Chapter I

RELIGION
CHAPTER 1

RELIGION

In the history of mankind there has never been a tribe of man 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 above the senses and relates him in some way to the universe, or the infinite and eternal, of which he is a part. It is that aspect of a person's experience including his thoughts, feelings and actions whereby he endeavours to live in relationship with what seems to be the Divine to him. Religion aims chiefly at creating a refined way of life. The problem of life and death which confronts him demands a solution sooner or later and religion provides him with an answer. Religion is thus a constitutional necessity for man and an essential element in all human progress. 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 realisation of the harmony between the aspiring soul and the integrating principle."1

The word 'religion' comes from the Latin word 'Religo' which consists of two words 're' (back) and 'ligare' (to bring). That which binds the soul back to god is religion. To define religion is not an easy task. Religion is so inclusive and complex that it needs to be analysed, so as to be completely understood and fully appreciated. "Religious experience is far too complex to be defined."2 Definitions might restrict the scope of the study, for each definition focuses attention on one or a few aspects of religion. The very attempt to define religion, to find some distinctive or possibly unique essence or set of qualities that distinguish the religious aspect from the remainder of human life, is primarily a western concern. The term religion, whatever be its best definition, clearly refers to certain characteristic types of data — beliefs, practices, feelings, moods, attitudes etc. 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 on reference to this matrix.


It is not as important to define religion as it is to recognize it whatever it appears to be and to understand it. Any definition of religion may fall under one of the two classes - either it reveals the attitude of the definer or describes religion in terms of the central meaning or its essential character. Religion is defined as that which man believes about ultimate. Robert Leet Patterson defines religion as "the belief in a harmony between what is judged to be the highest part of 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." Religion is how a man feels or experiences about ultimates. Religion is 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, realisation, experience and fulfilment. "Realisation is real religion, all the rest is only preparation." "Happiness is only found in the spirit. Therefore the highest utility for mankind is to find this happiness in the spirit." The highest utility of man's life is the attainment of


5. ibid., Vol. II., p. 83.

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the extreme and everlasting happiness of mankind. According to Sree Narayana Guru

Everyman at everywhere makes effort in everyway
Aiming at his self happiness; therefore in this world
Know faith as one: understanding thus,
Shunning evil, the inner self into calmness merge. 6

The German theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher defined religion as a feeling of absolute dependence. Dr. Radhakrishnan defines religion as a life to be lived. "Religion or fulfilment of man's life, an experience in which every aspect of his being is revised to its highest extent." 7 "Religion is the innate, spontaneous urge of each individual towards ultimate freedom." 8 There is yet another attempt to define religion as what a man will to do about fundamentals. Immanuel Kant suggested that religion is essentially the recognition of all our duties as divine commands. Religion should guide all actions of men. In the words of Sri Nataraja Guru religion is a "whole hearted relationship binding man with his fellow-men or with some unseen value factor." 9


We cannot trace the actual origin of religion, but we can find the conditions necessary for its existence. Religion did not create man, but man created religion. Rather man pursued his inner urge and found out the goal, and the world named the path as religion. So religion is not something extraneous to a man’s life; it is part and parcel of his very being. It springs rather from fundamental psychological reactions that were possessed by man long before he could be said to have possessed any religion. R.N. Dandakhar says that “the instinctive urge to transcend the finiteness may be called a religious feeling.” To attempt to find the absolutely first form of religious life is an unsuccessful one. Religion is to be judged by what it has become rather than by what it first was. Max Muller, a well known Anglor-German student of religions, believed that he had found a clue to the beginnings of the religions in the use of some of the same names for different gods throughout the Indo-European religion. These common names came from linguistic roots meaning sky, earth, sun, moon, fire, thunder and so on. From this he constructed a complete theory of the evolution of religion and its gods, which was essentially that of a gradual transformation of nature forces into gods.

Any one universal theory cannot be applied to all religious origins. There is not even a uniform type of evolution from primitivism to polytheism and then to monotheism and monoism. The religious variations come into being constantly clearly. There must have been a time when there were only a few religions or possibly only one religion. A historical account of the development of religion goes through the various stages through which religion has passed and culminated in the present form. The tribal or the primitive religion may be considered the first or the lowest stage of the religious life of man. By primitive it is meant only the beginning of a historical development or the first step in the progression upward. Primitive religion is simple and crude with its simpler patterns of thought. In the primitive level religion is a function of a group or a class. It is the religion of man, taboo, totem and fetish. In the words of A.L. Basham "All religions in their primitive and early levels spring from the almost instinctive response of man to the mysteries and unpredictable features of his environment." The earliest forms of religious life concerned themselves with the mysterious potencies which were designated by the term 'mana'.*

Of the most primitive level, mana exists in everything and must

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* "Mana is a belief held by Polynesian that a power of a supernatural origin may reside in a person or object." New Webster’s Dictionary - Encyclopaedic Edition.
therefore be reckoned with as extra-human influences on all things in the normal course of everyday life. There are many religious attitudes towards these mysterious power, all ritualistic and ceremonial practices being designed to propitiate and achieve proper relations with them. Taboo is the negative restriction which signifies a valuable power to be found in certain things and persons, which must be handled rightly if relations to it are to be beneficial. It is the negative aspect of mana. All religions distinguish an area of Sacredness and set it apart from the rest of the reality by taboo. Totemism is the universal form of primitive religion, but its main significance is found in its characteristic embodiment of the group spirit. Totemism is a primitive form of religion in which every member of a tribe or class is believed to stand in some special relationship with an animal, a plant or even an abstract quality. A totem is treated not precisely as a deity, but as a cognate and one to be respected, not to be eaten or used, and if at all, only under certain restrictions. Totemism is essentially a social cult. The best characteristic of all totemism is its non anthropomorphism.

Magic is an "endeavour through utterances of set words, or the performance of set acts, to control or bend the powers of the world to man's will." It is purely utilitarian.

seeking only the means to achieve the human will in the world, a device that shall force the superhuman to serve the human. The three ways of exerting this magical control is shamanism, fetishism and popular magic. Shamanism is a primitive religious belief in controlling spirits only by shaman. Shaman "refers to the medicine-man, witch doctor type of healer and magic worker." He is considered to be processed by a spirit or mana at times, and is knowledgeable about many matters of secret lore handed down from practitioner to practitioner. Fetishism is a device of the professional witch-doctor or magician, though also some what independently practised by the laity. It is a belief that the supernatural powers dwell in material objects, and can be invoked by the proper use of the object or fetish. If the fetish or effective in securing the desired results it is praised and cherished, otherwise it is discarded. Popular magic is non-professional exercise of magical powers. Possession of an article of clothing, strand of hair or likeness of another individual will give him power over that person.

It is believed that religion began from animatism. Boquet calls animatism, a 'belief in a vague, potent, terrifying inscrutable force'. Animatism developed into animism, the spirit

fearing religion of the most isolated tribal people. It describes the vivid primitive awareness of the aliveness of all things in nature. The primitive conceived of all things in nature like trees, springs, stones, earth, mountain etc. as alive. The animistic theory represented by Tylor and Spencer contains the doctrines of spirit and a theory of worship. It was Tylor who proposed the term 'animism' for the study of the profound doctrine of spiritual beings. "The term animism properly refers to a theory set forth by the English Scholar E.B. Tylor (1832-1917), one of the founders of modern anthropology, in order to account for the origin and development of religion." 14 According to Spencer all religions arose in the form of worship of the spirits of ancestors. It had its origin in the experience of death. Death liberates some real but invisible force from the body. In the initial stage the dead were honoured in the funeral rites and then promoted to the status of gods. The evolutionistic theory of Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer were in general harmony with the animistic theory of E.B. Tylor. According to C.P. Tiele, "it is the belief in the existence of souls or spirits, of which only the powerful, those on which man feels himself dependant and before

which he stands in awe-acquires the rank of divine beings and becomes objects of worship." 15

The second stage of religious development is the national stage. The disappearance of the tribe and the rise of the nation produced a new set of needs which led to another level in the growth of religion - the national. It has often flowered in terms of a national culture, and worked hand in hand with its political organization. Thus Christianity is the national religion of America, not a national religion. It implies predominance of the faith with in the nation, and indicates a special relation of the national group of gods or god. Polytheism was a characteristic development of the period. Extensive development of cults and myths were characteristic of national religion. Cults became a natural accompaniment of national religion, for new and greater gods demand greater and different duties. Temples appeared in large numbers, ritual was elaborated and priests were appointed. Distinctive religious myth made its appearance. National religion represented a genuine advancement for the conscious and deliberate formulation of spiritual and moral factors. The national religion widened men's mental horizon and the religion became ethical and reflective.

Universal religion is the third stage in the development of religion. A religion is said to be universal when it is fit for acceptance by the whole world. Universality is not quantitative but qualitative. The truths and moral standards are to be universal and must be for all men. Universal religions in general are predominantly monotheistic. The religion reaches its fullest ethical and intellectual development in its universalistic forms.

