

POSSIBILITY OF RELIGIONS: A QUEST

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DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis entitled "Possibility of Religions: A Quest" has been prepared by me under the guidance of Dr. Koushik Joardar, Department of Philosophy, University of North Bengal. No part of this thesis has formed the basis for the award of any degree or fellowship previously.

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ABSTRACT

Religion is one of the most important, yet controversial, aspects of our day to day social life. It is controversial in terms of its nature and function that played a crucial part in our communal, social and individual life. Unlike that in primitive times, people today find themselves surrounded by many religious faiths, viz., Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity etc. Most of these religions originated out of a social crisis at a particular time of history amongst a particular group of people, in order to teach them the true nature of reality and true meaning of life. Furthermore, almost all the above mentioned religions have their own religious doctrines, which contain certain metaphysical and spiritual assumptions about the ultimate reality and human's ultimate goal. And it is important to note that such assumptions may contradict with each other. Surprisingly, each universal religion tends to prove that it is the only true religion for entire mankind. And In doing so, almost all the religious communities are engaged in collision with each other, sometimes in an extremely violent way. And sometimes the degree of this madness is too decisive that one fundamental religious community tries to destroy the existence of another religious community whom they think their rival or with whom their religious proclamation does not match. Such collisions are harmful for the peaceful co-existence of our social life. In this thesis, an attempt has been made to find out a possible solution to such religious conflicts, so that different religious faiths can live together with a harmony in human society.

Any critical discussion about religion would be incomplete without focusing on its origin. If we look at the development process or growth of religious consciousness of an individual as well as collective mind, the psychological and social basis behind the religious phenomenon becomes clear to us, which would help us to find the possible solution of religious conflicts. If we know the fundamental basis of religious consciousness of human beings then we might

be able to understand the meaning of various religious activities of a religious tradition as well as person also. Such understanding seems necessary for the co-existence of different religious traditions without conflict.

However, human are essentially defined as religious being by many academic scholars of the academic world. For them, religion is an approach of human mind to know the reality in order to make their existence stable, secure, permanent into this world which is full of troubles. The religious consciousness of human beings has been passed through many conditions and stages in due courses of time. Historical evolution of religious consciousness points to the three stages in the process of development of religious consciousness, namely, Tribal, National and Universal stage of religious consciousness. These three stages are intimately connected with each other. In the Tribal and National stage, human's religious consciousness is guided and governed by the laws and rules of nation or tribe. The individual choices and preferences have very little role to play in the religious discourse of the Tribal and National era. Thus, people were looking for a more refined form of religion where they can find a place for their choices and preferences. Under such a psychological and social condition universal religion came into being. However, through a gradual and constant process religious consciousness has been transformed into its universal mode. Universal religion does not mean the existence of one absolute religion. Universal religion can be defined as a religious consciousness which is free from the narrow boundaries of caste, creed, race etc., where human beings enjoy the primary place in any kind of religious discourse.

It is mentioned in the above that almost all the religious traditions claim about their universal authority over human society. Each and every religious tradition believes that their religion is the only valid form of Universal religion in the true sense of the term. But here one simple question can be raised that, —“Do they fulfill the criteria of Universal religion?” To answer such question it can be said that almost all the religious traditions have the potentiality to be a

Universal religion. But their dogmatic attitude, exclusive body of faith and many exclusive customs, taboos, rituals stand as a hindrance towards the path of Universal religion. Such dogmatic attitudes make us intolerant and also make us incapable of seeing the similarities between religions —one's own and that of the others. The knowledge about the claims of other religious traditions seems to be necessary for the peaceful existence of human society. The proper knowledge about the claims and their function, meaning and purposes of the life of concerned religious tradition, may make us aware about the contextual meaning of any religious claim of any particular religious tradition.

From a comparative study of the religious traditions, it is evident that different religions have some common claims besides their differences. Now the question is, whether different religions can be unified or a new universal religion can replace all the other existing religions. The fact is that, in spite of their common claims, religions continue to maintain their separate identity. Because, one of the most important claims made by each religious group is that, it is the true path or best path preferred by God. Our task of this thesis will be to examine the possibility of a world in which all human beings can live with peace in either of the following ways: maintaining their separate religious identity or under one universal religion or with no religious identity. Our finding is that, a society without religion is inconceivable, and we cannot but have to live with a world of many religions.

Preface

According to theological and scriptural origin we see that religion is handed down to us from God himself for betterment of the humankind. But if we see the origin of religion from historical and anthropological point of view, we can see that religion has grown and evolved with society. Nevertheless, it has played a vital role in controlling the people from any “wrong doing” or rather doing anything which contradicts the core belief of religion. It has also played a formative role and acted as a cementing factor in societies. Besides that sometimes religion is also considered as the root cause of certain social violence.

But the conflict which is prevalent among the religions remains from the time immemorial and it still prevails. One of the major reasons for their conflict is that, every religion, monotheist or polytheist, try to say that the world should be controlled by one God or group of powerful gods. Every religion wants to boast their god is one and only one true god and is superior to other gods of other religions. To impose their supremacy, the followers of certain religions sometimes tend to take extreme measures ultimately giving misery to humankind which is opposite to the main intention of any religion.

So, I have tried to unravel these subtle or open contradictions among religion and to find out any possible solution to subdue these conflicts.

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Introduction

The rivalries among the religious traditions to prove their universality is not a matter that has come up in the contemporary times. It rather has a long history. Throughout the entire human history, people, community, temple, mosque etc. were killed, buried, marginalized and destroyed in the name of religion. But how has religion acquired such prominence so as to determine the happening of important incidents and events of progress and destruction? The reason might be that in human history different religious traditions has been trying to prove their universal acceptance by showing the all-encompassing qualities of their religions, which are free of dogmatic practices, and upholds the principles of universal brotherhood and fraternity. Almost all the great religions of the world have their own religious doctrines, which contain certain metaphysical and spiritual assumptions about the ontological reality of Truth and human existence. And it is important to note that such assumptions may contradict with each other. Each religion acclaiming the status of universality, paradoxically, tends to prove that it is the only true religion for entire mankind. And in doing so, almost all the religious communities are engaged in collision with each other, sometimes in an extremely violent way. And sometimes the degree of this violence is so intense that one fundamental religious community tries to destroy the existence of another rival religion or with whom their religious proclamation

does not match. Such collisions are harmful for the peaceful existence of our social life which is naturally not desirable in a civil society. So a solution in this context seems necessary for the peaceful existence of society. This thesis is directed to find out a possible solution of these aforementioned religious conflicts to maintain peace in the society. In other words, we may say that the main objective of this thesis is to find out a possible solution of these religious conflicts to create a space for inter-religious dialogue. In order to accomplish the set objective the thesis is divided into five chapters.

The first chapter of this thesis is concerned with the origin of religion in which we shall try to analyze the notion of religion from the social, cultural and psychical perspectives. The search for a possible solution of inter-religious collisions gives birth to certain fundamental questions, like — why do religious traditions collide with each other? Is there anything embedded in religion which implies violence into the society? In order to find out a possible solution of religious conflict, we need to make a critical journey into the origin of religion. A critical analysis of the origin of religion may make us aware about the psychical, socio-cultural basis behind the religious phenomena which ultimately help us to find a possible solution of religious conflict. Furthermore, a proper knowledge about the governing principle of origin of religion may help us to understand the meaning and purpose of religious behaviour of a person. The perception of such religious behaviour may guide us to reach the intended goal of this thesis. In this chapter, we will also try to search into the writings of many thinkers like George Galloway,

Sigmund Freud, Emile Durkheim, Swami Vivekananda, Dr.KalidasBhattacharya, Max Muller, .B Taylor etc., a better understanding about the foundational basis of religion.However, for some scholar like G.Galloway and Swami Vivekananda,religion is essentially a psychical phenomenon, although they never try to deny the socio-cultural effect upon the religious consciousness of human mind. Religion is an enterprise of human mind through which they want to approach the truth by transcending the narrow limits of their sensory world. And for scholar like Durkheim, religion is not a creation of an individual human mind rather it is a fruit of collective mind where individual wishes and aspirations have a very little role to play. For him, religion is chiefly a social phenomenon which is directed to protect the common good for society. But for Freud, religion does not have any basis at all as it is a sort of ‘neurosis’. However, in order to make our understanding clear about the origin of religion we make a survey into the different stages of religion by following the survey of historical evaluation of religious consciousness.The survey of historical evaluation of religious consciousness provide us with the information of the two transformation of religious consciousness of human beings, i.e. the transformation from tribal stage of religious consciousness to the national stage of religious consciousness, and from national stage to universal stage of religious consciousness. In other words, it can be said that historical evolution of religious consciousness pointed out three intimately connected stages of religious consciousness, namely tribal, national, and universal. Besides the

origin of religion, another important factor is also discussed in this chapter i.e. the difference between magic and religion. This discussion seems necessary for the purpose of the first chapter. A distinction between religion and magic may help us to understand the origin of religion.

In the first chapter of this thesis, we see that both in the tribal and national stage of religion the religious consciousness of human mind are subjected to their laws accordingly. Individual preference does not enjoy the primary place in these two stages of religion. Cultural codes, laws, rituals etc., more or less, hold the central position in these two stages of religion. Thus, people were looking for a wider form of religion where individual preference could enjoy the highest place, which ultimately would give birth to a conception of religion known as universal religion. Hence, we can observe that almost all the religious traditions claim that their religion is the truly universal religion. But what does 'universal religion' mean? This question needs a critical approach. Without having a proper understanding about the nature of universal religion we may not be able to reach the main purpose of this thesis.

In the second chapter of this thesis, we try to formulate a proper understanding of the nature of universal religion. This chapter deals with the notion of universal religion itself, rather than any particular form of religion which claims its universal authority. Here 'universality' does not mean uniformity of thought and belief. It refers to a state of mind which is free from any sort of narrow social and cultural boundaries. However, in this chapter, we analyze the points of view of different thinkers like G. Galloway,

Sri Ramakrishna, and Swami Vivekanandaregarding the nature of universal religion. According to the great religious scriptures of almost all the existing religion, the ideal form of religion has been sent down to this world by the almighty god himself. In this chapter, we try to make a comparative study between theological explanationsabout the origin of ideal form of religions by following certain scriptures of some of the world's great religions like Christianity, Hinduism, Islam etc.Besides such theological explanations, we also try to make critical study into the writings of these thinkers to understand the meaning and function of universal religion. However, in their view universal religious consciousness is a kind of religion which is free from all sorts of narrow boundaries of caste, creed etc., and it is also a form of religion where human beings enjoy the primary place.

The third chapter of this thesis deals with some particular claims of existing religion which claim themselves as a universal religious sect. The critical exposition of the claims of a religion may help us to understand the nature and goal of respective religions. Each and every religious tradition maintains a metaphysical view regarding the ideal form of life and world which in a sense set their boundaries. The critical understanding of various claims of different religious traditions help us develop the nature of a particular religion which in turn may help us set a common platform for inter-religious dialogue. In this chapter, we discuss about the particular claims of Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam.

The fourth chapter of this thesis is about finding a possible solution of the religious conflicts in order to maintain peace in society. And the possible solution may lie inherently in the answer of a question i.e. religion or religions, i.e. if there should be predominantly one religion or multiple religions should co-exist tolerantly and with acceptance. Ironically, the exclusive claims of different religions sometimes make the existence of multiple religious sects in the society impossible. Each and every religious sect tends to prove that their way of life is the only ideal way of life, so everyone should take refuge in their tradition to lead the ideal life. That's why the question arises if in future only one religious sect would exist or multiple religious would exist respecting for each other. In order to find out a possible solution of the inter-religious conflict we will try to critically analyze three different possible solutions: first, there should be no religion in the future-world, second, there should be only one religion that will replace all other religious systems, and third, all the religions should co-exist together. In this chapter we try to find out a possible solution of inter-religious conflicts by making comparative study of the scripture and texts of some religious traditions. By making a comparative study among the scriptures and texts of these religious traditions we are trying to foresee some common principles which may act as a founding ground of inter-religious dialogue which may further work as a possible solution to religious conflicts.

The fifth chapter of this thesis is concerned about the main findings of our research work. Here one may find the essence of our preferred possible

solutions and suggestions to the religious conflicts in a summarized way. The discussion of this chapter also may help us to realize the impacts and influence of our findings in the life of human beings as well as in society.

First Chapter: Origin of Religion

“It is religion, the inquiry into the beyond that makes the difference between man and an animal”¹. This saying of Swami Vivekananda points to the importance of religion in human life; it shows that religion is something which is intimately connected with human existence and identity. It tells us that without religion human beings remain no longer human beings, their identity as humans may become subject to challenge. In spite of such evaluation and description of religion by Swami Vivekananda, it is difficult to answer the question as to what it means to be religious. What are the characteristics that identify a man as religious? These are some of the most important questions which draw the focus of many intellectual scholars. In different times of history, many intellectual scholars offered us different definitions and descriptions of religious phenomenon from their own point of views to satisfy the quest of human intellect and to solve many social problems. But none of these definitions can be treated as the sole definition of religion. Religion is so deeply rooted in the life of human beings and society that it is difficult to conceptualize it out of the human subjectivity. So, it is clear that it is difficult to give a clear definition of religion although religion is an inseparable aspect of human existence. For that, we better make an inquiry into the origin of religion. In our search for the origin of religion, the psychological and social basis behind religious phenomena would become clear to us. Moreover, the function of religion upon human life and society

also would become clear to us through this inquiry concerning the origin of religion.

However, before going into the entire discussion, first we will try to compare religious phenomenon with another mysterious phenomenon, namely, magic. This comparison becomes essential at this point of time, because from the very beginning of human civilization, these two phenomena (viz. religion and magic) thrived side by side. For the same reason, at times it becomes difficult to identify them separately.

In primitive society, at the earliest stage of religious consciousness, religious ideas were found to be mixed up with another mental activity of primitive people namely, magic. From the present point of view apparently it seems easy to identify the magical phenomenon with the religious phenomenon. Separating the two would compel undermining certain basic ideas which have to be quantified together. Especially it is really hard to separate magical attitude of primitive mind from the religious attitude. In the primitive society, magical ideas went side by side with the religious ideas. For that reason many philosophers of the past have claimed that the religious ideas generated due to the failure of magical attitude. But the failure of magic cannot be considered as a sufficient cause for the origin of religion. However, in primitive society magic has played a predominant role. It has also made a tremendous effect upon the religious consciousness of primitive people. It may be possible that in the remote history of human civilization these two human phenomena were intimately connected. As Galloway has mentioned in his book *Philosophy of*

Religion that, “Fetishism for example, though it is commonly treated as a phase of religion, is a form of spiritism so impregnated with magical ideas, that it might be treated as belonging to province of magic rather than a province of religion.”ⁱⁱ

But in due course of time religion has started to play a different role from magic. Observantly, it can be said that at certain stage of human civilization human minds have started to separate the religious attitude from magical one, and have tried to maintain a line of demarcation between magic and religion. Religion has certain special characteristics which magic does not have. German sociologist Emile Durkheim has explored certain basic differences between magic and religion. For Durkheim, magic lacks the characteristic of binding together—there is no binding element present in the domain of magical attitude which connects the magician and his client. For him, magic does not form any moral community to which an individual feels connected with each other. Unlike magic, religion contains an element within its very texture that binds people together. This sense of a binding people together apparently becomes the stronghold of religion compared to magic. For Durkheim, such binding elements form a moral community in which an individual feels himself connected with his fellow members on the basis of their common faith. In such a moral community, the members of a society feel united on the basis of the idea of a sacred world which society itself has fashioned. The religious attitude gets reflected through the common practices of the members of society. To these common ideas and common practices

Durkheim's gives the name of Church. According to Durkheim, "Now historically, we find no religion without a church."ⁱⁱⁱ For Durkheim, there is no church for magic, which binds its members. A magician only has clients and among them we do not find any bonding. He writes, "The magician has a clientele, not a church, and his clients may well be entirely unrelated, and even unaware of each other; even their relations with him are generally accidental and transitory, like those of a patient with his doctor."^{iv}

On the other hand, Prof. Galloway in his book *Philosophy of Religion* has also pointed out some difference between magic and religion, such as, "...the idea of religion is dependence; that of magic is control; the one encourages an attitude of trust, the other an attitude of self-assertion."^v But at the same time Prof. Galloway was also aware of the fact that the above mentioned difference between magic and religion is apparent, on the basis of which we cannot strictly distinguish between magic and religion. In the primitive society, it is estimated that people used to take the help of both magic and religion in order to bring material good and to eliminate evil from their clan. In other words, both the magic and religion used to serve the same purpose for human beings. As Galloway writes in this regard, "Each aims at the bringing about of certain results...the gain of material good and averting of evils."^{vi} The difference between magic and religion was mainly in the methods that they adopted to achieve the ends. However, we could do nothing less than agree with Galloway that these methods are also too confusing, on the basis of which it is really difficult to separate religion from magic.

