CHAPTER –V

VIVEKANANANDA AND OTHER CONTEMPORARY
INDIAN PHILOSOPHERS: A COMPARISON
FROM THE RELIGIOUS STANDPOINT

5.1 Introduction

Vivekananda and other contemporary Indian philosophers made attempts to re-interprete some of the ancient ideas derived mainly from the Upanisads and yet, in their philosophies we notice some new conceptions and rational expositions and similar other endeavours in construction. From this standpoint, they may, thus, be said to be both interpretative and creative- of course within certain limits.

It can be said that every philosophy bears with it the mark of its originality. In that sense, Indian philosophy may be named as meditative. It comes as the outcome of a kind of meditation on the holy forces for the soul and of nature. Normally, Indian philosophy is called to be ‘spiritual’. By this is meant that it emphasises on values that is super natural and other worldly. But this is not adequate as it offers the impression that Indian Philosophy possesses no concern with these worldly values. It lays emphasis on the ultimacy of spiritual values. In fact, the contemporary Indian philosophers try their best to reconcile
the two. They expressed that spiritual awakening cannot take place in a void—it indicates that for spiritual development the physical nature is not to be rejected but perfected. They have also adopted the method of meditative speculation, and hence, the contemporary Indian philosophers too do not attach to rational argumentation that value that is normally attached to it; the contemporary Indian philosophers, at least in this respect, are very reverential towards the tradition of philosophy.

They acknowledged the reality of suffering and advocate the possibility of an escape from it; and still they explain the problem in a different way. The contemporary Indian philosophers offer a meaning and purpose to life and make it an aspect of the process of spiritual upliftment. Some of them proceed towards the extent of putting that life receives a dignity and human significance through pain and suffering. They think that the roots of philosophical thinking are found in consideration which are existential. R.N. Tagore and Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, in particular, explain the existential conditions of man, talk of the life of care and anguish, of fear and boredom and put that life is nothing but living in the midst of and in spite of them. In addition to these, they took talk of the ultimate escape, more or less, in the similar way of the ancient Indian philosophers. But a difference is made by them between the concern of philosophy and the ideal of philosophical thinking.

From what has been analysed above, it may be said that the contemporary Indian philosophers share some common beliefs. They all appear to be in
agreement with some vital issues like monism, reality of the world, integral nature of man, dignity of manness, reality of human freedom, importance of intuitive knowledge etc. They give to the world a reality and advocate the dignity of humanness. Again, they think that the apprehension of reality is possible merely through some intuitive awareness. All of them believe almost in the same way with respect to the concept of human freedom. Here, it is taken into account that the notion of freedom is metaphysical or existential.

Thus, the contemporary Indian philosophers believe in philosophy to be essentially tied up with life. One particular point about which contemporary Indian philosophers express is ‘humanism’. They are all, in a specific sense, humanists. Though there exists many sides of philosophic thinking, here in this chapter, a comparison from religious standpoint among the contemporary Indian philosophers is intended to analyse. To make a religious comparison with Vivekananda, other seven contemporary Indian philosophers have been chosen. They are chronologically B.G. Tilak, R.N. Tagore, M.K. Gandhi, Sri Aurobindo, K.C. Bhattacharyya, Ramana Maharsi and Dr. S. Radhakrishnan. These eight contemporary Indian philosophers have been selected for an analytical explanation of their religious teachings as representing the very spirit of contemporary Indian philosophy.

5.2 Vivekananda and Tilak

Vivekananda says, “of all the forces that have worked and are still working to mould the destiny of the human race, none certainly is more potent
than that, the manifestation of which we call Religion.”¹ According to him, religion is a necessity of life. Generally speaking only those things are treated as necessary for life which satisfy the daily and the external requirements of life. Food, clothing, shelter etc. are examples of what can be named, physical or naturalistic needs. But, they are not the only needs of life. This is distinctly proved from the fact that they alone do not fully satisfy man, even in the midst of comfort and luxury man craves for something higher-something better. This craving is his religious craving, without seeking satisfaction for which he cannot live.

According to Vivekananda, a very essential characteristic of religion is that it necessarily has a supernatural content. This element of super-naturality gives to it a uniqueness and distinguishes it from all other forms of intellectual discipline. What is the nature of the supernatural content? There is possibility of a personal God or the Absolute or a supernatural Law or anything of this kind. Such element may be the object of religious expectations and hence expresses the very core of what’s called religion in real sense of the term.

Vivekananda considers that conflicts are only apparent, and that they do not affect the essence of religion. Truly expressing, Vivekananda receives that sects and conflicts have to be there. If everybody gets used to think the same thought, there remains actually nothing to be thought. “It is the clash of thought, the differentiation of thought, that awakes thought… whirls and eddies occur only in rushing, living stream. There are no whirlpools in stagnant, dead water.”² Change or variation is the sign of life, it must be there.
But then, a question arises, “How can all these varieties be true? How can opposite opinions be true at the same time? The answer to a question like this includes the very possibility of a universal religion. To Vivekananda, a universal religion, if really universal, must satisfy at least two conditions; first, it must open its gates to every individual, it must admit that nobody is born with this or that religion; whether he takes to one religion or the other must ultimately be left to his inner likes and choice. From this point of view, by individualizing religion we really universalize it. Secondly, a really universal religion must be able to give satisfaction and comfort to every religious sect. After all, the universal religion has to supersede the conflicts of these sects, and therefore, must appear satisfying and reasonable to them all. We have seen that variety is inevitable, that all these various thoughts and attitudes have to be there. Therefore, if there is going to be an ideal religion- a really universal religion, it must be broad and large enough to supply food to all these minds.

In the views of Vivekananda, the concept of the universal religion already exists. Like some men fail to notice the universal brotherhood already therein, so universal religion is there although some of us are not aware of it. But what is its true nature? Does it apprehend the common elements of all religions? Has it succeeded in discovering some such aspects of religion that would give comfort to everyone? Vivekananda comments that this is a difficult-almost an impossible work. Because different religions affirm different qualities of religion and as such, it is not possible to detect the common elements. As for example, Islam
lays stress on universal brotherhood, Hinduism on spirituality, Christianity on self-purification for entering into the kingdom of God. To make a comparison among these is not an easy task, and that’s why the doctrine of universal religion would not be the common character of different religions. He says the universal religion is not a religion that will have one universal philosophy, or one universal mythology or one universal ritual. They may all differ from sect to sect or even from individual to individual, and yet the universal religion is there.

The Universal Religion, to Vivekananda, has to be acceptable to all minds. The largest possible proportion of mankind has to be satisfied, and therefore, it must be able to supply food to all the various types of mind. So, according to Vivekananda, the ideal religion must harmoniously balance all the aspects of religion viz., philosophy, emotion, work and mysticism. “And this religion is attained by what we, in India, call Yoga-union. To the worker, it is union between men and the whole of humanity, to the mystic, between his lower and Higher self, to the lover, union between himself and the God of Love, and to the Philosopher, it is the union of all existence. This is what is meant by Yoga.” The target of yoga is union, realization of oneness. Vivekananda says, “Religion is realization, not talk nor doctrine, nor theories…. It is being and becoming not hearing or acknowledging, it is the whole soul becoming changed into what it believes.”

Vivekananda propounded the open religion based on the spiritual texts of the Vedas and the Upanisads. For him, religion was a matter of experience and not a system of dogmas. He wanted to break all barriers between religions and
remove all conflicts and oppositions. He pointed out that religion must be limitless and Infinite like God. Vivekananda affirmed that it was the same Brahman that manifested in different forms and powers. He observed, “May he who is the Brahman of Hindus, the Ahura Mazda of the Zoroastrians, the Buddha of the Buddhists, the Jehovah of the Jews, the Father in heaven of the Christians, give strength to you. The Christian is not to become a Hindu or a Buddhist nor a Hindu or a Buddhist to become a Christian. But each must assimilate the spirit of the others and yet preserve his individuality and grow according to his law of growth.” Vivekananda vehemently criticized fanaticism, priest-craft and exclusive tendencies in religions. For him, all religions are true and they all lead to the realization of God. He did not want that a religion should grow by defeating other religions. He wanted diversity in religions which reveal spiritual awakening and evolution in humanity. Like Vivekananda, Bal Gangadhar Tilak holds that there is an underlying unity between God, man and the world. Tilak accepts the world as an existent, because God wills it so. Man strives to achieve union with God. He must also seek unity with the world and act for it. Otherwise unity will not be perfect. Tilak says almost in the similar voice with Vivekananda the religion is nothing but to serve the poor, needy, greedy, hungry, downtrodden people. For Tilak, to serve the poor is to serve God, i.e., service to man is service to God. So, in these cases, there is very much similarity between Vivekananda and B.G. Tilak. Of course, Tilak was not in favour of asceticism. He rejects the idea of renunciation of the worldly life after the attainment of the ultimate goal.
B.G. Tilak was the first nationalist leader who sought close contact with the masses and in this respect, he was a forerunner of Vivekananda. He always talked about India and not of international issues like Vivekananda. Vivekananda talked about the world religious perspective. Vivekananda talked about the concept of universal religion where he holds to bring a worldwide understanding and brotherhood. To get freedom from British rule, B.G. Tilak devoted all his abilities. By his extreme dedication, he laid the foundation of India’s freedom without which we could not have received the freedom in the true sense of the term. While Vivekananda can be said to be the true spiritual figure of India, Lokamanya Tilak is the father of Indian nationalism. He felt more strongly that for the strength of any nation and the success of any nationalist movement, the people of the country must have a strong activistic outlook. That is why Tilak wrote the secret of the Bhagavad Gita (Gitarahasya) in which he wanted to prove that without the path of action, no salvation was possible. Tilak had moulded his entire life on the basis of the teaching of the Gita. In accordance with the Bhagavad Gita, Karma comprises all types of action which a man performs, no matter where these actions are bodily (kayika) or vocal (vacika) or mental (manasika). Tilak has put emphasis on the Gita’s concept of Karmayoga and tried to apply the same for the upliftingment of humanity as a whole. To Tilak, there is no exposition which is so scientific as the Karmayoga of the Gita. Vivekananda advocates function of right action through jnana so as to realize the real nature of
one’s Self. In this case, Vivekananda was very much influenced by the Bhagavad Gita as well as the Vedanta.

Tilak was using Karma as an instrument for the attainment of swarajya. He as a political philosopher has given us a theory of nationalism. His theory of nationalism was a synthesis of the Vedantic ideal of the spirit as supreme freedom and the western concept of Mazzini, Burke, J.S. Mill and later on Wilson. In 1919 and 1920, he accepted the Wilsonian concept of self-determination and pleaded for its application of India. Tilak held that the attainment of Swarajya would be a great victory for Indian nationalism. He regarded swarajya not only as right, but as dharma. Tilak encouraged two festivals of Sivaji and Ganapati. Sivaji is the symbol of boldness and greatness and Ganapati is the symbol of wisdom. He tried to establish unity among the people through festivals. But unlike Tilak, Vivekananda does not directly think about politics. He says that man’s freedom can be had through the real knowledge of the indifference between the general self and the Brahman, the highest reality. Vivekananda wanted to do service for the betterment of the poor, illiterate and ignorant masses of India. He wanted them to be free from the constant impact of ignorance, lack of food stuff, nutrition etc. Vivekananda wanted purification of the self and the real liberation of his people.

Tilak has not supported the view of certain ancient Sanskrit treaties which bifurcate the same into niti dharma meaning legal-jurisprudence and good conduct respectively.
To Tilak, niti, Kartavya or dharma are all synonymous. We have seen that religion meant for Vivekananda the practical religion from the practical Vedanta. Religion for Vivekananda is a matter of experience about non-duality between the self and the Brahman. Tilak’s religious thinking was highly influenced by the then political circumstances and the changes. He wanted to establish a complete swarajya through religious ideals. He tried to solve social problems in terms of religion. To Vivekananda, service to the poor is like service to the God. Here lies similar of ideals of thought between Tilak and Vivekananda.

