Introduction

Man appears to be a religious being by his very nature. For from the lowest stage of civilization we find him to possess as much religious instinct as the social instinct. But while the social instinct can be seen among many animals and insects, religion is an exclusive human instinct.

The word ‘religion’ comes from the Latin word ‘religio’ which means to unite or to bind. Literally speaking, religion is a principle of unification or harmonisation. It is an institution as well as a belief which binds us all together in a wholesome way. The word religion usually denotes a relationship between human individual and the super human being or God. In this sense ‘religion’ can be defined as man’s attitude towards life and the world in the light of his belief in the supernatural. It is a whole hearted relationship binding man on the one hand with his fellow-men, and on the other hand with the ultimate Reality which constitutes the supreme unseen value factor. Because of being religious a man behaves differently from all other living beings. He may conform to group patterns of behaviour or live apart in isolated contemplation.

Philosophy and religion are intimately related to each other. Religion at its deepest level concerns itself mainly with the problems of union or communion with the Divine and with the realisation of the
supreme value of human life called Mokṣa, Nirvāṇa or Salvation. Religion has to reveal a right understanding of the nature of the Absolute or the Divine and the nature and structure of man and the world. It appears that Philosophy and religion have their origin in some deeper urges and aspirations of man. In this sense one may define religion “as the way to the Divine, the infinite or the unconditioned.”¹ Man is a rational being endowed with a sense of freedom and responsibility. It is religion that makes man conscious of the ambiguities inherent in his own existence with its creative activities. The religious man seeks to solve the ambiguities of life by transcending his existential situation in a state of harmony and unity with the Unconditioned. Philosophy is primarily a rational reflection on the nature of existence. Thus, religious philosophizing consists in rational reflections on the individual’s predicament and his irresistible urge towards perfection through a union with the Highest Reality.

1.1 DEFINITIONS OF RELIGION

Scholars have tried to define religion in various ways on the basis of their studies in comparative religion. Some of them regard it as a sort of speculation upon all that evade science and discursive thought in general. According to Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) “Religions are diametrically opposed to their own dogmas (scientific thinking) and are

perfectly at one in the tacit conviction of the existence of the world with all its contents and with all which surrounds it, as a mystery calling for an explanation. He, therefore, says that religion is the belief in the omnipresence of something which is inscrutable.

William James defined religion as "The feeling, acts and experiences of individual men in their solitude so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine." E.B. Taylor defines it briefly as "a belief in spiritual beings". To Haffoding, religion is "the conservation of values". According to Alexander, religion is "faith in deity". To Patric, religion is "the consciousness of our practical relation to an invisible spiritual order". Whitehead defines religion as "the vision of something which stands beyond, behind, and within the passing flux of immediate things". W.T. Stace defines religion as the hunger of the soul for the impossible, the unattainable, the inconceivable. According to Kant religion is "a matter of the will, it being understood and identified with practical reason, that is to say, certain acts ought to be done or that certain attitudes ought to be adopted". According to Max Muller "Religion is a faculty of the mind which enables a man to grasp the infinite independently of sense and

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4 ibid.,
5 ibid.,
6 ibid.,
reason⁸. One of the significant definitions of religion is given by J.G. Frazer. "By religion I understand a propitiation or conciliation of powers superior to man which are believed to direct and control the course of nature and of human life."⁹ Durant Drake defines religion as "This disposition of the heart and will, through which man comes to care for the highest things and to live in gentleness and inward calm above the surface aspects and accidents of life, we call, in its inner nature, spirituality; when it is embodied in outward forms and institutions, and spreads among the whole communities, we call it a religion"¹⁰.

In The Religion of man, Tagore defines religion as that "which consists in the endeavour of men to cultivate and express those qualities which are inherent in the nature of man the eternal and to have faith in him"¹¹. To Swami Vivekananda, religion is not doctrines, dogmas nor intellectual argumentation; it is being and becoming, it is realization. According to Radhakrishnan religion is "the discipline which touches the conscience and helps us to struggle with evil and sordidness, saves us from greed, lust and hatred, releases moral power and imparts courage in the enterprise of saving the world ..."¹² Nehru says that "religion seemed to be closely associated with superstitious practices and dogmatic beliefs, and behind it lay a method of approach to life's

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⁹ ibid.,
problem which was certainly not that of science. There was an element of magic about it, an uncritical credulousness, a reliance on the supernatural.”

