CHAPTER-II

THE CONCEPT OF RELIGION

2.1 Introduction

Broadly speaking religion consists of ideas, aims, activities and experiences of human beings that passes from generation to generation. Religion may be said to be the most important power, moulding and regulating human lives. If we take a comprehensive survey of human experiences then it will be found that religion has from the earliest times and throughout the ages occupied an important place in life and history of human civilization. In ancient time religion consisted of some crude, superstitious and miraculous beliefs used in a very narrow meaning. Through the progress of science, technology and knowledge a modern man has stopped to keep belief in heaven-hell, virgin birth and many such stories of miracles. The development of religion starts with the belief in a host of spirits yielding mysterious power which can be influenced by certain rites duly practised. It is an inspiration of man to proceed from lower level to higher level. Man is completely aware of going further towards becoming a higher being. Presently, we detect that many thinkers have become very critical of conventional religions. Now, religion has been utilized in a very wider sense. Yet it should be noted here that there has been no completely new religion since the very beginning of the world. The elements and root of religion were there as far back as we can trace the history of human being. Freudian teaching regarding
human brotherhood, free from inner compulsion and given to the resignation of inevitable is not substantially different from other conventional forms of religions. About the advancement of religions we certainly can assume that there exists some criterion or ground of valuation through which we may decide what is lower and what is higher in the scale and why? As for example, when we treat polytheism as higher than animism and monotheism as higher than polytheism. The criterion of us will depend upon our definition of religion. Therefore, this leads us to the question of the definition of religion. In this way, we should make an attempt to answer the question – ‘what is religion’? before proceeding any further. Let us discuss regarding the definition of religion.

2.2 Definition of Religion

It is not an easy task to define what is religion as it is a growing, dynamic thing, elemental, personal and broad in scope. Religion is a matter of realization and experience. It comes from the Latin term ‘religio’ that signifies a bond. Etymologically, therefore, religion means a bond which unites human life as well as social life. We see innumerable definitions of religion. Therefore, it is difficult to give a simple and direct, answer to the question, ‘what is religion’? Different definitions put forward by some famous scholars are given below-

The famous philosopher Hegel says that religion is the knowledge of the finite mind of its nature as absolute mind. So, it is a form of knowledge, the
knowledge of absolute idea or absolute knowledge involving the ultimate unity of the finite and the infinite. Here it is seen that the Hegelian interpretation of what religion is with their stressing on logical unity, system, coherence, obscure the valuational approach which is the important feature of religious experience.

Another great philosopher Whitehead explains that religion is a doing of individual with his own solitariness. Like Whitehead, William James said that religion is an outcome of the feeling acts and experiences of mankind in solitude as they apprehend themselves to be in relation to the divine. These definitions of Whitehead and William James respectively give stress on individual emancipation. But religion is not simply a personal matter. It may begin with the individual but it must end in fellowship. A union with the divine in its totality is not possible unless we have unity with our fellow beings. Holfding analyses religion as the faith in the conservation of values. He rightly observes that the essence of religion is in value, but intends to obscure the practical aspect of it. Religion is in the very realization of what is called value. Again, the value as essential in religion is not moral alone as God is moral. The great name in the domain of philosophy Alexander appropriately criticizes this type of definition as too reflective. Alexander rightly shows that God cannot be called the highest value, as there is no ‘unvalue’ with which he can be contrasted. Here Alexander seems to be confused regarding the absolute predicate with relative ones. That is, if a thing has value, then it is in contrast to something which has no value. But the case applied to God is otherwise. All that is in God exists absolutely and does not
need the negation of its opposite. In addition to these, Alexander says that religion is faith in Deity or a sentiment which brings us towards him. This explanation indicates some salient points regarding religion. At first, we may find out that religion moves us to God and to a higher experience. Secondly, it is faith in God. But the requirement of realization is missed. Alexander explains that value will originate merely whenever Deity is realized, but then, paradoxically it will cease to be Deity, as then the ‘nisus’ moves forward to the Deity of Deity and so on ad infinitum. In this way, God is never identified with value. But such a possible God does not satisfy the very demands of religion. Max Muller, the renowned philosopher-scholar-critic, puts “Religion is a mental faculty or disposition which enables man to apprehend the infinite”¹

Another famous name in the history of human civilization E.B. Tylor analyses religion as the belief in spiritual beings. Frazer too says, “By religion I understand as propitiation or conciliation of powers superior to man which are delivered to direct and control the course of nature and human life.”² In this respect, Tylor’s notion regarding religion does not include man’s feelings and practices associated with his religion. Frazer describes religion as a mode of behavior which is not the only aspect of religion.

An important group of philosophers like Schleirmacher and Ritschel etc. point out the element of feeling as the main characteristics in defining what is called religion. Schleirmacher explains religion as a feeling of total dependence on God. In accordance with Schleirmacher, pure religion is pure feeling i.e.
feeling separated from thought on the one hand and from morality or action on the other. But the feeling element in respect of religion can never be mere feeling. The life of feeling grows up beyond itself into thought and function, the whole forming one invisible movement. Religious feeling cannot be disconnected from its object or intellectual content or from the behaviour which is its external representation. Besides the feeling of dependence on God on the Infinite is to give the feeling of an idea content however vague and so to stress on the point that religion cannot be pure feeling to which ideas are foreign. And such an attitude leads to degenerate religion into an infra-rational one. Instead religion as faith in the realization of God is supra-rational.

