. This world of action provides man the greatest and the finest occasion to become perfect. Every

moment of his time is a gateway to the final goal of timeless freedom. He declares as follows: "The man form is higher than even the angel form, and of all forms it is highest; man is the highest being in creation, because he attains to freedom."³¹ Man is conscious of his superior status and of the greater possibilities of spiritual development. Every individual, however degraded and fallen he might be, is capable of infinite growth. He never becomes imperfect. The essence of man is changeless spirit. In the words of Vivekananda: "A brute is like the diamond in the dirt and dust-brush the dust off and it is a diamond, just as pure as if the dust had never been on it, and we must admit that every soul is a big diamond."³² Religion is the realization of the inherent divinity of the spirit in man as eternal, everlasting and pure. It teaches man not only to refrain from evil but also to insist on doing well to others. It elevates man to the supreme position of God. Vivekananda describes the task of religion as follows: "Religion is the idea which is raising the brute unto man, and man unto God."³³ It is the spirit in man that forces him to go beyond his animal nature and to behave like a real man. He is considered as the crown of creation and has the privilege of realizing God immanent in him. He asserts as follows: "Rise, thou effulgent one, rise thou who art always pure, rise thou birth less and deathless, rise almighty and manifest thy true nature . . ."³⁴ It implies the demand to listen to the call of divinity inherent in man.

Another important feature is that his teaching is the source of infinite strength and fearlessness. For Vivekananda, strength is goodness and weakness is sin. True religion emerges out of strength, not from weakness. It saves the soul from the bondage of fear. Fearlessness grants man freedom from all kinds of external and internal enemies. It provides calmness and ineffable peace of mind. The positivistic and constructive force of his teaching is evident in his own words: "Arise, Awake! Awake from this hypnotism of weakness. None is really weak; the soul is infinite, omnipotent, and omniscient. Stand up, assert yourself, proclaim the God within you, do not deny Him!"³⁵ The significant step towards the acquisition of fearlessness is the living faith in God within man. His teaching has the power to fill the mind with boundless energy. It is the illumination of one's own consciousness, which empowers man with a new view of life in a more unified and glorious world.

Lastly, his teaching enables man to attain freedom within himself in order to realize the eternal truth of kinship with the whole world. Man should utilize this freedom to meet the requirements of the social progress. Everyone becomes member of a family and of a society, then of a nation, and finally of Humanity, which is made up of all the nations of the earth. For Vivekananda the whole humanity belongs to one family, 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam'. When the whole mankind work together as a global family,

not merely belonging to a particular race, religion or nation, world peace and blissfulness will once again prevail on this earth, which are drenched with the tears of division and conflict. This oneness of humanity is the ultimate goal of his religion.

1.5. The Relevance in Modern Age

Vivekananda gives more importance to the practical teaching of Vedanta because he was convinced of the fact that it could alone be regarded as the Universal Religion as it was more suitable for the modern scientific era. The philosophy of this religion is so simple that there is no difficulty to accept it even for the scientific man. It is rational, scientific and practical in its nature. It satisfies the demands of the modern science in regard to the highest generalization that the explanation of a thing comes from within itself. Brahman is such a concept that has nothing outside of Him. In Taittiriya Upanishad, it is described as that from which these beings are born, that by which when born they live, and that into which when departing they enter.

The necessity of the realization of the fundamental truth of vedanta in our daily life is widely recognized. The truth of Vedanta is capable of verification not only for the saints and sages living in the caves of forest but also the monarchs and ordinary men, in the laboratory of their

own soul. The liberated souls take their higher births to guide the rest of the humanity on their way to spiritual perfection. The greatness of Vedānta lies in the fact that it is suitable for all mankind in whatever position it is. The door to salvation is equally open to all through the proper practice of yoga. Every one of us can ascend to the higher plane and can experience the truth, which is the ultimate explanation of everything. He declares as follows: "These prophets were not unique; they were men as you or I. They were great yogis. They had gained this super consciousness, and you and I can get the same. They were not peculiar people. The very fact that one man ever reached that state, proves that it is possible for every man to do so. Not only is it possible, but every man must, eventually, get to that state and that is religion."³⁶ It provides a meeting ground for all contradictions in the name of religion. It is the only religion in which the whole superstructure of nonsensicality in the name of religion can be collapsed and disappeared to a great extent. The content of Vedānta is harmonization by manifesting the similarities between the religions of the world. It is broad, liberal and universal in its attitude towards other religions. There will be no distinction in the name of caste, creed or religion. The universal message of Vivekananda is valid and relevant in a world steeped in hatred, violence, suspicion and prejudice.

Man's progress on the spiritual plane is essential to bring about an era of peace and prosperity. Modern man is always searching the truths that govern the physical world for material advancement. He is leading a mechanical social life in which he has no ideal, no freedom and no outlook. He is totally ignorant of the moral and spiritual truth that governs the human behaviour. The realization of the knowledge that this truth is not outside, but is within man enables him to open his eyes with a fresh outlook and to understand things in a new light and spirit.

The Universal Religion of Vivekananda upholds love, peace, religious tolerance, co-operation and goodwill among nations. It describes the universal eternal truths embodied in all the great religions of the world, which constitute an everlasting unity. It is the result of realization of the necessity of harmonizing the essence of Vedas, the Bible and the Koran. It is acceptable to all people irrespective of differences in race, religion, language, customs and traditions. In the religion of Vedanta the Hindu, the Muslim and the Christian are all one, the children of the Almighty God. His teaching has the power to transcend the barriers of fanaticism and exclusiveness into a communion of Universal Brotherhood.

The present critical situation of India is mainly due to the spiritual ignorance. There is an urgent demand to bring about spiritual renaissance

all over the world. Vivekananda clearly states that religion is the most suitable way for the awakening of spirituality in man. His universal message is an antidote to the pseudo - religious practices, and superstitions in the name of religion. Religion can be used for the progress and welfare of humanity as well as for the exploitation and destruction of the masses. If it is properly understood and practiced, it could serve as a source of inspiration for human progress. Most of the people talk too much of religion but do not practice it in their daily life. Mere knowledge without practice is futile. There is a need to enter into its spirit and to live with it.

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MODERN INTERPRETATIONS OF RELIGION - WESTERN AND INDIAN

N. Nirmala “ Vivekananda's concept of universal religion - an appraisal”
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CHAPTER 2

MODERN INTERPRETATIONS OF RELIGION- WESTERN AND INDIAN

Man, from the beginning, was conscious of some supernatural forces. He was overawed by the might of the natural forces- the roaring thunder, the rain, the wind, the fire, the sky, and the earth - and worshipped them all. Even mountains, trees, rivers, snakes, and animals were worshipped and believed to be spirit-oriented, and more powerful. It is here that the origin of spirituality or spiritual consciousness lies and still continues to be a vital force in many cultures through out the world.

Religion is based on the faith in an unseen supernatural Being or God with which man tries to establish communion through the act of worship or meditation or prayer. The immense variety of primitive forms of beliefs and practices such as animism, totemism, fetishism, ancestor-worship etc., are nothing but the indication of the growing thirst in man to know or to establish communion with the mystery surrounding the universe. Undoubtedly there is a difference in the intensity of its expression and the form of its manifestation, but that the thirst is clear beyond all doubt. The religious experience is the result of the awareness of the

inadequacy of sense and reason. With the process of development of human civilization, religion and religious activities came to be associated with certain rites and ceremonies, dogmas and even superstitions.

The word 'Religion' is derived from the Latin word 'Religare' which means 'to bind' together, signifying that it is essentially a principle of unification and harmonization. It is the binding force, which unites man to the man, man to the society and man to the universe as a whole. It is not mere belief but behaviour; not mere conviction but conduct; not mere faith but functioning.

'Dharma' is the word often used for 'Religion' in Sanskrit. It is derived from the root 'dhr' which means to support or 'to sustain'. That which sustains the universe is dharma. It is the unifying principle, which promotes harmony and stability in society in every context. S. Radhakrishnan defines dharma as follows: "It is the norm which sustains the universe, the principle of a thing in virtue of which it is what it is."¹ Generally dharma means religious rites or rules of conduct. The purpose of dharma is to uplift man from his physical plane and make him function at higher spiritual level. It is the complete rule of life, the harmony of the whole man who finds a right and just law of his living. In Mimamsa philosophy, observance of Vedic Commandments is called dharma. In Bhagavadgita,

dharma denotes the duty of every individual towards other members of the society. Everything in the universe has its own dharma. Man too has his 'Svadharmā', which he or she is expected to discharge truthfully and to the best of his ability and understanding in order to contribute to the security, peace and stability of the society. In Ramayana, dharma is supreme in the world, and truth is based on dharma.

Obviously, the terms 'religion', 'reality' or 'truth', and 'dharma' appear as interchangeable. Dharma is truth in action. Adherence to truth is necessary for the practice of dharma. Peace is adherence to dharma itself and to live in accordance with it. It is a state of equanimity based on the understanding of divine presence in all and everything, animate and inanimate.

Religion is a process that has two aspects, an inner and an outer. From the one point of view it is a state of inward spiritual experience, an utter self-abnegation and surrender to the unknown Reality. From the other it is the expression of a faith in religious institutions, rites, practices, observances and attitudes. Both these aspects are associated to the nature of religion and it is found through out the process of spiritual growth. Religion is the vision of that which transcends the limitations of human reason and scientific knowledge. The secret of its strength and persistence can be traced

to the realm of the spirit. Some people misinterpret religion with rituals, creeds, customs, practices, taboos, festivals and inhibitions. All these factors are only the secondary details of religion. The very fact of their existence proves that they are necessary at certain stages of spiritual progress. But it does not mean that they are absolutely necessary for making one to lead a spiritual life. There is every possibility to lead a high spiritual life without even performing any of the rituals and ceremonies or believing in any creed, doctrine or mythology. Religious experience is one of affirmation and assurance, not of uncertainty. It is not a bundle of superstitions, but a definite attitude to life. It enables man to live his daily life in harmony within himself and with others and to lead a life of peace and happiness. It is the source of virtue and prosperity of the individual, and through individual, of the society.

A careful analysis of religious experience points out that the trinity of feeling, willing and knowledge form the basis of all religious experience, though these psychical elements are seldom present in equal degree or proportion. But it is true that the nature of religion is determined by the predominance of this element or that. If the element of feeling is predominant, religion becomes mystical or emotional; if the emphasis is laid on knowledge, religion becomes intellectual and abstract; if the element of willing is prominent, religion becomes practical and ritualistic. The feeling

involved in religion ranges from the fear and awe experienced by the primitive men in the face of the tremendous powers of nature to the feeling of love and devotion experienced by the followers of a personal God. True religion touches the different aspects of religious consciousness with the view to harmonize them into a unity. It springs out of life and is intimately connected with life.

The attempt to define religion in terms of some distinctive or unique essence or set of qualities is a natural consequence of the western speculative, intellectualistic and scientific disposition. Such definitions tried to emphasize the sharp distinction between the religious and non-religious dimensions of culture and sometimes, equated religion with beliefs, particularly belief in a supreme being. The fact that the definitions are so many and so different from one another is enough to prove that the word 'religion' does not have any common characteristic feature. The many different aspects subsumed under religion can be related in the way that the linguistic philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein has characterized as the differences and "resemblances between members of a family." ² To him religion is a different form of language game played by its own rules. In general, all these definitions themselves are a valuable contribution to the understanding of what religion was, is, or should be.

The question of the origin of religion is scientifically studied and analysed only in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The different modern approaches to religion are enough to throw light upon the nature of religious consciousness and its development from embryonic stage to the highly developed one. E.B. Taylor, the father of modern anthropology and the authority on 'Primitive culture', defines religion simply and briefly as a "belief in spiritual things."³

Some definitions emphasize the cognitive or intellectual aspect of religion. Max Muller describes it as follows: "Religion is a faculty of the mind which enables a man to grasp the infinite independently of sense and reason."⁴ According to Hegel, "Religion is the knowledge possessed by the finite mind of its nature as absolute mind."⁵ Hoffding defines religion as "the faith in the conservation of values."⁶ Though this definition rightly discerns the essence of religion in value, it tends to obscure the practical aspect of it. Religion is not mere faith in the conservation of values but in the realization of these values.

The sociologists and anthropologists exalt the social function of religion. They rightly argue that religion is never an abstract set of ideas, values, or experiences developed apart from the total cultural matrix and that many religious beliefs, customs, and rituals can only be understood in

reference to this matrix. Emile Durkheim, a pioneer in societal interpretation, finds the presence of religion in the distinction between the sacred and the profane. "The real characteristic of religious phenomena is that they always suppose a bipartite division of the whole universe, known and knowable, into two classes which embrace all that exists, but which radically exclude each other. Sacred things are those, which the interdictions protect and isolate; profane things, those to which these interdictions are applied and which must remain at a distance from the first. Religious beliefs are the representations which express the nature of sacred things and the relations which they sustain, either with each other or with profane things." ⁷ He describes religion as the source of all higher culture and views religion naturalistically, holding its function to be the creation and maintenance of social solidarity. According to T. Parson, religion is "a set of beliefs, practices, and institutions which men have evolved in various societies." ⁸

The famous anthropologist Herbert Spencer's definition specifies the ritualistic function of religion. According to him "Religion is the recognition that all things are manifestations of a power which transcends our knowledge," or again, "humanity's response to the divine." ⁹ To Feuerback "it is a desire which manifests in prayer, sacrifice and faith." ¹⁰

W. T. Stace defines religion as "the hunger of the soul for the impossible, the unattainable, the inconceivable."¹¹

Others stress the psychological aspect of religion. For them, religion is not only beliefs, customs, traditions and rites belonging to particular social groups, but individual experiences also. William James describes it as follows: "The feeling, acts and experiences of individual men in their solitude so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine."¹² "Religion", says whitehead, "is the vision of something which stands beyond, behind, and within the passing flux of immediate things."¹³ Though these definitions emphasize the divine element in religion, they overlook the aspect of freedom from limitations in which the man is enhanced from his solitude into a divine presence.

German philosopher Friedrich Schleiermacher considers religion as an intense experience resulting in the feeling of absolute dependence. This attitude tends to deteriorate religion into an infra-rational one for it gives more importance to the element of feeling.

The moralists emphasize the moral aspect of religion. Mathew Arnold describes it as "morality touched with emotion."¹⁴ Immanuel Kant emphasizes the supremacy of moral will in one's own life. He admits both

the immortality of Soul and the existence of God only as the postulates of moral life and there by implicitly indicates faith in the reality of a superhuman source and basis for the moral values, which religion calls God. According to him "Religion is a matter of the will, it being understood and identified with practical reason, that is to say certain acts ought to be done or that certain attitudes ought to be adopted."¹⁵ It is amoral since the object of religion ultimately transcends all human values. Religion as the psychic urge includes thought, will and feeling and yet it is something more than all this.

Perhaps one of the best definitions of religion is that of J.G. Frazer since it takes into account the cognitive and conative aspects of religion. He says: "By religion I understand a propitiation or conciliation of powers superior to man which are believed to direct and control the course of nature and of human life."¹⁶ All these definitions describe either the intellectual or the psychological or the social or moral or religious functions of religion. Therefore, they are one sided and satisfactory only up to a point.

The Merriam Webster's New International Dictionary describes: "Religion . . . is the outward act or form by which men indicate their recognition of the existence of a god or of gods having power over their destiny to whom obedience, service, and honour are due; the feeling or expression of human love, fear, or awe of some superhuman and over

ruling power, whether by profession of belief, by observance of rites and ceremonies, or by conduct of life."¹⁷ This broad definition of religion seems to possess cognitive, conative and affective aspects of religion such as the beliefs in the supernatural, a moral code, rituals, religious practices, worship and meditation.

Modern Indian thinkers emphasize the necessity of religions for the survival of humanity, which is standing on the crossroads of destruction due to the menace of devastating progress in the field of scientific materialism. They tried to find solution to this predicament in life in a different way by asserting the value of an east - west synthesis. Some of the prominent issues with respect to which all these thinkers appear to be in agreement are: monism, reality of the world, integral nature of man, dignity of manness, reality of human freedom, importance of intuitive knowledge etc. All these thinkers are monists, but monism expresses itself differently in all of them. According to some thinkers, the distinction between monism and monotheism is irrelevant; some of them, while asserting the oneness of the Absolute, make God a necessary aspect of the Absolute, and according to others, the monistic character of reality carries it into the realm of the Indefinite. They all are one in asserting the reality of the world and the dignity of humanness. They all believe that the ideal of life can be realized only by transcending the finite world. The apprehension of reality is possible

not by sense - experience or by intellectual reasoning, but by a kind of intuitive awareness. The notion of freedom, however, is not ethical or social, but it is existential or metaphysical. Freedom is both the nature of man and his ultimate destiny. There is one particular point with respect to which there appears to be an agreement among all contemporary thinkers of India. They are all, in a particular sense, humanists. Scientific humanism overlooks one of the fundamental aspects of human aspiration. Spiritual humanism, on the other hand, represents satisfaction of all kinds of human aspiration. It is in this sense that the teaching of modern Indian thinkers, in spite of its emphasis on spiritual ideal, is humanistic. For them, religions are the means to attain perfection, peace, harmony and brotherhood. The most prominent Indian thinkers of the twentieth century are Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi, Sri Aurobindo, and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan. These eminent thinkers of modern India deal with the problem of man's nature and destiny in an integral and comprehensive way and take full account of man's spiritual as well as empirical existence. They have given immense importance to the development of man's ethical and social nature and to the cultivation of the secular values along with the spiritual ones. They believe in a religion that is above all denominational religions, which is universal and embraces the whole of humanity.

According to Lokamanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak, the meaning of the word Dharma is a very complex one. Dharma has been defined in terms of its fundamental form as 'respectable behaviour'; in terms of its origin as custom; and as limitations or restrictions imposed for the welfare of the society. These three definitions are inadequate since the precepts of the venerable persons differ, customs too widely differ and the consequences of any restricted act also are too many. The complexity increases with the fact that an excess of Dharma is vice; and as regards the type of person who should decide as to what is too much and what is too little; and the decision has to be taken in terms of time and person. Tilak uses the word Dharma to mean ethical duties relating to the life in the world. It is clear when he says, "Dharma means our duty towards God and towards man."¹⁸ The common people understand the meaning of the word dharma as the path leading to the happiness in the next world. The word dharma is also used as raja dharma or the duty of kings, praja dharma or the duty of subjects, 'desa-dharma' or the duty of a country, kula dharma or the duty pertaining to clan or family, mitra dharma or one's duty as a friend etc., which indicate the limitations of worldly- morality. He emphasises the role of morality in regulating the unrestricted course of human life resulting from passions for the maintenance and the general well being of society. Man accepts moral principles like non-violence, justice, kindness etc., as independent of

material happiness or unhappiness and also as permanent. Tilak considers all these sattvika virtues as "humanness", which can serve as the index of morality. An act that enhances humanness or is consistent with it, is a moral act. The absolute immutable laws of ethics are based on the metaphysical foundation that there is one imperceptible spiritual force in all the created things. This force exists in the human being as atman, the consciousness that relates him to the universe. The foundation of ethics, according to Tilak, is the frame of mind and mode of life of a self-realised person.

Tilak's philosophy of life is mainly based on the views of the Bhagavad-Gītā and the Vedānta. To him, the message of the Gītā, correctly interpreted and earnestly followed can lead to man's complete happiness and fulfilment. Fundamentally, the Gītā is a gospel of karma-yoga, its teachings about jnana-yoga and bhakti-yoga being only subservient to karma-yoga. This emphasis on the predominance of karma-yoga marks the novelty in Tilak's interpretation of the Gītā. He approaches the problem of man's nature and destiny through the doctrine of karma-yoga. Karma-yoga or the science of right action is being taught to such persons who are inspired by the desire for knowledge, how to perform action in a right way even while leading a worldly life. Since jīvanmukta is virtuous by nature, he is not under the compulsion of any ethical laws. He may either abandon actions without any desire for the fruits (Karma-Sannyāsa) or perform

actions without any desire for the fruits(Karma-yoga). The karma-yogin takes sannyasa or renunciation in the sense of abandonment of the fruit of action and performs his duties enjoined in the scriptures with a peaceful frame of mind till death, for the purpose of Universal Welfare. In an enlightened person the sense of agency disappears, and the result of action does not bind him since his karma gets burnt by the fire of knowledge. According to Tilak, jnana-karma-samuccaya, the simultaneous combination of knowledge and action is the means to release. He regards karma-yoga as inclusive of all other yogas like jnana-yoga, bhakti-yoga etc., defining it as 'jnana-mulaka-bhakti-pradhanya-karma-yoga'(knowledge-originated-devotion-predominant- path of action).

