CHAPTER - I

A GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO

RELIGION AND ETHICS

Religion occupies a central place in all speculations, ancient or modern, East or West. Religions of the world are a great driving force in imparting guidance and inspiration to human beings in general. The essence of all religions is the attainment of self-happiness. When the essence of all religions in the world is strung together in understanding and mutual acceptance, then it will create a pleasing world of human well-being and peace. The philosophy of all religions offers a clear and stable foundation for the harmonious existence of men, nations and civilizations.

In our age of scientific and technological civilization, where everything is measured in terms of pragmatic results and quick remedies, man is hardly in possession of the art of self-enquiry, the result of which is that our contemporary human society faces an alarming debasement of values. Violence, injustice, wars and human cruelty, our modern age is well acquainted with all these. Scientific progress has further sharpened and refined our skills of destroying each other.

What is truly needed today is a moral and spiritual regeneration of religion apart from man’s far-reaching material progression. To make it more clear, one can firmly specify that our cultural and social milieu demands an
inner transformation of consciousness, a qualitative improvement of mankind as a whole. That consciousness is the realization of the Ultimate Reality. That consciousness is to understand the essential oneness of religion. Here the essence of all religions is to better his soul to be good to the world. The task of religion is to enkindle in the minds of modern man intuitive perception of his true nature and potentialities. It is here the study of Narayana Guru gains importance as he held that ‘all religions in essence lead every man to attain happiness’.

The relationship between religion and ethics has occupied an important place in the discourses of philosophers. The logical position regarding the relationship of religion and ethics in general, the intimate relationship between the two, as contingent facts of history, has never been and never can be, denied.

There may be morality without religion, but there has not been a religion without morality. This becomes all too clear when we examine the contents of the great living religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Christianity and Islam, which have made a very fundamental use of ethical objectivity.

The religious and ethical aspects of the Guru are an application of his philosophy of non-dualism (Advaita). Narayana Guru accepted religion as a set of moral and ethical concepts which would help mankind to grow upward and onward. Being a non-dualist, the Guru was not a partisan in favour of any particular religion. This made it possible for him to have a neutral stand and to
view all religions with the attitude of a devoted lover of beauty, goodness, love and truth.

Religion had to be rid of its distortions and had to be made to reflect Reality. This was the secret of the type of spiritual life upheld by the Guru as a model.

Individuals always do everything for Self-happiness. According to the Guru, all men are brothers. One’s happiness should be the happiness of others too. It means that while one is acting for one’s own pleasure, he is bound to give happiness to others also. Narayana Guru held the view that all religions are having the same theoretical foundation, the attainment of happiness.

Religion is not meant for the welfare of the inner world of man alone. Physical and spiritual betterment should result from religion. The founders of all religions have aimed at realizing the Absolute. Their faith therefore is one itself and not more. Speaking about religion, Narayana Guru once said, “Whichever the religion, it suffices if it makes a better man” (Nataraja Guru Life and Teachings of Narayana Guru 72). Therefore, it can be argued that Narayana Guru left the choice of religion with the people and their individual tastes, depending on whether it would make them good people in the world. The Guru says: “All religions aim at one thing. When rivers join the sea they lose their separatedness. The function of a religion is to turn the hearts of men upward and onward. When that is accomplished they will discover the truth for themselves. For the seekers of truth religions are the finger-posts. But to those who have
already attained the truth, religion is no authority. They are the authors of religion” (John Dharmatheerthan 27). The Guru said that religious teachers should make use of the discriminative power in reforming the religion. Anything that is a hindrance to human progress should be discarded.

Narayana Guru was a prophet of religious harmony. The Guru believed that religious harmony can be achieved through familiarizing people with the religious truth of the various religions. The Guru declared that one religion may seem defective, when viewed from the point of view of another person with faith in a different religion. One religion’s doctrinal approach will be imperfect for other religions. This is true with all religions unless and until man realizes this truth, he will be deluded by ignorance. The Guru advised his followers not to argue for the sake of argument, ‘To know and to make known not to argue and to vanquish” (Nataraja Guru The Word of the Guru 43.)

In life, whether in its individual, social or national aspect, man needs an ethical norm based on fully convinced and realized truth. The Guru gave to humanity such an ethical norm intended on the happiness of one and all.

‘One man’s action aiming at one’s Self-happiness must spell at once the happiness of the fellow man also’. This is the key; this is a norm acceptable to every man, irrespective of the belief in established religions or faith in political ideologies. It does not have any ideological or religious corroboration and is universally acceptable. The Guru gave us this ethical norm as an aspect of his
bringing down the unitive wisdom or Self-knowledge he attained, into the domain of the actualities of life.

Ethics is not to be conceived as depending on the conduct of a good man taken by himself, it is to be understood as a double-edged situation cutting both ways. It has to be conceived not as a lame or one-sided affair, but as a process in which the donor and the beneficiary belong to a unitive and universal context.

In order to understand the religious and ethical views of Sree Narayana Guru it is very essential to understand the different religions of the world and their ethical teachings. The Guru’s concept of religion is an all inclusive one. His religion is a universal religion. It is the reconciliation of all the religions of the world. Before dealing with the world’s major religions a brief introduction to the origin and definition of religion is essential. To define religion is not an easy task. Religion is so inclusive and complex that it needs to be analyzed so as to be completely understood and fully appreciated. “Religious experience is far too complex to be defined” (Alban G.Widery 35).

**ORIGIN OF RELIGION**

In the history of mankind there has never been a tribe of men without some form of religion. It is as old as man himself, his real life, a light unto his soul and a lamp unto his feet. Religion occupies the most important part in the life of human beings and it is the chief differentiating characteristic of man. Religion indicates what is highest in man and lifts him in some way to the
universe, or the infinite and eternal, of which he is a part. Religion aims chiefly at creating a refined way of life. It satisfies the inward craving of man who is leading an animated life and wishes to attain a spiritual consolation, solace and peace. The aim of religion is the factual realization of the harmony between the aspiring soul and the integrating principle.

The word ‘religion’ comes from the Latin word ‘religare’ which consists of two words ‘re’ (back) and ‘ligare’ (to bring). It means “that which binds human beings to each other in bonds of love, sympathy and mutual rights and duties and binds them also to God, endeavour to lead them back to that word soul” (S.W. Bakhle 10). That which binds the soul back to God is religion (Alben G. Widgery 35).