Rudolf Otto, one of the greatest religious philosophers in the world, puts that religion is an outcome of a priori numinous feeling. The term ‘Numinous’ has been derived from ‘numen’ which means divinity. This numinous feeling is suigeneris and cannot be reduced to any other. Otto explains it as ‘Mysterium trimendum et fascinans’. W.T. Stace said that religion is the hunger of the soul for its impossible, the unattainable, the inconceivable.

Those who are moralists do emphasise the moral side of religion. To Mathew Arnold religion is morality touched with emotion. Immanuel Kant, the great German philosopher, gives emphasis on the primary of moral will and brings in God merely as moral postulate. Bradley said that morality is led into a higher form of goodness, it ends in religion. These approaches do not make justification to the inner nature and motives of the religious consciousness.
Religion is not an appendage of morality. Religion is morale but the matter of it transcends all sorts of human values. Religion as psychic urge involves thought, will and feeling and yet it is more than all this. The great thinker Emile Durkheim and his pupils advocate that religion originates in the moral order of society itself. The affective force of religious symbols and beliefs comes from the sense of interdependence and obligation. Each and every man experience as a social being in achieving learned culture rather than innate instincts. Evolutionary thought still influence Durkheim’s treatment of religion as an integral part of society. In the elementary form of the religious life (1915) Durkheim selects Australian totemism to explain his theory as because according to him, it is the most primitive and therefore most primitive-form of religion. The work of this school is one of crucial importance as they form a kind of historical bridge between the earlier in evolutionary origins and the later interests in the functions of religion whatever may be its origin.

The word religion in the context of Indian language is utilized as ‘Dharma’. It is derived from the very root ‘dhre’ which means to uphold, to support to nourish. In the Rg-Veda, the term is used in the sense of ‘upholder or supporter of sustainer.’ In the Atharvaveda, it has been utilized in the sense of “merit acquired by the performance of religious rites.” In the Chandogya Upanisad, it means the peculiar duties of ‘Asramas’. Therefore, passing through several transitions in meaning the word ‘dharma’ assumes it commonly accepted importance “the privileges, duties and obligations of man, his standard conduct as
a member of the Aryan community, as a member of one of the castes, as a person in a particular stage in life.”

The Mahabharata treats religion basically as a symbol of humanity. In accordance with it, religion is not only a symbol of the external conduct, practice, rites and belief but that energy which sustains society and keeps it organized. Thus we may find that the ancient Hindu allowed ‘dharma’ to denote various things not because of their failure to define it, but because of their effect to have that all empowering principle which would cover each and every aspect of human life.

From the side of Indian philosophy, the Vedantic view regards that every form of theistic religion ultimately has to be negated in favour of the one single religion of the supreme spirit. Vivekananda clearly 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.”

We cannot accept a definition of religion in terms of theism merely, as it leads to the rejection of Jainism and Buddhism as a form of religion. Buddhism and Jainism are ethical systems which have adopted ‘Kaivalaya’, and ‘Nirvana’ as the end of moral life.

Each and every attempt to define religion will be as futile as an act of throwing a handful of sugar into the ocean with a view to making it sweet as the term ‘religion’ can be utilized in several meanings. Religion is growing and dynamic. Religion is something which is to be realized and experienced. From
the time immemorable religious thinkers have been trying to define religion. But there are few definitions of religions which throw light on all the important aspects of religion. To be precise “Religion is a growth which is perennial and its evaluation has gone on obeying the primary laws of human progress. As religion is still in the process of growing and until the growth is complete, an adequate definition cannot be found.”\textsuperscript{5} Western minds are largely theistic in its approach to religion. In defining religion, theologicians accepted the view of Flint, according to whom anything more than theism is not possible and anything less than theism is no religion at all. Following the footprints of Flint William James too remarked- “Anything short of God is not rational, anything more than God is not possible.”\textsuperscript{6} Galloway defines religion thus “Man’s faith in a power beyond itself where in he seeks to satisfy the emotional needs and gains stability in life and which he expresses in acts of worships and service”.\textsuperscript{7} Galloway’s definition of religion is applicable to theism as it gives stress on faith on a power beyond man as the essential feature of religion. Some theologicians, of course, do not accept the view that religion involves an element of feeling. But by ‘feeling’ Galloway meant emotional satisfaction and feeling of stability or security which was greatly emphasized by Freud. In Freud’s own words “…….. a belief in God subserves the purpose of giving us a feeling of security in the face of helplessness caused by the pitiless and dark workings of fellow man…..”\textsuperscript{8} Jung also maintains that religion gives us peace and satisfaction. The concept of ‘sthitaprajna’or ‘Nirvana’ that we find in Indian Philosophy is also state of stability where a man remains
unmoved by the vicissitudes of life. In this respect, Y. Masih comments—“…… This is what Stoics, Epicureous and Spinoza emphasized as the ripened fruits of wisdom. In theism this state may assume the form of creatureliness or a state of being abased…. before one’s creator or simply that feeling of being and unclean before the sacredness of God. In current literature this state is being talked as pure subjectively, inwardness or state of commitment.”

That religion involves conative element is testified by the observance of taboos, taking part in magico-religious dances etc. in the primitive forms of religion and in the form of hymn singing, fast, rituals etc. in more organized religion. James Martineau, Braithwaite etc. were of the opinion that religion is a matter of morality. Religious acts are ethical in so far as these observations pertain to theistic religion exclusively. But it is a fact that there are certain religious acts which are mostly ritual without any moral principle involved in them. Here also we must agree with Galloway that religion does not consist in mere acts of worship and social services. Though it has been conceded by majority of thinkers of the West that religion is a matter of whole man and this has been asserted by Galloway in his definition. Yet his definition would not suffice us.

