

Third Chapter: Basic Tenets and Claims of Some Religions

Almost all the religious traditions maintain a metaphysical claim regarding the nature of ultimate reality and goal of human life and belief that it is the only authentic view stated by God. Accordingly, people are supposed to orient their world view which would enable them to attain the ideal form of life. According to Paul J. Griffiths, any religious doctrine has five basic functions to play for its followers. Among them, the following two are most basic functions of any religious doctrine: religious doctrines function as a rule governing principle of life for its adherents and it sets a definition of community boundary for its followers. In explaining the two important roles of religious doctrines he writes:

“First religious doctrines function as rules governing the life of the communities that profess them. Among other things they delineate the kinds of conduct that are appropriate for and required for members; provide rubrics for the ritual acts of the community; supply conceptual categories to be used by members in thinking about and analyzing their religious lives; and most generally, structure and order the intellectual, affective, and practical life of the community. The dimension of religious doctrines is perhaps the most basic of all; from

it the others flow.... The second dimension of religious doctrines, again one that focuses upon one of their functions for religious communities, is that many of them exclude what is unacceptable to the community, reject heresy and so define conceptually and practically, the bounds of the community.’^{xiii}

According to Paul J. Griffiths, a proper understanding of the claims of different religious doctrines may help us to understand the function of religious doctrines upon the life of their adherents. Such understanding of the meaning and function of the claims of different religious doctrine may guide us to find a platform for inter-religious dialogue. In this chapter, we will try to explore some of the exclusive claims of certain religious traditions, like Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam to fulfill the main purpose of this thesis. Their claims and metaphysical assumptions about the world can be taken up for discussion individually.

Hinduism

“Hinduism” does not refer to a religious system like other religions. The word “Hindu” is a Persian term, used by the Persians to refer the people who lived in the river bank of *Sindhu*, in ancient India. In that sense, primarily, Hinduism can be defined as a system of belief, socio-cultural and moral behaviour of the people ancient India. As Kshiti Mohan Sen writes:

“The term Hindu is derived from the River Sindhu (the Indus), for the Persians referred to India as the land beyond the Sindhu. Hinduism would thus appear to be a generic term meaning the religions of people of India. There is, however, a greater unity in Hinduism than this derivation would suggest, indeed Hinduism was for centuries the most important factor in preserving the unity of India.”^{lxiv}

The term “religion” contains an idea of a personal God within its body as a necessary characteristic. The God who has created the world and human beings from outside the world out of His holy will. “Religion” also includes an idea of a prophet or a messenger of a God. God sent down his dearest messenger at certain point of time in the history of mankind in this mundane world in order to proclaim His message concerning the ideal way of life before the people of the world. So, according to the western understanding, religion has a beginning in time. God has sent down his messenger to establish the respective religions. Hinduism is not a religion in the above mentioned sense of the term “religion”. Hinduism is not established by any prophet or messenger sent by God at any definite point of time. It is just mere amalgamation of thoughts of the people about the natures of life and universe who lived and have come to live in to the ancient India. As Kshiti Mohan Sen writes:

“Unlike other world religions such as Christianity, Islam, or Buddhism, Hinduism did not have any one founder. It grew gradually over a period of five thousand years, absorbing and assimilating all the religious and cultural movements of India. Consequently, it does not have a *Bible*, or a *Koran* or a *Dhammapadam* to which controversies can be referred to for resolution.”^{lxv}

Nevertheless, a large number of people (especially the people of India) identify themselves as a member of Hindu religious community. *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions* maintains that “About 80 percent of India, approx one billion people regarded themselves as Hindu, and there are about 30 million Hindus elsewhere in the world.”^{lxvi} This is interesting. Why a large number of people believe that Hinduism is just a religious sect like other great religious sect of the world namely, Christianity, Islam etc.? For that we need to critically relook into the nature of Hinduism and try to find out some common characteristic of modern Hinduism which can be seen in the case of other great religions of the world as well.

For some scholars, the essence of Hinduism can be said to be dharma. The word “Dharma” is a Sanskrit word, comes from the root word *dhr*, which means “to hold or binding together”. However, the word “Dharma” has been used in many senses in the ancient literature of India. In different contexts it is used to mean different things. Sometimes it stands for law, custom etc., sometimes it is used to refer the intrinsic virtues of human mind like ahimsa,

love, justice etc., and also sometimes to duty of human beings. Therefore, it is not easy to define the word “Dharma” in a specific sense. For our minimum understanding of Dharma we may take the help of *Mahābhārata*. In many Chapters of *Mahābhārata* the concept of Dharma has been beautifully explained. In the SāntiParva of *Mahābhārata* we see that Bhisma tries to bring out the characteristics of Dharma before Yudhirstira. To explore the nature of Dharma he says:

“All the sayings of dharma are with a view to nurturing, cherishing, providing more amply, enriching, increasing, enhancing, all living beings: in one word, securing their prabhava. Therefore whatever has the characteristic of bringing that about is dharma. This is certain.”^{lxvii} (109.10)

“All the sayings of dharma are with a view to supporting, sustaining, bringing together, and in their togetherness upholding, all living beings, securing, in one word, their dharma. Therefore, whatever has the characteristic of doing that is dharma. This is certain.”^{lxviii} (109.11)

“All the sayings of dharma are with a view to securing for all living beings freedom from violence, ahimsa. Therefore, whatever has the characteristic of not doing violence is dharma. This is certain.”^{lxix} (109.12)

From the above mentioned opinion of Bhisma about the nature of Dharma, it seems that Dharma is like a principle and a way to sustain good for the all living beings. It is a matter of constant practice of some inner virtues like *ahimsā* (non-violence), *love*, etc. which seems necessary to establish happiness into the human society. Badrinath Chaturvedi has put his stress upon this point of view of *Mahābhārata* with regard to the nature of Dharma and says, “... dharma is said to be the order that sustains the people and secures the good of living beings.”^{lxx} And the goal of Dharma i.e. good for all living beings would not be possible without the exercise of non- violence (*ahimsā*) and truthfulness to one self and also towards other living beings. That’s why it has been said by many enlightened beings of India that “*ahimsāparomā dharma.*” So it can be said that the spirit of Hinduism as a Dharma does not end only in the scriptural injunctions. At the World Religious Parliament, Swami Vivekananda has beautifully presented this unique nature of Hinduism. He says, “The Hindu religion does not consist in struggle and attempts to believe a certain doctrine or dogma, but in realizing – not in believing, but in being and becoming.”^{lxxi}

However, on the basis of the above mentioned characteristics of Dharma it can be said that, Dharma is not totally different phenomenon from religion because more or less the purpose of the world’s great religions are, in some respects, same like Dharma, i.e. to sustain good for living beings. Etymologically says the root meaning of the word “religion” contains the essence of Dharma. Prof. Chaturvedi has beautifully explained this fact. He

says,“...dharma is the foundation of religion itself, if we understand “religion” also in its original Latin meaning religio, that is to bind together.”^{lxxii} So in a loose sense we may use the term Dharma as a religion. Now we may take an attempt to explore the nature of Hindu dharma as religious phenomenon and try to point out certain basic metaphysical claims of it as we have seen in the case of other religious traditions, in the following way.

But because of its wide nature it is not easy to draw a complete picture of the claims of Hinduism as a religious sect. Hinduism as a body of faith is further divided into various subsets. Among these different sects five sects are main, namely, Shaivism, Vaisnavism, Shākta, Ganapatāya, and Souriya. Each of these sects maintains views which are different in some respects regarding the ultimate nature of the world and the form of worship. As for example, Shaivism holds that Lord Shiva is the ultimate reality form which everything of the world has come and also will go to him after the stipulated time. Thus, for the Shaivist, all prayers should direct towards Lord Shiva. Vaishnavism on the other hand maintains that Lord Vishnu is the ultimate source of everything, and prayer should direct towards to Lord Vishnu. Among these different views within Hinduism it is quite difficult to summarize the main tenets of Hinduism.