We cannot trace the actual origin of religion, but we can find the conditions necessary for its existence. Religion is the oldest factor in human history. More pertinent to say that, the true history of man begins with the history of religion. It is a general conception that religion is a product of man. Man is ever conscious of his own existence as well as the existence of this universe. There is a constant drive to reach a satisfactory explanation regarding the cause of the existence of the universe. Again man is conscious about his limitations that he cannot be the creator and controller of the universe. The consciousness enables him to recognize that there is some superior power to create and control the universe, which is beyond the human control. This power is identified as God. The awareness regarding the limitations of human
existence also enables man to recognize the necessity of help from the superior power for his inner satisfaction.

Religion thus primarily implies the relation between man and his creator. It is a heart grasp since it is inherent in the constitution of man. The history of humanity reveals the successive development of human reason. In the history of humanity from the Stone Age to Nuclear and Space Age, we cannot find a stage, which is devoid of religion. Man desires to establish relation with the superior power from the very primitive stage itself. Therefore, he adopted different modes of worship and later treated each of them as a particular religion. Whatever may be the mode of worship, religious instincts are inherent in the nature of man. Man in this sense may count as ‘incurably religious’ (Max Muller 334).

An analysis of the history of religion reveals that it is difficult to establish a single source pertaining to the origin of religion. There are diverse conceptions regarding the genesis of religion.

The approach and perspective of modern anthropology towards religion is the projection idea, which assumes that every religion is created by the human community that worships it, that "creative activity ascribed to God is projected from man (Jacob Pandian 507).

The psychologists conceive religion as a medium for ‘wish fulfilment’. Here the term ‘wish’ is considered as the ‘father’ to the thought (Winston L King 19). Sigmund Freud considers that religion is a product of wishful
thinking in order to face the unpleasant events of life. The psychological approach considers religion only from the standpoint of the limitations of human existence. Man fears to face the unpleasant events of life. Therefore seeks help from the supernatural power for attaining courage in order to face such circumstances. In this sense religion may be considered as an invented entity.

Psychological theories of the origin of religion take their departure from the work of Sigmund Freud. According to Freud, religion, "is a universal, obsessional neurosis of mankind," which operates as an escape mechanism for our infantile jealousies and is born of a wish for protection from the terrors of life and nature. All forms of worship and all dogmatic beliefs are wish projections. God is the rationalization of the father ideal and is consequently a purely human creation. Since the earliest time, man has felt the force of the father image and has consequently believed in some kind of god; he will not relinquish this belief until he recognizes that it constitutes a false security which expresses rather than cures neurosis. When this recognition comes, religion will vanish and its place will be taken by science and the controlling intellect. Many psychologists disagree with Freud's analysis, but his influence has been prodigious upon those who seek to explain the origin of religion in purely psychological terms. In all cases psychological theory takes its cue from the emotional problems of men.
The subjective theory teaches that religion originates with man. Humans have a psychological need for a transcendent being that provides meaning and hope to their existence in this vast impersonal universe. Adherents of this view believe that this religious makeup exists below our conscious awareness. Cultures have various views of reality according to their experience, but the awareness and desire for religion is a universal phenomenon. They therefore, conclude that this disposition lies in our subconscious. In other words, our beliefs about a transcendent being are not the result of external realities or interactions with such a being. Rather, these beliefs derive from our psyches.

The other theory regarding the origin of religion is the evolutionary approach. This is the most popular view that is taught or implied in the study of religion. Proponents of this theory believe, as in the subjective theory that religion originates with man. Religion is the result of an evolutionary process in human culture.

The sociologists conceive religion from the angle of social entity. According to this conception, religions originated as an attempt to organize society. The religious rites still remaining as a major part in all important functions like opening a new building, marriage, death etc. According to the sociologists, the performances of similar rites are capable of inspiring common feelings. The feeling of similarity greatly helps humanity to unite. A close study of the history of religions, on the other hand, reveals that religion itself is the root cause of many conflicts and bloodshed in society. Yet, religion is usually
considered as a socio-cultural phenomenon through its close association with the social life.

The sociologists visualize that the evolution of religion passes through three stages. The theological stage, the metaphysical stage and the positive stage. The theological stage explains all events in terms of supernatural beings. During the metaphysical stage the abstract unseen forces were invoked. The positive stage apprehends events in a scientific way. Here, rationality is the dominant aspect and tries to understand every religious concept in terms of human reason.

The existentialistic approach to religion is based on the conception that it is a product of the limitations of human existence and finitude. The origin of religion is from the human desire to avoid anxiety and limitations, and to seek an authentic existence. The authority implies a positive approach towards human life and suffering. Human suffering is the main theme of the existentialistic apprehension. An analysis of religion shows that it not only recognizes human suffering but also considers the meaning of suffering and how to get rid of them. Again it provides a new way of approach towards the concept of human suffering. Apart from these conceptions, Karl Marx, looking from the angle of materialism, perceives the origin of religion as a justification for the existing disorders and injustice in society.

According to Marx, religion is an expression of material realities and economic injustice. Thus, problems in religion are ultimately problems in
society. Religion is not the disease, but merely a symptom. It is used by oppressors to make people feel better about the distress they experience due to being poor and exploited. According to Marx, religion plays a significant role in maintaining the status quo. Marx argued that religion was actually a tool of the bourgeoisie to keep the proletariat content. Marx argued that religion is able to do this by promising rewards in the after-life rather than in this life. It is in this sense that Marx said, "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the feeling of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless circumstances. It is the opium of the people. The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is the demand for their real happiness" (Karl Marx and David McLellan 72).

Lenin conceives religion as “one of the aspects of spiritual oppression” (K.P. Shanker 87). These social thinkers apprehended religion on the basis of the existing social injustice and inequality against the exploited class.

Individualistic thinkers like Bertrand Russell visualizes that fear and death are the sources of religion. Man exceedingly fears the state of death. Russell says: “Religion as a disease born of fear and untold misery to the human race” (Bertrand Russell 18). Here again, the source of origin of religion is visualized from the stand point of human limitations.

The theory of the evolution of the idea of the infinite conceives that the beginning of religion is from the personification of the powers of nature. Man attributed powers to the natural forces; then worshipped the personified forms of these natural forces. These two theories may seem to contradict each other.
Swami Vivekananda tries to reconcile these two theories by the conception that the real germ of religion is the struggle to transcend the limitations of the senses (Swami Vivekananda 45).