With reference to the essence of religion we can notice various stages through which it has travelled its course to the present condition. It has been noticed that man is incurably religious and it is a part of his normal experience and it is something he possesses as soon as his life begins. The most elemental of all factors that constitute religion is fear or awe and it influences religion at all levels of its development. Fear is a self-preservative device, necessary at every stage of development and it does not become distinctively religious until it grows into awe and reverence. It is fear that drives man to try to establish a harmonious relationship with the divine. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan says that the undying need for religion springs from a universal and basic fear that is in every human heart. "When a man gets a feeling or fear that after all life means..."
nothing, leads nowhere, and at bottom no one is really necessary and nothing worth while, he cannot live. According to Frederick Paulsen, the awe inspiring feelings of humility and trust are the theme of all religions of the world. Rudolf Otto defines the essence of religious awareness as awe, a unique blend of fear and fascination before the divine.

'The wish is the father to the thought' is given a major role in the formation of religion. Human life in seeking to fulfil its desires finds itself thwarted in all directions. Natural impulses of all sorts are inhibited by social conventions. Though man's situations are thus against him, he longs for the fulfilment of his wishes. He fabricates an illusory but comforting world in which there are powers to aid him. The supreme and loving Heavenly Father offers him companionship and promises him compensation in a life to come for the disappointments he suffers here. Thus through religion man goes about the business of fulfilling his heart's desire.

There is another view that religion could be explained as a plot on the part of power-hungry priests. It is believed that the priests originated religion for their own profit.

and that the religious institutions have often concentrated power in the hands of the clergy. Indian society has been ruled for centuries by the priestly caste. Tibet has been under the control of its monks. Roman Catholicism has always been heavily priest-controlled.

There are certain distinguishing marks that separate the religious aspect from all other areas of human experience. The sacredness or holiness is one such aspect that distinguishes what is religious from other aspects of life. The quality of sacredness is dynamic in nature and is both positive and negative. The taboo rules are there to keep man away from harm. There are sacred things, sacred places, sacred writings, sacred persons etc. related to every religion. In fact religion might be defined in a superficial manner as that way of life which sets apart the sacred from the profane, the secular and the common, and constitutes itself the guardian of that sacredness. These sacred things have a particularly close relation to the supernatural. Supernatural indicates more than human power or goodness with which man seeks to make contact through religion. Another characteristic feature of religion in its quality of religious practice and life called revelation. Revelation is the "self-communication of the supernatural to chosen individuals or
Revelations are religious doctrines or experiences that have come down to the people from the Divine. It is these that have been communicated and is being communicated between the supernatural and man. This sense of the possibility of communication with the supernatural is one of the most vital elements of all religions. And each religion recommends its way as being the best for making such contact. Observances, practices and rituals form the essence of every religion. It is that part of religion which helps to communicate with the divine. They are rules or techniques by which men seek to make effective and beneficial contact with the supernatural. Worship is an essential ritual adopted by all religions. It is to be found in the sacraments of every religion. Reading the holy scriptures is a part of worship. Hence sacred places also are considered equally important. Prayer is of greater importance in that it is central to every faith. Meditation is the Indian way of prayer in which the most direct contact with Supreme Reality is possible. It is the ritual pattern that most clearly distinguishes one faith from another. Group life is another characteristic of all religions. Man is instinctively group-minded. Men receive both social and supernatural benefits from group life. That religions prescribe a

way to salvation is the most important of all the essential natures of religions. The different religions have different explanations as to why men need salvation and of what sort it should be. Thus all the efforts that religions put forth are to enable men to achieve salvation of some sort, in this world or the next.

Thus we can notice that the essence of all religions is the same. Hence religion is one and it is many as well, it is diverse and yet the same, it is both strange and familiar. Religion is unity in diversity and diversity in unity. In the abstract sense there should be only one religion, since there is only one God. Religion is basically the response which human beings make to God. Swami Ramdas says that "All the great teachers of the world are from one-God the first eternal cause of all existence." 18 All the religions of the world have a fundamental unity. Sri Ramakrishna believed that one infinite religion exists and this religion is expressing itself in various countries in various ways. The different geographical conditions, temperaments, and dissimilar stages of mental development of varying degrees of spiritual evolution require different phases of

religious thought and practice. Practically one religion will not suit the whole of mankind. The basic problems of all religions are the same - constant upward movement of the consciousness, to gain salvation, to divinise life and to establish the kingdom of heaven on earth etc. The knowledge of the universal truths of practical value of all the religions will give the feeling of fundamental sameness and the unity of all religions. "True knowledge of religion breaks down the barriers between faith and faith." 19 In the common attempt to fulfil the basic human physical, social, aesthetic and intellectual needs, they are one. "Religions are similar in that they seek to reach the same general goals, fulfil identical functions, satisfy like desires and needs, and answer the same questions." 20

ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF HINDUISM

Hinduism is a unique phenomenon in the history of religions. 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


20. Winston. L. King, op. cit., p. 89.
most informative of all religions. "The tendency of Hinduism to absorb and sanctify what ever it came across has been to a large extent responsible for the fact that it spread all over India rapidly and without resorting to any active proselytisation."

The richness of Hinduism has been in retaining the scriptures through myriads of commentaries and commentaries upon commentaries. "It is synthetic and perpetually serving life. All known ways, works, faith, science and trances - have been woven and interwoven into an amazing tapestry and ideologies and practices."

The term Hinduism is a comprehensive one. It was ascribed to the religion at a fairly late period and the significance of it was acquired at comparatively recent times. But what is usually understood by the term Hinduism has been in existence in the past. It originated in a peculiar way. It was not coined by the people who are called Hindus. It is of foreign geographical origin. The name was applied by the Greeks to the people of the Eastern side of the river Sindhu. Later it acquired a religious connotation rather than geographical. "Originally the


term 'Hindu' seems to have had a purely geographical connotation.\textsuperscript{23}

Hindu uses the word 'Dharma' for religion. It is derived from the root 'dhr' which means 'to hold'. Thus the etymological meaning of the term Dharma is 'that which holds'. Dharma is the essential nature that upholds the Divine as an entity and that the essential nature of man is his power to become Divine. So what ever helps to realise this essential nature is dharma. Hinduism is often referred to as Sanatana Dharma and Vaidika Dharma. Sanatana denotes the eternal nature of religion and Vaidika refers to its alliance with Vedas. Sanatana Dharma is a universal dharma promising salvation not only to its followers but to the whole mankind of all times. It resembles Plato's Justice which provides a formula that is adaptable to each level of his society. Every religion has a generic form or a 'samanya rupa' and a specific form or 'visesha rupa.' The Samanya rupa is essentially the same for all religions and this aspect of religion is called Sanatana. The other aspect of religion which changes according to the change of time, place and circumstances is the external aspect and it is ritual or Dharma. Thus dharma assumed

its own forms in the four yugas namely Satya, Treta, Dwapara and Kaliyuga. Dharma assumed the form of contemplation in the Satya yuga, sacrifice in Tretayuga, worship of lord Hari in the Dwaparayuga and loud chanting of Lord Vishnu's names in the Kaliyuga.

Any definition of Hinduism can only be partial and incomplete. Yet attempts have been made to define it from different stand points. In the words of Dr. S. Radhakrishnan "Hinduism is a movement, not a position, a process, not a fixed revelation."24 In another context he defines it as "a way of life than a form of thought."25 According to Sir William Hunter Hinduism is a religious and social nexus of the Indian races. "Hinduism is an amorphus body of beliefs, philosophies, worship, practices and codes of conduct."26 In the words of Swami Vivekananda, "The Hindu religion does not consist on struggles and attempts to believe certain doctrines or dogmas, but in realising not in believing but in being and becoming."27

25. ibid., p. 77.
The origin of Hinduism cannot be precisely calculated since the source of it cannot be specific. One has to go back to the remote period in the history of India where some of the distinctive features of Hindu religion had already been manifested. But it is not a historic religion as Christianity and Islam are "Hinduism is not a religion in the sense in which Buddhism, Muhammadianism and Christianity are religions." 28 No specific date or author can be fixed for Hinduism. It was not revealed to a prophet and then propagated among or imposed upon the people. But it is the spiritual experience of many Sages and Saints at different times from different stand points. "Hinduism is founded in the varied religious and moral experiences of teachings of many ancient, medieval and modern Indian Sages and seers, Saints and devotees, Munis, Risis, Acaryas and Bhaktas." 29 "In the case of Hinduism the realisation of the truths and their expressions were the result of gradual process of reflection by many individuals through centuries." 30 It had been believed that the Indian civilization began with the migration of Aryan to India from Central Asia. But the excavations at Harappa Mohenjodaro and


other related cities proved that its origin were much older. "The history of Hinduism is as old as the History of India."\(^{31}\)

