

Chapter I

Religion in modern mind — some antireligious views of modern age — An analysis of the essential elements in religion.

Section - I

An examination of some antireligious views.

Religion is deeply rooted in man. Man is not only conscious but also a self-conscious being and for this reason he is superior to all other living beings in the world. In self-consciousness we meet a set of phenomena quite distinct from physical, vital or mere conscious. Thus being essentially spiritual by nature man has in his deepest depth of consciousness a vision however hazy of something sacred which is great, which is noble, something high and powerful qualitatively superior to all worldly things. Man earnestly longs for this something greater and higher because realisation of it in his own inner consciousness will give him a sense of security, assurance, peace, comfort, a feeling of stability or in other words something by means of

which he understands and interprets the meaning and value of life - his place in the universe around him. This spiritual hunger in man is as fundamental as his rational urge or his quest for knowledge and in course of history they develop side by side. Sometimes he tries to explain and establish his spiritual experience rationally and sometimes he even rejects it on rational ground. Yet he can never throw it away altogether - because religion is as old as man.

In this scientific age we find a development of antireligious attitude. It is because of the intellectual integrity, the scientific modern mind can not rest satisfied with traditional religion which has become defeated to establish true spirit of religion. Instead of convincing man about the spiritual fervour of religion it has been misinterpreted by the thinkers of this age that it is nothing but the dogma or creed. For too much emphasis on the rituals and ceremonious in traditional religion the unity of mankind has been destroyed and as a result sectarianism prevails in the society which divides people into innumerable hostile camps. The inability of traditional religion for reconstruction of a good civilization based on socio-political and economic equality and also its own point of view regarding supernatural made the scientific mind confused. In a word, the

antireligious attitude is based on a confused notion regarding the true spirit of religion. So we shall discuss the antireligious views in brief before establishing the essential elements of religion.

Naturalistic atheism, Agnosticism, Scepticism, Humanism and Authoritarianism all are known as antireligious views in modern age.

The naturalists have no faith in life and spirit inherent in man. Man has been described by these thinkers as the accidental product of unconscious material atoms of which the whole world is composed. Ultimate reality here is taken as purely material in nature and man is regarded as dominated and guided by natural laws as he has no independent place in the universe. In this world picture man's feeling of reverence and worship which are essential facts of religion, will be meaningless. Besides, he becomes the victim of the world full of sorrows and sufferings and sometimes finds an escape from these hardships of life in religion. Thus religion is born of fear and on this ground the naturalistic atheists have no faith in religion.

Moreover, naturalistic atheism holds that religion consists of two parts : "a worship of the ideal conceived merely as the ideal, and a worship of the actual or existent. The first involves the goodness, but not the existence of its objects, and the second involves the existence, but not the goodness of its object."⁽¹⁾ All religious ideals are false because they are only ideals but not real.

The agnostics again deny religion on the ground that religion if based on the discovery of reality or truth, will be meaningless as reality itself is unknown and unknowable. Reality may not be known by any finite as finite can never reach it.

The sceptics on the other hand, have no faith in religion as the fundamental principle of scepticism is doubt or denial of certainty. Scepticism is a revolt against the traditional religious beliefs and dogmas. Because the sceptics are too cultured to have faith in any system or in any unfounded belief, thus religion here is a subject of doubt and its necessity in man's life has been ignored in this negative approach.

1. S. Radhakrishnan, An Idealistic view of life. P-53.

The failure of traditional religion in the field of spiritual progress in man gives rise to the antireligious view of humanism. To a humanist, temples, rites, ceremonies, beliefs and dogmas are false and meaningless. They serve no purpose, no active role for the progress of man and society.