However, like other world’s great religions, Hindu “religion” does not have any central religious text. Hindu social, spiritual and metaphysical assumptions were based on bunches of texts like *Veda, Upanishada, Rāmāyana, Mahābhārata, Bhāgavad-Gītā, Purānas,* and

SmritiShastras etc. Sometimes it is mistakenly believed that *Veda* is the sole foundation of Hinduism. But *Veda* is not the only foundational basis of Hinduism, although it is one of the foundations of it. A comment of Kshiti Mohan Sen is worthy to mention here that, “The *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, the *Gītā* the *Rāmāyana*, the *Mahābhārata*, the *Purānas*, the books of the so-called ‘Six Systems of Philosophy’, the songs of *Bhakti* movements and of the mystics are all authoritative, but none is exclusively so.”^{lxxiii}

As a religious phenomenon, Hinduism is based on the principle of *dharma*. And *dharma* is not solely based upon the Vedic injunctions. The nature and purpose of *dharma* is wider than the injunctions of *Veda*. As Bhisma says in the Shanti Parva of *Mahābhārata*:

“Neither can one ascertain *dharma* by mere reading of Vedic texts.”^{lxxiv}

Veda is supposed to be brought by the Aryans. But many non-Aryan characteristics were clearly found within the cultural system of present Hinduism. As Kshiti Mohan Sen writes:

“It is interesting to note that the *Vedas*, though accepting many gods, are without idols or images. The fact that the Indus valley Civilization had many images shows that image-worship is a contribution of the non-Vedic cultural trend. Some attribute its rise to Greek influence on India, which was strong after Alexander’s

invasion. It is believed that the Greeks, under Buddhist patronage and inspiration, made the first image of Enlightened one. This thesis does not seem fully satisfactory, as there was image worship in India even before the Graeco-Buddhist *Gāndhāra* school of sculpture developed. In fact, evidence of image-worship in Mahenjodaro suggests that it has existed in India at least since the third millennium BC. There is no doubt, however, that Buddhism of the *Mahāyāna* school enriched Hindu image-worship^{»lxxv}

So it will be wrong if we define Hinduism as purely Aryan culture or Vedic religion. Hindu Dharma is more than that. It is a great fusion of both Aryan and non-Aryan culture and rituals and spiritual activities.

Hinduism is not a prophetic religion. It is believed that there were some hermits who lived in the ancient India and has seen the eternal truths of this universe through their inner eyes. They have come to tell us about the fundamental truths of life sustaining moral principles of the universe, the truths that is inhered in the universe from the very beginning of its own being. And it is believed by a large number of Hindus that Hinduism is nothing but the amalgamation of such eternal truths which have been seen by the saints of ancient India. Hinduism represents such truths from the very first day of this realization. That is why it is difficult to trace the exact time of the origination of Hinduism. For that reason Hinduism is also known as *Sanātana Dharma*.

However, the present form of Hinduism is also influenced by the enlightened persons of modern India like Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda and many others. Furthermore, it is also influenced by many other traditions which came to invade India. They have left their traces upon the cultures of Hinduism. Hinduism has been moulded by all these influences and forms a multi-cultural tradition.

In this context one thing needs to be pointed out that Hinduism as religious phenomena cannot be separated from the philosophy of ancient India. Here we do not find any sharp line of distinction between the philosophy and religion. Indeed the conception of Dharma itself is a fruit of philosophical speculations. Philosophical speculations of ancient Indian thinkers about life and world are embedded in the body of Hinduism. Both the Vedic (Samkhya, yoga, Vedanta, Naya, Veishika, Mimamsa etc.) and non-Vedic (Buddhism, Jainism, Charvakas etc.) schools have left a tremendous effect upon the Hindu religious behaviour. The impact is so decisive that many times it seems impossible to differentiate between Hindu philosophy and religion. Under such influence, Hinduism becomes a great fusion of philosophy and theology. For that reason many theological concepts of Hinduism are found to be discussed by the Indian philosophers. Under such philosophical influence, Hinduism in its true spirit is less dogmatic than other traditions. May be that's why apparently opposing streams simultaneously flows through the heart of Hinduism and each religious sect developed a philosophy of their own, especially Saiva and Vaisnava (Kashmiri Saivism, Ramanuja, Chaitanya etc.).

As Hindu religion is closely related to philosophical schools, metaphysical speculations are evident in this tradition. However, like other world's great religions, metaphysical assumptions regarding the world and human beings found to be present within Hinduism. But here, we do not find any single metaphysical theory concerning these facts. As for example Veishikaphilosophers maintain that god created the world out of the atoms of some pre-existing substances like water, air, earth, ether, fire etc. God has just arranged them in a particular order in the unknown past. Like god, the elements are also eternal. Whereas, the AdvaitaVedantanis believes that world is the product of *Maya* or illusion. *Maya* is the illusory power of one absolute eternal divine consciousness namely, *Brahman*. Due to this illusory force of *Maya* the world just appears before our consciousness as real thing. But the world does not have true existence. It has only a phenomenal existence with respect to the ultimate existence of Brahman. In the absolute sense, only *Brahman* exists.

The concept of God is one of the most central concepts of all the great religions. Moreover, most of them maintain a single ideal conception regarding the nature of God. But in the case of Hinduism we do not find any single conception of divinity or god. The conception of god has been changing in due courses of time within Hinduism. As for example in Vedic era the Vedic people worshiped the forces and events of nature, like fire, wind etc. At this stage the conception of god is purely animistic. They have spontaneously projected an idea of power behind these forces and events of

nature and have started to worship them. Because they believed that these powers of nature may bring happiness to their life. Thus we may see in Rig-Veda various hymns concerning the worship of fire (*Agni*). As in the very first Mandala of *Rig- Veda* we may see a Hymns concerning Fire (*Agni*):

“... 7 .Thee, O Agni we approach day by day

O (god) who shiniest in the darkness;

With our prayer bringing adoration to thee.-^{»lxxvi}

“...9. Thus O Agni be easy to access to us

as a father to his son, stay with us for our

happiness.^{»lxxvii}

But in due courses of time these forces of nature acquired certain personal characteristics by the Vedic people. As a result the worship of such natural forces gradually forms polytheistic conception of God with in Hinduism.

However, probably within the 8th century B.C. i.e. in the Upanisadic period, the polytheistic conception of gods replaced by the idea of one absolute god namely *Brahman*. *Brahman* is defined as a absolute divine consciousness by the Upanisadic thinkers. Upanisadic thinkers have started to proclaim the existence of one eternal absolute consciousness, and have tried to explain the apparent existence of various gods in the light of it. For them, in the true sense of the term existence only *Brahman* exists and resides in each and every objects of the universe. And human consciousness is nothing but the reflection of the consciousness of *Brahman*. As it is inscribed in the *Isa Upanisada*:

“This whole world is to be dwelt in by the Lord,
whatever living being there is in there is in the world...”^{lxviii}

So it seems that Upanisad’s pantheistic conception of divinity have replaced the Vedic conception polytheism. No doubt those Upanisadic philosophers have left an immense effect upon the religious psychology of the concerned people with their conception of one absolute divinity. Even after such a tremendous effort of Upanisadic thinkers, polytheism continues to play important role in Hindu society. That’s why polytheistic conception of gods goes simultaneously beside the Pantheistic conception divinity within the main stream of Hinduism. This is a unique characteristic of Hinduism.

