CHAPTER III

Critique on Later Hick

"the individual's next life will, like the present life, be a bounded span with its own beginning and end. In other words, I am suggesting that it will be another mortal existence."\(^1\)

The above stated view of later-Hick, on the subject of "life-after" is that, he affirms the possibility of life hereafter. However, it is not free from problems or totally devoid of any argument against the subject. He has retreated from the first line of attack and is no longer in the camp of those that attack resurrection. However he has not joined the camp of those who accept resurrection, completely. In other words, even if he appears to be within the camp, he still continues the attack, with the difference that the attack is from within. And therefore the consideration of this new attack, which calls for a distinction between the present life and the future life, becomes the subject matter of our immediate concern.
II A. PRESENT LIFE AND FUTURE LIFE ("A quantum leap")

The earlier mentioned words of Hick suggests, that Hick is making an attempt to understand the nature of the future life. In order to do so, he says that (resurrected life) or future life is something, which has predicates of the present life. The predicate of birth, death, time, and mortality which are easily understood in this life, are being predicated to resurrected life as well. In other words Hick is attempting to bring out the characteristics of resurrected life or future life.

In doing so later Hick is still in the same spirit of trying to define resurrected life, or life hereafter, within the bounds of time. As seen earlier in the previous chapter. Hick had the idea of eternity, in terms of "an age" or aeon, which he still has when he says, 'that the next life will be bounded by a span with its own beginning and end'. In other words. Hick is
suggesting that one's death in the present life, is a birth into the next life; where again the individual should have an "age", wherein he could progress spiritually, and then the end, is anticipated for that next life. The "end" in the next life is possibly the death in that life, which could mean the birth-into some other life, if one did not "live" a successful "moral and spiritual life" even in that life. This process could go on and on, until one has exhausted all the possible "other-life(s)" and be possibly back in this earthly life.

Hick here is suggesting the re-incarnational scheme of the Vedantic philosophy, which indeed is a quantum leap from Western Philosophy (Christian) to Indian Philosophy (Hindu).
II B. FURTHER SPIRITUAL GROWTH:

The idea of re-incarnation that seems suggestive in the earlier section, appears to take deeper roots when Hick explains about life after death as a

"process in which further moral and spiritual growth is possible . . ."

Hick is of the opinion that in this present life, with all its limitations, man has not been able to fully realize the God-given potentialities, and therefore the present life must continue beyond death, in which "growth" is possible. Hick, who belongs to the Christian tradition, is fully aware for himself, that he is suggesting a purgatorial scheme of the Catholic tradition and immediately withdraws himself from that tradition, by saying that the purgatorial scheme of the Catholic tradition is "spiritually static".2

Therefore a

"further temporal process in which growth is possible."
This type of survival is questionable, because "growth" can be understood only in relation to a world of limitation. It becomes more bizarre to conceive of a discarnate person, 'to grow' into a full personality, when devoid of some body of limitation. Growth is not merely increased intellectual, but suffering and sacrifice, in a world of limitation. In other words, in this world of limitations alone, can the meaning of 'growth' be fully realised.

If Hick is anticipating after death, a

"future temporal process in which moral and spiritual growth is possible..."

the only possible way, is by the process of re-incarnation. This implies, donning a fresh human body by the soul (on as many occasions, as needed by the individual) to 'realise the God-given potentialities'.
In this scheme of reincarnation, the (soul) or the individual is ensured of the growth of the soul, whereby the soul is able to attain its ultimate fulfillment. This way of rebirth is envisaged in the Vedantic thought (Hinduism). The general teaching of Hinduism in relation to reincarnation, is that, in each successive re-incarnation, one repays the past debts which are caused by the Kamma (action) are totally cleared up. Only then can the soul attain its Moksa or salvation.

This reincarnational scheme implies a cyclic view of life, as opposed to the linear view, which is one of the hall marks of Western (theistic) religion and of Christianity as well.

Further more, the Christian tradition would consider this scheme as redundant and unnecessary, because the atoning sacrifice of Christ ensures, (at least for the believer) a blissful heaven at one's death, or the
torments of hell and eternal damnation, if one is not a believer.

