

Chapter III

The Indian Concept of Universal Religion.

The Upanishads And Humanistic Religion.

Background of The Universal Religion of
Ramakrishna Paramahansa.

Section - I.

Germs of Universal Religion in
Hinduism.

We have already seen a religion to be universal contains a fundamental truth which man has found in his religious experience in all times and in all places. Therefore it should not only harmonise ancient and modern outlook but it should also harmonise the eastern and the western point of view. In the last chapter we have discussed the essential features of humanistic religion accepted by modern mind and here we shall see how the features of universal

religion being present in Indian concept from an early time fosters the religious philosophy of Ramakrishna. Religion in India gives man a stable ground for fellowship, love and salvation under the common roof of spirituality and this universal nature of Indian religion will be understood from a brief discussion regarding some specific characteristics of Hinduism. Prof. Radhakrishnan says, "Hinduism is an inheritance of thought and aspiration, living and moving with the movement of life itself, an inheritance to which every race (1) in India has made its distinct and specific contribution."

Hinduism in India started with vedic religion and it has been historically found that vedic religion originated before the Aryans came to India.

A specific characteristic of Hinduism is that it is not based on testimony of any particular prophet. (2) When religions contain the teachings of their particular prophets there is a danger that the ideas which they taught became

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1. S. Radhakrishnan. Religion and Society. P.-102.
 2. Basanta Kumar Chattopadhyay. The Teachings of the Upanishads. P.-313.

rather confined to particular books and for this reason they can not grow. There is always the danger of stagnation, orthodoxy, misinterpretation and even misrepresentation of what was really taught by the great prophets. Religion is a way of life through which man can realise the spiritual values in his practical life situation. Thus in religion there are two aspects — internal experience and an external way of realising it. But life situation is never static which changes and becomes more complicated with the changing circumstances. And it so happens that as life situation becomes more and more complicated the external factors of religion are given more importance and the internal factor instead of being a living experience becomes more or less a dogma. As a result religion becomes outdated or obsolete and its main purpose which is to satisfy man's spiritual needs in his actual life almost fails.

Religion being of the nature of living experience of man always expands with spiritual realisation of different persons at different ages of different places and is therefore,

essentially evolutionary in character. It evolves with the developing consciousness in man. The eternal truth of the spirituality in man is realised by different sages from different angles and at different times and in course of time man goes deeper and deeper and understands its real significance. Hinduism is not confined to any prophet or any book but it is dynamic in nature. (1) It is a tradition nourished by religious people from the prevedic age till now. Thus Hinduism in its essence is never rigid and stagnant. "It is a growing tradition, live science and not a closed system." (2)

Thus in the history of Hinduism we find that there is a development from the ancient religion of the vedas to the modern religion of practical vedanta. For this reason Hinduism is assimilative in character. Here we find a mixture of vedic and prevedic thoughts as has been pointed out by the historians. In vedic mythology the male Gods

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1. S. Radhakrishnan. Religion and Society. P.-54.
 2. Swami Mukhyananda. "Ten cardinal principles of Hinduism." The Vedanta Kesari. Sri Ramakrishna Matha, Madras, Oct. 1981, Vol.LXVIII No.10. PP-377-378.

were highly influential and Goddesses were regarded as subordinate. This vedic conception of God was changed at the non-vedic influence and Goddesses then began to be worshipped in place of Gods. Besides as Radhakrishnan points out that the Gods in the vedas have little individuality and they have no concreteness as their functions were not differentiated to them. But the entire conception of God has been changed in later Hindu thoughts when Gods have been recognised as of concrete nature and with their particular functions. As for example, Brahmā was assigned the function of creation. Here differentiation of functions of a particular God has been recognised though not the concreteness of his nature, as the conception of Brahmā was purely abstract. For this reason He dwindled in religion and continued to have a place in mythology. Further improvement in this respect has been found when Śiva and Viṣṇu were taken as highly individualised because of their differentiated functions performed by them and for their own concrete nature. They occupied the highest position in Hindu thought.⁽¹⁾

1. S. Radhakrishnan. History of Philosophy. Eastern and Western. Vol.1. PP. 34-35.

Again we find in Hinduism the copresence of primitive magical religion and sophisticated spiritualistic and humanistic elements of modern age. Swami Mukhyananda says, "It covers the whole gamut of religious life, from the primitive to the most sublime, and provides sustenance to one and all and aims at lifting them up to the Highest truth from where they are." (1)