However, after the Upanisadic era, probably within the 5th to 6th B.C., human beings have started to enjoy more significant place of within the religious discourse of Hinduism. However, Buddhism and Jainism played an important role in this regard. It is true that from the Upanisadic period human beings have been regarded as the mere representative of the eternal divine consciousness. But from the beginning of Buddhism and Jainism human beings became almost the point of departure for religio-philosophical discourse. They deny the existence of a so called personal God and have tried to search the existence of divine element with in human beings. They believed that human beings potentially possess the divine element; they just need to explore the concerned divine element through the means of right moral behaviour. In this regard the opinion of Swami Vivekananda is worthy of consideration. He says, “The Buddhists or the Janis do not depend upon

God; but the whole force of their religion is directed to the great central truth in every religion, to evolve a God out of man...»^{lxxix}

And also like other great religions of the world, different sub-sects of Hinduism is directed towards an ultimate goal of human beings. The ultimate destination is known by many names like “Atmaupalabधि”, “Nirvana”, “Moksha” etc. but more or less all the names refer to the same mental state, the state of peace and joy. Hinduism as an amalgamation of different sub-sects prescribes different ways to achieve the ultimate destination. There are three well-known ways are found within Hinduism namely *JnanaMārga*: the way of knowledge, *Karma Mārga*:the way of righteous action and *Bhakti Mārga*: the way of love and division. People can chose any one of them, all the ways leads to the same goal. Swami Vivekananda has pointed out this unique nature of Hinduism at the very first day of parliament of religions by chanting hymns of his boyhood. He says:

“As the different streams having their sources in different places all mingle their water in the sea, so O lord, the different paths which men take through different tendencies, various though appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee.”^{lxxx}

It is evident from the above discussion that why a large number of people identify Hinduism as a religious tradition. But the true spirit of Hinduism does not simply ends in purely religious discourses. However, it needs to be pointed out that the journey of all the above mentioned sub-sects of Hinduism

has not been always very peaceful. In past many times they have engaged in collision with each other concerning the nature of true religion. But after a number of encounters not a single sect has been rooted out from its base. Yet it is true that a wave of a particular sect has rose so high in the ocean of Hinduism and sub-marginalized the waves of other sects. But in the very next time the waves of other sects have proved their existence in a different form. It is our inability that we do not recognize it. I think that this happened due to the unique principle of Dharma on which Hinduism is grounded. It is due to the principle of Dharma, a wave of monism flows simultaneously besides the wave of polytheism in the ocean of Hinduism. As a DharmaHinduism adopts and nurtures these entire apparently diverse sects. This is the uniqueness of Hindu Dharma.

Buddhism

Buddhism as a religion has touched the heart of a large number of people throughout the world. Whether Buddhism is a separate religious tradition than Hinduism or not is a debatable issue. However, Gautama Buddha himself did not want to introduce a new religion. For many scholars, Buddhism is not a separate religious tradition; it emerges within Hinduism as a reformation movement. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan has pointed out this fact in his book *Indian Philosophy*. He writes, “Buddha was not so keen about founding a new scheme of the universe as about teaching a new sense of duty. It was his privilege to start a religion independent of dogma and priesthood sacrifice and sacrament, which would insist on an inward change of heart and system of

self culture.^{»lxxxix} On the other hand, for some scholars Buddhism is not a religion in the western sense of the term “religion”. For them, it is a way of life, not a religious sect, because in early Buddhism there is a lack of existence of any personal god which is the sole characteristics of any religion. As for example, Galloway said in this regard in his book *Philosophy of Religion*, “Buddhism has the qualities of inwards, universality and humanity, but it has attained them at the expense of ceasing to be a religion in the commonly accepted sense of the word ‘religion’. For in its original form Buddhism had neither God nor theology, it simply is a way of life and attitude to experience.^{»lxxxix} But now in the present canvas of the world it stands as an exclusive body of faith. However, as a religious sect Buddhism stands in an exceptional position in the history of world religions. It has an interesting history of its origination unlike the other great religions of the world. Before going into entire discussion of Buddhism, i.e. the claims of Buddhism let us try to look back into the history of early Buddhism in order to grasp a clear picture of its nature.

Early Buddhism has appeared as a protest against the absolute authority of Brahmanism over the life of the people of ancient India. It questioned the moral behaviour of Brahmins of 5th to 6th century B.C. of ancient India. Gautama Buddha (563 B.C.) is considered as the founder of Buddhism. But he himself did not want to establish a new religion. He had just tried to preach the ideal moral behaviour to the people. However, after the death of Gautama Buddha controversies were started to arise among the disciples of Gautama

Buddha, and a number of councils had been arranged in different times to explore the true message of Gautama. It is after one hundred years of Gautama Buddha's death, controversy had started to arise among his disciples of regarding the authenticity of his preaching. Probably after the assembly of Vaishālī (483 B.C.) early Buddhism has primarily divided into two groups namely, Sthavirvāda and Mahāsāṅghikas. The last Buddhist council was held in the first century B.C. under the guidance of great king Kaniska. After this council, the disciples of Mahāsāṅghikas came under the head of a new form of Buddhism namely, Mahāyana. However, the Mahāyana felt that the existing preaching was not the real preaching of Buddha. The disciples of Mahāyana school interpreted the early *pali* text into Sanskrit and gave Buddhism a wider perspective. Thus, it can be said that the present form of Buddhism both contains and reduces many traits from early Buddhism. For some scholars like Galloway, popular Buddhism includes many new conceptions than early Buddhism. As he writes, "Popular Buddhism wandered far from the way of its founder, it even came to have heaven and hell and rewards and punishment." ^{lxxxiii}

While considering these facts let us try to point out the claims of Buddhism in the following way:

Like Hinduism, in the case of Buddhism too it is difficult to make a distinction between philosophy and theology. Philosophy and theology are intimately connected in Buddhism. Indeed Buddha did not want to preach any theological doctrine regarding the nature of human life and word. It is true

that at the very primary stage of its development early Buddhism has appeared as a moral system only and not as a religious sect. In early Buddhism, the moral behaviour of people held the central position. But in latter times, Buddha's philosophical assumptions somehow took a theological and philosophical form and made the basis of Buddhism as a separate religious tradition. Moreover, in a sense, Buddhism is not a prophetic religion. Buddha is not a prophet like Jesus who is presumed to be sent down by the ultimate God to preach His preferred way of life. At least Buddha himself did not claim such.

Tripitaka is considered as the central text of Buddhism. *Tripitaka* means the combination of three *pitakas* or segments, namely, *Vinaya*, *Sutta* and *Avidharmmapitaka*. These three *pitakas* contain three different preachings of Lord Buddha concerning three aspects. *Vinaya-pitaka* contains the moral preaching's Lord Buddha concerning the ideal moral behaviour of his disciple. *Sutta-pitaka* contains Buddha's philosophical preaching of the life and world. *Avidhamma-pitaka* contains the detail explanation of Buddha's philosophical assumptions. However, early Buddhism was primarily an oral tradition. Buddha did not write the *Tripitaka*. It is after the death of Gautama Buddha his disciples assembled together and had given Buddha's preaching a written form, which ultimately takes the form of complete *Tripitaka*.