It can be mentioned that in India there are certain systems like Hinayana form of Buddhism, orthodox kind of Jainism, Sankara’s non-dualistic Vedanta where there is no room for a power beyond man or ever-living God. If Galloway’s definition is accepted then these systems cannot be entered into the
fold of religion. The western religious thinkers in defining religion exclude Buddhism or Jainism as the form of religion rather they are regarded as form of ethical systems and Sankara’s Vedanta either as super-religion or a philosophical speculation. This misconception arises due to the fact that both Jainism and Buddhism do include much that is ethical. But it is to be noted that their ethics remain subordinate to their spiritual aim. As both of them emphasise the spiritual goal as the real end of life and it is activities, they must be treated as religion because of their spiritual culture.

Herbert Spencer said that religion is a recognition that all things are revelation of a power that transcends our limit.

From the above discussions, we find that the above definitions are not capable of touching all the aspects of religion. The definitions may be said to be incomplete as they overlook one or the other aspects of religion. So it is better to detect the central characteristics of the word ‘Religion’ through which all religious issues are to be understood rather than to define it.

2.3 Nature of religion

Religion is highly complex and it comprises of different aspects. It is, therefore, necessary to make an analysis of the nature of religion for a proper, systematic and comprehensive understanding of religion itself. Let us now go deep into its details.
There were at the primitive period two theories regarding the origin of religion, namely (a) Divine revelation and (b) Human reason. Divine revelation indicates revelation of God to mankind. This revelation theory is not acceptable as this theory is psychologically false. How it would become possible that a man who had no consciousness of religion in him, attain suddenly the message from the Divine being? The English Deists of the 18th century rejected the Divine revelation theory and emphasized the origin of religion to human reason. But this theory comprises of certain faults as this theory over emphasises reason and ignores emotion and intuitions which are meaningful sources of religious ideas and experiences.

Religion is an internal element of human nature. It has always been a dominant tendency in the history of human civilization both in the East and the West. Man is the genesis of religion. So long as man is attached to the truest vision of religion, the greater is the worth of his life. Religion may be said to be the most important characteristics which has found its revelations in human art, literature and his different functions more in the ancient past than in the modern times. So, to understand the basic nature of religion, one has to study the architecture of temples, idols, hymns, songs, religious poetry of the Zendavesta, Rg-Veda, the Bible, the Koran, Adigrantha and so on. Some of the beautiful poetries in the world have been dedicated towards religion. The Ramayana, the Mahabharata, Dante’s ‘Divine Comedy’, Milton’s ‘Paradise lost’ and ‘Paradise
regained’ are some of the most glorious examples of religious poetry. So, one has to treat religion seriously in order to study man.

In almost all the religions of the world, man has been given a very respectful as well as a high status. As for example, Buddhism and Jainism have regarded man as the highest being as because they do not believe in God. Man’s actual nature is temporarily hidden owing to ignorance. He becomes infinite and free from all limitations when he realizes his real nature. Judaism and Christianity make man the greatest of all creatures in their own manner. In accordance with them, God made man in his own image and man has made to establish the complete reign of good on earth by eradicating evil. Zoroastrianism too offers the same position to man. According to it, in the constant strife between the forces of good and evil on earth, man is to play the role of the fellow partner of Ahura Mazda with a view to making him able to dislodge the forces to evil completely and establish the reign of perfect good on earth.

From the discussions cited above we find that Zoroastrianism seems to give the greatest dignity to man. In accordance with Zoroastrianism, man is born fully pure and spotless with perfect freedom of will. In this way, man, for each and every act of him, is completely responsible. This is not the case in respect of other religions. As for example, in Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism, human mind comes to earth with certain limitation and so, neither he can be taken as completely free nor he can assume the full responsibility for his work. For Islam, man seems to have been denied freedom of will to some extent. Of course there
are certain lines of Quran which make some rooms for man’s freedom, but the overall tone come out to be deterministic. Judaism and Christianity too approve freedom to man in their own ways. As a result, it can be said that each and every religion including Islam grant some amount of freedom to man in their own manners. If freedom does not indicate anything, man cannot be held responsible for his functions either good or bad.

Now, it is clear that religion springs out of life and can never be divorced from it. The basic motive of religion is that which finds men together and also finds the desires and different process of every man. From this point of view, religion is an integrative experience of men collectively and individually. Though there are many forms of religion, they all agree in one factor, i.e., all of them are occupied with the work of living adjustment to the different demands of life and society. Successfully adjustment needs an understanding of the world where individual lives. He lives in a physical and social environment and social environment consists of his fellowmen with their histories and prophecies that have evolved as a result of competitive and co-operative enterprise of numerous generations.

The scientific discoveries that have penetrated all parts of the earth have been making the whole world one though the various civilizations live by and cherish their distinctive principles of life. In this respect if the whole is to united on a religious base, then it will not unite on the basis of this or that religion but by a well co-operation amongst the various religions of the world. This is the key to a universal religion.
Each and every form of religion requires us to look upon life as an opportunity for self-realization—‘Atmanastu Kamaya’. Universal brotherhood will follow when mankind awakes to the truth. One whose life is rooted in the experience of the supreme, it spontaneously develops love for all creation. He will be free from hatred for any person. One should boldly function for a society where man can get freedom and fearlessness as a subject, not as an object. Then he will oppose terror and cruelty. He will give voice to the men who lack voice.