The religion of Rabindranath Tagore is the religion of the whole race of mankind. Tagore most profoundly reconciled the ancient Indian self-detachment and self-transcendence with ardent communion with Nature and the great throbbing heart of the multitude. Under the influence of the Upanishads, Bhagavad-Gita and Buddha, he developed positive view of life and love of humanity. As a poet philosopher, Tagore is not interested in arguments and logic, he is a visionary, and therefore, communicates the truths that are revealed to him directly through his poetic images. But at the same time, he also admits that there is an urge in him to go beyond the poetic images deep into the poet's personal realisation in order to pick up

the truths and to gather evidences. It is clear when he says, "I have already made the confession that my religion is a poet's religion. All that I feel about it is from vision and not from knowledge. Frankly, I acknowledge that I cannot satisfactorily answer any question about evil or about what happens after death. Nevertheless, I am sure that there have come moments in my own experience when my soul has touched the Infinite and has become infinitely conscious of it through the illumination of joy."¹⁹ Ultimate Reality, according to him, is One. It is not merely an abstract principle negating completely the reality of the many but it is a concrete whole comprehending the many within its bosom. Tagore claims that this Ultimate Reality to be God and God to be the Ultimate Reality. He emphasises the role of man in the apprehension of Truth or Reality. Reality is the personal God, not the Absolute. The divine-human relationship is mystical and it is incomprehensible. Ultimate Reality is the Supreme Personality, or the Grand Nature, the concrete ideal of man's life and aspirations. In the words of Tagore: "Reality can be regarded as Personality acting upon personalities through incessant manifestations."²⁰

Like Vivekananda, Tagore considers man as the supreme being of the entire evolutionary process of the world. He says, "Man is more than his qualities as much as the beauty of a lotus is more than the constituents of the lotus."²¹ According to him, religion consists in man's capacity of self-

transcendence. It is the spontaneous expression of the essential and Infinite aspect of man. Man has a self - awareness, which reveals to him the fact that he has a capacity of going beyond himself- of constantly pushing himself ahead towards higher and higher regions. In fact his religious life means constant exercise of this capacity. Tagore calls this infinite aspect of man's nature as 'The Man of his heart'- his 'Jivan-Devata'. Jivan-Devata is God in man and as such it is this element of divinity present in man that makes him God-like. Religion is concerned with man-God relationship and God-man relationship. It aims at a harmony or unity between man and man, man and nature and man and the Universal Spirit. He examines man's relation to nature and attributes western man's self-centredness to his disharmony with nature. Salvation lies in bondage and not in freedom. The realized soul enjoys communion with the Infinite and he experiences the touch of the Infinite in every aspect of the Nature. He says that beauty of the world and truth of divinity are in fact dependent on the existence of human beings. He did not negate world and nature. Man finds both his solace and his ultimate objectiveness only in communion with nature. He is always yearning for uniting himself with the Infinite. The Infinite also, in turn, is longing to express itself in and through the finite. Tagore believes that the whole universe is itself an expression of the Infinite. Religion of man consists in the reconciliation of the Universal Spirit with the individual spirit. It is the

realisation of a true relationship of intense love between the Infinite and the finite. For him, finite self is real but the underlying Infinite Self is much more real. Salvation lies in bondage and not in freedom. The realised soul enjoys communion with the Infinite and he experiences the touch of the Infinite in every aspects of the Nature. Religion is based on the faith of man in the unity of his being with all existence. In his view there is a religion of man, which concentrates itself on the love of man, to love the human beings, as one's own self and hence this concentration is possible only when there is insistence on man's dignity or uniqueness in the universe. Tagore insists on social service not in a materialistic sense, but as a way to realise the Infinite. He speaks of love as the way of realization of the Infinite. The Supreme Personality has created the universe out of love and it is imperative for man to love every object in nature. It is evident when he says, "The religion of the Tagore implies the creation of beauty which is fulfilment of love."²²

The religio-philosophic outlook of Mahatma Gandhi is based upon the Upanishadic doctrine of the unity of all existence and the identity of the Atman and Brahman. According to him, religion is not a matter of knowing scriptures or performance of various rites and rituals or even engaging in philosophical discussion. It is evident when he states, "True religion is not a dogma. It is not external observance. It is faith in God, living in the presence of God."²³ His religious ideas are based on the conviction

that there is One reality – that of God, which is nothing else but Truth. Since Truth is God, sincere pursuit of this Truth is Religion. Every one who experiences this Truth is really experiencing God. Religion is ordinarily defined as devotion to some higher power or principle. Gandhi is not against such a description of religion, but only qualifies it further by asserting that higher principle being Truth, devotion to Truth (or God) is religion. He describes the nature of religion as follows: “ Let me explain what I mean by religion. It is not the Hindu religion... but the religion, which transcends Hinduism, which changes one’s very nature, which binds one indissolubly to the truth within and which ever purifies. It is the permanent element in human nature which counts no cost too great in order to find full expression and which leaves the soul utterly restless until it has found itself, known its maker and appreciated the true correspondence between the Maker and itself.”²⁴ True religious spirit has the capacity of changing one’s nature because it is the expression of good elements present in man. For him the religious way is the way of realization of truth in actual life (Satyagraha). Every action of everyone is an attempt to experience Truth or God .The Bhagavad-Gītā played a major role in moulding Gandhi’s philosophy of life. Religion is the experience of God through the performance of selfless action for the good of humanity (Nishkamakarma). Religion enables the individual to cultivate and develop a sense to the right

and the good, and makes him a truly moral man. He says, "It is a matter of heart- culture, of unmeasurable strength. Fearlessness is the first requisite of spirituality. Cowards can never be moral."²⁵ Morality consist in action conforming to the demands of justice and in avoiding injustice. True religion and morality are inseparably related with each other. The act of self-transcendence or love constitutes the very essences of morality. Religion is the law of life and God is the living power. As a practical idealist, he tries to see God in the service of humanity for he knew that "God is neither in heaven, nor down below, but in everyone."²⁶

The spirit of the modern age is more truly represented in Aurobindo's ideal of cosmic liberation. A union with Divine in all its integrity is impossible unless we feel unity with our fellow beings. To be alone in the religious sense, should means to be in the presence of Divine, who is not exclusive of any person or group or interest, but is the end of all and be all of all things. Religion means faith in the realization of the Highest Value, the Absolute, which can be apprehended in some supra-rational insight. In the words of Sri Aurobindo, "The inmost essence of religion....is the search for God and the finding of God. Its aspiration is to discover the Infinite, the Absolute, the One, the Divine who is all these things and yet no abstraction but a 'Being'. Its work is a sincere living out of the true and intimate relations between man and God, relation of unity, relation of

difference, relations of an illuminated knowledge, an ecstatic love and delight, an absolute surrender and service, a casting of every part of our existence out of its normal status into an up rush of man towards the Divine and a descent of the divine into man."²⁷ The nature of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy may be described as integral non-dualism. It is idealistic since it conceives reality as supremely spiritual and indeterminate; it fixes up an ideal for mankind towards which all over efforts have to be directed. It is called 'integral' since it both accepts and synthesises the opposition between the lower hemisphere and higher hemisphere or between matter and spirit. The opposition between the two is transcended as a result of the operation of a super conscient creative force, the Mother.

The evolutionary approach of Sri Aurobindo is based on the Vedanta, but with large modifications, and also on the modern evolutionism. Sri Aurobindo regards creation as a process of descent and ascent, of involution and evolution; it is firstly a descent of the spirit into the worldly forms and then it also implies an ascent of the worldly forms to its original higher status. He talks about the different cords of Being- Existence, Consciousness- force, Bliss, Super mind, Mind, Psyche, Life and Matter - as the expressions of reality viewed from the point of view of creation. It is on account of the descent of the spirit in Matter, Life and Mind that these ascent to the higher regions of the spirit. Matter can evolve into life because life

itself has involved in it, life can ascend to mind only because there has been a descent of mind into life already, the entire lower hemisphere can ascend to the higher one only because the higher is already in the lower one. He further argues that the lower cannot evolve into the higher unless the higher is already in it because evolution cannot proceed out of nothing, because it cannot violate the principle of 'nothing out of nothing'. In this evolutionary process the higher descends into the lower and transforms it completely in that way the lower ascends to the higher. Sri Aurobindo envisages the possibility of the emergence of a race of super men or Gnostic beings. The emergence of super men on earth and the spiritualization of man and the world is, according to him, the goal of cosmic evolution.

Religion, according to Radhakrishnan, is the insight into the nature of Reality or experience of Reality. It is the response of the whole personality, the integrated self to the Ultimate Reality. He describes religion as a strenuous endeavour to apprehend truth. Radhakrishnan observes, " A religion represents the soul of the people, its particular spirit, thought and temperament... It is the expression of the spiritual experience of the race, a record of its social evolution, an integral element of the society in which it is found."²⁸ He gives a spiritual interpretation to the modern theory of evolution. He maintains that man is the higher product of evolutionary process, spiritual evolution takes place only after the emergence of man. The

function of religion is to further the evolution of man into his divine stature, develop increased awareness and intensity of understanding, and bring about a deeper and more enduring adjustment in life. Religion is based on the spiritual experience combined with moral sense. Morality disciplines human nature and leads him towards perfection. It is a pre requisite for the attainment of spiritual destiny of man. To him, "Religion is the discipline which touches the conscience and helps us to struggle with evil and sordidness, saves from greed, lust and hatred, releases moral power, and impart courage in the enterprise of saving the world."²⁹ Religion implies a faith in the ultimacy of absolute spiritual values and a way of life to realise them. It commands man to make the transformation of his own nature, to let the divine in him manifest itself. Radhakrishnan points out that the purpose of life is not the enjoyment of the world but the education of the soul. The religious discipline consists in turning inwards, deepening one's awareness and developing a more meaningful attitude to life. Religious experience is a kind of inner experience in which the whole nature of human being is involved. It is an integral undivided consciousness in which the distinction between subject and object disappears and the individual self realises in itself the Universal Self. It does not require the support of logic or metaphysics. "Religion", Radhakrishnan says, "is a matter of life and experience and not of belief and dogma. It has for its aim the perception of

the deepest reality which is one with the deepest self.”³⁰ Thus the aim of religious experience is to discover the hidden and the ideal possibilities of human life; it is a quest for the emancipation of mankind from the compulsions of finite existence. Its peculiarity consists in its attempt to discover eternal truths, in its effort to raise the life - spirit to some higher spiritual level. As a great representative and exponent of Hinduism, he has shown the universal appeal of Hindu religion and points out that it contains the most universal and sublime truths of religion. His concept of religion transcends all kinds of creeds and dogmas. It is a universal religion, which fulfils the aspirations of humanity. The total perfection or sarvamukti is possible for man only when the human race as a whole is liberated, only when all released souls become one with the Infinite. The objective of morality is social redemption and not individual salvation. He asserts that a religion, which does not give importance to social reform and international justice, has no appeal to the modern mind. It is evident when he says, “The believer in God loves his fellow men as he loved himself, seeking their highest good as he seeks his own, by redemptive service and self sacrifice. He will put justice above civilization, truth above patriotism.”³¹ His view about the function of religion is quite realistic and appeals to the modern mind. The present day growing dissatisfaction with the established religion is the prelude to the rise of a truer more spiritual and more universal

religion. The goal of the world process is a harmonious unity, and therefore moral life is the enrichment of life that is the outcome of the recognition of others and adaptation to them. According to him, the different religions are comrades in a joint enterprise for facing the common problems of peaceful co-existence, international welfare and justice, social equality and political independence. Modern age needs a careful and diligent cultivation not only of worldly prosperity and materialistic success, but also a moral and spiritual personality empowered with a sound mind.

The great challenge before the leaders of the modern world is to create a grand all-inclusive vision of life on the earth. Religion of Vivekananda is significant in this context since it holds that Truth is One and that all religions lead to the same goal. It emphasizes that man in his true nature is divine and that the purpose of life is to discover one's divine nature and to experience divinity here and now. It recognises that unity in variety is the law of nature. The recognition of the variation of human nature requires a well-balanced development of a religion that will accept human beings as they are. The essence of Vivekananda's message was 'Universal Religion', the unitive vision of humanity. People of any faith as well as people without any fixed beliefs can benefit from its broad teachings.

NOTES

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31. *Ibid.*, *Is this Peace?* (Bombay: Hind Kitabs Publishers, 1950) 24.

VIVEKANANDA'S INTERPREATION OF RELIGION

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CHAPTER 3

VIVEKANANDA'S INTERPRETATION OF RELIGION

According to Vivekananda, there are two modern theories of the origin of religion, the spirit theory of religion and the evolution of the idea of the Infinite. Herbert Spencer's spirit theory specifies that it originates in the worship of ancestors combined with the belief in ghost caused by dream experiences. The other one maintains that it originates in the personification of the powers of nature. These two modern theories get reconciled in his new view of religion.

Every religion comprises three parts such as Philosophy, Mythology and Ritualism. The philosophical part contains abstract basic principles, theoretical knowledge of the means as well as the end of life. It provides a solid intellectual foundation for the religious belief and the resulting mental peace and satisfaction. Religion without philosophy becomes superstition; philosophy without religion becomes atheism. In India, the relationship between philosophy and religion is very intimate and coherent. Here the word 'darshana' means vision of truth, that is the realization of Reality, and nobody is expected to take the role of a philosopher unless he has an inner and intuitive experience of the Reality. Our ancient thinkers were the seers of truth. One cannot be deeply religious

without being philosophical in nature. The religious man tries to see the hidden reality in the universe face to face.

Mythology consists of legends relating to the moral and spiritual adventures of men. Abstract philosophical ideas become concrete and clear by elucidating it through the lives of men. The Mahabharata, the Ramayana and the Puranas are guidebooks of spiritual living. They set forth ideal examples of right conduct, compassion and truth.

Ritualism deals with the practical aspect of life. It contains the rules for the performance of rites, sacrifices and ceremonies in connection with the various occasions such as birth, marriage, death etc. It is also a way for producing a source of fellow feeling among the members. Hospitals, orphanages, destitute homes are the direct result of this fellow feeling. The temples, churches, mosques etc. are places of common worship and have a higher purpose of disciplining and cleansing the human mind.

Human beings are different from one another. They differ in their intellectual and physical complexion. Differentiation of thoughts is the cause for the multiplication of religious sects. In the words of Vivekananda: "If we all thought alike, we would be like Egyptian mummies in a museum looking vacantly at one another's faces - no more than that! Whirls and eddies occur only in a rushing, living stream. There are no whirlpools in stagnant, dead

water. When religions are dead, there will be no more sects; it will be the perfect peace and harmony of the grave.... Variation is the sign of life, and it must be there."¹ Though there are differences in doctrines, mythologies and rituals; there is unity in the background. To him, "unity in variety is the plan of creation."²

Vivekananda describes religion as a fundamental element in human constitution. There is an innate or inborn urge within man for the Eternal, for the Infinite. It indicates that religion is a necessary aspect of life. There is an element of inevitability in religion that cannot be given up. The effort to give up religion will itself become a religion, which proves its necessity. The fulfilment of this urge is the true purpose of religion. Man, being finite and infinite at the same time, is eager to grasp the nature of Infinite as it is considered as the highest goal in life. Religion is such an endeavour on the part of finite being to transcend not only the limitations of the senses but also the limitations of pure reason and to realize the Infinite Truth. Vivekananda declares: "Religion is realization; not talk, nor doctrine, nor theories, however beautiful they may be. It is being and becoming, not hearing or acknowledging; it is the whole soul becoming changed into what it believes. That is religion."³ Religion is essentially a practical discipline to attain physical, mental, moral and spiritual development of man. It is, therefore, called Practical Vedānta or Neo-Vedānta.

3.1. Neo - Vedānta : A New Approach to Vedānta

The 'word' Vedānta literally means, ' the end of the Vedas', the concluding portions of the revealed Vedic literature. It denotes the Upanishads and their teachings. The first systematic work on Vedānta is Bādarāyaṇa's Brahma-Sūtrās, which are also known as the Vedānta-Sūtrās. These Brahma-Sūtrās are differently interpreted by different eminent teachers like Śāṅkara, Rāmānuja, and Madhva, the respective founders of the three main schools of Vedānta: the Advaita, the Viśiṣṭādvaita and Dvaita. These systems of thought are highly metaphysical in nature and remains ever oriented towards the realization of liberation. They describe the nature of the world as either phenomenal or illusory, and therefore, it is not a suitable place for the spiritual life of man.

Neo-Vedānta is a sort of harmonious combination of the three main schools of thought in Vedānta known as Dvaita, Viśiṣṭādvaita and Advaita, which represent merely the three successive stages in man's progress towards the realization of Ultimate Reality. The first stage does not contradict the earlier stages, but rather complements and completes them. As Vivekananda puts it: " One cannot exist without the other; one is the fulfillment of the other; one is the building, the other is the top; the one the

root, the other the fruit, and so on." ⁴ The difference between them is only in manifestation. Dvaita expresses lower form of truth than the Viśiṣṭādvaita, which in turn finds higher expression in Advaita. Advaita is the last word in spiritual experience, which is something to be experienced in Samādhi. In the words of Vivekananda: " Whether we call it Vedāntism or any ism, the truth is that Advaitism is the last word of religion and thought and the only position from which one can look up on all religions and sects with love. I believe it is the religion of the future enlightened humanity."⁵ It is Truth it self, the assimilation of all philosophy. He describes it as the "the crest-jewel of all spiritual thought." ⁶ This progressive evolution of the idea of Ultimate Truth is considered as the discovery. Neo-Vedānta embraces doctrines of dualism of Dvaita, qualified non-dualism of Viśiṣṭādvaita, non-dualism of Advaita, and every form of religious faiths and philosophies of life. It is the reawakening of the Truth of traditional Vedānta into a new form of all-embracing concrete monism. It is like a mighty banyan tree, extending its far-reaching branches and covering with its innumerable leaves. It comprehends metaphysics, logics, ethics, social philosophy, economics, politics and aesthetic values. It is neither mere metaphysics nor a mere system of thought, but a practical way to realize the supreme goal in life. It is the combination of spirituality with that of sociality, which characterizes the concept of man. Neo-Vedāntins conceive the world as both real and

spiritual. They believe that in Vedānta the word 'Mithyā' has been used in a special sense. It means that which has no permanent value, that which is changing and varying, and that which is transitory and temporary. They provide new meaning and purpose to life by making life in this world as an aspect of the process of spiritual growth. They have a positive attitude to the world and it reaches its summit in the philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi. They reject creedal and sectarian forms of religion along with their myths, rituals, dogmas and sectarianism of any kind. They are mainly concerned with the reconstruction of religious attitudes and values along the humanistic lines.

3.2. Metaphysics

Vivekananda derives his metaphysics from the Upanishads and the classical non-dualistic system of Advaita tradition. He interprets the metaphysical concepts in order to make them intelligible to modern men. We find that it is evident in his interpretation of the concepts of the Ultimate Reality or Brahman, world, man, karma, rebirth, suffering, ignorance, liberation and so on. He has tried to show that these doctrines are not simply based on faith or scriptural revelation and are not merely products of intellectual speculation, but they are fully supported by logic and reason. Philosophy of his religion is not an abstract discipline remote from man's

empirical and transcendental life. It is something living and concrete experience. It is the practical application of the Ultimate Truth of Advaita Vedānta as a solution to all the problems in human life.

In the Upanishads and Vedānta the Ultimate Truth is described as the One Reality, which is without a second, 'Ekamevadvitīyam'.⁷ It is the sole non-dual Reality by knowing which everything else can be known. It is identified with Brahman or Atman or Spirit. The quintessence of Advaita vedānta can be expressed in a statement, 'Brahman is real, the world is illusory, and the Jiva is non-different from Brahman'. "This is the cornerstone of the Vedanta philosophy, the Alpha and the Omega,"⁸ says Vivekananda. Sankara describes Brahman as the cause from which precedes the origin, subsistence and dissolution of the world, which is extended in names and forms. It has two aspects: the transcendental and the immanent. From the transcendental aspect, it is Saccidānanda. Sat, cit and ananda are not the attributes of Brahman, but its very essence. The very concept of Brahman implies Existence, Consciousness and Bliss. According to Taittiriya Upanishad, it is Satyam, Jñānam and Ānantam. It is Real, it is Knowledge, and it is Infinite. It is formless, attribute less, impersonal and indescribable (Nirguṇa Brahman). It is free from homogenous (Sajātīya), heterogeneous (Vijātīya) and internal (Swaājātīya) differences and distinctions and is absolutely non-empirical. The words are incapable to

impart the knowledge of Brahman. The famous Upanishadic passage 'not this, not this' ('neti neti') indicates the truth that it is beyond the reach of empirical thought. But it does not mean that it does not exist. Brahman is not non-existence. It can be known indirectly and realized directly through spiritual experience. It is Absolute or Brahman that manifests itself in the form of God. Therefore, it is not contradictory to the personalistic conception of God. From the practical standpoint, Reality is immanent and is called God or Īśvara, the benevolent, omnipotent and omniscient. (Saguṇa Brahman). God is the only one truth that forms the basis of all creation, and therefore, an aspect of God. The idea of creation has validity only from the practical point of view. In the state of realization, the distinction between the creator and the created world would not exist, but for all practical purposes, creation has to be conceived as real.

According to Vivekananda, Ultimate Reality is both personal and impersonal. It has forms and is also formless. (Sakāra and Nirākāra). Following Ramakrishna, he combines both qualified and quality less (Saguṇa and Nirguṇa) forms of Brahman. For individual, God is personal, the essential unity and as such is the all-pervasive immanent reality of everything that exist in the universe. He is everywhere at the same time, far and near, in past, present and future. The consciousness of a separate ego is the barrier that keeps one at a distance from the highest notion of

realization. He considers the concept of the personal God as the characteristic of the religion of the common masses. The belief in an all-powerful personal God is necessary for the spiritual aspirant, at least, at the initial stages. To him God is immanent in the world as well as transcendent to it. For enlightened ones, it is Impersonal, the Absolute. The illumined soul realizes the presence of God while he is absorbed in meditation, attaining oneness with the impersonal Reality. His experience is mystical in nature and cannot be fully described in rational language. When he comes back to the ordinary level of consciousness, he sees this universe as a manifestation of that Reality. Here, the universe of plurality extinguishes since he attains oneness with Brahman.