Unlike many other world religions, early Buddhism did not believe in the existence of a personal God. Buddha himself did not believe in the existence

of a personal God existing beyond this mundane world who has created the world at a certain point of time. But he did not altogether deny the existence of divine elements. According to him, true divinity does not lie outside the human nature. It exists and resides within human beings. People can realize it by maintaining right moral behaviour. In a sense, it can be said that Buddha had tried to explore an idea of divinity within man. In doing so, he has tried to bring human effort into the central position and has tried to impose the sole responsibility upon the human's moral action in the case achieving salvation. In the case of Christianity it can be seen that God's grace played a central role in achieving salvation. Without the grace of ultimate divinity human beings can never be able to achieve salvation. But by denying the existence of such ultimate divinity Buddha imposes the sole responsibility upon the individual in the case of salvation. The absence of personalized god ultimately gives the sole authority and responsibility upon the individual human beings over their action in premises religion. In this regard, a comment of Dr. S. Radhakrishnan is worthy to be mentioned. He writes, "This warning was needed at a time when people were losing their moral energy in the ecstatic apprehension of the absolute."^{lxxxiv} Here, a similar account of view can be seen in Vedanta. Vedanta also maintains a similar account of view regarding the nature of divinity. However, in later times, after the death of Buddha the conception of personal god in the form of Buddha emerged. Buddha took the place of god in the religious culture of Buddhism. Dr.SarvapallyRadhakrishnan has tried to point out in his *Indian Philosophy*

the cause of such decisive change in the nature Buddhism as a religious sect. He writes, “The religious instinct of man requires a god and so in the practical religion of Buddha he himself was deified, in spite of his own caution.”^{lxxxv}

In the absence of a personal god, early Buddhism has explained the origin of the world and life solely on the basis of natural evolutionary way. As we have seen earlier in this chapter that Buddha himself did not believe in the existence of a creator god. For Buddha, the world is purely a matter of natural evolution. There is nothing like personal God who can be considered as the creator, sustainer of the world. Early Buddhism maintains that world is constructed out of atoms like earth, water, fire etc. in a natural evolutionary process, under the supervision of a spontaneous causal principle namely, *Praītyasamutpāda*. A report in American newspaper has pointed out this fact while reporting the Swami Vivekananda’s view concerning true Buddhism. It states, “...it denied the existence of a personal God, believing that everything sprang from the atom or nature.”^{lxxxvi} (Brooklyn standard Union, February, 4, 1895). However, *Praītyasamutpāda* means the dependence theory of origination. According to this theory, every event has certain conditions. If the conditions are present then the event will be produced. According to Buddha, this basic casual principle is dominating in nature. For him everything of this universe is subjected to this casual principle. The world itself, even the human moral behaviour moves under the supervision of this causal principle. However, it works spontaneously without the help of any personal god. Moreover, it is not only Buddha or early Buddhism but many of

the later developed sub-sects of Buddhism also maintain a similar account of view regarding the origin of the world.

Like the world, human beings are also a construction of natural elements. Humans are not creation of any personal God. They are nothing but assimilations of certain material elements like air, fire, water etc. and certain mental aspects like consciousness, affection, cognition etc. According to early Buddhism human body is construction out of the atoms of air, fire, water, earth. In Buddhist terminology, humans are defined as *Namarupa*. The term “*nama*” means mind and the term “*rupa*” refers to body. Humans are nothing but the assimilation of Mind and body, which is assimilated in a natural procedure.

Like all the other great religions of the world, Buddhism also professes an ultimate goal for human beings. But here in early Buddhism, salvation does not mean mere achievement of heaven or the enjoyment of fellowship with some higher being. The nature of human’s ultimate goal which is known as Nirvāna in Buddhist terminology and is difficult to understand. Buddha himself remains silent in this regard. Primarily it seems that Nirvāna means the freedom from the sufferings of the cycle of life and death. As per the precept of the early Buddhism, human’s earthly life is full of suffering. For Buddha, every event of this world has a cause and human’s suffering is not an exceptional case. It has various reasons for this. According to Buddhism, due to our ignorance about the knowledge of Four Noble Truths we are absolutely moved by our desire and passion. All our worldly actions are guided by our

lusts. And for Buddhism desire, lust, passions are the enemy of human life. Due to our lustful work we fall under the painful circle of birth and death. Therefore, salvation or Nirvāna can only be achieved by acquiring the true knowledge of the Four Noble Truths. But Buddhism puts its sole focus upon the moral behaviour of human beings for achieving salvation. Buddha himself urges to his disciples to develop their moral behaviour. Without developing a perfect moral behaviour people can never be able to achieve the eternal peace of Nirvana. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan writes, “He made it clear that, salvation does not depend on the acceptance of doubtful dogmas or doing deeds of darkness to appease an angry God. It depends on the perfection of character and devotion to the good.”^{lxxxvii} Moreover, for Buddha, people have to walk alone in the way to salvation. An individual human being has to achieve it only by his own moral effort by following the doctrines of Buddha alone. A. K. Warder, in his book *Indian Buddhism* has beautifully pointed out this point by sighting an example of conversion between Ananda, the Buddha’s disciple and Lord Buddha himself. He writes “...Ananda, in this case, you should live yourself as island, with yourselves as refuge, with no one else as refuge with the doctrine as an island with the doctrine as refuge, with no else as refuge.”^{lxxxviii} Thus, for Lord Buddha, people have to deepen upon oneself in order to be awakened (gain *bodhi*). A similar kind of conversation is found between Bhishma and Yudhishthira in the SantiParva of *Mahābhārata*. In answering to the question of Yudhishthira about the nature of Dharma, Bhishma

said, “One should deepen upon one’s intelligence to decide between dharma and adharma and act accordingly.”^{lxxxix}(142.23)

However, Lord Buddha himself has explored the way of eight fold paths (*Astāngikamārga*), to purify and develop an ideal moral behaviour to achieve Nirvāna. The Eight fold paths are as follows:

Right Understanding (*samyagdr̥ṣṭi*): For Buddha, ignorance is the prime cause of suffering. Due to the ignorance of the true nature of life and world people fall into the circle of life and death and suffer. Therefore, according to Buddha one has to free oneself from the chain of ignorance in order to attain liberation i.e. Nirvāna. For him right understanding is the necessary condition for having a true knowledge of anything. By right understanding he means a free, critical and pure understanding. By following Buddhism it can be said that a person has to put his faith over the preaching’s of his teacher and doctrines but his faith must not be dogmatic in nature. It should be grounded on the pure reason itself. Thus *Dhammapadda* said: “They who know truth in truth, and untruth in untruth, arrive at truth, and follow true desires.”^{xc} (12) (The twin-Verses).

Besides it a seeker of Nirvāna has to acquire the true knowledge about the doctrines of Four Noble Truth, *Praītyasamutpāda* etc.

Right Resolve (*samyagsaṅkalpa*): For Buddha mere knowledge may not be able to free a person from the bondage of suffering. That’s why the concerned person has to fulfill the second path i.e. *samyagsaṅkalpa* (Right Resolve). The second path says that a person has to maintain a right mental

determination to lead his life in accordance to the right knowledge. For Buddha our desire and passion always throw us into the sea of suffering. Therefore, the concerned person needs to develop a right determination to walk into the path of right knowledge by making a triumph over his desire and passion. Such kind of mental determination is referred to by the term 'Right thought' in Buddhist terminology.

Right Speech (*samyagvāk*): Along with the right knowledge and mental determination, a seeker of Nirvāna has to maintain right speech. He has always to speak the truth because lies may cause harm to the others. Therefore, it causes violence. But a seeker of Nirvāna has to practice the principle of non-violence in order to be liberated.

Right Action (*samyagkarmānta*): Buddha believes in the theory of *Karmavāda*. For him our worldly actions form our life. Our actions of the present decide our future life. So the person who wants to be liberated has to be conscious about his worldly actions. For Buddha, our worldly actions should be grounded upon the principle of non-violence because for him the principle non- violence is the life sustaining principle of the world. A seeker of Nirvāna has to sustain the life of others. Therefore, the actions of the seeker of Nirvāna must be grounded on the principle of non- violence. As *Dhammapadda* said, "The evil door mourns in this world and he mourns in the next he mourns in both. He mourns and suffers when he sees the evil (result) of his own work."^{xi} (15) (The twin -verses). It is important to note that by action Buddha does not mean only the physical actions. By action he

broadly understands not only physical action but also verbal and mental actions.

Right Livelihood (samyagājīva): In Buddhism right livelihood means living life by honest means. For Buddha a seeker of Nirvāna must lead honest life by choosing honest means of earning. He has to avoid any kind of dishonest means in order to sustain his life, like the selling of any kind of toxic materials, human trafficking etc.