This explanation gives us the true sense of the purpose of religion, i.e. to assist man to grow from this world of intellect, this world of divided consciousness, with its discords and dualities, to a life of unity, of freedom of love. Religion is spiritual change, an inward transformation. It can be said to be transition from darkness to light, from an unregenerate to a regenerate conditions. It is an awakening, a rebornness.

Religion voice man’s protest against the subnormal and his aspiration for the supernormal. It develops character and in this way cures degenerations. Religion may be said to have its roots in the tendency of mankind to look upwards. This is to say, if a man has to proceed, religion must live. Religion maintains the social momentum towards progress. Religion is rarely detected in its pure form. Everywhere it has connection with social and cultural ideals. Religion has been transformed with the transformation of social ideal. It is an index of man’s expectation for and a guide towards future. Religion is a force that can be used both for good and evil. The more it approaches spirituality the more
it serves its true purpose, as spirituality is its fulfilment and culmination. Community rises higher in culture through religion. Religion evolves correlation with the social evolution, i.e., the evolution of thought, culture and spirituality. In this respect man should not overlook the individual aspect of religion, since it is social only through individuals. Religion is social in the sense that individual is social. The social aspect of religion is merely an outer and secondary though necessary form. All religion is primarily personal and individual. A diminution or subordination of this personal aspect by the socio-religious systems of churches, priesthood, rituals and ceremonies has frequently crushed the spiritual elements in religion.

The ideal of religion is spirituality. This spirituality does not negate life. Religion has nothing to do with social development, if its aim is life negation. Religion should satisfy the whole being of mankind. It should make perfect man’s physical vital and mental being. In this manner, spirituality is the essence and criterion of religion. The success of religion as a method of social development depends upon the spiritual element in it. Religions are serviceable merely so far as they are spiritual. While the spirituality is not present, religion is only an activity of man, powerful yet never a principle of guidance in his life. Spirituality is the very opposite of limitation, fixation, systematization.

It is fulfilled by freedom which means the power to make an expectation and growth to its perfection through the law of one’s own nature. A spirituality-based religion gives freedom and perfection to philosophy, science, art, social and
political acts and makes these for many-sided results of their greatest, highest and deepest potentialities. Sociologists treat religion as a social activity that may make a society a reality. Philosopher Durkheim in this way treats God figure as a social truth and necessary for holding the society together as a moral community. The basis of religion should not be negative feelings like feelings of fear, want, guilt and hatred but the positive fullness of life, joy and freedom. The values of religion get deeper with the depth of social values.

2.4 Religion of Advaita

Religion magnifies the virtues of human nature as it distinguishes man from his animal faculties. It justifies the ascending journey from the natural profane to the supernatural insight in the human soul…. a transaction of the soul from within and self-surrender. Religion is intimately related to our whole world from external as well as from internal aspect.

Towards the life of Indian people, there has always been a firm conviction regarding something that is not shakable, eternal, divine and self- evident. This conviction points out the characteristic element of the thought process better known as Hinduism. It is through the development of spiritual laws, which contends for the existence of a supersensuous sense, that man can attain revelations of spiritual truths.

In the religion of Advaita Vedanta, we get the principle that you, I and everything of this universe are that Absolute- not parts but the whole. The Atman
or the Self is same as the Brahman. The vision of Vivekananda which shaped his practical Vedanta, ultimately explored the quaintessence that ‘Jiva is Siva’. ‘Service to man is service to God’… The solution to every religious crisis is found in the Advaita. The greatest and the best known system of Vedanta is Advaita. The Advaitism is mainly spoken of in connection with Sankara’s philosophy. Although Sankara was the consolidator of Advaita, he was not the first to advocate Advaita. Among the seers of the Upanisads there are sages like Yajnavalkya and Uddalaka who held firmly to the doctrine of monism. As a matter of fact, they were the pioneers who did the spade-work and framed the structure of Advaita philosophy which later writers made use of for streamlining their individual thinking on this basic Advaita philosophy. Gaudapada is the first systematic exponent of the Advaita Vedanta. He is reputed to be teacher of Sankara’s teacher Gobindo and Sankara has honoured him as his paramaguru. Gaudapada’s work the Mandukyakarika may be considered to be the first available synthetic manual of Advaita. Though the Vedas and the Upanisads are the foundations of Advaitism, yet they were hardly framed into a concrete philosophic thought before Sankara took it upon himself the task of giving it a concrete shape and form and establishing a new philosophy out of it. He is the most conspicuous and eminent thinker of all the Indian thinkers.

Sankara’s purpose was to reduce to unity and harmony under the canopy of the Vedanta. The Upanisads, the Bhagavadgita and the Brahmasutra are the triple basis of Advaita philosophy. The Upanisads contain the wisdom of
Vedanta, the Gita supplies its cream and the sutras expound its philosophical basis. Advaita Vedanta of Sankara may be said to be an attempt of a harmonious interpretation of the Upanisadic texts. All works of Sankara were directed towards one purpose of helping the individual to realize the identity of his soul with Brahman, which is the means of liberation from human bondage.

The central doctrine of Advaita is that Brahman is the only Reality, all else being an illusory appearance thereof Sankara himself expresses the quintessence of his philosophy in a half verse –

Brahma satyam Jagatmitya

Jiva brahmaiva na parah.

Brahma is the only ultimate Reality, the world of multiplicity and plurality is false and ultimately, the Atman and the Brahman are not different. This is the central theme of the religion of Advaita Vedanta.

The non-duality of Brahman, the non reality of the world and the non-difference of the soul from Brahman- these three constitute the essential teaching of Advaita.