Hinduism is liberal in character. It aims at the salvation of man and never compells anybody to take a particular path. It considers the freedom of man to chose his own path for attaining the Truth. In the Gita the Lord says more explicitly, "In whatever way one may try to attain me, in that particular way I show favour to the devotee." (2) That is why in Hinduism we find the presence of innumerable religious sects. In spite of their differences regarding their superficial aspects of rituals and ceremonies they all belong to a common religion Hinduism which aims at the spiritual

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1. Swami Mukhyananda. "Ten Cardinal principles of Hinduism." The Vedanta Kesari. Sri Ramakrishna Matha, Madras, Oct. 1981, LXVIII. No.10. PP.- 377-378.
 2. Gita. 4-11.

union with the Truth. Again in the history of India there has been always foreign invasions and it is a great thing to point out that Indian culture has neither been totally destroyed at this nor it remained confined to the circle of its own culture without accepting any new thoughts of the foreigners. But due to the catholicity in Hinduism religions, cultural thoughts and ideas of the foreigners were assimilated in Hindu thought and culture. In fact the secret of the living nature of Hinduism is due to the fact of assimilation that it ever assimilates new thoughts without ~~losing~~ losing its essential identity and at the same time it expands receiving nourishment from new culture. In the medieval Hinduism we find a beautiful combination of Hindu and Muslim culture and in the making of modern Hinduism the contribution of Christianity and western culture is highly important.

Thus we find the spirit of tolerance is an important characteristic of Hinduism. It refuses none. It respects all other faiths in the world and accepts all of them as means to

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 reach the final goal. It believes not in revolution but in gradual evolution of thought. Though it has the richness of diversity it takes the principle of non-violence. It is always ready to absorb the noble thoughts from other religions. It is hospitable to all and always ready to welcome other religions. It is the great reservoir of Truth where all religions meet at a common point of reaching perfection. It is the symposium of all the religions of the world. Hinduism is concerned with the complete truth and regards all other religions as the different ways to attain this Truth. Dr. R. Vedavalli says, "Hinduism is a vast ocean with unfathomable depth into which flow innumerable streams and rivers."
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Thus from a historical review we find that Hinduism though having always a prehistoric origin, because of its assimilative, tolerant and catholic nature is still a living

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1. Nitya Narayan Banerjee. Manu and Modern times. P.-132.
 2. Dr. R. Vedavalli. "Hinduism - A way of life." Hinduism. (Journal of The Bharat Sevashram Sangha. London Branch). 1976. Spring. No.72. P.-12.

religion of India to-day. But the real secret of its living character is due to the fact that it always regarded external rituals as the superficial aspect of religion and man's quest for the supreme spirit as the essential element of religion.

The Gayatri Mantra which was the essential element of Hinduism in vedic age is still chanted by modern Hindu in his religious worship. In spite of all differences in sects, in ceremonies a Hindu prays to the supreme spirit. Here he meditates upon the "adorable" supreme spirit who is the creator of the universe, who is present in the earth, the air, the starry region and who also vibrates in the soul of man.

The essence of religion according to Hinduism lies in the realisation of the supreme spirit in intuitive consciousness. Thus in the core of Hinduism we find philosophy and religion are inseparable. Truth is both known and felt by intuitive consciousness of man. So the heart of Hinduism will be found in the Upaniṣadic philosophy. Modern Hinduism in essence is nothing but a reinterpretation of the Brahmavada

of the Upaniṣads to meet the needs of present age. It may be called the Upaniṣads reinterpreted in a modern way. As spiritual urge is an essential and universal element of all religions, modern Hinduism as reinterpreted by Ramakrishna can claim to be the universal religion.

In the next sections, therefore, we will discuss in brief the spiritualistic philosophy of the Upaniṣads and the role it played in giving modern Hinduism a universal character.

Section - II.

Germs of Universal Religion in the Upaniṣads.

- (A) Relation of Philosophy and religion according to the Indian view point.