1.11 ANTHROPOLOGICAL FINDINGS ON NATURE AND ORIGIN OF PRIMITIVE RELIGIONS

The anthropological studies on the development of religions from the primitive social groups to the advanced religions tend to show that most of what is found in the advanced stages are also found in the lower stages, though in a different form.

Various schools of anthropological studies have tried to enquire into the nature and origin of the primitive religions. J.G. Frazer in one of his works studies totemism both as a religion and as a legal institution in a detailed manner. Maclennan expressed that most religions sprang originally from certain totemistic practices found in abundance in Australia. Robertson Smith in his Religion of the Semites tried to show that the practice of communion meal was derived from totemism.

According to some theorists religion originated in wonder. The vedic people wondered at the natural phenomena of storm, thunder, shower of rain, music of birds, the firmament with its infinite number of stars, the sun and the moon passing from the East to the West when the

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13 Jawaharlal Nehru, The Discovery of India. (Culcutta: Signet Press, 1946) p. 26
firmament remained firm and unshaken. To their primitive minds motion only appeared to belong to life and they attributed the changing phenomena of nature to living deities presiding over the diverse forces. The presumed these natural phenomena to be deities and regarded them as being mightier than man. They attributed divine characteristics to these and worshipped them.

E.B. Taylor believed that religion arose on the basis of animistic view of the world. Animism means worship of stones, trees and animals in the belief that these are abodes of spirits, good or evil. To Taylor "animism is not a religion, but a basis of religion, a kind of philosophy of religion."\(^\text{14}\)

Durkheim criticises the possibility of the origin of religion from animism and he expressed his own view that "When a certain number of sacred things sustain relations of co-ordination or sub-ordination with each other in such a way as to form a system having a certain unity but which is not comprised within any other system of the same sort, the totality of these beliefs and their corresponding rites constitutes a religion."\(^\text{15}\)

Max Muller's naturalism supposes that religion must begin with the senses or rather the sensuous things, as all other forms of knowledge do. But Durkheim argues that if religion begins with

sensuous things such as visible fire, then it is impossible to explain how the various Vedic Ceremonies could be conceived as producing certain fruits merely by virtue of rituals and rites. Durkheim rejects the theories of animism and naturalism on the ground that they do not provide scope for the exclusive classification of the sacred and profane which to him appear as the fundamental characteristic of religion. In tracing the origin of religion he accepts the idea of totemism which is based upon the kinship between man and animals or vegetables. This idea of totemism was brought to light as early as in 1792, and it was based upon the study of primitive people of America. The totemic view consists in the conception of a force which is supposed to be present in a material form.

The complex idea of totemism, however, cannot be considered as the basis of all religions. The religious ideas of totemism may have partial similarities with some of the religious ideas but they are neither so germinal nor ubiquitous as to form the basis of evolution and development of several other religions.

It appears that the principles of biological evolution cannot be followed strictly in the comparative study of religions. Even in the modern age certain customs may arise which might be easily regarded as a revival of certain old custom or superstition. Those customs may be the outcome of natural spontaneity similar to that which was originally responsible for the rise of the customs in earlier times. Thus we find the evolution of the Islamic religious literature from the middle of the 6th
century A.D. But we can also discover the development of some of the
Hindu sacred literature during the same period. This might lead one to
think that the two developments to be dependent on one another, though
in fact, they are quite independent.

1.111 RELIGION AS A SPIRITUAL FACT

Religion manifests itself through our psychic states—conscious
and unconscious, through our tendencies, temperament, emotions and
will. Almost all religious people would admit religion to be a spiritual fact.
It is spiritual in the sense that it has no material basis. The great
religions have emerged out of a religious consciousness which is
universal and distinct from what is known as social sense. Religion
differs from science in that it is not interested in the universals or laws of
nature. Its point of emphasis is upon man as an individual with his own
deepest and highest aspirations. The Old Testament, the New
Testament, the Quran and the Upanisads emphasise this element.