Human endeavour to know what happens when the physical body disintegrates or what is the power working behind the nature etc. ultimately led to the original religion. Whatever be the real cause, one fact is certain that man desires to get rid of the limitations of his senses. “He cannot remain satisfied with his senses; he wants to go beyond them” (Swami Vivekananda 46). In this regard, Sri Aurobindo points out that “Religion is the first attempt to get beyond himself and obvious material fact of his existence”. Swami Vivekananda opines that the glimpse of religion was acquired through the dreams of man. In his words “To me it seems very natural that the first glimpse of religion should come through dreams. The first idea of immortality man may well get through dreams” (Swami Vivekananda 46). In the background of these observations by various thinkers, one fact is clear that religions originated as a reflection of man on his limitations, and his urge to transcend it.

The primitive religions are enormous in number. Their excessive number and lack of historical evidence prevent us to say which the earliest form is. There exists diversity regarding the conception of the earliest form of religion. For instance, Emile Durkheim conceives ‘totomism’ as the first form. Edward Tylor and Herbert Spencer consider ‘animism’ as the earliest form. According to Max Muller ‘naturalism’ is the primitive one (Max Muller 23). J.F. Frazer believes that ‘magic’ is the first form of religion.
In the most primitive period of a culture, the most basic form of religion begins with an innate feeling that a spiritual force exists. This force is impersonal and pervades all creations.

The goal is to manipulate this force so that one may attain a desired outcome. Objects such as sticks or dolls, called fetishes, may contain the force and be used or worshipped.

The next stage is animism. At this stage, the force is visualized as personal spirits. Animism teaches that a spirit or spiritual force lies behind every event, and many objects of the physical world carry some spiritual significance.

The anthropological approach towards the history of religion considers that the present form of religion is a product of evolution occurred through many stages like atheism, totomism and gradually to the state of ethical monism.

It is a fact that changes are an essential aspect in each religion. As time passes, every religion witnesses changes. For instance Christianity in the ancient period believed in authoritarianism. Rituals and sacrifices were recognized as high values. The concept of faith is important to human reason. During the medieval period, there was an attempt to reconcile faith and reason. Faith seeks the support of intelligence. Similar changes can also be found in other religions. It is also a fact that whatever may be the changes, they only affect the customs
and codes. There is no characteristic change pertaining to the essence of religion.

Whatever may be the earliest form, as time passes religions are undergoing evolution. There are many changes occurred within the religion to reach the present state. In this regard Hopkins states “Every religion is a product of human evolution as conditioned by environment” (E. Washburn Hopkins 1). Religions originated as a form of belief gradually evolves as a set of beliefs and then to an organised system of beliefs.

**DEFINITION OF RELIGION**

Definitions of religion tend to suffer from one or two problems: they are either too narrow and exclude many belief systems which most agree are religions, or they are too vague and ambiguous, suggesting that just about anything and everything is a religion. A better way to explain the nature of religion is to identify basic characteristics common to religions. These characteristics may be shared with other belief systems, but taken together they make religion distinct.

The term religion whatever be its best definition, clearly refers to certain characteristic types of data - beliefs, practices, feelings, moods, attitudes etc. Belief in the supernatural, especially gods, is one of the most obvious characteristics of religion. It’s so common, in fact, that some people mistake mere theism for religion itself; yet that is incorrect. Theism can occur outside of
religion and some religions are atheistic. Despite this, supernatural beliefs are a common and fundamental aspect to most religions, while the existence of supernatural beings is almost never stipulated in non-religious belief systems. All the profound and more permanent values of life are in some way religious. Religion is never an abstract set of ideas, values or experiences developed apart from the total cultural matrix and many religious beliefs, customs and rituals can only be understood in reference to this matrix.

It is not as important to define religion as it is to recognize it whatever way it appears to be and to understand it. Religion is defined as that which man believes about the Ultimate. Robert Leet Patterson defines religion as “the belief in a harmony between what is judged to be the highest part in our own natures and the total environment together with the emotions to which the belief gives rise and the type of conduct, motivated by this belief and these emotions” (Robert Leet Patterson 31).

Religion is how a man feels or experiences about the Ultimate. Religion is an experience as opposed to comprehension or theoretical knowledge. It is intensely practical and daily comes to the use of man throughout his life. Swami Vivekananda says that religion is always practical and is concerned with action and attainment, realization, experience and fulfilment. “Realization is real religion, all the rest is only preparation” (Swami Vivekananda, 31). Happiness is only found in the spirit. Therefore, the highest utility for mankind is to find this happiness in the spirit (Swami Vivekananda 83). The highest utility of man’s life is the attainment of the extreme and everlasting happiness of
mankind. So the Guru in the *Atmopadesa Satakam* states that all beings endeavour to achieve happiness. The one religion which is acceptable to one and all is able to attain happiness which is but the exterioration of the *atma*.

The German theologian Friedrich Schleirmacher defined religion as a feeling of absolute dependence. Radhakrishnan defines religion as a life to be lived. “Religion is the fulfilment of a man’s life, an experience in which every aspect of his being is revised to its highest extent” (S. Radhakrishnan *Religion and Society* 12). Religion is the innate, spontaneous urge of each individual towards ultimate freedom. There is yet another attempt to define religion as what a man will do about fundamentals. Immanual Kant suggests that religion is essentially the recognition of all our duties as the divine commands. Religion should guide all actions of men. In the words of Nataraja Guru “Religion is a whole-hearted relationship binding man with his fellow men or with some unseen value factor” (Nataraja Guru *Wisdom Frame of Reference* 69).

**RELATION BETWEEN RELIGION AND ETHICS**

Man as a human being, cannot exist without religion because it is intrinsic in his nature. One cannot isolate religion from the life situation. Religion determines its true value from the role it plays in the enrichment of the quality of life. It has a role to play, a contributive role in the evolution of man, by providing society with ethical codes, social rules and ideals, rituals and devotion. Religion also enhances human values and Self-awareness.
Religion helps one to lead a disciplined and purified life. Religions always stand for the betterment of human soul. The different religions, though devotedly called by different names, show a surprising likeness of spirit and life. It is a unique specific expression and cannot be equated with anything. There is no religion which does not stress one form or other of universal brotherhood, and which does not advocate kindness to all living things. In the religions of the non-vegetarian people, there is an acceptance, in principle at least, of the non-killing commandment. And there is the general acceptance by the Semitic religions that a form of grace accompanies fasting and abstention from meat eating on certain days (Nataraga Guru *The Word of the Guru* 321). Buddhism in principle is solidly based on non-hurting (*ahimsa*), and Jainism makes the high level of this principle.

A religion worth the name must incorporate some system of morality for the guidance of its followers. The problem of the relationship between religion and ethics has occupied for sometimes an important place in the discourses of philosophers. The logical position regarding the relationship of ethics and religion in general, the intimate relationship between these two, as contingent facts of history, has never been, and can never be, denied.