The Indus religion is the earliest form of religion and represents the first period of the history of Hinduism. It is known as proto-historic Hinduism. The only evidence of the nature of religion is the excavated seals, seal impressions, brief inscriptions on the seals etc. from the destroyed cities. Since no writings have come down from this civilization, we are much ignorant about the civilization. Yet from the archeological findings we can draw up an idea about the religion of the period. The seals, seal impressions, carved figures and other concrete symbols disclose that the people were polytheistic and they worshipped their gods in the form of idols. Seals of many animals show that animal worship prevailed. Bull was depicted in many of the seals. Tree worship was a prominent element in the mythology of Indus civilization. Many of the potteries were depicted with big trees, accasia and the peepal trees. The prominent God of the period was the three-headed Pasupathi. This three-horned Pasupati is identical with the Siva of the classical Hinduism and has much

in common with the Siva of later Hinduism. The three forms were depicted in such a way that two forms were seated on a stool and the third on the ground. This resembles the yogic posture of the later Hinduism. "Thus a seal has been unearthed in which is depicted a horned figure seated on a cross legged position, in all essentials similar to that in which the God Siva is often represented today."32 The yoga of later Hinduism has been a development of the pre-vedic religion. The yogic posture points to the practice of turning the mind and senses inward. Linga or phallus worship which is the familiar accompaniment of the worship of Siva was another feature of the faith of the people. Many of the terra-cotta figurines of broad-hipped women, semi-nude figurines and ring-shaped stones were symbols of Mother Goddesses. They worshipped Sakti in the form of mother goddess. The importance of female divinity indicates that matriarchy was the social structure of the period. The presence of drained bath rooms, swimming pools etc. show that they preserved the purity of body. The ablutions form the prototype of the ritual bathing in sacred streams of the later Hinduism. Absence of temples indicate that the religious life centered round home. Worship was in the form of puja. Puja

consisted of bali.* Thus the Indus religion establishes a close and direct affiliation to classical or historical Hinduism and also establishes a line of direct development from it.

The evolution of Hinduism can be traced through three principal stages or phases of development. They are Vedism, Brahmanism and Hinduism, "... with a view to greater perspective, I propose making use of the three words Vedism, Brahmanism and Hinduism as convenient expressions for the three principal stages or phases in the development of that complicated system."33

Vedism is the religion of the Vedas. Vedic religion is distinct with its mythology, magic ritualism and spiritualism. "With Vedism a new religious ideology which is exotic and basically distinct from the proto-historical Hindu religious ideology makes

* Bali was the raw offering to the divinity. It comprised of anointing the idol with the blood of the animal offered to him, or some other substitutes. The sacrificers put sacramental blood on their bodies or wore red clothes. Sacrifice consisted in immolating a victim in order to absorb its vital principal.

its appearance on the Indian scenes."34 From this period onwards we have a rich and almost unbroken tradition of religious literature.

The religious history of India begins with the arrival of the Aryans. We do not know precisely who the Aryans were and from where they came. They were believed to be a family of people who came from the steppes of Russia and Central Asia. The word 'Arya' means noble and was supplied by Aryans themselves. They were religious minded people with great powers of appreciating and admiring the magnificent phenomena of nature. Hence they turned with awe and veneration to the natural powers like sky, air, light sun etc. According to A.L.Basham "The Aryan was the twice born man who supported and followed a certain distinct and thoroughly regularised way of life."35 They gradually conquered the early inhabitants and established themselves in the northern part of India.

34. R. N. Dandakhar, op. cit., p. 108.

Vedism is the form of religion which was represented in the songs, innovations and prayers collectively called the 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 but 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 there in."^36 Vedas are eternal (nitya) in the sense that they have no beginning or end and 'apuruseya' because there is no author for Vedas. It is coeval* with nature. It is the God who reveals these eternal laws at the beginning of each cosmic age and the Rishis discover these laws and transmit it to the posterity. They are breath of God, truths conveyed to great rishis, accumulated treasures of spiritual laws, discovered by different persons at different times.

Tradition arranged these eternal laws into four groups. They are the four Vedas namely Rig Veda, Yajur Veda, Sama Veda and Atharva Veda. Among the four Vedas Rig Veda is the

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* Coeval = (person) of the same age; (person, things) existing at, lasting for the same period of time.
oldest and the most important. The Vedas are composed in an archaic form of Sanskrit called Vedic.* Vedas were kept alive by reciting them from memory. As the mode of transmission was of chanting and listening Veda is also known as 'Sruti'. It was only in a later period, they were written down in Sanskrit. Vedas in turn are divided into four parts. They are the Mantras, Brahmanas, Aranyakas and the Upanisads. These four parts are in conformity with the four stages in the life of a man. A Brahmacari learns by reciting Mantras. Rituals and sacrifices to be offered at the stage of a householder is contained in the Brahmanas. Aranyakas provides preparation for Vanaprastha and Upanisads give philosophical wisdom at the stage of Sannyasa. There is a gradual evolution from the ritualistic Mantras to the intellectual wisdom of the Upanisads. Consequently the Vedic period can be divided into the Age of Mantras, the Age of Brahmanas and the Age of Upanisads.

The Vedic religion is mythological** and evolutionary in nature. Since the Vedic people have been

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* Vedic is generally believed to be derived from a language called proto-Aryan, an early prakrit, which may have been common ancestor of Avestic. Vedics also called old Indo-Aryan and is classed with the primary prakritis. Vedic is the classical predecessor of Sanskrit.

** Myth is the primitive man's unique mode of apprehending reality.
profoundly influenced by naturalistic concepts, their mythology was also naturalistic. To begin with there was no idea of a single supreme god head. There were a plurality of powers and not even personal ones. These gods were connected with various objects, occurrences or episodes of daily life. The ever changing conditions of life of the people had been modifying their concept about God and new features appeared on God's personality and it became highly complex. The character and personality of god had been in full conformity with the cultural life of the people and also with the ethos of that period. "There is no dependable measuring rod to determine their importance of greatness. It is only possible to say which god was the favourable at any given time and occasion."37 The early Vedic gods were conceived as beings like men and women possessing physical bodies and requiring food. In a later period the innumerable Vedic gods were grouped into three classes according to their position in the sky, the atmosphere and the earth. Agni, Indra and Surya were the prominent gods of the three groups. "The true gods of Veda constituted a trinity of deities. They were the Fire God, the Rain God and the Sun God, one for each of the three worlds, earth, air and sky."38 All other deities were either modifications or associates of one or the other of the Vedic Trinity.

Agni, one of the prominent masculine deities of the Rig Veda is the personification of the three forms of fire namely the Sun, the lightning and the sacrificial fire. He takes precedence over every other god in connection with sacrificial rites and has been an object of veneration among all nations. He has been variously called the son of Dyasus and Prithvi of Kasyapa and Aditi, of Angirus and several other gods and sages. Agni is manifested by the friction of two pieces of Arani, and he devours them as soon as he is born. To consume anything and everything is a tremendous capacity of Agni. It has been told that he devoured the Khandava forest with the help of Krishna and Arjuna in order to restore his vigour. It was at the command of Bhrgu that Agni was first brought down from heaven to the earth for the use of man by the Hindu Prometheus, Matarisvan, a wind godling. Agni is a domestic friend, father of sacrifice and mediator between men and gods, earth and heaven. Agni not only brings the gods to the sacrificial altar but also carries the offerings to them after burning and consuming it first. Since Agni carries the sacrifices he is known as havya-vahana. "He was the source of Vedas, possessing and knowing all creating thing, the mediator between men and gods, the protector of men and their homes." 39 Agni takes

away sin and restores the sinner to favour and hence has a moral character.

Agnihotra is the foremost of the Vedic sacrifices and is performed to please the God Agni. Agnihotra brings peace and prosperity for the family and had the potency to reconstruct favourable condition for the performer. Agnihotra purifies the atmosphere as well as the mind. The simplest form of Agnihotra consists of a daily libation of milk into the fire every morning and evening by the householder. An elaborate form of sacrifice consists of additional rites performed to the accompaniment of mantras. Offerings at sunrise and sunset consist of raw rice and cow's ghee by the accompaniment of two mantras.* The ceremony is conducted by dipping a darbha grass into the agnihotra milk and throwing it into the ahvaniya fire.** Pranagnihotra is a variant

* "Suryaya, Swaha, Suryaya Idan namama, prajapatya swaha, prajapatya Idam namama"

"Agnaye Swaha, Agnaye Idam namama, Prajapatya Swaha, prajapatya Idam namama."