The philosophy of the Upaniṣads which is based on the utterances of the sages in India who had direct, immediate

and intimate contact with truth and Reality, transcends all limitations of time and space, creeds and codes, and hence has the germs of universal religion in it. Here a question may be raised how can philosophy contain the germ of religion. To answer this we shall discuss certain characteristics which make Indian Philosophy distinct from western philosophy. According to the western view-point there must be difference between the two. Modern philosophy in the west was a revolt against medieval religion. Stace criticises Indian philosophy for its intimate association with religion. He criticises the "religio-philosophico" thinking of the Upanisads and doubts whether India ever had any philosophy. (1) Here Stace fails to appreciate the attitude of Indian mind towards philosophy. Philosophy is a quest for truth but this truth is not a mere concept satisfying our intellectual need but it is a truth of our whole life. It is where we understand the real value and significance of life. Truth is thus all comprehensive. Hence in India philosophy and religion are inseparable. Philosophy in India is nothing but a process of achieving religious

1. W. T. Stace. A Critical History of Greek Philosophy. P.-14.

experience through knowledge. It finds out a remedy for the miseries of life in the same way as does religion. Philosophy here aims at discovering the truth behind the wonderful panorama of life and religion aims at realising that truth in each man's life in order to escape from the miseries of existence.

A sharp contrast between the Indian and the Western philosophy is that while in the west philosophy is a rational attempt to know the Ultimate Reality, in India knowledge is regarded not as an end in itself but only as a means to an end. Thus knowledge is not sought for the sake of knowledge only, but it is a means of obtaining liberation or the highest goal of man. Philosophy is thus not concerned with mere theoretical or rational cognition of truth but it has a practical side and it is regarded also as a way of life. One should not know Reality only but one should live Reality.

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Philosophy does not discuss the isolated concepts but it is intimately related with life. The most striking character of human life is that it is permeated with value and philosophy should be regarded as a many-sided attempt to understand and conserve value. Man is basically idealistic. His concern for values is his unique characteristic which differentiates him from other animals. Man's quest for knowledge is inextricably related with his search for values. Philosophy in India then is not a mere knowledge of truth but it is darsan or vision of Ultimate Truth which is to be realised in and through his life. (1) This vision not only enlightens him but also inspires him towards the realization of a greater and nobler self in and through his activities in this world and at the same time it fills his heart with an inner joy by means of which he transcends all his miseries of his physical and material existence and enjoys a state of spiritual calmness, serenity and equanimity. Thus philosophy and religion are blended in a whole of experience and can not

1. S. Radhakrishnan. The Hindu view of life. P.-15.

be isolated from each other. As Prof. Radhakrishnan says, "Philosophy is not so much a conceptual reconstruction as an exhibition of insight."⁽¹⁾ That is why it should not remain "pure cerebral activity" but must grow into a "therapy of the soul."

Similarly religion in India is not dogmatic. It has always a philosophical basis. God in Hinduism is the Ultimate Reality which is both immanent and transcendent. For the same reason relation of God and the world is not wholly external. In Hinduism God is not regarded as a purely transcendental and supernatural Reality residing up in heaven. But He is the supreme Reality underlying all existing things. He is the basis and backbone of all existence. Hence to worship God one should not only look up to find something which is beyond the sky but also that which is present in every part and particle of this universe including human heart. God is in us, with us and above us. Hence here we find in Hindu religion (there is) a blending of

1. V. S. Naravane. Modern Indian Thought. P.-239.

Absolutism and theism — a blending of philosophy and religion. Reason plays an important part in Hinduism because of its philosophical basis. Here religion is the intuitive approach to truth along with the rational synthesis of new concepts of world and man. Here saints and philosophers may not be isolated from each other as philosophy is based on the direct intuition of the sages. Describing a relation between philosophy and religion Swami Abhedananda says, "Of the tree of knowledge philosophy is the flower and religion is the fruit. Philosophy is the theoretical side of religion and religion is philosophy in practice."⁽¹⁾

For this reason Indian philosophy is basically humanistic. Because the aim is liberation of man. Thus philosophy is concerned with that knowledge which is connected with the destiny of man. Philosophy here is an attempt to understand and interpret the meaning and value of human life, it is an attempt where man seeks his relation with ultimate truth and his place in the universe. Indian philosophy thus can be called man-centric. This point is further evident from the view of

1. Sobina Thorne. Precepts of Perfection. P.-47.

Radhakrishnan who points out that an eminent characteristic of Indian philosophy is that it starts with the thinking self while western philosophy starts with the object of thought. "In India interest of philosophy is in the self of man."⁽¹⁾ Western philosophy starts to know the truth of the objective world, Indian philosophy starts with the question, 'Who am I'. Thus 'ātmanam biddhi' or 'know thy self' is the keynote of Indian thought.

Prof. Radhakrishnan observes that philosophy in India is essentially spiritualistic. Excepting eārvāka, Idealism is the chief note in the Indian philosophical thinking. Matter is not regarded as the Ultimate Reality but it is the supreme spirit. Therefore, man is also interpreted as essentially spiritualistic. The essence of man lies in his soul not in body. Soul consciousness and soul culture have a fundamental place in Indian thought.