Tilak agreed with Sankara in making a distinction between Nirguna Brahma and Saguna Brahma, the absolute without attributes and God as endowed with attributes. He was also in agreement with Sankara when he said that the endowment with attributes was the result of the illusory maya. But Saguna Brahma and Nirguna Brahma are equally valuable for Vivekananda though he regards God as a matter of deep contemplation through right knowledge.

Tilak was sometimes not consistent in his teaching. At some places he said that jnana, the path of knowledge was the only way for realizing the identity of Atman and Brahma. But at other places he considers that means to self-realisation consists of a combination of jnana and karma. But this combination is not possible in the view of Advaita. The reason is that the content and the fruit of jnana are different from Karma. The self which is the content of jnana is one, independent and eternal whereas actions are many and are dependent on causal correlates and are transient. The fruit of knowledge is release while the
The non-dual self is ever existent and it does not depend on human activity.

As an advaitin, Tilak agrees with Adi Guru Sankaracharyya in maintaining the fact that the Ultimate Reality, Brahman- Atman is non-dual and of the nature of Existence- Consciousness- Bliss; that the world of plurality is an appearance of Brahman, that what is responsible for this appearance is the illusory maya; and that the so-called individual soul (jiva) is no other than Brahman.

To Tilak, Karma (action) has a very dominating influence in the religious life style. He distinctly upholds the necessary role of Karma in one’s religious life with the assistance of Sri Krishna’s declaration in the Bhagavad Gita: ‘what is action and what is inaction…. here even the learned people are deluded.’ And again he says ‘he who sees action in inaction and inaction in action…. he alone really sees.’

Tilak maintains that a combination of jnana and karma (jnana karma samuccaya) is the means to release but this combination is not possible in the view of Advaita. It cannot be the object of doing, not doing, or doing otherwise. It is unmodifiable. Action disappears along with its cause which is nescience or ignorance. The aspirant who is eligible for Vedanta study which leads to release, is the one who has renounced all attachment to works.

The religious philosophy of Tilak is very important for his realistic interpretation of the Vedanta philosophy. He says that man can never bring into
grip the realization of one’s own Self without its realistic understanding through the fire of true knowledge. Tilak, therefore, can be said to be a very good follower of the Vedanta philosophy. According to Tilak, the jivan mukti is virtuous by nature, and not under the compulsion of any ethical law. In the work called the Naiskarmya- siddhi by Suresvaracarya (one of the four main disciples of Adi Sankara), we find this point clearly expressed: “if the man who has awakened to the non-dual reality behaves as he likes, what then is the difference between a dog and man of knowledge in the matter of eating prohibited food?”

Tilak asserts that to understand the indifferent identity between Brahman and Atman is the destination of human beings. To Tilak, one who has realized the true identity of Brahman and Atman before death is called jivanamukta. The man of jivanamukta, Tilak comments, reaches the Brahma-loka after this body is cremated. This is also known as karma-mukti or gradual release or videha mukti or bodily release. According to Tilak, three duties are prescribed in the Gita to the jnani or the realized person. By realizing the identity of Brahman and Atman, his mind should be peaceful, non-contradictory, equal and free from the objects of pleasures. Secondly, one should perform one’s duties to set an example for others. Thirdly, he should make everyone progress step by step peacefully. Tilak says that the jnani should perform all the specific functions even in his perfect state, the specific functions pertaining to one’s family and to one’s nation. One has to accept religion or right action as a revelation, as one accepts the existence of the non-dual Brahman as revealed by the Vedas. According to Tilak, dharma (religion) in Indian philosophy, controls karma and artha, but leads to moksa.
5.3 Vivekananda and Tagore

Describing religion, Vivekananda says that the Vedanta is the rationale of all religions. Without the Vedanta every religion is superstition, with it everything becomes religion. Religion is the most comprehensive whole of human existence because it embraces every fact of life. It is an experience of life revealed through the individual’s conscious aspiration of the realization of an ideal intuitively felt. This intuitive feeling is just the numinous element in our religious consciousness and is again the non-rational counterpart of our knowledge of the infinite. Our knowledge of the infinite comprehends everything which ultimately corresponds in us a sense of unity and oneness with all. Religion as expressed in human life involves all faculties of man.

Rabindranath Tagore, on the other hand, was greatly influenced by his father Devendranath Tagore and the verse of the Upanisad. The first mantra of Isa upanisad was the guiding principle and perennial source of inspiration on his life. He owed the concept of divine immanence directly to the Upanisad. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan and Dr. S.N. Dasgupta called Tagore an absolutist thinker whereas Dr. D.M. Dutta took him to be a theist. Tagore assimilated both theism and absolutism in his exalted philosophy. Though Tagore synthesized theism with absolutism, he was more concerned with God and took the absolute as his secondary aspect. It is to be noted that Tagore did not mention the word ‘Absolute’ in the ‘Religion of Man’ even once. He denounced the empty absolute
of the Advaitins who reduced the world to nothingness. For Tagore, God is greater than the impersonal absolute. He conceived God to be the supreme person who was absolutely perfect, absolutely omniscient, absolutely omnipresent, absolutely kind and absolutely in all his powers, qualities and existence. He pointed out that God is the absolute.

Vivekananda says that intellect is only one of the aspects of life. Though in religion we find the intellectual side, but its practical side is simultaneously very important. The deeper urge in man leads him to rise above the egoistic view and makes him to realize the true nature of the Self. So, Tagore said that man possesses a hope within that always walks before our present narrow experience. This experience is undivided Faith in the infinite in us.

For Vivekananda, religion is the feeling of Reality. It is never a creation of principles but always a spiritual discovery. The characteristic mark of religious experience is directness, joy, vividness and like. He does not accept any religious act which fails to promote religion as an experience. So, religion may be a bewildering study but never a vain speculation. To such a view of Vivekananda, we can refer to the feelings of Radhakrishnan also who regards religion as a way of life that seeks the eternal. It is more a behaviour than belief. If we believe in God, we must act in the light of that faith. Spirituality is the core and the inward essence of religion.

Tagore finally came to believe in what he called ‘The Religion of Man’ though he initially combined some elements of Brahmasamaj with some elements of orthodox Hinduism. Like Vivekananda, Tagore explicitly believed
that religion could not be confined to any group or sect or tribe or nation. He said that man picked up that particular form of religion that suited him, but in the final analysis, religion transcends all such particular forms. The aim of true religion is the realization of one’s kinship with everything. Religion, according to Tagore, was a sort of homesickness. He insisted that true religion must not be confused with what is called ‘Institutional religion’. Tagore sincerely believed that religious organizations have almost debauched religion. Like Tagore, Vivekananda’s religion is not confined to temples, books, churches, rituals and other outer forms. He says, religion does not mean a set of dogmas nor does it mean conformity to rites and rituals. Vivekananda tried to yield equal status to each and every religion in the world. He was also strictly opposed to forceful conversion.

Tagore conceived of the ultimate reality as the personal God, the infinite being, who included all finite souls and the world of matter. Like Vivekananda, the poet philosopher even said that the Infinite becomes the finite without losing its infinity. God, according to Tagore and Vivekananda, could only be realized or experienced from within.

Being influenced by the humanist tradition of the Buddha and the Buddhist way of life, Tagore advocated a humanistic religious philosophy. Like Kabir, Tagore considered the universe as the manifestation of God. Again, being influenced by the Gita, like Vivekananda and other contemporary Indian philosophers, Tagore, in his sadhana says, that we cannot get freedom from
action, rather we can get only freedom in action. Like Tagore, Vivekananda was also very much influenced by the Gita especially by the concept of Niskamakarma.

Tagore’s spiritualism was humanistic. He stressed the role of national humanistic religion. Tagore and Vivekananda were also pained at the division of the Hindu society on the basis of caste, religious beliefs and sex. The religion for water is essentially its wateriness, the religion of the spark of the flame is the Fire. In the similar way, the religion of the man lies in his inner most truth. Thus for him, religion consists in the endeavour of man to cultivate and express these qualities which are inherent in the nature of man, and to have faith in them. Like Tagore, Vivekananda holds that religion of man is the realization of unity of individual soul with the supreme soul.

Tagore may be described as an unique humanist, because unlike any other, he tried to raise humanity to the level of the ultimate reality. His view of God and man reconciles extremes of immanence and transcendence. He regards human personality as the principle of unity. It is no individuality but universality. So, like Tagore, at times Vivekananda’s religion seems to take the colour of a humanistic religion. For Vivekananda, God is everywhere in everything, but he resides specially in the poor and the helpless. Therefore, serving the poor was the greatest form of religion according to Vivekananda. In Tagore’s religion, man is necessary to God as God is necessary to man. Tagore’s humanistic interpretation of religion reveals that his religion is the religion of man where the
infinite is manifested in humanity. He like Vivekananda said that humanity is a necessary factor in perfecting of the Divine Truth. Like Tagore, Vivekananda also took religion as consisting of love, kindness and sympathy towards others.

Tagore believes that religion cannot be confined to any group or sect or tribe or nation. Man discovers that particular form or religion that suits him, but in the final analysis religion transcends all such particular forms. To Tagore, the aim of true religion is the realization of one’s kinship with everything. He asserts religion as a sort of homesickness. Like a flock of homesick cranes flying night and day back to their mountain nests, the religious man is also on his sacred voyage to his eternal home. In the Gitanjali, the poet bursts out in a religious fervour, “No more sailing from harbour to harbour with this my weather- beaten boat…Now I am eager to die into the deathless.” Tagore, therefore, is against asceticism. Man, according to Tagore, will realize his kinship with everything, only he has to cultivate the universal feeling of love.

From this, it comes clear that, religion in Tagore’s view, consists in man’s capacity of self-transcendence. Man possesses a self- awareness which makes him realize the fact that he has a capacity of going beyond himself- of constantly pushing himself ahead towards higher and higher regions. This may be called as distinct and essential peculiarity of man. So, man’s religious life will have to consist in ceaseless exercise of his capacity.

Rabindranath Tagore’s religion is the religion of a poet. His philosophy is the philosophy of a poet. The account of religion as given by Tagore, itself suggests what, according to him, is the ultimate human destiny. Religion,
according to Tagore, is nothing but the active realization of unity— the realization of Divinity, it is comprising in an act of supreme love, nature and everything else, it is the realization of the Universal within.

5.4 Vivekananda and Gandhi

Humanism was the dominant note in Vivekananda’s philosophy and religion. He has pointed out a number of ways how religion could be regarded as a necessary aspect of life. Religion, according to Vivekananda, is a growth from within, it is inherent in the very constitution of man, and therefore, the nature of religion can be known by analyzing the religious sense. Vivekananda described this sense more or less in the manner of a psychologist.

A very important characteristic of religion, according to Vivekananda, is that it invariably has a supernatural content. For him, supernatural may be anything—a personal God or the absolute or a supernatural law or anything of this kind. He said that this element was the object of religious aspiration and hence represented the core of religion. Vivekananda further said that religion transcends not only the limitations of the senses but also the power of reasoning.