Humanism in modern age which is more rational, scientific and practical approach to the development of man believes that the upliftment of man on the basis of socio-economic equality, should be the goal of life. Like the sceptics, the humanists have no negative attitude to reality but they have a positive programme of human service, equality, fraternity and freedom from poverty. Man is superior to all other creations of the world and has some ideals and values in his life and he is not guided by natural laws as the naturalistic atheists hold. Hence humanism aims at how to establish a secular state and a well planned society where man will be extremely happy. Thus religion according to ^{the humanist attitude} their conception, is ~~not~~ nothing but mere speculation and opiate for the poor, which deviates man from the path of searching truth in a practical approach. Humanism has been taken by a large number of people today as a substitute of religion.

Authoritarianism believes in the certainty of authority of holy book, pope, church, rites and external performances, but has no faith in religion. One group of thinkers simply believe in their tradition, their authority of past and they like to follow a fixed creed without knowing its value or significance. Again there is another group of men who find a relief from confusions and doubts regarding religion, in a certain fixed knowledge of authority.

Though all these theories are based on some reasonable grounds of their own, yet they ignore some essential aspects in the life of man. They all have made a common mistake that they avoided the spiritualistic note in the life of man. But need of religion is persistent in man which never be overlooked. Here we find an attempt of Prof. Radhakrishnan to examine all these antireligious views in order to prove and establish the meaning and significance of the term religion.

The argument against religion raised by the naturalistic atheists is of no value as it is based on false metaphysics. Here nature of ultimate reality has been recognised as purely material. But in modern age the whole nature is regarded as the manifestation

of spirit and even matter is the dim manifestation of it. In this respect there is no antagonism between spirit and nature, rather nature is the embodiment of spirit. Hence the view is no more accepted that the world is composed of unconscious material atoms or energies and man is an accidental product of these material energies. To ignore the spiritual aspect of man and his individual freedom in the universe means total extinction of man. Man has an independent status in the world, has creative power and his freedom to build up a new world of his own. He neither is deminated by nature nor becomes the victim of sorrows and sufferings of the world. Alongwith pain life has pleasure also and he finds reality not so unsatisfying that he will earnestly long for an escape from it and will frame a religion. Thus atheists give a wrong picture of the world and their antireligious view is based on intellectual disbelief. But religion takes us deeper than the intellect and there it finds out a vital relationship of man with nature. It discovers the truth that man finds out. Actually the whole world is the manifestation of consciousness only in different grounds and man is the highest manifestation of this spirit because of his spiritual nature or his inner religious consciousness. Thus religion is the essence inherent in man and is the only way for spiritual

growth which may not be abolished on the ground that it is irrational and unscientific.

Criticism of religion by the agnostics may not stand as Prof. Radhakrishnan observes. How can the agnostics be sure that the truth which is unknowable at present will remain unknown in future also ?

The method of doubt of the sceptics is not final but it is the starting point of discovering the truth. Mere negation is abstraction and hence it should be based on some positive background. To doubt reality means to apprehend its nature on some positive background. Thus to doubt religious truth signifies its firm conviction in the life of man. Religion, however, may not be abolished, rather it will be established on a strong foundation of living experiences and spiritual awakening.

Again humanism may not be a substitute of religion. What religion emphasises on, the spiritual growth of a personality is overlooked by a humanist as he points out the progress of man from the point of view of economic equality and socialisation

only. Though the positive programme of humanism for the development of personality claims an open admiration from all, yet it is also the fact that man is not only a social being but he is a spiritual being also. So economic equality alone may not satisfy him but he has the craving for the Great, the Infinite, the Eternal. Throughout life man endeavours to improve his spiritual moulding for the best realisation of the truth inherent in him and it is religion alone which inspires him to be enlightened with self-knowledge and to attain perfection. Thus humanism should not oppose religion which aims at the development of man on the spiritual ground.

Again the approach of the authoritarianism to criticise religion is also not correct as it is a view completely enclosed within a circle of traditional belief, tradition nourishes the individual at the first step of his development of spirituality no doubt but one will have to go ahead of traditions in order to realise a direct communion with universal spirit. Mere belief in holy books and churches and rites may not quench the spiritual thirst in man. The nature of spiritual thirst in man is that it makes him restless to have living experience of the truth, the Infinite, Eternal what he contains within himself. In this respect religion, not mere belief in authority, will help a man

more to be spiritually elevated in the pursuit of truth. (1)

Section - II.