3.3. Epistemology

Man, by his nature, is a seeker of knowledge. He acquires knowledge of the objects and various relations between them in the form of causes and effects. These causes and effects are known as the laws or principles of science. The human mind consists of sense organs, manas, intellect or buddhi, cit, and ahamkara. When the cit comes into contact with the external object by means of the sense organs, there is vibration, which is called the manas. The reaction to this vibration is called intellect or Buddhi, which along with the ahamkāra is carried to the Witness-Self to form a

whole. This Witness-Self is present in the knower and the knowable things and knowledge is possible only with the unity of both. The very moment the subject and the object unite, we see the objects. According to him, "The external instruments and the organs catch the impressions and convey them to the mind, and the mind to the intellect, and the intellect reflects them as on a mirror, and back of it is the Soul that looks on them and gives His orders and His direction." ⁹ Vivekananda compares cit to a lake and thought to a wave. Thought wave does not vanish but becomes finer and appears at some other time. Memory is thus the calling back of a finer thought. Man by his power of memory recollects various impressions and synthesizes them. But he cannot imagine or reason beyond sense perception. Since knowledge is limited to the direct perception of certain subjective reactions, external world always remains as unknown and unknowable. The external world is only a suggestion, or the occasion that stimulates one to study one's mind. If knowledge means knowing by the witness-Self of a reaction, then truth means the approximate apprehension of object. The question of truth in knowledge resolves itself into one of how great is the extent of one's apprehension of the object. The nature of the truth materially considered is only relative, and it depends on various adjuncts. If it is so, a judgment is the outcome of one's limited point of view or point of vision. From the limited plane of human existence, the nature of truth, knowledge, and God

are relative. He does not admit a sharp distinction between truth and error for he declares that even in apparent perception, there is some perception of truth. What is true on the more general plane of being must be equally true on the more limited plane of human existence. It is evident in his own words, "we must learn that the same thing can be viewed from a hundred different stand points and yet be the same thing." ¹⁰ All kinds of empirical knowledge have its own relative validity.

Like Sankara, Vivekananda accepts Brahman or the Absolute as the highest and the only non-dual Reality. It requires neither means nor any proof, since it is self-illuminated and self-proved. It is the knowledge, knower, and the known. The distinctions of the process of knowledge do not apply in the case of Brahman knowledge. The so-called means of knowledge do not give knowledge, but only remove the ignorance based on the distinction of subject and object. Highest Knowledge is an enquiry into the mystery of the Ultimate Reality, which is beyond the limitations of the senses, the mind, and the intellect. It is self-valid because it is the immediate witness of reality to itself in which the knower and the known ultimately coincides into One Reality. In the field of knowledge, he points out the inadequacy of reason and considers super conscious experience to be the only means. The trans-empirical knowledge is the outcome of this super

conscious experience, which never contradicts reason. But it fulfills the task of reason and maintains harmony with it.

3.4. The Nature of the Absolute

The light of reason cannot demonstrate the existence of the Absolute. Vivekananda believes in the incapacity of reason to know the nature of the Absolute. He argues as follows: "The field of reason . . . is narrow and limited. There is a little circle within which human reason must move. It cannot go beyond."¹¹ It indicates that the Reality or the Absolute is beyond the domain of reason. The knowledge of God and Soul is not the result of reasoning, but through something that transcends ordinary level of reason. There are three planes in which the human mind works: unconscious, conscious and super-conscious. In the unconscious plane, work is not accompanied with the feeling of egoism, whereas in the case of conscious level, it is followed with the feeling of egoism. The human mind has the power to control the activities of the unconscious plane by leading it to the plane of consciousness. It has also the power to transcend this conscious plane. This higher state is unaccompanied by the feeling of egoism. It is called the super-conscious experience. Direct perception or prathyaksa is the only proof of the existence of the Absolute or Brahman. In fact, a perfect saint or prophet is one who has experienced that essential

unity which has the value of the Absolute. His knowledge is more in the form of direct vision or immediate experience, which transcends the realm of the ordinary ego consciousness and world-consciousness. His experience is in a non-conceptual order and therefore cannot communicate or convey in ordinary language. The Bṛhadāraṇyaka upanishad describes the Brahman experience as follows: "He is inconceivable, for he cannot be conceived, unchangeable, for He is not changed, untouched, for nothing touches Him."¹² Following the teaching of the Upanishads, Vivekananda speaks of Brahman as the Infinite, the unique, the free and the all-pure. In his own words: "He is the eternal, eternally pure, eternally awake, the almighty, the all-knowing, the all-merciful, the omnipresent, the formless, the part less."¹³ The famous triad Sat-Cit-Ananda is considered to be the least defective of the positive definitions of the Absolute. The fact that it is beyond time, space and causation leads him to deny in Brahman that mode of being which is under 'desa-kala-nimitta', that is to say, the space-time - causation principle. The Māṇḍūkya upanishad describes the Brahman experience as an experience without any awareness of the external world. The ordinary man is always identified with his body and attracted by sensible things that he cannot easily transcend them so as to experience the highest notion of the Absolute. Therefore Vivekananda argues as follows: " . . . so long as he

identifies himself with his body, he cannot see God."¹⁴ His conception of personal God is different from the personal God of theism.

3.4.1. The Nature of Personal-Impersonal God

According to Vivekananda, the idea of personal God in theism is a very convenient, natural, commonsense explanation of the universe. But it is not a true scientific generalization. First of all, the acceptance of a Personal God as the all-knowing, all merciful, all good and all just is not consistent with the problem of good and evil in human experience. Secondly, the superstitions and tyranny in the name of religion lead him to the conclusion that such a God cannot be true. He finds solution to all the problems of human existence in the idea of the Absolute, which is the unifying ground of everything in the universe. To elucidate this, he employs the analogy of a geometrical circle. "The nearer we are to the centre of a circle, the nearer we are to the common ground in which all the radii meet; and the farther we are from the centre, the more divergent is our radial line from the others."¹⁵ The centre where all the radii of existence meet is inside, that is in the innermost core of the human soul, which is the centre of the whole universe. Human life is worthless if man ceases to push forward in his inquiry into that which is beyond and behind the material world. It is clear when he states: "If man rest content with the present and gives up all

search into the beyond, mankind will have to go back to the animal plane again." ¹⁶ It is this search into the beyond that differentiates man from the animals.

For Vivekananda, religion is the inquiry into the beyond, the Impersonal God, which provides a secure foundation for the personal God of religion. He states, "the personal God is the highest reading that can be attained to, of that impersonal, by the human intellect." ¹⁷ His reconciliation of the Personal and Impersonal God is based on the argument that "the Personal God is that very Impersonal God." ¹⁸ Hence there is no contradiction between the God of the heart and the God of reason. As a rationalist, he finds in pure advaita the God of a scientific and rationalistic religion. Like Śaṅkara, he accepts Brahman as nirguṇa and nirākāra in its eternal aspect as the Absolute. But unlike Śaṅkara, he does not accept God (Īśvara), the aspect of Brahman with forms and with attributes, as either illusory or as a reality of a lower order. The Impersonal Absolute in its sportive aspect when involved in the process of creation, preservation and destruction, he calls the Personal God. There is no fundamental difference between the Impersonal Absolute and the Personal God (Nirākāra and Sakāra). The idea of Personal God is only the manifestation of the Impersonal Absolute. One is not more real than the other. Rather it indicates that they are infinite dimensions to the manifestation of Reality. As a result

of this, there may be variety of approaches to Reality. In his own words "you and I, as representing ideas, have grown, these gods also, as representing ideas, have grown. This may seem somewhat curious to you - that God can grow. He cannot. He is unchangeable . . . But man's idea of God are constantly changing and expanding." ¹⁹ He believes in the evolution of the idea of God from the primitive and anthropomorphic level to the higher Impersonal Absolute. The Personal God is called the Impersonal Absolute when viewed without any reference to cosmos or creation of the world.

3.5. The World as the manifestation of God

Advaita Vedānta maintains that the exact cause of creation of the world is unknown in the sense that human intellect and understanding cannot comprehend the deep mystery of the meaning. Therefore, it is better to accept the creation of the world as it is. In it Śāṅkara describes the nature of the world as merely an illusory appearance and hence do not exist in reality. Both Brahman and the world, both unity and diversity cannot be equally real. Judged by the test of reality the world of experience reveals its phenomenal character. The real is what is free from self-contradictions. The world is full of contradictions, so it is not real. Brahman alone is free from self -contradictions, so Brahman alone is real. He is interpreted as the

unmodified ground (adhiṣṭhāna) of the appearance (vivarta). The world is not a modification of Brahman but an unreal appearance that is mistaken for it. It is neither sat nor asat in an absolute sense. Since it exists for a time it is sat, but since it does not exist for all times it is asat. The things of the world are of an order intermediate between Absolute Reality of Brahman and the complete non-existing entities. The snake, which appears where there is only a rope, is neither existent nor non-existent. When we examine the object we find that it is only a rope and not a snake. But it is not utterly non-existent, because it lasts so long as the illusion lasts. In the same manner the self-existent character of the world persists so long as the right knowledge of Brahman as the only reality does not arise.

According to Vivekananda, Advaita Vedānta does not in reality denounce the sense-world and all that is finite as absolutely unreal. But it merely emphasizes that the world cannot have any fixed or absolute existence of its own. He cites the opening verse of Īśa upanishad which begins with a description of secret depths of the Truth: 'Īśavāsyam idam sarvam, Yat kiṁca jagatyām jagat'.²⁰ The meaning is that the whole universe with all its changing phenomena is filled with the spirit of God. What neo-vedānta seeks to teach is the deification of the world- giving up the world as it appears to the senses - and to know what it really is? Vivekananda declares that the whole world is God itself, which signifies the idea of

spiritual harmony of all existence. The whole universe - heavens, planets, gods, living and non-living objects - is nothing but the expression of the Almighty God. It is clearly evident when he asserts: "The sum total of this whole universe is God himself. Is God then matter? No, certainly not, for matter is that God perceived by the five senses; that God as perceived through the intellect is mind; and when the spirit sees, He is seen as spirit. He is not matter, but whatever is real in matter is He." ²¹ All things are the different manifestations of the same Reality. The same divine nature is present in the lowest worms as well as in the highest beings. The difference is only in manifestation. The world changes at every moment. But there is something that persists which our reason cannot grasp and yet is a fact. God is the immanent innermost principle underlying the world of manifestations. Vivekananda describes Him as follows: "He is the Great Poet, the Ancient Poet; the whole universe is His poem, coming in verses and rhymes and rhythms, written in infinite bliss." ²² If every thing is God, then the world is not outside of God. According to him, God is both the material and efficient cause of this world.

He emphasizes the fact that the world is not a creation. It is only a projection or manifestation of that which already existed, the Absolute. Vivekananda rejects the idea of creating something out of nothing for it is unreasonable to the human mind. He neither admits the independent

existence of the effect (world) from its cause (God), nor difference from that. He argues as follows: "The effect is the cause manifested. There is no essential difference between the effect and the cause."²³ The world cannot be created out of nothing because something cannot come out of nothing. The effect is essentially nothing but the limited manifestation of cause for a time. It is the Absolute or Brahman manifested. According to Vivekananda, the world and God are not separate but are one and the same from the ultimate point of view. Such a notion of causality explains everything from within and not from without. In the light of evolution of the universe, he states that the whole of creation from inorganic to organic, from organic to human, is nothing but the unfolding of the Infinite Energy that is Brahman. To quote his own words: "All the possibilities of a future tree are in the seed; and the possibilities of a future man are in the little baby; all the possibilities of future life is in the germ."²⁴ Creation means coming out from its cause, from the subtle to the grosser, and destruction means again the merging of effect with its cause. According to the law of the conservation of energy, the total of the energy will always remain the same. Only its manifestations are varying from form to form. Here we find that he reconciles both the Vedantic view of Brahma Vivartavāda and Brahma Parināmavāda in his theory of creation. The cyclic process of evolution and involution has its beginning and end in the Cosmic Mind or the

Absolute, which is psychologically called Mahat. This Mahat vibrates and differentiates itself into Akāśa and Prāṇa. "Prāṇa acting on Akāśa is creating or projecting the universe." ²⁵ Both the matter and the force are the outcome of Akāśa and Prāṇa. At the time of involution, everything is resolved back through subtle forms into the original Akāśa and Prāṇa. To illustrate this he uses the beautiful simile in the Vedas: "That eternal One breathes out this universe and breathes it in." ²⁶ The whole universe is going on in a circle of evolution and dissolution in this fashion, but at the same time it does not affect the Brahman. This process of creation is true only in relation to the phenomenal world.

According to Vivekananda, the nature of the phenomenal world is an indefinable combination of finite and infinite, existence and non-existence, good and evil, life and death, happiness and misery at the same time. The problem of the creation of this world is referred to Cosmic Intelligence, not to an individual consciousness. The Sruti says that Brahman without any plan, in a child-like manner, desired, 'May I become many', and so created the world. He endowed with the divine power of self-expression, spontaneously, freely and sportively created the world. Creation of the world is the outcome of entirely spontaneous desire of God to go forth into the forms of finitude. Vivekananda treats creation of the world as the Divine Sport or Play of Brahman, which is already absolute and perfect, free from

any purpose or aim in creating the world. He further claims that it is futile to ask how, when and why the ever-free Infinite Brahman comes into contact with Māyā and appears into the world of manifestations. Since such problems exceed the limits of our mind, it is impossible for one to know the reason behind this paradox. It is the very condition of relative knowledge that no one can go beyond the limits of time, space and causation. Therefore, for any finite mind, the problem of creation of the world ever remains as a mystery. It is the nature of phenomenal world that it exists only in relation to Maya, which gives names and forms to what, is basically Brahman.

3.6. The Nature of Māyā and its Creation

The word 'Māyā' is used in many times in the Vedas and the Upanisads. In the Rig Veda, the God 'Indra assumes many forms through mysterious powers of creating illusion'²⁷ (Māyā). Again, we find 'Through Māyā, Mitra and Varuna sent rain and guard their law'.²⁸ In the Atharva Veda, it is used in the sense that the sun and the moon follow one another by Māyā. In the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad, it is said that the individual self is bound by Māyā and that Māyā is the source of all that appears. In the Bhagavad gītā, it is used either in the sense of mysterious power of the Supreme Lord or the worldly effects of his power or the ignorance of the individual.

According to Sankara's Advaita Vedānta, Māyā, Avidyā, Adhyāsa and Vivarta are synonymous and interchangeable terms. It is the inherent power of Brahman, yet it is unaffected by it like a magician unaffected by His magic. The status of Māyā is indescribable and indefinable as it is neither real nor unreal nor both at the same time. It is a theory for the explanation of the world, which is ultimately unreal. As it is the causal potentiality, it is also called Avyakta or Unmanifested. It is because of this power that the indeterminate Brahman becomes determinate and is called the creator of the world. Brahman due to Māyā is Īśvara, the Lord of the individual selves and the creator of the world. The manifold that is manifested by Him is due to His own creative will. Māyā as Ajñāna or ignorance is said to have two powers, namely, Avarana or the power of concealment and Vikṣēpa or the power of projection. This explains how Brahman who is really one and indivisible appears as the multiple world. The power of concealment conceals the real nature of Brahman, which is Existence-Consciousness-Bliss, and the power of projection gives rise to the illusion of innumerable things of names and forms. Ignorance with its twin powers of concealment and projection is like rope-snake illusion. The rope is concealed as rope due to the concealing power of ignorance and it give rise to the illusion of snake due to the power of projection. According to Śāṅkara, this rope-snake illusion cannot have any separate and independent existence from its

underlying substratum that is rope, even for a moment. Similarly, the world has also no separate and independent existence from its underlying reality, that is Brahman, which is the Real of the reals.

Vivekananda derives his doctrine of Māyā from Advaita Vedānta, but it is not exactly similar to that of Śāṅkara. Like Śāṅkara, Vivekananda also admits that the Māyā is the power of the creator with the help of which One appears as many, Infinite as finite, Consciousness as matter in infinite ways. But he does not accept Śāṅkara's position that Māyā is the power that creates illusion, which has the capacity of deluding man into believing that the world is real. According to Vivekananda, Māyā is not a theory or a hypothesis for the explanation of the world of multiplicity. It is a simple description of facts about the nature of the world of what we are and what we see around us. It indicates the transitory and contradictory nature of our experiences of the world, as they exist. It is the common property of everything in the universe and is everywhere. He asserts as follows: "We are born in this Māyā, we live in it, we think in it, we dream in it. We are philosophers in it, we are spiritual men in it, nay, we are devils in this Māyā, and we are gods in this Māyā. Stretch your ideas as far as you can make them higher and higher, call them infinite or by any name you please, even these ideas are with in this Māyā. It cannot be other wise, and the whole of human knowledge is a generalization of this Māyā trying to know it, as it

appears to be. This is the work of Nama-Rupa—name and form.”²⁹ Māyā is the power to create the appearance of the world of duality, which exists only in relation to the mind, and has no real existence. But it is not false or unreal at the same time. Māyā is indistinguishable from Brahman just as the burning power of fire is from the fire itself. If everything is Brahman, the world with its forms of space, time and causation cannot be an illusion.

Vivekananda elucidates the nature of Māyā with the help of the analogy of ocean and waves. The waves are not separate from the ocean. They are the same as the ocean, yet they are different. But when waves subside, the forms also vanish in a moment. This does not mean that forms of the waves are illusory. So long as the waves exist, the forms are there, and one is limited to perceive them. Brahman is the all-pervading life principle of which all life in this world is but a different manifestation.

The concept of Māyā of Vivekananda is in conformity with the etymological meaning of the term that comes from the root ‘ma’ which means to measure. That which limits some thing is Māyā, which signifies the veiling characteristic of it. It only indicates that it is a lower order of reality. The object as it appears to us gives only a partial picture of the actual object, and its other aspects are hidden. That is why each and every statement of fact is Māyā, a measured expression of the immeasurable. It is Māyā or

ignorance that deludes the reality and compels us to see what really it is not. It also denotes that the world is a mixture of good and evil, of life and death, of reality and appearance, of existence and non-existence. Māyā is the expression of duality, limitation and changeability. We experience the world with full of startling contradictions hence it cannot be denied merely as an illusion. The world is empirically and relatively real so long as one experiences its diversities through ignorance. It is not unreal, but different limited manifestations of Brahman. The question of the unreality of the world comes only when it is viewed separate and independent from Brahman. The world is real, but not as real as Brahman, which cannot be negated at any time. The goal of religion is therefore to sustain perfect calmness upon all the panorama of the world by realizing its true nature.

The nature of the world is neither good nor bad. Likewise, human life is good or evil according to the state of mind in which we perceive it. The secret is that good and bad is not two separate existences. They are merely the two sides of the same thing. The same thing, which is appearing good in one, may appear bad in another. Vivekananda states that this world does not need any help at all. It is perfect to meet its end. Doing well to others and the world is only the way to practice internal purity in life. Through it, the giver or the helper gets an opportunity to exercise his inherent power and mercy in the world.

3.7. Philosopher of Synthesis and Reconciliation

As a neo-vedāntin, Vivekananda did not like to differentiate the sacred life from the secular affairs. His multifaceted powerful personality cannot be measured by any rigid classification. For him, religion is the search for the unity and identity behind the multiplicity of the universe. It is the effort to realize harmony in all spheres of life. Sister Nivedita in her introduction to *The Complete works of Swami Vivekananda* explains this harmony of life as follows: "If the many and the One be indeed the same Reality, then it is not all modes of worship alone, but equally all modes of work, all modes of struggle, all modes of creation, which are paths of realization. No distinction, henceforth, between sacred and secular. To labour is to pray. To conquer is to renounce. Life is itself religion."³⁰ Each religion is true and has a soul of its own. The soul of one religion may differ from the soul of another religion. But they are not contradictory; they are supplementary. His main aim of attending the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893 was to show that the apparent contradictions in different faiths were not real. The soul of each great religion is in a particular ideal. The particular religion will not vanish so long as it remains true to that ideal and has its value. Vivekananda argues vehemently that if one religion is true, then all others must be true. Otherwise is not possible. Religious harmony does not mean indifference. It is the toleration of other religions as

well as the acceptance of all other religions as true. The watchword of Vivekananda is 'acceptance' rather than 'tolerance'. His standpoint is clear when he says: "Our watchword, then, will be acceptance, and not exclusion. Not only toleration, for so-called toleration is often blasphemy, and I do not believe in it. I believe in acceptance. Why should I tolerate? Toleration means that I think that you are wrong and I am just allowing you to live. Is it not a blasphemy to think that you and I are allowing others to live? I accept all religions that were in the past, and worship with them all; I worship God with every one of them, in what ever form they worship Him." ³¹

3.7.1. Reconciliation of Religion and Science

According to Vivekananda, religion is a quest for truth in practice. The whole effort of religion is to realize the presence and silence of Truth by transcending the limitations of the senses and the reason. Religion is super-sensuous knowledge. But the foundation of it is science and hence there is scope for both the material and social advancement. There is no essential distinction between true science and true religion. The aim of all science is to find the truth, the One out of which every thing else can be manufactured. All truths flow from the same fountainhead, and when properly understood, must harmonize with one another. Religion is science in its incomplete and improper form. Science is religion in limitation for it eliminates the spirit

that gives value to nature. It is religion only when it becomes all comprehensive, universal and infinite in its outlook. Modern science has also proved that the world processes as the manifestation of One Primordial Energy in a balanced manner. The scientific pursuit of empirical truth is not antagonistic to the religious pursuit of metaphysical truth. Religion has to transcend the sphere of empirical truth to experience the non-empirical metaphysical truth. It is man's ceaseless struggle to rise above the bond of nature and to become free.

