

## **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.