1. S. Radhakrishnan. Indian Philosophy. P.-28. Vol.1.

(B) Elements of Universal Religion
in the Upanisads.

We have already seen in Chapter II that the most important component of universal religion is spiritualism. With the growth of man's spiritual consciousness a new form of religion which is universal evolved distinguishing it from primitive and national religion. But in Indian thinking religious experiences and philosophical thoughts are inextricably blended. Spiritual consciousness in India finds its full expression in the idealistic philosophy of the Upanisads which declared that Ultimate Reality is the supreme spirit or Brahman. According to the Upanisads essence of man lies in his spirituality. In the quest to know the real nature of the self or Atman the Upanisads say that the body, the senses, the manas, the intellect are the sheaths (kosas), the outer covers, so to say, which conceal an inner permanent reality and which can not be identified with any of these, though all of these are grounded in it and are its manifestations. "The body, the senses, the manas, the intellect and pleasures arising

out of them are all tested and found to be passing changeful modes not the permanent essence of the self. The Real self is pure consciousness. The Real^{self} is called Atman. As Infinite, conscious Reality (satyam jnanam anantam), the self of man is identical with the self of all beings and therefore, with
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 God or Brahman."

The truth of the spirituality of man is derived from the Supreme Reality which is regarded as the Infinite, eternal, spiritual being. This Reality is both transcendent and immanent. As transcendent it is infinite, eternal and beyond this world, but as immanent it is the very soul that pervades the universe. Thus the spirit satyam jnanam anantam Brahman underlies all existing things including man. In the spiritualistic philosophy of the Upanisads we find a blending of Absolutism and Theism. God is taken as Reality beyond this universe and also as the soul and substance of the universe. Thus spirituality is engrained in man as his highest truth. But the knowledge of the spirituality is not

1. S. C. Chatterjee and D. M. Dutta. An Introduction to Indian Philosophy. P.-357.

logically derived from the spiritual nature of the Ultimate Reality, but is directly perceived by man by his intuitive vision. The presence of Infinite spirit in man as the basic immanent principle enables him to be aware of it directly and immediately. This has been expressed in the Upaniṣad when it says,

"eso devo visva karma mahātmā
 Sadā janānām hṛdaye Sannivistah
 hṛdā manisā manaso bhikṣpto,
 Ya etad vidur amṛtāste bhavanti." (1)

"The Maker of all things, self-illuminated and all pervading, He dwells always in the hearts of men. He is revealed by the negative teachings (of the Vedānta) discriminative wisdom and the knowledge of Unity based upon reflection. They who know Him become immortal." (2)

According to the philosophy of the Upaniṣads the highest source of knowledge is not intellect but intuition.

1. Svetāśvatara Upaniṣad. (IV. 17)

2. Swami Nikhilananda. The Upaniṣads. P.-136.

Intuition is a direct and immediate vision of Reality in which there is no distinction between knower and known, subject and object. Here knowing and being are identical. Man knows the spirit because he himself is a spirit. Thus man's awareness of the presence of spirit inherent in him enables him to have a direct vision of the Ultimate Reality where he finds his identity. Here Truth is not proved indirectly by discursive reasoning but it is directly felt to be present in our inner self. Thus intuition is a faculty higher than reason. It is a direct and living experience of truth whereas in reasoning there must be indirect stages of arguments and counter arguments. In intuitive vision knowledge is beyond any doubt. It is a knowledge of the highest certainty. Here highest truth is discovered, it is felt from within. It is not a matter to be proved where as in discursive reasoning proofs are necessary. Intuitive knowledge is beyond any proof. It is prāmānyam nirapeksham. Intuition supplies the first principles or postulates of Logic, aesthetic and morality. By accepting intuition as the highest method of knowledge, the philosophy of Upaniṣads

is inseparable from religion on the one hand as true knowledge is not a theoretical speculation but an actual or living experience and on the other hand it leads us to the depth of the inner world from external physical facts of the phenomenal world. Prof. Radhakrishnan says, "In the Upaniṣads we return to explore the depth of the inner world. From outward physical fact, attention shifts to the inner immortal self situated at the back of the mind, as it were, we need not look to the sky for the bright light; the glorious fire is within the soul. The soul of man is the keyhole to the landscape of the whole universe, the Akāśa within the heart, the limpid lake which mirrors the truth."⁽¹⁾ Here we find that penetrating in to the deepest depth of innerworld man discovers the truth with the inner vision of soul. Truth is spontaneously revealed to soul at the highest stage of intuitive experience of man. Thus as a religion the Upaniṣads discover the essential spiritual truths of the inner world and as a philosophy it synthesises this science of inner world with the other sciences of the external world and 'in this way it presents a unified vision of total reality.