According to Christopher Iserwood, a great thinker, Vedanta is a non-dualistic philosophy. He teaches that Brahman, is one without a second- Brahman the ultimate Reality behind the phenomenal world. Brahman is the Atman of every human being, creature and object.

William James has rightly remarked that Sankara’s system is the paragon of all monistic systems. As a monist Sankara points the reality of one category
and he termed that entity as Brahman. “Reality is Brahman”, it alone was in the beginning- remarks the Upanisads. Sankara calls his philosophy non-dualism.

In some texts of Upanisads, Brahman has been defined as sat, cit and anada-existence, consciousness and bliss. But even the description of Brahman as sat, cit and ananda though more accurate than accidental descriptions cannot directly convey the reality of Brahman. Such descriptions serve only to direct the mind towards Brahman by denying It of unreality, unconsciousness and blisslessness. Hence truly speaking an accurate description of Brahman must be negative, that is, by way of saying that ‘It is not this’ ‘not this’, or of dissociating it from all qualities and characters. Brahman is really Nirguna.

Sankara, however, says that Brahman may be described as the cause, the creator, the sustainer, the destroyer of the world and therefore also as an omnipotent and omniscient Being from the lower attitude of our practical life. From that standpoint he appears to possess all these qualities. Brahman in this respect is called Saguna Brahman or Isvara in his philosophy who is also the object of worship.

Sankara accepts the theory of Maya for the explanation of the world. The doctrine of Maya is very old. It has been used in various senses in Rg-Veda. Sometimes it is used in the sense of magic, at other times, it is praised as a world sustaining power, and it is also used in a supernatural sense. It is stated that Varuna and Indra assumed various forms through this Maya.

In Mahayana Buddhism we find the reference of the doctrine of Maya. Hence critics of Sankara opine that as Buddha along with earlier schools of
Buddhism is prior, Sankara must have been influenced by the doctrine of Maya advocated by some schools of Buddhism. They consider him to be a Buddhist in disguise and his mayavada is but crypto Buddhism.

Dr. S. Radhakrishnan describes that the world is dependent on Brahman, and not vis-a-versa. This one-sided dependence and the logical inconceivably in respect of relation between ultimate Reality and the world are established by the word, ‘Maya’. The world is not essential being like Brahman, nor is it only non-being. It can be realized as either being or not being.

Sankara has explained creation by reference to snake-rope illusion. In our ordinary experience we mistake a snake for a rope. The illusion of snake in a rope is not without any foundation. Due to ignorance we project the attributes of snake in a rope (which is the ground of adhithana) and in consequence have the illusion of a snake which is really non-existent there.

The imaginary attribution of something to where it does not exist is called adhyasa. The two objects- the rope and the snake are two different things. But when this difference is lost sight of, and the two are taken to be identical, we have adhyasa. So also Brahman appears to be the world. Brahman is the only Reality.

According of Sankara, the Atman is absolutely non-different from the Brahman. The relation between the Atman and the Brahman is often called the relation of pure-identify. Atman and Brahman are same, but owing to limiting adjuncts of body, mind etc. that it appears to be different from Brahman. The individual soul is not a microcosm in a macrocosm; it is the macrocosm itself.
For Advaita, the world is a product of Maya, an illusory creation of God’s magical power. The individual self as limited person is also unreal. But the real self of man, the Atman in him, is ever pure, free, infinite and immortal, it is the same sat-cit-ananda, that Brahman is, and as such it is Brahman itself. Its false association with the body through ignorance is the cause of its bondage. Therefore, liberation is to be attained only through knowledge of the self as identical with Brahman, and not through religious work nor through devotion to God. Describing the attitude of Sankara Swami Visudhananda says that so long as we are under the clutches of Maya the universe appears real to us. Maya has produced this universe with its multifarious names and forms and has drawn a veil, as it were, over the Reality behind the phenomenal world. When we are able to tear off this veil of Maya, the real man will manifest himself and then we shall realize our true nature, namely, Brahman. When we see the world through the senses, it appears to us as the world of names and forms and the same world is transformed into the world of ideas when we see it through the mind. And when we see it as Brahman, then we become conscious of a real being. Hence the Vedanta urges to discover the ‘Tat’- the Ideal in us and identify ourselves with It. To become Brahman is the highest ideal of the Vedanta. The main ideal of the advaita (non-dualistic) Vedanta philosophy as taught by Sankara school is this, that the ultimate and absolute truth is the self which is one but appearing as many in different individuals. The world has no reality apart from us, the individuals to show other than this self.
Vivekananda explains that in the Upanisads the arguments are frequently very obscure. By Buddha the moral side of philosophy was laid stress upon, and by Sankaracharya, the intellectual side. He worked out, rationalised, and placed before men the wonderful coherent system of Advaita.

Thibaut who cannot be charged with any partiality for Sankara speaks that the doctrine of Sankara is, from a purely philosophical point of view, and apart from all theological considerations, the most important and interesting one which has come from Indian soil; neither those forms of the Vedanta diverged from Sankara, nor any of the non-Vedantic systems can be compared with the so-called orthodox Vedanta in boldness, depths and subtlety of thinking. A commentator writes that the system of Sankara holds the first place in Indian philosophy. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan is right when he puts that the problem Sankara sets to himself possesses a universal interest, and the solution he has arrived at seems a satisfying one. It is truly a philosophical solution, as Sankara lifts us through the power of thought which alone can reconcile and enable the various sides of life, into the ideal of joy and peace. Sankara admits that thought cannot solve all the problems, but it helps in gaining the intuitive reality.