On the basis of above discussion, it can be said that religious ideas at its first flight, heavily influenced by the wind of magic, although negatively. As a matter of fact, the present society bears the traces of magical attitude within their religious consciousness, which sometimes is expressed through their rituals and taboos. This aspect of religious consciousness also needs to be taken into consideration if we want to understand it.

Regarding the origin of religion, we may find two different theories or two stand points in the writings of earlier thinkers. Among them, one point of view maintained that religious ideas are generated within the human mind; that means the germ of religion comes from within the human mind. On the other hand, the other view maintained that the religious ideas come from outside of human mind, from the unexplained events of nature. In a lecture delivered on ‘TheNecessityofReligion,’ Swami Vivekananda had tried to bring these two theories before the audience and said that:

“Two theories have gained some acceptance amongst the modern scholars. One is the spirit theory of religion, the other the evolution of the idea of Infinite. One party maintains that ancestor worship is the beginning of religious ideas; the other, that religion originates in the personification of the powers of nature.”^{vii}

However, we may leave aside these two earlier approaches of origin of religion and put our focus into the origin of religion explored by scholars like

George Galloway, Emile Durkheim, and Sigmund Freud etc. Nevertheless, the above mentioned earliest approaches are also found in the writings of these scholars.

Prof. Galloway understands religion essentially as an inner spiritual process. Religious ideas were generated due to the reaction of human mind upon the events of nature. And in later stages of man's religious development human society played an important role in forming the belief system of religious consciousness. Therefore, for Galloway, the origin and development of religious consciousness is a complex process. In the origin and development of religious consciousness of an individual human being the influence of society is an important factor. There are certain social tools like language, custom, belief which by and large are the inventions of society, adopted spontaneously by members of society. These social tools played a role of formative factor in the origin of religion. The social asset like language is embedded within the religious consciousness at its early stage. In the process of linguistic development, human beings acquire the capacity to employ a word for certain object in order to bring that within the preview of their fellow member's consciousness. Such capacity of human psyche helps in developing the idea of relation between the individual and some higher power. This idea of relationship between the man and some higher power is the essence of religion as Galloway understands. According to Galloway, linguistic development of human being made this relation possible. In his book *Philosophy of Religion* he writes, "This linguistic achievement, made

practicable the common recognition by the members of a tribe that constant relation existed between them and the power who could help them or harm them^{viii}

Along with this social influence upon the human psyche, Galloway puts his main focus on the psychological basis behind the religious consciousness. As Galloway himself rises in his book *Philosophy of Religion*, the question, “what were the motives, which prompted man to be religious?”^{ix} In order to achieve a clear conception about motives, impulse, feeling behind the religious consciousness and for the better understanding of the nature of religion, he makes a study into the governing principles of mind, which generate the religious consciousness and govern its evaluation from past to present. In doing psychological analysis from the point of view of religious psychology, he finds that there are three aspects of psyche, namely cognitive, volitional, feeling present conjointly behind the religious consciousness along with the conception of superior intellection. As Galloway writes, “...in any case of psychical life which man brings him to the development of religion is one in which the cognitive, volitional and feeling aspect are already clearly distinguishable^x

In this regard Prof. Galloway tries to point out some misconceptions about psychical factors or elements as sole formative factor of the religion. Accordingly, Galloway sights out the most popular conception about the origin of religion. For him, religion has been popularly described as a phenomenon which is solely originated from the fear of dead ancestors who

might harm them and make survival impossible. In this understanding, religion is thought to be completely originated from and guided by the means of feeling or emotional impulses, which shows the feeble basis of man's religious consciousness. But for Galloway, the psychological basis behind religious consciousness is not so simple which can be described in such a simple way. At the initial stage, this explanation of religion of it being simply originated out of fear of something, seems to be holding good but on further deep analysis of human's psyche this explanation of origin of religion loses its strength. It is no doubt that at the earliest stages of human consciousness, the impulsive elements like fear, awe, and joy enjoys the primary place. The hostile force of nature creates a sense of fear and awe to the minds of primitive people. The primitive men reacted to these forces and approach them in a certain way. The sense of fear might evoke them in projecting a being like them behind the natural phenomena and approach them in order to secure their life from the object of fear. But the religious consciousness of human beings does not end with this sense of fear, although it plays an important part behind the genesis of religious consciousness. For Galloway "...although fear is a cause, it is certainly not the sufficient reason for religion."^{xi}

Therefore, if we try to interpret the religious consciousness solely on the basis of elements of fear of human psyche, then religious attitude of human beings merely becomes a negative attitude. Some early philosophers interpreted religious phenomenon along this line. We would rather agree with George

Galloway that there are also certain positive elements lying behind the religious phenomena without which the religious phenomena no longer remain religious at all, rather it becomes a magical attitude. The presence of positive attitude behind the religious consciousness was beautifully demonstrated by Kalidas Bhattacharyya when he said that, "Religion originates with the sense of freedom."^{xii} For him, man is a part of nature and subject to natural laws like other animals, but unlike other animals man always has dared to transcend these natural bindings. Human beings were not merely satisfied with their given mode of being and orders of nature, like food, with their basic instinct. Man has always tried to show his freedom to go beyond the natural bindings by putting his step outside the natural dominance. For Dr.Kalidas Bhattacharyya, this sense of freedom and transcendence clearly comes into being (i) when man tries to study and explain the natural phenomena, as a scientist does, (ii) when he tries to behave in a certain way by avoiding or dominating the forces of their natural instinct, as moral man does, and (iii) when he tries to admire a certain phenomena of life in a dispassionate way as atheistic does. Dr.Kalidas Bhattacharyya said, "Although in common parlance, only the second of these three alternative attitudes is called freedom of man, all the three sorts of freedom in the sense that in all the three cases man somehow stands aside Nature and exercises an initiative all his own."^{xiii} Like these three above mentioned endeavour of human mind, religious endeavour of mind also wants to go beyond by approaching the world as a whole, in order to enjoy the

freedom of their own essence. As Dr. Bhattacharyya said, “Along with the sense of transcendence, freedom and co-extensively and co-temporally with it, there dawns on man what is called religious consciousness a rough and ready as yet undefined total attitude to life and the world in general”^{xiv}

Swami Vivekananda has also expressed a similar kind of positive attitude regarding the origin of religion. For Swami Vivekananda, the germ of religion does not come from the outside of the human mind. It is generated within the mind of human beings. For Swami Vivekananda, behind the origin of religious phenomena human aspiration and endeavour played a prominent role. According to him, the human’s struggle for transcending the limits of senses gave birth to the religious phenomena. For him, human mind cannot be satisfied by mere sensuous pleasure. It aspires something more. Thus human beings want to transcend their limits of their senses. Human mind wants to go beyond the narrow boundaries of senses and want to uplift its mode of consciousness into a higher level, in order to realize higher conscious being. According to Swami Vivekananda, religion is nothing but the greatest motive power of human mind which helps in knowing the infinite aspect of the consciousness of their being. As Swami Vivekananda says, “Religion is the greatest motive power for realizing that infinite energy which is the birth right of every man.”^{xv} For him, such spontaneous feeling of human mind for transcending the limits of sense, actually works out behind the origin of religious phenomena. He further adds to it, “...to my mind, is the real germ of

religion, and that I propose to call the struggle to transcend the limitations of the senses.”^{xvi}

However, by following Galloway we may say that the earliest stages of the development of religious consciousness have been decisively influenced by the impulsive emotional factors like, awe, joy fear etc. According to Galloway in modern times some thinkers such as Hume, have given so much stress upon the notion of fear, and considered fear as the sole foundation of religion. But For Galloway, fear alone cannot be regarded as the sole foundation of religion. He writes, “In modern times, Hume has laid stress on fear as the motive to religious acts, though he too acute to overlook the fact that fear could not operate alone... But although fear is a cause, it is certainly not the sufficient reason of religion.”^{xvii} For Galloway, primitive minds had an idea of good life in their mind neither they would not had the fear of something. They had an idea of good life for which they strived. Their struggle for having a good life may be a reason of the origin of religious ideas. As Galloway writes, “Man is afraid of the loss of some good, it may be life, health, or property: he would not fear unless he had hopes and wishes whose fulfilment he desires. Religion implies the positive attitude as well the negative, and man’s fears are inexplicable if we do not remember there are goods on which heart is set. Feeling, then in the form of the emotion of fear, is only a partial explanation of religion.”^{xviii} For him, with the gradual development of human consciousness, objects of consciousness have also appeared with larger significance before the human mind. On the one hand,

human consciousness has started to feel its independence. On the other hand, a need is also felt for fellowship with a higher power which he assumed behind the moving forces of nature, because the primitive mind felt feeble before the uncanny environment of nature.

However, according to George Galloway, the belief in a divine power behind the natural forces bears the traces of cognitive aspect of human mind within the religious phenomena. For Galloway, without a belief in divine power the reformed feelings will lose its strength. As if a man does not have a belief in divine power then with whom he/she wants to relates his/ her life. So, the feeling for maintaining fellowship with the divine entails the existence of belief in some higher powerwith whom a devotee wants to relate his/her life. In order to bring out the importance of cognitive aspect within the origin of religious phenomena, Galloway said that,“To become religious, feelings must be qualified by cognitive element, a belief in power or powers on whom the individual depends, and between whom and himself a positive relation subsist”^{xix}The feeling for fellowship with some higher authority along with a belief in some higher power whose fellowship man seeks make the religious consciousness complete.

A question still remains as to the purpose of assuming some divine power and want of fellowship. Without a purpose man’s belief in divine persona becomes meaningless. It exists without a practical value, which is sole characteristic of man’s religious consciousness. And for Galloway, this sole characteristic of religious consciousness is provided by human will, which is

another important formative element of religious consciousness. For him, human will provides an idea of good. The desire for good which man wants to realize, for the realization of good human beings want relates his/her life with a higher person. As Galloway writes, “With the activity of the will the presence of values in human life is intimately connected: the desire for goods, which plays an important part in leading man to religion is an expression of the volitional side of his nature.”^{xx} The volitional aspect of human consciousness makes feeling wider in terms of its intensity. The feeling for fellowship with a higher being is gradually become refined, transformed by desire for good, by the desire of realization of good. As Galloway said, “Religious ideas again are a means of actuating the will, they give direction and meaning to feeling and it is through the ideas that man has slowly raised himself to the vision of religion as life and the religious life as a reasonable service.”^{xxi} Along with these three aspects of consciousness human intellection also played an important role in the formation of religion and origin of religion. It reforms the religious system in due courses of time, it modifies and reform the dogmatic ideas within the religious consciousness. Galloway writes:

“ The pressure of thought, demanding that a religious system be internally coherent, and also consistent with secular knowledge, is able to overcome the conservative tendencies fostered by feeling and habit... in the realm of thought men co-operate freely, man sharpening the

countenance of his friend. Only through the combined toil of many generations of minds have religious ideas been delivered from their ancient vagueness and rudeness. Thought has gradually liberated religion from its native narrowness and enabled it to exercise an enlightened and universal appeal.^{xxii}

The above mentioned elements and aspects of human consciousness conjointly played a formative role in the genesis of religious consciousness. But the influence of each element varies in due courses of time. The predominance of one over another can be seen in religious endeavour of human beings of different history of time. According to Galloway, the predominance of one element over others brings our attention towards a special characteristic of religious consciousness. He further says, “When the feeling element prevails, piety is termed emotional or mystical; when thought predominates, piety is termed intellectual, and when will takes the lead, it is called practical.”^{xxiii} But all these factors of human psyche conjointly bring the religious consciousness into existence.

On the other hand, the French Sociologist Emile Durkheim (1859-1917) has tried to give a different sort of interpretation of origin and development of religion. Emile Durkheim has tried to give a scientific explanation of the origin of religion from the perspective of society, or in his words, from the perspective of “collective mind”. He has made a search in the core of society

in order to acquire a comprehensive view of religion and then look into the individual psyche as a member of society.

For him, religion is not some individual's phenomenon. In other words, it is not an approach of individual's mind rather it is an approach of collective mind or society in which an individual mind participates in accordance with the principle given by the respective society. In explaining the origin of religion as a social phenomenon he puts his utmost focus into the social sentiment of concerned society. According to Durkheim, there are two kinds of social sentiment, namely (i) Inter-individual sentiment (ii) Inter-social sentiment. Inter-individual sentiment links an individual with other individuals or the fellow members of society in terms of respect, affection, fear etc. According to Durkheim, an individual enjoys the autonomy of spirit under the shed of this sentiment. This kind of sentiment makes the members of society interdependent without much taking their freedom. On the other hand, inter-social sentiment links an individual not with the other individuals but with the society as a whole. Here an individual is subject to the social norm. Individual's wishes and code of conduct were solely guided by the society under the influence of inter-social sentiment. Under this kind of sentiment, society imposes certain obligations upon the individuals –which is the soul characteristic of inter-social sentiment in Durkheim's understanding. According to Durkheim, it is the inter-social sentiment which gives birth to the religious sentiment. Therefore, according to him religion is a social asset,

a tool of society through which it regulates the behaviour of the individuals.

As he writes:

“It is society which they persecute or favour directly. In fact natural forces which show an exceptional degree of power are of even less interest to the isolated individual than to the group as a whole-it is entire tribe which is menaced by thunder, enriched by rain, ruined by hail, etc. of cosmic forces, only those which are of collective interest will be deified. In other words it is inter-social tendencies which give birth to religious sentiment.”^{xxiv}

According to Durkheim, natural events like, rain, catastrophes like storm, thunder, and earthquake etc. have appeared as a challenge not solely towards an individual's mind but towards the collective mind, towards the members of society as a whole. Durkheim writes, “It is the entire tribe which is menaced by thunder, enriched by rain, ruined by hail etc.”^{xxv} Therefore, the people of society as a whole approached to these natural hazards to secure their life. That is why in Durkheim's understanding God is conceived as the protector of the entire group or clan and not of any individual. As God is the projection of the collective mind/society and not any individual's mind, an individual human mind approaches God as a member of society. In this discussion an important characteristics of religion points out that, religion as a social phenomena binds the members of society. As a member of a society an individual human being approaches the same God which has been approached

by his fellow members. So, religion has the characteristic of ‘binding together’. For that purpose every religion has its own religious institution (that is “church” in Durkheim’s own word) under which the member of same society feels united with one another. For Durkheim, church is embedded within religion. In his book *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* he writes, “Now historically, we find no religion without a church.”^{xxvi}

However, in explaining further elementary characteristic of religious phenomena, Durkheim has divided religious phenomena into two categories namely (i) belief and (ii) rites. In Durkheim’s understanding, all kinds of religious belief presupposes two kinds of things, namely, real and ideal, which are usually expressed by our ordinary language—profane and sacred. For him, these two distinct, and even contrary, things ultimately create two worlds namely a world containing sacred things and a world containing profane things. According to Durkheim, these sacred things are subject to general interest that is the interests of collective mind or society and to some extent society itself has fashioned the representation of sacred things. As Durkheim says, “Sacred things are those whose representation the society has itself has fashioned.”^{xxvii} Contrary to the sacred things, profane things are the interests of individuals. So far as Durkheim is concerned the idea of sacred things has a social origin which is an elementary factor in the genesis of individual religious sentiment, through which an individual mind makes a distinction between sacred and profane things and maintain a distance from profane things under his religious sentiment as the collective mind usually do.