For Vivekananda, religion does have a value and significance for the individual but it has a social content too. In this case, M.K. Gandhi also agreed with Vivekananda. Gandhi discussed the concept of religion not only in individual life but in social life also. According to Gandhi, religion was not something which concerned a man in his isolation from his fellow beings.
Gandhi always worked hard for the social upliftment of the down-trodden like the shudras or the untouchables and the women. His whole social life, as a matter of fact, was devoted to upliftment and welfare of those two classes which were most neglected and suppressed. Gandhi’s social philosophy is important because he wanted to bring about total transformation without creating ill will, violence and injustice to any section of the society. Caste and class division only impeded social progress hence the socialist ideal of classless society must be accepted. The ideal of sarvodaya-upliftment of all was given by Gandhi to Indians and to the world as a means of complete social change. Gandhi’s non-violent approach towards social reconstruction made him a distinct and unique kind of social reformer and ushered in a new era of humanism. Gandhi was a great socialist of this country. He believed, as Ruskin has put in his book “Unto this last’ that “good of the individual is contained in the good of all.” The only real and dignified human doctrine is the greatest good of all and this can be achieved by utmost self-service. Gandhi directed all his energy and enthusiasm towards removing the economic inequality and social injustice he saw around him.

According to Gandhi, economic equality meant the levelling down of the rich people on the one hand and levelling up of the poor people on the other. Gandhi said that Sarvodaya was the highest end of man’s life. He also said that self-realisation or the realization of God was our highest end. Self-realisation, according to Gandhi, does not mean finding out some such unique reality within oneself which is so separate from all else in the universe. To realize other in
oneself and oneself in other is the first lesson of Sarvodaya. Again working for Sarvodaya or self-realization is also one and the same thing. Both can be gained, according to Gandhi, by adopting the path of complete ahimsa, universal love and brotherhood and selfless social service and not through any tapasya in the jungle.

Vivekananda said that a simple insight in the nature of different religions will show that they were not actually contradictory to each other, they were in fact supplementary to each other. For him, the truth of religion was so comprehensive that different religions concentrated only on one aspect or on a few aspects of religion. Again he said that there may be contradictory points of view of the same thing, but they were basically views of the same reality and so all the same and hence supplementary to each other. That is why Vivekananda pointed out that the universal religion already exists. By universal religion, he did not mean a religion that will have one universal philosophy or one universal mythology or one universal ritual. He said that they may differ from sect to sect, or even from individual to individual and yet universal religion is there. The one watchword for universal religion, according to Vivekananda, was acceptance. He recommended positive acceptance. That is why he said that he could worship in any form with any individual or sect. He said that he could enter and offer his prayers anywhere in a temple or a church or mosque or any other place. For Vivekananda, the believer in the universal religion should be broad-minded and open-hearted and he should be prepared to believe in the scriptures of all
religions and keep his heart open for what may come in the future. Such an attitude led Vivekananda to discover at least one such element which could be said to be common to all religions in a general way, and which consequently may represent the essence of universal religion.

That common point for Vivekananda was God. He said that all living beings men, animals and plants were all one and in that way talked of different aspects of the truth as aspects of the same truth, they were all one. According to Vivekananda, that truth is God. In Him we are all one. Vivekananda used the word God in its most comprehensive sense, it may be personal omnipotent and good God or it may be described as the universal existence or the ultimate unity of the universe. Vivekananda observed that each and every religion consciously or unconsciously is struggling towards the realization of this unity or God and therefore this may be said to represent the ideal of universal religion.

For Vivekananda, another important characteristic of universal religion is that it should be acceptable to all minds. He wanted to propagate a religion that will be acceptable to minds and also it should equally be mystic and conducive to action. It is important that like Vivekananda, Gandhi also tried to give equal status to all religions. But like Vivekananda he did not talk about universal religion. Gandhi said that all religions had imperfections, because all of them revealed only partial and relative truths, but again all were equally holy, because all were the creations of the same God.

Mahatma Gandhi’s thought of religion can be said, more or less, as same with the basic teachings of Vivekananda as the former believes that true religion
and true morality are inseparable. These are supplementary to each other. Gandhi would like to reject any religious doctrines that conflicts with morality without any hesitation. He prepares himself to recognize even unreasonable religious mentality provided it is not immoral. Gandhi puts, “As soon as we lose the moral basis we cease to be religious. There is no such things as religion over-riding morality. Man, for instance, cannot be untruthful, cruel and incontinent and claim to have God in his side.”

The chief conviction of M.K. Gandhi is that there is one reality- that of God, which is no more than Truth. His religious philosophy may be said to be derived from that conviction. To Gandhi, truth is God and sincere pursuit of Truth is religion. In ordinary sense, religion has been explained as devotion to some higher power or principle. In reality, Gandhi cannot be said to be against such explanation of what is called religion, he merely upgrades it further by putting that higher principle being Truth, devotion to Truth (or God) is religion. Gandhi says, “Let me explain what I mean by religion. It is not the Hindu religion…. but the religion which transcends Hinduism, which changes one’s very nature, which binds one indissolubly to the truth within and which ever purifies. It is the permanent element in human nature which counts no cost too great in order to find full expression and which leaves the soul utterly restless until it has found itself, known its maker and appreciated the true correspondence between the Maker and itself.” To M.K. Gandhi, all the religions of the world are nothing but the various ways converging on the same ultimate goal. Hence, it
does not matter at all, if various groups of human race accept different ways to reach the same goal. It may theoretically be said that since there is merely one God, so there must be one religion in the world. But, in practice, it is not an easy task to find a common agreement among the followers of different religions. “I do not”, Gandhi observes, “foresee a time when there would be only one religion on earth in practice… Therefore, there will, perhaps, always be different religions answering to different temperaments and climatic conditions”.

He says that men are naturally seekers of God which is but Truth. Because, they still remain imperfect to achieve the perfect state of Truth of God. Therefore, the religion got by them must also be imperfect. According to Gandhi, the religion which forces human being to accept a particular religious practice by claiming itself as perfect should not be treated as a religion in the true sense of the term. That is to say Gandhi possessed no soft corner for proselytization. He says that a true religion must create fellowship among people. There should have mutual respect for followers of different faiths. Man should always remember that all the religions possess certain errors in them, and that all great religions are equal. Gandhi puts, “My position is that all the great religions are fundamentally equal. We must have innate respect for other religions as we have for our own.”

For Gandhi, all man-made religions are not perfect. So, the question of superiority and inferiority does not arise at all. Each and every follower of Truth should regard all religions as equal. Moreover, every follower should make attempt at correction of the defects of his own faith, and thereby uniting all good
traits of other faiths into his own faith. In the words of Gandhi, “Looking at all religions with an equal eye, we would not only hesitate, but would think it our duty, to blend into our faith every acceptable feature of other faiths.”

He recommends that the attitude towards different religions should be based on tolerance and respect. Although sometimes it is said that Gandhi possesses a special preference towards Hinduism, his standpoint towards other religions is one of reverence. As he was born in a Hindu family the atmosphere where he grew and developed implanted in his mind the elements of Hinduism. Thus, the Gita and the Ramayana became his two inseparable companions.

But he studied many great religious scriptures like the Bible and the Quran and he was influenced by a lot of saints and religious teachers. These made him believe that various religions are nothing but the different paths of attaining the same truth. He believed that each and every religion possesses good precepts and noble teachings. Moreover, Gandhi detected that some of the explanations and commentaries have degraded religion and distorted it. To him, every religion gives rise to some fanatic and unreasonable practices. So, he said that all religions are good as well as bad, especially good in attaining its ideal, but bad in giving rise to hatred, fanaticism and crusades. The experience got from communal riots in India strengthened Gandhi’s belief. So, his suggestion was that religions- historical religions- should not be given permission to cross the limits of reason -of ‘sober reason’, as he calls it. He thought that this element of
‘rationality’ will be capable of bringing about ‘a fellowship of all religions’ or, ‘the kingdom of God.’

Explaining his approach towards all historical religions, Gandhi said in 1921 as, “After long study and experience, I have come to the conclusion that all religions are almost as dear to me as my own Hinduism, in as much as all human beings should be as dear to one as one’s own close relatives. My own veneration for other faiths is the same as that for my own faith, therefore no thought of conversion is possible. The aim of fellowship should be to help a Hindu to become a better Hindu, a Mussalman to become a better Mussalman, and a Christian a better Christian. Our prayer for others must be NOT “God, give him the light thou hast given me,” BUT “Give him all the light and truth he needs for his development.” Pray merely that your friends may become better men, whatever their form of religion.”

5.5 Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo

Vivekananda reveals that truth, virtue and purity are all not destructible. Man has taken centuries to find out the true nature of himself. He is not what he appears to be but someone greater. Vivekananda says that it is impossible for man to give up religion so long as he holds up his mind and body. As long as one thinks, this religious struggle will continue and one will get some forms of religion. This view of Vivekananda contradicts the Freudian conception of

Vivekananda’s concept of religion is influenced by the philosophical boundaries of the Upanisads. His principle in life is essentially determined by the teachings of the Vedas and the Vedanta. The term ‘Religion’ finds its explanation in the philosophy of Vivekananda as, “… Essentially religion belongs to the super sensuous plane. It is beyond all reasoning. It is never determined by the plane of intellect. It is a vision, an inspiration, a plunge into the unknown and unknowable, making the unknowable more than known…. “14 This search of the unknown is present from the very dawn of human civilization. Vivekananda like Tagore, opines that religion comes from within. Spirituality is ultimately connected with beauty in his religion. Religion, thus, consists in the endeavour of men to cultivate and express those qualities which are inherent in the nature of Man.

In Vivekananda’s religious philosophy, philosophy and religion are consistent with each other. The realization of ‘oneness’ has made Vivekananda to draw parallel between the beliefs of Hinduism and the basic theories of modern sciences which seem to be the echoes of the Vedanta philosophy. Vivekananda further asserts here that the ideal of Hinduism lies in its catholicity and universality. If it is perfectly realized, it can be the possible ideal for a universal religion, a religion which is the sum total of all creeds and yet there remains infinite space for development.
Sri Aurobindo, one of the great contemporary Indian philosophers, holds that the success of a religion depends upon the spiritual element within it. To him, a religion, which aspires for spiritual freedom of mankind, is to be judged as an efficient religion. He puts that God or the ultimate reality is the object of man’s religious experience. The essence of religion is the search and finding of God. Sri Aurobindo would like to say that fear of God is the beginning of religion. Following the footsteps of the ancient Indian philosophers, Sri Aurobindo declares that in religious experience, there is an apprehension of the real, a spiritual realization of God. Thus, it can be said that an element of mysticism is involved in the religious thinking of Sri Aurobindo.

We can through a partial analysis of the religious views of Sri Aurobindo, see that he is against the observance of external ceremonial or authoritative religion. Sri Aurobindo shows very distinctly how insistence on the above mentioned types of religion leads to discords, disputations, persecutions etc. He revolts against ceremonial religion owing to his belief that religion ought to be subjective in nature and character.

Sri Aurobindo resembles Vivekananda as well as Gandhi and Dr. S. Radhakrishnan when he puts emphasis on the development of the religious qualities such as altruism, humanitarianism, love of neighbour, mercy to all creation, service, labour for the well-being of the poor man and so on. He thinks that all religions should look upon themselves as friendly partners. Then and only then the world unity may become possible. He is of the remark that negation of spiritual life causes religious war. He thinks that instead of engaging in religious
war, the great religions of the world should work together for the cause of enriching the spiritual life of human beings.