3.7.2. Reconciliation of Matter and Spirit

The purpose of religion is to realize the Self or Spirit in the region of the not self or matter. The Absolute or Brahman reflecting through the universe is nature. Vivekananda identifies spirit within nature with the Spirit within man. Everything that exists in the universe is fundamentally spiritual. Nature is thus alive with Spirit. Man, as a part of nature, is also spiritual. He personifies this spirit as the ruler of the universe, the God. The personal God is true as much as this material world is true, but no more. Both the mind and matter are the appearances of the same One Reality. They are merely the instruments of the Self or Spirit. Human mind is composed of the material called subtle matter, the Tanmātrās. The gross form of the subtle matter is called material world. Like matter, mind is also

changeable, destructible, limited, finite and relative. Therefore neither of them is ultimately real. Vivekananda emphasizes that both the views of realism and idealism are partial and hence true only up to an extent. Everything in nature grows from certain subtle form to its grosser form. There is, therefore, an inner unity in the world processes from matter to vegetable, through animals to man, mind and spirit. At the level of the relative experience, the duality of matter and mind cannot be ignored. Without Spirit, which is over and above matter, the problem of duality cannot be solved satisfactorily. When one realizes the ultimate spirit, he transcends to all such dualities and sees nothing but Brahman everywhere and in every thing. Though the spirit is dimly shining through the veil of ignorance, it is there, ever pure and ever free.

The experience of difference between man and other forms of sentient creation or between man and nature or even between man and God is only one of degree because oneness is the secret of everything. The existence of man becomes a reality only when we admit a harmonious relationship with the rest of the manifestations of the universe. Vivekananda declares that the might of the whole universe is within man. Man is more than the universe because he has the power to live independently in his own inexpressible infinity as well as in cosmic harmonies. He can be one with all cosmic existence by multiplying his

power of self-consciousness. He even becomes superior to all cosmic existence by entering into the world-transcending spiritual consciousness. The universe in its various forms is just a manifestation, an expression of God. Man is not an exception. This new dimension of religious experience that the whole universe is an integral part of one's own existence, maintains the harmonious relationship between man and universe or between man and God. Vivekananda defines the nature of man and God as follows: "Man is an infinite circle whose circumference is nowhere, but the centre is located in one spot; and God is an infinite circle whose circumference is nowhere, but whose centre is everywhere."³² The idea of God is a mere manifestation of the Absolute by the human mind. Man can become God if he increases infinitely his centre of self-consciousness and there by the God of heaven comes down to earth in the soul of man. Since the soul of real man is infinite and unchangeable, he achieves the power to control the whole of nature, internal and external.

3.7.3. Reconciliation of work and worship

Work and worship are not exclusive of each other. The essence of work is worship itself. He identifies the spirit of work with the spirit of worship. Here, work becomes a method of worshipping the world and everything in it as God. His religion is the outcome of the harmonious

combination of the two ideals of life, the ideal of renunciation and work. It is not mere renunciation, but the renunciation of the work as it appears to the senses. Work without renunciation becomes completely fruitless. It is not the work, but the spirit in which it is done that binds individual consciousness. Work with the spirit of renunciation leads to Self-realization. There is no distinction between sacred and secular, work and worship and life and religion. In the words of Romain Rolland: "No work is secular. All work is adoration and worship."³³ It implies that the whole of nature is worship of God. Doing well to others is a means for revealing one's own Self or Ātman. He insists to worship God in poor as a way for God-realization. Self-sacrifice is the first requisite in the performance of selfless service. The desireless service to the poor is considered as the best form of worship. Romain Rolland claims as follows: "to see Shiva represented in living men, and especially in the poor."³⁴ Religion is service to the poor and sacrifice even at the cost of one's own life for the benefit of others. The object of worship is man, the only existing God in the earth. Vivekananda says, "May I born again and again and suffer thousands of miseries, so that I may worship the only God that exist, the only God I believe in, the sum total of all souls - and above all, my God the wicked, my God the miserable, my God the poor of all races, of all species, is the special object of my worship."³⁵ This is the most practical form of all worship. This is practicality according

to him, and that the ideas and theories are impractical. It channelizes its power into a new dimension of social service by the process of transmuting the spiritual reality as a trait of social behaviour. It provides a spiritual background to the humanitarian ideals of compassion and charity by the service to the living God dwelling in the heart of all human beings.

3.7.4. Reconciliation of Religion and Moksha

In the field of religion Vivekananda considers moksha or liberation as the ultimate goal to be realized in the life of every individual. Freedom or liberation is not an end, which is to be achieved. It is not conceived as a quality belonging to the soul, it constitutes the very essence of the soul. A quality is something different from that to which it belongs. Freedom does not belong to the soul; the soul is freedom. In the words of Vivekananda: "The soul is one with freedom, and the soul is one with Existence, and the soul is one with knowledge. The Sat-chit-Ānanda - Existence - Knowledge - Bliss Absolute - is the nature, the birth right of the soul, and all the manifestations that we see are its expressions, dimly or brightly manifesting itself." ³⁶ The effort to realize this freedom underlies all forms of worship.

According to Vivekananda, religion and moksha are, indeed, synonymous. It is waking up from the delusion of accomplishment. It is an

essential possibility present in man always, and at no time in particular. It is evident in his assertion: "come up, O lions and shake off the delusion that you are sheep. You are souls immortal, spirits free, blest and eternal. You are not matter, you are not bodies. Matter is your servant, not you the servant of matter." ³⁷ The Soul or Ātman is always remains free and is immortal. It is never in bondage. The distinction between bondage and freedom is only apparent. The practice of religion itself can be a stepping-stone to moksha, the highest goal in life.

The bondage or samsara includes the conception of an after-life. The corollary to this after-life concept is the doctrine of karma, that is, that a man's place in this life is determined by his deeds in a former life and that his moral or immoral actions in this life will determine his status and character in future lives. Though the past actions set a limit to the exercise of our free will, yet within the range of the limited freedom allowed, there is no restriction. There is scope for growth and gradual perfection by the performance of meritorious actions in this present life. Therefore, it is not a fatalistic view of life. The doctrine is essentially optimistic since it encourages man to lead a good moral life. It also provides a rational explanation for the human inequalities in the world.

Moksha is Self-realization, which is impossible without self-purification of the mind. Self-purification requires self-discipline, and self-discipline is nothing but the practice of moral virtues such as kindness, sincerity, charity, justice, truthfulness, humility and chastity in life. Religion is that which purifies man's soul, which enables him to unite himself with his inner truth. Generally, we make a distinction between morality and religion, and considers the former as only a means to the realization of the latter. For Vivekananda, there is no such distinction. They are inseparably related to each other. Moral laws are the spiritual disciplines of life. Moral life is nothing but a righteous life. A righteous life, which is based on the principles of morality, leads to the self-realization.

The key to the solution of problems in life is the right discrimination of the means and the end of life. Vivekananda's religion ascertains the means and the end of life in view of what man really is. The progress of man depends on his idea of the knowledge of true Self and the process of its fulfillment. The practical applications of different spiritual disciplines of yoga lead one both to the development of individual and to the welfare of the world.

NOTES

1. Swami Vivekananda, Complete Works, Vol.II (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1992) 363-364.
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3. Ibid., Vol.II (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1992) 396.
4. Ibid., Vedanta and Indian life Vol. III, 234.
5. Ibid., Epistles, Vol.6, 415.
6. Ibid., Vol.III, 432.
7. Chāndogya Upaniṣad, 6.2.2.
8. T.M.P.Mahadevan, Swami Vivekananda and Indian Renaissance (Coimbatore: Sri Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya Teachers College, 1967) 52.
9. Swami Vivekananda, Complete Works, Vol.II (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1992) 425.
10. Ibid., 383.
11. Ibid., Vol.I (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1992) 181.
12. Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad, 4.5.15.
13. Swami Vivekananda, Complete Works, Vol.III (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1992) 123.
14. Ibid., Vol.VII, 36.
15. Ibid., Realisation, Vol.II, 157.

16. Ibid., Unity, The Goal Of Religion, Vol.3, 3.
17. Ibid., Reason and Religion, Vol.I (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1994) 377.
18. Ibid., 378.
19. Ibid., Vol.II (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1992) 107.
20. Isa Upanisad, 1.1.
21. Swami Vivekananda, Complete Works, Vol. I (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1994) 375.
22. Ibid., Vol.II (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1992) 149.
23. Ibid., 228.
24. Ibid., 227.
25. Ibid., Vol.I (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1994) 360.
26. Ibid., Vol II, (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1992) 427.
27. Rig Veda, VI.47.18.
28. Ibid., V.LXIII.37.
29. Swami Vivekananda, Complete Works, Vol.II (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1992) 112.
30. Sister Nivedita, Complete Works, Vol.I, Introduction by Swami Vivekananda, (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1994) XV.
31. Swami Vivekananda, Complete works, Vol.II (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1992) 373-374.

32. Ibid., 33.
33. Romain Rolland, *The Life of Vivekananda and The Universal Gospel* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1999) 120.
34. Ibid., 102.
35. Swami Vivekananda, *Thoughts of Power*, 20th Imp. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1998) 23.
36. Swami Vivekananda, *Complete Works*, Vol. II (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1992) 193-194.
37. I bid., Vol. I (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1994) 11.

YOGA-PATHWAYS TO SELF REALIZATION

N. Nirmala “ Vivekananda's concept of universal religion - an appraisal”
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CHAPTER 4

YOGA - PATHWAYS TO SELF- REALIZATION

The word 'yoga' is derived from the Sanskrit root 'yuj' which means to yoke or join. In the Upanishads and the Bhagavad-Gītā it is used in the sense of the union of the individual soul with the universal consciousness. Individual soul in its mundane imperfect condition is estranged from the universal consciousness. Human bondage is due to the separation, disunion, and estrangement of individual soul from the universal consciousness. Liberation means spiritual unification, the consciousness of the two in one, or yoga. The term 'yoga' is also used in the sense of practical method - physical and mental - for the attainment of spiritual realization. According to Patañjali, yoga does not mean union, but only the methods of concentration and active striving through disciplined practice for experiencing the Transcendent. For Patañjali, says Radhakrishnan, "yoga is a methodical effort to attain perfection, through the control of the different elements of human nature, physical and psychical."¹ Again it is "the control of thought-waves in the mind"² through meditation. For Vivekananda, every soul is potentially divine. Yoga is the systematic methodology for the unfoldment of this inner potential divinity within the consciousness. It is the harnessing of one's own inherent power for the experience of oneness of

existence. The path leading to the realization of the immortality of the soul is also the path of discipline and union. Hence, it is both Philosophy and Science. In his new sense of the word yoga, he embraces both these two meanings in a very comprehensive manner.

Yoga is not something different or divorced from religion. It is an adjunct to religion in India. It is the experimental part of religion, the ways and means to the qualified spiritual aspirants. The constant practice of yoga enables one to increase his power of concentration and to reach a higher level of consciousness through the transformation of the psychic organism by establishing mastery over the vagaries of mind. The illusion of the mind completely disappears immediately with the dawn of yogic consciousness and the soul or atman within the man experiences the state of universality, silence and equilibrium. While yoga succeeds in establishing a state of Self-realization or Samādhi, religion establishes the link between the lower and the Supreme Self. Thus we find that yoga and religion are supplementary in nature.

Traditional religion recommends the three paths of bhakti, jñāna and karma corresponding to the three elements - desire, action and cognition - in human being. The Bhagavad-Gītā prescribes three paths, namely, the Karma-Yoga, Bhakti-Yoga and Jñāna-Yoga. The most outstanding exponent of Raja-Yoga is Patañjali, the renowned author of Yoga- Sūtrās. The main

object of Patañjali is not metaphysical theorizing, but a practical motive of indicating how self-realization can be attained by disciplined activity. Vivekananda's exposition of the different paths of liberation is based on Upanishads, Bhagavad-Gītā and Yoga- Sūtrās. He laid equal emphasis to all these four kinds of yogas in his Concept of Universal Religion. For him each one of these four yogas is independent and self-sufficient that leads to the same goal of human freedom, freedom from all the bonds of relativity. To quote Vivekananda: "Each one of our Yogas is fitted to make man perfect even without the help of the others, because they have all the same goal in view. The Yogas of work, of wisdom, and of devotion are all capable of serving as direct and independent means for the attainment of Moksha." ³ These different methods of yoga bring about mental purification and intuitively penetrate into the inner super conscious planes through meditation and finally lead to samadhi. Though they are different, their essence is one and the same and is complementary to each other.

According to Vivekananda, human beings differ in their capacities due to the predominance of one or the other of the four elements of the human mind: philosophy, mysticism, emotion and action. The ideal of religion is Man-making, to become harmoniously balanced in all these four directions, which could be attained by the practice of different methods of yoga. In the words of Vivekananda: "This religion is attained by what we, in

India, call Yoga-union. To the worker, it is union between men and the whole of humanity; to the mystic, between his lower and Higher Self; to the lover, union between himself and the God of Love; and to the philosopher, it is union of all existence." ⁴ All these are different ways for the realization of the same goal.

Jñāna-Yoga is the path suitable for those who are intellectual and possess discriminatory knowledge. A man of reason is capable of discriminating Truth from untruth, Spirit from matter, Knowledge from ignorance and the Eternal from the ephemeral. Karma -Yoga is the path suitable for the men of action. As the disinterested action does not produce its effects, a man of action becomes free from bondage. Again Bhakti-Yoga is the path suitable for men who are emotional by their nature. They establish communion with God through their intense unselfish devotion and unconditional self-surrender to God. Raja-Yoga is the path suitable for the men who possess in them the power of concentration. They realize in themselves the supreme reality through various physical, mental and spiritual practices. Karma -Yoga and Raja- Yoga are nothing but the application of the will in the internal and external world, While the Jñāna-Yoga and Bhakti-Yoga are based on the intellect and emotion respectively. These yogas are really different aspects of Adhyātma yoga, that is, the realization of the Self. A harmonious balance of all these four directions can

be seen in the case of an ideal perfect man who is free from all doubts and misconceptions. Since the man is divine in nature, he is consciously or unconsciously struggling towards the goal of human life, the realization of the immortal nature of the soul in all walks of life. In the realm of spirituality, every one alone has to struggle and proceed further for self-realization. "None can teach you"; says Vivekananda, "none can make a spiritual man of you. You have to teach yourself; your growth must come from inside." ⁵ The renunciation of desire or attachment is the only way of getting freedom and it is possible through the practice of yoga.

4.1. Karma-Yoga - the Path of Action

The word 'Karma' is derived from the Sanskrit root 'kri' which means 'to do'. All action is Karma. It also means the effect of actions. In the Karma Yoga of Vivekananda, it is used in the sense of work. Any work, physical or mental, is called karma or action.

Constant work or action is the sign of life. It is essential till we attain self-realization. It promotes man's physical, mental as well as moral and spiritual well-being. Man always works with attachment to fame, money, power and heaven. Pursuit of unending attachment is the cause of all unhappiness. Work without attachment is the goal of life. A continuous practice of non-attachment in all walks of life enables man to rise above his

lower self, and to have a feeling of oneness with every thing in the universe. All the great men and the sages of the world became great by their work they performed. They lived in the world, but were unattached to the world. They did their work only to set an example in the society, so that others will follow them. Work or activity is also the foundation of the phenomenal universe. The earth is constantly spinning on its axis and rotating around the sun, and so the whole planetary system is in action without rest.

Karma-Yoga is the knowledge of the secret of work. The secret of work lies both in its means and its end. The means are the causes, which produce the effect. If the cause is exact and perfect, the effect automatically will be perfect. The realization of this ideal is the effect. Karma-yoga involves "work without motive" ⁶ and is unselfish. It is the end in itself. Karma-Yogi is one who knows the secret of work. He performs good works with the sense of duty for the welfare of mankind. By acquiring the secret of work, the ignorance, which creates dualism and multiplicity in him, is completely removed.

Each man has a particular duty to perform in his life. He has to do his duty (svadharma) in conformity with his nature and with little concern for the immediate fruits of his action. The duty of the householder is different from the duty of the sannyasin. But the spirit behind the work is one and the same for all. Therefore, Vivekananda boldly asserts: "Each is great in his

own place, but the duty of the one is not the duty of the other." ⁷ For him, duty for the sake of duty is equal to worship. Right performance of duties leads to the highest realization of the perfection of the soul.

Each man has to work for work's sake, not for the sake of anything else. Vivekananda insists: "work for work's sake" ⁸ without any kind of attachment and selfishness. Work for the sake of work is an end in itself. In the words of Vivekananda: "Any work that is done with any the least selfish motive, instead of making us free, forges one more chain for our feet. So the only way is to give up all the fruits of work, to be unattached to them." ⁹ All actions performed with the desire for its results and with a sense of ego will form what is called the ordinary actions (karma). On the contrary all actions performed desire less and ego less, indifferent to its results is 'Karma-Yoga'. Such an action becomes sacrifice or 'yajñā' in the language of the Gita. When action is performed in this higher sense, it has no binding power. This sacrifice of the lower mind to the higher mind is the supreme form of yajñā or the 'Cosmic Sacrifice' in the language of the Gita. Karma-Yogi works not for his own selfish motives or to gain anything, but for the sake of the world. He can make the world move according to his will, because his will- power is so great and pure that it is recognized as one with the Universal Cosmic Will. Thus through selfless work one's mind becomes

pure and he is able to identify himself with all. Even an atheist can work without attachment and be a Karma- Yogi.

For Vivekananda, work without attachment is a kind of worship and declares, "Work is worship."¹⁰ Selfless work possesses spiritual merit. It is worship itself because it is an act of complete self-sacrifice, an offering to God in man. The only way to find God is to see Him in His creation. Karma-Yoga is the religion that seeks to see God in the soul of the poor and refers to him as Daridranārāyana, the God of the poor. The act of worshipping Nārāyana in the poor is known as the doctrine of 'daridra-nārāyana-seva'. It implies that everyone should feed a hungry Nārāyana or a lame Nārāyana or a blind Nārāyana and offer him the same worship as he would to Shiva or Vishnu in the temple. Vivekananda emphatically exhorts to " see Shiva in the poor, in the weak, and in the diseased"¹¹ Karma-Yoga is the technique to transform any action, sacred or secular, big or small into true worship.

The ideal of Karma-Yoga is not the attainment of pleasure, but freedom through unselfish action. Through unselfish action man can rise above his lower self and can realize oneness with Brahman. According to Vivekananda, slave's action is one of attachment. It involves selfishness. If one allows selfish considerations to control his action, then he will become a slave of his desires. So he asserts to practice "work like a master and not as a slave; work incessantly, but do not do slave's work."¹² It is the assertion of

the sign of true love that is related with the spiritual nature of man, that is freedom.

The ideal of renunciation is a preliminary requisite for the practice of this spiritual discipline. Man cannot renounce action completely by thought, word and deed. But he can renounce attachment and the fruits regarding the action. It is not the action, but the spirit in which it is done that binds us. Self-realization is not a state of escape from the world; it is a state of perfection through selfless service of mankind. The true life of work is indeed a life of renunciation in practice.

Vivekananda does not recommend asceticism, the complete renunciation or withdrawal from the active life. For him, Karma-Yoga is the method of living in the world and practicing disinterested service. To quote his own words: "Do not fly away from the wheel of the world-machine, but stand inside it, and learn the secret of work. Through proper work done inside, it is also possible to come out."¹³ A true Karma-Yogi is a person who possesses unselfishness, love and equality for all. He should live in this world like a lotus leaf that grows in water but is never moistened by it. He should live in this world with his soul to God and his hands to work for the benefit of all mankind. Selfishness or attachment is the root cause of all kinds of sufferings in this world. Every selfish action is an obstacle in the path of self-realization.

Vivekananda advocates spiritual resurgence through Karma-Yoga, especially through the ideal of Nishkāmakarma in the spirit of the Bhagavad-Gītā. The central theme of Gītā is Karma-yoga, the proper performance of action without attachment. It is skill in action, "yogahkarmasu kausalam." ¹⁴ A true Karma-Yogi is a 'Sthita-prajña' according to Gītā. A Sthita-prajña is one who has risen above the pairs of opposites such as cold and heat, pleasure and pain, who has subdued his passions like attachment, fear and anger, who treats friend and foe alike, and who is unaffected by honour or dishonour. Vivekananda combines intense activity with eternal calmness, the calmness, which cannot be ruffled, the calmness, which is never disturbed, what ever happens. It is only when the mind is very calm and concentrated that the whole of its energy is spent in doing good work. The man who gives way to anger or hatred or any other passion cannot work. It is the calm, forgiving and well- balanced mind that does the greatest amount of work.

Vivekananda restates the message of Karma-Yoga as a method for binding the individuals together for the benefit of humanity. He recommends ceaseless work without attachment by realizing the fact that it is the key to the well being of the individual as well as the family. The same ideal is the very foundation of all collective and social life.

