Introduction:

A moral sense is inborn in man and, through the ages, it has served as the common man's standard of moral behaviour, approving certain qualities and condemning others. While this instinctive faculty may vary from person to person, human conscience has consistently declared certain moral qualities to be good and others to be bad.

Justice, courage and truthfulness have always found praise, and history does not record any period worth the name in which falsehood, injustice, dishonesty and breach of trust have been praised; sympathy, compassion, loyalty and generosity have always been valued, while selfishness, cruelty, meanness and bigotry have never been approved of by society; men have always appreciated perseverance, determination and courage, but never impatience, fickleness, cowardice and stupidity. Dignity, restraint, politeness and friendliness have throughout the ages been counted virtues, whereas snobbery and rudeness have always been looked down upon. People with a sense of responsibility and devotion to duty have always won the highest regard, those who are incompetent, lazy and lacking in a sense of duty have never been looked upon with approval.

Similarly, in assessing the standards of good and bad in the collective behaviour of society as a whole, only those societies have been considered worthy
of honour which have possessed the virtues of organisation, discipline, mutual
attention and compassion and which have established a social order based on
justice, freedom and equality. Disorganisation, indiscipline, anarchy, disunity,
injustice and social privilege have always been considered manifestations of decay
and disintegration in a society. Robbery, murder, larceny, adultery and corruption
have always been condemned. Slander and blackmail have never been considered
healthy social activities, while service and care of the aged, helping one’s relatives,
regard for neighbours, loyalty to friends, aiding the weak, the destitute and the
orphans, and nursing the sick are qualities which have been highly valued since the
dawn of civilisation.

Individuals who are honest, sincere and dependable, whose deeds match
their words, who are content with their own rightful possessions, who are prompt in
the discharge of their obligations to others, who live in peace and let others live in
peace, and from whom nothing but good can be expected, have always formed the
basis of any healthy human society.

These examples show that human moral standards are universal and have
been well-known to mankind throughout the ages. Good and evil are not myths, but
realities well understood by all. A sense of good and evil is inherent in the very
nature of man. Mahatma Gandhi too held the same view. He holds that the
ture of man is good. The nature of man is peaceful, and it is the innate nature of man.
Man is made in the image of God. Gandhi, who developed a universalistic outlook
towards Religion gained popularity not only in India but also in the world. Gandhi’s
Religion was spiritual humanism because he declared that the service of the poor, whom he called 'Daridranarayana', was the true service of God. In other words, Gandhi found God amidst his creation; this creation is confined not only to India, his own land and not Hinduism alone, the religion to which he belongs, but consists of men belonging to different land and different Religions. Therefore, the study of comparative Religion was important to Gandhi. The best principles of different Religions he felt, should be assimilated for the advancement of our society. To him, Religion binds man to God and importantly, man to man.

Today when we focus on the condition of the world or society, there is chaos and conflict everywhere. Most of the causes of this chaos and conflict arise due to Religious issue i.e. claiming superiority over their own Religion, one religion dominating other religion, the people of a particular religion even take to sword to elevate their own religion and so on. Inter-religious hatred continues to be one of our major unsolved problems. In this arena, Mahatma Gandhi came and opened up a new path for humanity. He taught to the people that every religion is fundamentally equal and true and that inter-religious dialogue would be conducive to lasting inter-religious harmony and growth of all religions. He believes that if only we could all of us read the scriptures of different faiths from the standpoint of the followers of those faiths we should find that they were at bottom all one and were all helpful to one another. He argues that each religion has its own contribution to make to human evolution. He regards the great faiths of the world as so many branches of a tree, each distinct from the other though having the same source.
Various religions are like the leaves on a tree. No two leaves were alike, yet there was no antagonism between them or between the branches on which they grew. Even so, there is an underlying unity in the variety which we see in God’s creation.”

For Gandhi all the principal religions are equal. There are supplying a felt want in the spiritual progress of humanity. Hence he had no difficulty in bringing up Muslim, parsi, and Christian children under his care in their own faith.

The purpose of this thesis is to explore and understand the meaning of what Gandhi meant by the term “religion”. Though it is about religion, my work does not concern itself with religious metaphysical problems such as the problem of existence of God, soul, or life after death etc. Nor my work is about the origination or the chronology of different religions. My concern here would be with the ethics of each religion i.e of Hinduism, Christianity, Islam and Buddhism in the classical sense of the expression in which it includes not only the study of moral values, obligations, moral duties, and virtues etc, but also the study of value of moral life and its means.

This work also will try to see how the importance of Inter-religious dialogue is crucial for establishing inter-religious harmony.

The present study consists of Six Chapters. In the beginning of the present research work, in the first chapter, the concept of Religion according to Gandhi and how religion and ethics go hand in hand has been explained. For Gandhi Religion and Morality are inseperably bound up each other. Men often have a

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merely superficial ideas of religion. Gandhi believed in religion in the broader sense of the term and not in the conventional sense. By religion Gandhi did not mean blindly following the beliefs of particular religion, neither does it mean simply believing or preaching the particular beliefs systems without practicing it. For him the essence of Religion is Morality. “The root of religion is ‘that which binds’. The root meaning of its Sanskrit equivalent Dharma is ‘that which holds’. It sustains a person as nothing else does. It is rock bottom fundamental morality. When morality incarnates itself in a living man it becomes religion, because it binds, it holds, it sustains him in the hour of trail” He does not consider any selfish action to be a moral or spiritual action.²

My work therefore will be Gandhi’s concept of Religion in a broader sense and not Religion as we took it in ordinary sense. According to him, true Religion is not narrow dogma. It is not external observance. He has recognised the major religions of the world as historical and cultural phenomena. Beyond these particular forms there is the religion of humanity which is reflected as faith in the moral order.