Ethics is the study and evaluation of human conduct in the light of moral principles. Philosophers consider ethics as a philosophy. Some philosophers seek an absolute ethical criterion in religion. Major religions have stressed the importance of ethics. Religion, ethics and philosophy are interconnected. Religious vision gives necessary guidance to all other pursuits. Also ethical
conduct and philosophical knowledge help the development of spirituality. Without ethics and philosophy religion becomes empty and in the same way without religious guidance, ethical and philosophical endeavours become meaningless. All religions recognize the importance of ethics. Religion as an encounter with something in the higher order of existence and morality as a personal and social code of conduct are interconnected; they constitute the spiritual endeavours of man.

Religion is concerned with the moral life of man. F.H. Bradly considers that religion is an expression of moral goodness of man. Bradly defines “Religion is rather the attempt to express the complete Reality of goodness through very aspect of our being” (Paul Edwards 140). Apprehending religion from the angle of morality, N.F.S. Ferre says: “Religion is a search for power to overcome the evil side of life even more than its concern for understanding what life at its centre or depth means” (Y. Masih 3).

The concept of free-will is a moral, religious and social concept that is central to most religions. It has been argued that the basis of freedom lies in the contingency of natural events. According to Kant, freedom of the will is the chief postulate of moral philosophy, it does not require proof, and it is an apriori truth (Kant, 18. Freedom is the very basis of morality. The moral and religious life is a genuine one, and it cannot be so without freedom. As far as the religious interpretation of the problem of the free-will is concerned, it seems that the religious traditions of the East and the West both have treated it very differently. Western religious traditions, especially Judaism and Christianity, deal with the
problem of free-will in two different spheres of philosophy; first the philosophy of religion and secondly the moral philosophy. In the philosophy of religion the problem of free-will arises in the context of theistic concept of good and evil. There, this is known as problem of evil. In morality, this is related to the human responsibility and comes as a problem of free-will and determinism.

Indian religious traditions are very much concerned with the concept of freedom, liberation and salvation, etc. Indian thinkers have discussed the problem of free-will and determinism under the heading 'law of karma'. The cosmic principle of karma conjoined with the universal law of causation, shapes itself into the Indian doctrine of karma, as every cause gives rise to an effect, so every action produces a result. Thus the doctrine of karma is not a dogmatic theory; rather, it is only an ethical version of the scientific law of causation. Radhakrishnan has described the doctrine of karma as “The law of karma is the counter-part in the moral world of the physical law of uniformity (S.Radhakrishnan Indian Philosophy 244).

Sankaracharya accepted the principle of karma. He says, individuality is due to karma, whish is a product of avidya. Freedom from the subjection to the law of karma is the end of human life. To get rid of avidya is to be freed from the law of karma. The law of karma expresses the will of God. The order of karma is set up by God, who is the ruler of karma. Since the law is dependent on God’s nature, God himself may be regarded as rewarding the righteous and punishing the wicked. To show that the law of karma is not independent of God,
it is sometimes said that, though God suspends the law of *karma*, still he does not have the will to do so (S. Radhakrishnan *Indian Philosophy* 595).

**HINDUISM**

Hinduism is a unique phenomenon in the history of religion. It is one of the major living dynamic religions of the world. It is said to be the oldest, the richest, the most spiritualistic, the most influential, the most complex and the most informatic of all religions. Hinduism is usually considered as an Aryan religion but its true history traces back to the pre-Aryan period. The exact period of the origin of the Hindu religion is unknown. The fundamental ideas of Hinduism may be traced back to the third millennium B.C. (S.W. Bakhle 55).

Hinduism is not a prophetic or a founded religion like Buddhism, Jainism, Christianity or Islam. The Hindu civilization is so called because the earliest followers occupied the territory drained by the Sindu River. The people of the Indian side of the Sindu were called Hindu by the Persian and the later western invaders. From Punjab, the civilization flowed over into the Gangetic Valley where it met with numerous cults of primitive tribes. In its onward march through the Deccan, the Aryan culture got in touch with the Dravidian and ultimately dominated it, though undergoing some modifications extended over the whole of India; it suffered many changes, but kept up its continuity with the Vedic type developed on the banks of the Sindu. The term ‘Hindu’ had originally a territorial and not a creedal significance.
The Indus religion is the earliest form of religion and represents the first period of the history of Hinduism. The excavation of the Indus Valley Civilization provides evidence that a clear nation of religion existed during this pre-Aryan period. According to Opper this religion was a higher one. As per his statements the Indus Valley religion is highly spiritualistic and theistic in nature.

Hinduism as a religion is not restricted to mere theism, metaphysics or spirituality, but it is an all embracing religion. The Vedic religion itself is a typical example for the multifaceted nature of Hinduism. The Vedic religion is an offspring of the Aryan civilization. The Vedas are the foundation of the Indian religion. Since further developments of Indian spirituality are based on the teachings of the Vedas. The Hindus therefore ‘trace the original source of their cultural life to the Vedas’.

Vedism is the form of religion which was represented in the songs, invocations and prayer collectively called Vedas. Being the earliest body of literature, Vedas form the basis of all subsequent development of Hinduism. It is the fountain head of Indian thought. Veda means words. Words refer not only sounds bur also meanings contained in and conveyed through it. “Thus Veda came to mean the verbal expression of the vision, vision of what exists in knowledge. So Veda refers to words, writings, scriptures and to knowledge of the true view conveyed therein” (Archie J. Bahm 64).

There is a clear idea of the concept of God existed in the Vedic religion. Therefore, the Vedic religion may be considered as a theistic one. There is also
a deviation regarding the concept of God from the early Vedic phase to its later section. The early Vedic religion is nature centred and polytheistic. Max Muller conceives this polytheistic approach as ‘Henotheism’ (Max Muller 15).

The polytheistic conception of God gradually changed to Monotheism and Monism in later Vedic phase where the Supreme God is not only conceived as the creator of the world but also the primal cause which unfolds itself as the world. There is also the deviation regarding the mode of worship in the Vedas from simple offerings and progress to complex rituals. The Upanishads constitute anti-ritualism which is more shifted to the ethical and spiritual aspects.

The Vedic religion is also concerned with metaphysical aspects. It considers the law and order in the universe and believes that there is a controlling power beyond the cosmic rhythm. The concept of rta in Vedic religion signifies an eternal law of truth and right. Rta is considered as the original source for the belief in the law of karma in Hinduism, which resembles the principle of cause and conservation of energy. The concept of sin and suffering is an important derivation of rta in to the moral world.