The task of this discipline is to bring harmony between the pairs of opposites such as life and death, pleasure and pain, and good and evil etc. Human life is neither good nor evil. Both good and evil action produces bondage. Evil exists in relation to good and it is not possible to separate one from the other. Freedom is a state beyond all relativity, good and evil. Therefore, it is above good and evil. In the words of Vivekananda: " Evil is the iron chain, good is the gold one; both are chains. Be free, and know once for all that there is no chain for you. Lay hold of the golden chain to loosen the hold of the iron one, then throw both away." ¹⁵ Equanimity and spiritual progress result only from selfless service. Dedicated selfless work leads to everlasting peace and happiness here and hereafter. The message of Karma-Yoga is universal for its principles can be applied to all without any discrimination.

Karma-Yoga enables everyone to share the fruits of his action with those who need it. Mutual give and take is essential for the maintenance of life. It is the most suitable yoga for the modern man for its principles can be applied to all work, whether secular or sacred. It is suitable for all those who work in different spheres of life. It has empirical as well as spiritual significance. Right action for the good of others leads to the purification of the mind; and when the mind is purified, it gradually reflects the higher knowledge, or wisdom. It leads ultimately to the attainment of complete

freedom from limitations, and the realization of God as one's own Self or Atman. Hence it is as useful as the Bhagavad-Gītā and Upanishads in the present era.

4.2. Bhakti-Yoga – the Path of Devotion

Bhakti-Yoga is the science of supreme love and devotion. It is a genuine search after the Lord; a search beginning, continuing and ending in love and devotion. It is the way of self-realization through ceaseless pure love to God in which the object of love or devotion is not the finite, but the Supreme Reality. For Vivekananda, love or devotion is a natural instinct, which is present in all human beings; but its manifestation is different in different cases. The union with God through intense love is the most natural path to spiritual realization, since purity and self-control come on the way when man begins to love God. It can be more easily practiced by all in every condition of life.

According to Vivekananda " Bhakti-Yoga is the path of systematic devotion for the attainment of union with the Absolute." ¹⁶ It is the loving attachment to God, a longing for God for its own sake. The development of the feeling of love creates great change in the individual and he sees nothing but God in everything.

The first stage of Bhakti-Yoga is that of external worship. In this stage, idols, images, Gods and Goddesses, prophet and God men are all objects of devotion and worship. Idol worship is the most popular form of external worship. Here Bhakti, which is used as an instrument of liberation, is really a lower form of worship. The feeling of total dependence on God and inseparability marks the higher form of worship and it is inseparable from the lower form of worship in the later stage.

The second stage consists of prayer and repetition of God's name, chanting religious hymns and singing songs of God's glory with devotion, patience and faith. The first and the second stages are only preparatory to the attainment of Parā-Bhakti. Vivekananda points out: "Prayers, ceremonials, and all other forms of worship are simply kindergartens of meditation." ¹⁷ In the third stage of silent meditation, there exists for the devotee nothing but God. The faithful practice provides inner strength and confidence to travel the spiritual path to its conclusion. In the fourth stage the devotee seeks to reduce ego and becomes almost one with the supreme. Devotion begins with the feeling of selfless love, but with constant practice it develops into the feeling of oneness, which ends in the universal love for all beings.

Devotion to one God is absolutely necessary for the beginner in the practice of religious devotion. God is both Personal and Impersonal. The

Personal God worshipped by the Bhakta is not different from the Absolute or Brahman. God is the highest manifestation of the Absolute by the human mind. He argues as follows: "Our minds are like vessels, and each of us tries to arrive at a realization of God. And God is like the water that fills the vessels of different shapes. In each vessel the vision of God takes a different form. Yet he is one; he is God in every case." ¹⁸

4.2.1. Pāra-Bhakti or Supreme Devotion

The ideal of religion of love is Parā-Bhakti, which is inexpressible in human language. It is the highest and the most unselfish manifestation of love in the world. Divine love transcends all kinds of bondages. It is motiveless. To quote Vivekananda "The Bhakta loves the Lord because He is lovable; there is no other motive originating or directing this divine emotion of the true devotee." ¹⁹ The devotee renounces all the finite, perishable, temporary and worldly attachments of wealth, wife, children etc. and surrenders himself voluntarily, unconditionally and completely unto God. He dedicates all the fruits of his actions to God and places all his responsibilities to God.

According to Vivekananda, divine love can be represented as a triangle and each of the angles corresponds to one of its inseparable characteristics. The first angle of the triangle of love is that love knows no

bargaining. It is love for love's sake and does not expect any reward from God in return for love. Prayer for health or wealth is not Bhakti. Real worship does not mean begging for something. It is longing of the soul to seek union with the Divine. True religion begins only when we stop begging. In the words of Vivekananda: "To worship God even for the sake of salvation or any other rewards equally degenerate. Love knows no reward. Love is always for love's sake."²⁰ Divine love is an end in itself.

The second angle of the triangle of love is that love knows no fear. To worship God from fear of punishment is merely an unrefined form of worship. Divine love conquers all fears, which derive out of selfishness. To quote Vivekananda: "Love knows no fear. It conquers all fear."²¹ The fear of God is the beginning of religion but the love of God is the end of religion. All fears, external or internal, rotate round the body. If man succeeds in acquiring detachment for his body, he will be completely free from all kinds of fear. Man cannot love so long as he subjects himself to fear.

The third angle of the triangle of love is that love knows no rival, for in it is embodied the highest ideal which is God. To quote Vivekananda: "The highest ideal of every man is called God. Ignorant or wise, Saint or sinner, man or woman, educated or uneducated, cultivated or uncultivated, to every human being the highest ideal is God."²² True love is universal, without any limits and bonds.

Renunciation is the stepping-stone to the practice of the parā-bhakti. It results from the unswerving intense devotion to God by controlling and channelizing emotions, passions and feelings in the human heart to a higher and higher direction until they attain the spiritual realization. The essence of this religion is to love and to be loved. It begins with the lower truth but ends with the higher truth that Love, the Lover, and the Beloved are one. Bhakta loves the whole universe by way of loving the Samashti - the universal abstract person. To quote Vivekananda: " God is the samashti, and this visible universe is God differentiated and made manifest. If we love this sum total, we love everything." ²³ Bhakta finds God in everyone, every life and every being. He feels the whole universe full of love. Everything is sacred because all things are His manifestations. The whole universe is the manifestation of the Infinite in the language of the finite, and ultimately attains the goal, that is, God-realization. Here we find that bhakti leads one from dualism to Oneness of Existence.

Parā-bhakti is the intense and supreme love to God, which is based on a clear understanding of the individual soul and its relation to God. It is the continuous and constant loving remembrance of God. Vivekananda elucidates different attitudes of the mind of bhaktas, with their different approaches to God. Such approaches are of five kinds: - (1) Shānta-Bhava (2) Dāsya-Bhava (3) Sakhya-Bhava (4) Vātsalya-Bhava (5) Madhura-

Bhava (God as Impersonal, as Master, as Friend, as Child, as Husband). These are the different human representations of the divine ideal of love.

Vivekananda describes the nature of perfect Bhakta as follows: " The perfected Bhakta no more goes to see God in temples and churches; he knows no place where he will not find Him. He finds Him in the temple as well as out of the temples, he finds Him in the saint's saintliness as well as in the wicked man's wickedness, because he has Him already seated in glory in his own heart as the one Almighty in extinguishable Light of Love, which is ever shining and eternally present." ²⁴ Bhakti-yoga is the quest of union through love, devotion and complete self-surrender to God.

4.3. Jñāna-yoga - the Path of Knowledge

Jñāna-Yoga is the science of wisdom or knowledge. It is based on the realization that bondage is due to the ignorance regarding the true nature of self. Since the ignorance overshadowed on the divine nature of man, he fails to distinguish the real from the unreal. This lack of discrimination is due to ignorance. Ignorance in respect of true nature of Self is the root cause of bondage. Knowledge of the Self is liberation or freedom. Jñāna-Yoga enables one to differentiate between one's ego and the true self by developing proper discrimination and right knowledge. The energy of the self is wasted through its bodily activities, through the senses and the motor

organs. It must be detached from them and concentrated in the direction of knowledge. It is very difficult to practice, since it requires perfect purity and self-control.

Renunciation or Vairāgya is the turning point in the practice of Jñāna-Yoga. The aim is to unfold the real nature of Self by the renunciation of selfishness and ego. In the Katha Upanisad it is stated: " Know the Self as the lord of the chariot and the body as, verily, the chariot, know the intellect as the charioteer and the mind as, verily, the reins." ²⁵ In other words, the Self is unbound and free, he is not the servant but the master; the senses, the mind and the organs of activity are all mere instruments of the body. Yogi should control his mind by incessant efforts in order to achieve realization.

The real nature of man is Spirit or Self, which can never be destroyed. Vivekananda describes: " This self, weapons cannot pierce, nor fire can burn, water cannot wet, nor air can dry up. Changeless, all-pervading, unmoving, immovable, eternal is this Self of man." ²⁶ Every soul is infinite and has enormous energy, which must be utilized for the purpose of knowledge, not for the enjoyment of senses. The goal of mankind is knowledge, not pleasure. All knowledge, secular and spiritual, is inherent in the individual soul. According to him, " All human knowledge is but a part of religion." ²⁷ The knowledge of Self will make one free from all doubts. By acquiring the secret of knowledge, the ignorance, which creates dualism and

multiplicity, is completely removed. The Gītā says: “As the fire which is kindled turns its fuel to ashes, O Arjuna, even so does the fire of wisdom turn to ashes all work.”²⁸ The offering of the ego in the fire of wisdom is the greatest form of sacrifice. The positive aspiration for knowledge is an essential condition of renunciation.

The word 'Jñāna' means both empirical and transcendental knowledge. When it is used in the transcendental sense, it becomes Ātman or Brahman knowledge, which transcends the categories of time, space and causation. Upanishads describe Brahman knowledge as that knowledge by knowing which everything else is known. Empirical knowledge is concerned with the world of the senses and it is limited by time, space and causation.

Jñāna-Yoga can be achieved either through the discipline of renunciation or through the meditation upon the true nature of the self. The nature of the self is all knowing; its knowledge does not depend upon the relation between the knower and the object of knowledge, but it remains unchanged even when all the objects of knowledge have ceased to exist. The Upanishad refers to the self as self-effulgent Sun. As the nature of the sun is to illumine itself as well as other objects, so the light of the self illumines its own nature as also the phenomenal world. The Real Self is neither the body nor the mind. Time, space and causation are in the mind. The Real Self is beyond time, space and causation; and therefore it must be Infinite.

Infinite cannot be two. It appears to be heterogeneous, but is really homogeneous. It is unchangeable and immovable. The apparent man is merely a reflection of the Real Man. He is limited by time, space and causation, and is, therefore, bound. To quote Vivekananda, "The Real Man, therefore, is one and infinite, the omnipresent Spirit. And the apparent man is only a limitation of that Real man."²⁹ The Real spirit or Soul is one who is not controlled by any one of the bondages. It appears to be bound but really it is free. In the words of Vivekananda, "Freedom, O Freedom! Freedom, O Freedom! " is the song of the soul."³⁰ It always shines in its own light unaffected by the pairs of opposites experienced by the apparent man, such as birth and death, growth and decay, strength and weakness, virtue and vice, knowledge and ignorance and pleasure and pain. The idea of God is within man. It is the God with in the Self that is impelling one to seek for Him, to realize Him. The search for some thing external is a mistake; it is due to delusion.

Nikhilananda describes Jñānayoga "as a form of spiritual discipline based mainly on philosophical discrimination between the real and the unreal, and the renunciation of the unreal."³¹ Jñāna-Yogi realizes the truth about the self that it is already free and perfect. He experiences Brahman and becomes one with Him. He also realizes that the gods and goddesses of different religions are the manifestations of Brahman. The

Bhagavad-Gītā describes the true nature of Jñāna-Yogi as follows: "He who abandons all desires and acts free from longing, without any sense of mineness or egotism, he attains to peace."³²

Human life is a journey towards self-realization. There are two states of realization: Jīvanmukti and the Vidhehamukti. Jīvanmukti is a state of embodied salvation. Jīvanmukta's present life is due to the past habits generated through the accumulated result of karma and is liberated due to the attainment of the discriminatory knowledge. He does work automatically for the welfare of humanity (lokasaṁgraha) without having any credit of doing the same. All his actions are uncontaminated by selfish desire, attachment and egoism and therefore, spontaneously good. Vivekananda's 'real man' is such a person who is different from 'the apparent man'. He describes: "The ideal man is he who, in the midst of the greatest silence and solitude, finds the intensest activity, and in the midst of the intensest activity finds the silence and solitude of the desert."³³ Vidhehamukti is a state of salvation after the dissolution of the body. Vidhehamukta is not reborn, but remains as Brahman.

4.4. Raja-Yoga - the Royal Path of Concentration

Raja yoga is the means for the attainment of concentration. It is the method to conquer the activities of the body and the mind. Human mind is

the cause of ego, attachment and bondage. But it is also the instrument to freedom. The particular mind is a fragment of the universal mind and it has the power of continuity of thought with the universal thoughts of the universal mind. There is no limit to the powers of the mind. It can be increased through the constant practice of concentration. The more concentrated it is, the more power is accumulated on one point. The powers of the mind, if properly guided and controlled reveal innermost secrets of every mind. In the words of Vivekananda "He who knows and controls his own mind knows the secret of every mind and has power over every mind."

³⁴ The main difference between man and man lies in the difference in the power of concentration of the mind. Raja-Yoga is the study of mind by mind itself. The object is internal, and therefore there is no distinction between the subject and the object. Raja-Yoga provides the means of controlling the internal states of the mind. The external world is only the gross form of the internal, or subtle. The control of the external world can be gained by the concentration of the powers of the mind. True success in life depends on the control over the thoughts and activities of the mind.

Raja -Yoga is based on the pre-supposition that our bondage is due to the distracting activities of the body and the mind. The purpose of Raja -Yoga is to stop the activities of the body and the mind through the practice of physical and mental disciplines. Patañjali, in his Yoga-Sūtra, laid the

foundation of Raja-Yoga. It is called Raja-Yoga, the king of all yogas because it is the surest and quickest path for the realization of truth. It is a practical and scientifically worked out method for the realization of freedom. This method includes certain yogic exercises of the psychophysical nature. It requires an immense faith in oneself and also physical and mental strength. It is a religion for the strong, not for the weak. It cannot be practiced unless a man is physically very healthy and free from all worldly attachments. It ensures clear vision, equanimity, fearlessness, courage, cheerfulness, kindness, endurance and other good qualities, through the practice of the concentration of the mind.

Raja-Yoga prescribes eight-fold path of yogic exercises through which one can control his body and mind. In the final stage, the yogi is able to practice complete concentration leading to the realization of unity with the Universal Consciousness. The eight disciplines are yama, niyama, āsana, prānāyāma, pratyāhāra, dhāraṇa, dhyāna and samādhi. The first five disciplines are external aids (bahiranga sādhana) whereas the last three are internal aids (antaranga sādhana) to the practice of Raja-Yoga. All these practices of Raja-Yoga should be done regularly with spiritual consciousness. Vivekananda says that there are so many obstructions in its practice; hence "there must be perfect chastity in thought, word, and deed; with out it the practice of Raja-Yoga is dangerous, and may lead to insanity."

³⁵ The state of tranquility and the purity of mind are unavoidable in order to make inner life more perfect, more universal in essence.

Yama means abstention from evil doing. It is the practice of five principles in thought, word and action. They are truthfulness, non-stealing, celibacy, non-injury and non-acceptance of gifts from others. It is relevant to practice all these virtues in day-to-day life in order to purify the mind. In addition to this there is devotion to God, which is conceived as a cause of union with the Supreme Self with out any obstacles. One who is devoted to God is always in the state of yoga due to His grace.

Niyama is observance of certain rules of conduct for the cultivation of good habits. They are purification of body and mind, contentment, penance and self-surrender to God. The practices included in Yama are, in a general way, moral and prohibitive, while those in Niyama are disciplined and constructive. The former aims at laying the ethical foundation of the yogic life and the latter at organizing the life of the aspirant for the highly strenuous yogic discipline, which is to follow.

Āsana means posture. It includes the practice of the proper holding of the three parts of the body- the chest, neck and head- in a straight line, which is conducive to meditation. The whole weight of the body is supported by ribs that keep the spinal column free. The various bodily

postures have different effects and have to be learned from a qualified master. They are important since mental concentration cannot be achieved with out the body kept in a comfortable position. It is recognized that there is a definite connection between mind and body; culturing and disciplining the body indirectly will also discipline the mind. Patanjali gives only three sutras regarding the technique of Asanas, but in these he has condensed all the essential knowledge concerning the subject.

Prānāyama is the practice to control prana, the life-principle. It is the energy that helps us to act, to think, and to breath. Vivekananda describes it as follows: " The sum total of all forces in the universe, mental or physical, when resolved back to their original state is called prana." ³⁶ It is the infinite omnipresent manifesting power of this universe. Everything in this universe is but the manifestation of this prana. Prānāyama is not breathing, but regulation of the breathing, that is, controlling the power within the body. These breathing exercises bring about rhythmic action of the prana in the body and thereby lengthen the state of concentration of mind. The Ida, the Pingala and the Sushumna are the three principal nerve currents inside the spinal column. The Ida and Pingala are clusters of nerves. They work through the prana. The Sushumna is a hollow canal and is closed in the case of ordinary man. At the lower end of the hollow canal is the Kundalini. To open this Sushumna is the main aim of the Yogi. Vivekananda states: " The

aim of prānāyāma here is to rouse the coiled-up power in the Muladhara, called the Kundalini." ³⁷ Thus the rousing of the energy from its seat in the Muladhara to the Sahasrara is the only way to attain the super conscious experience, the realization of the Spirit. For Patanjali, the Pranayama consists of three parts: inhalation, exhalation and pause.

Pratyāhāra is the practice to withdraw the five senses and the mind from their external objects. It is the inward orientation of the mind from the external objects to the mind itself. Human mind is the slave of passions, yet it is the only key to the concentration.

With the practice of the withdrawal of the senses the Yogi becomes independent of the external world. From this stage onwards his exclusive field of operation is the inner Reality. This internal progression towards the awareness of the Reality takes place in three different phases namely Dharana, Dhyana and Samadhi.

Dhāranā is concentration or attention, fixing the mind steadily on the object of contemplation. It is the restriction of the mind intently towards the centres of spiritual consciousness. In the Yoga-Sūtra, Patañjali defines it as follows: "Concentration (dhāranā) is holding the mind within a centre of spiritual consciousness in the body, or fixing it on some divine form, either within the body or outside it." ³⁸ The mind's field as we know is unlimited; it ranges over all manner of subjects and objects- concrete, abstract and

imaginary. The aim of this step is therefore to narrow down the mind's field of activity.

Dhyāna is contemplation or meditation. It is the spontaneous and the continuous flow of the process of thought towards the object of concentration. It is the greatest moment in life in which the soul thinks of itself, free from all matter. The nature of the object of concentration is gross. When dhyana reaches its maturity, the gross matter disappears and leaves in its place the subtle infra-atomic constituents, which make up the ultimate elements of matter. The ability to perceive this subtle background of matter depends on the purity of the concentrating mind. The consciousness of the outer world is lost, but it can still be restored by a strong stimulus from without. Unless and until this condition is fulfilled the practice of samadhi cannot begin and the real secret of yoga will remain hidden from the aspirant.

Samādhi means super-consciousness, the final step in the practice of yoga. The purification of both body and mind is essential for the realization of this super-conscious state. In this stage, the individual self merges into or becomes one with the Universal Self which is the object of contemplation. The object alone shines in the mind and all other thought-processes stop. The yogi realizes that he is the Self, the canvas on which the picture of the world is painted by illusion. The distinction between 'Samādhi' as the means

and 'Samādhi' as the end has to be noticed. When it is the means, the immediate object of meditation is the focus, whereas in Samādhi as the end, all objects in their real nature can be revealed to the yogi. The individual self (jīvātman) and the Universal self (paramātman) is experienced as a unified whole in the final intuitive experience. In other words, there is a union or undifferentiated identity between the lower self and the Absolute, where in there is total absence of duality.

All these spiritual disciplines are essentially designed for the moral purification, intellectual clarification and spiritual sanctification. No one can deny the fact that there is an urgent need to develop righteous conduct at the physical level, truth in the intellectual level, peace on the emotional level, love at the psychological level and tolerance at the social level. They are especially significant in this age of reason, as the growing intellect of the race demands some proof for the existence of Transcendent Reality within the universe.

The practice of yoga is a real solution both for individual perfection and social harmony. It not only annihilates evil elements in man but also promotes social welfare. It is also a method to alleviate the discord and rivalry that exists between the followers of major religions. The harmonious synthesis of yoga, knowledge, devotion and work is the nearest approach to the realization of Universal Religion.

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UNIVERSAL RELIGION AND RELIGIONS

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CHAPTER 5

UNIVERSAL RELIGION AND RELIGIONS

The foundation of the Universal Religion of Vivekananda is the philosophy of Oneness of Existence. All that exist in nature is nothing but the various manifestations of Infinite Reality, the Impersonal God or Brahman. The whole world is Brahman, the fullness of all things. All things are in Him and He in all things. Brahman or Infinite is the underlying principle of everything that exists from lower to higher forms of existence, from stones and plants to human beings and higher spiritual beings. The differences between one form of life or existence and another are a difference of degree rather than of kind. Infinite is hidden in the universe. Yet it is something beyond this universe. The spirit of harmony is evident in his own words: "Behind and beyond is the Infinite in which there is no more evil. Some people call It God, some Allah, some Jehovah, Jove and so on. The Vedantin calls It Brahman." ¹ The essence of Universal Religion lies in the realization of this Infinite, the real God behind the divine manifestations. It transcends all particular religions which are only a step towards the realization of this Infinite, yet it harmonizes them and gives them reality. Vivekananda declares that the realization of this Infinite requires a very

radical transformation of the individual; he must be changed morally, religiously and spiritually.