Sri Aurobindo says that religion is evolutionary. He gave a full account of religion in conformity with his theory of spiritual evolution. Because the theory of evolution is the central theme of his philosophy. To Sri Aurobindo, religion satisfies the fundamental needs of human life, he points out a wider purpose of Nature behind this narrow object. It seeks not merely to heighten but also to widen, not only evolution but also integration, not only fulfilment of physical, vital and mental, but also an uplift of all into spiritual, a psychisation, spiritualization and unity with Sachidananda. Sri Aurobindo reminds us that the career of religion has only just begun, leading man to a vision of himself beyond the fortuitous circumstances of his ‘history’. Unlike Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo shows the difference between Eastern and Western religions with the assistance of his concepts of ‘true religion’ and ‘religionism’. Moreover, what is peculiar to Sri Aurobindo is that the culmination of religion is Yoga. Religion is a half way house from mind to spirit. He says that to make man enter into spirituality it must give place to Yoga. Thus, Sri Aurobindo holds that not religion but Yoga is the way to divine which is not exact to Vivekananda’s religious position. Of course, for Sri Aurobindo, Yoga does not annihilate religion, philosophy or science, but find place for all of them and utilize them as instruments for God realization. Like Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo too very effectively exhibits before the world community the principles of Hinduism. He says that Hinduism is not a creed but a mass of thought collected round the Vedanta, stressing not belief but conduct,
accepting graduated levels of comprehension and seeking a deeper understanding and refining the existing content. Sri Aurobindo has been able to present before the world the broad outlook of Indian religions especially Hinduism.

Describing Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy, the well known thinker Haridas Choudhury puts, “The philosophy of Sri Aurobindo may aptly be described as integral non-dualism (Purna Advaita), or integral idealism (Purna Vijnana), or just integralism (Purnavada)”. Aurobindo’s philosophy makes a synthesis or integrates the two. He says, “The affirmation of a Divine Life upon earth and an immortal sense in mortal existence can have no base unless we recognize not only eternal spirit as the inhabitant of this bodily mansion, the wearer of this mutable robe, but accept matter of which it is made, as a fit and noble material out of which he weaves constantly His garbs, builds recurrently the unending series of his mansions.”

The attainment of the Divine life, for Sri Aurobindo, is the chief goal of human beings. So, it may be called the best way the human mind should seek to find out in life, the religious contemplation for mankind.

Keeping consistency with his theory of spiritual evolution, Sri Aurobindo expounds his theory of religion. The spiritual evolution ascends through the relative to the absolute, through the finite to the infinite and through all divisions to oneness. In this spiritual realization man begins to find and seize hold on the satisfying intensities of the absolute in the relative, feels the presence of the infinite in the finite and discovers the reconciling law of a perfect unity in all divisions and differences.
Thus, the inmost essence of religion, according to Sri Aurobindo, is the search and finding of God. The object of religion is achieved through self-transcendence, absolute consecration, aspiration and experience, revelation, inspiration and intuition etc. The delight of God realization is ineffable. The devotee has to surrender his entire being. The way of religion is absolute.

5.6 Vivekananda and K.C. Bhattacharya

Vivekananda says that the real truth in any field of knowledge will not contradict itself. Knowledge when it comes from inside can overcome every difficulty. Religion must be justified by the discoveries of reason. Religion deals with the subtle realm of the mind where the universe is perceived. In such context, Vivekananda says that religion is an extension of science.

Religious inquiry is a science in its own right when it follows the internal path appropriate to its own field. It again tests its finding by reason and verifies its reasoning by experience. Like any physical science, religion moves toward broader generalization, unless and until it becomes an all-embracing principle. To this view, Vivekananda reconciles science and Advaita Vedanta because the fundamental principle of knowledge is common to both. This actually discards nothing but increases the quality of everything. Vivekananda, thus, insists that Advaita…. the non-duality, the oneness, the idea of the impersonal God, is the only religion. Vivekananda has observed that art, science and religion are but three different ways of expressing a single truth.
Each and every religion of the world claims that there is a unity within us. But Vivekananda guards us against this unity in every religion. Being one with divinity, there cannot be further progress. Science of religion cannot further progress if religion finds this perfect unity. It is only out of diversity that advancement comes. If diversity stops, creation will be destroyed. It is because of variations in thoughts that religious sects are multiplying. For Vivekananda, it is ‘Unity in Variety’… the sign of progress in religion. Contradiction to him comes from the same truth which adopts itself towards the changing situations of various natures. These little variations have been essential for adaptation. Of course, the same truth reveals in the heart of everything.

Real religion rises above mythology. Modern science has really made the foundation of religion strong. The whole universe can be demonstrated into one. The metaphysician’s being and the physicist’s matter are just one. The atom is invisible, unthinkable and the cause of everything. Likewise, for the Vedantist, the potency of the universe depends on the Atman. So, there is no real fight between modern science and Vedanta, both regard a self-evolving cause. The comprehensive study of religion must not aim at finding perfect unity amongst different religious practices. Only scientific undertaking requires to look at the facts from objective standpoint, free from business and prejudice. ‘Truth alone triumphs, not untruth. Through truth alone is opened the way to God. One should not care for a moment who joins hands with him or not. One must be sure that he touches the hand of the Lord. To deal with a religion objectively is to describe
and interpret the inner events and meanings without prejudice and with sympathetic understanding. The study of religion is a science, which requires a sensitive and artistic heart’.  

Dr. Krishnachandra Bhattacharya’s religious philosophy is spiritualistic in nature and character. Bhattacharya says that religion is the way of apprehending the very path of realizing the non-difference between the self and the ultimate reality, the Brahman. He says that everyman should attempt at knowing the true nature and knowledge about this reality, i.e., latent in one’s within. He has taken into consideration the different modes of experience involving object, self-subsistent, pure subjective experience and the transcendental which is neither subjective nor objective. This progressive interiorisation had led him to arrive at the conception of his absolute.

Knowledge, feeling and willing have been considered by K.C. Bhattacharya as the three basis of his formulation of the Absolute where he is not able to realize the very existence of the agency or subject that knows, feels or wills. Sri Ramana’s method of inquiry of source that knows or wills or feels will enable one to understand the deficiency involved in Bhattacharya’s conception of the absolute. The analysis of three states waking, dream and deep sleep has forced Bhattacharya to accept subject-object dualism as long as there is a sense of individuality and the transcendence of the same as the technique in the investigation of the nature of the Absolute.
The aim of the religious thinking of K.C. Bhattacharya is the understanding the nature of unification of the soul and the supreme soul, i.e., the highest Self. If the Absolute is able to alternate, it is subjected to change or limitations, it must be finite hence, cannot be the Absolute. Bhattacharya accepts the necessity of the transcendence of subject-object duality in the Ultimate Reality. Where there is duality of any form, there is no possibility of transcendence.

In “subject as Freedom,” Bhattacharya begins with the consideration of one’s body as the subject of perception of the external objects. He, in the higher stages, deals with felt-body, psychic subjectivity along with its image and thought, and spiritual subjectivity with its feeling and introspection. Lastly, he comes to the conclusion that the introspective subject is free from objectivity and is freedom itself. Bhattacharya considers the transcendence of subject and object as the goal. He believes that the gradual liberation from objectivity and the consequent subjectivity leads one to freedom. Here, Bhattacharya has not considered the possibility of such a freedom in the deep-sleep state.

The spiritual philosophy and religious thinking of Bhattacharya has been dominated by psychological and epistemological interpretations. A deeper analysis shows clearly the limitations and the consequent unsatisfactoriness of such a reasoning. The emphasis on transcendence of the subject-object duality points out the influence of Advaita Vedanta in Bhattacharya’s philosophy.

The concept of object is in contrast with the subject as the self-evident content of spiritual consciousness. The object is understood as self-subsistent
before fact is understood as object. The contrast between logic and metaphysics suggests the distinction between the self-subsistent and the real. This suggestion is verified in the ‘enjoying’ consciousness of a content ‘I’ as symbolized by a contemplated meaning ‘am’. This ‘enjoying’ understanding is introspection. Its content is understood as what object is not, as speaking subjectivity. First, the object is accepted as a shadow or a symbol of ‘I’; in the second, ‘I’ and the other person are contradictorily the symbol of the other; and in the third case, there is a consciousness of the over personal reality as symbolized by ‘I’. This consciousness of being is the religious experience whose theoretic form is philosophy of religion. According to K.C. Bhattacharya, the Absolute can be expressed only by the negation of ‘I’. The Absolute can be revealed, even as ‘Absolute is’, since ‘Is’ means not reality but truth.

The thinking of K.C. Bhattacharya in the realm of philosophy has been noted to be peculiar in nature as his writings were brief, precise and full of meaning. Spiritualism may be said to be very essence of his religious philosophy. Spiritualism is a very dominant trend in the religious speculation in contemporary India. Bhattacharya believes in the very existence of the spirit which is permanent. It is not an easy task to give an account of his philosophy in terms of any accepted philosophical model. Still an approximate description of his philosophy can be given by calling it the philosophy of Transcendental ‘Idealism’. He says that his idealism is not in the sense of ‘idea-ism’, it does not seek to suggest that the reality is an idea. It is idealism in the sense of ‘ideal-ism’. To him, the ultimate reality that one is to achieve through one’s religious exercise is conceived as the end of the process of realization. Bhattacharya’s
thought can be called transcendental, for the nature of the ultimate is not describable in terms of any accepted philosophical epithets. He relates everything to experience and reality is conceived as the ultimate presupposition of experience. It is neither subjective nor objective; to relate the subject and object in knowledge it is very essential that the relating principle is neither subjective nor objective. So, Bhattacharya receives the ultimate reality as transcending the distinction between the subjective and the objective. That is why his philosophy has been called ‘transcendental’. On the other sense, his philosophy can be called the philosophy of Abstract Idealism also. Although his ultimate reality is not quite similar to the substance of Spinoza or to the Brahman of Advaita Vedanta, it is very much abstract.

Bhattacharya’s concept of philosophy is similar to that of Immanuel Kant, or even to that of the Logical positivists. Like these philosophers, Bhattacharya too believes that it is not an essential function of philosophy to construct a synthetic view of the world. He realizes that the judgments of philosophy are not factual; they are not related to facts like the empirical judgment. Bhattacharya says that, “It is the theoretical inadequacy of its approach to the object…. it is the irrationality of our beliefs in the ultimate truths of matters of facts that leads to the more rational belief in the pure object, or the self-subsistent.”

K.C. Bhattacharya’s concept of philosophy is a high spiritualistic investigation within and that particular exercise can be said to be religious in nature and behaviour. He searches for a pure Self that transcends both the subjective as well as the objective existents. From this, it follows that religion is an intrinsic practice to understand the true nature of the Self which is beyond the
subject-object co-relation. This is the key to his religious tendencies in his philosophical speculations. The subject in his investigation for self-awareness starts by relating itself to the object. That relation has to be avoided. That process is only to stress on the difference between the two-only to impel the subject to disassociate itself from the object. Even so, this primary act to the realization of subjectivity involves a negative relation with the objective. It is only when the subject realizes its distinction from the object that it is on its way to the realization of complete subjectivity. Bhattacharya says that the sense of the subject is that which frees itself from the object, and that sense of the object is that from which the subject frees itself.

5.7 Vivekananda and Sri Ramana Maharsi

Vivekananda maintains that religion knows no limitation because logic is within the realm of Maya. Reason, theories are all help of religion. Religion consists in realization. Vivekananda says- preaching of religion generally depends on faith. But this preaching consists only in different sects of theories which are based upon belief. These theories ultimately lead to all confusions and quarrelling with one another. Religion at this juncture becomes a pretension of truth and depend on wonder working. Every fear of the unknown becomes a childish curiosity when the Truth is attained. This can be achieved only through purity, patience and perseverance. There must be no fear. No begging but demanding…. Demanding the Highest.
Kant has discovered in philosophy that time, space and causation are modes of thought. Vedanta taught this long before and called it Maya. Unlike Schopenhauer and Sankaracarya, Vivekananda said that religion consists in realization.