The early Vedic system gives authority to man on the basis of the principles of karma. Karma signifies that man is the determining factor of his destiny. The later Vedic phase, namely the Upanishadic period, reveals the dominant philosophical aspects of Hinduism.
Hindu ethics emerges from the background of Indian philosophy and its significance can be fully understood only in the context of the Hindu concept of man, his predicament and the law of *karma*. The religious perspective of the Hindu ethics is quite evident. The Hindu ethics speaks of four ideals (*purusharthas*) to be realized through the four *asrams* (*brahmacharya*, *grahasta*, *vanaprasta* and *sannyasa*). Of the four *purusharthas*, *dharma* is the moral action, it is righteousness. *Dharma* moralises *moksha* and *moksha* spiritualises *dharma*. The fulfillments of other *asrama dharmas* are generally required before one takes to the *sannyasa asrama*. *Dharma* means those duties and obligations which follow from one’s station in society. *Dharma* also means those actions and duties which are intrinsic to the moral nature of man.

The Hindu ethics speaks of *sadharana dharama*, that is, the duties that are common to all and *varnasrama dharma*, duties that depend on one’s station or position in society. Hindu scriptures show that they have laid emphasis on a number of *sadharana dharmas* or universal virtues. Great importance has been attached to virtues like truthfulness, straight forwardness, self-control, compassion, forbearance and freedom from envy. The emphasis on social duties and obligations indicates the social concern of Hindu ethics; individual is told that his good, spiritual or material, is closely bound up with the good of the other members of society. To understand the doctrine of Hinduism an overall view is needed. If we take an overall view of Hindu ethics, it is clear that one or more common virtues have been stressed in different writings.
The Dharma Sutras are mainly concerned with defining conduct in relation to one’s varna and asrama. Still they speak of a number of moral virtues which are to be practised irrespective of one’s station and position in society. In the Manu Smriti, we find that one’s own conscience has been stated to be one of the sources of moral law. Like the Dharma Sutras, the Manu Smriti also mentions a number of virtues or sadharana dharmas; abstention from injuring (creatures), veracity, abstention from unlawfully appropriating (the goods of others), purity, and control of sense organs.

In Epics number of sadharana dharmas being mentioned. Truthfulness, non-injury, charity, compassion etc. have been stressed in the Mahabharata. The greatest concern of the Mahabharata is social good and all virtues are considered to be conducive to this end. The central theme of the Mahabharata is the necessity to fight evil and establish the kingdom of justice and righteousness. The Ramayana is typically human. Rama, the hero of the Ramayana, suffers many hardships and is in a moral dilemma, but he upholds the highest principle of morality with determination.

In the Rig Veda, the most striking moral idea is that of rta. Rta stands for a cosmic order, which includes a moral order. Rta has great ethical and metaphysical significance. “It represents the sublime moral order which is inviolable. The Vedic literature does not propound the doctrine of karma in a clear cut fashion, yet it can be said that the action of rta anticipates the doctrines of karma”. The Rig Veda and the Atharva Veda command honesty, rectitude,
truthfulness, fellow feeling, charity, non-violence, celibacy and faith as important virtues.

**Upanishads**

The *Upanishads* represent the idealistic vision of the Indian religion. The ethical doctrines have their place in the *Upanishads*. As a means, the ethical path helps man in acquiring the true knowledge. The ethical concepts like detachment, abstinence, chastity, honesty, decry against violence etc find the importance in the teachings of the *Upanishads*. The moral sense of the *Upanishads* is very developed. The problem of salvation is central to the *Upanishads* which stress that a person who has failed to attain moral purity can never aspire to reach the goal of salvation. The *Upanishads* stress certain cardinal virtues like speaking the truth, self control, giving charities and being compassionate.

The *karma* theory is the law of the conservation of moral energy. We reap what we sow. The good seeds bring a harvest of good, the evil of evil. The concept of *karma* as implying *punya* (merit) and *papa* (demerit) was well-known in the age of the *Upanishads*. As the concept of human responsibility is closely related to the law of *karma*, so many people think that the principle of *karma* is not consistent with social service. But the real thing that the *Upanishads* hold is that we can be free from *karma* only by social service.
Bhagavad Gita

The Bhagavad Gita is not only a revered Hindu scripture but also a book of universal wisdom. The Gita deals with metaphysics, religion and ethics, and rightly called the Gospel of Humanity. The message of the Gita is universal in its scope. It is the philosophical basis of popular Hinduism. The Gita represents a unique synthesis of action, devotion and knowledge.

The ethics of the Gita represents a signal point in the history of Hindu ethics. The fundamental ethical idea of Gita is non-attachment. The theory of the Gita is that if actions are performed with a detached mind, their consequences do not bind the performances. This distinctly implies that the morality of an action depends not on the eternal consequences, but upon the inner motive.

The Gita insists in various ways the importance of karma. The Gita tries to build up a philosophy of karma based on jnana and supported by bhakti. Through divine service of karma we can reach the highest. karma, is act or deed, even that by which the impersonal becomes personal” (Bhagavad Gita VII 24-25) “Karma is said to be beginningless, and the exact manner by which the work of the world proceeds is hard to understand” (Bhagavad Gita IV 17). The Gita recognizes a soul superior to the mechanically determined will. Whatever may be the truth of the ultimate state of the soul, when freed from bondage to nature, at the moral level it has a separate independent existence.
The *Gita* believes in human freedom. Krishna, after describing the whole philosophy of life, asks Arjuna ‘to do as he chooses’ (*Bhagavad Gita* XVIII 63).

*Karma* is only a condition and not a destiny. The real cessation of *karma* is the abnegation of its fruits. The abnegation of the fruits of *karma* is also the true essence of *karma yoga*. The *Gita* advocates absolute unruffledness, equilibrium of mind, sameness to all beings, friendship and charity, which are the cardinal virtues. It advocates best the path of philosophy of wisdom and of devotion, though it prefers the latter. *Karma yoga* is, of course regarded as an important accessory to both the *dhyana yoga* (path of meditation) and the *jnana yoga* (path of knowledge) From the ultimate point of view, no one is responsible for his action, for God is seated in the heart of all and makes them act by His power (*maya*), like objects placed in a wheel. (*Bhagavad Gita* XVIII 61)

**Brahma Sutras**

The *Brahma Sutras* of Badarayana is the third source book of Indian philosophical system. The aim of the *Brahma Sutras* is to represent the teachings of the *Upanishads* in a consistent way. They are meant to clarify and elucidate the doctrines of the *Upanishads* and the *Smriti*. All the schools agree that the *Brahma Sutras* stand up for a discriminate use of reason. They hold to the primacy of the spiritual intuition and the ultimate validity of religious experience. The *Sutras* emphasize the need for enquiry and the study of the scriptures and reflection on the nature of Ultimate Reality.
The incontestable validity - supremacy and the special place of the Brahma Sutras are established on three counts. The validity of Sutras is due to the personal reliability of their author; their basis is sruti, and their logically satisfying nature. Hence, they are accorded the highest place by all. The importance of Brahma Sutras is enormous and without them we would not have been able to unify the definitive message of the apparently conflicting passages in the Upanishads which form the basis of Vedanta. Hence, they hold the key position for the proper understanding of Vedanta. They are not only constructive but are also critical.