In other words, the linear view according to the Christian tradition is this, that the present life is for once and only once, and not repetitive. If the individual in the present life, does not realise the God-given potentiality, he will not have another 'term poral process', to grow spiritually and morally.
II C. THE IRRELIGIOUS CONCERN (The Personal Immortality)

Reincarnation, which was seen as suggestive in the first section, becomes evident in the second section. We now proceed to the next section, where we discuss, what Hick calls as, an 'irreligious concern'. Hick is of the opinion that if the anticipated resurrected life of immortality is a personal one, then it is not only selfish, but an irreligious concern of the little ego. A careful analysis of this leads us to the inevitable conclusion, that Hick is once again making reference to Indian thought, or to be precise the Vedantic view of 'Atman and Brahman', when he emphasises self-transcendence of transcending ego-boundaries, many-in-one, one-in-many. Transcending ego-boundaries or one's own self, means the denial of individuality or individual personality. And merging one's individual self in unity with other selves at death, or in the life hereafter.
Hick here is referring to the Indian Philosophy of the advaita Vedanta, where the Brahman is the ultimate reality, which on account of the (avidya) ignorance gives rise to an illusory world and individuals. The illusion of the 'individual' personal is the Jiva and will persist so long as the Jiva realises his identity with the real self Brahman. The self-realisation is the individual's salvation (moksa), where he ceases to exist as a separate person and becomes one with the Brahman, and is delivered from the endless cycle of births and rebirths. In short, the salvation (moksa) for the individual is the merging of the finite ego-consciousness into the infinite consciousness.
III D. THE VEDANTIC VIEW: (Reincarnation Theory)

We have drawn attention to the 'quantum leap' made by Hick from Western to Indian thought. It would be in order in this section to briefly outline the Vedantic view of life-hereafter,

Vedantic philosophy falls into two broad divisions, namely, Advaita (non-dualism) and Vishishta-dvaita (qualified non-dualism). Shankara being the outstanding exemplar of the former and Ramanuja of the latter. It must be pointed out that the differences in the corpus of their respective teachings notwithstanding, the two share an essentially similar view of reincarnation. We shall first outline the distinct features of their positions before turning to their views on reincarnation.

According to Advaita Vedanta, the ultimate reality is Brahman, pure and undifferentiated consciousness. This reality is also called 'Satcltananda'. 
meaning a trinity of being, consciousness and bliss. Further, Brahman is here also referred to as **Nirguna Brahman** and **Saguna Brahman**.

Nirguna Brahman transcends all qualities while Sugana Brahman possesses qualities, and is Brahman as known to man, is God (Isvara). Isvara is the personification of the ultimate reality.

Maya, a creative power of the Brahman, expresses itself in the existence of the universe, in which the "infinite Consciousness", in association with maya, results in the plurality of "finite consciousness", the jivas or the jivatmans. These finite consciousness, being the products of maya, are wrapped in the illusion of separatness from the infinite or the one universal consciousness, namely, Brahman, whereas in reality, there is a unique identity of the jiva and Brahman.

It follows that the jivatmans are the pure
consciousness of Brahman, but are limited because of maya. plurality and inviduality are ultimately illusory, and once the jivas or jivatmans attain the true consciousness of themselves at atman, the distinction ceases.

The theory of karma and rebirth, is primarily concerned with the Jiva attaining its true self-consciousness, through a succession of re-births, and culminating in the attainment of moksa (liberation), or the realisation of identity with the sole ultimate reality, the removal of the illusory sense of separateness.

While the foregoing is the position of Advalta Vedanta, Vishishtadvaita affirms that the Brahman is personal and is known as Isvara or Bhagavan (lord). It is He who was created the multitude of jivas, as an act of his divine play. In other words, the multitude of individual souls is an expression of His creativity and of the superabundant energy of His infinite divine life. The samsara, the cycle of rebirths, is
not actually a purposive activity with an eschatological end, but is, in itself, divine play, an end-in-itself. Therefore, it is without beginning and end. Maya, too, is the exercise of divine creativity within which souls are moving through illusion towards a conscious communion with God. Each individual Jiva may attain liberation, worshipping and reflecting the glory of God; yet there is an infinite number of them, in the never-ending process of samsara.

i. BRAHMAN:

As we have seen, Brahman is the ultimate reality, the highest transcendental truth, which is beyond all attributes, is pure bliss, pure consciousness, one-without-a-second.

However, is this pure consciousness thinks itself to be a God, the clarity of a pure spiritual being is clouded, and this cloud is a self-delusion on a cosmic scale, becoming forgetful of the true state and nature of the Brahman, on account of the maya the cosmic aspect of ignorance or avidya, resulting a plurality of
ii. JIVA/JIVATMAN:

The Jiva, in reality, is uniquely identical with the Brahman or Atman. But it is maya that has caused the plurality of finite consciousness. The separation of Jiva and Brahman is only illusory. The Jiva is conditional, finite and many. It is described as a finite individual self, a reflection of the Self/Brahman.

Brahman is transcendental, while Jiva is practical. The jivatman, is identified with the mental and vital self of man and the Brahman is identified as cosmic soul. Further, the jivatman is identified with our body and the Brahman with the cosmos as a whole. The whole world is in the process of the finite striving to become the infinite, and this tension is found in the individual self.