It is clear from Durkheim's view that the religious sentiment which is a collective sentiment does not allow any individual sentiment within its body until and unless it does not go with in the same track of collective sentiment.

In order to maintain the uniqueness and purity of collective sentiment society always imposes obligation or moral authority upon the behaviour of individuals to regulate the behaviour of the individuals as well as individual's religious sentiment. That is why in Durkheim's understanding religion appears and exists in society in the form of custom.

People do possess so many beliefs in order to sustain their life. Among them religious belief is an essential one. But religious belief in a sense is not like a mere commonplace belief like 'I believe in the democratic system of India'; it has its own peculiar characteristic on the basis of which it maintain its distance from other sorts of beliefs. For Durkheim, it is the obligatory aspect of religious belief that makes difference of one from other sorts of beliefs. Religious beliefs are obligatory in nature. According to Durkheim, an obligation points to a command to be followed and a command always implies an authority whose command we need to follow. Religion as phenomenon of collective mind, always tries to impose certain obligations upon individuals. As a member of a society an individual obeys the obligations throughout his/her social life. This obligation leaves a mark on the individual behaviour which simply defines them as a member of corresponding religious community. This sense of authority or moral authority is the sole characteristic of religious phenomenon, which makes it

different from other sorts of phenomena, like, the phenomena of natural sciences. Unlike natural sciences, in the case of religious phenomenon individuals' wishes enjoy a very little room. By exploring all these characteristic of religious phenomenon, Durkheim finally defines religion in the following manner: "...a religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and surrounded by prohibitions—belief and practices which unite its adherents in a single moral community called church."^{xxviii}

No doubt, Durkheim's view regarding the origin and nature of religion as a social phenomena affects the mind of many intellectual scholars. The obligatory aspect of religious beliefs and the unique mode of authority or moral authority which religion tries to impose upon the individual to secure general interests are beautifully and clearly pointed out by Durkheim.

But Durkheim's stress upon the obligatory aspect of religion and its artificial origination of religion at a certain point of history in order to secure general interests in which individual's choice, endeavour, aspiration have no prime importance and does not hold good. In his conception of religion, an individual human being becomes a robot of collective mind whose obligations are to be followed, whose chosen God is to be worshiped.

However, it will be wrong if we tend to abandon the spontaneous sense of dependence on some higher being from the religious endeavour of human mind. To some extent, it is true that religious man spontaneously feel the need

of such kind of fellowship throughout their life. Along with the obligatory aspect of religion, this individual's spontaneous endeavour to relate their life with some higher being needs to be taken into consideration if we want to understand religion properly. It is evident that in primitive society, primitive mind's spontaneous longing towards a power in order to sustain their life without being prescribed by the respective society. This psychological aspect of primitive man as well as a religious person of modern civilization also played a crucial part in the formation of religious phenomena which Durkheim, we think, has failed to notice. We can say that religion is not an artificial phenomenon which is created at a certain point of history of human civilization in order to secure general interests. Rather, it is a spontaneous expression of human mind in order to sustain well-being of their life. Religious sentiment, feelings are used by the society in order to secure the general interests or the integrity of society and ultimately give an institutional form. Therefore, along with this later developed form of religious phenomenon, we need to take into consideration the psychological aspect of primitive mind as well as the religious person of modern civilization in order to understand religion properly, with all its aspect and colure.

On the other hand, the great German Psychologist Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) has tried to point out the unscientific and illusory basis behind the origin of religious phenomena. For Freud, due to the fear of uncanny objects of nature and due to the helpless situation towards fate, natural catastrophes, human minds have projected a person behind these so called forces of nature

–but it is not merely person like him. They considered it as a person like supreme father (god) and wished to maintain a relationship of father and son in order to secure their life. According to Freud, such conception of supreme father (god) in a sense is actually an image of their own father who is able to secure their life in their childhood. Here Freud has compared helpless situation of primitive mind with the helpless situation of childhood of human beings. A man in his childhood simply depends upon his parents, especially upon his father and believes that his father can save him from the dangers. But at the same time he fears his father. For that reason he maintains a relationship of love and awe with his father. For Freud, such sense of dependence of human mind on their father at childhood is actually worked out behind the genesis of the idea of God or supreme father.

In the strict sense of the term primitive minds have projected an image of supreme father like their own behind the forces of nature, and wished to be saved by him. In Freud's understanding the element of wish fulfilment here in the case of projecting god as father played a prominent role as it is played in dream work. Out of their wish to secure their life from the uncanny events of nature, the anxieties of life etc. human mind have projected a supreme father (god) who is able to give them security. For Freud, such psychical condition is also worked as a formative factor behind the origin of the idea of God, which is considered as the sole base of religion. Thus for Freud, the idea of god does not have any factual basis. It is just a mental assertion of human mind. It is illusory in nature. Freud writes, "...they are illusions fulfilments of

the oldest, strongest and most urgent wishes of mankind. The secret of their strength lies in the strength of those wishes.”^{xxxix} Further he writes, “It is over again merely an illusion to expect anything from intuition and introspection; they can give us nothing but particulars about our own mental life, which are hard to interpret, never any information about the questions which religious doctrine finds it easy to answer.”^{xxx}

So, according to Freud, like the idea of god, religious ideas do not have any factual basis in the actual world. They are simply the creation of human mind in which the element of human psyche played an important role as it is played in the dream work. These religious ideas cannot be meaningfully interpreted with the help of reason. Rather, on a further analysis reason shows its absurdity. Human civilization provides with justification of their respective religious beliefs, doctrine etc. but none of them are justifiable. According to him, religion works as a regulator for the civilization. Civilization imposes its respective religious idea upon its participants for the renunciation of instinct. People believe in religious doctrines, ideas because these are handed down to them through their ancestor and their ancestor professed a strong belief in it. For him, none of these arguments are justifiable. As Freud says, “...ancestor of ours far more ignorant than they believe in things we could not accept possibly occurs to us that doctrines of religion may belong to that class to.”^{xxxi}

However, Freud is right in pointing out some of the obligatory and obsessive characteristic of religion. Religion in its institutional form imposes certain prohibition upon the individuals for regulating their behaviour and for

maintaining the social harmony. Such prohibitions sometimes go against the basic rights of the individuals, and causes privation to them. But it seems that Freud puts too much concentration upon the negative aspect of religion such as fear of God, sin, helplessness before nature, on the basis of which he defines the religious attitude and denies the ontological basis of religious beliefs. But unfortunately Freud overlooks the positive aspect of religious endeavours in which an individual human being desires for something higher without being pressurized, without being feared by the external forces. Human mind sometimes possess it's believe in higher good, with which they want to relate to their life. Freudian method of verification may not be able to verify it. But it is true that there are many things found to be present in human psyche which is difficult to verify.

However, the inquiry concerning religion and religious consciousness would be incomplete without a study of its origin and development. A comment of Prof. Galloway is worthy to mention in this regard. Prof. Galloway writes, "It is impossible to give a clear conception of the function and meaning of religion without some study of religious ideas in their beginnings and growth. The nature of an idea, institution, or phase of culture must be reached, if it is to be reached at all, by an examination of its process of development."^{xxxii} The philosophers in different times of history have come forward to explore the development process of religious consciousness. As for example, Dr.Kalidas Bhattacharyya has characterized the development process of religion into three classes, namely, tribal stage, intermediate stage and universal stage. The

survey of historical evaluation of religious consciousness provide us with the information of the two transformation of religious consciousness of human beings, that is the transformation from tribal stage religious consciousness to the national stage and from national stage to universal stage of religious consciousness. As Galloway pointed out in his book, “There are two critical points in the historic development of religious consciousness: the transition from tribal to national, and the transition from national to universal religion.”^{xxxiii} In other words, it can be said that historical evolution of religious consciousness pointed out three intimately connected stages of religious consciousness, namely tribal stage of religious consciousness, national stage of religious consciousness and universal stage of religious consciousness. The development of religious idea is actually the development of religious consciousness which can be expressed through external attitude. Like, George Galloway, we would like to follow the survey of historical evolution of religious consciousness concerning the development process of religious consciousness.

Tribal stage of religious consciousness / Tribal religion:

Tribe is the earliest form of human civilization. In the uncanny and challenging environment of tribal era, an individual human being felt feeble and helpless concerning food and shelter. Under such circumstances primitive mind felt the need of their fellow members. It can be said that the basic needs of human life bind them together. Moreover, nature has often appeared before primitive mind with more power, strangeness and mystery, which causes

anxiety to the mind of the primitive people. As a result, the journey of their life again become challenging to them. With their naive consciousness they tried to explore the strangeness of these natural events in order make their life secure. For that reason with their naive consciousness spontaneously they have started to react towards these strange forces of nature in order to understand it. As a result they have projected an idea of power behind the forces of nature, and approached it in order to bring good to their life. For many scholars such spontaneous endeavour of primitive mind towards an unknown power formed the basis of religious consciousness.

Research about the development of tribal stage of religious consciousness provides us with two well-known theories concerning the origin of religion namely, Animism and Spiritism. Both of these doctrines have tried to describe the origin of religious consciousness. According to some scholars, like, George Galloway, with the animistic conception of nature, people have started their religious journey. As Galloway said, “In the first place there is the animistic conception of world, a conception not in itself religious, but forming the basis on which religious ideas are developed. And there is the life experience of human individual, which prompts the movement of the whole self towards a divine object conceived as ministering to the needs of the subject.”^{xxxiv} So for him, the animistic approach is the earliest approach of savage mind, which formed the basis of religious consciousness. Later on, the concept of spirit came into existence.

On the other hand, Herbert Spencer believed that ancestor worship is the root of every religion. And for him ancestor worship is nothing but a form of spiritism. Spiritism is the worship of spirits of dead ancestor. There are some other scholars also present, who think in a slightly different way. For them, there must be an idea of deity or a supernatural being present in the mind of primitive people before the idea of spirit and the power with whom they connect their dead ancestor. For some scholars, the primitive mind have developed the idea of these supernatural being or some idea of power within nature by experiencing the mysterious, strange, hostile environment of nature. In a single word, it can be said that primitive mind have peopled the world. For scholars, like, Max Muller and George Galloway, there must be an animistic conception of world, or in other words, there must be an idea of deity or God which has already been developed within the minds of primitive people on the basis of which ancestor worship proceeded. By following the religions of Romans, Greeks and especially of India, Max Muller writes, "...any scholar acquainted with the literature of these countries, knows at the same time how in every one of these religions ancestor-worship presuppose nature-worship, or, more correctly, a worship of the gods of nature. We constantly hear that the Departed, the Fathers, the Ancestors, the Heroes are admitted to the society of the gods, they are often called half gods, they may at times claim even a certain equality with the gods. But the gods are always there before them, and even when their individual names are forgotten, there is the general concept of deity to which the ancestral spirits aspire."^{xxxv}It is

difficult to point out which one is the prominent one. But these two theories highlight some of the basic psychological and social basis behind the religious phenomena of primitive mind.

However, on the basis of the above discussion it can be said that, animism is one of the earliest views regarding the origin of religious consciousness. The term “animism” actually comes from the Latin word “anima” which means ‘soul life’. In the animistic stage, primitive mind have started to animise every moving object which can move and some way or other influence the life of primitive man. Moreover, primitive mind lacks the ability to separate animate being from the inanimate objects. The moving objects of nature like the river, which can flow from one place to another, the rain, etc. and the events like day and night and many more things have influenced the mind of primitive people. These events of nature left certain impressions upon the minds of the primitive people like fear, wonder, awe and joy. And out of such impacts on primitive mind and due to the disability to separate the inanimate objects from animate one, primitive mind have spontaneously started to impose a sense breathing power behind the events and objects of nature as they felt within themselves. By doing this, the primitive mind tried to interpret the events of nature by their naive consciousness. In this way, human mind has started to people the world. The animistic approach of primitive mind forms the basis of religious consciousness. The animistic approach of primitive people brings an idea of soul or power behind the natural events and objects of nature which appeared in the mysterious form

towards their consciousness. Furthermore, they not only projected an idea of power or soul like him at this stage but they have also felt an intimate connection with the projected soul. Later on they felt a need to approach them in order to bring material goods like food, shelter etc. and to eliminate the evil forces. To explain the role of animism in the development process of religious consciousness Prof. Galloway writes, "The religious significance of Animism is, that man fits the object for its religious function by endowing it with a soul like his own."^{xxxvi} The traces of animistic conception of world can be found still among some of the African and Australian tribes.

However, E.B Taylor (1832-1917) in his article 'Animism' has tried to give a simple definition of the religion of primitive people. He defined the religion of primitive people 'as the belief in spiritual beings.' He writes, "The first requisite in a systematic study of religions of the lower races, is to lay down a rudimentary definition of religion... It seems best to fall back at once on this essential source, and simply to claim, as a minimum definition of religion, the belief in Spiritual Beings."^{xxxvii} Prof. Taylor has believed that all the "low" races possessed a belief in the spiritual beings with whom they felt connected. According to Taylor, the animistic conception can be found among so called low races, which at least form the basis of their religion. As Taylor writes:

"Animism is, in fact, the groundwork of the Philosophy of Religion, from that of savages up to that of civilized men.

Although it may at first sight seem to afford but a bare and meager definition of religion, it will be found practically sufficient; for where the root is, the branches will generally be produced. Spiritual beings are held to affect or control the event of material world, and man's life here and hereafter; and it being considered that they hold intercourse with men, and receive pleasure or displeasure from human actions, the belief in their existence leads naturally, and might almost be said inevitably, sooner or later to active reverence and propitiation. Thus Animism, in its full development, includes the belief in souls and in a future state, in controlling deities and subordinate spirits, these doctrines practically resulting in some kind of active worship. I propose here ...to study the animism of the world so far as it constitutes, as unquestionably it does constitute, an ancient and worldwide philosophy, of which belief is the theory and worship is the practice."^{xxxviii}

However, Animism as an earliest stage of human's religious consciousness has been rejected by the German philologist and philosopher F. Max Muller(1823-1900). He was not satisfied with animism. Like Herbert Spencer, Max Muller did not believe that primitive minds were unable to separate the animate object from the inanimate one. Like Spencer, he also thought that it is nothing but merely an insult of human intellect. According to Max Muller, it is not because of the inability to separate the inanimate

object from the animate one, but it is due to early man's use of language through which man has started to name the events and objects of nature as an agent. That is why primitive mind has a conception of rainier but not the rain itself. At the earliest stage of primitive society primitive mind tried to conceptualize everything in terms of an agent. For him, the general notion of causality was not clear to their minds of primitive people. That is why instead of searching for a cause of the events of nature, they search for an agent who made these actions possible. As Max Muller said,

“...the ancient dwellers an earth could think and seek of the great phenomenon of nature, say the storm, wind, the fire...we shall see that ,at first they could name and conceived them in no other way but as active or agents, and not yet as mere cause what we now call the category of causality is no doubt at the bottom of all this, but historically it manifested itself first of all, not in a search of something like a cause but in the assertion of something like an agent.”^{xxxix}

According to Max Muller, the language of primitive mind was essentially expressive of agency. That is why they named the events and objects of nature as agents especially like human agents. Such conception of human agent of primitive mind gradually uplifted to the idea of a super human agent. For Max Muller, the idea of a human agent uplifted to the idea of a super human agent when they have started to understand the difference between the activity of a human agent and a super human agent.

On the basis of above discussion, it can be said that Max Muller has committed the same fallacy that he charged against others. Like the other he has also pointed out another kind of inability of human intellect. As he said that the primitive mind was not able to distinguish between the action and agent. That means primitive minds were unable to understand the law of causality. From this it can be said that primitive people lacks certain abilities like the distinction between animate and inanimate objects or the inability to distinguish between agent and action. It seems that Max Muller has also tried to point out certain inability of primitive mind that form the basis of religious consciousness.