5.1. Religion and Spirituality

Spirituality is the core of the Universal Religion of Vivekananda. For him, everything in the universe including man is essentially spiritual. The realization of the spirit in its true nature is spirituality and the practical manifestation of this spirituality is Religion. The more spiritual a man, the more universal he is. The test of spirituality is the ability to experience the Unity of Existence. It is the same spirit that is residing in the Christian, Hindu, Mohammedan and all others. His religion stands for the spiritualization of the whole mankind, which ultimately leads to the peace, and unity of all religions. The backbone of progress- social, political, scientific and technological- is religion, the manifestation of the divine spirit within man. Religion is spirituality and it is complementary and contributory to the human development. It seeks to realize God in the soul of all human beings. Temples, Synagogues, Churches and Mosques are symbols possessing the spiritual significance. God is, Vivekananda says, "the Soul of our souls, the Reality in us." ² In the beautiful words of Romain Rolland it is "to see Shiva represented in living men, and especially in the poor." ³ The role of true religion, that is spirituality, is to awaken this awareness in man.

Religions like Hinduism and Christianity admit a spirit element within man and its inseparable relation with God. Hinduism emphasizes the ultimacy of Spirit more intensively than other religions. In the words of Radhakrishnan: "True religion is born of its spirit, not of flesh and blood, not of codes and customs, not of races and nations." ⁴ The statement 'Tat Tvam Asi' signifies the truth that this Supreme Spirit is in the Soul of man. The statement of Jesus Christ " Kingdom of God is within you" ⁵ expresses the realization of the Spirit of God in Soul. God is present with us through the Holy Spirit, a living reality in the experience of people. To quote St. John " God is Spirit, and only by the power of his Spirit can people worship him as he really is." ⁶ The word 'Islam' itself means the surrender of the Soul or Spirit within man to the will of the Omniscient, the Omnipotent and the Merciful God. Religions are serviceable only in so far as they are spiritual in nature. Spirituality is the *raison d'être* of different religions of the world.

5.2. Religion and Universality

The Religion of Vivekananda is universal in its scope. It is catholic rather than critical. It seeks to see the universal and all pervading spirit of Truth in all the human beings. It eliminates every type of discrimination between man and man, man and nature, man and God, between one form of manifestation and the other form of manifestation. It has no geographical

barriers. This is evident in his own words: " If there is ever to be a universal religion, it must be one which will have no location in place or time; which will be infinite like the God it will preach, and whose sun will shine upon the followers of Krishna and of Christ, on saints and sinners alike; which will not be Brahminic or Buddhistic, Christian or Mohammedan, but the sum total of all these, and still have infinite space for development; . . . It will be a religion which will have no place for persecution or intolerance in its polity, which will recognize divinity in every man and woman, and whose whole scope, whose whole force, will be created in aiding humanity to realize its own true, divine nature." ⁷ A Universal Religion, if it is really universal, must satisfy at least two conditions. Firstly, it must open its gates to every individual, it must admit that nobody is born with this or that religion; whether he takes to one religion or the other must ultimately be left to his inner likes and choice. In this sense by individualizing religion we can universalize it. Secondly, it must be able to give satisfaction and comfort to every religious sect. The most important fact is that it has to supersede the conflicts of these different sects, and therefore, must appear reasonable to them all.

The gospel of Universal Religion is based on the realization of the essential truth underlying the teachings of the saints and prophets of different religions. The sense of fundamental unity is provided by the

universal acceptance and religious tolerance of all other religions. Religious harmony means tolerance and acceptance, not exclusion. The fact is that the essence of Vedas, the Bible and the Quran is one and the same. Religious unity and mutual goodwill in the context of religious plurality would be a reality only when all religions are accepted in a spirit of give and take. In the words of Vivekananda " The Christian is not to become a Hindu or a Buddhist, nor a Hindu or a Buddhist to become a Christian. But each must assimilate the spirit of the others and yet preserve his individuality and grow according to his own law of growth." ⁸ He further states that he has no difficulty to enter and offer his prayers to anywhere, in a temple, or a church, or a mosque, or any other place. The believer in Universal Religion must be broad-minded and open-hearted, he must be ready to learn from the scriptures of all religions, and keep his soul open for what may come in the future. It is evident when he declares: " I shall go to the mosque of the Mohammedan; I shall enter the Christian's church and kneel before the crucifix; I shall enter the Buddhistic temple, where I shall take refuge in Buddha and his law. I shall go into the forest and sit down in meditation with the Hindu . . . Not only shall I do all these, but I shall keep my heart open for all that may come in the future." ⁹

The ideal of Universal Religion is moral and spiritual rather than material. It is not an unattainable otherworldly one. Vivekananda advocates

practical methods to experience oneness in every form of life. In his own words, " Take up one idea - make that one idea your life; think of it, dream of it, live of that idea. Let the brain, muscles, nerves, every part of your body, be full of that idea, and just leave every other idea alone." ¹⁰ He states that one can choose the method he likes. If one follows it with sincerity and earnestness, he will be able to reach the goal. This is the only way to success, peace and perfection.

The greatness of the Universal Religion of Vivekananda depends on the realization of the fact that the religions of the world preach the same truth, but through different religious practices. Religions are different in beliefs, attitudes and practices, but they are one in essence. It indicates the unity in diversity of the universe. The different religions are the various expressions of the One Eternal Religion and are merely the different stages of the spiritual growth. They are only different pathways meeting to the same point. Though the different rivers originate from different sources but merge in the same ocean, losing their names and forms, so the various religious paths that human beings take, will lead them to the same goal. To quote Vivekananda: "As so many rivers, having their source in different mountains, roll down, crooked or straight, and at last come into the ocean - so, all these various creeds and religions, taking their start from different standpoints and running through crooked or straight courses, at last come

unto THEE." ¹¹ His attitude to all forms of worship is sympathetic and tolerant. Tolerance does not mean indifference to one's own religion; it is clear and deeper understanding of ones own religion by having a clear understanding of other religions.

Mahatma Gandhi expresses a similar viewpoint in his concept of Sarva-dharma Samānatva, which means toleration of faiths or reverence for all religions. Theoretically it is possible to find that there is only one God and there must be one religion in this world. But in the practical world, it is very difficult to find a common agreement among the followers of different religions. He observes as follows: " I do not foresee a time when there would be only one religion on earth in practice... Therefore, there will, perhaps, always be different religions answering to different temperaments and climatic conditions." ¹² The different religions of the world are different paths converging on the same ultimate goal. They are nothing but "beautiful flowers from the same garden, or they are branches of the same majestic tree." ¹³ Man of one faith should respect the followers of other faiths. He should remember the fact that all religions have some errors in them, and that all great religions are equal. To put in his own words: "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." ¹⁴ Like Vivekananda, he also admits that there is Truth in every religion. It is the duty of every

follower of Truth to treat all religions as equal, to overcome the defects of his own faith, and to unite all good traits of other faiths into his own faith. He argues as follows: " Looking at all religions with an equal eye, we would not only hesitate, but would think it our duty to blend into our faith every acceptable feature of other faiths." ¹⁵ Human beings are imperfect to attain the perfect state of Truth or God. All man-made religions are also imperfect and hence the question of superiority and inferiority does not arise at all. The religion, which compels man to follow a particular practice by claiming itself to be perfect, cannot be regarded as a religion in the true sense of the term. Religion, if it is to be true, must create fellowship among people. The true knowledge of religion teaches man how to tolerate other religious faiths by acknowledging them as equal to our own. The cultivation of tolerance imparts not only the knowledge of one's own religion but also the understanding of the truth of other religions. In short, the equality and unity of all religions depend on the attitude of toleration and acceptance of all other faiths as equal and true.

Like Gandhiji, Radhakrishnan also shares Vivekananda's belief in the unchanging essence of religion, the essential unity of religions and the oneness of existence. He tries to convey his insight into the meaning and purpose of earthly life in order to promote his concept of religion of the spirit. Earthly life is the gradual revelation of the divine in man. The inner

self of man is akin to the supreme one; it mirrors the divine. He is at one with Vivekananda in maintaining that there is no discontinuity between animal life and human life, or between human life and spiritual life, since all forms of life are expressions of the divine spirit. Spiritual life means the fulfillment of human life and the ultimate goal of the cosmic process is the establishment of the spiritual kingdom of free spirits.

5.3. Religion and Truth

Truth is summum bonum of all religions. It is variously described in the Upanishads as Brahman (The sub-stratum of existence), Ātman (Self), Ekamevadvītyam (One without a second) and Neti Neti (Not this, not this). The word equivalent to Truth is 'Satya'. 'Satya' is a Sanskrit word derived from the root 'sat' which means 'existence' or 'being'. Thus the word 'Truth' means 'that which exists.' Hinduism is a relentless pursuit after Truth, which is an important cardinal virtue in Hindu tradition. This Truth manifests in action as dharma, spiritual obligation. It expresses itself in human being as love and purity of heart. Religion is the way to experience and practice truth in life. Since the Hindu saints are pre-occupied from the Vedic times with the desire to escape from ahamkara and samsara (sense of ego and world) as the way to the Ultimate Reality, Hinduism can be regarded as one of the highest expressions of mystic experience.

Both the prophetic and non-prophetic religions aim at the same goal, which is the realization of this Truth. In Christianity Jesus Christ identifies himself with truth and declares that He is the only way to God, the Father. In the gospel of John, Christ declares " I am the way, the truth and the life; no one goes to the Father except by me." ¹⁶ Truth is potentially hidden in every individual soul. It is expressed perfectly in the awakened spiritual consciousness. To quote from the Bible: " your body is the temple of the Holy spirit, who lives in you." ¹⁷ The finite soul is considered as environed by the divine spirit and is capable to be filled with the fullness of God.

In the New Testament the whole gospel of Saint John is a powerful incentive to spiritual mysticism. He promises that the Christians shall establish inward contact with God. Jewish mysticism in all its phases of development has its roots in the Old Testament. The visionary experiences of the prophets, and their highest insight into the will of God and their satisfaction at the attainment of this insight and vision constitute the mystical elements. While mysticism is a natural element of Hinduism, the question of mysticism is a new one to Islam. The mystic saints in Islam were called Sufis. The early Sufi mystic saints renounced pleasures and amusements, despised riches and honors and devoted themselves to a life of devotion and seclusion. The later Sufi mystic saints declare that they can establish oneness with God, absorption in the Eternal.

Though certain differences may exist among their interpretations, all saints in different religions agree in one respect and declare in one voice that unity underlies diversity. This is the basic characteristic of mysticism, which in its wider sense may be described as an attitude of the mind founded upon an intuitive experience, which culminates in the expression of Unity or Oneness of all things. The mystic experience is the very center of their being; it is the flame, which enlightens their whole life. It is not confined to any one racial group and is undoubtedly one of the common grounds of personal religion.

The prophetic religions like Judaism, Christianity and Islam maintain that this Truth is essentially unknowable and it can be known only through their prophets. 'Neti Neti' description of Brahman in the Upanishads also points out the same fact that it is essentially unknowable and indescribable. The nature of this Ultimate Truth is mystical and hence cannot be fully described in rational language. In this mystic state the jnani experiences nothing but the quality less Brahman. Even when he comes out of his samadhi the mystic sees every thing as permeated by Brahman; he sees Brahman as the Self or Atman of all beings; he perceives God every where and in every thing: 'Sarvam- khalv-idam Brahma'.

The great pioneers of Indian renaissance search for the truth in all religions. According to Vivekananda, Brahman is Truth and the purpose of

life is to know the Truth. We attain knowledge of Truth when we come to experience that we are at one with the Universal Being. He transforms the truth to wear different groups in accordance with the requirements of the modern age. Universal Religion is rooted in the intuitive experience of this truth, which is lying beyond the limitations of perception and the power of reasoning. This super sensuous experience of the mind is self-evident (Svata Siddha) and is called anirvacanīya (indescribable). It is a state of oneness of existence. This highest stage of experience is one and the same for a Muslim, Christian and a Hindu. A true Muslim is one who experiences the brotherhood of all without any distinction of rich and poor and without the differences of nationalities. Likewise, a true Christian and a true Hindu. In the transcendental state of religious experience the differences of a Hindu or a Christian or a Sikh or a Muslim disappear forever. Though this state is realizable to all men, they do not experience it in their spiritually ignorant condition.

Mahatma Gandhi identifies God with Truth. He states: " God is truth and love; God is ethics and morality." ¹⁸ Later on he changes his emphasis from 'God is Truth' to 'Truth is God.' Since the truth is God, everyone who experiences truth is really experiencing God. Every action of man is an attempt to experience Truth or God in his life. He describes the nature of path towards this truth as straight, narrow and perilous. To quote his own

words: "I know the path, it is straight and narrow. It is like the edge of the sword." ¹⁹ It also preserves the metaphysical and ethical significance of terms like dharma and rta (moral law).

5.4. Religion and Non-injury (Ahimsa)

All religions insist the principle of non-injury (Ahimsa) as a means for the world peace and unity. Non-injury is an attitude and practice of living in harmony with others and with one self. It implies love, compassion, forgiveness, courage and fearlessness. It requires adherence to high standards of truth and self-control, which guarantees the peaceful co-existence of the multitudes.

The concept of non-injury has its roots in Vedanta that every life is a spark of the divine spirit. Vivekananda's religion is based on the recognition and identification of this universal spirit in every living being. This spirit of non-injury depends on the extent of one's conviction about the truth of identity of all living being, universal love, and toleration.

The central teaching of the Gita is not violence, but non-violence. It advocates to reach a state beyond the three gunas of sattva, rajas and tamas, a state in which the individual is free from anger, hatred etc.

Both Buddhism and Jainism insist the practice of non-injury as the highest virtue. The central doctrine of Jainism states 'Ahimsa Paramo

Dharmah.' Hinduism also considers it as the supreme virtue 'Paramodharma'. In Buddhism the concept of Karuna or compassion and friendliness (maitri) involve the spirit of ahimsa.

In Christianity the unconditional practice of love requires non-violence in thought, deed and action. According to Mahatma Gandhi. "A true Christian is one who practices non-violence in his life." ²⁰ Christ's love is non-violence; it is forgiving. He prays to God, "Forgive them, Father! They don't know what they are doing." ²¹ Though there is place for forgiveness, man is condemned to everlasting punishment after death. To return good for evil, of love for hatred, of blessing for curse is the key to non-resistance, which can be acquired only from the power of resistance. The inner purity of mind is as important as the outer manifestation of an action. Therefore, it commands "Be perfect - just as your father in heaven is perfect." ²²

Islam believes 'Allah' as the abode of unconditional mercy and forgiveness that can be attained only by the grace of God, not by human merit. This kind of unconditional mercy is essentially non-violence.

Judaism represents God as "merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and fruitfulness." ²³ But it also describes him as the "God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the terrible

God"²⁴ who executes justice for the orphan and the widow. He is very strict to keep a proper balance between justice and mercy.

Manu interprets the word 'ahimsa' more liberally by allowing the killing of animals for sacrifice and food and even the killing of men in self-defense.

Truth and Ahimsa together constitute the essence of all religions. For Mahatma Gandhi, Truth and Ahimsa are so inextricably related that it is difficult to separate them. They are "like the two sides of a coin, or rather a smooth unstamped metallic disc."²⁵ They are convertible terms. To practice Ahimsa is to realize Truth and to realize Truth is to practice Ahimsa. There is no other means of realizing Truth in human relationships except through the practice of ahimsa. He says, "Truth is my religion and ahimsa is the only way of its realization."²⁶ Non-violence does not imply submission to the will of the doer. On the other hand, it inspires man to stand against the will of the tyrant. It teaches man to love even the evil doers, but not their evil acts. Much effort is required for an ordinary man to achieve this mental state of non-violence. It is the pure quality of heart and has to be acquired by strenuous training.

5.5. Religion and Love

Love is the foundation of all religions. Universal Religion of Vivekananda is the embodiment of pure love, which is the outcome of the realization of the Oneness of humanity. The power of unselfish love is tremendous. It does not seek any return for love. In the words of Vivekananda "It is love without thought of return-love like that of the moth for the light."²⁷ He identifies love with truth for it is love that unities the mother with the child, families with the societies and societies with the whole world. It also unites the individual consciousness with the divine cosmic consciousness. The basis for the entire cosmic creation is love itself. Later on, this love transforms into selfless service and the selfless service into worship. Vivekananda declares: "It is in love that religion exists and not in ceremony, in the pure and sincere love in the heart. Unless a man is pure in body and mind, his coming into a temple and worshipping Shiva is useless."²⁸ More over, in loving others we love ourselves. And this 'ourselves' is not the body or the mind, but the Self within. The real fact is that no one loves the other for other's sake but for the sake of the Self-alone. This love for the Self presupposes love for the ideal of oneness. In hurting others, we hurt ourselves, simply because we are all one. This spirit of love and sympathy towards evildoers is similar to that of Judaism and Christianity. The great commandment of Judaism demands to "love your

neighbour as you love yourself." ²⁹ This ideal of loving one's neighbour as oneself contains the seeds of a powerful egalitarian doctrine of social justice. Jesus Christ identifies God with love and follows the same Rule of Love. He manifests his love and mercy to all men - both good and bad - without regard to need or merit. That love is technically called as 'Agape'. ³⁰ It can be realized only when one attains the ability to overcome anger by loving even his enemy. He preaches to "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." ³¹ Again "If any one slaps you on the right cheek, let him slap your left cheek too." ³² His love is unconditional since he does not expect anything in return. It is divine, noble and motiveless. It is this simple truth that works in the social service field also.

5.6. Religion and Social Service

The central purpose of Universal Religion is service to humanity. Its principles refer to the unity and upliftment of the entire mankind. The people belonging to different faiths, cultures, races and traditions constitute the family of God. For Vivekananda, religion is not mere social service but service of the poor as worship of God. The gist of worship consists in being good and doing well for others. Social charity and service to the poor are natural expressions of love in action. All religions encourage alms-giving. It implies that the rich should economically help the poor and thus economic

inequality should be reduced to the extent possible. Christ's crucifixion is self-sacrifice atoned for the sins of mankind. In Christianity Jesus Christ insists "to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to welcome the stranger, to cheer the sick, to visit the imprisoned - in short to love and serve man is to love and serve the Father." ³³ Hospitals, nursing homes, dispensaries, homes for the aged, abandoned, and orphanages and a number of other specialized institutions for the service of the weak and ailing members of the society are the expressions of love for all men. The aim of Hinduism is general good of whole mankind, 'lokasaṁgraha,' in the words of Bhagavad-Gita. In Islam, there is Zakat and Sadaq through which a Muslim discharges his duty to the poor and needy. Zakat is a monetary obligation. Every Muslim who possesses more than a minimum amount of wealth has to contribute at least a certain percentage of his total wealth for the welfare function of the society. It is not merely a charity; it is a religious right, which the rich owe to the needy and poor, and to the society at large. The spirit of this compulsory contribution is that it is paid by the rich as an act of worship and not merely as a tax.

5.7. Religion And Morality

World's religions stress the role of morality and in fact both stand for each other. Morality is a necessary and inevitable element for the ascent of

individual soul to the higher spiritual realm of divinity. The moral law that 'as one sows, so one reaps' is inescapable and unavoidable. It knows no exception. Morality is adherence to truth, love, goodness, duty, peace, and non-violence. These moral virtues are the core teaching of all the religions. Righteousness and virtuous character are the essential qualifications for the spiritual journey towards self-perfection.

Hinduism advocates five cardinal virtues. They are non-injury (ahimsa) truth speaking (satya), abstention from stealing (āsteya), celibacy (brahmacharya) and disowning of possessions (aparigraha). Upanishads, Buddhism, Jainism, the yoga system of Patanjali and many others recognize these five virtues, though their interpretation varies from one another. Manu, the great Hindu lawgiver, emphasizes the first three of these virtues while he substitutes purity and self-control for the last two.

Judaism prescribes the famous Ten Commandments. In Christianity there is the way of prayer, of worship, of divine love and of meditation; shariat, tanqut, hagigat in Islam; sila, prajñā, and samādhi in Buddhism; samyak carita (right conduct), samyak jñāna (right knowledge) and samyak darsana (right faith) in Jainism. True religion and morality should go hand in hand. In the words of Vivekananda the essence of Buddhism constitutes: "Be good, be moral, be perfect." ³⁴

Morality and spirituality are the two salient features of Vivekananda's religion. Moral principles are the means and methods for preserving valuable virtues in life. According to R.B. Lal, "the relation between morality and spirituality is the same as that between cause and effect, the means and the end, the seed and the fruit. Godliness is the daughter of goodness, the finest flowering of the tree of morality."³⁵ Morality is the key to spirituality.