1. S. Radhakrishnan. Philosophy of Upaniṣads. PP.21-22.

Thus according to the Upanisads Ultimate Reality is the universal spirit and is the essential principle of man. Man in his spiritual consciousness knows the highest truth and this consciousness is a direct and immediate vision of Reality. Hence it can also be called religion where man realises his God in the profoundest level of his spiritual consciousness. It is really wonderful to find that man's spiritual consciousness which is regarded as the essential element of modern universal religion can be traced in such an ancient period of civilization at the age of the Upanisads.

The Ultimate Reality or God in the Upanisads is the supreme spirit and man is a spark of "divine fire". Religion or realisation of God is the highest goal of life and this realisation is possible by man's enlightened spiritual consciousness by means of which he can realise divinity within himself. He realises his identity with the supreme spirit. According to universal religion man approaches God through knowledge, through his spiritual realisation, not through rituals and ceremonies. In contrast with the Vedic religion, rituals, ceremonies are regarded useless and futile as means

of salvation. The Mundaka says that 'the rituals are like weak rafts'. With rituals one can not reach to immortality. (1)

Man's relation with God in Vedic religion was external and Gods were worshipped for material wealth. There was a mechanical relation between God and man, a relation of give and take, profit and loss. In the Upanisads God is present in the soul of man. Hence only through spiritual revelation man reaches God. The Upanisads are thus based on soul-culture which means, "The discovery of the central truth of our being, and moulding our physical, vital and mental life around that being." (2) This central truth of our being is immortality which we aim to attain in this life. So the aim of life is the attainment of immortality but not any material gain. Unlike Vedic prayers which is magical and materialistic in character, the prayer in the Upanisad shows man's quest for spiritual perfection. The sage here prays, 'lead me from unreal to real, from darkness to light and from death to immortality.' Here we

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1. Chatterjee and Dutta. Introduction to Indian Philosophy. P.-358.
 2. C. R. Goswami. The soul culture in the Upanisads. PP.33-36.

find a universal prayer, an innermost longing present in each man for attaining perfection. It is not through external actions but through an internal process of spiritual upliftment, man realises his highest goal.

The central point of the Upanisads is spirituality of man and his quest for perfection. Man is given the highest status. He is regarded as the "Son of Immortality". The sage of the Upanisads wants to know the Reality because that will make him immortal. Thus he asks 'What is it by knowing which I shall be immortal. There are many slokas in the Upanisads which point out that the knower of the Brahman — the knower of the Highest Truth gets immortality.

In his spiritual realisation man discovers his identity with the supreme spirit. The Upanisads declare 'aham Brahmasmi' or 'ayomātmā Brahma'. Thus in Upanisadic religion man realises something great, something noble and something sublime in his spiritual consciousness and he earnestly longs to realise that in his actual life. In other words the Infinite

in him inspires him to transcend his finite limitations and to approach the divinity which he feels to be present within. Religion here is a dynamic process — a process of becoming, a process by means of which man realises his true self. Thus religion of the Upanisads is dynamic in nature and hence universal in character.

Actually man's divine status, his true excellence as consisting in realisation of his immortal nature has been established by the Upanisads. This central theme of the Upanisads represents the Indian culture and nourishes all the later developed philosophies and religions in India with their spiritual strength. ⁽¹⁾ In the words of Nagaraja Rao, "Modernity is not a matter of date, but of outlook. The Upanisads are described as focal classics, affirming the eternal truths and harmonising the fundamentals of all faiths. It is treated as a forum for the programme of the spiritual reconstruction of Humanity." ⁽²⁾ Thus spiritualistic philosophy of the Upanisads is the basis of all enlightened faiths in India

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1. Swami Ranganathananda. The Message of the Upanishads. P.48.
 2. Dr. P. Nagaraja Rao. Religion in the changing world. P.89.

and here we find in rudimentary form the essential unity of all religions which is indeed a marked characteristic of universal religion. The philosophy of Ramakrishna is the glorious expression of the Upanisadic thought and more clearly it is based on the Brahmvada of the Upanisads. In the words of Basanta Kumar Chatterjee, "It is not an accident that Hinduism has produced saint like Ramakrishna Paramahansa ..."⁽¹⁾ His discovery of the essential truth inherent in all religions is the actualisation of the Upanisadic teachings in practice.

