

CHAPTER-6

Some more problems and their solutions : Conclusion

In this chapter the present scholar tries to compare the Hindu view of the self with the Christian view of the self by pointing out differences as well as similarities between these two views.

Hinduism is partly revelatory and mostly evolutionary, while Christianity is mostly revelatory and partly evolutionary. Hinduism is a continuously evolving religion, not founded by a particular person or prophet and shaped by the collective wisdom of enlightened masters, incarnations and revelations of God accumulated over several millenniums. It is regarded as an eternal religion (*sanātana dharma*) by its followers. On the other hand, Christianity is founded by Jesus Christ. To be a Christian, one should invariably believe in the ways of Jesus only and acknowledge him as the only saviour. Central to Christianity are the life and teachings of Jesus Christ and the glory of God, as described by witness and others in the old and new testaments of the Bible.

The Bible is the main source of the principles and values of Christianity. The Roman Catholic Church acknowledges tradition along with Bible as the source of their doctrine. Central to Hinduism are the *smṛtis*, or books of revelations, which include the *Vedas*, the *Āgamas* and the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, which Hindus

revere as God in word form and which are considered to be eternal, inviolable and revealed by God for the welfare of the worlds. Tradition, law books, the epics and the *Purānas* and the writings of several enlightened scholars, philosophers and masters also play an important role in the religious lives of Hindus. Hinduism played a significant role in the emergence of other world class religions such as Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism and shaping the history of the eastern world, while Christianity played a significant role in shaping the history of Judaism and Islam and the western world. Hinduism is also the most dominant source of inspiration for many new age religions and religious movements.

There is a fundamental difference between the Indian theory of soul and that of the Christians. According to the Hinduism, the soul is beginning less and eternal whereas according to the Semitic view, God created the souls and sent them to this world.

What Hinduism calls *ātman* (self), the Christianity calls it soul. In Hinduism, the self is the unified being in which all creations take place. The goal in Hinduism is to bring the individual person to the realisation that he indeed is not a separate being, but rather a partaker of the Great Self. So the saying is “*Ātman* (self) is *Brahman*.” The goal of the individual through *yoga* and spiritual exercise is to realise and know that he is *Brahman*. In this context the idea of diluting one’s self identity is to realise that the individual human being should not speak or

think of being an individual self and should not act upon the desires and wants of the individual self. The goal of the self in Hinduism is to attain detachment from personal desires and wants, and to become one with the Universal Self.

Jesus affirms the individual self as a real and true creature. This individual self is never lost or dissipated into some Greater Self, but is a created being with definite personal existence. Jesus teaches that the person will exist as an individual for all eternity in either a state of relationship with God (heaven) or separation from God (hell). The problem with man is not one of mistaken knowledge. The problem with man according to Jesus is sin, rebellion against God. This happens when a separate and individual creature (man) chooses to live in a manner that does not honour and recognise God (a transcendent and independent being—separate from man). Jesus warned in very strong language against sin and the danger of the individual being consigned to hell for this rebellion. The concept that Jesus taught of selflessness was to forsake the desires of a real, independent self that are in rebellion to God's ways. Jesus taught that man has lived in sin and separation from God ever since the fall or rebellion of Adam and Eve (the first man and woman God created). This original sin is a part of the very nature of each individual man. To live for the self, according to Jesus, is to live in sin. Jesus said, 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.' This means to abandon the sinful personal desires that are a part of human nature. And the individual should

choose to deny his real personal selfish desires and to live for what God has said is good. Thus, while the Hindu views of self preaches an affirmation and strengthening of self in the Greater Self, the teaching of Jesus is that the self is corrupt and is living upon that orientation of corrupted (sinful) self; selflessness is to turn from that life and to live for God.

Hinduism follows the ‘cyclical’ view of the universe, in which a person or anything for that matter never truly dies; after death of a living being the soul takes a new body depending on its *karma* in previous lives and again enters into the material world. In this manner the cycle of birth, death and rebirth continues to roll. While the Christianity believes that once a person dies his soul never returns again to the material world, it then departs to a heaven or a hell depending on their deeds to live there for eternity.