The striving jivatman is responsible for its present state, whether of joy or of suffering, for
it is karma, i.e., the chain of action in previous lives that has led to the present state of existence.

The present existential state is justified in terms of the past life which, in turn, refers back to an earlier one, and so on in a regressive manner.

The discordant, striving nature of the individual jivatman will continue so long as there is the avidya or ignorance caused by maya. Just as Atman and the Brahman, are identical, so are maya and avidya. What Avidya is to the Jiva, maya is to Brahman, for it is a creative force attributed to (Saguna) Brahman.

The struggle for liberation from avidya is, in other words, the struggle of the individual self to be identified with the ultimate Self. This will occur when the inner (God) realises itself, or when illusion (maya) is purged.

iii. REINCARNATION:

The purging of maya and the eradication of avidya
is not something that is achieved within the span of one human life, but is a gradual process, occurring over a succession of rebirths (the cycle of samsara). For jivatman is able to exercise real, though limited, freedom only in this human birth on earth. It is here alone that jivatman undergoes stages of development towards the ultimate self-awareness which will culminate in moksa or liberation (mukti), i.e., the realisation of identity with the ultimate Reality.

iv. MOKSA:

The Vedantic view of moksa is that of the highest condition, marked by a disintegration of individuality. It is attained through knowledge, the knowledge of the true - self. Knowledge itself is construed as liberation. Brahman's knowledge culminates in a stage where there is no difference between the knower, the known and knowledge.
From a transcendental viewpoint, self, Brahman and liberation are the same. The Self is Brahman, or the Atman becomes one with the Brahman. The plurality of finite consciousness is annihilated by the removal of the ignorance (avidya) which set up boundaries. The liberated self incorporates everyone in the self. This is the individual salvation (moksa) or deliverance from the samsara, the end-less cycle of rebirths, and the merger of the finite ego-consciousness with the infinite consciousness.

From what we have outlined, it follows that Vedantic Philosophy clearly enunciates a belief in afterlife, whether in terms of the cycle of birth and rebirths or in terms of the ultimate union of the self with Brahman. In either case, the notion of afterlife is affirmed.
III E. AMALGAMATION OF THE CHRISTIAN AND THE VEDANTIC VIEW:

Hick's reference to the Vedantic view of life is vividly seen in his emphasis of 'transcending ego boundaries' and the "corporate living - one - in - many" and a "further temporal process", is the life-hereafter. In short, the merging of the finite ego consciousness with the infinite consciousness.

In order to justify this new stand, Hick is amalgamating the Christian thought with the Vedantic thought by saying that the teachings of Jesus, support this kind of ego transcendence.

For instance, he quotes Jesus' sayings

"love thy neighbour as they self,"
"forgive with out limit",
"do not retaliate", etc. and says, if one follows these fully, one has

"ceased to be a self seeking ego".
These teachings of Jesus are indeed a challenge to the little ego, to overcome egoity and also self renunciation. But the error of Hick's justification is that, Jesus no doubt challenged the 'little ego' but in the context of its humanlife or present life, or in the interest of corporate life of perfect humanity.

No where does the Bible teach the of loss of the individual self, or that one has to give up the 'personality', specially in the context of resurrected life or immortality. On the contrary, the Bible maintains very emphatically, the 'personalist' view; in the context of life hereafter, whether in hell or in heaven.

We really would understand the meaning of resurrection, only if the individual personality continues to exist, even after death. In fact the talk about resurrection stands meaningful, only if we maintain the 'personalist' view, because Hick himself was in
his early writings, asking the criterion for linking earthly life with resurrected life.

If resurrected life or immortality is for the individual as a whole, the individual self personality is as much involved as anything else that partakes immortality. The concern for personal immortality either by resurrection of the body, or the immortality of the soul, is no more selfish and irreligious concern, than one's desire to be known as Hick or Smith or John.

To take stock of what we have said thus far, we have considered in this chapter, the second phase of Hick or the writings of later Hick. Later Hick, as we have seen, affirms the immortality of soul but in this affirmation, Hick has made a quantum leap from the linear view of life, to a cyclic view of life, by suggesting reincarnational scheme. Further, Hick misinterpreted the Christian view of life after death. The Christian view is that the immortal life one anticipates is a personal one, but Hick says this is an
'irreligious concern' and suggests that one should transcend ego-boundaries. This is an indirect denial of the basic tenets of Christian view of life after death.

The next chapter is aimed at showing how Christianity is inextricably linked with the idea of resurrection. The idea of resurrection is not a New Testament contribution, but has its roots way back in the garden of Eden, where God created man.