BUDDHISM

Buddhism is an ethical religion of India, based on the teachings of Gouthama Buddha. The main theme in the teachings of Buddha comprises the Reality of human suffering and the way to get rid of it. Buddha shows full faith in human potentials. Since individual is the known saviours, the dignity lies in man.

Buddhism may best be defined simply as the means to enlightenment. The more we study Buddhism the more are realize the greatness as a religion and philosophy. Buddhism with its religion, philosophy, literature and art is a tremendous storehouse of knowledge. It played a predominant part not only in the evolution of art in India but also in other countries where it had been accepted as a way of life. However, Buddhism has become a civilization of
international importance. Historically, it was one of the most tremendous religious movements that the world ever saw, the most gigantic spiritual society.

Buddhism is a religion of kindness, humanity and equality while the religion of the *Vedas* allowed animal sacrifice to propitiate the God. Buddhism set its face against such sacrifices; on the contrary, it waged a merciless campaign against this practice. Another special feature was that Buddhism denounced all claims of superiority. It denounced all social distinctions between man and man, and declared that it was *karma*, the actions of man, that determined the eminence or lowness of an individual.

Buddhism is absolutely an ethical religion which emphasizes the great values of good conduct and intuitive insight. Love and compassion constitute the important ethical concepts of the religious vision of Buddha. To lead a moral life is the important motto. Buddha shows more interest in formulating a remedy for the sufferings of human life rather than discussing the metaphysical question (P.C. Alexander 45). In this sense, Buddhism is a way of life than a metaphysical religion. It purports to be a universal religion applicable to all mankind.

The ideal of universal order of state with internal unit of its constituent parts, based on compassion and non-violence is the best way of human life suggested by Buddhism. Buddha as a perfect symbol of *mahakaruna* (great compassion) and *mahaprajna* (great wisdom) is valid everywhere and forever. He is the embodiment of great compassion and wisdom and is the very essence
of truth and goodness. Every good word is the word of Buddha. The doctrine of
atmavada is taken in Buddhism as a system of self-interest, and anatmavada is
taken as a system of altruistic ethics. One who is free from selfishness and is
interested in the welfare of other beings is the ethics of anatmavada or the
document of the negation of self-interest.

Lord Buddha is the principle of universal goodness, free from self-
interest and he is called ‘Marajit’ or the ‘Conqueror of the temper’. As the
world teacher, he is to be conceived as an ideal of universal good revealed to us
through the life and acts as Sakyamuni.

Buddha’s ethical ‘middle path’ is like the golden mean of Aristotle.
Self-indulgence and self-mortification are equally ruled out. He believed in the
law of karma and rebirth. He found one life too short form an individual to
work out his salvation. It may appear strange that the law of karma could work
in the absence of an enduring Self. If there can be action without an agent, there
can be transmigration without a soul. When a person dies his character lives
after him and by its force brings into existence a being that through possessing a
different form is entirely influenced by it.

The members of the Buddhist Community, both laymen and mendicants,
observe many ethical rules to conquer temptations. The practice of charity
(brahmacharya), non-possession (anupadana), and non-violence (ahimsa) are
the three main rules of Buddhist life (Kedar Nath Tiwari 101).
The Buddhist system of moralists does not attach importance to the ideas; a caste, a race, a nation etc. Its aim is to establish a universal order of mankind. The growth of nationalism in modern times tends to wipe out not only Buddhism but also every other movement of world unity. This seems to be a grave danger for mankind.

The Buddhist thinkers point out that it is not necessary that a *karma* done in a certain state of consciousness should fruitify in the same state of consciousness. In the world of desire, a *karma*, whether good or evil fruitifies in its own good time. It may be sooner or it may be much later.

No doubt, tomorrow or yesterday, the fittest will survive in the struggle for existence. According to Buddhism, the measure of fitness is to be determined by breadth and depth of love. Selfishness of bygone ages of mankind will have no more survival value in future. The earth will have no man on its surface without a living unity between individuals, families, clans, and nations. A divided mankind will not survive but will destroy itself, for it has now in its possession the most terrible and destructive weapons. The Buddhist way of life of non-violence is a timely remedy to save mankind from total destruction, because active non-violence results in love and cooperation and leads to peace. Non-violence, a unique ethical idea long ago presented by Buddha has a great relevance to our times.

The teachings of Buddha may be confined to the four Noble Truths and the ‘Eightfold Aryan Path’. The four Noble Truths comprise the reality of
suffering, its cause, its removal and the way of removal. The Eightfold Path consists of right faith, right aim, right speech, right action, right living, right efforts, right mindfulness and right contemplation. According to Buddha, this “ethical and meditative path absolutely leads to the state of Nirvana or salvation. Salvation is the goal of life. It is the state of detached life free from sufferings of the world. Nirvana is a spiritual state attainable in this life and compatible with intellectual and social work” (P.C. Alexander 49).

Buddhism is an offshoot of Hinduism. Although, Buddhism has not accepted the authority of the Vedas even then, there are various signs of the influence of the Vedas, and the Upanishads on it. This aspect of Hinduism has influenced Buddhism to an extent which did not allow the latter to maintain its completely separate identity for a long time in India. Nevertheless Buddhism is indisputably a separate religion and philosophy, which has exerted immense influence over the religious and philosophical thinking of the world. It has greater followers in the world than Hinduism has and is deemed as a universal religion rather than a national one by most of the western thinkers.

JAINISM

Jainism is one of the oldest living religions of the world. The Jaina faith influenced Vedism on the one hand and Buddhism on the other, though being influenced by them in the course of its gradual development. It may be counted as a ‘man centred religion’. It believes that man is the maker and unmaker of this world and recognizes the absolute perfectness of mankind.
Jainism is a theistic religion. Jainism denounces God more vocally than Buddhism; it embraces the Hindu concept of soul, as an absolute entity. Jainism strongly advocates non-violence and purification of soul. According to Jainism, the Vedas are unable to save man from his bondage. It does not consider God, heaven or hell in an eternal sense. Jainism shows full trust in man. Mahavira himself says “Thou art thine own friend why whilst thou for a friend beyond thyself” (John B.Noss 13).