According to Vivekananda, Universal Religion, which is based on the principle of unity of all existence, is above morality. Yet it is the sure foundation of morality. Selfish action is the root cause of immorality. Unselfish action is moral. To quote Vivekananda, "That which is selfish is immoral, and that which is unselfish is moral."³⁶ He asserts that man from birth is endowed with certain physical, biological and pschical conditions, which naturally make him selfish, egoistic and limited. He is bound with certain natural instincts and habits, appetites and passions, love and hatred, pain and pleasure and desires and impulses. Morality is conformity to a rule or standard. It is the pursuit of an end. His view of religion is clear when he declares: "Try to be pure and unselfish- that is the whole of religion. "³⁷ The keynote of religion exists not in theories but in practice. Unselfishness is religion. That quality which tends to increase the divinity in man is virtue, and that quality which tends to increase brutality in man is vice. Love to all

beings is the unconditional standard for morality and spiritual growth. The central teaching of Gandhi expresses a similar viewpoint. He states, "As soon as we lose moral basis, we cease to be religious."³⁸ He identifies religion with morality in order to make it dynamically operative in human life. To him "All virtues cease to have its use if it serves no purpose in every walk of life."³⁹

5.8. Religion and Unity of Mankind

The prophetic religions like Islam and Christianity insist on dogmas and a uniform and unalterable way of life. In Islam, through prayers five times each day, a worshipper enters into a higher dimension of spiritual life by leaving the life of material pursuits. The uniformity in words, their order and of postures ensure unity, equality and brotherhood among all the faithful Muslim believers. The performance of Hajj at Mecca at least once in their lifetime strengthens the universal brotherhood of the Muslims. It also manifests the Islamic equality of the rich and the poor, of the black and white before Allah, irrespective of any race.

In Christianity there is belief in the complete union or oneness of the Father with Son. This deep relationship is evident in the statements, "The Father and I are one"⁴⁰ and "I am in the Father and the Father in me."⁴¹ It also signifies universal brotherhood of all men since all are sons of the same

loving Father. The goal of Christianity is to become faithful Christians, to become children of God. God is for all people and all are equal before Him.

The Universal Religion of Vivekananda harmonizes all religions into one single unity. Religious unity does not mean to achieve the external uniformity of religious conduct for social purposes, but a harmonious blending of religious variety into a symphony of spiritual quest. In the words of Romain Rolland, "Vivekananda wanted India to have an Islamic body and Vedantic heart."⁴² That is to say, it would be an egalitarian society, all people being equal and enjoying the same rights as in an Islamic society. And it should have a Vedantic brain, that is, an idealism that recognizes an essential unity behind all the diversity of existence. With reference to Hindu-Muslim difference, he states that the ideal society for India would be a union of the two great religions, Hinduism and Islam.

5.9. Religion and Conversion

Christianity is a missionary religion with emphasis on conversion. The sacred book is Bible, which contains the word of God. Bible preaches Jesus Christ as the only God in the human form. It also preaches Christianity as the only one true religion for the whole mankind. This claim of the monopoly of spiritual truth adds zest to missionary work and makes a religion worthy of consideration by all. But there is also the temptation to

belittle other faiths and the tendency to extol one's own religion. It is because of this reason that the attitude of the Christians towards other religions, except Judaism, is found very negative.

According to Vivekananda, conversion is not a means to attain the Universal Religion. He allows equal validity for all religions. Like his Master, he emphasizes the futility of changing one's own religion. To him, Christianity is the fulfillment of the Old Testament; Buddhism is the fulfillment of the truths of the Hinduism. He stresses strongly the need to synthesize the wonderful philosophy of Hinduism with the humanizing power of the Buddhism as a solution to the problems in life. At the same time he also stresses the need to synthesize the unity of Hinduism with the uniformity of Islam and Christianity. His aim is to lead mankind to the higher spiritual realm, where there is neither the Vedas, nor the Bible, nor the Koran; yet this has to be done only by harmonizing the Vedas, the Bible and the Koran. Universal religion shows the way to conquer oneself, not to conquer others. The unity of existence in Universal Religion cannot be realized by the triumph of any one of the religions and the destruction of the others. The common element in every religion is to help man to attain perfection, peace and harmony.

5.10. Religion and God

Belief in God is the corner stone of all religions. The prophetic religions like Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Zoroastrianism are all monotheistic. For them, God is One, Omniscient, Omnipotent and is transcendent. Judaism proclaims: "I am the first, the last, the only God; there is no other god but me." ⁴³ The cardinal tenet of Islam is "There is no God but Allah" and "Mohammed is the Messenger"⁴⁴ the Unitarian conception of God. The universal order can come into existence only on the basis of a universal faith and not on the basis of commitment to the Gods of race, colour or region. In Christianity, Jehovah is the Lord of the whole world. Jesus Christ universalizes the conception of God and commands: "to love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." ⁴⁵ The parable of the Mustard Seed and the Kingdom of God contains universal significance: "It is like a grain of mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his garden; and it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches." ⁴⁶ These religions share in common: the transcendence of God, the revelation of God through prophets, the resurrection of the dead, the day of judgment, and the doctrine of Heaven and Hell. They also believe in the authority of any particular prophet. Christianity seeks to become Christ-like; Islam seeks to become Mohammed-like; Buddhism seeks to become Buddha-like. From time

immemorial Hinduism is spiritual and it does not demand unquestioning submission to any particular prophet or religious teacher. It is based on the sacred scriptures of Vedas, Upanishads, Puranas, and Bhagavatgita. The aim of this religion is not to know the reality, but to know the reality in order to become that entity. The knower of Brahman becomes Brahman - 'Brahmaveda Brahmaiva Bhavati.'⁴⁷ According to Vivekananda, the ultimate unity of the universe is God. Every religion, consciously or unconsciously is struggling towards the realization of this Unity or God.

5.11. Religion and Freedom

According to Vivekananda, Religion is man's ceaseless struggle to attain freedom. It is not a state to be attained, but is the realization of the true nature of Atman, the identity between the individual self and Brahman as taught in the Upanishads. It needs only the removal of ignorance, which hides the true nature of the Self. Therefore, freedom means the removal of ignorance by knowledge, which consists in the immediate realization of the truth in the form of Oneness of Existence. Following Sri Ramakrishna, Vivekananda states: "We are like silk worms; we make the thread out of our own substance and spin the cocoon, and in course of time are imprisoned inside."⁴⁸ The way of immortality is to break it and come out from it. This struggle for freedom or liberation is the essence of all religions. Upanishads

insist a leap of faith from the untruth to Truth, darkness to Light and mortal to Immortal. ⁴⁹ The progression is from the appearance to the real, from the darkness to the light and not vice versa. The triumph of light over darkness is called liberation. In Hinduism, moksa means freedom from the endless chain of births and deaths. It is the union of individual soul with the supreme soul. It is a state of immortality obtained by the knowledge of Ultimate Reality. Nirvāna is the summum bonum of Buddhism. It means the annihilation of worldly desires, hatred, delusion and ego. It is of the nature of supernatural Bliss, which is eternal and pure. It is similar to the Moksa of Hinduism. The word Brahma-nirvāna of Gītā, Mukti or Moksa in Hinduism, Nirvāna in Buddhism, Liberation or freedom in Jainism are all synonymous. In Jainism, liberation or freedom is a state of perfection by the complete dissociation of soul from matter. In Judaism, salvation means union of the human soul with God by means of strict obedience to the laws of Moses. In Christianity, salvation means deliverance from the burden and guilt of sin and misery, here and here after, by fellowship with God in heaven. In Islām, salvation means the development of the divine spark in man by surrendering one's will to the commandments of Allah and by observing the 'five pillars of faith': Creed, prayer, charity, fasting and pilgrimage.

5.12. Religion and Asceticism

Asceticism or Renunciation is the watchword of all religions, except Judaism. Hinduism regards Vanaprastha or ascetic life in the forest as the highest stage of man's life coming at the end of his life. Buddhism and Jainism recommend asceticism as a way of life undertaken at any time after the Brahmacharya. Even Christianity upholds asceticism to a great extent. The life of Jesus Christ itself is more an ascetic than a householder. His gospel of Kingdom of God is not of this world, but an experience of bliss. In Judaism, nowhere in the Torah man is instructed to detach himself from the world in order to please God. For Vivekananda religion is renunciation in action, not abstention from action. It is the manifestation of the higher Self in man. One cannot, to use an illustration, go down and go up a mountain simultaneously. To love the darkness of the gorge and to love the brilliance above at the same time is impossible. To attain the higher without giving up the lower is impossible. To reach the summit, to attain the supreme end, one should renounce his lower self.

5.13. Religion and Meditation

The basis of all religious faiths of the world is common. It is yoga or meditation. To some, it is a science of the mind. To others, it is an indefinable mystical experience. For Vivekananda it is the realization of

Oneness in the world and in us. The meditative yogi constantly endeavors to decipher the real truth of the Vedic aphorisms (Mahavākyas) like, 'Prajñānam Brahma',⁵⁰ 'Ayam Ātma Brahma'⁵¹ etc. and realize the essential unity of the Self and the Absolute. One cannot neglect the significance of meditation, which enables man to master harmoniously the workings of the human mind. At the same time it is important to note that many people who are not believers of any religion also practice it all round the world as it provides them peace, wisdom and freedom.

Karma - samsāra - jñāna - mukti are the four-fold pillar of Indian religions. Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism accept it in common. They accept the different principles of yoga, dhyana and samadhi as the means for enlightenment. The followers of Judaism, Christianity and Islam are devoted to worship their Gods through the activity of meditation in one form or other. In Advaita Vedanta of Sankara, prayer and worship are mere means for the purification of the mind. It recommends jnana-marga as the only way for Brahman realization. It insists on four important pre-requisites, which are absolutely necessary for the spiritual aspirant. These four fold pre-requisites are: 1. Nityānityavastu viveka (discrimination between the eternal and non-eternal). 2. Ihamutrārtha-phalabhogavirāga (abstinence from enjoying fruits of any actions here and here after). 3. Samādhi salka Saṃpatti (spiritual exercises such as sama or the control of the mind, dama

or the control of the senses, uparathi or the renunciation of works, titikṣā or the endurance of heat and cold and other pairs of opposites, śraddhā or the faith in the teachings of the Vedānta as imparted by the Guru, and samādhāna or the constant contemplation of the mind). 4. Mumuksutva (the yearning for self realization). Thus a complete control of the external and internal senses is prescribed to aspirants as a prelude to a contemplative life. All these ascetic practices prepare the individual soul for the intuitive vision of the Reality. In addition to these spiritual disciplines, it also prescribes three mental activities, namely, Shravaṇa, Manana and Nididhyāṣana as the immediate preparation for the attainment of Brahma-jñāna. Sravana means hearing the truth in its different aspects from a Guru; cogitating on and accepting that truth; then becoming one with it is the method of the progression. Manana means constant deep reflection over the mystic truth imparted to him by the Guru. Through intense reflection over the truth, the aspirant convinces himself that the doctrine, which he has already heard about from the Guru, is true. Nididhyāṣana is the climax of the yogic training and is the continuation of Śravaṇa and Manana. It is said to be the uninterrupted and prolonged contemplation on the convinced doctrine on which the attention is directed like a stream of oil, which is an unbroken flow. As this contemplation grows in intensity and duration the mind ceases to be the medium through which contemplation takes place. As

a result of this the Self or Consciousness stands apart, the mind becomes Supra-mental conscious. The great people of all the religions have achieved spiritual experiences through arduous methods of training and disciplines that resemble yoga.

To conclude, in every religion essential truth is always found in association with the non-essentials, which are different in different religions. Though the non-essentials are not attractive, the essential truth remains in it. In the Reports in American Newspapers on religious harmony it is stated: "The shell of the oyster is not attractive, but the pearls are within." ⁵² Since this essential truth being the same, there is every possibility for the religious harmony. The non-essentials are only apparent, and they do not affect the inner core or the essential truth of religion. Vivekananda admits variation as the sign of life and hence the acceptance of different religious sects and conflicts. According to him, the Universal religion already exists in the form of universal brotherhood of man, although human beings are not aware of it. By Universal Religion Vivekananda does not mean a religion that will have one universal philosophy or one universal mythology or one universal ritual. They may all differ from religion to religion or even from individual to individual, and yet the basic unity or oneness is there as the ultimate goal in life. The quarrels in the name of religion are childish and immature. The greatest ideal is oneness and it should be the song of the new millennium.

The realization of this fact will inspire toleration and respect for religions other than one's own and may serve to enrich and deepen one's insight into one's own religion.

NOTES

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5. Luke, 17.21.
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7. Swami Vivekananda, Complete Works, Vol.I (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1994) 19.
8. Ibid. , 24.
9. Ibid., Vol.II (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1992) 374.
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15. I bid. , Yeravada Mandir, 1945, 38-40.
16. John, 14.6.
17. 2 Corinthians, 6.16.
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19. I bid. , 17-6-1926, 92.
20. I bid. , An Autobiography (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Trust, 1948) 106.
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22. The Sermon on the Mount, 5.48.
23. Exodus, 34. 6-7.
24. Deuteronomy, 10.17.
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26. I bid. , April 30, 1938, 99.
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28. I bid. , Vol.III, 141.
29. Leviticus, 19.18.
30. 1 Corinthians XI. 'Agape'- love or charity feast celebrated among the early Christians.
31. The Sermon on the Mount, 5.44.

32. Mathew, 5.39.
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35. R.B.Lal, Religion in the Light of Reason and Science (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1978) 161.
36. Swami Vivekananda, Complete Works, Vol.I (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1992) 244.
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38. M.K.Gandhi, Young India, 24-11-1921, 385.
39. I bid, Harijan, 26-7-1942.
40. John, 10.30.
41. I bid, 14.11.
42. Romain Rolland, The life of Vivekananda and the Universal gospel (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1999) 110.
43. Isaiah, 44.6.
44. Surās,6,A.102 and 48,A.29.
45. Mathew, 22.37.
46. Luke, 13. 18-19.

47. Muṇḍāka Upanisad, 111.2.9.
48. Swami Vivekananda, Complete Works, Vol.II (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1992) 355.
49. Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upanisad , 1.3.28.
50. Aitareya Upanisad , 111.5.3.
51. Māṇḍūkya Upanisad , 3.2.
52. Swami Vivekananda, Complete Works Vol. II (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama,1992) 483.

CONCLUSION

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CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Modern era is characterized by a tremendous upheaval, a great explosion of knowledge in almost all aspects of human endeavor. It has made spectacular achievements in many fields like transport and communication, astronomy, electronics, industry, agriculture, health and hygiene. Hence it is called the Age of Science. Modern man does not like to look beyond the horizon of scientific truths. He is striving hard to dive deep into the unknown mysteries of the physical world with uncontrollable passion for material advancement. The practical application of such scientific discoveries has added to man's higher levels of comforts and worldly enjoyments of human existence. All these developments since independence has necessitated transformation of man and society.

6.1. Crises and Transformation

Change and development are the signs of modern life. Man has transformed from the old barbarian stage to the modern materialistic stage. Society has also developed from the primitive agricultural stage to an industrial one. M.N. Srinivas has introduced the concept of westernization to express the multifold changes on the Indian scene brought about by

British rule and their continued reign of more than one hundred and fifty years. He has also used the concept of sanskritization in order to explain some features of religions, cultural and social mobility in the traditional social structure of India.

There is no doubt that man has made enormous progress in knowledge and scientific inventions. But he has not progressed beyond the level of past generations in ethical and spiritual life. Rapid industrialization is a good sign of economic prosperity. But along with the economic prosperity, we can find that there is an increasing worldwide crisis of spirit everywhere. The crisis is due to the lack of harmony of the human spirit to the amazing developments in science and technology. The absence of a strong and effective moral foundation has caused considerable damage to the modern society over the years. We may agree with S. Radhakrishnan when he observes: "The present crisis of civilization is the direct result of the loosening hold of ethical and spiritual ideals".¹

The distinctive characteristic of modern society is that it has become more and more materialistic in its nature and has alienated from the idealistic values of Truth, Beauty and Goodness. The Traditional Indian Society recognizes four fundamental human values of life: Artha, Kama, Dharma and Moksha. Artha means material acquisition; kama means

earthly enjoyment. These two basic ideals are considered as a hindrance to the path of spiritual development. Dharma prescribes complete rules of life for right living. As a regulative value, it has the function of guiding man's pursuit of artha and kama and preventing him from running into extravagance. When artha and kama are regulated by dharma, they are not only conducive to the individual's spiritual progress but also to the realization of the social good. It is also considered as an instrument to achieve moksha or liberation, the ultimate goal of life (Paramapurushartha). Modern Indian society is based upon artha and kama rather than dharma. The material prosperity and the consequent pleasure from it are considered as the goal of modern life. Wealth has become the criterion to determine the status of man in society. It has made man selfish, greedy, jealous and materialistic.

Any culture finds its level in society and eternal values of life such as truth, love, honesty and fellow feeling are the parameter that indicates the type of culture that a society breathes. The progress and civilization of humanity depends on the increase of genuineness, sincerity and unselfishness. It is only on the foundations of the past, we can build the future. For a healthy development of any society, it is necessary to maintain a continuing link with the tradition. Therefore, it is neither advisable nor

necessary to ignore the tradition altogether in order to modernize Indian society.

Before the present era, the mankind was divided into countries by the barriers of mountains, rivers and oceans. The rapid scientific and technological revolution has minimized the distance of time and space and has placed all the nations and regions of the world nearer and closer. It has made the world shrink into a small global village. Consequently, the problems facing the human race are increasingly global in nature. There are global problems created by economic injustice, religious intolerance and persecution, crime and corruption, political conflicts, and social imbalances. The problems of poverty, population, starvation, unemployment, malnutrition, and environmental degradation are not confined within the boundaries of India alone. The world is also lying under the threat of war and resultant death from modern weapons like long range remote control and radar guided missiles, poisonous gases, biological weapons, atom bombs, hydrogen and neutron bombs, capable of destroying the whole human race and the very existence of the planet earth. The modern men are brutalized having no respect for human dignity and values in life. They are ready to use destructive and dangerous weapons as a defense against the enemies around them. But the real enemy is not outside, but within man. Although the world has become closer through technology, we have not

drawn closer in our hearts. The whole world can be divided into two sections: the affluent section of the community and the poor, what we call the suffering section of the humanity. If we analyze the situation today, the conditions are developing where both the affluent section and the poverty section cannot live in peace in this world. Therefore, the most important problem of present era is world peace, which can be attained only by generating toleration, mutual goodwill and co-operation and friendship between nations.

There are several factors related with the rapidly changing society, which operate behind the spiritual crisis of India. Economic factors such as industrialization and urbanization have created adverse effects on family structure and relationship. The traditional joint family system has split into the modern nuclear family as a result of changed environment. The people from the rural areas migrated to the urban sector in search of employment. The result is that the bonds of common interest between the relatives are loosened and even shattered. The true fact is that there cannot be any industrial development in the absence of sound and prosperous rural economy.

The great tragic social problem in life is poverty, which is a threat to the social and spiritual development of the individual. The hungry stomach

cannot understand the lofty ideals of life. Democracy cannot be built on the poverty-stricken majority of the population. Though socialism is the aim of Indian society, no serious attempt has so far ever made to prevent the accumulation of wealth in individuals. The uneven distribution of wealth is the cause for the gap between rich and the poor. The wide disparity between rich and poor, strong and weak creates a deep, uncontrollable restlessness in the midst of illiterate and downtrodden millions of the world over. Personal ownership, monopoly of resources of individuals and exploitation of workers by capitalists are some of the main causes of poverty. Economic development is often identified with economic growth with social justice. Without economic equality there cannot be social stability. There is an urgent need to provide minimum level of standard of living to all people irrespective of their caste, creed, race and religion.

The problem of corruption is highly detrimental to all efforts to achieve modernization of ideals. It is the major factor in keeping India poor and backward despite having the best of natural and human resources. The prevalence of corruption raises strong obstacles and inhibitions to social and economic progress in all directions. Poverty is the cause of corruption at the lowest levels of society. But love of wealth and selfishness is the cause of corruption at the highest levels of society. Bribery, favoritism, black-marketing, tax evasion, adulteration and smuggling are different forms of

corruption. The corrective action is needed to counter the rampant corruption and dissipated tendencies in the society. Corruption cannot be stopped through laws, however strict they may be. The moral values, not rules or regulations, are the cornerstone of society. It has to be realized that corruption is a canker that it destroys the basic value system and has no cure if allowed to go beyond a certain stage. The process of awakening amongst the people is, however, needed for the emergence of moral values. It is the only way to bring people in tune with the ethos of our nation.

The unemployment is another serious problem associated with the problem of poverty. It is really a waste of manpower resources and a black stigma on the forehead of a developing country. Economic backwardness, population growth, business depressions, computerization, mechanization and defective educational system are some of the reasons responsible for the spread of unemployment. The educational system should shift from an examination orientation to development orientation, in tune with the changing needs of the society. The objective of education should be to promote all round development of the individual in the larger interests of the country and its economy. The progress made in the areas of science and technology should be put to use to qualitatively improve the educational content and the human resources development factor.

The disharmony in the relationship with the environment is recognized as one of the fundamental problems confronting human race in the present century. The fact that man and his natural environment are mutually interdependent cannot be neglected. His survival on the surface of earth depends upon the availability, preservation and recycling of natural resources. The environmental issues stem out of the over-exploitation of the riches of nature by man for his social and economic needs. The contemporary world is more hazardous than it was ever in the past, and its hazards now affect more people. The need is not to master nature, but to maintain harmony within it. The man who takes care of his immediate environment would learn to think in terms of the environment of the whole world sooner or later, which only could cure its environmental maladies. Modern ecological interpretation of human life demands harmony in the relationship between man and nature. Since the natural environment of human existence has been destroyed by modern civilization, the universal gospel of the harmony of all existence has become the most essential of all sciences.