However, individual's experience about life has also played a role in forming the basis of man's religious consciousness. In this context many intellectuals, scholars have put their stress upon a unique state human of mind, namely, the state of dream. For Swami Vivekananda the real germ of religion resides in the inner aspect of human mind. It is a kind of inner struggle of human mind to go beyond the limitation of sensory world. As he said, "...to my mind, is the real germ of religion, and I propose to call the struggle to transcend the limitations of the senses."^x So according to Swami Vivekananda through religion people want to achieve higher nature of their self. He thought that the dreaming state of human mind played a crucial role in fulfilling the purpose of religion. For him the dreaming state of human mind somehow inspired human beings to know the inward aspect their own mind. It worked as inspiration to reveal the higher aspect of mind. As swami Vivekananda said

that “This, to my mind, would be a more natural explanation of the supernatural, and through this dream idea the human mind rises to the higher and higher conceptions.”^{xli} In a sense the dreaming state of human mind make people more aware about their inner aspect of mind. In his view, this dreaming state inspired the human mind to go deep into their internal nature. This sense of inspiration helped human being in transcending the limits of their sense, which is considered as the real germ of religion. And he further said:

“By this time the search had begun, and the search was inward, and man continued inquiring more deeply into the different stages of the mind and discovered higher states than either the waking or the dreaming. This state of things we find in all organized religions of the world, called either ecstasy or inspiration.”^{xlii}

Galloway has also maintained that dream phenomenon of individual’s mind have played a prominent role in forming the idea of soul and spirit. In the state of dreams, primitive person finds himself/herself in a place, which is far from his/her tribe and he has also experienced the presence of a dead tribe man who was freely moving from one place to another. With their naive consciousness they could not interpret their dream phenomena. The only interpretation that they could fathom to the best of their understanding and exposure is that an individual had a second self, who has made this experience possible. This interpretation acquired though the minimum

exposure and understanding ingrained deeper into their belief system. Hence, they started to believe in the existence of their second self which is free in its nature. They thought that their second self for a certain period left their body and freely moved from one place to another. With the idea of free soul they have also started to believe that the free soul can occupy an object, and use it as an instrument to influence the life of tribal people. Primitive minds have also started explain the moving events, forces of nature through the movements of free souls. For that reason primitive minds have started to approach towards the idea of free soul through some objects which is occupied by the concerned spirit, in order to secure their life. Such psychological conditions form the basis of spirit worship, namely Spiritism, which is nothing but an advance form of Animism. As Galloway writes,

“Primitive man conceived animated things to be possessed of spirits, who dwelt in them for the time being, and used them as their instruments. The spirit might desert the tree or the spring and return to it again. So man peopled his world with a host of spiritual beings who could be approached and revered through the material things in which they made their dwelling, but who are themselves invisible? Spiritism marks an advance on mere Animism and implies a development the idea of soul.”^{xliii}

According to Galloway, at the animistic stage of religious consciousness the idea of soul or spirit was not very clear to the savage mind. At the animistic

stage they have a vague sense of power which dwells within the object and was supposed to affect their life. But at the stage of spiritism the idea of soul or spirit became clearer. Along with that they have also obtain an idea of the immortality of the soul. For Galloway the development of the idea of a free soul is actually the developmental step towards the idea of more refined concept of a divine being.

There are many scholars like Max Muller who believe that there is nothing like a stage called Spiritism in the evolution of religious consciousness. For the ethnologists, animistic stage is a psychological inference and does not have any ontological basis.

But such psychological inference could be a legitimate one, because human mind did not start its journey of religious consciousness with the idea of independent soul. There must be an idea of power that a primitive mind feels inside it. The idea of independent soul is actually a later development of human religious consciousness.

However, by following the research works of George Galloway we have come to know that the idea of free spirit of primitive society was transformed into 'ancestor worship' in later history of time. In the primitive societies, the cult concerning the spirit of ancestor was practiced by the savages. The fear of the spirit of a dead ancestor may be a reason for ancestor worship. The fear of the spirit of dead ancestor may become a reason for the veneration of ancestor worship. At the stage of spiritism an idea of free soul has come into

existence before the minds of savage people. They have started to believe in the mysterious power of the spirit of their dead ancestors. They have also started to believe that the mysterious power of the spirit can influence their life. It may bring happiness or evil to their life. Under the influence of such belief in the mysterious power of the spirit, primitive people have started to approach the spirit of their dead ancestor. In the ancient religions of Egypt the traces of ancestor worship can be seen clearly.

Moreover, ancestor worship in the later phase of tribal society forms the cult of totem. Describing totem Galloway writes, “The totem is a species of animal and occasionally a species of plant whose life is conceived to bind up with the wellbeing of social whole. The totem, which in some cases is an individual animal, is the visible embodiment of the unity of the society, and its life is mysteriously connected with that of all the members of the group.”^{xliv} The totem animal is nothing but a supposed image of a dead ancestor who in the remote past has brought the existence of their group and secure of their wellbeing. As an image of their dead ancestor, totem animals were regarded as a sacred animal which may not be killed by the group. But in a special occasion the killing of totem animal was permissible. A particular tribe had their specific totem which they do not share with the other tribes. In later times many sub-practices, custom etc were generated concerning the cult of totem animal. The taboo concerning the killing of a particular totem animal was strictly followed by the members of respective tribe. Furthermore,

concerning the totem cult practice of exogamy has started to flourish within the tribal society.

For Galloway, the cult concerning totem animals has left an influence upon the religious consciousness of human beings. At the stage of totem-cult, the idea of ancestor spirit was transformed into much refined and sacred form. At this stage the idea of spirit enjoys a much better place than previous stage of religious consciousness. With the idea of refined spirit, a sense of bonding has been started to develop between the lives of spirit with the life of tribal people.

According to Freud, totemism primarily gave birth to the prohibition against murder and incest. But at the same time, he also demonstrated a kind of connection between totemism and religious endeavour of human mind. As he said, “It has an intimate connection with the later god-religions. The totem animals become the sacred animals of the gods; and the earliest, but most fundamental moral restrictions- the prohibitions against murder and incest originate in totemism.”^{xlv}

But Max Muller holds a different position regarding the nature and role of totem. For Max Muller, totem animals have nothing to do with religion. Totems merely denote the ‘clan mark’ of certain groups and nothing else. For Max Muller, the misconception regarding totemism as a stage of religious consciousness generates because the scholars do not use the word “totem” exactly in the same way. Max Muller writes,

“Totemism is no doubt, a very convenient term. I have often used it myself, and should have been the last person to cavil at its barbarous form, if only its meaning were accurately defined. It was simply in order to hint at the danger of using such terms without knowing even their etymology and meaning, that I lately recalled the remarks of Father Cuoq. The word totem is properly *yote*, meaning ‘clan mark’. The possessive form *isotem*, and with the personal pronoun *nindotem*, ‘my clan mark’, *kit otem*, ‘thy clan-mark’. Nothing was further from my thoughts than to wish to abolish the old familiar term of *totem*, when it is used in legitimate sense... All I wish for is that those who write about *Totem* and *Totemism* should tell us exactly what they mean by those words, and that they should not take it granted that religion must everywhere pass through the phases of fetishism, totemism, animism or any other ism”^{xlvi}

On the basis of the above discussion it can be said that, at the stage of tribal religion, the religious consciousness was chiefly directed towards the veneration of nature for the fulfillment of material good in their life. It is not concerned about the ethical perspective of religion. The presence of ethical elements within religious consciousness is the fruits of mature age of religious consciousness. The mature stage of human’s religious consciousness can be described in the following way.

National stage of religious consciousness/ National religion:

With the growing age of human civilization, human society gradually turned out to be more complex. The journey of human civilization from tribe to nation is also a complex one. In the past, a powerful tribe made a victory over the neighbour tribes and formed a larger tribe, which ultimately took the shape of a nation. At this stage of human civilization, the cultural code of primitive society gradually lost its strength. Under such circumstances, a kind of cultural and religious assimilation became necessary among the existing tribes for the smooth running of the greater society. In such situation it seemed that the gods of concurred tribe played a role of assimilation among the members of defeated tribes. In other words, it can be said that the gods of the concurred tribe is used by the ruling clan in order to unify the members of defeated clans. On the other hand, people of the defeated tribes also surrendered themselves before the gods of concurred tribe for more security. As they thought that the gods of the concerned tribe was more powerful than their gods. It was the god of concurred tribe who made this victory possible for them. So, like the members of winning clan they also wanted to come under the shade of same god. In this way the god of winning clan helped in forming the basis of a wider clan.

However, unlike the tribal stage, at this national stage people have started to enjoy more security with regard to the basic necessities of life like food, shelter etc. As a result, people have found more time to look upon the natural events. In this way, natural events became more open to the human psyche.

Humans have started to enjoy the speculative nature of their consciousness. They could also find time to look upon the nature of their own self. But at the same time, the life of primitive people became complex within this new form of society. The economic, social and cultural systems become more complex within the nation. People were going through a new sorts anxieties, and restless situation which are nothing but the fruits of complex form of society. Under such environment people were looking for a way to get rid themselves from the growing hazards of wider clan or society. Previous means approaching the world were found disable to satisfy the minds of wider clan. So, the people of wider clan were looking for new way to satisfy his growing mental crisis. For that reason they have started walking towards a new vista by following the paths of the ancestor.

Moreover, in this new journey the religious consciousness of men no longer remains satisfied only with their material good. They felt the need of something else like, inner psychical good or psychical good. Such growing crisis of human mind made them more aware about their psychical needs. Now instead of looking for a material good, now the people of wider clan were looking for something spiritual good which will be able to satisfy their new inner crisis. At the same time they found that the primitive method, that is, the veneration of spirit is unable to provide it. Therefore, they have started longing for something higher, something greater power and also looking for a new way to approach it. Consequently, the tribal idea of spirit gradually started to acquire some personal characteristics at this national stage of

religious consciousness. In other words, it can be said that the process of personalizing the nature of spirit has started at this stage. The greater powers of nature of tribal stage have been personalized by the people of national era with the intention of securing inner good. However, such process of personalizing the idea of spirit ultimately results in the polytheistic system of national stage of religious consciousness. In this way a connection has been made between the gods of nation and the tribal idea of spirit. But unlike the tribal stage the connection between the object and the spirit god became more permanent. For Galloway, the polytheistic attitude of national religion did not replace the old idea of spirit worship. In other words, the spirits of different tribes did not cast aside by the ruling tribe rather they have become assimilated with the Gods of nation on the basis of some common characteristic. However, it helped to develop a stable form of polytheism within the national stage of religious consciousness.

However, at this national stage, the gods of nation started to possess some higher qualities and functions which were not found to be present within the tribal stage of religious consciousness. So the object of worship became more refined and powerful than that of the tribal stage. By following the research works of Galloway we have come to know that at this national stage the gods have acquired names. For him, this is purely a function of civilized mind. At this stage people started to believe that they can hold a relationship between gods and themselves. As Galloway writes, “provided with a name, endowed with a variety of attributes and offices and possessing something of personal

character the national god was a power between whom and the worshippers personal relation could exist.^{»xlvi}

In later stage, with the growing complexities of nation polytheistic, gods began to be arranged in a chronological manner, on the basis of their power and the influence up on the human life. At the same time people also started giving priority to a specific god and empowered him/her with the charges of different office. Through this kind of modification within the nature of God the previous minor gods came under the province of a powerful God. Galloway has beautifully explained this point by pointing out the growing nature of Apollo—the religion of Roman civilization. He writes, “At an early date he was the gods of agriculture, vegetation and at the later time he known as the gods of song music and poesy the arts of divination and healing, were likewise put under his protection. In art he came to be the embodiment of the Greek conception of strength and mainly beauty of form.”^{»xlviii} However, in later time of national stage, a single God brought the focus of the respective people towards him/her among others. It is believed that the concerned God can fulfil every requirement of human life and maintain a moral order within the life of its followers. So the polytheism of national era took a move towards the way of monotheism or pantheism.

Besides the growing nature and function of national gods, Galloway has also pointed out another fact which is also played a role of binding element among the people of nation. It helped to bind the religious life of people of nation by the thread of one single moral principle. In ancient India, Vedic religion

maintained a belief in the existence of such divine moral principle, namely called Ṛta. According to *Veda*, Ṛta enjoys the supreme place over everything even the Gods obey the principle of Ṛta. Among the Gods of Hindu civilization Varuna holds the charges of Ṛta. In the Indus civilization the veneration of lord Varuna is so popular even today. Therefore, it can be said that in the national stage the religious consciousness of human beings somehow is directed towards the presence of one ultimate god or divine norm.

However, the journey from polytheism to monotheism, from different Gods to one absolute God sometimes may result in extreme violence in some places. As we know the history of Arabia, where after a long struggles the idea of one absolute god has come into being. In Arabia we can see the battle between the pagan culture and the religion professed by Mohammed concerning the nature and number of god. However, it is the fact that human religious consciousness takes a gradual shift from the idea of many Gods to the idea of one God.

Certainly it is not the case that all the people of a nation belonging to different corners have started believing in the presence of one absolute God at once. In the history of religious consciousness the idea of one God came in to existence through a certain group of people. By following the great religious scriptures of the world it can be said that the idea of one God came into being through a single person, whom we call prophet or the messengers of respective religion. The religious doctrine of a particular tradition claims to

be so. Unlike the tribal stage of religious consciousness, the national religious attitude is systematically organized. Here in the case of national religion the religious cults, sacrifices, mode of devotion, place of endeavour to god all were systematically arranged. For Galloway, at this national stage a group of people have also grew outwho have claimed their supreme authority in conducting the sacred cults. They hold the position of conductor who approached God on behalf of worshipper; as for example the Brahmins of Vedic society. In India within the Vedic culture the Brahmin group of people has claimed their supreme authority over the practice of sacred cultures.

For George Galloway, the tribal notion of taboo concerning the totem animal has also been developed within the national stage of religion. The tribal conceptions of taboos were known as 'prohibition' within the national stage. The taboo of tribal society has been used to direct the religious boundaries of respective people. From that it can be said that the religious traits of tribal era does not vanish altogether. It has just molded into a new form.

Universal religious consciousness / Universal religion:

Within the national stage, religion still remains a matter of state or nation, where individual aspirations and their feelings regarding the mode of worship do not play any role in the religious behaviour. In the national stage of religion, individual human being is a subject to the law of nation. They have to behave in accordance with the prescribed laws of nation. From the perspective of nation, a monotonous religious behaviour is fruitful to maintain

the law and order of society. This monotonous and artificial religious attitude of national stage becomes subject to question by different thinkers. Under the growing pressure, complexities and regulative nature of religion within nation stage, the religious consciousness of human beings takes another shift towards a more comprehensive, joyful and life breathing form of religion, in which human's choice, aspiration and endeavour enjoy the primary place, without being pressurized by any group, tribe or nation. At this present stage of religious consciousness human mind wants to approach a divine power without being feeling pressurized by some outer force. In other words it can be said that at the universal stage of religious consciousness human beings try to give a space for individual choice rather try to give a primary place, where nation, caste, creed does not play any role at all. Under this religious consciousness an individual human being first of all treat as a human being as such. As a human being he/she is free to choose his/her own God and the way to approach his preferable God.

In the next chapter we will try to discuss briefly the nature, characteristics, and conditions of universal religion.

Second Chapter: Nature of the Universal Religion

In the previous chapter, we have tried to describe the basis of religious consciousness and its gradual process of development. In doing so, we have found that in both the stages, namely, tribal stage and national, the religious consciousness of human being does not enjoy the primary place. In these two stages, either the tribe or the nation holds the central position in which an individual human being's choice and aspiration is subject to the laws of the tribe or nation. In both these stages, religion has appeared as narrow and conservative in the perspective of people. Moreover, at these two stages, a particular religious behaviour gets restricted to the people of the concerned tribe or nation. The people of tribe or nation had to follow its way and worship the same God which is prescribed by the nation or the tribe, irrespective of their individual choice.

With the growing nature of human personality and consciousness, human beings gradually became aware of their own choice and aspiration. Consequently, they became self-conscious about their own inner quest and did not remain satisfied with the existing mode of religion. The existing mode of religion could not satisfy their growing inner quest. Moreover, the tribal or national mode of religious consciousness sometimes caused privation to the participants. The prescribed rules and regulations of the tribe or the nation somehow pressurized the individuals to follow certain cultural code and

rituals which went against their inner psych. Therefore, religion simply became an external and artificial expression to them.