The Jaina view of religion lays stress on realizing the transcendental nature of the Self, which the individual feels as his own. The idea of Self occupies a central place in Jaina religion. The religious treatises of the Jainas deal with the nature of the Self from two perspectives, nominal and phenomenal, or transcendental and empirical, so as to bring home to us the totality of the Self in its mundane and supramundane aspects. The transcendental view represents the Self in its unadulterated state of existence, where as the empirical view describes the Self in its defiled form. It is to be borne in mind that these two states of Self are metaphysically indistinguishable, though the karmic adjuncts create distinctions between them. In other words, the empirical Self is potentially transcendental, though this noumenoal state of existence is not actualised at present, hence the distinction of undoable.

Jainism is an ethical religion paving high dignity to the individual. It is humanistic in its approach and spiritualistic in its depth. Jainism has religious fervour and moral earnestness. These two elements are so greatly intertwined in it that one is apt to confuse religion with morality and vice versa. One cannot be
reduced to the other; though the two are closely associated and they are quite distinguishable. Jainism teaches “religion if taken seriously and rationally will be deeply moral; but it is no morality”. These two are identical. A religious man will be necessarily moral, but a moral man may not be necessarily religious. Religion is co-extensive with morality but morality is not always being religious. All these show that the realms of religion and morality are theoretically distinguishable. The Jaina faith vehemently criticises the view which identifies religion with personal and social morality, and which defines it merely as ‘the consciousness of the highest social values’. The Jaina saints and sages have always exhorted to look beyond the mere moral nature of man to transcendental horizons of life, thereby justifying that social righteousness is not the be-all and the end all of human life. This is not to decry social morality, but to save religion from being identified with it, and to keep the domain of religion as quite distinct from that of morality.

The path that leads to salvation in Jainism is ethical and meditation. The three jewels namely the right faith; right knowledge and right conduct represent the means to attain salvation. Ahimsa or non-violence is the most important ethical aspect, which is conceived both in a positive and negative way. It aims at the inner purity. Salvation is not an immediate experience. Therefore, Jainism believes in the process of reincarnation. It can be found that Jainism is a religion of ethical and metaphysical nature.

Spiritual awakening, according to the Jaina faith, is the commencement of religious living. The performance of spiritual exercises presupposes the
practice of morals. Without moral observances spiritual progress is inconceivable. The conviction of the Jainism is that for the man who is spiritually awakened, morality serves as a means to spiritual living, but for the ordinary man, it is an end in itself. The realms of morality are auspicious physical states resulting in auspicious activities. The obstacles to the achievement of morals are inauspicious activities emanating from inauspicious physical states. Thus, in order to stamp out the inauspicious physical states from the texture of Self, the individual must alert in himself root and branch from violence, falsehood, theft, unchastity, and acquisitions. Thus negative process of purifying the Self necessarily requires the pursuance of the positive process of non-violence (ahimsa), truthfulness (satya), non-theiving (asteya), chastity (brahmacharya), and non-acquisition (aparigraha). These five virtues replace the five vices. It may be noted here that ahimsa is the central and fundamental of these virtues. All the rest are regarded as the means for its proper sustenance, just as the field of corn requires adequate fencing for its protection. When the replacement of vices by virtues is total, we are said to observe complete morality (sakala) and when it is partial, we have partial morality (vikala) (Kedar Nath Tiwari 104).

Ahimsa is central in the Jaina faith that it may be called the beginning and the end of the Jaina religion. All living beings from the one sensed to the five sensed are basically like our own Self. Consequently, it is not justifiable to injure them, to rule over them and to torment the essence of wisdom and the eternal religion. Ahimsa of all living beings is equivalent to the realization of the
highest Self. The truth is that to be violent to other beings is to be violent to one’s Self. It is, therefore, said that one should keep an attitude of friendship towards all living things.

The observance of these five vows is capable of bringing about individual as well as social progress. Thus the Jaina faith and morals sum up the spiritual and moral living of the individual along with the social upliftment.

Like any other systems of Indian thought, salvation is the ultimate goal of life in the Jain philosophy. Bondage is the fusion of spirit with matter by the action of karma. Here karma is considered as a form of subtle matter. The liberation of spirit from the physical matter constitutes salvation or nirvana, which is the supreme state of the soul. The Jaina system conceives salvation in a positive sense. It is the entry into an everlasting blessedness.

**JUDAISM**

Judaism was the ancient religion of the Jews. There is little doubt that Christianity has come out of Judaism and the first apostles of Jesus were all Jews. In the beginning Christianity was preached among the Jews only, and only later on St. Paul opened the gate of Christianity for all nations. But apart from Christianity, Islam was greatly influenced by Judaism most considerably. Thus, Judaism is the parent religion of both Christianity and Islam.

Judaism is a robust religion which teaches strict obedience to the laws, statutes and ordinances of God. Judaism teaches justice, righteousness and
holiness in the life and conduct of the people. A man is believed to have been made in the image of God, so by following the laws, statutes and ordinances given by Moses one becomes a partner of God and fit for his fellowship.

The Jews were not initially philosophical; they have not laid much stress on metaphysics or metaphysical concept, although, there are much sayings about the nature of God, man and the universe. Some times, it has been said that the Jews should work to redeem all the mankind. “Jews are the chosen people, so they alone serve as sacrifice so that mankind may be served. The task of the chosen people it is not only to redeem themselves, but to lead mankind for its redemption too” (Kedar Nath Tiwari 105).

The ethical values of Judaism have made an impact on the religious, political and social spheres. Judaism set down a moral code of conduct for individual perfection. Life, according to Judaism, is a moral striving and man has to become a worker with God in his divine activities. It believes that this world is good and that man is capable of perfection. He possesses free-will and is responsible for his activities. Jainism teaches morality and perfect conduct. Life is a struggle for God, for fight against every sort of injustice, for truth against falsehood, for purity against impurity. It is a religion of virtues, of meekness, submission and resignation, kindness and consideration to animals, peaceableness, harmony and modesty. Peace and harmony occupy a predominant place in Judaism, peace is the soul of the Divine attributes and the symbol if human perfection.
Like Hinduism, Judaism also propounds the theory of *karma* (action) and rebirth. If a person performs noble work, he is rewarded, while evil actions bring him deserved punishment. So every individual receives the fruit according to his action. Man’s primary duty is to work, because work is worship, work is life and work is the way towards salvation. This leads Judaism to believe in rebirth (Kedar Nath Tiwari 105).