In the earliest forms of religion, such as in Judaism we find man
as anxious being with his personal grieves and wants, which he refers to
God for fulfillment and redressal. Similarly the ordinary people looked
upon God as the most beneficent and all powerful being, the sovereign
of the earth who removes the sorrows of the people. Thus in popular
religion sacrifices are offered to the Deity for the attainment of success
and good luck. But this kind of a personification of God and gross form
of worship for the fulfillment of material needs would not correspond to
the higher concept of religion. However the urge for the higher ideal is
not of purely spiritual nature. The urge for morality does not depend
upon its inner norm, but upon the prospects of fear and hope. It sprang
from a belief that there is a Master behind the great show of this
universe, and that our pleasure and pains, our enjoyments and
sufferings are not arbitrary happenings, but regulated either by certain
divine laws (such as the law of Karma) or by the will and dispensation of
God. This ethical and moral values are inalienably connected with the
practice of religion.

1.IV DIFFERENT STAGES OF RELIGIONS IN INDIA

In India religion is a way of life based upon certain definite
conception of reality. For the sake of convenience, a study of the
development of the religio-philosophic culture of India may be divided
into six stages.

1.IV.1 Pre-Aryan-Mohenjo-Daro Period (B.C. 3000 - 2000 B.C.)

The extant religious literature and philosophy in India is mainly
that of Aryans who entered India about 2000 B.C. But the elements of
Indian religion can be traced back to the Pre-Aryan Mahajo-Daro
civilization in the Indus Valley around 3000 B.C. or even earlier. It had a
script that has not yet been fully deciphered. The earliest known stage
of Indian religion is that of Mohenjo-Daro civilization about which we
know very little. "Of their religious culture some traces are left in their
icons which include the Mother goddess, the Phallus and a male god
seated in Yogic posture who has been regarded as Siva." Our
knowledge of this religion remains vague because of the absence of any
written documents. But there are enough indication that the worship of
Siva in the form of Phallus was prevalent during that period.

1.IV.2 The Early Aryan Period or the Vedic Period (2000-600 B.C.)

The second stage is that of early Aryans who reflected upon the
values of reality like the early Greeks. The Philosophic thought and
religious practices during this period are known to us from Vedas. They
worshipped the natural forces and beings and theirs was a religion of
sacrifices and hymns to various spirits of forces as found in the Rig vedic
hymns. Such a religion is called a 'nature' religion and it involves the
beliefs called 'animatism' as it deals with forces considered to be alive or
animated. When man discovered a general order in Nature, he felt that
the natural forces were governed by certain laws. They began to
distinguish within themselves between body and spirit and they believed
that there must be a Supreme Governor that controlled all the others.
The Supreme Governor must be Supreme Deity or Supreme Spirit akin
to human spirit, with regard to intelligence and personalities and that all

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(Culcutta: Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture Gol Park, 1993) p. 32
other deities were only His own different forms or manifestations. Thus, ‘nature religion’ which is a pluralistic animatism, leads to a stage of religious reflection called monotheism and finally to monism in which the Supreme Spirit is described as an inward Being. The outward world becomes a manifestation of the inward Being. Consequently it was understood that the essential truth of reality of the world could be realised only through meditation-turning the consciousness inward. Therefore the meditative religion gained in priority over the religion of sacrifices. The Philosophy of religion took shape around the ninth century B.C. when the first Upaniṣad -Brhadāranyaka was also composed.

1.IV.3. The Age of Revolt (B.C.600-300 A.D.)