** According to the ritual directions three different kinds of fire should be alighted. To the East - the ahavaniya fire for offering to the gods, to the South - dakshana fire for the cult of Manes and to the West - grahapatyia fire for the cooking of food and for offerings.
form of agnihotra in which agnihotra becomes a sacrifice to the prana (breath) in which the Vedi (altar) is the sacrificers heart, the fire is the officiants' mouth, the darbha the body hair, the offering made is homage to fire.

Rain god or Indra is an atmospheric god who appears human in his character and morals. He possesses, on a large scale, defects and qualities like temperance and courage of a Kshatriya. He is a god of battle who helped Aryans to conquer the aboriginals. Indra is close to man as a brother and father and supplies them with light and water. He is also a god as the principal of fertility. Largest number of hymns are seen addressed to Indra. By the end of the Rig Vedic period Indra became the greatest of gods.

Varuna or Sun god is a celestial god. He is the controller and regulator of the universe. His power is so great, his knowledge so vast that nothing can escape him. He maintains the law and order in the universe and hence known as the guardian of rta in later Hinduism.

Besides the trinity of gods there are certain other deities which the Aryans worshipped. Soma, is a polymorphic deity among them. It is the golden nectar which gives immortality and
ensures victory over death to all who drink it. It is the juice of a plant used in the sacrificial offering. The violent quick tempered storm god, Rudra is another god of the period. He is a malevolent, terrible god and yet compassionate. He is sometimes qualified as auspicious Siva. In the Atharva Veda Rudra becomes the god of the cattle-pasupathi. Along with gods there are goddesses also. Ushus and Aditi are the important among them.

Aryans when they came to India were typical pastoral polytheistic people. The hymns to all the gods are the clearest proof of the Rig Vedic polytheism. It was a priestly religion, ritualistic in its external practices, utilitarian and practical in its immediate purpose or economic aspect. Sacrifice was to propitiate gods and it established a bond of loyalty between men and devas. It aimed at cosmic order and also prosperity on the earth like to secure happiness, success, health, wealth, cattle, progeny and to vanquish enemies and foes. The religion of the Veda contained the germ of Hinduism. The doctrines which existed in them in a nebulous form were fully developed in the Upanisads and Vedanta faiths. The Vedas speak of Divinity in various ways as the Absolute, indiscriminated Essence, indestructible, the Eternal, The One, Sat, the Ultimate Reality etc. It has been definitely stated that the manifested Deva is not merely an aspect of the ultimate Reality. "Ideal human virtues are attributed to them to such an extend that it will be
inaccurate to take them as mere symbols of natural phenomena.  

Along with polytheism the tendency of monotheism was present in Vedism. The likeness of gods to one another and their identity reveal the monotheistic principle. This tendency developed into a conception of a supreme god. Thus Prajapati is enthroned as the Supreme god. "Prajapati represents the highest conception of unitary god head in the later Mantras and Brahmanas, taken as a whole." 

The principle of monism had its origin in the Vedic period. During the later part of the Rig Vedic period there was a steady movement towards unity. The principle of monism ascribes a single primordial cause which unfolds the universe. This monistic principle has been further elaborated in the Upanishads. The concept of rta or cosmic order has been an important development of the period.

Brahmanism grew out of Vedism and hence cannot be separated from it by any hard line of demarkation. Its development was gradual and in logical as well as chronological sequency from the stage of cosmoheroic mythology and the magic of the Vedic Samhitas through the stage of mechanical sacerdotalism, to the stage of monistic idealism of the Upanishads. Brahmanism


was rather a philosophy than a religion whose fundamental doctrine was spiritual pantheism. They favoured the concept of inner purification than the outward ritual of the Vedism. The upanisads, the Vedic speculations, proved to be the harbinger of the doctrine of Vedism. In Vedic times there was a perpetual feeling after one supreme being. They felt a spirit, Atman, beyond the cognizance of senses. This mysterious all pervading vague spiritual power and presence became a reality at last. This reality became the Brahman. The Brahmanical religion allowed the Brahmans the highest place in society. They formed the intellectual class among the Aryans and claimed the highest respect.

Brahmanism has four phases. They are the Ritualistic, Philosophical, Mythological and Nomistic Brahmanism. Ritualistic Brahmanism is connected with the mantras or hymn portion of the Vedas. The sacrificial acts to secure the favour of gods were ingrained in the whole Brahmanical system. Ritualism became the marked feature of the period when sacrifice rose to much importance and became so complex and varied in the Age of Mantras. The rise of the priests to conduct sacrifices and raising priesthood to a supreme level were the consequences of the period. The varnasrama dharma was organized during the period.
Philosophical Brahmanism had its rudimentary ideas found running through Vedism. The Upanisads are the special bible of this phase of Brahmanism. It is the purely spiritual doctrine of a universally diffused essence, divested of all ritualistic incrustations and carried into the lofty regions of transcendental speculations. "The upanisads are products of a perfectly spiritual movement which implicitly superceded the under ceremonial religion of the Vedas." 42 It is an enquiry into the best method of escape from the troubles of life, and of deliverance from the necessity of transmigration. "They were compositions which expressed the desire of the personal soul or spirit for deliverance from a long series of separate existence ... and its longing for final union with the supreme soul or spirit of the universe." 43 The master conceptions of the period are Brahman, Atman, Moksa, Sansara, Upasana and Jnana. Gods and priests receded into the background, and sacrifices were looked down. Contemplation took the place of worship and acquisition of divine knowledge took precedence over the performance of rites and ceremonies. Absolute Brahman took the place of Prajapati. Thus the foundation of Hinduism was well and truly laid during this period. Mythological Brahmanism is also the religion of the epics. As the term denotes, the great


epics Ramayana and Mahabharata are the two scriptures through which Mythological Brahmanism reveals itself. It was great renaissance in the history of Hinduism. As a result of the rise and popularity of the two great religions, Buddhism and Jainism, the highly metaphysical and mystical religion of the Hindus began to recede into the background. "With the birth of the heterodox philosophical systems, Lokayata, Jainism and Buddhism, however the attitude of the people towards Vedism, Brahmanism, Varnasrama, fatalism, karma veda, sacerdotalism and supernaturalism began to change."44 To restore the lost prestige, the Absolute Vedantic metaphysics were kept aback and new warm theistic elements in the upanisads were developed. "On account of some of their peculiar characteristics, the upanisadic teachings which were the result of the way of thought of few, could not possibly become translated into the way of life of many."45 The gospel of Gita was a new religion of Bhagavatism in the tradition of Vedism and Brahmanism. "The puranic literature was entirely a reaction against the non-theistic and socially dynamic religious movement."46 By

46. D. R. Jatava, loc. cit.
giving emphasis on the personal aspect of the Deity, the Absolute came to be known as Iswara.* Thus the epics remained faithful to the upanisads and at the same time re-interpreted and appealed to the practical life of the masses. For example the old ideal of Sannyasa** is there, but it is a sannyasa to be practised in active life. The popularisation of the doctrine of Avatara or incarnation is a noteworthy development of the period.

By the end of the epic period, the highly spiritual, impersonal, pantheistic creed of Brahmanism assumed the new phase of Hinduism which appeals to the need of the vast population naturally craving for personal objects of faith and devotion. It was Brahmanism that spread out into a confused tangle of divine personalities and incarnations. The chief point which characterises Hinduism and distinguishes it from Brahmanism

* In the place of the impersonal or supra-personal Absolute, we have now an Iswara, or personal god. For instance the Bhagavan of Gita is not only an imminent principle but also the Friend and Saviour of men. Thus he is not only a creator and destroyer but also a loving protector.

** The spirit of Sannyasa should pervade all the activities of a man, whether he is a student, or a householder, or a recluse. We should learn to live in the world without becoming worldly, as a lotus leaf rests on water without becoming wet.
is that it subordinates the purely spiritual Brahman to the personal deities Siva, Vishnu or to some form of these deities.

Nomistic Brahmanism had its origin in the needs of organized resistance of the growth of rationalistic thought and liberal opinions. It is called nomistic Brahmanism because it represents that period of Indian religious history when the Brahmins composed codes of law and laid down precise rules for the constitution of the Hindu social fabric, for the due co-ordination of its different orders, and for the regulations of everyday domestic life. The three principal codes of law are the codes of Manu, Yajnavalkya and Parasara. The codes of Manu is the most sacred of the three and is held to be the most remarkable literary work of the world. The code of Yajnavalkya is founded on that of Manu, but introduces many additional rules. Parasara's is the most modern and enacts special laws adapted to the fourth age of the world.

It can be concluded that the origin of Hinduism has been attributed to an intermingling of Aryan and Dravidian faiths. "It gradually emerged out of the conflict and amalgamation process which resulted from the invasion of India, around 1500 B.C. by Indo-European Aryans who came in contact with the native
Several popular tribal gods and religions which differed from the Vedic divinities and practices came under the spell of Vedism. But the ascendency of Brahmanism limited the sphere of influence of these tribal religions. The decline of Brahmanism afforded them the opportunity to assert themselves. Consequently the popular religious practices came to be organized into a single but multicharacterised whole.