Hinduism believes in the physical, mental as well as spiritual evolution of life. This is not exactly the evolution as explained in science books but rather the progression of soul in matter. Christianity does not believe in any form of evolution. According to Christianity, God created all life forms at once over a period of seven days. In Hinduism manifestation is essentially a process of entanglement of pure soul with matter. Creation happens because the self becomes involved with the qualities (*guṇas*) and principles (*tattvas*) of *prakṛti* and loses its true nature. This is called illusion or *māyā*. When a man realises these attachments which bring pains he, then, tries to attain bliss through right

knowledge. This is called liberation or *mokṣa*. Left to itself this process of liberation may take a very long time. But human beings can hasten their liberation through the practice of devotion, desire-less actions, *yoga* and meditation. During its existence upon earth, the soul passes through various physical bodies from lower organisms to higher organisms and finally into human forms. In Christianity the concept of physical or spiritual evolution is anathema or sacrilege. According to Christianity, God created the world perfectly from the beginning. He populated it with living forms. He created a man and a woman in the Garden of Eden and asked them to abide by His law. He cast them away from heaven when they failed to obey. It is a Christian doctrine that human being has a soul, but unless we are familiar with other religious orientations we may be unaware of the further Christian doctrine that only human beings have souls. According to Hindu religion, even insects have soul; furthermore, according to Hinduism as well as Jainism even plants have souls. Christianity holds that man is the highest creation of God. Hence, service to fellowmen is the highest duty. Other lower animals and trees have been made for men. In Christian belief, every soul lives only once on earth and is thereafter immortal. In Hinduism, a soul returns many times, and it not only 'will' live forever but 'has' lived forever.

There is also difference between Hinduism and Christianity regarding the nature of man. In Christian theology, human personality is regarded as dichotomous,

consisting of only the body and the mind, the mind itself being called soul and spirit. According to Pauline doctrine of Original Sin, the sin of Adam, transmitted to all humanity, has tainted the human soul so much that man is incapable of saving himself. All schools of Hindu philosophy hold that human personality is trichotomous, consisting of body, mind and spirit, the latter being known as the *ātman* or self. Evil tendencies, which are derived from one's own actions in a previous life, taint only the empirical self. The real self or *ātman* is ever pure and untainted by evil.

The Hindus view salvation differently from the Christians. According to Hinduism, the soul is eternally free, but it has wrongly identified itself with certain extraneous elements. In Hinduism, salvation is the release from the wheel of life, the cycle of rebirths, through which we must work to make ourselves better and realise our oneness with *Brahman*. For Hindus, the problem is attachment to the material aspects of this world. Within Hinduism, a person aims to get relieve of the endless cycle of rebirth and transmigration and ultimately, to merge with the Great One, *Brahman*, to become synonymous with this Ultimate Being. The soul transmigrates from body to body until it achieves this final release by casting off the *kārmic* particles attached with the soul by proper knowledge and devotion. Attachment to the body is the issue that causes rebirth into the material world. Knowledge and control are the prime means of winning release from the bonds of the body. The conception of salvation or release in

western theology, however, implies that the soul has fallen in the dearth of the world (*samsāra*) at a particular time due to certain sin and we have to release the soul from it. According to Hindu teachings, men are in need of salvation from rebirth and this salvation can only be obtained by proper knowledge of reality, devotion and practice of ceremonial works such as *yoga* with the help of a spiritual preceptor who shows the proper way. And in Christianity, it is said that man is in need of salvation from his sins and this salvation can only come by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, for “this is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” [1 Timothy 1:15]. The Bible clearly states “for it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast” [Ephesians 2:8-9]. Furthermore, “neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection” (Luke 20:36). Man will never become God. Whereas Hindus believe that humans as well as the whole universe is constantly going through cycles of death and rebirth, Christians believe that there is one universe created by God and that we only have one life to live. Christians believe that, based upon the good and bad deeds during this one life, a person will either be saved or face an eternity of damnation, whereas Hindus believe that, eventually, everyone reaches salvation and no one is eternally lost. Furthermore, Hindus, if faced with a handful of bad *karmas*, may makeup those

wrongs with good deeds. Less harshly, Christians' bad *karma* is taken away by God if one devotedly asks Him for forgiveness. Finally, Hindus, being very open-minded, believe that, although various religions may have different forms of worship and different names for God, they are all on the paths that lead them towards one common God. More exclusively, Christians believe that it is their way and that if a person does not follow their path, then there is no way that he will be saved. When one lays out the beliefs of many religions, one begins to notice that human faiths aren't all that much different. Although wars have been fought over religious differences it seems that the Hindus have the right idea: we are all on our own paths, but they will ultimately lead us to the same God.