Right Effort (samyagvyāyāma): In Buddhism *samyagvyāyāma* means the exercise of good thinking. According to Buddhism, a seeker of Nirvāna has to nurture good thinking and has to reduce all kind of evil thinking, like the thinking of unlawful sexual desires etc. in order to be liberated. According to Buddhism, in most of the cases our evil thinking works as a hindrance into the way of Nirvana.

Right Mindfulness (samyagsmṛti): Beside all the above mentioned steps a seeker of Nirvāna has to restore the knowledge of Four Noble Truths into the memory of the seeker of Nirvāna. The presence of this knowledge in the mind of helps the concerned seeker to concentrate into the way of Nirvāna.

Right Concentration (samyagsamādhi): After the successful practice of all the above seven steps the heart and mind of a seeker of Nirvāna becomes peaceful and selfless. After having a selfless mind a seeker becomes able to concentrate on the four noble truths. By an absolute meditation on the four noble truths a seeker of Nirvāna ultimately can free himself from the painful circle of birth and death.

These eight fold paths of Buddhism are also known as *Prajñāshīlasamādhi* in Buddhist language. The word “*Prajñāshīlasamādhi*” is etymologically consists of three different words, namely, “*Prajñā*”, “*shīla*” and “*samādhi*”. The word “*Prajñā*” means wisdom of knowledge of real nature of the world, the knowledge of the Four Noble truth. “*Shīla*” means right conduct. And “*samādhi*” means right concentration. The first two paths among the eight paths fall under the category of *Prajñā*. The next five category falls under the category of *shīla*. And the last path i.e. *samyagsamādhi* falls under the category of *samādhi*. The practice of these three together ultimately lead human beings to the ultimate destination of Nirvāna.

Christianity

Jesus of Nazareth is considered to have laid the foundation of a new religious path which is well known and accepted as Christianity. However, it is a continuation of old Abrahamic faith, i.e. Judaism. As an ideal inhabitant of Jews community, Jesus believed in the existence of Jehovah, the almighty God of Judaism. Hence, he substantiates:

“... Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly I say to you until heaven and earth pass away, not iota not a dot, will pass from the Law, until all is accomplished.”^{xcii}(6:14) Matthew.

Jesus himself believed in the prophecy of Abraham and the commandments of Moses etc. He proclaimed to his disciples to follow the paths prescribed by the Abraham, Moses etc. But at the same time he was quite dissatisfied with the superstitious cultural endeavours of his time. He was depressed with the social, moral and spiritual conditions of the people of Jerusalem of his time. He tried to bring a social, moral and a spiritual reformation within the classical Judaic tradition, without any intention of establishing a new kind of religion. He tried to bring a reform within the existing system of faith.

Therefore, it can be said that Jesus shares the Judaic conception of the origination of religion. Jesus walked in the paths prescribed by Abraham and Moses. Throughout his life he makes a spiritual struggle to renewing the ways of absolute divinity, i.e. Jehovah. However, later in history, the life and death of Jesus appears with a new meaning towards some of his beloved disciples. Incidentally, the twelve apostles of Jesus like Mark, Luke and Matthew etc. were spread in different parts of Jerusalem to proclaim the gospels of Jesus. The gospels were held together in the New Testament. It is worthy to mention here that the Bible (Old Testament and New Testament) is the central text of Christianity. The concerned disciples of Jesus tried to follow his prescribed paths of God and wanted to lead their life accordingly. His life, preaching, and his death centers round the concentration of many Hebrew people which ultimately lead to another form of religion in the human history, namely Christianity. Hence, Christianity stands as an exclusive body of faith and further sub-divided into two popular sects namely, Catholics and Protestants.

Although Christianity is a continuation of Judaism, and Jesus tried to maintain the chain of thought but in due courses it gradually separates itself from Judaism and many other faiths also. Now let us see the exclusive claims and concepts of Christianity which makes it different from Judaism and other religious sects.

Like the conception of God in any other religious sects, the conception God is central one in Christianity. Christianity is a monotheistic religion that believes in the existence of one absolute God. However, the God in Christianity is of anthropocentric in nature. In Christianity, God is conceived as eternal and infinite. In other words, Christianity holds the same monotheistic conception of God with Judaism. But the nature of God in Christian theology changes from the Judaic conception of God. The conception of God in Christianity becomes more refined than that of the ancient Judaism. Like Judaism, Christianity believes in the existence of anthropocentric conception of God. This God is a transcendental entity and created the entire universe out of His volition. But, unlike Judaism the God in Christianity is not only described as a king of the Universe but, as the Father of His disciples. Therefore, the relation between the God and His disciples becomes more close and familiar in Christianity. Jesus proclaims himself as the son of God. For scholar like John Hick, the attribute of fatherhood is a transformation of the previous personal characteristics of Judaic conception of God. He, thus, writes:

“The conviction that God is personal has always been plainly implied both in the biblical writings and in later Jewish and Christian devotional and theological character. In the Old Testament God speaks in personal terms... and the prophets and psalmists address God in personal terms... In the New Testament the some conviction of the personal character of God embodied in the figure of fatherhood that was constantly used by Jesus as the most adequate earthly image with which to think of God.”^{xciii}

In Christianity, love is considered to be one of the most important attributes of God. Love is the essential nature of God. The love that is being referred to in this context vis-a-vis God is in nature of un-conditionality and purity that transcends the general cosmic significance. And apart from the nature of being ‘unconditional’, other features that have been ascribed to God encompasses the ontology/being of ‘Holiness’ and ‘Mercy’. These virtues are intrinsically associated with God by any standard of religious understanding and stance. Essentially, these virtues become the stronghold for people to hang-on their faith upon one religion or other to achieve the higher goals that would provide them the meaning- making elements in the world. It is to understand the nature of one self and the world that human beings strive for generations. Many take the path of professing holiness and reflecting mercy

in their action. However, the goal remains same i.e. to attain an understanding of the higher one, God.

The conception of Trinity — the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost — is one of the central concepts of Christian theology, which makes it different from other two Semitic religions like Judaism and Islam. In Christian Trinity, the three denominations, the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, correspond in attributes to the same God. Hence, it is clear that for this reason God is replicated in the form of three, as aforementioned: God as Father, God as Son and God as Holy Ghost. Despite having various representational forms, it is to be in cognizance and faith understood that the privileging of God cannot be replaced. In other words, the trinity serves to portray God in different forms but the replication of God Himself becomes the ultimate end. The main essence of this argument jars down to a common standing that God alone exists. And as mentioned repeatedly above that the three forms are mere representations of one God. It also bears an understanding that God can be approached, prayed and invoked through three different paths/means/denominations. A further argument can also be built at this juncture saying that the conception of the Trinity is more of a symbolic order than of customary. Symbols can be understood and decoded by the preceptor rather than unfolding by the entity itself, the meaning coded within it. Therefore, the symbolic essence also embodies certain mystery within it which cannot be unraveled every time. Hence, it becomes a little difficult to grasp the meaning of Trinity in its full essence.

Christian theology also professes the same view of ‘representation’ concerning the origin of human beings – God has created human beings in his own image. Therefore, God’s personality gets clearly reflected through human beings. As in the Old Testament, Christian theology maintains that painful life humans encounter in this earthly life is an outcome of an original sin committed by Adam, the first human being. But unlike the Old Testament they do not solely give their utmost importance to the original sin. In Christian theology, an individual human being is also responsible for his sinful life. Prof. Rama ShankerSrivastava in his book, *Comparative Religion* has briefly explained this point. He has thus opined:

“But whereas Judaism gives immense importance to the original sin, Christianity does not. It gives importance to man’s commitment of sin by transgressing God’s commandments and moral principles in life. For Christianity sin consists in dishonoring God and turning away from His love and grace. Every man according to Christianity is committing sins and is becoming an Adam to himself for he misuse his free will as Adam did.”^{xciv}

From that it can be said that in Christianity an individual human being writes his own destiny through his work and by using his own freewill. Like some other great religions of the world, Christianity also believe in the conception of Judgment day, the day in which all the worldly actions of human beings will be judged by the almighty God. As it is inscribed in the Bible:

“...I tell you on the Day of Judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for your words you will be justified, by your words you will be condemned.”^{xcv}(12:11) Matthew.