Vivekananda took up the thread of Sankara’s philosophy at this stage. He detected enough convincing thought in the Advaita Vedanta. But he also felt that there was scope for intuitive awareness of many aspects of life not encompassed by Advaita Vedanta. Deeply impressed by the great universal heart of Buddha, Vivekananda found enough ground and thoughts to make up for the apparent irreconcilables in Sankara’s Advaita Vedanta. As an outcome of his
comprehensive study of the heart of Buddha and Advaita Vedanta of Sankara he could offer us a more comprehensive view of life. He established a clear view of life which if we comprehend shall lead us to a far deeper understanding and awareness. In the words of Vivekananda, in Buddha we had the great, universal heart and infinite patience, making religion practical and bringing it to everybody’s door. In Sankaracharya we saw tremendous intellectual power, throwing the searching light of reason upon everything. We want today that bright sun of intellectuality joined with the heart of Buddha, the wonderful infinite heart of love and mercy. This union will give us the highest philosophy. Science and religion will meet and shake hands. Poetry and philosophy will become friends. This will be the religion of the future and if we can work it out, we may be sure that it will be for all times and peoples. Though Vivekananda was inspired by Buddha’s deep universal love for all living beings, he could not endorse all his philosophy. Vivekananda’s philosophy takes the form of living Vedanta entering in our ordinary life and conduct. The core of Vivekananda’s role comes from his courageous attempt of bringing down the sky-high elevated thoughts of Buddha and Sankara down to the level of practical life and application. The philosophic thoughts of Vivekananda were drawn from various studies of Indian philosophy especially Buddhism and Advaita Vedanta have this uniqueness regarding it that there is nothing visionary or vain speculation of an idler in it, but it encourages and stimulates further thoughts which can be translated, applied, and implemented into the foundation of human society.

From the above discussion it is seen that for Advaita religion, the ultimate Reality is not a personal God but an impersonal Absolute. There is a personal
God in this scheme, but He is merely our thought of the Absolute. The Absolute called Brahman being the only ultimate Reality, the phenomenal world is only empirically real, as far as it goes. So is the case with evil. It is not ultimately real. And we are its author. Brahman is beyond evil, beyond good also in the human sense. Pains and evils we suffer are owing to our past karma.

2.5 Unity of all religions

Religion is not a make-believe. It is a real life force and its very aim is to bind together the heart of all living beings to each other and to God. To Vivekananda, all the forces have been still working to mould the destiny of the human beings. They are more potent in manifestation of one’s own true nature which we call religion. He also said that the goal of all religions is the same in essence. The ultimate goal of all men, the end of all religions is but one, i.e., reunion with God or with the divinity which is the real nature of all mankind. There are so much similarities in different religions which suggest the idea that the particulars of various religions have been copied from one another. Realization of self as God in all is the principal teaching of all religions. It is the belief in all religions that service to all living beings is the service to God and this is the way of attaining perfection in life. All religions believe in super-natural Being, transcendental but not indifferent to His creatures. All religions also believe that this supreme imposes its all pervading, all embracing unity upon the countless multitude. Comparative study of all major religions of the world shows
that except certain differences in regard to non-essentials or superficial elements, all religions teach the same fundamental truth. All religious practices are the expressions of the inward desire for realizing the supreme. The founders of different religions agree in holding that underlying differences there is essential unity.

To Vivekananda, religion gets expression through different nations, languages and customs. So, the difference among the world religions is one of expression and not of substance, and their points, of similarity and unity are intrinsic. The language of the soul is one for all men. All religions believe in one supreme spirit as the source from which the world proceeds, by which it is sustained and ends. This ultimate reality manifests itself and it can be conceived in various manners and it suggests various paths to perfection. As a matter of fact, no founder of a religion does preach absolutely new truth. There is no difference in regard to fundamental truth and different prophets preach the same fundamental truth in varied languages at different times in almost all religions of the world. In the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna puts to Arjuna- “The royal saints, the kings, the philosophers of ancient days from one to the other did pass this wisdom from age to age, that same eternal yoga, ancient vision. Here I declare to this day to strengthen the mind and heart of life’s perpetual strife.”\textsuperscript{10} Buddha and Jaina speak respectively of the past Buddhas and Tirthankaras and they admit that they have codified the same truths taught by them. In Christianity, Christ says- “I am not to destroy the law of the prophets but to fulfill them.”\textsuperscript{11} Similarly in Islam Muhammad says – “This that I am now telling unto you the Holy Quran it is to be
found within the ancient seers too.” Kung-pen-Tu (Confucius) declared –“I could hand on, I can not create new things”. The Sufis declared that –“Just it is luster of one Sun that shines in the different sea waves and bubbles, so it is one truth that is expressed under the cover of different forms”.

In all religions we find that each religion appears to an ethical ideal. Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism, all of them advise their followers to become conscious of the operation of the inexplicable moral Law of Karma and to follow the path of righteousness and wisdom to get rid of bondage. The path that Buddha taught categorically is known as ‘Majjhima Pratipada’, i.e., the middle path. Confucianism primarily teaches—“Commit no excess, do nothing injurious, there are few who will not then take you for their pattern. The will should not be gratified to the full; pleasures should not be carried to excess”. The Bhagavad Gita also teaches that he who avoids excess in food and fast, on sleep and waking and in work and play, he wins peace and joy. Taoism too teaches five moral principles and puts much importance as moderation. He who possesses moderation is lasting and enduring. Too much is always a curse. Shintoism teaches its followers certain moral offences for it leads to the displeasure of God. Zoroastrianism is ethical and it asks its followers to follow three principles—Think good, speak good and do good. It teaches the principle of ‘Ahura Mazda’ (the principle of light, justice and good) in order to reap the benefit of righteousness. Christianity, which is primarily a religion of love, preaches to follow the Golden path and to establish the Kingdom of God on earth following
the path of righteousness. The Bible says- “Be not righteous over much, neither make thyself over wise, not over- wicked, neither thou be too foolish.” Islam also asks its followers to develop a calm resignation to the almighty God for guidance of the right path and to form one Brotherhood. It asks to perform only those acts which are good and safe. Sikhism asks to have simple faith in God and to have plain living with high moral spirit.