Section - III

Decadence - Renaissance. Brahma Samaj as the background of universal religion. Re-interpretation of Hinduism by Ramakrishna.

The elements of universal religion found in the

1. Basanta Kumar Chatterjee. The Teachings of the Upanisads. PP. 324-325.

Upanisads had its fulfilled development in the religious philosophy of Ramakrishna Paramahansa. In the words of Romain Rolland, Ramakrishna was a philosopher of Indian Renaissance. He was born at the time when India was suffering from intellectual retardation and moral degradation. The ancient religion of the Upanisads was almost forgotten and Hinduism reached at the stage of stagnation as it became extremely formal and mechanical. The spiritual fervour was almost nil. All irrational, immoral and inhuman practices were passed in the name of Hinduism. Historically at that time India came into contact with liberal and scientific thoughts of the West through the British conquest. There have been three distinct kinds of reactions to the influence of Western ideas on the Indian mind.

1. The extreme orthodox thinkers who had a firm conviction about the certainty and purity of their own tradition tried to save it from western influence. Because they believed that their glorified tradition would be polluted with the western influence of thought and culture and so they completely rejected the western ideas.

2. Another group was totally absorbed by western mode of life and patterns of belief. The blind imitation of the west~~ern~~ was the influence of the Christian Missionaries. The young scotch missionary named Alexander Duff took active part to spread English education in India because he believed that it would open the moral and religious side of man. Man would be free from blind superstitions and would acquire new liberal outlook to go through their lives more scientifically. Further it would give more modern education to the Indians
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than their own vernaculars they had.

The ultimate goal of the Missionaries was to convert Indian culture into British culture but they could not successfully actualise their plan as it was found that neither a great number of intellectuals were converted into Christian religion nor Indians accepted British education
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more willingly.

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1. J. N. Farquhar. Modern Religious Movements in India.
PP. 19-20.
 2. Nemai Sadhan Bose. Indian Awakening and Bengal. P. 135.

3. The third section was the movement of the renaissant thinkers. They did not follow the West blindly but they assimilated the best elements of western culture. They kept the window of their own cultural chamber open to be well ventilated with the blow of foreign and modern thoughts, but they were not swept away by the storm of undue influence of western culture. Their feet were firmly rooted in their own tradition. These thinkers had a creative attitude to build up a foundation of spiritualistic religion compatible with scientific and modern outlook. They tried to get back their spiritual strength of their past what they had lost and at the sametime they were highly interested to accept the liberal and scientific way of approach from the West. This renaissant movement took place in India for the first time by Raja Rammohan Roy, who was the founder of Brahma Samaj and Ramakrishna Paramahansa was intemately related with this Samaj too.

Raja Rammohan Roy was not only a social reformer but he enters into a different phase of his religious activities

also. He determined to destroy idolatry at first because he thought that it is the root of all kinds of superstitions, exploitations and all religious conflicts and people would be saved from all these specially from the priestly tyranny at the total extinction of it. Raja Rammohan Roy assimilated the very best of the western and eastern cultures. He accepted from Christianity the ideal of humanity, its catholicity, its liberal notion of one God and the ideal of Vedanta was taken from the eastern culture. He tried to revive the public interest in Vedanta because he thought that Vedanta would be the great defence of Hindu unitarianism and would pave the way for universal religion. Like Vedantic discipline he believed in one Brahman, the Absolute, the Infinite. On this ground he realised the unity of all religions and tried to prove that religion must be universal. He found no distinction among the Hindus, the Mohammedans and the Christians and from this standpoint universalism in modern age started. (1)

1. Max Muller. Rammohan to Ramkrishna, Calcutta. S. Gupta (India) Ltd. 1952. PP. 17-18.

It was not the aim of Rammohan Roy to imitate west blindly but his aim was to save India from moral degradation reviving the spiritual strength of her own along with the new and liberal thoughts from the west. He controlled the unmanagable situation of the conversion of a large number of the educated Hindus to Christians. (1) He recapitulated and revitalised the universal thoughts of the Upaniṣads. One important thing he realised that the ideals of the Upaniṣads should be taken by the Indians whole heartedly. Because the fundamental elements of universal religion are inherent in the Upaniṣads and if they are properly understood, people will come to know the real nature of religion which does not mean a mere practice of idol worship, or total absorption in rituals and ceremonies. Religion is wide being spiritualistic and humanistic.