Kumarila and Sankaracharya contributed a lot to revive traditional Brahmanism. They advanced all sorts of arguments in defence of Hinduistic theology and puranic mythology and endeavoured to re-establish Brahmanism on stronger grounds. Kumarila revived the spirit of Brahmanism for re-establishing the authority of the Vedas. Sri Sankara wished to establish a single irrefutable system in order to put an end to the diversity in faith and bring all the Hindus under a social and religious unity. He preached oneness of all human beings, for the Absolute Brahman resides in all.

The monotheism of the Vedic period continued as the theism of the common people in the post Vedic period. The two

Tantric* cults of Vaisnavism and Saivism contributed the very life of Hinduism. "The religious expression of this cult is in love and adoration, and it implies a belief in the Supreme Person rather than a Supreme Abstraction." 48

The third century B.C. was the most eventful period in the history of Vaisnavism. Vaisnavism first appeared as a religious reform based on the theistic principles. Its early name was "Ekantika Dharma", 49 which means a religion of a single minded love and devotion to one. It then assumed a sectarian form and came to be called Bhagavata religion. "For the foundation of Vaishnava bhakti rises in the Gita, passes through the songs of the Alvars, gathers its waters in the systems of Ramanuja and flows out later as we shall see, in varied streams all over India." 50 "Vaisnavism, or the worship of a single deity as Vishnu revealed through the avatars." 51 The two avatars of Vishnu are

* Tantra is the mode of worship (Cult) necessary for the evolution of human soul.


Rama and Krishna. Vaisnavism emphasises bhakti as the means of redemption. "Bhakti for a personal god constitutes the very kernel of Vaisnavism."

Ramanuja, Madhava, Nimbarka and Vallabha were those who built systems of philosophy as the foundations of Vaisnavism. "It was Ramanuja who gave a social and philosophical basis to the teachings of Vaisnavism."

He preached that karma and jnana help to purify the mind and prepare it for bhakti. Alvars preached the puranic ideal of personal devotion to the deity in Tamil poems of expressed immense religious enthusiasm. The hymns of Alvars are collectively known as the Nalayira Prabhandam.

Saivism is the creed in which Siva is conceived as the supreme god. It has its roots in the past. But as a distinct cult it was strengthened by the rise of Sankara's Advaita system. "The term Saivism refers to a number of distinct but historically related systems comprising of theology, ritual, observations and yoga which have been propagated in India as the teachings of the Hindu deity Siva."

The Kashmir Saivism, Virasaivism and

52. R. N. Dandakhar, op. cit., p. 235.
Saivasidhanta are the different forms of Saivism. Vira Saivism is also known as Lingayatas because they worship the Lingam and carry it with them always hung round their necks. Sakti cult is identical with Kashmir Saivism and it emphasises Sakti - the consort of Siva - as the reality. "In Saktadarsana, the woman, especially as mother, is assigned the first place of honour."55

"The concept of shakti or the Divine Power personified as the Mother-goddess is the foundation of Shaktism."56

The Bhakti movement entered its second phase and was firmly established as a result of Muslim rule. It arose as a movement under the compelling social and religious circumstances. The Bhakti movement sought to refashion the collective life on a spiritual basis, envisaging a society in which men of all creeds shall be able to develop to their full moral and spiritual stature. "The feeling of deep loving adoration which he has for his God in his heart is called bhakti."57 They denounced idol worship. The Vaisnava bhakti launched by Ramananda was divided

into Ramabhaktas and Krishnabhaktas. Ramananda, Tulsidas and Nabhindas were devout bhaktas of Rama while Jayadeva, Nimbarker, Vallabha and Chaitanya were the bhaktas of Krishna. Surdas and Mirabai popularised the cult of Krishna. By the Nirguna - Saguna conception of god, Kabir tried to reform the Hindu society.

Reformation took place whenever there was external or internal danger to Hinduism. With the clash of values between Hinduism and other systems, Hindu leaders tried to strengthen the faith. Brahma samaj founded by Raja Ram Mohan Roy was an organization for the revival of Hinduism. It stood for a purified value system on the basis of Hindu Sastras. It defended Hinduism against the attacks of Christian Missionaries. It tried to organize a society devoted to the essence that there is a similar spiritual core in all religions. "The Brahma Samaj sought to root out polytheistic practices from Hinduism, and thus restore the faith in the Eternal and formless God who is the creator and preserver of the universe." 58 Raja Ram Mohan Roy opposed social customs and evil practices like Sati. He tried to synthesise the most valuable elements in Vedic Hinduism and Protestant

Christianity. Devendranath Tagore following Raja Ram Mohan Roy, established branches of Brahmosamaj all over India.

Dyananda Saraswathi propagated the religious ideals through an organization known as Arya Samaj. The Samaj questioned the superiority of the hereditary priests and maintained the right of every individual to study the sacred scriptures. The Slogan 'Back to Vedas' was inspired with true urge to bring about national unity and to kindle national pride and consciousness among Hindus. Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa through his personal experience of various religious traditions was able to claim that the different religions were different paths to the same goal. His life was a story of religion in practice. The Ramakrishna Mission became an agency for popularising neo-vedantism and defended everything that was associated with Hinduism. Swami Vivekanananda, the disciple of Sri Ramakrishna gave practical expression to his religious ideas. The Vedantic doctrine of the divinity of man is a significant tenant of Vivekanandas teachings. Rabindranath Tagore, Sree Narayana Guru, Mahatma Gandhi and Dr.S.Radhakrishnan were some of the eminent reformists who contributed to the revival of Hinduism towards the modern period.

The main characteristic of Hinduism can be briefly stated as follows. Hinduism has certain unique features. It does
not venerate any particular person as its sole prophet or founder. No date or founder can be cited as marking the beginning of Hinduism. There is no dependable account of the manner in which the religion was established by a person.* "Hinduism has no Pope or Primate." The lack of a personal founder in Hinduism has influenced its character to a great deal. Usually one sees the nature of a religion in the personal life of its founder. While Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Muhammadianism etc. claim to be prophetic, Hinduism and Shintoism are the two religions without a personal founder. But Hinduism is a revealed religion. The intuitive spiritual experiences (aproksha-anubhuti) has been revealed to Rishis and Sages through millennium. In the words of Sri Ramakrishna, the eternal religion, the religion of the Rishis, has been in existence from time out of mind and will exist eternally.

The sources of teachings of Hinduism cannot be found from all in one place, or in one work, or one period of time, or in any sort of written record. It does not recognise any

* It is one of the well-founded religion of the world, which continues to renew itself in the process of time, while remaining absolutely firm in its root, which is the knowledge of reality.

particular book as its absolute authoritative scripture. They are so voluminous that they cannot be gathered together in a single volume. All the known scriptures of Hinduism can be brought under the divisions of either sruti or smriti. Vedas form the sruti and they are the foundations of Hinduism. The authority of the Vedas is primary and whenever any other scripture contradicts, the vedas form authoritative. Hinduism is "primarily based on vedas and upanisads and popularised through the great epics of the Ramayana and Mahabharata including the Bhagavat Gita."60 "The foundation of Sanatana Dharma is Sruti, Smritis are the walls, the Puranas and the Ithihasas are the buttresses or supporters."61 The Sruti takes precedence over the Smruti. The different Agamas, Darsanas, Tantras and Cults also offer valuable guidance for Hinduism. The great Indian epics, the Ramayana and Mahabharata were formulated and became influential literature. A part of Mahabharata, the Bhagavat Gita, became a source of stirring excitement to many Hindu philosophers and religious teachers as well as to people generally.

Hinduism does not recognise any particular religious practice as being obligatory. There is no such thing as

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a uniform stationary unalterable Hinduism, whether in point of belief or practice. Those who call themselves Hindus may not necessarily have much in common with regard to faith or worship. On the one hand it lays down rigorous austerities and penances for the sake of religious discipline, while on the other it seems to permit various sensualistic rites. There is not even a common prayer for Hindus. Hinduism represents different levels of religious beliefs and practices and different stages of cultural development and offers almost endless grades of spiritual possibilities. Though religious practices and beliefs were bound to change according to different times and different climes they could all be comprehended within a longer unity. The religion is one, but the ideas of religions vary.