It is, however, to be noted that the ethical ideas to be pursued by the followers are not individualistic but social in outlook. It is the principle of all religions of the world. In Hinduism this universal outlook has been found since the period of Rg-Veda. “United be the thought of all that may happen to agree”. The concept of universal salvation is a testimony to this. Bhagaban Das points out that all the religions of the world aim at binding together a new the hearts of all to each other and get back again to God. Jaina’s conception of Ahimsa is nothing but another name for universal love. Zoroastrians believe that the souls of the faithful of both sexes in are to be venerated. Islam and Christianity teach the brotherhood of man under the common faith in God. In fact, all religions teach us to rise above selfishness and to develop a spirit of universal love.

Each and every religion advises its respective followers to make attempts for reaching forward to something super-natural which transcends the physical world. Every religion believes in some stable character of inner personality, called the soul. And this soul is believed to be in kinship with the spirit. Thus soul has destiny of its own even after death. It may be absorbed in the supreme soul or
continue in everlasting communion with Him. The Supreme soul or dwells hidden in the hearts of all and make possible for man to understand and help each other in the difficulties of life. It is the one soul force of whatever unity is there in all human thought.

The realization of soul alone as eternally present in oneself and in all selves bring deathless happiness and peace. The suffering to which the soul is subject and at the same time show that the possibility of liberation or salvation. All religions offer importance to suffering and problem of escape from them and suggest means of overcoming the suffering.

Hinduism looks upon liberation as the highest goal of human life. For Hinduism liberation ultimately means the union with God or God realization. The Upanisads declare – “The one God is hidden in all living beings, the living witness binding all hearts. The wise who seek them and find them in themselves, to them one else, is eternal joy.” \(^\text{17}\)

The idea of salvation is found up with Christian conception of God. It treats the spirit of man as the candle of the Lord and which is to be lit up with divine flame. It advises its followers to be perfect as their heavenly perfect Father. Islamic religion too believes that each and every child born in Islam is being made by their parents either jew or Christian.

Vivekananda points out that the different expressions or religion have only one common central point and that is preaching of freedom that find the way out of this world. These religions never came into existence to reconcile the world
and religion but to cut the guardian knot, to establish religion in its own ideal, and not to compromise with the world. This is what each and every religion preaches. He too believed that all the religions of the world assist their respective followers in gradual development towards the realization of truth. He said that holy, perfect and pure men are found in all creeds, so, they all lead to the same truth, i.e., how can nectar be the outcome of poison. He compared Christianity and Islam to the dualist branch of Hinduism. Vedanta contains in it all the religions of the world. By Vedanta he meant universal oneness of humanity and not in sectarian sense. He said that each and every religion is found in the Vedanta. There are three stages of Vedanta philosophy, the Dvaita, Visistadvaita and Advaita. One comes after another. These are nothing but man’s three spiritual stages of growth. Each is necessary… Vedanta is applied to different ethnic groups and creeds of India. Hinduism is basically Vedantism. The first stage, i.e., Dvaita applied to the ethnic groups of Europe, is Christianity, as applied it to the semitic groups, is Muhammedanism, and the same as applied in its yoga perception form is called Buddhism.

Religion, according to Vivekananda, is not a mere dogma or body of beliefs. He urged upon the followers of various religions to make it a living thing so that society is benefited. Religion should help in the development of humanitarian values. Necessarily, the goal of religion is man-making, not institutionalization only. Vivekananda explains that the goal of all religions is Divine awareness, arising and awakening to the individual insensitivity and
callousness to our divinity, to the injustices nearly all round, to the misery and sickness of the world.

Amidst the variety of religions, Vivekananda found the universal element in God conceived as a generalized entity. He said that through this generalized entity we can see one as a man or a woman. So, universal religion runs through all religions of the world in the form of God. This God may be attained as personal, omnipotent or it may be described as the universal existence or the ultimate reality of the universe.

To Vivekananda, all religions of the world preach oneness of God and a practical application of the truth of the brotherhood of man. All religions of the world have inspired deep spiritual attainment among saints and prophets who had never taught religion to divide the masses, break solidarity and unity of mankind. Different religious altars like mosque, church, temple, gurudwara etc. are the centres of worship for unifying our invisible spiritual links.

Like Vivekananda, M.K. Gandhi too opined that belief in one God is the corner stone of all religions. In theory there is one God no doubt, but thereby we cannot expect that there will be one religion on earth. Because no two persons have the identical conception of God. As a result there will and always be different religious answering to different temperaments and climatic conditions. Still the teachings of religions are the same. No religion can stand on injustice, untruth or violence.
According to him, the central teachings of all religions can be realized only through our reading the scriptures of the different faiths from the standpoint of their own. We should not forget that there were at the bottom all one and were helpful to each other. From all these it is clear that by religion Gandhi did not mean formal religion or customary religion but the religion which underlies all religions which brings us face to face with the Maker. To Gandhi at bottom all religions preach the same maxim—that is struggle to realise the truth. Refering to divergent religions existing he said that every religion embodies a common motivating force desiring to uplift man’s life and give it a purpose. Prophets of different religions are not the exclusive property of any religion, they belong to all. He said that Jesus does not belong to Christianity only, but to the entire world people. It does not matter under which flag or, name or doctrine they work, profess a faith or worship a God inherited from their forefathers. To Gandhi all religions preach the same gospel of peace and universal brotherhood.