According to Hinduism, man is judged and punished by his own *karma* and the consequences of his desire-ridden actions decide his fate and future continuously. As long as he indulges in egoistic and desire-ridden actions, induced by the qualities of nature, considering himself to be the doer of his actions, he runs the risk of leading an illusory and ignorant life subject to the cycle of births and deaths and the laws of nature. The only way out of this is by doing desire-less actions, surrendering to God and acknowledging Him as the doer of all actions, offering the fruit of all actions to Him with detachment, devotion and sense of sacrifice. Christianity believes a person commits sin against God, not against himself by transgressing His law. If he leads a life of sin without acknowledging God and without believing in Jesus, he will become a

victim of the Devil and fall into hell. If he is a true believer, God will save him and grant him an eternal life in heaven. So it is the conduct of a person upon earth in the light of God's established law and his belief in God that determines the fate of an individual here and hereafter. A sinner can seek forgiveness of God and Jesus, through repentance and submission and he will be forgiven according to the strength of his belief. On the Judgement Day all souls are resurrected and judged by God according to their actions on earth.

In the Christian religion there is only one God, and underneath that God there are archangels, angels, cherubs, the devil and humans respectively. In the Hindu religion, however, there are multiple gods and goddesses, meaning it is a polytheistic religion. In the Judeo-Christian tradition it is a widely accepted belief that the real essence of God can never be seen by any living person. In the Old Testament God tells Moses, 'Thou canst not see My Face, for man shall not see Me and live'. To see God's essence, to see Him as He really is, to see Him face to face (*facie ad faciem*) is possible only in heaven after death. By contrast, from very ancient times Hindu sages and philosophers have held that God's actual essence can be directly experienced. In *Bhakti* schools God is regarded as having not only personal attributes but also a transcendent anthropomorphic form which is real and can be directly perceived. In the *Gītā*, it is repeatedly asserted that through *Bhakti* it is possible to know and perceive the true essence of God and attain oneness with it. Even *Advaita Vedāntins*, who deny that the

impersonal Absolute known as *Brahman* can be made the object of knowledge, assert that the attainment of the total identity of the individual self with *Brahman* is possible in this very life. Gods of the Hindus do not forgive sins and are not interested in saving their worshippers. If someone does anything wrong, the individual has to face the *karmaphala* that results from their actions whether they feel guilty or not. The God of the Bible is always willing to show His mercy and forgiveness to those who are truly sorry for their wrongs and many a times reverses the punishment the person would have received if they had not repented.

Another doctrinal difference between Christianity and Hinduism is the soul's relationship with God. In the whole Judeo-Christian tradition, God is regarded as the 'wholly other'; He is the self-existent Creator whereas all other beings (including human souls) are created things. Mystical experience may bring God and the soul closer together but they can never become one because of the difference in their nature. On the contrary in Hinduism, all schools of *Vedānta* hold that God is the Supreme Self and that the individual selves, which are self-existent and of the same nature as God, are only reflections of Him. Mystical experience is only the realisation of this integral relationship between God and souls. It may also be noted here that whereas some Hindu sects accept God as the impersonal Absolute, other sects accept Him as personal and even anthropomorphic.

In Hinduism, man and animal, both are endowed with souls by God. So, they carry equal values as a creature of God. Christianity teaches that man is created in the image of God and this one fact elevates him above the rest of the creations. Though he falls into sin, he is so valuable to God that God comes in human flesh and pays the penalty for man's sin making it possible to forgive and redeem him. Finally sin and salvation in the Hindu conception are defined as not living in accordance with the norms of the religion and seeking a release from the endless cycle of reincarnation, respectively. In Christian doctrine sin is an act of personal rebellion against a perfect and holy God. Salvation is an escape from eternal punishment to an eternal life as a gift from a loving God to all who call His son Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.