What is religion.

In the above discussion of an examination of the anti-religious views we have seen that religion is the indispensable aspect in the life of man which unfolds his true nature to have a direct vision of Truth. In course of history it has been proved that the need of religion is persistent in man. It is a peculiarity in man that he is a finite-Infinite creature, finite in manifestation and infinite in principle. For the presence of Infinite in him he aspires for Goodness, desires to live a noble life and wants to have a direct vision of truth in his life and in this respect he is fundamentally different from all other animals; more clearly, he is distinctively superior as he is the highest manifestation of the supreme spirit. Yet he is not free from his animality because of his finitude and thus he is a wonderful blending of both animal nature and divine nature.

1. S. Radhakrishnan, An Idealist view of life. PP-52-74.

Swami Abhedananda rightly points out "Human nature seems to be a most wonderful blending of that which is called divine. It is like the twilight before day break, through which the darkness of the night of the animal nature passes into the glorious sunshine of the supreme wisdom." (1) Here is an opportunity to

destroy the dark animal side in the light of the supreme spirit and also here is a scope to realise his universal nature. In

Tagore's language "..... there is on the one hand the Universal

Man and on the other, the animal man limited by his self-

(2) seeking." Man the animal is totally guided by his ego and so long he belongs to the field of his ego he boasts of his own status, his own performances and finds that the satisfaction of his material necessities is adequate to his happiness. But this outlook of his life and existence, his interest in the worldly objects become changed and remain no longer satisfied with temporary happiness, as the seed of the Infinite is already rooted in man. His discontents with worldly pleasure, his restlessness for something higher, greater in his life and his intense desire to find out the truth prove that he is not a wretched creature of flesh and blood only but he is a spiritual being interested to

1. Swami Abhedananda. Divine Heritage of Man : PP.-193-194.

2. Rabindranath Tagore. Man P.-40.

unfold the mystery of his innerself. Realising the Infinite in his 'soul-consciousness' he is inspired to realise it in his actual life. He transcends his limitations of lower self or his ego in order to reach to the shrine of truth. Thus transcending the animality within him, he enters into the field of spirit to realise man the Universal. Tagore says, "In the life of self-seeking the burden of pleasure and pain is very great, but when man transcends his self interest he feels the burden so light that his patience when faced with the bitterest suffering and his forgiveness inspite of the heaviest insults seems to us to be super human."⁽¹⁾ In a process of self transcendence man becomes the owner of power and strength and he is elevated to super human level. Transcending the limitations of his ego he transcends the meanness, selfishness, jealousy and his attachment to material objects. His continuous search for truth in life aims at the revelation of the 'Universal Man' in the world of man. It is to rescue his own inmost truth from the great hindrances set up to his ego and this truth is greater than all other material achievements in his daily life. Thus religion is the pursuit of Truth in a process of self-transcendence. It is

1. Tagore. Man. P.-41.

a process of soul's growth from the dark side of the ego to the enlightened sphere of the higher self. As has been defined by Gaskell, religion is "a symbol of the science of the scriptural life — knowledge of the process of the soul's growth from imperfection to perfection, from ignorance to wisdom, from separateness to love and from illusion to the eternal truth."⁽¹⁾

And this process of self-transcendence or soul's growth is based on the spiritual hunger in man, another important element of religion. Because man's invincible hopes to reach perfection through this process inspires him to be spiritually elevated and he feels an inner urge to transcend the barriers of the material world.