Probably under such psychical and social condition, religious consciousness of the human started to look for another sort of religious phenomena within their unconscious states of mind. They were looking for a more refined and developed form of religion which could satisfy their growing mental crisis. The growing religious consciousness of human mind wanted to enjoy a state which was free from narrow boundaries of caste, sex, race etc. It seemed that such growing crisis of human psyche gave birth to the quest for a universal religion. However, it is difficult to answer that at what point in the history of human civilization, human beings have started to longing for universal religious phenomena. In other words, it can't be measured by the criteria.

However, some theological explanations concerning the origin of the ideal form of religion for mankind can be found in almost all the great religious scriptures. Here the term "ideal religion" can be understood as a form of religion which is the best form of religion for entire mankind. So in this ideal context religion can also be seen as a universal religion. The different religious scriptures of both the Eastern and Western world have tried to proclaim the ideal form of religion for mankind in their own fashion. Every scripture holds quite a similar account of view concerning the establishment of religion into this mundane world. Additionally, it does not maintain any historical evolution and development of religious idea but a supernatural origin of religion. They say that the true form of religion was handed down to

the human being by the Almighty God through His dear messenger. In other words, true religion was revealed before humanity by God's wish. According to the scriptures of prophetic religions, God had an intention to save humanity from this troublesome world and its sin. As a result, God has sent his messenger to preach the true teachings concerning the nature of life and world for their salvation, i.e. freedom from suffering. In brief, God handed down the ideal form of religion into this world.

To substantiate this point we take an example: according to Islamic theology, between 5th to 6th century C.E. a beloved messenger of God namely Muhammad appeared before the people of Mecca to preach the eternal and ideal way of life approved by the God, in other words the true eternal form of religion. Through Prophet Muhammad, the Absolute God intended to evolve the ideal form of religion, i.e. Islam, into the world. A quite similar account of view concerning the origin of a true form of religion can be found in the literature of Judaic-Christian tradition. It can also be seen that the great messengers of God like, Moses, Jesus etc. were also sent to earth by God to preach the eternal truth of religion before mankind. If we go through the scriptures of Judaic-Christian literature, then we find that around 1300 B.C. Moses, the great messenger of the Absolute God appeared before the people of Egypt (and Canaan) to preach God's message. Like Moses, there were many messengers emerged among the people of Canaan to preach the true form of religion preferred by God. On the other hand, if we look into the New Testament, we see that Jesus was sent among the people of Jerusalem in the

4th to 3rd A.D by the same Absolute God to advance the true teachings of God before the human civilization for their salvation through relief from their sin. Evidently, one can notice that many of the great religious scriptures of religious traditions believed/believes that ‘true’ form of religion has been established by the Almighty God within the human society.

Similar accounts of the universal religion (in the sense of dharma) can be found in Hindu mythology. Many of the Hindu mythological texts maintain that God Himself incarnated in various forms in this mundane world to establish the Dharma and to emancipate evil from the human society. However, the word “Dharma” is not an exact synonym of the word “religion”, although in a very loose sense they can be used interchangeably. In the next chapter, an attempt will be made to clarify it while exploring the claims of Hinduism. The conception of *Dashavarata* of Lord Vishnu is a unique and popular conception in this regard. It is believed by most of the Hindus that Lord Vishnu has incarnated (and will incarnate) into this mundane world in ten different forms (*Matsya, Kurma, Varaha, Narasimha, Vamana, Parashurama, Rama, Krishna, Buddha and Kalki*) to protect the Dharma. In the *Matsyapurana* (250-500C.E.) we see that Lord Vishnu incarnated into this mundane world by taking the form of a fish, which was named as ‘*Matsya Avatar*’ (fish incarnation). Lord Vishnu takes the form of a ‘*Matsya*’ (fish) and incarnates to this world during the period of ‘*Mahapralaya*’ (dissolution) in order to save the life of seeds and the life of King Manu (Vaivasvata Manu the king of Dravidadesa). And in

‘*NarasimhaAvatar*’, we find that during the Satya Yuga the Lord Vishnu has incarnated in the form of half lion and half man to save his beloved follower Prahalad from his father, Hiranyakasipu. Before the *Narasimha Avatar*, in Satya Yuga the Lord Vishnu takes the form of a boar in order to save the life of both humans and gods and to restore the dharma from the hands of Hiranyakasipu’s brother Hiranyaksha who becomes reckless at that time. However, it is not only the belief of ancient Indian people but it is also the belief of a greater number of modern Indian man that God has come down to the world to establish Dharma or we can say, the true form of religion. It is a dynamic Hindu believe that whenever a human society is besmeared with sin and decay the Lord will incarnate and descend to the world, again and again, for the establishment of dharma. Verse from *Bhagavadgita* is a testimony to the expression of this beautiful Hindu thought. In the verses 7 and 8 of chapter 4 it is proclaimed that;

“*yadāyadā hi dharmasyaglānirbhavatibhārata*

Abhyutthānamadharmasyatadātmānaṁsrijāmyaham”^{xlix} (verse7)

“*Paritrāṇāyasādhoṇaṁvinsāyacaduṣkṛitām*

dharmasamsthāpanārthāyasambhavāmiyugeyuge”¹ (verse8)

A.C Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupādā translates these two verses in the following way;

“Whenever and wherever there is a decline in religious practice, O descendant of Bharata, and a predominant rise of irreligion-at that time I descend Myself.”^{li} (verse-7)

“To deliver the pious and to annihilate the miscreants as well as to re-establish the principles of religion, I myself appear millennium after millennium.”^{lii} (verse-8)

However, if we go through the religious scriptures of Semitic religions, similar kind of assumptions can be found concerning the origin of religion like that of *Bhagavadgita*. By following the research works of many scholars we have come to know that before the emergence of a new messenger of God of Semitic religions, the Semitic society was suffering from a social, political and moral decay. These great messengers of God were sent amidst the people of respective societies to lead them towards the way of God. In this regard, the opinion of Karen Armstrong is worthy to be mentioned. In her book *Muhammad*, she writes, “These paradigmatic personalities shed light on the often dark conditions in which most of us seek salvation in our flawed world. They tell us what human beings can be.”^{liii} This same notion can be discerned in the gospels of Holy *Koran*. Before the enlightenment of great messenger of God, namely Muhammad (570-632 C.E), the socio-political conditions of Mecca had gone through a massive decay. After the vision which Muhammad gained in the month of Ramadan at 610 C.E, he preached the ideal ways of God for living life before the people. By avoiding the collisions of people he tried to unite the people of his surrounding clans under the head of one

absolute God. Swami Vivekananda has beautifully expressed the intention of Muhammad in the following words, “Mohammad by his life showed that amongst Mohamadans there should be perfect equality and brotherhood. There was no question of race, creed, color and sex”^{liv}.

Similarly, if we look back into the history of ancient India (within 5th to 6th century C.E) then we find that how the people of India were constantly deprived of the basic human rights, and often misguided in the name of religion by the group of (Brahmin) people. At that time Lord Buddha (SiddhartaGoutam) has appeared just like a light of hope for those people, the concerned people found a sense of relief in Buddha’s preaching. Lord Buddha seemed to have become a banyan tree to these deprived people of India. As we see by following the scholarly works of HaraprasadShastri, within the 5th century CE greater number of mass of that time of Indian civilization became Buddhists. Lord Buddha preached some cardinal virtues of human beings like non-violence, truth, justice, averting from sexual misconduct, refraining from stealing, etc., and tried to mention its worth to the human society, which is essential at that temporal perspective. He preached the unique lesson of dharma. Likewise if we follow the other two Semitic religions such as Christianity and Judaism, we find similar conception of origin of religion. The Judaic-Christian tradition also maintained that the beloved messenger of God had appeared before the respective group of people at the time of a social crisis in order to preach them the true form of religion.

Therefore, it can be said that almost all the great religious scriptures of the world (except Buddhism) hold that the true form of religion (that is, itself) has been handed down to us by the almighty God at the time of a social and spiritual crisis of human beings. But such claims of religions are not verifiable by any empirical means. There is no possible means through which the theological explanation of religion can be established. So we may put aside the theological explanations of the origin of religion and try to look into the writings of the thinkers to have an idea about the nature and function of universal religion or (so called) ideal religion.

George Galloway in his book *Philosophy of Religion* has tried to give a brief explanation of the nature and function of universal religion. Interestingly, he found prophetic movement (i.e. roughly from 8th to 6th century B.C.) of history among the religious tradition as the first step towards the universal religious consciousness.

According to George Galloway, through the prophetic movement within the great religious traditions, the narrow bindings of religion gradually lost its strength. For him, at the national stage of religious consciousness, God is supposed to be a matter of respective nations. But due to the prophetic movement, the gods of the nation became globalised. He writes in *Philosophy of Religion*, “In moving forward to this large and enlightened creed the prophets were at the same time moving away from the limitations of National religion. The God who the ‘Lord of the whole earth’ could not be the monopoly of one nation: the worship of the God whose service was

righteousness could not be restricted to a single ritual system.”^{lv} For him, the sprites of the great prophets have liberated new ideas and interests which gave birth of a deeper view concerning the true nature of life and world.

Here, we can say that the great prophets, throughout the world, came to propagate the true meanings of the life of the respective people. They had also come to spread awareness of common origins of people from the absolute divine source. From the above-mentioned point of view, it seems that all the great prophets of the world have focused on a universal form of religion (an ideal form of religion). According to their views, humans have a common origin; therefore, humans should follow ‘the ideal way’ prescribed by the Almighty God to lead their life. That means, they have professed one uniform religion for entire mankind. If we go through the scriptures, then we will find that the prophets of all the great religious traditions have always tried to unify the human races under the shelter of one absolute divine being. For Galloway, the prophetic spirit has tried to establish a kind of close connection between the human race and God-like ‘Father and Son’ although, for him, this short connection is not completely a new sort of connection. This similar kind of intimate connection can also be found in tribal religion. According to Galloway, similar kind of connection is found to be felt by the primitive mind. At the initial stage of religious consciousness, tribal people have felt closely connected with certain kind of mystical power. But for Galloway, such kind of relation has lost sight off within the national stage of religious consciousness. For him, at the national stage and in a sense tribal

stage also, religion became mechanized through the norms and rituals of the concerned tribe or nation. It is the prophets who brought this sense of close connection again into the domain of religion to bind human beings with the divine being through a single thread. Through the hands of the world's great prophets, the idea of a personal relationship between the God and the human beings started to flourish. Unlike the tribal stage, a prophetic movement tried to establish a personal relationship between the human beings and God. According to him, the prophetic spirit gave human beings a new vision to look at the religion from a different perspective, i.e. the perspective of humanity. In this regard, Galloway in his book *Philosophy of Religion* writes,

“Man’s relation to his god is no longer a ready-made fact, but a spiritual end to be realized. This inner spirit is not the monopoly of any caste or people, and it is by the spirit man is religious. So the ancient limits are transcendent; faith is possible is possible for all and because it is so religion in higher forms in its activity and universal in its claim. Instead of religion for tribe or nation, we have a religion of humanity.”^{lvi}

Sri Ramakrishna, the famous Indian saint of the late 19th century also cultivated a form of religion where individual human beings enjoyed the central place. He maintained the personal relationship between the humans and divine being. Ideal religion in his opinion must be free from narrow boundary of caste, creed, race etc. According to him, humans have a divine

origin; they are the sons of Goddess. They need nothing special, in the true sense of the term, to approach the divine except a pure heart and mind. Besides this, he never avoids the cultural influence upon the minds of the human being, and their psychological differences. For him, each individual is different from others regarding test, the capacity of consciousness etc. Therefore, it is quite natural that people will choose different ways. So, for him, people can take the help of different methods/mediums/practices according to their capacity of consciousness to approach the absolute divinity. Apart from the ways, everything in religion refers to the same essence, in a different tradition. With the help of a beautiful analogy, he has tried to explain this fact to his disciple:

“The mother cooks different dishes to suit the stomachs of her different children. Suppose she has five children. If there is a fish to cook, she prepares various dishes from it- pilau, pickled fish, fried fish and so on- to suit their different tests and power digestion.”^{vii}

So in his view, diversity in religion is a scientific fact. The external diversity between different religions is entailing the existence of diversity between minds of the human being. So in his view, an ideal religion must give importance to the humans and not to their accompanying characteristics.

So we can see that the different scholars at different times have sought for a religion of humanity where human’s aspiration, feelings, the endeavour

would enjoy primary place without considering caste, race, creed etc. For them, the true form of religion or universal religion must be a religion of humanity. Swami Vivekananda, the renowned social reformer of India, also searches for a religion of humanity throughout his life. According to him, the existing religions such as Islam, Christianity, Judaism, and in a sense Hinduism also fails to fulfill the criterion of a universal religion which is a religion of humanity. Because all the existing religions somehow confine themselves within the narrow bindings of caste, creed, race and many others narrow prejudices, which preclude human beings to realize their own divine nature. But he never leaves the hope of a religion which should be the religion of humanity in the future world. In 1893 at the Parliament of Religions he expressed his thought in this regard: "...but if there is even to be a universal religion it must be one which will have no location in space or time."^{lviii} Like his teacher, Sri Ramakrishna, he too maintains that religion is purely a human phenomenon and it exists within the very inner essence of human's heart and mind from the very beginning of the human race.

By following the philosophy of Vedanta, he maintains that humans are nothing but manifestations of one absolute divine being. Religion is a struggle to realize the absolute identity with the divine being, by transcending the limits of human desire and passions. So for him, religion is human's inner endeavour or struggle to transcend the limitations of narrow senses and desire. Therefore, religion in the true sense of the term is purely a human phenomenon. It is a spontaneous activity of human mind to realize the

divinity of their inner essence. Thus, an ideal universal religion must give its utmost concentration towards this endeavour of the human mind. For him people can take the help of any existing religion, ideology to transcend their limits of desire and passion because all the so-called different ways lead to the same goal, i.e. the realization of one absolute divine being within him/her. With a suitable analogy, he expresses his thought at the Parliament of Religions, “It is the same light coming through glasses of different colours. And these little variations are necessary for the purpose of adaptation. But in the heart of everything the same truth reigns.”^{lix}

In his conception, the future universal religion must keep open its arms for the humans irrespective of their associated identities. Furthermore, the future universal religious consciousness needs to develop a sense of tolerance, i.e. the power to accept others' views or a sense of respect for the other's ways. Such kind of sense of acceptance and respect towards others' views can be regarded as the defining characteristics of future universal religion. For him, all the existing religions such as Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism etc. serve the same purpose for the humanity in their true religious spirit. All the existing religious traditions try to help human beings to transcend the limits of their sensuous boundary for realizing the divinity of their soul.