“... For the son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.”^{xcvi}(16:26) Matthew.

As per Christian theology, human beings are created by God in his own image; therefore, human nature reflects and represents the glory of God. Accordingly, Christianity believes that human have qualities that is of divine nature or of God. They can transcend the narrow boundaries of their desire and passion and take across the limits of bodily self which ultimately prepares the way for Kingdom of heaven. In the kingdom of heaven a man can enjoy the peace of heaven under the fellowship of God. However, according to Christian theology the kingdom of heaven is regarded as the ultimate goal of human race, where human beings enjoy a fellowship with the almighty God. In Christianity, the word “Kingdom Of Heaven” is used in a very technical sense. Apparently, it seems that Kingdom of Heaven belongs beyond this mundane world. But its essence lies very deep. It is difficult to explain this ultimate destiny of human life in our ordinary words. Jesus himself uses various parables to explain the nature of ultimate destiny before his disciples. As it is inscribed in the Bible,

“The Kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants, and becomes a tree, so that the birds of air comes and rest.”^{xcvii}(13:23)Matthew.

“The Kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his Joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.”^{xcviii}(13:23).

It seems that the kingdom of heaven does not belong outside human mind or spirit. It potentially is embedded within the human consciousness, like a tree potentially within a seed. It is an achievement of a kind of mental state where man can enjoy eternal freedom and joy within his consciousness under the fellowship of absolute divinity. But for Christianity, it is not easy to achieve such kind of mental state. The way of Kingdom of heaven is not an easy one. According to Christian theology one has to emancipate all his narrow desires. As it is inscribed in the Bible:

“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”^{xcix} (16:25) Matthew

In Christianity, it is acknowledged that God has created human beings and has given them the freedom of will. And also has given them the freedom to choose a way of life to lead their lives. According to Christianity, the person who chooses the way of God will enjoy the Kingdom of heaven, and the one who chooses its opposite will be thrown into the dazzling fire of the hell on the Day of Judgment. So in Christianity, by choosing the way of God, one may be able to redeem from his sins. It is worthy to mention here that like Buddhism, Christianity also gives importance to the individual endeavour in the case of salvation. But unlike Buddhism, it does not give the whole authority in the hand of an individual devotee in the case of his salvation. In spite of his utmost endeavour, an individual devotee can never participate into the kingdom of heaven. Without the grace of God it would not be possible for an individual human being to emancipate from all his sins.

Therefore, according to Christianity, the grace of God upon the efforts of an individual devotee paved the way to Kingdom of heaven. Moreover, according to Christian theology humans can emancipate from their sins through the help of Jesus. Christian believes that God has sent down Jesus in order to save human beings from their sins. In a sense Jesus is a mediator between Almighty God and human beings. In his book *Comparative Religion* Ram Samkar Shrivastav writes in this regard, “Man can repair their broken relationship with God through Jesus Christ.”^c Further, in defining the divine nature of Jesus he says, “Jesus Christ is the incarnation of God in human form. He is both God and man. He has divine nature as well as human

nature...”^{ci} Christian theology upholds that Jesus sacrificed his life for the sin of mankind. He died to emancipate mankind from their sins. That’s why it believes that one has to put his faith in the divine nature of Jesus and follow his path in order to gain the grace of God for his salvation. Without his interference mankind could not be saved. Rama Shankar Shrivastava has beautifully explained this point in his book *Comparative religion*. He writes:

“Christ’s intervention is necessary for the suffering of mankind and without His crucifixion man cannot be saved from his sins. Christ intercedes between man and God to restore and divinely resurrect mankind. Man must have faith in Christ. His work, crucifixion and resurrection are meant for the redemption of mankind. Man has to participate in the church of Christ through the sacraments especially, Baptism and Eucharist.”^{cii}

Like many other great religions of the world Christianity puts its stress upon the purity of the soul as a necessary requirement to participate into the kingdom of heaven. According to Christian theology, a pure soul can only see God. Swami Vivekananda has beautifully explained this Christian conception. In a lecture on “Christ The messenger” which is delivered in Los Angeles California, he says: “...these are not at all necessary for salvation, neither wealth nor position nor power, not even learning; but what is necessary is that one thing, purity.”^{ciii} For Swami Vivekananda, our

consciousness is covered with ‘dusts’ like greed, lusts etc which make us unable to see the light of pure spirit which resides in us. According to him, the kingdom of heaven belongs within our inner spirit and nowhere else. Due to such vices of inner spirit we become unable to realize it. Therefore, for the realization of the light of spirit or for the realization of the kingdom of heaven we need to clear our spirit. We need to make our soul pure. He says, “It is only necessary to clear away the dust and dirt and then the spirit shines immediately...cleanse the spirit and it is there. It is already yours.”^{civ}

Prayer in Christianity becomes the medium through which one can, to the best, try to establish covenant relation with God. In order to establish such a bond of pure relation with God entails humans surrendering of doubt and embracing of utmost faith upon God. As Jesus preach to His disciples in order to bring out the implication of faithful prayer before their consciousness. As it is inscribed in the Bible,

“Whatever you ask in prayer you will receive, if you have faith.”
(21:6)^{civ}Matthew.

Christianity also rests its understanding of and faith in the fact that Jesus gave up his life to crucifixion for the betterment of mankind by emancipating them from their sins, which he took upon his own shoulder. This sacrifice of the holy son is the bedrock upon which the entire faith system of Christianity is based. Resurrection of Christ becomes a threshold of hope that becomes diminished after his crucifixion. His resurrection becomes the major fulcrum

for Christian belief to lay their hope upon the return of the God in the form of the holy Son in the near future.

Islam

Islam is the youngest organized religion among Semitic religions. As an ideal way of life, God's preferred way was started to reveal from the month of Ramadan of 6th B.C to Prophet Muhammad who is the founder of Islam by. As Michael Cook writes, "Islam is the religion established among the Arabs – the people until then confined to Arabian Peninsula – by the Prophet Muhammad in the early seventh century."^{CVI} However, he believed in the prophecy of earlier prophets and maintained that earlier prophets like Ibrahim, Musa, Isa have come to professes the divine messages of Allah; the one absolute god. Like Jesus, he has also come in the history of human society to fulfill the divine emperor of the same almighty God. The third chapter of the holy *Quran* namely *Aale- Imraan* bears the evidence of this unique fact. In the third chapter of the holy *Quran* it is written that:

“Say like this, ‘that we believe in Allah and in that which was sent down to us and in that which was sent down to Ibrahim and Ismial and Ishaque and Yaqoob and his children and that which was given to Musa and Isa and prophet from their Lord we make no distinction between any of them in believing and to Him we have bowed down our necks.’”^{CVII}3:84.

It is also believed by a number of thinkers that Muhammad had just tried to profess the ideal way of Allah before the people of Arabia at the time of their social and spiritual unrest. He only had tried to create a just society where all the members of society would be treated equally. Karen Armstrong in her book *Muhammad* gives a beautiful explanation of Muhammad's intention. She writes, "Muhammad did not think that he was founding a new religion, but that he was merely bringing the old faith in the one God to the Arabs, who had never had a prophet before. It was wrong, he insisted, to build a private fortune, but good to share wealth and create a society where the weak and vulnerable were treated with respect."^{cviii} However, now Islam stands as an exclusive body of faith where a large number of people throughout the world have found spiritual refuge in it. In due courses, Islam has tend to prove itself as a universal religious culture before the human society. Let us now see what claims and metaphysical assumptions make it an exclusive body of faith.