Bhakti is the thread which binds the lowest form of worship with the highest form of love. Religion requires us to gather empirical facts and to verify them, but it is essential on our parts to see the truth. This is possible only when we go beyond the knowledge which lies in the region of the five senses. To see God is the one goal. Power is not the goal. The test of having ceased to be an idolater, Vivekananda suggests: when one says ‘I’, does the body come into his thought or not? If it does then one is still a worshipper of idols. Religion is experience.

Rudolf Otto’s view of Religious Consciousness comes near to Vivekananda. Otto was aware of the difficulties involved in interpreting religion in terms of our belief in God. For him the existence of God cannot be proved on rational ground. At the source of every religion there is a non-rational awareness which Otto calls the numinous feeling. The mystics call this as intuitive experience.

Hegel, being an absolute idealist, regards religion as a self-subsisting essence. In Religion which is thus a transcendental entity, we find underlying all particular historical manifestations. To him, the aim of philosophy is to know the truth, to know God. Hegel advocates that truth is an elaborate speculative system
claiming objective validity. Religion is a self-subsisting essence or a transcendental entity which underlies all particular historical manifestations.

Kierkegaard reacted against the philosophy of Hegel and the former demanded radical faith in religion. For Kierkegaard if religious knowledge goes beyond reason then it must be something irrational. But in Vivekananda’s Advaita Vedanta, the subjective awareness is the realization of the transcendental truth… The Atman in its own nature. The realization of the Unchangeable one is the religion for all. One who experiences God face to face in everything is a Rishi. Here lies the core of religion for men. Vivekananda is not influenced by Kierkegaard. The subjectivity in Vivekananda’s philosophy is turned with monism. Because he asserts that there is only one individual. Each of us is that. Oneness alone is love and fearlessness. Separation leads to hatred and fear. This Vedantic gospel constitutes the religion of the Hindu. To Vivekananda, the ideal religion is called Yoga…. Union. To the worker, it is union between men and the whole of humanity. To the mystic it is union between his lower and Higher Self. Again to the lover, union is attained between himself and the God of Love. To the philosopher, it is union of all existence. This is Yoga in India.

The most distinctive feature in Vivekananda’s religious philosophy is his comprehensive and integral vision. His remarkable world-wide contribution in the sphere of religion is the ‘Religion for Mankind.” His religion is above every distinctions of race, nationality, culture, creed and the like. He has seen the divine self of man. Man, for Vivekananda, is the symbolic expression of the Divinity. ‘Divinity of Man’ and ‘Essential spirituality’ of life are thus the two
fundamental outstanding truths of Vivekananda’s Religious Philosophy. Vivekananda’s religion, thus, is synonymous with universalism of the spirit.

Sri Ramana Maharsi maintains that the absolute Reality as the non-dual Brahman, infinite without parts, underlying all the appearances. It is the self-luminous ‘I’, Isvara or God is also a reflected light as associated with maya. To him, the Self alone is knowledge, the underlying consciousness, and Sri Ramana accepts the intrinsic validity of truth.

Sri Ramana has been considered to be an avatar of Lord Subrahmanya by some. But in one context, Sri Ramana says that he is Subrahmanya in the sense an idol is considered to be Subrahmanya. Sri Ramana had no guru in the human form, and in his case the Self also cannot be considered to be his guru, as he did not practise meditation etc. prior to realization. The absolute Truth just flashed into his mind. From this Standpoint, Sri Ramana may be compared to Apantaratamas who had achieved realization in the previous birth, but due to his anekajanma – prarabdha-karma took another embodiment. For vasanas the jnani comes back to the vyutthana state from the Samadhi, but as soon as the force of the mental tendencies weaken, he once again experiences the absolute Bliss. If sarvakarmani includes prarabdha – karma also as stated by Sri Ramana, one has to accept that owing to the momentum of the prarabdha karma only, the embodiment is possible after realization. The important point here is that Ramana Maharsi was in sohajasamadhi, and his mode of preaching was ‘silence’ through which he lifted up innumerable individuals from the miserable ocean of samsara, and his life and teachings still serve as the Veda fulfilling this purpose.
Duality appears when the I-thought appears. Sri Ramana in a very apt way, explains the ‘witness-consciousness’ and defines perceptions as ‘Being’ not as ‘seeing’. The individual self is only the ego, the illusory manifestation that in truth is identical with Isvara. For Ramana Maharshi, the enquiry into the three states of experience and the five sheaths also leads to the same truth of the non-dual Self. He says that the world is mental and its cause maya itself is illusory. One has to conclude that the creator, created and creation are all illusory appearances.

But the question arises: If creation is illusory appearance caused by ignorance, liberation is the realization of the natural original state by the destruction of this ignorance. It is a paradox of ‘I’ casting off the illusion of ‘I’ and yet remaining as ‘I’. Sri Ramana with force declares that there is no classification of the realized, as knowledge is only one. Such a classification from the perspective of the ignorant can merely be accounted for by the difference in the prarabdha-karma. When there is no ego in the same people, there is no possibility for any action posterior to realization. But the action we see in his body makes us to infer the existence of mind; the truth is the vasanas that cause enjoyment, the effect of the past deeds, get manifested as actions, the result of which has to be experienced.

The real goal of the religious life, to Sri Ramana, is to know the true ‘I’ and to remain in it. When there is a creator who is responsible for his world of creation, there is no ‘duty’ as such for the individual whose ‘free-will’ is only as
appearance of his past karma. Not to identify the self with one’s own body is the secret of ethics.

Sri Ramana puts that the means to liberation is self-enquiry which is pure jnanamarga. In this enquiry, in the first stage, one has to discard the not-self from the real ‘I’, and remain in the source of ‘I’ – thought which is the experience of the non-dual Brahman. Sravana, manana and nididhyasana are the three steps to reach the goal. When the aspirant realizes the identity of the jiva with Isvara, the world of duality disappears for him. The various yogas, karma, bhakti etc., are the preliminary helps for the aspirant to get the necessary qualifications of dispassion and concentration. Sri Ramana says that when one realizes the karma-yoga, bhakti-yoga, etc., one gains emancipation. If he is not fit for the enquiry, perfect surrender to God and karma-yoga are the means that cleanse his mind and strengthen him for the higher stage.

If follows that Ramana Maharsi’s thinking is identical with that of Adiguru Sankaracharya’s Advaita philosophy. Sri Ramana explains the Absolute Reality, ajatavada, the doctrine of maya, the vivartavada, pratibimba-vada, jivanamukti and jnana as the ultimate means. The source of I-thought, says Sri Ramana is not sunya or ‘nothing’ rather the self-luminous consciousness, and declares that it is wrong to criticize Sankara as just a maya-vadin.

The deep thinking regarding reality which is described by Ramana Maharsi as transcending seer, sight and seen, or knower, knowledge and known paves the way for religious speculation in his life. For Ramana Maharsi, the
‘reality – consciousness’ or the ‘I – consciousness’ is the central point of his deep religious thoughts. Sri Ramana explains the nature of Reality as eternal and is ‘existence’ without beginning or end. It exists everywhere, it is endless and infinite; it underlines from force, matter and spirit and it displaces and transcends the triads of knower, knowledge and known etc., which are mere appearances in it.

To Ramana Maharshi, what is infinite and perfect cannot have parts. The finite being without the association with the infinite cannot be perfect. There are no levels of Reality; there are only levels of experience for the individual. The Absolute is eternal; what exists in space and time and is gained, can be lost and therefore is not real. The waking body has no experience either in dream or in deep sleep, but there is Self alone that exists always. The Self is pure consciousness in sleep; it evolves as ‘I’ (aham) without ‘this’ (idam) in the transition stage; and becomes manifest in the waking state as ‘I’ and ‘this’. The universal principle takes the correspondence between the ideas ‘within’ and the objects ‘without’. The world and the body are only external to oneself and only the ‘Heart’ manifests in all these. In the realm of pure mind, in the core of the all-comprehensive Heart the self-luminous ‘I’ always shines. It reflects in everybody and is called the omniscient witness or the fourth state. So, the infinite expanse is the Reality the supreme spirit or the Self that shines as the consciousness within the ‘I’, as the one in all the individuals. Reality is not the unconsciousness of the deep-sleep state nor the self-consciousness of the present.
Ramana Maharsi can be regarded as one of the greatest religious thinkers in contemporary India as well as in the world. He believes in the religious force in man which can transform into a spiritual one. To Ramana Maharsi, the aim of religious life is to realize its true nature so as to understand the supreme spiritual Reality which is beyond spatio-temporal existence, omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent. For Ramana Maharsi, "The Absolute is eternal; what exists in space and time and is gained, can be lost." The ‘Being’ or ‘Existence’ which one cannot deny in all these states is the Reality. So, consciousness is the reality which is the unchanging common factor in self-consciousness, unconsciousness, sub-consciousness, super-consciousness, human-consciousness, dog-consciousness and the tree-consciousness.

Ramana Maharsi says that man is to realize the true nature of the self within and understand the futility of the external existence. Religion must come out of the spirit within and not from the outward agents like flesh-blood compound, caste, creed, cult, convention. He puts comment that the pure Being which is the aim of a true religious life becomes diffused through darkness which is original ignorance or original sin, emerges out as reflected light called Isvara or God. Isvara who is the reflected light is known to be associated with maya, the original ignorance. God, Sri Ramana says, exists everywhere, works through all, but in pure minds his actions are seen clearly. God-realisation and the unification between the self and the God or Isvara to Ramana Maharsi, lead one’s religious life perfect. He maintains the monotheism in collaboration with the Vedantic trend of beliefs.
Extending support to Adiguru Sankaracharya, Sri Ramana says that Sankaracharya has been wrongly criticized as mayavadin. Samkara put forward three statements: Brahman is real, the universe is unreal, and Brahman is the universe. The third statement explains the first two signifying that when the universe is perceived apart from Brahman, that perception is illusory. The phenomena are real when experienced as the Self, and illusory, when seen apart from the Self.

5.8 Vivekananda and Radhakrishnan

Vivekananda took the essential and good elements of all the religions especially Christianity, Buddhism, Jainism, Hinduism and Islam and then he tried to assimilate it in his own way. This shows that Vivekananda’s acceptance is not just tolerance. Tolerance indicates something which is allowed in spite of its being wrong whereas Vivekananda recommended positive acceptance. He did not refer to religion either as an institution or as an association, he referred to the spirit of religion.

Vivekananda did not consciously enter into the controversy regarding personal and impersonal nature of God. In fact, he described God on both ways and he was convinced that this distinction between a personal God and an impersonal God is not God’s nature in anyway. He observed that God is what He is and the distinction between personal and impersonal was the result of our attempts to apprehend God. Vivekananda pointed out that God cannot be
described and our language is inadequate to represent Him accurately. For him, to call God father, or brother, or our dearest friend were attempted to objectify God which could not be done. Vivekananda observed that God was the eternal subject of everything. The greatest contribution of Vivekananda to Indian philosophy consisted in a new interpretation of the Advaita Vedanta. This new interpretation of Vedanta was known as Neo-vedantism of Vivekananda as distinguished from the traditional Vedanta propounded by Adiguru Sankaracharya. A remarkable feature of Vivekananda’s philosophy was the formulation of what he called the practical Vedanta. It is true that Vivekananda borrowed the doctrine of Maya from Advaita Vedanta, but his conception of Maya was not exactly similar to that of Sankara. In Advaita Vedanta, Maya is the power that creates illusion, it is that divine sakti which has the capacity of deluding man into believing that the world is real. But Vivekananda did not accept this position. To him, Maya did not necessarily mean being illusory or unreal, maya is conceived just as a fact about the nature of the world, it seeks to express the essential characters of the world as it exists. For Vivekananda, another name for Maya was contradiction. He said that our whole life was a contradiction, a mixture of being and non-being. He said that when Maya gives way, it gives way only to find that all the time it was lying within the bosom of the Brahman itself. This shows that Vivekananda somehow gave to the world also a reality. But it cannot be denied that the metaphysics and disciplines of Vivekananda did not deviate an inch from the standpoint of Advaita Vedanta of Sankara.
Dr. S. Radhakrishnan is universally accepted as one of the greatest religious philosophers of the world. He was a thinker and an idealist of the 20th century. He also could be treated as a Neo-Vedantin. He had given a new orientation to classical upanisadic thought. He restated the advaitic Vedanta of Sankaracarya. Dr. Radhakrishnan was not recapitulating nor endorsing the views of the Upanisads. He was interpreting them as a scholar, thinker and an idealist of the 20th century. Therefore, his Vedanta is not identical with that of Sankara and the Upanisads.