According to Indian sages, the realisation of moral values is never regarded as our ultimate goal whereas the moral values are the ultimate aim of western thought. "Humanity (the phenomenon of human being, the ideal of its perfection and the ideal of the perfected human society) was the paramount concern of Greek idealism, as it is today of Western Christianity in its modern form: however, for the Indian sages and ascetics, *mahatmās* and enlightened saviours, 'humanity' was no more than the shell to be pierced, shattered and dismissed."¹

Thus the western thinkers have confined themselves only to humanity and morality. But Indian sages did not stop here. They went a step forward and said that humanity and morality are not the ends. According to them, our ideal is

super-moralism, where there is no ‘is-ought’ problem, which is at the very root of morality. In the state of super-moralism, moral activities become spontaneous activities as the instinctive activities. This is the stage of liberation. The conception of liberation is the greatest indigenous contribution of Indian sages to the world philosophy.

Corresponding to the consciousness of sin in the Semitic religion, specially in Christianity, we have in the Indian religions the consciousness of suffering or pain. There is no religious problem for man unless, in his reflective mood, he reviews his position and is conscious of his peril. No religious problem is involved in efforts to overcome the hardship imposed by adverse nature or in making adjustments with fellow men. Both of these could be solved without recourse to any total or transcendental effort. The religious situation emerges only when man reviews his existence as a whole. It is an awareness of the deeper aspects of life, of the root problem of it and extends over his entire existence. The religious solution aims at a final and total solution of all problems. It is man’s ultimate concern (*paramapuruṣārtha*). This statement of the religious problem would be acceptable to Buddhism and Jainism and some forms of Hinduism, which does not find a place for a personal God and, therefore, cannot consider the aim of religious endeavour as the establishment of an intimate relationship with God.

The Semitic religions, which assert the creation of finite souls by a personal God, do not feel the need for the doctrine of rebirth; rather, they are opposed to it. However, they cannot satisfactorily explain the transmission of original sin committed by Adam to individual souls born here and now. Absolute dependence on God, even for the existence of the soul, determines that the highest and perhaps the only form of spirituality in Semitic religion is the loving personal relationship of trust and surrender to God. The love of God takes the form of incarnation as man, as in Christianity, and his sacrifice on the cross to redeem humanity. Unlike the Semitic religions, Indian religions are not necessarily committed to theism and to a personal deity. In Indian religious thought, there is no dependence on such dramatic event or intervention by God. Although, the grace of God is accepted by most Indian religions for revelation of the real, and it is admitted that self-surrender and devotion (*bhakti*) towards God may help very intimately in attaining freedom, it is through knowledge or insight that we could dispel ignorance and thus achieve freedom.

With all their diversity of beliefs, the major religions are in accord in one great teaching: human beings are mortal and their spirit comes from a divine world and may eventually return there. All the major world religions hold the belief that how a person has conducted himself or herself while living on earth, whether or not one chooses to walk a path of good or evil, determines how that soul will be treated after death. All the seeds that one has sown throughout his or

her lifetime, good or bad will be harvested in the afterlife. In fact, many teachings state that the only reason for birth into the material world is the opportunity to prepare for the soul's destiny in the immaterial worlds.

When an individual dies, according to many world religions, the soul is judged or evaluated, then sent to what is thought as an eternal place— heaven or hell. The Hindu or Buddhist expects to encounter *Yama*, the god of the dead. In the Hindu scriptures, *Yama* holds dominion over the bright realms and can be influenced in determining a soul's admission by offerings made for the benefit of the deceased by relatives and friends.

In Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, the soul's arrival at either heaven or hell is made somewhat confusing by the teachings of a great, final Judgement Day and the resurrection of the dead. When Roman Catholic Christianity added the doctrine of purgatory in the sixteenth century, the matter became all the more complex because now certain souls were given an opportunity to atone for their sins while residing in a kind of interim area between heaven and hell. While many Christians, Jews and Muslims believe that the dead lies sleeping in their graves until the Last Judgement, others in those same faiths maintain that judgement is pronounced immediately after death. Likewise, the concept of the world to come in Jewish writings may refer to a present heaven or foretell of a future redemption on earth.

Many Indian systems ascribe our ultimate troubles to ignorance (*avidyā*). By contrast there is the Christian doctrine of original sin in which the human race is implicated through the primordial acts of Adam and Eve. Additionally, there are varying conceptions of how human life works: for instance, in Christianity, life stretches essentially from birth or conception to death and then the question arises about the status of posthumous existence, if any. But in South Asian framework, the condition of living beings is termed as '*samsāra*', which implies a potentially endless round of rebirths from which one escapes only through ultimate liberation or *mokṣa*. Hinduism teaches that life is an endless cycle of rebirths where all living things die in one bodily form but return in a different bodily form. By contrast, Christianity believes that we only have one life to live on this earth.

Christianity believes that God created the world out of nothing. Hinduism declares that nothing can come out of nothing and that everything has to exist in a latent form before it manifests. So, God created the world out of Himself using the elements and qualities of His energy known as *prakṛti*. Just as from within himself the spider expands thread through his mouth, plays with it for some time and eventually swallows it, similarly, God expands His potency from within Himself. Thus, the Lord displays the network of cosmic manifestation, utilises it according to His purpose and eventually withdraws it completely within Himself.

Christianity believes in one heaven ruled by God and one hell inhabited by a devil, who is also described to be its chief prisoner. Hinduism believes in a gigantic star studded universe consisting of innumerable worlds, heavens and hells, created by one Supreme God and left to the care and control of several gods and goddesses. The dark world is populated by demoniac forces that play a negative role according to the divine plan.

Hinduism teaches that doctrine of *avidyā* is the real cause of man for coming into the material world, to enter into the cycle of births and deaths and his miseries. Christianity holds that man in his worldly existence has fallen into sin and requires a saviour in the form of a prophet.

According to Hinduism, the body is due to *karma* and is a blemish. It is a product of *avidyā* and can be dissolved only through *jñāna*. Christianity states that, the body has to be used in God's service.

Although both of these religions may seem to be very different from each other, it is very easy to find similarities between the two if they are sought out. Both the religions present a Trinitarian view of God. In the Christian religion there is the Holy Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, these three make up the power behind God. In the Hindu religion there is also a trinity of sorts between three gods, *Brahma*, *Viṣṇu* or *Kṛṣṇa* and *Śiva*. *Brahma* is the Creator of all the reality, similar to the Father, *Viṣṇu* or *Kṛṣṇa* is the Preserver of all

creation, similar to the Son, and *Siva* is the Destroyer of creation, similar to the Holy Spirit.

The basic way of living is also very similar between the two religions. The Christian believes that good deeds will lead a person to eternal salvation in heaven. Similarly, Hindus believe that good *karma* (achieved through good deeds) will eventually allow a person to achieve *mokṣa* and return to the *Brahman*. Thus, there is a similarity between the concept of *mokṣa* in Hinduism and the Christian concept of salvation. Non-violence is an apparent theme in Hinduism and is also seen as theme for Christianity when Jesus instructs his followers to ‘turn to other cheek’. Respect for oneself and others is essential in Hinduism because of the belief in the *ātman* which exists in all creatures. Christianity adopts the idea that ‘your body is a temple of God’ that must be protected because of the need to preserve the soul within. Finally, rituals may seem different but, for all intents and purposes, they are the same. Both religions have specified places of worship where believers come together to pray and celebrate.

Both the religions believe in soul, salvation, *karma*, God, heaven and hell etc. Both the religions hold that the soul is different from the body.

The prolonged discussion made so far covering all the chapters above shows that there are selves over and above the corporeal bodies. The no-self theory of the

skeptics like the *Cārvākas* has no legs to stand upon. The existence of soul or self must be admitted.

Reference:

1. Zimmer, *Philosophies of India*, Princeton University Press, New York, 1969, p.232.