Islam is a reveled religion and a prophetic religion too. The word "Islam" means Surrender towards the will and the way of Allah (God). Thus, the followers of Islam (Muslims) are defined as a devotee who surrenders themselves to the will and the way of God. In this regard Karen Armstrong says, "...a Muslim was a man or a women who had made this submission of their entire being to Allah, and his demand that human beings behave to one another with justice, equality and compassion."^{cix} It is believed by the Muslims that Allah has revealed his way before Muhammad in order to

establish the ideal spiritual way of life in human society. However, the sole preachings of Allah were held together in Quran. The word “Quran” means recitation. The Holy *Quran* is the most sacred text of Islam. A comment of Michael Cook can be mentioned here in this regard. He writes, “The Koran is the Muslim scripture, that is to say the scripture of the followers of Islam... According to Muslim tradition, the Koran was revealed to Muhammad by God through the agency of the angel Gabriel; this took place partly in Mecca, his home town and partly in Medina, where he succeeded in creating a state in an otherwise stateless tribal society.”^{cx} Further he writes, “The most sacred text of the religion, and the most authoritative text of the culture, was the Koran.”^{cx} Quran has 144 *sūras* or chapters. The chapters of Quran contain the preaching concerning the social, moral, legal and spiritual duties of human beings. It is important to mention that according to Islamic tradition Muhammad himself did not assemble the verses of Quran. He has only got the revelations. The verses of Quran were assembled after his death. It is believed that the successors of Muhammad i.e. Caliphs were assembled the verses of Quran. Michael Cook writes in this regard, “Although the revelation was completed before the death of Muhammad in 632, the tradition tells us that he did not himself assemble the material into a definitive text. The task of making a book of his revelations- the ‘collection’ of the Koran- was thus left to his successors, the Caliphs, who ruled the Muslim community from Medina in the decades after his death. Muslim tradition would place the completion of this task somewhere around 650.”^{cxii} For some scholars like

Karen Armstrong, the verses of Quran were revealed before Muhammad from the month of Ramadan in 610 BC to next thirty one years. In Islam it is believed that Allah has sent down the holy Quran to this mundane world for his bondman in order to direct them in the holy path. A specific chapter of the holy Quran namely, *AL- Furqarn (The Quran)* speaks about the genesis of the holy Quran:

“Immensely blessed is He

Who has sent down the Quran

to his Bondman that he may

be a warner to the entire world to the entire world.”^{cxiii} 25:1

Moreover, apart from the *Quran*, *Hadith* and *Sharia* are also considered as the sacred books in Islam. *Hadith* contains the preaching’s and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad regarding the ideal way of life and society. On the other hand, *Sharia* maintains the laws and the paths which are directed towards the God’s commandments.

Islam is a monotheistic religion. It believes in the existence of one absolute God, i.e. Allah. The word “Allah” is an Arabic word means the mighty one. But now at present times the word “Allah” appears with wide emotive meaning before the followers of Islam. According to Islamic theology, Allah has created the world out of his wish for creation. As a purely monotheistic religion, Islam strongly opposes polytheistic conception of God. Islamic

conception of one absolute God makes it separate from the pagan culture of ancient Arabia. According to some scholars, Muhammad has tried to unite the people of ancient Arab under one absolute God. Like other Semitic religions, the God of Islam is not only merciful but also a punisher who gives punishment to the people in accordance to their wrong deeds. In harmony with the Judaic-Christian tradition of God, Allah is omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent. He is the creator, sustainer, and destructor of the world. The very first chapter of the holy *Quran* namely *Al- Faatihah* (The opening) has beautifully narrated the nature of Allah:

“All the praise unto Allah, Lord of all the worlds.

The most affectionate, the merciful.”^{cxiv} 1:1, 1:2

According to the holy *Quran*, Allah alone has the independent existence. Every single entity of the universe exists in accordance to His will. Allah has the supreme authority over everything.

As a purely monotheistic religion Islam is strictly opposed to the popular conceptions relating to any pagan religion. Firstly, Islam does not believe in the theory of incarnation. According to Islamic theology God never incarnates in various forms into this mundane world. He is the formless absolute; therefore, he can never confine himself within a form. Secondly, Islam as a monotheistic religion strictly opposed to the Polytheism. God is one and absolute, therefore, there can never be many gods. In the chapter *Al- Ambia* (The Prophets) we see that prophet Ibrahim proclaims before the Polytheists

about the unworthiness of polytheism. For Islam, polytheism is nothing but an error. In Islam polytheism is sometimes compared with darkness which covers the light of one absolute Allah. For Islamic theology, worship of the images and idols of gods is nothing but a meaningless endeavour of human psyche. As it is inscribed in the *Quran* that, “What are these images before which you are sitting firmly, (for worship)”^{cxv} 21:52 Moreover, the Quran maintains a very harsh destiny for the gods of polytheist. As Quran preaches:

“If there had been gods beside Allah in the heavens and earth then necessarily they would have gone ruined. Therefore, Glory is to Allah, the Lord of throne, from the utterances which they fabricate.”^{cxvi} 21:22

Furthermore, Islam does not believe in the idolatry and priesthood. By the performance of social duties as prescribed in Quran and by means of prayer one can surrender himself towards the will and way of Allah. Therefore, there is a no need of any priest or any idol who can work as a mediator. Prayer and other social duties are enough to enjoy the peace in heaven.

Islam also opposes to the idea of son-ship of prophet. In Islam God is absolutely one and he has no son. Contrary to the Christian theological view point Islam maintains that God alone exists in his kingdom, no one can take part in His kingdom. Thus Quran says:

“He for where is the kingdom of Heaven and earth and has not taken a son of Himself and has no partner in His

kingdom and after creating everything He has ordained it on a right estimate.”25:2

“And that it may warn those who say Allah has taken a son of Himself.”^{CXVII} 17:4

Islam denies the Christian doctrine of Trinity. The Christian doctrine of trinity holds that the almighty God can be approached through three different ways, such as God as Father, Son and Holy Ghost. According to Christian theology God is one and absolute, these three aforementioned forms of divinity is actually the three integral aspects of same God. The Christian doctrine of trinity professes that the light of the absolute divinity can be realized through these above mentioned forms i.e. God as Father, Son and Holy Ghost. However, Islam rejects that. According to Islam God is one, absolute and formless. Therefore, the existence of different aspect of God does not match with the true nature God. Consequently, Islam deniesthe son-ship of Jesus because trinity maintains the son ship of Jesus. As it is inscribed in the in the fourth chapter namely, S-An-Nisaa of the *Quran*:

“O people of the Book! Exceed not in your religion, and do not say of Allah anything but truth. The Maseeh ‘Isaa’ son of Maryam (Mary), is only the Messenger of Allah and His word, that was sent to Mary and a spirit from Him, then believe in Allah and His Messenger and do not say ‘thee’. Refrain for your own good. Allah is the

only God. Far is it from His Holiness that He should have a son. To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth. And Allah is sufficient, as the real Doer.”^{”CXViii}4:171

Further the fifth chapter namely, S-Al- Maidah of the *Quran* inscribes in this regard that:

“Undoubtedly, those are infidels who say, “Masih son of Maryam is the very Allah.” And whereas Masih had said ‘O children of Israil! Worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord; undoubtedly, whoso associates anyone with Allah, then Allah has forbidden paradise to him and is Hell. And there is no helper of unjust.”^{”CXix} 5:72

Again it inscribes;

“Undoubtedly, those who are infidels who say, ‘Allah is third of three Gods; and there is no God but the One God. And if they desist not from what they say, then a painful torment shall surely befall to those who will die infidels.”^{”Cxx}5:73

However, some scholar believes that Islam takes the conception of son-ship of God in a very literal sense. But in the Christian theology the son-ship of god is used in a symbolic sense or in a technical sense.