Hinduism believes in many gods and goddesses and encourages prayer and worship of them. But the many gods are regarded as only many forms and manifestations of one Supreme Spirit with reference to His many powers and attributes. Hinduism is a monistic faith which finds one in all and all in one. "Hindu recognizes one Supreme Spirit though different names one given to it."62 He is worshipped both as personal and impersonal. There

exists in Sanatana Dharma all forms of worship - worship of God with form and worship of God without form as well. On the one hand Hinduism regards god as a superfluity, while on the other it sponsors a deeply emotional theism as the highest form of religion. There is not a unitary idea and the scriptures do not represent a direct succession of ideas nor do they reveal a common pattern which can be traced within them from antiquity to modern times. But we can find an evolution of knowledge of the ideas from polytheism to the Absolute monism which is the central idea in all scriptures. Hinduism is thus "the denial of one entity after another until we came upon a reality that cannot be denied."63

There is not even a specific moral code for all. One cannot speak of any sacrament being obligatory to all the Hindus. The different castes and different stages of human life consist of different moral codes. What is essential for one section of the Hindu community may not be necessarily so for another. An institution appropriate and wholesome for one stage of human development becomes inadequate and even dangerous when

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63. S. S. Rama Rao, et. al., Indian Philosophy Past And Future (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1982), p. 70.
another stage has been reached. Though the social structure of Hinduism has many castes, there is only one society.

The different paths that lead to the same single goal also reveal the variety in Hinduism. All means to the end are equally approved. Rig Veda declares the fundamental principle that the Truth is one (Ekam Sat Vipra bahudha Vadhandhi). Different paths are laid down in order to suit with the different tastes and temperaments, abilities and aptitudes of the multitude. The disinterested performance of duties (nishkama karma) leads one to liberation. Bhakti marga or devotion to god is another path for liberation. The eight fold path of raja-yoga or concentration is rather a difficult path in which perfect control of body, senses, mind and passions are maintained. Sri Aurobindo Ghosh prescribes integral yoga which is effective in raising life to the sublime realm of consciousness. Gita says "However men approach Me, even so do I welcome them, for the path men take from every side is Mine." Sree Narayana Guru proclaims that whatever may be the path chosen, it must lead to the welfare of mankind. Hinduism unlike other religions does not assert that the final

64. Gita, Cha. IV, Verse: 11.

"Ye Yathā mām prapadyante tāṃs tathāi’va bhajāmy aham mama vartma ‘nvartante manushyāḥ partha Saivasah."
emancipation is possible only through its means alone. The philosophical knowledge or jnana is the most important and difficult of all paths and it imparts one the supreme reality; when jnana is attained all the other paths become degraded. Hence Hinduism extols moksa, jnana and sanyasa as the highest religious ideals. The different paths are by no means exclusive of and antagonistic to one another. They are inter-related and complementary.

Appreciation is the flower of Hindu culture. It has always been variable, elastic and receptive. Elasticity and responsiveness to the needs of different communities and to the demands of different ages and regions have been a remarkable feature of Hinduism. Hinduism allows absolute freedom to the rational mind of man. There is never undue restraint upon the freedom of thought feeling and will. The extremely catholic and liberal nature of Hinduism is revealed through its innumerable religious ideas and sects that have been flourishing in India. "Hinduism has within itself all types of religions such as Theism, Atheism, Polytheism, Advaitism, Dwaitism, Saivism, Varnavism and so forth." Assimilation and not destruction is the watch word of Hinduism. It accepts the truths of other religions, if they fit in with the essentials of Hinduism. Hinduism stands for

synthetic unity, spiritual hospitality and universal love and its genius consists in harmonising the differences between alien religions by intuitioning their underlying unity. It has been exceedingly tolerant towards other religions and tolerant towards itself. It's characteristic is all comprehensiveness and receptivity. The keynote of Hinduism is one of good will and respect for all religions. To the Hindu all religions are the different attempts of the human soul to grasp and realise the infinite, each being determined by the condition of birth and association. This convinced the Hindu that the religion in which a person is born is the best for him and that all religions are paths flowing from God.

Hinduism is thus not based on the principle of uniformity but on that of unity in variety. All the deities are organized and united in the body of Hinduism. Oneness is the underlying principle throughout the religion. It is "a thread of harmony." 66 Unity in diversity is the glory of Hinduism. Variations are ornaments to it. "The unity of Hinduism is not one of unchanging creed or a fixed deposit of doctrines, but it is the unity of a continuously changing life." 67


Judaism is a Semetic religion in the sense that the Hebrews belonged to the Semetic race that included the Assyrians, Babylonians, Moabites, Amorites, Edonites etc. "The Hebrews was originally a part of the Semetic tribes which wandered from Mesopotamia into the land of Canaan." 68 "it is one of the most ancient of the monotheistic religions." 69 "It appears to be the standard example of a moral religion to be more precise, of ethical monotheism." 70 The monotheistic Semetic religions like Christianity and Islam have their origin from Judaism. Hence Judaism is considered as the major source of the religious tradition of the Western world.

It is a universal living faith and the religion of the people, a culture, a civilization. Accordingly Judaism is a historical religion. The relation between the people and faith is unique in Judaism. "The religion is inconceivable without a continuous living Jewish people." 71 Their history for about one


thousand six hundred years from 1800 B.C. to 200 B.C. reveals a constant and direct unfolding of a divine plan not only for Israel but for all mankind. The historical role of the Jewish people rests on the belief that they have been chosen* to receive, cherish and study the Torah, to practise its precepts and to teach them diligently to their children and eventually to whole mankind. "Israel was God's chosen spouse, as such they could be neither widowed nor divorced, but only bidden to return God's love and to return to God's love."72 "The core of their enduring unity has been the strong conviction of the divine election (choice) as a people for a very special destiny."73 They considered themselves to be the chief instruments of the divine revelation** "God had revealed himself in a general way through his created works but that he had made a special revelation through the Hebrew people, a

* The Jews believe that they were chosen by God because they had been the only one race who firmly and continuously for over a thousand years worshipped one god. It was their purity of faith and their high ideals of life and conduct made them the chosen people.


73. Winston L. King, op. cit., p. 177.

** The revelation is the divine activity manifesting itself in the creation and continuation of the objects of the natural world.
people chosen for this very purpose."  

"Israel was the only ancient people through whom God was manifesting himself."  

"Judaism is a scheme willed by God for the establishment of a divine order, the kingdom of Heaven in fulfilment of His eternal purpose."  

"A Jew is a Jew by birth and by action, by participation in Judaism, not by stating his faith or reciting a creed."  

"Judaism points forward to a state of human perfection and bliss to be brought about by the complete unfolding of the divine in man or the revelation of God's full glory."  

The old Testament, which alone constitutes the Jewish scriptures, is the primary and principal source of Judaism. The Jews never used the term old Testament for their scriptures. But it was a later designation by the Christians to show their

75. ibid., p. 264.
identity from the Jews. The records we get of the Jews are from the five divisions of the Old Testament namely the Patriarchs, the Exodus, the Monarchy, the Prophets and the Exile. "The Hebrew-Jewish pattern is more familiar to us by virtue of its Old Testament portraiture." It has been written about a thousand years before Christ and by many authors at different times and for various reasons. In the early stage there was no written accounts. The experiences were transmitted through oral traditions such as songs and ballads. They were memorised and retold during family gatherings. The Old Testament is a record of the covenant between God and His chosen people. "The books of the Old Testament do not merely tell about life; they grew out of life." The Jews divided the Old Testament into three divisions. The first is the Torah or the five books of Moses. It is also known as the Pentatench. The second portion is known as the N'kee-un-meaning prophets. The third section includes the messages known as ketubim. The initial letters of these divisions were taken and the term 'Tenakh' was coined by them.

One must turn to Jewish people as a whole in order to uncover the sources of Jewish faith and doctrine. For it was in and through the living experiences of the people of God that the fundamental truths were manifested. History reveals that Judaism developed from a systematised and codified form of the pre-exilic Hebrewism. The name Hebrew is derived from an ancient designation of foreign groups frequently called "Habiru".\(^{81}\) Habiru is an old Babylonian term which means nomad, bandit or mercenary. Its Hebrew equivalent is 'ibri' which came from a verb 'abar' meaning 'to crossover'. This general description for any who crossed over a border was applied aptly to invading Israelites centuries later. The history of the Hebrew people occurred in 'the fertile crescent' where mingling of many ideas and cultures took place.

The Jews emerged themselves as a separate people when the patriarch Abraham received a call from God to separate himself from his idolatrous neighbours in Chaldea, and to go to the land of Canaan. Genesis\(^{*}\) deals with the beginning of the

\(^{81}\) ibid., p. 56.

* Genesis recounts the beginning of the world and human culture under the divine and more particularly what God was trying to do in history through his covenant people the Hebrews.
divine revelation through the descendants of Abraham. Under the leadership of Abraham the people migrated from Ur of Chaldea to their promised land. The city of Haran had a profound influence on the Hebrew people. It was considered to be their real fatherland since generations of the patriarchs used to have their wives from Haran. Abraham received from God the confirmation of his promise at Shechem on the way towards Canaan. "Unto thy seed I will give this land."82 Thus Canaan became their promised land and their permanent territory. "Abraham became convinced through various experiences that God has given to him and his descendants the land of Canaan, as an eternal possession."83 As a token of the protection God had rendered the people they have to submit to two conditions. The first one was the change of the names to Abraham and Sarah from Abram and Sarai. The second one was that Abraham should consent to be circumcised together with all his class. Circumcision was the sign of the covenant, the painful mark of submission to the will of God.