He believes that the soul of religions is one, but is encased in a multitude of forms. Gandhiji would not accept any interpretation of scriptures which conflict with reason. He would consider such a view to be a false interpretation or an interpolation. “Scriptures cannot transcend reason and Truth. They are intended to

² Ibid, p.263
³ N.K Bose, Selections from Gandhi, navajivan publishing house, 1948 p. 254.
purify reason and illuminate truth\textsuperscript{4}. “I have no doubt that there are many interpolations in the Smritis or other writings that is inconsistent with Truth and non-violence of other fundamental and universal principles of ethics”\textsuperscript{5}

The second Chapter discusses the fundamental ethics of Hinduism. This chapter deals with the basic values and codes of Hinduism. Gandhi holds that according to Hinduism Truth is the ultimate end of life and Ahimsa is its means. Gandhi sees clearly that according to Hinduism, to realize Truth, to realize God, to realize liberation (Moksha) is essentially the same as to realize ethical perfection and pursuit of non-violence which is the root of all morality (dharma) is its means.

According to the theory of Purusharathas of Hinduism, pursuits of wealth (Artha) and pleasure (kama) within the limits of morality is necessary not only for the pursuit of moksha but also for development of prosperities in society. A liberated life (Jivan mukta) is a perfect ethical life of universal love which is

\textsuperscript{4} Ibid, p.260

\textsuperscript{5} M.K Gandhi, In search of the supreme, Vol.1. Navajivan publishing house, 1961, See also In search of the supreme, Vol.3, p.97 & p.193
Intrinsically a life of happiness of the highest kind. Any human being through conscious effort can pursue liberation and progress towards it from evil to good life, from good life to unselfish desireless good life and from it to liberated life. The universal ethical values (Sadharandharmas) as well as special ethical values (Varnasharmadharmas) are discussed in this chapter. Varnashramadharmas i.e duties relative to one's varna or social class and one's Ashrama or specific stage in spiritual discipline constitute the social ethics of Hinduism. The duties of varna and Ashrama together constitute the code of relative duties, the duties of station in life, the duties obligatory on the individual in consequence of social status, temperament, specific powers and capacities. The universal ethical values highlight the fact that the ethical rule of life is basically the same for all, viz; inoffensiveness, truth, non-theiving, freedom from wrath and greed, desire to do good to mankind etc. It is discussed that varnashramadharmas are not merely directed to the good of the community, they also subserve the purpose of the common good of humanity. Thus the individual of a specific community who observes the duties of his class does not serve his own community merely but also and in the same process, all other communities according to their ability and in this way the whole of humanity itself.

This chapter also attempts to discuss the concept of Yamas and Niyamas, the virtues important to lead a life of serenity and equanimity.

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6 see for example, the Bhagawadgita 6.20-23, 5.20-28

7 see for example, The Bhagawadgita 9.32-33, 18.45 etc
The Third chapter discusses and elaborate the basic codes of Buddhism which are five precepts or Pancasilas. Along with this I have also explain the four noble truths and the Eight fold Path. Gandhi viewed Buddhism as being part of Hinduism. He believed that Buddha was one of the great reformers of Hinduism. According to Gandhi God’s laws are eternal and unalterable and not separable from God himself. It is an indispensable condition of His very perfection. Buddha has presented a rational religion, practical ethics, and simple principles of life. Buddha’s contribution to humanity was in restoring God to His eternal place.

In Buddhism we find the Five precepts which is consider as their basic codes of conduct. The theory of Four Noble Truths, viz. those of concerning suffering, its origin, its removal and the way of its removal constitutes the core of the ethics of Buddha. Like the seers of Buddhism, Buddha also accepts ethical perfection to constitute the core of liberated life, the ultimate goal of life, which any person could realize through its Eightfold Noble path, viz, the path of right faith, right resolve, right speech, right action, right living, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. Any person by conscious constant effort could realize through the Noble path an enlightened unselfish desireless ethical life of universal love and compassion.

In Fourth chapter I have discussed the basic values and codes of Christianity. Gandhi loved Christianity because of its absolute emphasis on love as the most fundamental ethical virtue. But Gandhi disliked the claims of Christianity as superior over all other religions of the world. It is discussed in this chapter why Gandhi is against Christians of today and why he disliked the attitude of the Christian missionary regarding proselytisation even though he had a deep respect for the Christianity as religion. He was against certain forms of missionary
activities specially those relating to conversion. Gandhi was not opposed to conversion if it was based on one’s will but he was against any use of force or propaganda in the matter of conversion. As he remarked, From the comparative study of religions, Gandhi was convinced that a mere doctrinaire approach in the field of religion does not help to create inter religious fellowship.

The Fifth Chapter discusses the fundamental code of Islam ethics. It presents the discussion on following points:

- How Gandhi views Islam as a religion, and what Islam has its contribution.
- Islamic concept of moral life
- Discusses the various Islamic moral codes like:
  - Duty to Allah
  - Duty to Other Human Beings
  - Food and Drink
  - Sexual Relations
  - The aim of ethics in Islam
  - The spiritual significance of Jihad.

The last chapter is an attempt to present the viable and plausible solution to solve the issue by a critical dialogue between the fundamental ethics of the four religions in the light of Gandhi’s thought on the issue. This chapter examine the essences of all the four religions. Love is the essence of all religion,
for it is religion (not organised religion) that teaches ethics and compassion. Love is the parent of ahimsa or non-violence. It is love that shares, cares and gives. It is the foundation of dharma. It is unselfish love for humanity which is the culmination and the highest point to which love can soar to. When that happens, one lives for the good of others. The highest evolutionary attainment is the experience of love for all human and non-human beings. And if we claim to be religious and neglect this aspect we are religious only in name.