Radhakrishnan defined religion as the insight into the nature of Reality. For him, this experience was the response of the whole personality, the integrated self to the central reality. He rejected religion as a consistent attempt to apprehend truth. Dr. Radhakrishnan pointed out that the purpose of life was not the enjoyment of the world, but the education of the soul. Radhakrishnan stated that sravana, manana and nididhyasana (hearing, reflection and disciplined meditation respectively) are the three stages of religious life, and one has to rise from one stage to another.

Radhakrishnan says that no religion is perfect, because religion is a movement or growth in which the new rested on the old. The different religions, Radhakrishnan felt, were like comrades in a joint enterprise for facing the common problems of peaceful co-existence, international welfare and justice, social equality and political independence. He used these as the basis for the development of human culture. He also asserted that a religion which has not
given importance to social reforms and international justice has no appeal to the modern mind like Vivekananda.

Radhakrishnan said that the God-believer loves his fellowmen as he possesses love for himself. He seeks their highest good as he seeks his own by redemptive service and self-sacrifice. To Radhakrishnan, the God-believer can bring justice above civilization, truth above patriotism.

For Radhakrishnan, religion may be many on account of the divergence and the same like Vivekananda. Radhakrishnan says, “Religion is not a creed or a code but an insight into reality.” For him, this insight will express that man is always confronted with something greater than himself which is somehow immanent in the human soul and this is eternal or the Absolute Reality which is present in the soul of man as its secret ground and forms a bridge between the finite and the infinite. Insight into this truth is the essence of religion.

The Absolute or the Brahman is designated by Radhakrishnan both in the Indian way and in the western manner. He, at times, called it the Brahman, and at other times the absolute. His absolute contained in it the element both the Advaita Vedanta and the Hegelian tradition. Like the advaita vedantist, Radhakrishnan, too, believed that the Absolute did not have any internal differentiation. For him, the differentiations that appeared to us is so only from the point of view of creation. Radhakrishnan conceived the Absolute as pure consciousness and pure freedom and infinite possibility. The first two characters are described more or less in the Vedantic way. The third character is explained in the manner of Hegel’s Absolute Idealism. The Absolute, according to
Radhakrishnan, has to be spiritual in nature. He called the absolute the whole of perfection. For him, everything else is imperfect. In respect of the God and the Absolute, Radhakrishnan holds his position with saying that the supreme is conceived as revealing itself in two ways—Absolute and Isvara. The absolute is the object of metaphysical aspiration, God of the religious aspiration. Radhakrishnan did not agree to reduce God to unreality by making it a product of Maya and ignorance. For him, God is real in so far as creation is real and God is an aspect of the absolute. For him, God is the perfect as well as the highest moral being, free from all sorts of evils. He says that God performs His act in accordance with his own laws.

Radhakrishnan unlike Vivekananda treats the world as just an accident of the Absolute. Like Sankara, Radhakrishnan too believed that the world is not necessary to Brahman. Radhakrishnan borrowed this element from ancient Indian thought. For him, also creation is lila and this lila is real.

Dr. S. Radhakrishnan has been widely regarded as one of the greatest religious philosophers of the contemporary world. His philosophy is spiritualistic. Spiritualism is a religious outlook of the world. Radhakrishnan is not a theoretician of religion. He does not look at it from outside with disinterested curiosity. But he looks into it from within as a committed believer of true religion that is born of spirit, not of flesh and blood, not of codes and customs, not of races and nations.

Radhakrishnan puts that the spirit in man is life and it resists death in all its forms. “A man’s religion must be his own and not simply accepted on trust or
imposed by authority.” Trust and authority may put him on the way. But it is his own independent search that will take him to the goal. God or the ultimate reality is the object of man’s religious experience. Radhakrishnan observed that we may not know the ultimate meaning of God though we may know something about God through religious experience. Man’s belief in God is like the hypothesis of electron of the physicist. Radhakrishnan says, “we have certain experiences which we try to account for by the assumption of God. The God of our imagination may be as real as the electron but it is not necessarily the reality which we immediately apprehend”. The idea of God to S. Radhakrishnan, is an interpretation of experience. He says that religious consciousness has felt that God and religion are one. God is a symbol where religion cognizes the Absolute.

5.9 Conclusion

Contemporary Indian thinkers are true to their tradition. Their attitude towards tradition is ‘reverential’, and therefore, they appear to be tradition-tied and dogmatic. Tradition, at times, does become a source of dogmatism in philosophical thinking, but this also is true that a complete and radical breaking away from tradition is impossible. Those who wish to do so become ‘homeless’ and start looking towards other sources for inspiration. The philosophy that they produce becomes derivative, a kind of moon-light philosophy. Therefore, what is needed is to re-think the thoughts of the contemporary Indian thinkers.
Contemporary Indian thinkers try to re-interprete some of the ancient ideas derived chiefly from the Upanisads and yet, in their philosophies we come across some refreshingly new notions and rational demonstrations and similar other attempts at construction. They are, thus, both interpretative and creative of course within certain limits. Sankara, for example, is a commentator on the ‘Vedanta Sutra’, and yet he is one of the most original thinkers that the world has ever produced. Moore himself admits that he derives the subject-matter of his philosophy from the thoughts and writings of others and yet his philosophy is a consistent and continuous attempt at construction.

For the above mentioned contemporary Indian thinkers, the roots of philosophical thinking lie in considerations that are existential. Tagore and Radhakrishnan, in particular, analyse the existential conditions of man, speak of the life of care and anguish – of fear and boredom – and assert that life means living in the midst of and in spite of them. It is true that they also speak about the ultimate escape, more or less, in the manner of the ancient Indian thinkers, but they make a distinction between the concern of philosophy and the ideal of philosophical thinking. They accept the reality of the world and also of the bodily aspect of man.

From what has been said above, it is clear that the contemporary Indian thinkers share some common beliefs. At least with respect to certain issues there appear to be a general agreement among them. Some of the prominent issues with respect to which all these thinkers appear to be in agreement are: monism, reality of the world, integral nature of man, dignity of manness, reality of human
freedom, importance of intuitive knowledge etc. All these thinkers are monists, but Monism expresses itself differently in all of them. According to some, the distinction between Monism and Monotheism is irrelevant; some of them, while asserting the oneness of the Absolute, make God a necessary aspect of the Absolute, and according to some others, the monistic character of reality carries it into the realm of the Infinite.

In the similar manner, all the contemporary Indian philosophers give to the world a reality and assert the dignity of humanness. They all believe that the ideal of life can be reached only by transcending the finite world, and yet, they all are one in asserting that being in the world or being human is not a misfortune as the ancient Indian thinker took it to be. So, it is in this sense that contemporary Indian philosophy in spite of its emphasis on spiritual ideals, is humanistic.

Here, it can be mentioned that Adiguru Sankaracharya was directly followed by the two of the contemporary Indian philosophers. They are B.G. Tilak and Ramana Maharsi. On the other hand, Vivekananda, M.K. Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, Dr. K.C. Bhattacharya and Dr. S. Radhakrishnan were more or less influenced by Sankara. Of course, they are independent views of each.

Tilak’s teachings are those of Advaita. He agrees with Sankara in holding that the Ultimate Reality, Brahman-Atman is non-dual and of the nature of Existence-Consciousness-Bliss; that the world of plurality is an appearance of Brahman; that what is responsible for this appearance is the illusory maya and that the so-called individual soul (jiva) is no other than Brahman. He has rightly
judged that religion is the greatest potential energy that could be tapped easily, and hence, has utilized scriptures, the religious festivals, etc., for his cause of the freedom movement. Though Tagore declares that he relies on scriptures, he seems to view the infinite through his sense-organs, through the finite. He is a mystic who gets merged in his personal God, be one with Him and performs ‘His work’. It is worth remembering here the Lord’s statement in the Bhagavad-gita, ‘mat karma Krt’ while He describes the grades of devotees. As in the Vaisnava tradition, Tagore’s God has to wait, suffer till the individual soul unites with Him. At the same time, Tagore holds that God chooses his soul-bride for this union. The freedom loving poet Tagore with a craze for Nature, God’s creation, has advocated a poet’s religion as different completely from the philosopher’s religion, the politician’s religion.

M.K. Gandhi describes religion as a mighty tree that absorbs its sap from the moral height of people who possess that religion. Religionless life is like principleless life, and principleless life is like a rudderless ship.

By protecting us from being tossed about on the stormy ocean of the world, religion helps us to reach our destined goal. The different religions are the different roads converging at the same point. A single religion for the whole world is an impossibility and there is no need for it. Gandhi does not advocate conversion and says that a man who is not satisfied with his religion cannot derive permanent satisfaction from any other faith. Since religion is a matter of life and death, a man cannot change religion as he changes his garments; rather religion accompanies him beyond the grave. One cannot profess religion to
oblige others. He advocates Hinduism as a religion acceptable to all. This is an ethical religion and stresses the regard for other religions. Its essence is truth and non-violence and its central principle is liberation or moksa.

Sri Aurobindo says that the Vedantic formula “One without a second” must be interpreted in the light of the other truth “All this is Brahman.” His criterion of reality is that ‘Truth has to be sought in a larger and complete affirmation.’ The main tenet of Aurobindo’s philosophy of the Life Divine or the Realistic Advaita is “Brahman; Isvara is all this by His Yoga-maya.” To him, whenever there is the decline of dharma and the uprising of adharma, Godhead comes into birth by his self-maya. Avatara or descent occurs only when there is a crisis of spiritual character. There are two aspects of the Divine birth, one is the descent, when God becomes manifest in the human form and nature, the eternal avatara and the other is the ascent, the ascent of man into the Godhead.

In short, the philosophy of K.C. Bhattacharyya is dominated by psychological and epistemological interpretations. The emphasis on transcendence of the subject-object duality points out the influence of Advaita Vedanta in Bhattacharyya’s philosophy.

Sri Ramana’s philosophy is identical with Sankara’s Advaita. The Absolute Reality, ajata-vada, the doctrine of maya, the vivartavada, pratibimba-vada, jivanamukti and jnana as the ultimate means, are very clearly explained by Sri Ramana. He points out that the source of I-thought is not sunya and ‘nothing’, but the self-luminous consciousness, and declares that it is wrong to criticize Sankara as a maya-vadin.
Another great contemporary philosopher Dr. S. Radhakrishnan defines religion as the insight into the nature of Reality (darsana) or experience of Reality (anubhava). This experience is the response of the whole personality, the integrated Self to the central Reality. Religion is the self-manifestation of the Ultimate Reality in man. It is the awareness of our real nature in God; and in it is a way in which the individual organizes the inward being and responds to what is ‘envisaged by him as the Ultimate Reality’. Radhakrishnan defines religion also as a strenuous endeavour to apprehend truth. “A religion represents the soul of the people, its particular spirit, thought and temperament…. It’s an expression of the spiritual experience of the race, a record of its social evolution, an integral element of the society in which it’s found”.  