In this respect the role of Brahma Samaj was to establish such a religion which is one and universal. Here meditation on one Nirguna ~~Deity~~ ^{Brahman} was usually practised.

1. Nemai Sadhan Bose. Indian Awakening and Bengal. P.-141.

instead of worshipping idols.

After Rammohan Roy, Devendranath wanted to organise a society for propagating religious truth. Being elevated with the Upanisadic truth he inspired the Indians to follow their own tradition which contains the full spiritual strength. In Devendranath also the attempt of synthesising the East and the West or synthesising the orientalism and the modern liberalism has been found. He was the organiser of Tattva-Bodhi Sabha which took active part in the promotion of religious enquiry and in dissemination of the knowledge of the Upanisads.⁽¹⁾

Devendranath Tagore elaborated some fundamental principles of Brahma dharma. In short, the Brahmos believed in one supreme God and prayed for spiritual progress. They did not believe in pilgrimages but they believed that holiness would be attained by elevating and purifying mind. They did not perform the rites and ceremonies but believed in service to others.⁽²⁾ All these principles are asif, the

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1. Nemai Sadhan Bose. Indian Awakening and Bengal. P.-143.
 2. Herbert Baynes. The Evolution of Religious thought in Modern India. PP. 88-91.

prelude of the universal religion. From these ideals the universal religion was gradually developing.

Keshab Chandra Sen was another prominent figure of Brahma Samaj who emphasised on the fundamental ideas of it. Under his leadership the active movement of the Young Brahmos took part in social and religious reform. The aim of this movement was to abolish the Brahmin symbol of the sacred thread, to start the custom of intercast marriage and to establish the right of the women to take part in church services. ⁽¹⁾ Keshab Sen realised the basic unity of all religions. According to him Jesus, Chaitanya, Buddha, Mohammed and Nanak all are one before God. The object of his New-Dispensation was to prove the unity of all religions, all scriptures and all prophets of God. The creed of the New-Dispensation is based on some simple principles like "(i) One God, one scripture, one church, (ii) Eternal progress of the soul, (iii) Communion of prophets and saints, (iv) Fatherhood and Motherhood of God;

1. Susobhan Sarker. On the Bengal Renaissance. PP. 44-45.

brotherhood of man and sisterhood of woman, (v) Harmony of knowledge and holiness, love and work, Yoga and Asceticism in the highest development, (vi) Loyalty to Sovereign." (1)

These principles of the New-Dispensation are similar to some essential features of universal religion like oneness of truth, spiritual progress of man, love of humanity as a way of attaining God and synthesis of knowledge, devotion, action and mysticism. It is clear from this that though Brahmo dharma is regarded as a religion of particular kind, yet it has prepared the ground for universal religion in modern age making religion free from the dogmas and blind superstitions.

Thus we see India had a series of intellectuals and reformers at her critical situation who dedicated their lives to revive the spiritual strength in India. But inspite of the active role of the thinkers at the beginning of the age, opinions varied and conflict arose between the Brahmo and orthodox thinkers. Brahmos' firm determination to stop idol

1. Harbart Baynes. The Evolution of Religious thought in Modern India. P.-99.

worship and to practise the meditation of one nirguna Brahman became the point of objection raised by the Orthodox thinkers, who always tried to preserve their traditional concepts totally avoiding western influence of thought and culture. They supported idol worship. The argument of the orthodox thinkers in this respect is that idol worship is not at all meaningless. Idol is the symbol of God and symbol possesses the deeper meaning. 'Symbolism is the language of religion'. They further criticised the Brahmos on the point that if God is unknow-⁽¹⁾able then how the Brahmos think that God is one.

In the eyes of the orthodox thinkers, the Brahmos were becoming more and more westernised and their religion was regarded as another form of Christianity.

Hence the Brahmos' prohibition of idolatry and the orthodox thinkers' favouritism to the worship of Idols are the two opposite reactions of the movement. Here twofold

1. Niranjan Dhar. Vedanta and the Bengal Renaissance. P.-77.

questions arise regarding the conception of God — (1) whether God is with form or formless and (2) is God worshipped in Idols or God can be approached through meditation only.