Vivekananda expressed his firm conviction about the nature of universal religion to the audience of the Parliament of Religions in America in 1893. He said “It will be a religion which will have no place for persecution or

intolerance in its polity, which will recognize divinity in every man and women, and whose whole force, will be created in aiding humanity to realize its own true divine nature.”^{lx} Apart from that a truly universal religious consciousness must give utmost importance to the aspirations, endeavour, feelings, virtues, novelty and divinity of inner soul. Another important characteristic that has been mentioned by many intellectual scholars like George Galloway, Vivekananda also mentioned that a true universal religious consciousness must leave a room for future development for the progress of universal religious consciousness. He said “The religious ideals of the future must embrace all that exists in the world and in good and great, and at the same time have infinite scope of future development”^{lxi}

From the above discussion it can be said that the term “universal religion” does not mean the uniformity of thought or belief concerning religious ideas. In this context “universality” means a kind of a state of mind which does not have any narrow cultural and social bindings. It is true that different social and cultural tools like language, and group sentiments played a formative role in the development of religious consciousness, (which we have tried to discuss in the first chapter of this thesis). But the spirit of religion does not simply end within its social aspect. Religion has also an inner spiritual essence. Sometimes the role of these cultural and social tools over human psyche becomes so massive and predominant, that it suppresses the inner essence of religion. And under such absolute social and cultural influences people may often see religion only as social phenomena, matter of society

which does not have any individual preference. In doing so people only confine them within the social and cultural periphery, and may avoid the other side of religious endeavour. A true universal religious consciousness contains the essence of these two sides of religion i.e. the social and cultural aspect, and the psychical aspect of human mind. But it gives highest preference to the human beings and not to the artificial narrow social and cultural practices because religion itself is a human phenomenon where humans should enjoy the first preference. In addition, it can be said that the universal religious consciousness should not be grounded on dogmatic emotions. It can be said that emotions should be reformed by the reason. It is reason that can make universal religious consciousness free from the dogmatic influences of external world. Here freedom means the freedom to choose, freedom to approach, freedom to express etc. Here freedom does not mean freedom of doing anything. In a sense the concept of freedom is based upon the Kantian notion of universal moral principle. Kantian universal moral principle states that, “Act upon a maxim that can also hold as a universal law”^{lxii}. So in our context that can be translated as: One should hold that religious act justified which he or she is also ready to do. In this context, Kantian universal moral principle can be used to understand the limitation of freedom (a self-imposed restraint). Therefore, we may say that in the universal stage of religious consciousness, people may enjoy the freedom, to choose their own way of approaching reality (God) without any predominant external force, and also by not harming the others’ way of approach. Here, it is

important to mention that by 'universal religion' it is not intended to mean any new form of religion, which replaces all the other existing form of religion. Thereby, 'universal religion' means a state of consciousness which is mentioned in the earlier section of this paragraph. And this 'universal religious consciousness' does not require any new social or cultural institution to express its existence. People can achieve this state of consciousness by living in the existing tradition, because the spirit of universal religious consciousness is explicitly or implicitly present in all the great existing religious traditions.

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, Veiseshika, Mimansa 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 (*Astāṅgikamārga*), 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.”^{”cxxxiv}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.”^{”cxxxv}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.”^{”cxxxvi} 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 a 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.

Fourth Chapter: Religion or Religions?

The conflict of religions is a burning problem of human society. As a member of a particular religious community, we are guided by our religious values in almost every aspect of our life and social arrangements. Our religion becomes visible at the time of our birth, marriage, funeral, and so on. But sometimes our preferences create most undesirable situation for others. These individual preferences give birth to so many questions related to our social life. Such as – how should one look and behave towards others? How do our religious preferences enjoy the authenticity without being dominating the authenticity of others' religious values? How can we enjoy and maintain our religious identity amidst the diverse forces of religions? In the present chapter, we will try to find out a possible solution to the religious conflicts. But before going into the main discussion, at first, we shall try to explore the causes of religious conflicts.

In the previous chapter, we have seen that some of the world's great religious traditions maintain exclusive claims regarding an ideal way of life and true nature of the world. It is not only the case with the religions we have discussed; it is the case with all the religious sects throughout the world. Every religion has some claims that may not be accepted by the others. For example, Semitic religions proclaim the existence of divine personal God, who is considered to be the creator, sustainer and destroyer of the world and

life. On the other hand, early Buddhism and Jainism do not believe in the existence of such kind of personal god or principle, or rather any kind of god as ultimate reality. However, such exclusive metaphysical proclamations of religions create a boundary and set of taboos for their respective followers. Famous American theologian Paul J. Griffiths maintains that all the religious doctrines function as a rule, governing the life of the communities that profess them and also sets a boundary for them – which have been discussed in the very beginning of the third chapter of this thesis. Griffith's account of exclusive claims of religious scriptures is worth considering. He tries to bring out the exclusive nature of the scriptures. We can realize the influence of our religious scripture over our life and society. It shapes and forms ours in a certain way. However, among these different claims of religions, a common claim can also be found present in all the so-called diverse religious traditions. For example, it is the only true path or best path proffered by God for entire mankind. As Swami Vivekananda said, "Each religion brings out its own doctrines and insists upon them as being the only true ones."^{xxxx} Often they tend to prove it so by various means. And in doing so, almost all the religious communities find themselves in collision with each other, sometimes in an extremely violent way. Often the degree of this madness is too decisive that one religious community tries to destroy the existence of other religious community. Such violence and conflicts are harmful to the peaceful existence of human life and society. Such conflicts and violence cannot be the criteria of an ideal human society. In fact, such violence and

conflicts are main hindrances in the way of an ideal human society. Therefore, in order to establish a harmonious human society, we need to look for a possible solution of religious conflicts. And it is the primary subject matter of this final chapter of the thesis.

A search for a possible solution to religious conflicts may have the following three possible solutions: first, that there should be no religion in the future-world; second, there should be only one religion that will replace all other religious systems; and third, all religions should coexist.

It is hard to draw a picture of human society without using the color of religion. It's like a daydream that in future a human society will be established without any religious institution. This possibility seems to be meaningless if we consider the fact that religious history of human beings is as old as that of humans themselves. If we look into the history of human society throughout the world, then we may see that the notion of religion is embedded even in the earliest form of society. Indeed, it is difficult to conceptualize the social life of human beings without having an idea of their religious life. In the earliest societies, there were no sharp distinction between social life and religious life. The present form of society is nothing but a continuous flow of earlier social life. Therefore, the reflection of previous traits and habits of human society naturally transformed to the present form of society. There may be questions raised regarding the authenticity of previous patterns and characteristics of earlier social life from the current point of view and, this to some extent, seems necessary. But it is not possible to make a

completely new version of society by eliminating all the previous patterns and characteristics of earlier social life. So, under such conditions, we may leave aside the first possibility that, in future, a human society will be established without having any religious institution. Although there have been many intellectual people appeared in different times who tend to prove the unworthiness of religious institutions. Say for example, Sigmund Freud and Karl Marx etc. To some extent, they are successful to demonstrate the hegemonic role of religious institution over the mass. And they were also successful to apprehend the abnormal psychological basis behind many superstitious religious endeavours. But they were not successful to give a substitute of religion. They have successfully explored the negative aspect of religious endeavour through the scientific glass. Their Glass of Science makes the religious endeavour of people meaningless. But with their utmost effort, they did not become successful to cut out the religious endeavour of people from its root. The reason is simple that human race has found something positive elements in their religious endeavour. For people, religion does not only consist of superstitious endeavour and religious institution. Religion becomes a phenomenon of the human mind through which they try to know the beyond. For some enlightened persons, human society can never be a human society without religion. As Swami Vivekananda said “Now comes the question: Can religion really accomplish anything? It can. It has made man what he is, and will make of this human animal a god. That is what

religion can do. Take religion from human society and what will remain? Nothing but a forest of brutes.”^{xxxix}

Secondly, one may think of the possibility of one religion in the future world, so that no question of religious conflict may arise. The dream is that a single religious sect will replace all the other religions and will be able to satisfy the heart and mind of all the people of the world. Galloway thinks that Christianity in future will replace all other religions because only Christianity has the characteristics of universal religion. He says, “By its full and fair outlook on human nature and human life, Christianity has the best claim to be the Universal Religion.”^{xl} Therefore according to George Galloway, in the future world, there will be one religious identity, i.e. Christianity. Not only Galloway, but many others from other religions preferred their religions as the ideal and universal one. It may be the result of their strong attachment to their own tradition. This makes hard to imagine that people will live in the future world with a single religious identity. Let us examine the factors that make it difficult to imagine a single religious identity for all human beings.

As members of certain natural and cultural environment, we possess so many identities like biological identity, geographical identity, social identity, linguistic identity and sexual identity etc. Religious identity is one of our identities among such identities. It is true in that a specific identity of mine in some sense make me different from the other members of society. And sometimes it may become a matter of disagreement among the fellow members of society. But in spite of that, on most occasions, we are not

willing to abandon any of our identities – whether it is biological or certain social identities. Because some of the identities do not depend upon the individual's choice, but acquired by birth. For example, if a person is born in India, she/he is considered to be an Indian, and it becomes his/her national identity. Similarly, if one is born to a Bengali spoken family, Bengali becomes his/her mothertongue among the languages of the world. On the other hand, there are also certain identities which we choose ourselves willingly. For example, in these days, one may change his/her sexual identity. Religious identity is one of the essential kinds of social identity. Like the other kind of identities, religious identity is one of the primary identities of human beings. It is also true that like some of the aforementioned identities religious identity of a man/ woman also does not depend on his/ her choice. The religious identity of man/women is also acquired by birth like his/her linguistic identity. But there is a difference between the religious identity and other sorts of identity of human beings. Unlike the other identities, religious identity imposes a moral authority and sense of guilt upon the minds of people, which claims a particular behaviour from them. Disobedience to such moral claims creates a sense of guilt within the minds of the people. Unlike the religious identity, other identities like the identity of language do not impose such kind of moral authority or a sense of guilt upon the concerned person. People can talk in different languages apart from theirs, but this does not give birth to a sense of guilt upon their mind. But the disobedience of certain religious codes and cultures sometimes may cause a sense of guilt

in the mind of the people of that particular religion. And sometimes the notion of guilt causes a sense of fear in their mind, i.e. the fear of being abundant from the right paths of life. The fear of such things may cause a mental reservation with regard to the religious identity. All the great religions of the world maintain that their prescribed path is the only valid path preferred by God. Therefore, all of them believe that one has to follow their path in order to be saved from the sufferings of the world. In doing so, a particular religious community tends to profess that one should need to come under their religious identity in order to lead their life in the right way. It may be due to their strong attachment to their respective religious culture that they become a blind subject to their tradition, and unable to see the existence and importance of other religious tradition. But their subjective thinking about the supremacy of their religious faith does not make other existing religious faith unworthy. Sometimes people are so much dogmatic to their position that they may fail to realize the impartial aspect of reality. This is an obstacle in understanding the faiths of others.

Like other social and biological identities, people are more or less happy with their religious identity. They like to enjoy it. They generally find the true way of life in their respective religions. In the history of human civilization, many saints and religious leaders have come within all the great religious sects of the world to preach about the goal of religious endeavours. We have mentioned in the previous chapter, Swami Vivekananda's view in this regard. People have the freedom to choose and enjoy their religious identity. For

Swami Vivekananda, a particular religion may not take the place of all the religions. A single doctrine may not be able to fulfill the hearts all the devotees throughout the world. He says "...by the idea of universal religion if it is meant that one set of doctrine should be believed in by all mankind, it is wholly impossible."^{xxxiii} For him, diversity is the basic principle of life.

Under the above mentioned psychological basis of the human mind, we may leave out the possibility that there will be one religious identity in the future-world. The possibility of no religious identity has already been rejected by us. Identity is always meaningful with respect to diversity. The idea of one implies the idea of many, and accordingly the question of one religious identity would be meaningless without the existence of multiple religious identities. The idea of one religious identity exists so far as the different religious identities exist. So, logically it seems impossible to identify all the people of the world through a single religious identity by ignoring the existence of all the other religions. The reason that, if we would to assemble all the people of the world under a single identity the idea of many religious identities would automatically come into being beside the idea of one. Hence, the idea of one religion seems not a reasonable solution towards the problem of religious conflict. It is, therefore, better to find out a solution of religious co-existence not into any universal system of faith but the unity among the diverse religious system of faith. For that, we need to look for common platform or a meeting place where all the religious identities can enjoy their

uniqueness. Let us now try to find out the mechanism of unity among the diverse religious activity.

Scholars from the different corners of the world have given various suggestions concerning the possibility of religious co-existence. As for example, John Hick uses the Kantian distinction of two worlds, namely, the phenomenal world and transcendental world to propose a possible solution of religious co-existence. He thinks that Kantian division of these two worlds can be used as an analogy for a viable solution to religious conflicts. By following the Kantian analogy of schematization, he maintains that all the general concepts become concrete by the mental categories of understanding like, cause and effect, substance and quality etc. He applied this Kantian process of schematization over the most important concept of religions, namely, the concept of God and tried to explain the diverse claims of different religions. As in his book *Philosophy of Religion*, he says “Each of these basic concepts is, however, made more concrete (in Kantian terminology, schematized) as a range of a particular image of God or particular concepts of the Absolute. These images of God are formed within the different religious histories. Thus the Yahweh of the Hebrew scriptures exists in interaction with the Jewish people.”^{xxxiv} By following Immanuel Kant, Hick maintains that the knowledge of religious concepts is also relative to other empirical knowledge of the world. Furthermore, he maintains that the ignorance about the relative nature of the religious theology sometimes causes religious violence. Due to our ignorance we think that the gospels of

our tradition are the only true gospels of God and try to deny the authenticity of other's religion. Moreover, we tend to prove the uniqueness and authenticity of our concerned religious doctrine through various means. In doing so, we are engaged in a collision with other religious traditions.

But there is a problem lies within the Kantian theory of Schematization and the division of two worlds. In his theory, Kant has tried to show the limits of the human mind. He says that man can never know the true nature of the world. In Kantian sense, Humans can never "see" or know the 'world of noumenon', although they can think of it. The human mind can never go (to have scientific knowledge) beyond the boundary of the phenomenal world. Human mind is always confined within the boundary of the world of appearance because of its faculties. Thus, Kant draws a tragic picture of human thought, i.e. it can never know the true nature of the world. Human has to remain satisfied only with the shadows of the world.

However, there is no question of doubt that Kant's theory of knowledge makes a revolution in the field of epistemology, science and many other disciplines. The post-Kantian philosophers have applied his unique doctrine of epistemology to develop their own theory. But using this Kantian conception of schematization and his two world theory to the field of religion may be problematic. Firstly, the Kantian theory may not satisfy the heart of a devotee. Religion is said to be an endeavour of the human mind to know the reality. Kantian philosophy implicitly makes the religious endeavour of human mind impossible. According to Kantian theory, humans can never

know the world as such. By following Kant, we may say that our respective environment (both social and natural) and faculties of mind plays an essential role in the formation of our knowledge. But it is hard to believe for a devotee that human mind can never know the object in its own essence; although by denouncing scientific knowledge of the Reality, Kant has opened up the cope of faith. Therefore the complete structure religion cannot be seen in the light of Kantian theory.