Judaism believes that man has been created free, either to obey or disobey God and His commandments. And God also knows the abuses of free-will which a man is likely to make. God is the ideal of morality and perfection, which gives to the Jew a motive power and an inspiration for attaining perfection and lead a nobler life. The Jewish ethics provides for self-elevation under the elevating power of a holy God.

**CHRISTIANITY**

Christianity is one of the most popular and influential religions of the world, specially the western world. Christianity is a monotheistic religion. Some people originally believe that Christianity is a polytheistic religion, because it believes in Trinity. Though Christians believe in Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit the trinity represents three different forms of one and the same God, and not three different Gods. In Hinduism also, Brahma Vishnu and Siva are not three different persons but three different aspects of one God. So Christianity is a monotheistic religion, not polytheistic.
The concept of God has a pivotal place in the Christian philosophy and theology. In Christianity Jesus is treated differently. Sometimes, Christians, acknowledge him as the “Son of God”. Sometime Jesus is regarded as the true image of God. He is often regarded as God and often as man. He is in a sense taken as God man. In the teachings of Christ there is sown the seed of charity, renunciation, control of passions, universal love and faith in God. The problem which chiefly engaged leading Christian thinkers were God, the nature and future of man, and the realization of God and man.

The Christian ethics is closely related to the Christian faith. As there are many ways of comprehending the faith, there are also corresponding differences in the approach to ethics. The Christian ethics is rooted in its theology and salvation. There is close relationship between the Christian morality and the Christian theology. Ethics in the Christian context has three points.

The starting point of moral life is not the moral law but the acknowledgement of divine forgiveness freely offered to man. Self-righteousness of a moralist was a grater denial of the divine order than the immorality of the harlot, for the self-righteous is incapable of realizing his sinfulness and the need of divine forgiveness. The moral law can only accuse man’s conscience but can never give him power to fulfill it, and, therefore, the law becomes an expression of the spiritual self alienation of man.

The second point of the Christian ethics is the Christian meaning of love, which is the ultimate principle in the Christian ethics. Jesus said, “As the
Father has loved me, I have loved you; this is my commandment. Love one another as I have loved you” (Jn 15:9, 12 NEB). One of the aspects of the content of love is its universality. Love is the basic lesson that Christianity teaches men. It is by love alone that man can attain his redemption that is his original nature. Christian theologians have given recognition to the concept of free-will and according to them, the origin of sin or evil in this world is only due to the misuse of free-will, which God has provided to them.

A third basis of Christian ethics arises out of a new idea of the Reality of brotherhood, introduced into society by the Christian faith.

Situations vary and so do ethical responses. But the abiding principle is that Christian obligation is to be defined as a criticism and transformation of the moral sense, present in a situation in the light of the ultimate ethic of forging love and fellowship.

**ISLAM**

Islam is a prophetic religion of comparatively late origin. It has its origin in the teachings of Prophet Mohammad. His teachings are regarded as final and they are to be observed and followed by all. Islam shows a common Semitic origin with Judaism and Christianity. We will see that it has striking similarities with these religions in matters of the conception of God, eschatology and the ideas of heaven and hell. Islam is said to be the ‘Religion of the Book’. All the basic principles of Islam as a religion are contained in one book called ‘Quran’
or Koran. Quran, in Islam is regarded as eternal, the concreted eternal word of Allah.

Islam believes in one and only one God called ‘Allah’. It is therefore, out and out a monotheistic religion. It believes in the Reality and authenticity of prophets, who are regarded as carrying the message of God to people. It believes in the existence of angels and spirits, both of good and evil dispositions.

The most important factor in giving Islam its distinctive character is the rigorous discipline of daily life that it prescribes for its followers. In this sense Islam may be regarded as an out and out legalistic religion, although such an observation need not and should not imply that it leads to inner spiritual piety. The religion, we have seen, takes God as the Supreme Lord and man’s duty towards him is an unconditional and absolute submission. Consequently, much of Islamic discipline consists of teaching its people definite ways of sincere devotion and payer to God. It also consists within itself the elements of self-purification and liberality. Thus the Islamic discipline may be taken both as a religious and ethical discipline simultaneously.

Islam literally means submission. Islam is a religion based on the universal principle of submission to God. One of the dimensions of human spirituality is morality. Man is a moral being; he is free, responsible and conscious of values. Human freedom is, however, limited, because man is a created being. Man has been endowed with a fundamental discrimination
between the good and the evil. Besides discrimination, man has also been given the desire for the good as well as the evil. Although man desires both the good and the evil, he feels a responsibility for doing the right and avoiding the wrong. This sense of responsibility expressed itself in the feeling of shame, repentance and self-reproachment that follow wrong actions.

The Islamic morality is the same for everyone, a religious divine and a common man. There is a place for healthy asceticism in Islamic ethics but it does not make renunciation of desires or reduction of material needs an end in themselves. Islamic morality makes a distinction between ends and means. But this distinction is used in order to allocate emphasis and direct preferences. It is never used as a plea for the view that ends justify the means. Islam invokes the people, not only to practise virtues, but also to establish virtue and eradicate vice. It wants that the verdict of conscience should prevail and virtue must not be subdued to play a second fiddle to evil. It urges that the righteous should organize themselves and fight evil.

In Islam man is free either to obey or disobey the commandments of God. For a Muslim it is the proudest thing to be the slave of Allah. Hence, it is contented that Islam teaches that the highest virtue of man is to surrender to his free-will (Kedar Nath Tiwari 105).

Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism and Islam have dealt the law of *karma* exhaustively and in great detail. The word of *karma* signifies two things – action and also the fruit or result of action. In Christianity
too, there is a mention of this, when it is said ‘reap as you sow’, meaning that one will reap only what one has sown. In Islam ‘there is a concept of the day of judgment, wherein it is said that all the souls will be called by the Creator on this day, and justice will be meted out to each according to what he has done or what he has not done. Thus, *karma* one form or the other is to be found in all the great religions of the world.

The different religions, though devotedly called by different names, show a surprising likeness of spirit and life. It is a unique specific expression and cannot be equated with anything. Sree Narayana Guru accepted all religions. Before understanding the Guru’s concept of religion and ethics it is essential to understand the Guru’s life and teachings and the conditions of Kerala prevailed before the Guru came into exist.
REFERENCE