The age that followed the early Upanisads saw new developments in religio-philosophic thought. In this age we find the Philosophy in India began with a quest after the highest truth – the highest bliss, freedom and wisdom. Therefore it demanded a philosophical discipline of reasoning, the discipline of our conduct and the control of our emotions and passions. The object of Philosophy came to be conceived as attainment of wisdom so as to transform ourselves into perfectly wise beings and the enjoyment of absolute freedom and bliss. Thus out of a religion of sacrifices and other ritualistic observances, there evolved a religion of inwardness. In the
sixth century B.C. Jainism and Buddhism rose in protest against the religion of sacrifices and much that it implied. These two religions were considered as unorthodox since they rejected the authority of the traditionally accepted sacred scriptures – the Vedas. The Revolutionary changes were brought about by the Bhagawatha religion also. It substituted a personal God Hari in place of the abstract idea of a universal soul. The rise of the revolutionary religious sects reacted on the Orthodox system and led to the formulation of its doctrines in a more co-ordinated and logical form. The Chief developments took place in the religio-philosophic culture during the period 400-200 BC are:-

a) The formulation of the six systems of Philosophy, viz, Nyaya, Vaisesika, Samkhya, Yoga, Purva Mimamsa and Vedanta.

b) Development of Saivism into a complete theistic system.

c) Popularisation of religious Philosophy by means of epics like Ramayana and Mahabharatha.  

1.IV.4. The Puranic Age (A.D. 300 - 1200)

The beginning of this age may be regarded as a turning point in the religious history of India. By the twelfth century A.D., the downfall of Buddhism and decline of Jainism took place and new religions were introduced. Jainism and Buddhism were attacked by the Orthodox religions by incorporating much that the two religions contained and reasserted themselves by pointing out that the essential truths these two

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religions taught were already included in their own teaching. This revolt was staged by Kumarila – following the religion of sacrifices and by Sankara-Following that of meditation.

1.IV.5 The Muslim Period (A.D. 1200 - 1757)

The first Muslim invasions in the eighth century had very little effect compared to the invasions in the eleventh century. The establishment of a powerful Muslim community on a permanent footing all over India was the most outstanding feature of the religious development during this period. In the seventeenth century Christianity was spread along with the advent of the British in India who took advantage of the defects of the caste system, the position of women in the Hindu and Muslim Societies and the practice of untouchability and unapproachability. During this period new phases of the Bhakti cults like Śaiva, Sākta and Vaiṣṇava were also developed.

1.IV.6 The Modern Age (A.D. 1757-1947)

The Impact of Western thought led to the religious reforms of the nineteenth century. During this period a number of reform and revivalist movements such as Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj – and the Theosophical Society were started to prevent the people from embracing Christianity.

These three movements tried to bring an all-round reformation in the Orthodox Hindu religion and society. By the end of the 19th century,
the religious philosophies of Sri. Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, Sri. Vivekananda and Sri Narayana Guru rose in protest against casteism and untouchability. They established the Vedantic Doctrine of the identity of man with God and the fundamental equality of man. They also announced the world that all religions, if truly followed, are but different ways to salvation, and that there is no inherent conflict between one religion and another.

Thus we can see a synthesis of the varied cultures of India. The Philosophy of the Upanisads and Sankara is combined with the theistic beliefs. The highest knowledge of abstract principles is accompanied by meditation and devotion. Without any distinction of caste and creed equal honours are given to Buddha, Christ, Mohammed and other founders of great religions systems of the world.

1.V RELIGION IN GURU-PHILOSOPHY

Religion is the prominent and basic factor in the Philosophy of the Guru. So his philosophy is nothing but a religious philosophy. His quintessential message, ‘One Caste, One Religion, One God for man’, has brought drastic changes in the religious and social outlook. This brilliant motto is the basic principle of his Philosophy and this suffices to show that it is nothing but a religious system.

The Guru Defined religion as a whole hearted relationship binding man with his fellowmen and with some unseen value factor. The Guru
says that man’s religion does not become complete if it does not unite together the spiritual doctrines of Hindu Yogi (Ascetics), non-violence of Sri. Buddha, Love of Jesus and brotherhood of Mohammed the prophet. His religious doctrines include Yogic Culture, Non-violence, love and universal brotherhood. According to him religion is not meant only for the welfare of the inner world of man. Its aim is an integral development of all the physical, intellectual and spiritual capacities of man in the context of society. Thus we can see that the cardinal principles of Buddhism, Christianity and Islam are implied in this religion. This points towards the fundamentals of ‘One World Religion.’