Dr. Radhakrishnan asserts that a religion which does not give importance to social reform and international justice has no appeal to the modern mind. To quote him, “The believer in God loves his fellow-men as he loved himself, seeking their highest good as he seeks his own, by redemptive service and self-sacrifice. He will put justice above civilization, truth above patriotism.” A true religious soul will identify with social and human revolution and guide mankind for a better and fuller life.

Vivekananda advocated a man-making religion. According to him, religion has two modern theories, the spirit theory of religion and the evolution of the Idea of the Infinite. Man, according to him, wants to know the truth behind death or the power behind nature.
He arrives at the third universal generalization out of which everything else comes. The primal cause Brahman must be identical with the most insignificant effect. The last generalization, Brahman, is attributeless, is Absolute Existence, Knowledge and Bliss. According to him, Hinduism is comprehensive as it includes the high spiritual flights of the Vedanta philosophy, the practice of idol worship and its mythology, the agnosticism of the Buddhists and the atheism of the Jainas.

Explaining Hinduism Vivekananda uttered that the Hindu concept of religion is that reasoning cannot validate religious truth. Since religious facts are based on experience, experience alone can validate them. The law that governs the spiritual world, the moral and spiritual relationship between soul and soul and between individual and God are eternal. Thus the Hindus have received their religion through experience, and in Hinduism there is no struggle and attempt to believe a certain doctrine or dogma. Its goal is realization through constant endeavour to become perfect, to become divine, to reach and see God and to become perfect as God.

Vivekananda stressed on the importance and high necessity of brotherhood, integrated religions, positive thinking, feeling and willing to pave the way to universal religion to avoid fanaticism and communal disharmony. He had high esteem and faith in Vedanta philosophy that was had from Sankara. He advocated that all men are like Brahman and this truth could be achieved through one’s own way of religious faith.
From the above discussion, it can be said that the contemporary Indian thinkers were in favour of the idea of a casteless and classless society. They have given more attention and interest to the social renaissance for better humanism and humanistic spiritualism. They wanted the emergence of a society where nobody suffered from discrimination, inequality, fear, want and other evils and which was altogether freedom from the prejudices pertaining to colour, community, race, religions and so on. As for example, Vivekananda endeavoured throughout his life for the upliftment of the poor and the down-trodden. Tilak, Tagore and Radhakrishnan have also made substantial contribution in these cases, but in comparison to them, Gandhi discussed this factor in a much wider sense.

Religion for Gandhi was based on truth and non-violence. He observed that truth and non-violence were supreme ideals for mankind. On the other hand, religion for Vivekananda was based on realization which is intrinsic as well as spiritual in nature and character. Vivekananda advocated the universal religion so as to make a congenial atmosphere amongst all religious people. He says man should exercise harmony, unity and brotherhood. Vivekananda prefers to enforce love as the greatest power which can be utilized in solving all our problems. Most of the contemporary Indian thinkers held love as an individual virtue. If the contemporary Indian thinkers did not have their contribution to the people of India, then India have been backward in every aspect. Vivekananda loved all human and inspired them to live in a harmonious way. His love was neither
intellectual nor sentimental. It was based upon the fact that in his eyes there could be no bad or evil men in the world. Such men must be liquidated as all were the creatures of the same God. His contribution and ideas are getting more applause throughout the world today.

Gandhi’s concept of ‘sarva dharma samabhava’ is very near to Vivekananda’s universal religion and Tagore’s religion of man. Vivekananda aptly observes, “All religion is contained in the Vedanta, that is in the three stages of the Vedanta philosophy, the Dvaita, Visistadvaita and Advaita, one coming after the other. These are the three stages of spiritual growth in man. Each one is necessary. This is the essence of religion”.26

For practising religious tolerance, Vivekananda said, “I accept all religion that were in the past and worship with them all. I worship God with everyone of them. The Bible, the Vedas, the Koran and all other sacred books are but so many pages and an infinite number of pages remain yet to be unfolded.”27 Vivekananda accepted advaita Vedanta and yet engaged himself in social activities like famine relief, maintenance of orphanages, opening of training centers, educational institutions, dispensaries and the like. He was also against the exploitation of the low caste in the guise of caste system. He advised people to go in for inter marriages between different castes. Vivekananda was not simply intellectually convinced of the unity of all religions, but he experienced them and lived through.

Gandhi has identified truth with reality. His uniform experience has convinced him that there is no other God than truth. From his experiment of life,
Gandhi has been able to have of truth that can hardly convey an idea of the indescribable light of truth which has been compared by him to a million times more intense like that of the sun we daily see. In fact, what Gandhi has caught is nothing but merely the faintest light of the mighty effulgence.

Gandhi takes the voice of conscience as the dependable proof of the existence of God. To him, conscience expresses the Divine in man. Gandhi says that he does not have special revelation of God’s will. Gandhi himself says that he possesses nothing new to teach the world. Truth and non-violence are as old as the hills. All he has done is to do experiments in both. In fact, Gandhi discovered non-violence in the course of his pursuit of truth.

To Gandhi, man possesses no control over the end but over the means. The clearest possible definition of the goal and its appreciation would fail to take us there, if we do not know and use the means of getting it. We must, therefore, concern ourselves basically with the conservation of the means and their progressive use. Then the attainment of the goal may fully be assured and our progress towards the goal will be in exact proportion to the purification of our means. Gandhi, thus, clearly gives explanation that the end of truth can merely be grasped through the pure means of Ahimsa, i.e., non-violence.

The contemporary Indian philosophers have been found to have made a significance in different fields of thought, action and experience like politics, poetry and mysticism. The teachings of these philosophers bear a cross-section of living Indian thought and may guide to the nature and content of India’s rich
religio-philosophic culture. These eight thinkers seem to admit unity in varieties, i.e., the uniqueness of the self in all men in different perspectives.

Tilak asserts that jnana, the way of knowledge, is the only way to realize the identity between Atman and Brahman. To him, karma-yoga is not preliminary to jnana-yoga, rather superior to it. He treats karma-yoga as inclusive of all other yogas defining it as jnana-mulaka-bhaktipradhanya-karma-yoga (knowledge originated devotion predominant path of action).

Keeping consistency with the classical Advaita, Tilak says that the ajnana or ignorance makes the jiva unable to realize the eternal nature of the self. The jiva discovers its original identity with Brahman as ajnana or ignorance is removed. According to him, all men are basically same, i.e., there is a basic unity underlying this universe as revelation of the same Reality or Brahman.

Rabindranath Tagore accepts the cosmic (saprapanca) view. The Upanisads like Isa, the Candogya and the Svetasvatara where the cosmic view is emphasized, attract him than the Brhadaranyaka or the Mandulkya which possesses the cosmic attitude as the ultimate truth. Tagore regards the ultimate reality as the personal God, the infinite Being consisting of all finite souls as well as the world of matter. The poet asserts that the infinite becomes the finite without losing its infinity. He keeps belief in one infinite centre, the supreme person who possesses a relation to all the personalities and so, all the world of relativity. To Tagore, liberation or mukti of the finite soul lies in its non separation from the infinite God who takes every being and entity. Here, we see
reflection of Advaita teaching too. The poet reveals this as found in the
“Contemporary Indian Philosopher” volume edited by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan and
Professor J.H. Muirhead: “The I in me realize its own extension, its own infinity
whenever it truly realizes something else.” And again, “The fact that we exist has
its truth in the fact that everything else does exist, and the I in me crosses its
finitude whenever it deeply realizes itself in the Thou art.”

Vivekananda wanted men to be inspired by the ideals of Advaita Vedanta.
The religion of Advaita says that conflicts amongst all the religions of the world
are merely apparent, and that they do not affect the internal heart or the essence
of religion. Vivekananda, truly speaking, admits that there should be sects as well
as conflicts. If all men think the similar thought there remains in fact, nothing
else to be thought. But men, according to him, are lost so much in the external
conflicts of religion that men fail to notice its presence. We must see, through
impartial self-realization, the very oneness that the concept of the universal
religion that asserts among all the religions of the world. When men realize this
fundamental truth, all conflicts, all quarrels in the name of religion will
automatically be discarded. The domain of love and compassion, i.e., service to
mankind, needy and down-trodden, will reign. Such a beautiful exposition was
inherited by Vivekananda from his spiritual Guru Sri Ramakrishna
Paramahansha.

Sri Aurobindo, too, speaks of the spiritual oneness between the self and
the supreme reality. His philosophy has been based on his vision of the oneness
on the supreme reality. He was greatly influenced by the declaration by Lord Sri Krsna in the Bhagavad Gita: “At the end of many lives, the man of wisdom comes to me, realizing that Vasudeva is all, he is great soul, he is very difficult to find.” He perceived the presence of Vasudeva in each of the people and called for a spiritual evolution to realize the true nature of the Life Divine.

Dr. K.C. Bhattacharya who differs from some aspects of classical Advaita philosophized his beautiful thoughts and expressions to expound Advaita-Vedanta. He distinguishes three phases of philosophy: (1) Philosophy of the object which is different from a scientific study of the object, (2) Philosophy of the pure subject, and (3) Philosophy of the Absolute. These aspects, according to Bhattacharyya, stand respectively for pure objective thought, spiritual thought and transcendental thought. Corresponding to knowing, willing and feeling, the three modes of the subjective mind, the Absolute possesses three phases are: positive being (truth), positive non-being (freedom) and positive indetermination (value). He, thus, makes a spiritual revolution through positive consciousness towards purified transcendentalism where a chain-system like harmony between the self and the Absolute Being is present.

Ramana Maharsi arrived at Advaita experience without prior scriptural studies and practical disciplines. Advaita, for Sri Ramana, did not stand for any limited or partial perspective, but for the complete truth which includes and transcends all the pluralistic and quasi-pluralistic formulations of it. For Sri Ramana, ‘I’ – consciousness has been the regenerating principle which makes
distinction between the objective impermanency and what is called subjective or transcendental reality. Sri Ramana’s philosophy proceeds from ‘I’- consciousness to the understanding of what is Reality from transcendental point of view. He showed non-dualism between the objective world and the subjective world.