Hick was aware of the agonistic nature of Kantian epistemology. By following Kantian epistemology, he maintains that our social, cultural and natural environment formed our knowledge of the world in a certain way. Like the knowledge of the world, it also forms our conception of divinity in a certain way. Our respective environment and tradition, consciously or unconsciously, guide our mind to look upon the idea of divinity in a very particular way. Simultaneously, we take the help of our tradition frequently to understand the true nature of absolute divinity. So for Hick, the diverse images and names of god are the joint product of culture and mind. Therefore, our idea of divinity is not the idea of divinity in itself in the true sense of the term. In a sense, it can be said that our idea of divinity represents an aspect of absolute divinity among the various aspects. People use their respective images of god to know the same absolute. In his book, *Philosophy of Religion*, Hick says, "Given the basic hypothesis of the reality of Divine, we may say that Yahweh, and Krishna (and likewise, Shiva, Allah and Father of Jesus

Christ) are different personae in terms of divine Reality is experienced and thought within different streams of religious life.”^{CXXXV}

Vedantic philosophy, especially Advaita Vedanta, maintains a similar opinion concerning the apparent existence of diverse images of God. The Advaita Vedanta believes in the existence of one absolute divine being, namely Brahman. For Advaita Vedanta, Brahman means pure eternal consciousness devoid of any kind of quality and category etc. Because of it, Brahman can never be expressed in language. Generally, our consciousness can grasp only those things which have certain qualities, categories and form. So for Samkara, whenever we try to grasp the idea of formless Brahman we ascribe certain qualities and categories to the nature of Brahman like omniscient, omnipresent, merciful etc. By attributing such qualities we try to know about the one absolute divinity, i.e. Brahman. In doing so, we are actually creating a particular conception of divinity, namely Isvara, with our capacity of mind. According to Samkara, all these different images represent the divine nature of the one absolute divinity. Moreover, Isvara or the particular conceptions of divinity have only phenomenal existence. When we acquire the true knowledge of the one absolute Brahman, the apparent existence of different personal gods will be demolished. According to Samkara, due to our ignorance about the true nature of the absolute divinity, we perceive or conceive the existence of various personal gods instead of one absolute divinity

However, the phenomenal existence of different personal gods is not meaningless or worthless for human life, holds Advaita Vedanta. Human beings can take the help of these different personal gods (Isvara) to realize the true nature of Brahman because all the personal gods are nothing but mere representations of the one absolute divinity. In later history of time by following Vedanta Philosophy Swami Vivekananda also maintains the same opinion regarding the role of different personal gods (Isvara) in human life. He says, “My brethren, we can no more think about anything without a mental image than we can live without breathing. By the law of association, the mental image calls up the mental idea and vice versa. This is why the Hindu uses an external symbol when he worships. He will tell you, it helps to keep his mind fixed on the being to whom he prays. He knows as well as you do that the image is not God...it stands merely as word or symbol.”^{xxxxvi} John Hick in *Philosophy of Religion* gives a similar account of explanation of the existence of different personal gods into the human society, by following this unique Vedantic conception of divinity. He says, “If we suppose that the real is one, but that our human perceptions of the Real are plural and various, we have a basis for the hypothesis that the different streams of religious experience represent diverse awareness of the same limitless transcendent reality, which is perceived in characteristically different ways by different human mentalities, forming and formed by different cultural histories.”^{xxxxvii} Vedantic conception of divinity may be a platform where all the different conceptions of Personal gods may enjoy their superiority without

denying the existence of others. Probably for that reason Swami Vivekananda projects Vedanta as an ideal future religion of the world. For him, the basic principles of Vedanta would be seen as a harmonious platform for all the diverse existing faiths. He also tries to give a possible suggestion of religious conflicts by following the philosophy of Vedanta. By following the paths of Vedanta he attempts to establish a unity among the human beings. He believes in the diversity and variety among the human beings on the one hand, and on the other hand he believes in the absolute existence of eternal pure consciousness. For him, variety and diversity is the burning fact of the universe. But the variety is to be understood under the light of unity. As the diverse elements of the universe is nothing but the manifestations of the one absolute consciousness. For him the same eternal consciousness flows through among us. Human consciousness is the representation of the one absolute consciousness. Therefore, from absolute point of view, we are one, as we have all come from a common origin. As he says, “Such are the different pearls and the Lord is the thread that runs through all of them, only the majority of mankind is entirely unconscious of it.”^{cxviii} By following the philosophy of Vedanta, Swami Vivekananda observes this divine unity among the human race as a possible solution towards the religious collision and preferred Vedanta as an ideal future religion.

No doubt Swami Vivekananda has made an influential attempt towards religious conflict by following the path of Vedanta. His proposal concerning the possible solution of religious conflict inspires the mind of many

intelligent people. His words and thoughts left a tremendous effect upon our social psyche, which helps to form our refined religious behaviour. However, it seems that his dream of Vedanta as an ideal future religion of the world is subject to challenge. Firstly, can Vedanta be considered as a religion? Neither in the Western sense of the term nor in the sense of Hinduism can it be called as religion. It is a philosophical school rather a mere religious sect. Furthermore, one can raise arguments against his strong belief in the principles of Vedanta. May be it is due to his strong attachment to the Vedanta tradition he thinks of Vedanta as the future religion of the world. Most importantly by giving utmost attention and preference to the principle of Vedanta as a common platform of interreligious dialogue, are we not trying to accommodate all the other religious faith under the shade of Vedanta? By proposing Vedanta as a universal religion, are we not trying to replace all other religious systems with a single religious faith? Such questions make us doubtful about the success of Vivekananda's proposal of Vedanta as a universal religion.

It is true that many intellectual and enlightened beings have come forward in different times of the history of human civilization to tell us about the importance of harmony among the religion. They have proposed various suggestions in this regard. Their proposed ways towards the possible solution of religious conflict may vary from one another. But more or less they share a common concern about the role and function of religion in human life and society. According to them, religion belongs to the creative part of human

psyche. Human mind has created a unique phenomenon of religion to relate their consciousness with a higher consciousness and to enjoy a fellowship under the shade of that higher conscious being. Religion becomes a means for human beings for transforming the mode of self-consciousness. This unique endeavour of human consciousness is expressed through their cultural behaviour, practices, rituals and architecture etc. Such external expressions of human consciousness build the body of religion.

Such external aspects and expressions of religion are just the sub-ways to serve the above mentioned purpose of religion. In the view of many spiritual leaders like Sri Ram Krishna Paramhamsadev and scholars like W. C. Smith, John Hick etc., in the case of every religious tradition the purpose of religion is same which is mentioned earlier. But their ways to achieve that purpose changes on the basis of mental choice and aspirations. As the wish and taste vary from person to person, correspondingly the way of fulfillment also changes from one religious tradition to another. Thus, there is no problem or conflict between our religious endeavour and others if we consider the above-mentioned opinion. But for them, conflict among the religious traditions arises because most of the time people make confusion between the way and goal in the premises of religion. They start to give utmost importance to the ways and ignore the higher purpose of religion. In doing so, one religious tradition starts to undermine and ignore the other ways to reach the same goal. Such sort of negligence, ignorance towards others faith may cause a sense of hatred, conservative mentality and ultimately it gives birth to a

collision between the people of two religious traditions. So, a proper understanding of the relative and contextual aspect of different religious traditions may open a path of inter-religious dialogue positively. This helps to sustain the authentic existence of every religious tradition and also helps to maintain social peace and harmony.

From the ancient times of human civilization, many normative principles have emerged to guide our moral behaviours, for example, the principle of Dharma. The word “Dharma” has many senses like duty, morality, virtue, etc. one of its senses is morality or duty. In the previous chapter, we have briefly discussed the nature of dharma. Dharma is often described as a life-sustaining principle by the Indian saints and philosophers. Moreover, the essence of dharma has been uttered in different verses of *Mahābhārata* in several contexts. In the SantiParva of *Mahābhārata*, in explaining the nature of Dharma to Yudhistira, Bhishma says,

A person should never do that to others

Which he does not like to be done to him by others,

Knowing how painful it is to himself.^{cxxxix}(259.20)

Furthermore, we may hear the same in the AnusasanaParva from the voice of Brihaspati. In this chapter, he explains the essence of Dharma (virtue) to Yudhistira in the following way:

One should never do that to another

which he considers as injurious to his own self.

This in brief is the rule of virtue.

One by acting in different way by giving way to desire

becomes guilty of sin.^{»cx1}(113.8)

As a self-conscious being, if we do not accept the interference of others in the domain of our religious endeavour then we should remain aware of the fact that our interference may also disturb the endeavours of others. The concept of Dharma bears this basic moral principle within its essence. It may help us to determine our duties towards others and also to one's own self. As a social being, we are depended upon our fellow beings. Our happiness to a great extent depends upon the happiness of our neighbours. The essence of Dharma may help to maintain peace and happiness in society at the time of any kind of social discourse, along with inter-religious discourse.

So now it can be said that, all the religious endeavours are directed towards a common goal. But our ways towards this goal are different. If we dislike the taste and customs of others, then it may be possible that others may also dislike the taste and customs of ours. It seems that there is something common among us along with the divers' taste of consciousness. As a self-conscious being, our consciousness does possess a common state of aspiration and acceptance. Here the sole principles of Dharma may help in sustaining the common state of consciousness. It brings out eternal moral principle

before our consciousness, i.e. ‘our way to achieve aspiration should not become the pain for others.’

However, the sole essence of Dharma has been found to be present in almost all the central religious texts of existing religious traditions. It can be heard from the voice of many enlightened beings throughout the world. And of them, Buddha is probably the most important to be mentioned.

In the 5th century C.E, such life-sustaining principle has been spoken of by Lord Buddha. Buddha believed in the diversity and variety of human mind. He knew that people could choose different ways to sustain their life. But the diverse ways of life may cause social unrest. In order to maintain peace in society Buddha expressed the essence of Dharma before the mankind. He said:

All men tremble at punishment, all men fears death;

remember that you are like unto them; and do not kill, nor cause

slaughter.^{cxli}(10.129)

further,

All men tremble at punishment, all men love life,

remember that thou art like unto them, and do not kill, nor cause

slaughter.^{cxlii}(10.130)

Likewise in Jerusalem Lord Jesus has also professed the same kind of life-sustaining principle in the form of the Golden rule at the time of social and moral decay of Jewish community to restore the harmony and wellbeing of society. He said, “So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the law of the prophets”^{cxliii} (6.15 Matthew). Jesus has tried to guide our moral behaviour in accordance with this rule for the good of all.

Such humanitarians of the human civilization believe in the autonomy of life, and freedom to express ideas, freedom to choose etc. Succinctly, they believe in the individual autonomy. Besides this individual autonomy, they also feel that as conscious beings we all are connected to each other. Our happiness in some respect depends on others. Indeed such diversities and varieties of choice, idea etc. presupposed the autonomy of our life. Without presupposing the individual autonomy, we are not able to consider the diversity of individual choice, ideas etc. These are based on our autonomy of life. The autonomy of life makes various choice and ideas etc. possible. Simultaneously, different thoughts, emotions, choices, ideas etc. of the individuals prove the existence of their autonomy of life. Without one, another becomes meaningless. Without diversities of expression, our autonomy becomes meaningless. On the other hand, without autonomy of self-consciousness, our expressions become meaningless. Our religious diversities are one of the best examples of the autonomy of consciousness. Therefore, if we deny the varieties then indirectly we deny its base, i.e. the

autonomy of conscious life. The practice of such above-mentioned life-sustaining principles of different traditions within our social life is one of the best paths to maintain our own autonomy along with the others. Such principles can be a binding element, a harmonious principle among the different religious traditions. The practice of such above-mentioned life-sustaining principle can make a meeting place where all the great religions of the world enjoy their uniqueness.

However, ignorance about religion is one of the most important causes of the religious conflicts. Our ignorance about the basic traits of consciousness, our ignorance about the essence of other religious endeavours as well as the subjective nature of our knowledge about our tradition may sometimes play a crucial role behind the religious conflicts. In this regard, a very beautiful quote of the great epic *Mahābhārata* is worthy to mention here. In the SantiParva of *Mahābhārata*, the great Bhishma tries to make us aware of the prime enemy of human life i.e. ignorance. In order to bring out the absolute adverse effect of ignorance upon the human mind. He says,

“There is only enemy of man; there is no other
enemy as such ignorance, clouded by which
man acts in ways most cruel.”^{cxliv}(297.28)

Sometimes our blind faith over our religious tradition creates an illusion in our mind concerning the universal acceptability of our religious tradition into entire human society. We become so convinced by our blind faith that we

become unable to see the faith of others or lose the patience to accept others. Such blind faith about the absolute certainty towards our own tradition makes us dogmatic and conservative about the religious identity of our own. And it also makes inter-religious dialogue impossible and causes violence in the society, because we often like to hide our ignorance, blind faith etc. behind the veil of our brutal instincts. Thus, we need a deconstructive attitude towards our belief system to explore the subjective aspect of our individual belief. It also helps to explore an inter-subjective position among the individual beliefs, which ultimately may open a door of inter-religious dialogue peacefully.

On the basis of the above discussion, we may say that religion is a creation of human mind. These unique phenomena of mind are used to know the factors of outside the natural dominance. It is an approach to freedom to go beyond physical dominance. It can be seen as means to sustain life by avoiding the narrow impulses of senses; by going beyond the narrow boundary of desire and passion. Therefore, religion can be seen as a mental act of having a joyful and peaceful life. The meaning and purpose of all the great religions can be found only in sustaining principles of life and not in destructing principles of life. By following the writings of some thinkers, like Swami Vivekananda, it can be said that all the great religions of the world serve the same purpose for mankind; people take the shelter of any one of the religious sects to fulfil these purposes sustain their religious life. Swami Vivekananda has compared the different religious tradition with an orchestra and said,

“Why take a single instrument from the great religious orchestra of the earth? Let the great symphony go on. Be pure. Give up superstition and see the wonderful harmony of nature.”^{cxlv}

Chapter5: Concluding Remarks

In the Introduction to the present dissertation, an attempt has been made to highlight the causes as well as the impacts of religious conflicts in the life of human beings and society. It has been observed that religious conflicts may not be criteria of an ideal society. In this thesis, we have found that only probable solution to these religious conflicts may be achieved through religious co-existence. The discussions in each and every chapter were done aiming at a possible solution of aforementioned problem

So far as our inquiry into the origin of religion is concerned, it is observed that religion grew as a medium for human mind to know the reality in order to make their existence stable, permanent and meaningful in this troublesome world. In the hostile and challenging environment of primitive society people began to realize their own impermanence and state of vulnerability. They realized that ultimate fact of human existence is temporal and always open to or subjected to the harsh reality of death. Consequently, to make their existence more permanent, and sustainable in this troublesome, challenging environment, the native minds have spontaneously tried to explore, and approach his surroundings with the intention to know it. The primitive minds might have realized that the knowledge of their surroundings could help them to make their existence more permanent.

Human beings began to seek ardently the answers to the questions that bothered them with regard to the mysteries of life, like, its impermanence and

death. For this, they devised mechanism of institutions which provided or rather seemed to provide answers. Religion can be seen as one of the outcomes of such mechanisms. Hence, religion is a phenomenon which provides human existence a more stable and permanent basis in this world. But, there might have been lot of misinterpretation of the religious mechanism that it has been at times looked upon as negative. On the basis of our above observation we may say now, in this present context, that the notion of religion itself does not intend to do violence in human society. Rather it is a way to sustain our life in this world. Here a comment of Prof Pradyot Kumar Mukhopadhyay is worthy to be mentioned: “A religious man lives his life intensely, much more intensely than an ordinary man or even a socio-political activist. Such a life, even when it does not take a positive form of social service, makes man incapable of doing any harm to other man or to even animal or the environment. Authentically religious men know no violence and are living embodiment of peace and happiness.”^{xlvi} The knowledge about this ancient psychological basis behind the origin and development of religious phenomena may make us aware about other underlying factors behind a religious conflict. Such awareness among the mass may play an effective role in resolving the religious conflicts.

Here some of the Marxist thinkers may raise questions against such psychological basis and purpose of religion in human life and society. For them, religion has a very little role to play in sustaining the life of large number of people. Rather, according to them religion is a hegemonic tool of

sovereign class to manipulate productive force of labour class. For them, religion is nothing but a hegemonic discourse of sovereign class to control or to repress the voice of proletariat class. French Marxist Louis Althusser in his article 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)' has mentioned eight types of ideological state apparatuses, of which religious state apparatus is also an important one. For him, all the state apparatuses serve the same purpose for the ruling class. He writes, "All Ideological State Apparatuses, whatever they are, contribute to the same result: the reproduction of the relation of production, i.e. of capitalist relations of exploitation."^{cxlvii} So for him, as a religious ideological state apparatus, Church serves and secures the same purpose for the ruling class. Some people could say that for the smooth and better running of society the proper function of these different ideological state apparatuses seem necessary. One could even say that in order to build a harmonious society the behaviours and aspirations of the members of the society should be guided and governed by some principles. For many people, these ideological state apparatuses provide us such governing principles. The purpose and the function of different ideological state apparatuses can also be understood in this way. To some extent, the existence of different ideological apparatuses seems necessary for harmonious existence of a society. But whenever the function of these ideological state apparatuses are, they are solely directed to secure more benefits for the ruling class the problem starts. The Marxist thinker, Althusser critically and systematically points out that hegemonic function of the

religious state apparatuses in his above mentioned article. Althusser's view about the function of religious institution is not only applicable to the western world, but also to rest of the world.

It is worthy to mention that Bartrned Russell has also maintained same opinion regarding the function of Church in the human civilization. For him, Church is a medium through which certain group of powerful people restores their vested interest. In his article 'Has Religion Made Useful Contribution to Civilisation' he writes:

There is nothing accidental about this difference between a Church and its Founder. As soon as absolute truth is supposed to be contained in the sayings of a certain man, there is body of experts to interpret his sayings, and these experts infallibly acquire power, since they hold the key to truth. Like any other privileged caste, they use their power for their own advantage. They are, however, in one respect worse than any privileged caste, since it is their business to expound and unchanging truth, revealed once, for all in utter perfection, so that they become necessarily opponents of all intellectual moral progress.^{cxlviii}

It is true that in many cases notion of religion has been used by a certain group of people to satisfy their vested interested like power, authority etc.