At this juncture we hear the voice of Ramakrishna Paramahansa declaring that God is both with form and formless. He is both personal and impersonal. This new interpretation of Hinduism opens the eye of people to understand the essence of religion overcoming the meanness and conflicts regarding its superficial aspects. It solved all the conflicts of religion in the world. This spiritual awakening begins a new era which occurred due to Ramakrishna Vivekananda movement. In the words of Sudhansu Mohan Banerjee, "Ramakrishna-Vivekananda movement is an unique chapter in the history of the nineteenth century Bengal which led in the early twentieth to a re-estimation of our values and reshaping of our ideals and led tremendous influence on the nationalist movement and cultural ideas." (1) Here is the beginning of universal religion in India as catholicity of religion, its universalism and its practical

1. Sudhansu Mohan Banerjee. Vedanta as a social force. P.-53.

yet fully realised by the people. Actually it was the movement of self-renewal which meant spontaneous growth of self within and in this respect it assimilated new thoughts with the old instead of destroying the latter which reforms movement did. It satisfies the needs of the age and has a revolutionary spirit. Further reforms movement was not progressive in nature and so no other development in Hinduism was noticed. In neo Hinduism we mark some new currents of thoughts which welcomed the spiritual growth for attaining the truth. ⁽¹⁾ Swami Vivekananda used to say, "I do not believe in reform, I believe in growth. I do not dare to put myself in the position of God and dictate to our society." ⁽²⁾

Neo Hinduism believes in an approach to greater truth from lesser truth. None of the approaches to truth are totally false and none of them are absolutely true. Truth

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1. Swami Bhajanananda "Swami Vivekananda and Neo Vedanta." Vedanta Kesari. Madras. Ramakrishna Matha. Jan. 1977. P.-304.
 2. The complete works of Vivekananda. Vol.3 P.-213.

can never be reached by a finite, yet there is an attempt, a journey towards it. Thus it is an unending journey, a process of becoming more and more perfect, or it is a way of attaining more truth. Truth manifests itself in different degrees and so man proceeds to truth not from void but from lesser degree of it.

Again truth is one and all comprehensive though the paths of attaining it are many. On this ground the renaissance thinkers of Neo Hinduism established the essential unity of all religions. In this way they never established any separate religion like Brahmo dharma which was different from Hinduism, Mohammedanism and Christianity. Religion is the way of attaining Truth and hence one and universal.

Thus in this part of the religious movement in India in nineteenth century there has been a spiritual awakening of the people due to which they realised the need of one universal religion humanistic in character. The spirit of our traditional religion of the past has been nicely combined with the modern

new outlook. The scientific temper, rationalistic outlook, humanistic approach and belief in secularism of the west have been associated with the spiritualistic temper, intuitive approach, divine humanism and belief in sacredness of the East. The need of the synthesis of East and the West has been realised by Ramakrishna in his direct experience and it was declared by Vivekananda in the world meeting. (1) Here synthesis of all religions and all thoughts of both old and new, east and the west and sacred and secular has been proved and established in a spontaneous way. It is the result of living experience of truth by the seer, the great thinker in modern India. In the words of Sri Nemai Sadhan Bose, "Before Ramakrishna — Rammohan, Devendranath and Keshab Chandra had striven to build up a unity. But the synthesis of Ramakrishna was spontaneous and was the direct result of the light of knowledge and vivid realisation." (2)

The blending of ancient and modern, spirit and matter, sacred and secular becomes a new construction of

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1. Christopher Isherwood. Vedanta for modern man. P.-132.
 2. Nemai Sadhan Bose. Indian Awakening and Bengal. P.-180.

some living principles which points out one reality to realise in our actual life. Thus the advaita Vedanta of Sankaracharya which was so long purely theoretical possessing negative attitude to the world became enriched with some new ideals highly significant for man's life and became converted into practical vedanta. In this great work of reinterpreting Vedanta in a practical way and convincing people what religion is, "Ramakrishna was the spirit and Vivekananda his voice. Ramakrishna was the realisation and Vivekananda the actualisation. Ramakrishna was the messiah and Vivekananda was his messenger." (1)

Ramakrishna Paramahansa appeared as a unique personality in India for his simplicity, broadmindedness and his vision of truth. What India needed at that time, the universal ground of religion was realised by him. He never played active role in the religious movements but

1. Swami Siddhinathananda. "Sri Ramakrishna and Vivekananda." The Vedanta Kesari. July, 1975. Vol.LXII No.3, P. 91.

his spiritual power and his intimate feeling for total human race attracted a series of intellectuals. He evoked the spiritual power in man and made people convinced about their supreme ideal of God realisation. The ideal of God realisation is not only indispensable for the freedom of man but is the ground of peace, security, (1) happiness and prosperity also.

In the next chapter we shall discuss the main teachings of Ramakrishna Paramahansa.

1. Religion in the Twentieth Century. ed. Vergilius Ferm.
P.-402.