Abraham was regarded as the father of the Hebrew people. "The first person in the Bible to bear the name Hebrew was Abraham - afterwards he was regarded as the father of the

82. Genesis, 12.

Hebrew people." He was considered as the first patriarch of the Hebrews. "The spiritual resources of Judaism date back to Abraham the patriarch." Moreover he is considered as the father of three world religions. "Abram, exalted father or Abraham, father of the multitude, became the founder, in a sense of the three world religions, for to him, Judaism, Christianity and Mohamadanism trace their origin." The line of patriarchs extended from Abraham to his son Issac and from Issac to Jacob. It ended with Joseph, the son of Jacob. It was from Jacob that the chosen people were to receive their name Israel. "The qualifying term of Israel occurs first in the story of Jacob, the time at which, it would seen, the group reached its maximum degree of self-consciousness." With Jacob God renewed His covenant that not only one generation, but a company of nations and kings should emanate from Israel. Thus he became the father of twelve tribes.

When the Hebrews migrated to Canaan their religion was one of multiple gods, and the defied forces of nature. The air, sky and water received offerings of honey, wine and date cakes. It was from a polytheistic background where the moon-god Nannar was recognized as the Chief God, that Abraham came. The patriarchal religion was much influenced by the Canaanite religion. Worship of tree as sacred was a part of the Hebrew religion in the age of the patriarchs. 'The terebinth of Moreh' and 'the terebinth of Mamre' were examples of such holy trees. The God was known to the patriarchs as El Shaddai, and the name Yahweh was not known to them. God revealed this fact to Moses and in Exodus it is said as such. "I am the Lord, I appeared to Abraham, Issac and Jacob as God Almighty (El Shaddai), but did not make myself known to them by my name Yahweh (the Lord)." The religion of Abraham was rather a prototype of all that was highest in the old Semetic religion. It served as a foundation for later developments. The strong consciousness about the God, the act of separating himself from the corrupt polytheism and the alien and highly developed civilization was the development of a monotheistic principle. Each of the patriarchs saw the deity

88. Genesis, 6-2-4.
revealed to him in a very special and highly personal way. Thus we have El of Abraham, Awe of Issac, God of Jacob etc. The age of Patriarchs was of importance in the development of Judaism, since it was a period when God was patiently preparing a people through whom He was to reveal himself during the centuries to follow.

Genesis ends with the Hebrews in Egypt enjoying a privileged position under the care of Joseph, the last patriarch. But sufferings and hardships followed them. They were made slaves by the Pharaoahs of Egypt. "An Egyptian Pharoah whose passion for building large cities and monumental temples prompted him to draft his subjects into forced labour and slavery. Among them were the Israelites, progeny of Jacob's descendants." Moreover the Pharoah ordered his people to kill all the male children of the Hebrews. It was at the time of oppression and hardships that Moses was charged with the task of freeing the Hebrews from Egypt. The encounter of Moses with the divine emanating in the burning bush not only changed his life, but altered the destiny of the Hebrews in Egypt. It took dogged persistence and tremendous power

of miracle to convince the obstinate rulers of the cause of Hebrews. A series of calamities that visited on the Egyptians made the Pharaohs finally set the stage for the birth of the Hebrew nation. It was through the tenth and the last plague which killed all the first born males of the Egyptians that Moses was able to rescue the Hebrews. "It was by virtue of his humility and trust in God that he was able to do so great a task." Thus God came to the rescue with the assurance of his unalterable purpose to respect his ancient covenant and bring the Israelites out of Egypt and into their promised land. "It was the sagacity and skill of Moses, together with the timely intervention of their God, which brought about the phenomenal Exodus of the Hebrew people." Their God also came to their rescue at the Sea of Reeds by moving the sea by a strong East Wind to cross it and thus get away from the attacking Egyptians. Israelites considered this miraculous incident as a sign of Yahweh's presence with them.

Moses then led them to Mount Sinai a place of much religious importance for the Hebrews. It was at Mount Sinai that Moses united, the uncultured, disunited and contentious people into a single unit on the basis of a religious covenant made between them and God. "Moses succeeded in unifying Israelites on the strength

90. Heber Cyrus Snell, op. cit., p. 32.
91. G. Hade Man, et. al., op. cit., p. 59.
of their conviction that their God had great power and that he would save them from bondage." The Ten Commandments, the laws for the people by which they might live their lives have been given to Moses by God at Mount Sinai. The confrontation between God and the Jews resulted in a covenant. With the enactment of the covenant Israel and Jahweh adopted each other. Jahweh became their God and they became His people "... they received the revelation of the Law including the famous Ten Commandments, and made a Solemn compact with God to accept his law." "Convinced by the great power of Jahweh the Israelites were soon formally to accept him as their God and his laws as their codes of behaviour." The Ark of the covenant formed the visible reminder of their momentous experience with the God. As a symbol of the presence of God they carried the Ark in their wanderings and battles to its final destination in the Temple of Jerusalem. Having achieved his great task of freeing the Israelites from Egypt and leading them to their promised land, Moses met with his


end at a place called Moab. Palestine had been forbidden to Moses by God. It was Joshua who led his people to Palestine.

The history of Israel begins with Moses as he was the originator of her national unity and the religion. "Although Judaism is the religion of a people who trace their origins back to Abraham (1750 B.C.), the real beginnings probably are to be linked with Moses." He was the founder of the Hebrew faith Yahwism, and has been revered as the law giver of Israel and the first of the prophets. "He was not called a prophet at the time when he lived and he is generally regarded as the law giver rather than a prophet." Many of the religious beliefs and practices which characterised the Hebrews before Moses persisted. There were so many new and creative factors in Hebrew religion as a result of the life and work of Moses. "The religion which Moses proclaimed was not monotheism but henotheism or monolatry." Yahweh was to be worshipped to the exclusion of all other deities.


Holiness was a character of Yahweh in the Mosaic period. He was a zealous, jealous mighty God who thundered with his voice and sent forth lightning and fire revealing himself in a 'burning bush' and in a 'pillar of fire'. He was a mountain God and native deity manifesting himself in volcanic activity, in earthquakes and wind. A means of communication with Yahweh and origin of a group of priests were the consequences of the Mosaic religion. The duty of the priests was to care for the sacred emblem (Ark of the covenant) and to regulate the approach of the devout worshippers of Yahweh.

"The historical interval between Moses and Samuel from the thirteenth to the eleventh century B.C. is identified as the period of Judges."98 The period of Judges is from Joshua to King Samuel. The Book of Judges reveals the course of Judaism followed during the period of Judges. Judges were local military heroes who came from the common people as agents of God. They were conscious of their being commissioned by God to ensure for the people a home land of their own and to secure for them protection from the hands of their enemies. "The judges were local heroes who in the name of Yahweh led some part of the tribe

98. Solomon Nigosian, Judaism, op. cit., p. 72.
to meet these threats to their liberty or existence." The Israelites enjoyed complete autonomy during the period of Judges. The legal system of Israel began to take a definite shape during the period of Judges. There were no central capital or shrine for all Israelites. The Bible says that the period of Judges was a time of peril and unfaithfulness to the Lord. There was a tendency to worship the Baal or God of the natives. The most famous Judges were Ehud, Giden, Jephhat and Samson.

The period of Judges is followed by the period of kings. It began with King Saul. The rise of monarchy is described in the books of Samuel. Samuel has been one of the greatest characters of the Hebrew history, a seer, prophet, priest and maker of kings. "Samuel's principal achievement was the inauguration of the Hebrew monarchy, he selected anointed both Saul and David." He "... was instrumental in instituting kingship in Israel." Samuel established the kingdom of Israel and gave it a new unity and kept her from absorption by her neighbours.

100. Meredith F. Eller, op. cit., p. 74.
It was under Saul that Israel learned the value of unity under one king and one God. Saul began his career as a 'judge' and ended it as a 'king'. The monarchy was introduced through a special act, as a result of the craving of the people for a king. "There shall be a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go forth before us and fight over battles." 102 Saul was chosen the first king of Israel about 1036 B.C." 103 David succeeded Saul and established the most significant rule in Israel. He laid entirely new foundation to the history of Israel. David was known as the 'mighty man of war'. He established the kingdom upon the ancient foundations laid by Moses and unified the nation under Yahweh. A real governmental organization and a central capital with an official court was established by him. An outstanding achievement of David was the conquest of Jerusalem and bringing the Ark of covenant to Jerusalem and placing it in the tabernacle of God. Thus Jerusalem became the political, social and religious centre of nation and it became the primary dwelling place of Yahweh and a centre of worship. The Jewish kingdom achieved its greatest extent, power and wealth under the able administration of Solomon.