These lead to certain fundamental questions – does the essence of religion solely consists in the functions or the objectives of religious institution? Or is religion simply a means of repression and consequently the prime cause of social violence?

However, it seems that religion is not all about hegemonic practices. Indeed religion from its inner aspect does not intend to suppress or repress the voice of human beings. Rather it is a way of expressing the freedom of mind, which has been discussed in the first chapter of this thesis. Furthermore, religion in itself does not intend to be associated with the idea of violence. Behind social violence various interrelated factors work together. Sometimes people manipulate the inner essence of religion to fulfill their interest. They use the notion of religion to hide their hidden intention. When such sort of vested interest arises under a particular socio-political environment, the conflict starts between religion and science, between different religious traditions, and between the individual freedom and authority of institution. Indeed religion itself is not the cause of social violence. In this regard a comment of Karen Armstrong is worthy to mention. In her book *Fields of Blood: Religion and the History of Violence*, she writes, “Obviously the two world wars were not fought on account of religion. When they discuss the reasons people go to war, military historians acknowledge that many interrelated social, material and ideological factors are involved, among the chief of them competition for scarce resources. Experts in political violence or terrorism also insist that people commit atrocities for a complex range of reasons. Yet so indelible is

the aggressive image of religious faith in our secular consciousness that we routinely load the violent sins of the twentieth century on the back of 'religion' and drive it out into the practical wilderness.^{xxlix}

An understanding and awareness about the fundamental purpose of religion may help us explore political and other reasons behind a religious conflict. And if we are able to identify the cause of religious conflicts then we will be also be able to stop such religious conflicts.

An understanding about the nature and function of universal religion as it has been discussed in the second chapter can help us in understanding and resolving religious conflicts. It has been discussed that universal religion does not mean any one absolute religion, which exists ultimately by submerging all the other religions. Universal religion can be defined as religious consciousness which is free from all the narrow boundaries caste, creed, race, etc.; it is a state of consciousness where human beings enjoy the primary place in any kind of religious discourse. Universal religious consciousness regards human beings as of utmost importance because it realizes that religion primarily is a human phenomenon. It is human beings who have developed this unique phenomenon to sustain their life, to make their existence more permanent in this troublesome world. Therefore, the life of human beings cannot be destroyed in the name of religion. Such understanding about the nature of universal religion may bind human beings in a conscious level through a single religious chain, which may be called the chain of humanity. In objective world, different religious traditions will continue to exist. The

existence of these different religious traditions will go simultaneously besides such universal religious consciousness. But people may have that state of universal religious consciousness by cultivating the basic tenets of universal religion within their living religious traditions. If we try to destroy or negate the idea of religion itself from the future world, then it would again create conflict into the human civilization. The notion of religion is embedded in the very nature of human civilization. Indeed it is hard to draw a line of separation between these two ideas; right from the very beginning of human civilization the idea of religion flowing into the mind of human beings. A comment of Prof. Pradyot Kumar Mukhopadhyay is worthy to mention in this regard. As he says, “Unless we admit that all religions first came into being with the founding of them by their respective founders or hold that every religion is necessarily a founded religion, it is most likely that the first member of a founded religion is a convert from another and earlier religion. Just as every human child is born in a linguistic community even if later his language is changed (may be too early in his life, in infancy) so also it is quite likely or even theoretically compelling to hold that every man (or at least almost all men) is born in certain religion. The Hindus do not believe that there was ever a time, at least in human history when, there was no religion.”^{cl} Thus, it is difficult, or rather impossible to draw a picture of a human civilization without the notion of religion. So any single attempt to destroy the existing notion of religion from human society will bring damage

to human life as well as human society. The awareness of such facts may be seen as a possible solution to religious conflicts.

The concern about the relative nature of religious truths may also be seen as possible solution to religious conflicts. It is mentioned in the first chapter as well as in the very beginning of this chapter that religion is a spontaneous approach of human mind to know the reality to ease their existence and living. Here “reality” can be defined as truth. In this context, “truth” may stand for any absolute truth which has different shades and there is no question of supremacy among the shades of truth. So in that context, truth may be seen or known differently to different eyes. Again, there is no question of supremacy among the ways. That means, there are different possible ways, present simultaneously to explore the different shades of truth. These different ways stand as evidence for diverse mental abilities of human mind and also stand for the cultural diversity of human society. Here, the ways are considered as cross product of both culture and mind. The influence of culture on minds of its inhabitants is an unavoidable fact. The cultural influences give a particular shape to the thought process of its inhabitants to cultivate their worldview. A question may be raised in this context regarding the authenticity of such social influences on the mind. Some of the thinkers argue that such social influences take the individuality from the individuals and turn them as mere subject to the culture. In such cases, questions of manipulation, repression of individual choices come into being. Such arguments and questions are pertinent. The answer of such questions can be

answered in a better way if we try to answer it from the perspective of basic need of religious consciousness, i.e. to know the reality in order make their existence more permanent in the world.

Under the light of the aforementioned basic religious psychological crisis, we may become able to point out the predominant influence of socio cultural environment over the religious endeavours of people. Consequently, the inner aspect of religion goes into surplus and various cultural, social rituals, code of conducts etc. take the primary place. In such a condition our awareness about the basic purpose of religion may help us to reveal the truth by deconstructing the predominate influence of socio-cultural environment.

On the basis of the above discussion we may say that our knowledge about the truth in the context of a particular religious tradition is relative in nature, it is true but from a particular point of view. Along with this fact one more thing is worthy to mention that besides the exclusive religious claims of a religious tradition, there are also certain common moral principles present, (which we have discussed in the fourth chapter of this thesis,) which can be seen as a platform of inter-religious dialogue, which further work as a religious conflict resolving element.

One thing can easily be found out from the entire discussion of this concluding chapter that our knowledge about the different psychological, socio-cultural basis and purpose of religion in human life and society may bring an awareness to the mass about the place and purpose of religion in

human life, and also help them to realize the value of human life in a religious context. Such awareness all together can be seen as possible to religious conflicts. Yet it is hard to mention that the search for a possible solution of religious conflicts is a never ending search. It will also bring in future the benefit of society. Nonetheless, it assumed that such debate needs a fresh unbiased approach to become successful or fruitful not only for the society as a whole but also for the individual human existence.

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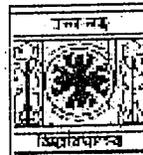
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RELIGION: TRIBAL AND UNIVERSAL*

SUMAN DAS

Whenever the term "tribal religion" is uttered, a picture of fearful, emotional and superstitious endeavor comes to our mind, because it is usually pictured so in history by many scholars. For many scholars, tribal religion is merely an expression of the fear of mystical spirits. Tribal religion is also defined as a collective approach where individual preference does not enjoy a primary place. In the case of tribal religion, individual aspirations are subject to the laws of a tribe. That means, in the case of religious endeavor, individual human beings has to follow the rules and regulations provided by the concerned tribe. It is supposed to be a narrow religious approach because in the case of a tribal religion, a particular tribe does not want to share their God with other tribes. Therefore, tribal religion stands in history as a narrow native superstitious approach of primitive mind. These are the general assumptions about the nature of the religion of tribal people of modern mind. On the other hand, we come to know that the religious approach of tribal people was loaded with the magical ideas. The presences of magical elements in the religion of tribal people make it unworthy in its essence. Because most of the time it does not fulfill the aspirations of tribal people. The religious endeavors of tribal people were basically directed by a sense of fear of the dead ancestor, of loosing material goods of life etc. The relation of fear rather than love is found to be present between the worshipper and the worshipped within the domain of tribal religion. As Prof. Galloway says "No doubt we find various rites of an elaborated nature performed by uncivilized tribes – initiation ceremonies and dances, for example. But in these cases the significance of the ceremonies is magical much more then religious."⁴⁰ They worshipped the spirits or the natural objects either in order to fulfill their basic needs or to pacify the spirits. Therefore, it is said by many scholars throughout the world that the religion of tribal people never goes beyond their physical needs.

* I am thankful to my supervisor Dr. Koushik Joardar for valuable guidance in framing this research paper.

⁴⁰ *Philosophy of Religion*, George Galloway, International Theological Library, Edinburgh, 1914, p.108

E.B Taylor (1832-1917) defines the religion of primitive people as "...the belief in spiritual beings."⁴¹ He believes that all the low races possess a belief in the 'spiritual beings' with whom they feel connected. But the journey through which primitive minds started to believe in the mystical power of spirits is quite interesting. By following the scholarly works of George Galloway we come to know that primitive mind lacks the ability to separate animated beings from the inanimate objects. The moving objects and events of nature like river, rain, moon etc. and many more things left an impression of fear and wonder into their mind. Under such influence primitive mind spontaneously started to impose a kind of life power or breathing power within these objects of nature, as they feel within themselves. In this way primitive man peopled this world. In later times such projected objects and events of nature were worshiped by the tribal people in order to fulfill their basic needs. This is, in brief, a short history of the journey of the religious ideas of the tribal people. For Taylor and many other scholars the ignorance with regard to the material status of the world ultimately gave birth to the religious phenomena of tribal people.

However, the great German Philologist F. Max Muller is not quite satisfied with the way Prof. Taylor describes the religious consciousness of the savage mind. Like Herbert Spencer, he disagrees with such conception that primitive minds were unable to separate the inanimate objects from the animate one. He writes that "I cannot help calling it irrational when we are asked to believe that at any time in the history of the world a human being could have been so dull as not to be able to distinguish between inanimate and animate beings, a distinction in which higher animals hardly ever go wrong... Even Mr. Herbert Spencer protests against this insult to the human intellect."⁴² However, Max Muller emphasizes upon the early man's use of language. According to Max Muller, at the earliest stage of primitive society the minds of primitive people understood and conceptualized everything in terms of an agent. For him, the general notion of causality was not clear to the primitive

41 'Animism' by Edward Taylor in *Theories of Religion A Reader*, (ed.) by Seth D. Kuhin with Jonathan Miles Watson, Edinburg University Press, p.104.

42 " Summary of the results of phsyical religion' by Max Muller in *Theories of Religion, A Reader*, (ed.) by Seth D. Kuhin with Jonathan Miles Watson, Edinburg University Press, p.75

people. And the roots of their language were essentially expressive of agency. That's why they named the events, objects of nature in terms of a human agent. That's why, instead of searching for the causes of the events of nature, they searched for an agent who makes these actions possible. For Max Muller, such conception of agent was gradually transformed into the idea of a super human agent.

There is a difference between the opinion of Max Muller and the Prof. Taylor. But in another sense there is also a similarity between their thought. Both of them put emphasis upon certain kind of disabilities of tribal people. Like prof. Taylor he also points out another sort of disability of intellect of tribal people, i.e. the disability to differentiate between the agent and action. In the voice of these two great philosophers a similar tone can be heard regarding the foundational basis of the religion of primitive people. Both of them hold that certain kind of physical and mental disability of primitive people sets the foundation of their religion. It is not only their opinion but it is the opinion of the many modern minds that the religion of the primitive people is based on the misconception about the true fact of the nature. Their misconceptions give rise to the spirits rather than God, it gives rise to the magical ideas rather than religious ideas.

Religious endeavor of human being made a long journey. It is believed that with the growing age of time we have transformed the narrow boundary of tribal religion and have developed a better form of religion than our ancestors. Unlike our ancestors, our present form of religious endeavor leaves a room for personal aspiration. It is more inclusive than the religion of tribal people.

Let us reflect upon nature of tribal religion. Is it a fact that we have developed a higher form of religion than that of the tribes? Was tribal religion really resulted from the misconception about nature and is ours the true one? Was the tribal religion loaded merely with magical ideas and nothing else? It is true that the minds of tribal people were basically directed by their basic needs. It may also be true that they tried to approach the events and objects of nature in order to secure their basic requirements of life. Within the uncanny and challenging environment it was rather practical to do so. Uncanny environment leaves very little room for spiritual speculation. Tribal group of people never think their religious endeavor as separate phenomena from their life and society. They lived with their objects of worship.

Now let us reflect upon the present form of religious consciousness. Is our present form of religious consciousness free from the basic needs and demands of life? Do we not approach towards our God in order to satisfy our needs of life? Religions always include necessities of life of people either in past or in the present. It is true that with the development of consciousness our aspirations are different in some respects from that of the tribal people. But this change of aspiration may not prove the inferiority of tribal religion. Present environment and developed consciousness provides us with a condition for speculation. But it cannot be a criterion to judge the status tribal religion. Dr. Kalidas-Bhattacharya suggests us with the idea that this growing form of speculation should not be a criterion for religious divergence. He says "so, high level religions cannot, as religion, be assessed against one another. Each is alternatively as highest as another. Of them one may be richer with contents than another, but not on that ground a superior religion."⁴³ The same may be said in comparing universal and tribal religions.

We may consider the religious approach of tribal people in a different way. The worship of natural objects of tribal people can be thought in terms of their spontaneous gratitude towards the nature, in terms of their curiosity to know the beyond. The problem regarding the nature of tribal religion arises because we always try to look at its nature through the looking glasses of evolution and due to our own understanding of evolution in terms of progress. The evolution of human consciousness may not necessarily point to progress. To identify with nature may not be a lower activity of primitive mind; it only points to the fact that they were different. It may not be the inability of the consciousness of tribal people that they felt identified with the nature. In a sense they felt their inability to live life without the help of nature. They realized the impact of natural events upon their life. So they spontaneously made a way to approach their life- sustaining forces of nature.

The *Upaniṣadic* philosophy is the fruit of the mature age of Indian civilization. It maintains a belief in the existence of an eternal consciousness within every natural object. *Upaniṣadic* religion provides us with the idea that natural objects are nothing but the manifestation of one absolute consciousness. Therefore

⁴³ *Possibility of Different Types of Religion*, Kalidas Bhattacharyya, The Asiatic Society 1975, p.76

each and every object of this world is conscious in the true sense of the term. The one absolute consciousness flows through every single entity of this world. Here *Upanisadic* philosophy somehow reminds us the tribal animistic conception of the world, where tribal people spontaneously felt a life breathing power in every objects of nature as they felt within themselves. No doubt the basic theme of *Upanisadic* philosophy is not similar with this religious endeavor. Therefore, difficulty lies in applying *Upanisadic* terminology to understand the religious approach of tribal people. But let us think our own religious attitude. What do we do actually in worshipping something? We believe in a sort of life power in the idol. Otherwise we will not worship it at all. From our own activity, it is not difficult to assume the activities of tribal mind. In a sense, religiously speaking, we do not practice completely a separate thing from our ancestor. The difference is that they have done it a spontaneously, whereas we do it consciously.

The journey of human religious consciousness is not a separate and flawless journey. It is a gradual and contentious process of our conscious mind, which takes no rest since the time of its beginning. It is gradual but constant. If the endeavor of the tribal people started to flourish on the basis of the misconception of the natural facts then it can be said that our present approach is also grounded on the same pillar. Prof Galloway himself says that our present form of religion bears the traces of much tribal religious conception. In his view many of the today's religious concept or ideology develops from the same tribal conception. As he says: the conception of spiritual brotherhood in modern religions comes from the tribal conception of blood-bond unity. He writes "More over the tribal blood-bond uniting all the members of the primitive group, there appears the rudimentary basis out of which was to develop the idea of spiritual brother hood society of religious society." Therefore it can be said that the religion of tribal people is not just a belief in superstitious power of sprits or natural objects.

Here, in this paper I am not denying altogether the evolutionary theory of religious consciousness. I am just trying to say that it is not always justified to judge the religious endeavor of tribal people through the glass of modernity. It may be possible that our modern glass is unable to grasp the true colors of tribal religion. Our modern glass of reason may make us unable to see the emotional connection between

the tribal people and nature. Somehow if we may encounter with the tribal people then they may say that it is we who fail to see the truth.

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