There is no doubt that India is passing through the tragic phase of communalism, religious fundamentalism and regionalism. Communalism is the exploitation of religion by the communal leaders for their narrow sectarian ends regardless of the interests of the society as a whole. It is

against secularism and national integration. The communalists are not religious-minded in the true sense. They interpret religion as a set of doctrines, dogmas, symbols, creeds, customs, ceremonials, churches, temples, and mosques. They over-emphasize the importance of non-economic ventures like festivals and ceremonies rather than the eternal inner core of religion.

Chamber's twentieth century dictionary defines fundamentalism as the "belief in the literal truth of the Bible." ² A fundamentalist is a devout believer in, and practitioner of, religious orthodoxy. By itself, fundamentalism of an individual is not anti-social. It becomes anti-social when it is accompanied by an element of coercion or force. A fundamentalist who restricts his religious orthodoxy to his own belief and practices and who does not try to impose it on others directly or indirectly, is neutral. Fundamentalism becomes socially harmful when orthodox beliefs and practices are imposed on others who do not necessarily cherish them. The element of compulsion may arise from different sources, when an overwhelming majority is required to adhere to the established belief and practices out of the fear of social censure and ex-communication. It becomes more dangerous when it is associated with the state's coercive power. It is a true fact that there are fanatics in each religion who have blind faith in God as is expressed in religious fundamentalism and intolerance. Religious riots

and bloodsheds occur either due to the narrowness of their outlook or misinterpretation, or due to the politicalization of religion.

The feeling of regionalism arises due to the continuous neglect of the basic needs of the area or region by the ruling authorities. In India agriculture is the foundation of economic stability of the majority of the rural masses. But there has been no systematic effort to create appropriate facilities like irrigation, power, roads, transport, etc. in the economically backward rural areas. The unequal regional rural economy has produced wide regional disparities, which affected the level of national integration. It has also created a feeling of unrest and revolt among the people belonging to the backward rural areas.

Another factor lying behind the demoralization of the members of the society is political degeneration. It seems that the moral values have been devalued by the growth of unprincipled power politics of selfish politicians who do not give much significance to the fundamental ideology and principles of their political line. The nature of the political structure is democratic, but its social base is rather feudal and communal. It can be strengthened only by a synthesis of spirituality and materialism.

6.2. The Ideological Conflicts

The present crisis is also due to the rejection of all eternal truths and norms, and the substitution of a host of ideologies and concepts in their place. The various modern and post-modern philosophical thoughts have deeply influenced the mind of present generation. They emphasize that there is a need to reject religion and God from this world. The outcome is that the spiritual and moral values are being ignored by the modern mind, which lead to the negligence of our grand tradition. Secularism in the west means the cultivation of a scientific attitude in life, and especially towards religious claims. Secularism in India is not Godlessness. It is the co-existence of all religions or equal respect for all religions. Secularization of religion is an essential pre requisite for the spiritualization of man.

Modern psychologists, social scientists, logical positivists and radical humanists tried to under-rate religion in different ways. For them, mind and body are mere objects of scientific treatment for the purpose of scientific understanding. They highlight the negative results of religion in order to establish their argument.

Modern psychologist Sigmund Freud undermines religion as a source of hatred and conflict and, as such, inimical to the feeling of fraternity. In his book 'The future of an illusion', he describes the origin of religion from

the feeling of dependence. Symbols of worship, Gods and Goddesses are nothing but the fabrications of the human mind, and are self-created. He has wrongly interpreted religion as "the universal obsessional neurosis of humanity."³ It is considered as an illusion and hence it offers a means of escape from the realities of life. Freudian concept of religion is really a threat to the moral and spiritual development of man.

Karl Marx, the well-known socialist and materialist argues as follows: "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of the heartless world and the soul of the soulless world. It is the opium of the people."⁴ Communism is a naturalistic world-view in which there is no place for God. In his opinion religion originates from the helplessness and ignorance of man. It is only a way to promote the economic interests of dominant class. For him, economic factors are more decisive for the determination of individual's status in the society. The modern commercial world is a religion of money worship. Social, economic and political stability is the only solution to the problems in life.

The French philosopher and socialist Auguste Comte, propagates the Religion of Humanity in the place of Religion of God. His claim is that the object of worship is neither God nor Christ, but Humanity itself. As a positivistic humanist, he explains the events of the world through the

scientific law of causation. Metaphysics is more concerned with impersonal and abstract forces of the phenomenon, and therefore, it is considered as a hindrance in the path of progress of man.

The logical positivists, the most influential philosophical thinkers of twentieth century, tried to provide secure foundation for the sciences and to demonstrate the meaninglessness of metaphysical propositions. They eliminated metaphysical statements with their verifiability principle of meaning and thus put an end to metaphysics. Ethical statements are also meaningless, since none of these statements can pass the test of being empirically verifiable. They are not really statements conveying knowledge, but are only expressions of feelings or emotions.

Ludwig Wittgenstein, in his major work 'Tractatus Logico-philosophicus', describes ethics, religion, and metaphysics as inexpressible. Unlike the logical positivists, he does not dismiss metaphysics as nonsensical, but they are things which lie beyond the reach of language. Further, in his second major work 'Philosophical Investigations,' he describes religion as a form of life. Religious language functions in accordance with its own set of conventions and criteria in terms of which alone it can make sense.

Modern radical humanists provide a scientific explanation of the world without the assumption of anything supernatural. They emphasize

the necessity of the freedom of man from the doctrine of eternal ignorance, superstitions and dogmas of natural religion. M.N. Roy, in his book 'Materialism', describes the objective existence of the external world independent and irrespective of being perceived by human consciousness. He expresses his views on religion as follows: "Religion is belief in the supernatural. Ignorance is its foundation. Metaphysical agencies are postulated by man unable to explain natural phenomena otherwise."⁵ A true materialist is a practical idealist. That is, the ideal of life is the motive force of the life of the materialist and it has even the power to transform the world.

Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche is considered as one of the outstanding critics of religion, especially of Christianity. He states that religion helps only to promote what he calls slave morality and to deprive man of all possibilities for realizing freedom and greatness through an unrestrained exercise of the will to power.

The different schools of philosophical thought such as Buddhism, Jainism and Carvaka materialism denied the authority of the Vedas as revealed truth. For the Carvakas, religion was invented by the cunning Vedic priests for earning their livelihood. Morality is not a divine command, but social convention. All these ideological forces developed as a reaction against the meaningless rites and superstitions associated with religion.

Indian culture is a mixture of different religions, languages, and races. All the great religions of the world can be found in India. Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism are some of the major religions of the world. From time immemorial, religion occupies a central place in human life and history of human civilization. During the past ages, religious faith in God, notion of heaven and hell controlled to a great extent the immoral activities of human beings. The tremendous expansion of scientific knowledge replaced the mythological religious view of the functioning of the world of nature. The scientific theory of evolution put a final blow to the religious doctrine of creationism. The most unfortunate fact is that the religions have lost control over people. The lives of modern Indians are governed by scientific and utilitarian principles rather than the religious principles. The educated urban classes are tempted to lead a secularized life. A large amount of them are anti-religious. Modern men have lost sight of the essentials of their respective religions, and are misled by bigots and fundamentalists whose activities represent the very anti-thesis of the true essence of their religion. There is nothing inherently wrong with the religion. Religious quarrels occur mainly due to the narrowness of their outlook and their failure to understand the true essence of religion. It is a true fact that there is an all round deterioration in the realm of religion and morality. Moral and religious bankruptcy is the root

cause of social, economic and other maladies in India. Spiritual and religious development can be attained only by the proper understanding and cultivation of moral and religious values. Religion is a factor of disintegration of modern society and it is essential to free religion from the social, economic, political, and intellectual abuses.

6.3. Solution

In order to meet all these challenges of the new millennium, developments of human activities in all spheres of life are highly important and indispensable. No one can ignore the invaluable service of religion in encouraging the moral and spiritual values in life. It is religion that binds the individual to his cherished ends and values in society. These ends may change with the transformation of man from one level to the other. Changing values manifest the change in the attitude that will continue till his evolution is complete and perfect. The more imperfect and crude the man is, the more the biological urges are dominate in him. As the humanity is still in an imperfect condition, religion is yet in the process of man making, and is evolving towards perfection. Religious truths and values form the basis of unity of humanity.

Universal religion considers inner perfection of the individual as the cardinal value and as a necessary pre-condition for the world unity. The

perfection of the individual is inter-linked with the perfection of the nation and the perfection of the nation with the perfection of humanity at large. It aims at exploring the great potentialities in all human beings and enables them to attain perfection and thereby integrate them in the national development. It prescribes the way to live in harmony with the realization of the principle of unity of existence. The principle is essentially simple, but it appears that it is usually the most difficult to realize in practice.

Another fact is that there is a human tendency to complicate religion with the non-essential theories and rituals. When religion is entirely identified with superstitious dogmas and meaningless rituals, it certainly narrows down the human mind and instead of helping man towards higher spiritual development it becomes the cause of disintegration and hatred. Universal Religion seeks to discover the essential truth often lost in the wilder-ness of superstitions, dogmas and myths. The awareness of the divinity of the self or spirit is the secret of man's development both in the individual and collective life, secular as well as spiritual life. When a man becomes aware of his divinity, he will also become aware of the divinity of other fellow beings. The insight of the inner divinity enables man to transform himself with the deeper understanding of love and with the growth of this love, human relation would improve, making the world a better place to live in. Universal religion teaches universal love, which

transcends all spheres of life and thus leads to a greater vision of oneness of mankind.

The concept of Universal Religion is based on the realization of the essential unity and identity behind the God, world and the man. Traditional religion is otherworldly and it tends to dissociate man from the affairs of the world and the service of the man. The idea that the entire universe is but a manifestation of God gives unlimited scope to serve such a God through all our actions. The identification of man and God has the power to raise the dignity of man in the world. The moment that he has realized God sitting in the temple of every human body, the moment he stand in reverence before every human being and see God in him, everything that binds vanishes, and he becomes free from bondage.

The principle of detachment or renunciation allows man to be impartial and just, and directed energies for the pursuit of higher moral and spiritual values of life. It culminates in the selfless act of service done to others. There cannot be any distinction between secular and sacred, and every action performed in this spirit is as effective as elaborate rituals and ceremonies. Since man is a social animal, this view of renunciation is of great social significance. It empowers man to build charitable institutions for providing justice and improving the conditions of downtrodden masses.

And even if one does not believe in a God, then too, the performance of disinterested action is an effective way for attaining perfection. The cause of all the problems in life is man's desire to be superior to others and the selfishness. The greatest benefactor of humanity is the man of pure heart. The inner purity of character qualifies him for an exalted spiritual life, which culminates in spiritual enlightenment.

Vivekananda's Universal Religion offers unity in difference. He recognizes the role of each religion for the spiritual and social development of man. Religion is life, an experience that gives great spiritual satisfaction. His Universal Religion stems from this highest spiritual experience and it strives to establish unity at the root of diversified religions. It is a comprehensive system of different forms of philosophies and worships, prayers, meditation, yoga, myths, dogmas, and sacraments. The multi-dimensional nature incorporates within itself the best ideals of the different religions. It is the product of not only the synthesis but also the spiritual realization of the essential truth in all religions. Every religion is true and harmonious in nature. The spirit of acceptance of religious plurality is evident in his own words: "The fact that all these old religions are living today proves that they must have kept that mission intact in spite of all their mistakes, in spite of all difficulties, in spite of all quarrels, in spite of all the incrustation of forms and figures, the heart of everyone of them is sound - it

is throbbing, beating, living heart. They have not lost, any one of them, the great mission they came for."⁶ This openness to the plurality of religious traditions indicates that he is not content to confine himself to a small island of his own tradition and culture and that he is fully aware of the significance of the spiritual insights of other religions.

Mankind is heterogeneous in nature. The idea of one religion to all does not suit the needs of men differently equipped and having varied dispositions. Just as many blind persons felt the elephant at different parts of its body, and thought each part a different animal, so do most of the religious sects see God from different angles and assume that their God has nothing to do with the Gods of the other religions. Thus the scope of any one religion remains limited since it covers only a limited aspect of Truth. The realization of the Universal Religion is the real foundation for the mutual understanding and fellowship among religions. It is beyond all religions and all sectarian 'isms'. There is total freedom to choose the means for reaching the end. God's infinite variety of forms can be explained by the variety of human beings. Conversion is not a solution to the tension among various religions. There will be nothing new if all the people of the world convert to Hinduism, or Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, or any other religion. But it is certain that the world will be a different place if all the people rise above the walls of non-essentials of religion and realize the

essential ultimate truth, which is common to all religions. In the midst of diversities there will be a harmonizing unity. Religions, if they are true, do not differ, and do not differentiate and separate man from man, but instead unite man to man. Vivekananda's Universal religion proclaims that it is the duty of every follower of faith to treat all religions as equal, and to unite all good elements of other faiths into his own faith for the promotion of common good.

Vivekananda points out the fact that one should eliminate the feelings of jealousy and hatred for other religions and get rid of one's religious narrow mindedness and bigotry. The religiosity of an individual is known by the respect in which he holds religions other than his own, since the essence of each religion is one and the same. The spirit of religious harmony is evident in his last address at the Parliament of Religions when he states that whether men like it or not, there will soon be written on the banner of every religion: "Help, and not fight", "Assimilation and not Destruction", "Harmony and peace and not Dissension."⁷ Differences between the various religious sects are immaterial since each has the same objective. The object of every religion is to increase a feeling of brotherhood in order to have peace on earth and to bring on earth, the kingdom of heaven. It is essential for man to adopt a more tolerant attitude towards religions other than his own. Vivekananda's understanding of world's religions was distinctly

modern, even now, more than a hundred years later; it still belongs to the future.

Crisis of the modern world is a problem concerning the human being. Religion started only when man had begun to ponder deeply over the mysteries of human existence. He may belong to any religion, race or creed, but if his attitude towards life is one of universal, if his consciousness progresses upward, then he belongs to the religion of man. Differences of doctrines and dogmas, temples and churches, books and rituals have only secondary importance for a man whose soul is hungry for spiritual unification. Man, unlike the animals, is not a helpless limited being, who cannot go beyond the heredity and environment. He is not a mere puppet in the hands of socio-economic and political conditions. In a sense man is never completely determined since there is innate spiritual power or freedom within him. He is not only the architect of his own destiny, but also the architect of the problems of the world. Though there are problems in the world, man has the capacity to transcend them. Man has innate spiritual greatness. But that is some how lost and he became the slave of circumstances. Religion in its universal significance teaches man to regain his lost power and freedom. He suffers because he is weak. Strength does not come from by thinking of weakness all the time. The remedy for weakness is not brooding over weakness, but from by practicing spiritual

power or strength. Man has the inner spiritual strength or freedom to face the critical situation and has to find out his accountability and responsibility in the modern nuclear age.

Universal Religion of Vivekananda provides a new approach to resolve the conflicts between religions. The present religious conflicts can be solved only on the basis of Advaitic means. Social stability can be achieved by the social unity between the major religions. The need of the hour is to utilize the corporate energy of the members of different religions for nation-building activities and to turn India into a real secular country. The spirit of India is not to be based on Hinduism or Islam or Christianity or any other religion but on Universal Religion, which alone can bring them together for common and constructive purposes. Vivekananda's scientific and rationalistic approach enables one to distinguish the real from the unreal. Everyone should know that the ultimate God is one and that the spark of God resides in every man. The different religions are only different means to realize God, and the members of each religion should cultivate the spirit of acceptance and tolerance. The modernized versions of the teachings of various religions appear to differ in respect of prophets and scriptures, mythology, customs and modes of worship. Such variety has to remain. It makes the beauty and is necessary to satisfy the infinite variations in the temperaments of human beings. Universal Religion reveals a

remarkable degree of unanimity with regard to eternal truths, such as the need for love and harmony, right conduct and proper performance of all duties, and the basic qualities of the ideal man. It will be seen that the points on which all religions agree are the heart and soul of religion and quite enough to build a new heaven and a new earth.

The most important problem of modern age is undoubtedly that of world-peace. The conflicts in man arise mainly due to the fact that he seems to belong, simultaneously, two worlds, the world of nature and the world of spirit. As a psychophysical being, he is subjected to all the limitations and the necessities of nature. But as a self-conscious rational and spiritual being, he is supposed to belong to another realm of existence, the world of spirit. He cannot attain peace and harmony if there exists a discord between material and spiritual aspects of his life and between the secular and the spiritual values of individual and social life. The secular life of man has to be enriched by the spiritual values; it has to be molded and developed in the spiritual pattern and has to be transformed and elevated by the enlightened power of the spirit, which is inherent in man and woman. There will be the threat of war in the world so long as there is conflict in the soul of man himself, so long as man is selfish and brutal in nature. The infra rational aspect of man should not be neglected but purified and uplifted not by rational but by spiritual illumination. Humanity should embrace the

spiritual messages of Vivekananda for the establishment of the world-peace. Vivekananda's vision of the welfare of the humanity depends on the harmonious integration of the transcendental spiritual wisdom of the East and the material prosperity of the West.

Man must arise awake and move on. He must free himself from blind technology and understand the complexity and wealth of his own nature. Indeed, mankind has made a great effort to know itself. The sciences of life have shown its goal and placed at its disposal the means of reaching it. They apprehend man as composed of distinct parts, not as a whole. Further the relations between consciousness and brain are still a mystery. Modern man is completely immersed in the world created by the sciences of inert matter without any respect for the laws of human development. In fact, his ignorance is profound. Modern world is the outcome of an error of human reason and from the ignorance of his true self. To such a world, man cannot become adapted. He becomes a stranger in the world he has created. The mission of man is to transform its values and harmonize it with reference to his true needs. The different paths of religion provide the means to develop all the potentialities of his body and mind. Depending on the law of karma, the individual soul has to evolve up or to revert back from birth to birth and death to death. Accordingly, Man knows that the present critical situation is a projection of his past actions and his

future will be a projection of his present action. He must, therefore, utilize his power and energy for a good future. He cannot blame any supernatural being; he cannot expect any help from outside external agencies. In the words of Vivekananda: "Help does not come from without; it comes from within ourselves. Cry to all the gods in universe. I cried for years, and in the end I found that I was helped. But help came from within."⁸ The end and aim of his religion is to make the man grow and to realize his inner capacity to create heaven on earth. The future of humanity depends on the choice we make. Each individual has the inevitable task of pushing forward unity and harmony among individuals and between nations. In the words of Alexis Carrel "Our destiny is in our hands. On the new road, we must now go forward."⁹

Man alone can be the savior of his race. Hence a ceaseless purposive endeavor on the part of each individual is enough to transform the entire world. It is the thoughts of each individual that becomes the part of the collective thoughts of a nation. A new outlook towards the problems of the world is necessary for establishing spiritual awakening in this world. The all-round development of man is possible only by the enhancement of the social, political and economic environment in which he moves and breathes. Humanity requires more urgently than at any other time, a fresh, clear and convincing demonstration of the spiritual portrayal life and existence. A

country is great not by the number of its people but by the kind of people it has.

The idea of Universal Religion entertains faith in oneself, which according to Vivekananda is the only panacea for all the problems in life. It is this faith that allows man to preserve even when he feels he has lost every thing. Therefore, it is a gift that has to earn over and over again since it plays an essential role in the life of all living beings. Without faith, one can attain nothing in life. If some thing is given without faith, that also does not bear fruit; it does no good to the one who receives it. The universal messages of equality, unselfish love and self-sacrifice will always remain as a source of inspiration to the humanity. His concept of ideal man is he who has the heart to feel, head to think and hand to work. A heartless man who is intelligent and active is worse than an animal. Universal Religion is a warning against these heartless intellectuals, for they do more harm than good. Mercy and compassion emerge out of strength alone can bring peace and brotherhood of mankind in the world. Weakness is one of the causes of all suffering in the world. Man lies, steals, and kills and commit other crimes due to weakness. Faith in one self enables one to regain his strength.

For the great attainment, purification of the mind is a necessary condition. Even to attain faith in oneself, the condition of the mind is the

crucial factor. Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Jnana Yoga and Raja Yoga are the different spiritual practices for the purification of the mind. When the mind is pure, it is filled with the supreme energy and it dissolves into the eternal principle. Like the great sages, Vivekananda advocates man to keep his attention always fixed on the highest. The purer the mind, the clearer the faith, the purer the heart, the greater the faith, only a great mind can create great things in the world.

It is only by the inner spiritual transformation that we can create a perfect human order. The great irony is that everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself. Everyone is eager to reform the world without realizing that the world is not different from oneself. Hence the real transformation must start with the individual. What is essential today is self-development, that is, the moral and spiritual revolution in man. The perfection of the soul within man has the power to perfect the outer environment.

Now we have stepped into the new millennium with great hopes and expectations of change. The change of the soul will alone cure the evils of life. Even if there is no visible change the perfection of the soul within man will eventually effect change in the outer environment. Further more, whatever harmony exists in the world today is the result of such a force. It

is too easy to imagine a new vision of humanity, but very difficult in practice. Reason or intellect alone cannot save mankind; it helps man only to a certain extent in his march towards the highest end. At a particular stage, man is bound to accept the limitation of reason. When reason fails, spiritual intuition helps man to attain the truth. "Intellect ends where religion begins. Inspiration is much higher than reason, but it must not contradict it. Reason is the rough tool to do the hard work; inspiration is the bright light, which shows us all truth,"¹⁰ says Vivekananda.

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9. Alexis Carrel, *Man, The Unknown* (Bombay: Wilco Publishing, 1959) 298.
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