Religion does not mean mere rituals and ceremonies which are its external features only. They are means to an end but not ends in themselves. Besides these superficial aspects it has its inner side also. It is the search of what is already in man. Here we find man's strenuous endeavour to realise that

1. Dictionary of all scriptures and Myths.
By G. A. Gaskell. P.-621.

he is the spirit himself. In his 'soul-consciousness' as Tagore puts it, man realises the Infinite spirit as his essential principle or his true self. Thus religion is not the attainment of anything new but is based on the discovery of worth and dignity inherent in the individual. In the words Radhakrishnan, "Religion insists on the apprehension of what (1) already is and not on the achievement of what is not."

It is the attempt to realise the spirit inherent in him. Man ignores his original source and his real nature that he is the manifestation of the Infinite. He thinks himself absolutely self-sufficient and in this way becomes isolated from the Infinite. Religion helps a man to be united with the Infinite which is his real destiny. Prof. Radhakrishnan says, "To restore the lost relationship between the individual and eternal is the (2) purpose of religion."

Dharma is another terminology of religion which has been formed from the root dhr. Dhr means to hold. The meaning of (3) this is that dharma holds a thing and maintains it in being.

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1. S. Radhakrishnan. ^{An} Idealistic view of life. P.-41.
 2. S. Radhakrishnan. Religion and Society. P.-43.
 3. S. Radhakrishnan. The Hindu view of life. P.-78.

In the words of Tagore, "Dharma is the innermost nature, the essence, the implicit truth of all things."⁽¹⁾ On this ground it may be said that each object of nature has its own dharma which is nothing but the essence of the object or it is the truth inherent in it. Regarding this point dharma is the universal term. Just as liquidity is the essence of water spirituality is the essence of man. With the growth of spirituality in man, he realises the Infinite within him. Religion ultimately helps him to grow in to the likeness of the spirit. In the words of Prof. Radhakrishnan, "Religion is an aspiration to grow into likeness of the divine. It is to help us to live from the depth of spirit."⁽²⁾ The aspiration in man to attain the truth inspires him to develop his inner power of spirituality. Man should be rebuilt in the mode of spirituality if he aims at perfection and it is religion which serves this purpose. Religion is "Truth's embodiment in life and power to refashion our nature."⁽³⁾ The attainment of truth is not a mere abstract theory without any practical significance in our life. Truth is not apart from us and to prove this fact vividly religion aims

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1. Tagore. Sadhana. P.-74.
 2. S. Radhakrishnan. Religion and Society. P.-120.
 3. S. Radhakrishnan. Religion and Society. P.-104.

at the embodiment of truth in this life. It moulds a man and his nature in its original form of spirituality and thus religion is the remaking of man. The growth of spirituality in man reveals in him his real nature that he is the owner of spirit, he is the divine being and on this ground he realises an intimate relationship with all and expands himself to the world.

Religion does not mean a fancy or a make-belief but it is such a conviction of something great in the deepest depth of mankind which may only be reached with intuition and hence is beyond any doubt. It is the living experience of truth which inspires man to behave in a particular way to be enlightened with self-knowledge and to be elevated to a higher spiritual life. It is the way of life which actualises all beliefs and hence it is behaviour. Mere belief if not practised is almost irrational and unscientific; so in order to be meaningful it should be applicable in our life. Prof. Radhakrishnan says, "religion as a way of life is the seeking of the eternal. It is more behaviour than belief. If we believe in God we must act in the light of that faith."⁽¹⁾ Thus religion is the active process and not a passive one. It evaluates faith with its pract-

1. S. Radhakrishnan. Eastern Religion and Western Thought. P.-60.

ical application. Faiths in religion are not blind but are based on living thoughts which have great significance upon life. Sister Nivedita defines religion as the living thought and belief with their reaction in character. ⁽¹⁾ Character represents good personality the manifestation of which in fulfilled form is the aim of life. Character is built up in a right living.