102. I Samuel, 8-20.

103. G. Hade Man, et. al., op. cit., p. 62.
The outstanding contribution to the cultural and religious life of the Hebrews was the erection of the Temple at Jerusalem. The Temple thus became the house of God, sheltering the most sacred possessions like the Ark of the covenant, and eventually became the national shrine. The period of the kings is called the Golden Age of Jewish history. "Never before David and Solomon did there exist a single kingdom embracing the greater part of the country."\textsuperscript{104} After the reign of Solomon the Israel nation became divided into Northern and Southern states.

In about 721 B.C. the Assyrians conquered the ten Northern tribes. The upper classes were exiled and the common people were assimilated into their empire. Thus the religion and people of Judaism lost the ten tribes. A Neo Babylonian, Nebuchanezzar, conquered the Southern tribes in about 586 B.C. and all the Hebrews were taken captives. This is what is known as 'exile' which caused the 'dispersion' of the Jews throughout the world. Nebuchanezzar destroyed the temple, the Ark and the city walls. Thus the Jewish empire was at an end and Yahweh worship was ruined. In about 528 B.C. the Zoroastrian king Cyrus conquered

\textsuperscript{104} W. L. Wardle, The History And Religion In Israel (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950), p. II.
Babylonia and restored the Jews to their home land. The return from exile came to be known as the post exilic period. This event stimulated a revival of great religious fervour among the Hebrews. Under the leadership of Ezara, Haggai, Zechariah and Nehemia they began to reconstruct the Temple and a priestly state was established. The high priests became the religious and civil rulers of Jerusalem. Priests and Levities were placed in charge of the ceremonies and temple property. The scribes became the expert interpreters of Torah and became known as teachers or Rabbis. "An elaborate system of Jewish religious practices, rites and ceremonies came into existence, which in the fifth century A.D. were gathered into one large volume called the Talmud, a book of instruction which for the Jews at times took precedence over the Bible."105 In 332 B.C. the Jewish theocracy came under the political control of Greece. Their cultural, religious and social influences had a far-reaching effect on Hebrew thought. After the conquest of Alexander the Great the Jews suffered much persecution and violence and were forced to worship alien Gods and were forbidden from the observances like Sabbath. This indignation of the Jews passed all bounds and they revolted and recaptured the city in about 165 B.C. and the temple and its worship were restored to the Jews. Again the Jews came under the rule of

Romans in about 63 B.C. The Romans destroyed the Temple in
Jerusalem which filled every Jewish home with horror and dismay.
For they had regarded Jerusalem as the heart of Israel and the
ruined Temple became the citadel of Judaism. Though they had
begun to settle down in distant cities, the inspired Jews
determined to defend their faith against every conceivable enemy.
"After the dispersal the Jews lived in Exile, but they continued
to regard Jerusalem as their rightful capital."106

The prophetic movement forms the climax of
Biblical history by the validity of the teachings and the power
of eloquence. Prophecy began under the kings when the cult of
Yahweh was undergoing dangers. "In the middle of the eighth
century, however, there developed a new and very different phase
in which the religious progress of Israel could be seen through
the lives and teachings of a small number of great men."107 The
word prophet is a Greek term meaning 'one who speaks for' or 'on
behalf of another'. The accurate Hebrew translation of the word
is 'nabi' which means 'to speak out' or 'speak forth'. The

106. Katherine Savage, op. cit., p. 166.
prophets were men who were sanctified by God and who received the communications from God by means of visions, either internal or external to themselves. "A prophet is essentially one who is called to speak or proclaim for God against all unrighteous and disloyalty to Yahweh."108 The Hebrew prophets were distinctly religious enthusiasts who babbled over, often boiled hotly, and bravely spoke out for God."109

The institution of prophecy has a peculiar significance of Judaism. They have contributed much to the enrichment of the Hebrew religion and thus towards the world community. The recorded messages and oracles of these prophets are counted as the greatest treasures of the Hebrew race. "Hebrew prophets were moral mentors who had the gift of seeing behind the surface character of events and of judging what course these events would take if men in power persisted in wrong courses."110 "The development of the conception of Yahweh into that of an

effective Agency for the conservation of the higher moral values, as has been said, was largely the work of the prophets. 111 There were professional prophets and vocational prophets. The professional were not specially called by God, but met the challenges of the time and dedicated their lives to the service of Yahweh. Vocational prophets were those who received the revelation of the holiness of God and His will and were inspired to speak in His voice. Though the prophets differed from one another, there were certain common characteristics. Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel were some of the important prophets. Their contribution to the field of moral and religious teachings were among the greatest ever known. "The spiritual vision and the moral force of the prophets was the major factor in the transformation of Judaism into a religion of universal moral law and righteousness." 112

The king, the priest and the prophets worked in close connection with one another. The message of Yahweh was brought to the king either by the priest or the prophet. Priests


were conceived with ritualistic observances and the prophets with the achievement of justice and social righteousness. Both worked towards the purpose of bringing the people into harmony with the will of Yahweh. They differed in their inspirations and methods used for carrying their instruction to the people. Priests acted through tradition and experience while the prophets used personal inspiration. A prophet often had to encounter with the priest and king when the interpretation of the divine will became so directly opposed to the wishes of the king and the priest.

The first of the prophets associated with the reign of kings was Nathan. Elijah was a great prophet who condemned the king and the queen for their worship of Baal. "Elijah protested against regarding the ethical religion of Yahweh as just another variety of nature worship."113 "It was from Amos onwards that we have written records of the prophecy. Amos is remarkable among the prophets as he was the first among them whose utterances have been preserved in writing.114 He considered Yahweh not only as the god of Israel and Judah but of all nations as well. He

113. Arche J. Bahm, op. cit., p. 245.

was known as the prophet of righteousness and laid the foundation for spiritual renaissance. Hosea was another prophet whose most valuable contribution to the religion was his concept of Yahweh as a god of love. "For I desire, steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings."\textsuperscript{115} Isaiah added the notion of holiness to God. "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory."\textsuperscript{116} It was through Jeremiah that God warned the Israelites of the consequences of their transgression. Ezekiel proclaimed that Israel will be restored to the Holyland and both the northern and southern kingdoms will be reunited.

Judaism appears to be the standard example of a moral religion, to be more precise, of ethical monotheism. It has not been the official religion of any nation until the creation of the modern state of Israel in 1948. Since the destruction of Jerusalem on A.D. 70, the Jews have been dispersed all over the world. This event is known as 'diapora'. Religion is not something separate from culture. The story of religion is the story of a long development. It began with the primitive religion of the earliest Hebrew nomads and it culminated in the ethical monotheism of the great Hebrew prophets. Judaism had its roots in

\textsuperscript{115} Hosea, 6-6.

\textsuperscript{116} Isaiah, 6-3.
the primitive polytheism and animism of the Semetic nomads. It was synthesis of the religion of Syria and adjacent regions. Canaanite influence was prominent during the formative period. "There was in the fifteenth century a sort of monotheism among the Canaanites and that this type of religion had a deep influence upon the Israelites."\textsuperscript{117} It was the Babylonian captivity that brought about major changes in Hebrew life and thought. During exile they made much introspection and kept away from the religious habits and customs of the Babylonians. They also absorbed many of the Babylonian ideas and returned with a new vigour and intense national spirit. "The evolution of Judaism from the Hebraic religion was stimulated by Babylonian influences, brought to Judea by the Hebrews, who were sent back after the captivity."\textsuperscript{118}

Judaism became in the full sense a personal religion without ceasing to be a national religion. The personal relation between individual man and God is the essence of the religion. Judaism has succeeded in achieving a unity of belief and observances among the Jews in all their wide dispensation.

\textsuperscript{117} Adolphe Lods, \textit{Israel From Its Beginning To The Middle Of The Eighth Century} (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1953), p. 143.

Wherever a Jew goes he finds the same system of domestic observances in effect. The synagogues he finds everywhere offers the same form of service with only minor variations. The unity and universality are based upon uniformity of observances. Ritual has an essential moral purpose. Its aim is the purification of man than propitiation of God.

The unity of God and the choice of Israel are the two principles on which the foundation of Judaism rests. God is an indivisible unity. The belief in the one and only God has long been an inalienable possession handed down from the remotest age. The belief of the returned exiles on a supreme God. Supreme not only for Israel but for the whole world, is unshaken and permanent. Judaism believes that there can be but one religion probably deserving the name, for God is one and it is revealed by the God. The fundamental relation between God and His people is legal and national. Religion meant a church based on a certain law and code. The law is the embodiment of the Divine wisdom and as such it is not subject to change like other laws. "The law was a system of opinion and of practice and of feeling in which the great principles of morality, the deepest concern of spiritual religion, the genuinely essential requirements of ritual, all found a permanent place."119