According to the Guru Religion must as far as possible correspond to the reality as such and not get lost in absurd dualities … Religion has to get ride of its distortions and reflect reality. This was the secret of the type of spiritual life held by the Guru as a model. The real and the existent met in neutral truth in all his deeds and words, revealing a common human value which was earthly and heavenly at once. All goods or values of life, from the most ordinary, such as a fruit that abated hunger to the highest, to emancipation, in his view, thus fell into a certain natural orders.

The Guru states that religion is an opinion. Whatever be the differences in religion, men can live together. Caste differentiation ought

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18 Souvenir, Cannanore. 1967 p. 43
not to exist. Such a state of affairs can be established. The Guru has no antipathy towards any religion. He desires human beings to live as one integrated group, whatever be the variations in the religion, dress or language. One must have the liberty to believe in the religion of one's choice. There should be freedom of faith for all. His religion was so simple and devoid of all sophistry.

According to the Guru religion is not a mere formula or a set of rites and ceremonies, but a way of life. "Religion itself has to be contemplatively understood as seeking to better man's relations with his fellows, endeavouring to raise him to a truly higher status as man. Religion therefore, cannot afford to be exclusive, neither should it tend to be orthodox or even heterodox. And this is where contemplative science has its virtue, for this superlative science is productive of that regulative principle or solvent of values without which religious or ideological rivalries can only spell disaster. It was in this sense that the Guru used to say: whatever be the religion, if suffices, if it makes a better man."\textsuperscript{20}

The Guru's spiritual faith is the result of a synthesis of many a humanistic ideal from the world religions. The guru was above all kinds of religious prejudices and so he believed in the oneness of all religions. He was influenced by Christianity and Islam. We must be tolerant as well as considerate towards all religions in moulding a spiritual belief appropriate to our times.

\textsuperscript{20} ibid., p. 72
The Guru states that religion helps man to become self-enlightened and we must see that our actions would bring happiness to all. A mode of life which gives happiness to both oneself and others is the gist of real religion. He held that all religions agree on this point. Ātmopadeśa Śatakam Verse 24 explains the above viewpoint.

“What here we view as this man or that
Reflection reveals to be the self’s prime form;
That conduct adopted for one’s self – happiness
Another’s happiness must also secure at once.”

Religion in most of its forms constitutes a system of beliefs, surcharged with emotions and transforming into actions, in the interest of our temporary and permanent welfare understood as happiness both here and hereafter. A study of the existing religions as also the religions among the primitive people, or the religions that already disappeared, point to the fact that all of them are constituted of beliefs which were mingled with man’s ignorance of scientific knowledge. These religions consist of fixed intellectual beliefs which mark off one religion from another, though in Hinduism no such limits are seen. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan says, “Religion is not the acceptance of academic abstractions or the celebration of ceremonies, but a kind of life or experience. It is insight into the nature of reality (darśana) or experience of reality (anubhava)... Religion is a specific attitude of the self, itself

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21 ibid., p. 549
and no other, though it is mixed up generally with intellectual views, aesthetic forms and moral valuations."

Religion fundamentally aims at the good of the self or the soul both in this life and in its post-mortem existence whatever may be its nature. Religious enlightenment is primarily the solitary communication with, and self dedication to the Divine, though the idea of divinity and individual's relation with it may be understood in different ways. But this should not amount to a disregard for the significance of religion. In many religions the highest good is conceived as eternal bliss in heaven, while in some religions it appears to be eternal bliss in itself. The ultimate idea of salvation of all Indian systems of religion is either the complete destruction of sorrow or the attainment of perfect blessedness. Therefore the main concern of religion is for the soul or the principle of individual personality.

As far as our country is concerned, religion has been the basis of her thought and life, and the guiding principle of her civilization through the ages. The freedom of the soul has been the *summum bonam* of life for the Indians. Her eternal messages are the divinity of man and unity of existence.