Like other Abrahamic religions, in Islam the conception of Judgment Day is also found to be present. For Islam, Judgment Day is the day of reckoning, when all the worldly deeds of human beings will be judged by the Allah, the almighty. Islam maintains that human beings make their own destiny through their own deeds. For Islam, human beings decide their own destiny. Several verses are found to be present in Quran which states these decisive facts of human race. As for example, in the seventeenth Chapter of the *Quran* namely *Bani- Isracl* it is written that:

“And we have tied to his neck the destiny of every man.
And we shall bring out for him on the Day of Judgment a
writing which will find wide open.”17:13^{cxxi}

“It will be said to him Read your book. Today you
yourself is good for your reeknoing.”^{cxii}17:14

“Whosoever comes to guidance, he comes to guidance
for his own good and whosoever strayed he strayed for
his own evil. No soul bearing burden will bear the
burden of another. And we are not to torment until we
have soul a Messenger.”17:15^{cxiii}

Allah the almighty God makes the heaven and the hell as a two completely opposite goals for human beings. Humans chose anyone of them by their own work. Like Christianity, Islam also maintains that the almighty God (Allah) creates everything and has authority over everything. But God gives freedom

of will to all the human beings to choose a way of life. And there in Islam there is two alternative way, the way of God and the way of evil (Iblis). For Islam, who believes and follow the paths of Allah will enjoy the peace of heaven. Whereas those who chooses and follow the way of evil (Iblis) will be suffered the dazzling fire of hell. As it is inscribed in the ninety eighth chapter namely *Al-Kahf* of the holy *Quran* :

“Undoubtedly, those who believed and did good deeds, they are the best of creatures.”^{cxxiv}98:7

“Their recompenses is with their Lord, gardens of habilitation, beneath which flow strems, abiding therein forever, Allah is well pleased with them and they are well pleased with Allah, this if for him who fears Allah.”^{cxxv}98:8

On the other hand, chapter-101 of the holy *Quran* namely *Al-Qauriah* inscribes the final destiny of the disbelievers in the following way:

“The frightening calamity. What is that frightening calamity? And what has made you know what is the frightening calamity? The day when mankind shall be carded wool. Then as for him whose weight is heavy. He is in a pleasing life. As for him whose weight is light, He is in the lap of abyss. And what made you know what the abyss is? A fire blazing.”^{cxxvi} 101:1-11.

According to Islamic theology, God has prescribed certain duties for the human race for their social and spiritual progress. Like other great religions of the world, Islamic conception of salvation does not only consist of individual freedom but it also contains an idea of freedom of society as a whole. In Islam, freedom of society can be interpreted as the freedom from any kind of social injustice. For many scholars, the main aim of Islam is to create a Just society. As Karen Armstrong says,

“The life and achievements of Muhammad would affect the spiritual, political and ethical vision of Muslims forever. They expressed the Islamic experience of ‘salvation’, which does not consist of the redemption of an ‘original sin’ committed by Adam and the admittance to eternal life, but in the achievement of a society which put into practice God’s desire for the human race.”^{cxvii}

So in larger aspect the aim of Islam is to established a spiritual society which will be governed by the laws of Allah and where all the members of society lives with a perfect harmony and brother-hood. In order to achieve such kind of ideal society, Islam prescribes five essential duties for human beings, which has both the social and religious function to play. The five essential duties of human life are known as, *Kalima, Namaz, Ramdan, hajj, Zakat*, these five essential duties of human beings together known as the five pillars of Islam. The basic claims of these five essential duties of Islam can explained in the following way:

Kalima: In Islam Kalima is the belief in the one absolute truth i.e. “*La ilahu illallahu Muhammad urRasulallah.*” That means there is no god but Allah and Muhammad is his prophet. Kalima in a sense contain the essence of Islam. Kalima is not just a matter of utterance but a matter of belief also. For Islam one has to surrender his will before the will and the way of Allah. In order to be a Muslim one has to put his faith in the truth of Kalima.

Namaz: *Namaz* means prayer. In Islam prayer is the way to pay gratitude before our creator. It is a sacred practice through which one can surrender himself before Allah. However, a Muslim has to pray five times in a day. However purity is the necessary requirement for *Namaz*, before going to *Namaz* one has to clear his mind and body. However *Namaz* consists of several postures namely *Raka*. *Raka* is a symbolic form of submission before Allah. *Namaz* is essential for realizing the peace of mind. It emancipates the mind from the evil thinking. Moreover prayer should be done by a devotee by turning the face towards the Mecca. More to say weekly prayers have arranged in the day of Sabbath i.e. Friday. In that day all the devotee of Islam assemble together in to the nearby Mosque to pray. These weekly prayer makes a sense of brotherhood among the Muslims and binds them together under a single shade.

Ramadan: In Islam, Ramadan is described as the month of fasting. It is observed in the ninth month of Islamic calendar. In that month every day all the Muslims except pregnant woman, sick, children old and the traveller have to maintain fasting (both food and water) from the morning to the sun sets.

The practice of Ramadan signifies struggle to triumph over the physical desires. For Islamic theology self control over the physical and the mental desire is one of the basic criteria for spiritual growth. According to Islamic theology the doors of heaven remains open at the month of Ramadan. At the end of the Ramadan month a festival has been celebrated by the Muslims namely *Eid-al-Fitar*.

Zakat: As a social being humans have certain liabilities towards the society. *Zakat* implies the social duties for the followers of Islam. According to the laws of *Zakat* a rich person has to pay 2.5% to 5% of his income to the poor and needy. In Islam, this is an obligatory religious tax for the rich Muslims. The aim of Islam is to create a just society. And Islam also believes that without an economical balance among the members of society a just society would never be established. Thus the holy Quran preaches;

“And established prayer and pay the Zakat (poor due) and bow with those who bow.”^{cxxviii} 2:43

Zakat is a sacred way to maintain economical balance among the members of the society. Besides it *Zakat* there is also a voluntarily practice of giving poor dues were found to be present within the Islamic namely *Sadaqa*. It is specially performed through the Ramadan month.

Hajj: *Hajj* is the visit of the pilgrimage of Mecca in the 12th month of Islamic calendar within a whole span of life. It is considered as one of the most sacred practice in Islam. It is to some extent obligatory for those who have

completed all his earthly duties. However throughout the sacred journey of Hajj one should free his mind from all sorts of earthly desires. The mind should be directed towards the Allah. In the way to Hajj a *Haji* (the person who goes to hajj) needs to wear white two parted garments. The color white refers the equal status of all the *haji* before the eyes of Allah. Mecca consists of so many sacred places like kaba, Zamzam etc. Kaba is the central pilgrimage in Mecca, which is built by the Ibrahim. Moreover, Mecca is the birth place of Prophet Muhammad. In Mecca we can also see the sacred well Zamzam. All these things make Mecca special for the devotees of Islam. Mecca in the 12th month of Islamic calendar becomes the meeting place for all the followers of Islam throughout the world.

However, there is another important conception can be found in Islam, namely Jihad. Literally the word “*Jihad*” means religious war, war for the protection of the will and the way of Allah. Scholars have tried to give an exact meaning of the term “*Jihad*”. For some of them, *Jihad* does not just mean the religious war. *Jihad* is an inner struggle to achieve the higher Islamic standard. For Karen Armstrong, the word struggle seems to be the satisfactory meaning of the word “*Jihad*”. It goes with the central meaning of the word “Islam”. As Karen Armstrong says,

“From time to time, Muslims who protested against the behaviour of the reigning caliph would retreat from the *Ummah*, like the Kharajites, and summon all true

Muslims to join them in a struggle (Jihad) for higher Islamic standards.^{29cxxxix}

Thus we can say that Islam as a religious tradition shares some common religious believes with the other two sematic religions of the world, i.e. Judaism and Christianity. But besides certain common theological aspects it also holds some exclusive theological claims which make it separate from the other great religions of the world.