That which helps us in right living is our religion in the true sense of the term. Because it is a mode of right action. It is not theory but practice in life. "Religion is not a refuge from the world but an inspiration to act in this world." ⁽²⁾ In order to be united with a Being, who dwells in the heart of humanity we should be a 'world-worker'. We must work for all and work should be universal in character possessing goodness. ⁽³⁾ Religion gives us guidance, salvation and fellowship. Our loyalty to the world community is the aim of religion to-day. Not only that it inspires us to act in this world but it makes us strong and courageous to face all kinds of situations. In the words of Sri Radhakrishnan, "Religion is

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1. Nivedita. Religion and Dharma. P.-38
 2. S. Radhakrishnan. Religion in a changing World. P.-139.
 3. Tagore. Religion and Man. P.-69.

the discipline which touches the conscience and helps us to struggle with evil and sordidness, saves us from greed, lust and hatred, releases moral power, and imparts courage in the enterprise of saving the world. As a discipline of the mind it contains the key and the essential means of coping with evil, which threatens the existence of the civilized world. It implies the submitting of our thinking and conduct to the truths of spirit."⁽¹⁾

Religion makes a man, builds his character and integrates his personality. It encourages him to go through his life with power and strength and to overcome the obstacles set up to his path of self-revelation through love and service to others. In a sense religion strengthens the backbone of morality in man with the help of which he can face any problem boldly, he can endure all kinds of struggles and sufferings and even he can save the world with purity and truthfulness.

Thus true religion goes through some ideals which are practical and living. Like nerve currents the urgency of

1. S. Radhakrishnan. Religion and Society. P.-42.

religion flows throughout our spiritual construction of living experiences and like fresh air it refreshes us with the glory of our self-knowledge. It makes us aware of our own destiny and our duty to others. Not only that but it points out the ways of attaining the truth. It purifies us, enlightens and evokes our consciousness to be awakened and to be glorified with divine light.

Swami Buchananda interprets two broad implications of religion. Objectively it is based on some spiritual principles like truthfulness, purity, self-control, equanimity, straight forwardness, dutifulness, other regard, compassion, love of God and longing for liberation or spiritual enlightenment. Living on these spiritual principles one attains perfection as they are necessary for right living and religion is not a theoretical conviction but is the practical application of these principles in the life of man.

Besides, subjectively speaking religion is intimately related to a person's life for all the time. It courses through our blood, vibrates our nerves and becomes very breath of our

life. It is the source of our energy to go through our life.
 It is our backbone of strength and universal love. (1) "It
 is spiritual certainty offering us strength and solace in the
 hour of need and sorrow." (2)

The life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa
 is the embodiment of truth. It ^{They form} is the strong pillar on which the
 world civilization stands. In the words of Romain Rolland, "He
 was no hero of action like Gandhi, no genius in art or thought
 like Goethe or Tagore. He was a little village Brahmin of Bengal,
 whose outerlife was set in a limited frame without striking
 incident, outside the political and social activities — of his
 time. But his inner life embraced the whole multiplicity of
 men and Gods." (3)

Such a man of deeper spiritual insight proved by his
 life the meaning and significance of religion. So long the spirit
 of religion which is one and universal, remained concealed under
 the mist of wrong interpretation of the term and its misrepresen-
 tation in showy religion of lifeless mockeries. Religion as

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1. Swami Buchananda. "True religion always helps." Prabuddha Bharat. Advaita Ashram. Mayavati, March 1976. Vol. LXXXI. P.-131.
 2. S. Radhakrishnan. Religion we need. P.-21.
 3. Romain Rolland. The Life of Ramakrishna. PP.-14-15.

taught by Sri Ramakrishna is neither dogma nor creed but is the living experience of truth. It is the inner conviction of truth and its actualisation in practical life in a spiritual growth in man. Thus it is a process, a way of life to attain perfection.

In order to understand the teaching of Ramakrishna that religion is one and universal, we will have to survey the history of religion from primitive stage to modern age. So in the next chapter we will see how religion is rooted in man of all ages and how the essential elements of modern religion have seen nourished by the vast background of religion in old age.