Wherever we look we are surprised to see how the seers and great humanitarians at all times had realized the unbounded soothing capacity of religion in making it their main channel to help the suffering

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humanity. The present work is aimed at an attempt to show how this mighty truth was realized by the great revolutionary religious philosopher of India, Sree Narayana Guru of Kerala whose appeal to religion was never a mere question of belief. His approach to religion was such that even the socially degraded too were turned deeply religious in spite of their hopeless living conditions. His mission was to let the people be convinced of things in their own ways and this explains his appeal to religion even when dealing with the grave social problems.

A complete exposition of the religious philosophy of Sree Narayana Guru requires a careful consideration of the following questions:

1. What is the ultimate source of Guru's philosophy?
2. What is the essential meaning of Guru's religious Philosophy? More exactly what is the ontological status of Being, God and the individuals?
3. What is the implication of Guru's religious Philosophy?
4. What is the hidden meaning in the various temple installations initiated by the Guru?
5. What is Guru's concept of God and what are the methods to realize him?
6. What are the methodological strategies worked out by the Guru in order to establish his thesis viz 'One God – One Religion'?
Sree Narayana Guru inspired the masses from the dormant life to the active life of divine purity. Guru's quintessential message, One caste, One religion, One God for man (Oru Jāthi, Oru Matham, Oru Daivam Manushyanu) is the principle which determine a pious life of man. The Guru exhorted the people to act as a man, to discard prejudices based on Caste, Class and Race, to one God and to apprehend that all are moving to one God and to realize that one divinity manifests in all beings. The Guru says in Daiva Daśakam the plurality of waves in the ocean are nothing but the body of water. Thus all the individuals and things we experience are different manifestations of the One Divinity.

The present study is divided into six chapters including introduction and conclusion. The first chapter analyses the meaning of religion in the light of different definitions given by various scholars. Nature and origin of primitive religion based on anthropological studies, different stages in the development of religions in India and a basic analysis of religious philosophy of the Guru are included in this chapter. The Guru's definition of religion as a wholehearted relationship binding man with his fellowmen and with the unseen value factor convinces us that his philosophy is really a religious philosophy. His religious doctrines include yogic culture, non-violence love and universal brotherhood. The messages and teachings of his religious philosophy is also implied in his very famous message, "One Caste, One Religion, One God for Man".
The second chapter entitled "Narayana Guru: Life and Mission" is devoted to extract the inner meanings of the religious philosophy of the Guru in the light of his activities, written works, sources of his philosophy, methodology and teachings. The Guru was against confrontation and so frontal attack was avoided. He saved the people of Kerala from the tangles of pernicious habits.

The third chapter entitled as Religious Philosophy of Guru—spiritual aspect, analyses spiritual facets of philosophy. The Guru states that the Absolute Brahman is the Real and "that Thou Art". This is the finalized doctrine of Vedānta as taught by the Guru. The individual soul is none other than the Pure Consciousness—Brahman. The obvious message contained in the various temple installations initiated by the Guru is that we examine ourselves, forsake sins, develop virtues and thus become a person worthy to offer worship. He expected us to become conscious of the fact that God is not within the idols and religious rites, but is right within us.

The fourth chapter, Religious Philosophy of Guru—social aspect, deals with the means and methods adopted by the Guru for the upliftment of the downtrodden classes of the society. This aspect requires a careful examination for it is common to interpret the Guru as a social reformer rather than a religious thinker. This chapter exposes the fact that the social ideas of the Guru are really rooted in his conviction of One God.
The fifth chapter entitled as Universal Religion – attempts to extract the universal applicability of the Guru’s religious ideas. In this chapter Guru’s quintessential message One Caste, One Religion, One God for man and its implications are described. All religious conference at Alwaye and Guru’s view on proselytism are also dealt with.

In conclusion, attempt is centered round to summerise the central principles of the religious philosophy in the preceding chapters.

In this work the historical method is used in the biographical narration. Analytic and Synthetic methods are also used wherever it seemed to be relevant.