Dr. S. Radhakrishnan to some extent was influenced by Plato and Adiguru Sankaracharyya. He wanted to expound Sankara’s Advaita in the light of the idealistic tradition of the West. Radhakrishnan clearly remarked on Advaita as Absolute Idealism. “It is my opinion” says Radhakrishnan, “that systems which play the game of philosophy fairly and squarely, with freedom from presuppositions and religious mentality end in Absolute Idealism”. 30

From the above discussion, it has come to notice that the Advaita is the main source of inspiration of the teachings of the contemporary Indian ‘thinkers’. Advaita may be explained in different ways. Mainly influenced by the Bhagavadgita, Tilak agrees completely with Sankara. They differ only in regard to the means to release. Because, jnana for Sankara is the direct means and karma-yoga an axillary, to Tilak, on the other hand, release may be attained by karma also or as in combination with jnana. Advaita has been accepted whole heartedly by Mahatma Gandhi. The base of his entire life of prayer, meditation and service is expression of the fundamental truth that the ultimate reality is one. Truth is equivalent to this reality which, according to Gandhi, can be attained through non-violence. The cosmic view of reality has been preferred by Rabindranath Tagore while realizing the higher attitude where reality appears distinctionless and non-dual. The point to be marked to him is his poetical view
to Advaita. The notion of evolution in Advaita has been introduced by Sri Aurobindo. The complete reality for him is nothing but sat cit ananda which descends into mind, life and matter; that possesses an ascending movement of matter, life and mind to the ultimately real, the double process has become possible with the meditation of the supermind. Matter in his belief will ultimately be divinised, losing its materiality. He has rejected the doctrine of Maya which Aurobindo narrated as a negative approach that has affinity to the materialist’s negation. He says that the world-creation is God’s lila while the world as the consequence of divine lila is recognized by Sankara. Vivekananda and Ramana Maharsi advocated the purest form of Advaita. His Master Sri Ramakrishna carefully chose Vivekananda to spread his mission of oneness and the transcendent unity of religions which is based on Advaita. The Advaita was taught to the West by him as a corrective to mark varieties and as a means to realize spiritual harmony. Vivekananda made a spiritual revolution in the minds of the people of India through Advaita as he believed that by this way only a lasting strength would be secured. Ramana Maharsi conceived Advaita experience without undergoing any preparatory discipline and after having such experience the sage remained in the natural state (sahaja). Silence and words were his media to instruct the aspirants of the world who approached him. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan and Dr. K.C. Bhattacharyya, the famous professors of Philosophy as well as Advaitins, simultaneously made attempt to translate into practice what they taught as the ultimate truth. They wanted to explain Advaita through the absolute tradition of the West where both of them recognized some sorts of similarities.
From the above discussion, it follows that the contemporary Indian philosophers, being influenced by the classical Advaita trend of philosophy especially of Adi Sankara, advocate the importance and the relevance of Advaita philosophy in the context of world-wide philosophical perspective. These contemporary Indian philosophers have expressed their philosophical as well as religious approaches from the fields of politics, poetry, mysticism, practical spiritualistic attitudes etc.

The religious philosophy amongst these thinkers may comparatively be considered to have possessed some sorts of uniqueness in thoughts and ideas as Vivekananda upholds the concept of humanism in the light of practical Vedanta. His religious philosophy has been in comparison to the rest of contemporary Indian thinkers very much dynamic, practical, constructive, influential and especially man-oriented concrete philosophy. As a famous Advaitin, Vivekananda believes Vedanta to be the foundation of all religions of the world. The most influential features of such a religious philosophy are: (1) Unity of existence and (2) Essential unity of every religion. The unique thinking of Vivekananda sprung out owing to the impact of the independent and free thinking of Europe, western education and culture of the second half of the eighteenth century.

The ‘Religion of the Upanishad’ has been embraced by Vivekananda to be the all-embracing creative genius with a view to awakening the divinity already existing in man. To him, religion is nothing more than Vedanta. He tried to establish throughout his life that Vedanta religion could be the foundation of all
the faiths of the world. Such a philosophy of Vivekananda for awakening of
divinity already in each and every soul from within marks uniqueness in
comparison to the other contemporary philosophers of Indian origin.

Vivekananda treats religion as belonging to the supersensuous plane
which is not found so vividly in the thoughts of other contemporary philosophers.
According to him, religion in the sense plane is not possible. The notion of
supernaturalism advocated by Vivekananda has given a concrete shape to his
idea of morality, socialism, practical – Vedanta, individual freedom and
education in a various paths. Such idea has deeply influenced his faith in the
‘direct experience of the spirit’ as taught by his spiritual Guru Sri Ramakrishna.
Vivekananda prescribes the ‘Monistic’ trend of the Vedanta philosophy as the
way of realizing the end of religious pursuit of truth. For him, religion should be
regarded as a vision and inspiration of the Reality, the very destined goal of all
human beings. Vivekananda’s best gift which has been presented towards the
world is his agreement that Vedanta philosophy exists in realization. The
relevance of such a thinking of Vivekananda has been an important issue of
discussion in contemporary religious thinking trend as it offers to religion its
substance. Realization means that every truth should be justified by us with
reason. That is to say, the realization of the Atman to be the spirit has been the
secret of Vedanta philosophy of Vivekananda.

Another significant point of uniqueness in Vivekananda’s religious
philosophy is that he regards Hindu philosophy and religion so broadly and
rationally that it embraces every idea of God and human spirituality. He, like the
classical thinkers, has reconciled philosophy with religion. Here he differs from Hegel’s notion of philosophy and religion. Every culture to him, is the struggling revelation of the ‘Reality’. Of course, both Hegel and Ramakrishna share the attitude that religion exists in faith. Ramakrishna asserts that faith only can make us realize God who is very near to us. Vivekananda with profound belief in religion holds that Hinduism is based on the Vedas which are the treasure of spiritual laws discovered by various persons at various times. Vivekananda, the great spiritualistic philosopher, conflicts with naturalism that proves matter to be the ultimate reality. Without spiritualistic explanation, says Vivekananda, the materialistic explanation of nature is not adequate. He, therefore, with agony says that the greatest blunder of this modern society is to realize the spirit as matter. The spirit which is the cause of all our thoughts and actions is untouched by good or evil.

The effort to make union between science and religion may be considered as another merit of Vivekananda’s religious philosophy. To him, no real fight is found between science and religion. Vivekananda asserts that religion should be justified by modern science. His approach towards religion is supernaturalism where he like his Guru Ramakrishna never encouraged sectarian and orthodox Hindu religion. His greatest message in the field of spiritualism is to overcome the limits of the so-called ‘established religion or cultural tradition’. He says that we should study the original sources of knowledge with a view to understanding any religion. Vivekananda prefers shraddha (respect) to attain remarkable
consequences in respect of religious discourses. According to him, every creed is in this way, makes the attempt at humanity to realize the infinity of himself. Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo and Dr. S. Radhakrishnan made labour to establish that the essential of religion is to become conscious of spiritual divinity. The comprehensive acknowledgement of each and every aspect of life may be called the significant contribution of Vivekananda. He wanted to discard the very distinctions in respect of creed, culture, sex, race and nationality through his unique concept of universalism in religion. The Great Master successfully put the Vedanta philosophy of ‘oneness’ into practice which reflects positively in the mind of Vivekananda. He advocates as an essentialist ‘unity of diversity’ as the law of every progress. Religion has been treated by him as synonymous with universalism of the spirit. His most distinctive message of ideal of religion is the harmonious balance of our directions which is attained by ‘Yoga’. Thus, to Vivekananda, Advaita is the future religion to enlighten humanity.

Another significant point in Vivekananda is that he very earnestly wanted to discard the external observances of religious practices. He called upon us to reach the depth of facts than mere outward perfection. Otherwise religious doctrines are just dead principles. M.K. Gandhi too made an endeavour to prove that we may have true religion in the urge to experience the universal and all pervading spirit of Truth face to face. His ideas of socialism, politics and economics were moulded by this deep belief in religion in a different way. Vivekananda identifies every vision of truth with a vision of God. He affirms that
everybody is born to re-discover one’s own Godly nature. To him, man begins as a dualist in the relation of God. As a result, God is being parted from us. Love comes in between. But as every relation is dissolved by being a monist, the little self becomes one with the infinite. Naturally, as an Advaitin, Vivekananda says that hypocrisy cannot remain where God exists. Being immensely influenced by his Guru Ramakrishna, Vivekananda asserted that it is love which instead of binding man to God, it binds man to man. This is a superb representation of his practical Vedanta. Thus, he puts that his religion indicates expansion and expansion signifies realization and perfection in the highest sense. Man’s realization of the divinity will ultimately lead to an infinite material and spiritual progress. To Vivekananda, the realization of the self governs the eternal world as he makes unification of every difference between matter, mind and spirit (self). Religion means reaching God where one can feel that ‘I am a spirit’ in manifestations. To Vivekananda, the manifestation of perfection already in man, is the remarkable principle of religion.

Vivekananda hopes for the time when the Vedanta will be worshipped, together with shalagrama… the household Deity. Here, we get the point of Vivekananda’s deviation from the classical Vedantic trend. It may, thus, be well said that Vivekananda’s philosophy gets culmination of the intellect of Sankara and the heart of Buddha. In this manner, Vivekananda comes to conclusion that he is an atheist who possesses no belief in the existence of God contradicting the classical theological concept. Thus, Vivekananda’s supernaturalism represents
the natural and harmonious enhancement of the latent power in man. To him, this latent force has been the Impersonal God manifested in man in the form of Divinity. So, to Vivekananda, reality in each and every man, must become the object of worship. Religion for Vivekananda is nothing but the experience of life and personal illumination can be attained through service to mankind.

Gandhi clearly indicates that Truth is God. This assertion possesses both a pragmatic value and a religious value. One very important thing is that the object of worship is not God but Truth. Such type of assertion may well consist of a basis for a really universal religion as ‘worship of truth’ is one thing that can bring persons of every caste, creed and nation altogether. He does not give stress on rational representation of God’s existence. To Gandhi, God can be known merely through the internal state of self-realization. That is to say, one can experience God by sincere and sacred inner realization. Gandhi in different times speaks about the order and the unity of the universe. Again he puts that the universe has been governed by a law. The order, the unity and the law, to him, presuppose an intelligent law giver. If the cause is not a unity, we cannot find unity in the universe. Gandhi prescribed the belief or the philosophy that all life in its essence is one. Such belief needs a living belief in a living God who is the ultimate decider of our fate or future.

Gandhi says that there can have no religion higher than Truth and Righteousness. Again he says, “Let me explain what I mean by religion. It is not the Hindu religion which I certainly prize above all other religions, but the
religion which transcends Hinduism, which changes one’s very nature, which binds one indissolubly to the truth within and which ever purifies. It is the permanent element in human nature which counts no cost too great in order to find full expression and which leaves the soul utterly restless until it has found itself known its Maker and appreciated the true correspondence between the Maker and itself.\textsuperscript{31} Here lies the tendency for a universal religion for all practisers of religions of the world. Gandhi, thus, transcends the very narrow limits of so-called religions bound up by so-called beliefs and practices.

The most striking point in Vivekananda is his concept of humanism which is based on the principle of Advaita philosophy. To him, if we long for being both rational and religious, Advaita can be said to be the best system in the world. The spiritualistic humanism has been determined by the Upanisadic dictum so Ham!... I am Brahman, I am Brahman. Vivekananda puts that humanity is immortality as we are all immortal as parts of the whole. This is the essence of Vivekananda’s religion.

Vivekananda says that the universal religion is to be accepted by all minds. It must satisfy the largest possible proportion of man and thereby harmoniously balance all the aspects of religion viz., philosophy, emotion, work and mysticism. The universal religion should supersede the conflicts of all sects and, therefore, should appear satisfying and reasonable to them all. Vivekananda through his concept of Universal religion wanted to bring a world-wide understanding and brotherhood. B.G. Tilak in similar voice with Vivekananda holds the underlying unity between God, man and the world. Religion for him is
nothing but to serve the poor, needy, greedy, hungry, down-trodden people. R.N. Tagore like Vivekananda says that religion of man is the realization of unity of individual soul with the supreme soul. To him, universality in religion is nothing but the active realization of unity- the realization of Divinity. For Gandhi, truth is God and sincere pursuit of Truth is religion which underlies each and every religion of the world. Sri Aurobindo says that the essence of religion is the search and finding of God. Religion satisfies the fundamental needs of human life which is a universal phenomenon. K.C. Bhattacharya expresses the universality saying religion is the path to apprehend the very way of realizing the non-difference between the self and the ultimate reality, the Brahman. Ramana Maharsi holds that religion aims at realizing and understanding the supreme spiritual Reality which is beyond spatio-temporal existence. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan says that religion is nothing but an insight into the nature of Reality which is the underlying spirit of a universal religion. In this way, it is seen that the contemporary Indian philosophers more or less possess same approaches regarding the universal religion. Each and everyone holds that realizing one’s non-difference from the supreme reality is the key point in respect of universal religion.

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