He said that he treated Islam as a religion of peace in the same sense as Christianity, Buddhism and Hinduism are. It is doubtless that there are variations in degrees but the aim of these religions is peace. Gandhi clearly explained that friendly study of the world religions is a sacred duty. We should have the richness of various traditions for we are the heirs of the heritage of the whole humanity and not simply of our nation or religion. The founders of all religions like Jesus, Zoroaster and Buddha etc. conceived and uttered the same truth. There is only one divine light, and every man in his measure is enlightened by the same
God yet, each has the only a few rays of that light which requires all the wisdom of all human traditions as manifest the entire compass of its spectrum.

From the above discussions, it follows that the new religions are only re-proclamations of the same essential truths in different languages, new forms amidst new settings and new conditions of life. They are new because after each reclaiming reform the particular followers step by step build up new faiths, new rites, ceremonies, forms around the core teaching in new conditions of time.

2.6 Comments and conclusion

From the foregoing discussion it becomes clear and distinct that human beings believed in religion a-priori. The present age is an age of science and technology. A great advantage in the field of science and technology have prevailed. The great thinkers like Sigmund Freud, Bertrand Russell, Marx etc. denounced religion. Freud denounces all religions including religions of totemism, naturalism and animal worship. He rejected all forms of religious practices in unmistakable terms.

Of course Prof. Leuba seems to be in favour of the value of religion in human life. In contrast to Freud’s concept Prof. Leuba puts that religion and science should work hand in hand for the better and happier production of man as divine man. This view has been seen to be very popular at present day context inspite of some agnostics and some materialist sceptics. That is why religion
cannot be divorced from human life, as it is instinctive. Religion can change only its form. Human life divorced from religion can never be a human life. Religion is an inevitable phenomenon for the world of mankind.

Besides these, there is no antagonistic relation between religion and science. They had a very common origin both in India and the West. Human minds can neither go back on scientific civilization nor can they drop what is called religion. The world renowned philosophers from both the east and the west have feeling about the need of both science and spiritual life. Science and technology should triumph over ignorance or avidya and superstition while religion over selfishness and fear and nations will come together to build a great future for humanity, the fraternity of man where man will find domain of peaceful and harmonious living.

In this respect it can be mentioned that the denouncement of religion by several genius like Freud, Marx and others is not completely senseless. It is to be realized that these anti-religious trends too have a certain truth behind them. Religions and their exponents sometimes may be said to have been too often a force of retardation, oppression and ignorance. As for example, Churches, cults, and creeds support superstitions, aberrations, violence and crimes and have been exploiting mankind for their own profit. True religion knows no boundaries of churches, temples, mosques etc. It is like free-flow of wind and water-spring.

Some people say that religion is a time bound entity; and making the scientific spirit deeper in man, religion is bound to disappear. But such description of religion cannot be said to be true characterization of religion.
Marxism, Freudianism and Dewey’s type of humanism have made attempt to destroy the very basis of traditional religions. Of course, these religious philosophers have accepted some sort of religion. As for example, communism in Russia and the Eastern Europe represents the preaching of the Christian Gospel. Even Freudianism teaches a religion of human brotherhood free from psychic complexes and dedicated to the alleviation of the suffering of mankind. The teaching of humanism put forwarded by John Dewey seems to have supporting elements of the American type of democracy which itself becomes a religious form. John Dewey regarded his naturalism as the implicit faith of all mankind. This is also a form of militant religion. So, human lives cannot be divorced from the influence of religion. Kurt Goldstein, Andras Angyal, Abraham Maslow, Prescott Lecky. Carl Rogers and many others have concluded that personality tends to become one unified whole. Each and every man has a strong drive to become an ideal self, i.e., an ideal self comes to be projected into a deity, by worshipping which each man gets a psychological satisfaction in respect of reaching and realizing his perfect self. In this way, religion is as natural as breathing, thinking and becoming. We may, therefore, say that any scientific form of religion is surely culture bound, but religion, to speak from the general point of view, is natural for mankind and we may say that religion is not going to disappear in near future or at any time to come.

Vivekananda discussed the concept of religion in a very practical way not only in individual life but in social life too. He cannot be treated as evolving any new religion in the academic sense of the term though he has made a superb
analysis on the concept of universal religion. Being influenced by many great religious philosophers-teachers of the world like Lord Buddha, Adiguru Sankara, his spiritual guide, Sri Ramakrishna etc, Vivekananda received the very essential elements of religions and he made attempt at assimilating them in his own way. He applied these not in his personal life but in social, political and economic problem also. Religion for him does not mean any creed, dogma or cult; but realization of the divineness of one’s very self within. Every religion, according to Vivekananda, should cultivate this fundamental principle for world peace and harmony. That is why Vivekananda can be said to be a practical philosopher- a true advaitin. He was concerned deeply and passionately for the development and salvation of the down-trodden, poor, weak and the neglected class of the society. Vivekananda became a shining symbol of how much could be good in mankind. He has been from different perspectives, characterized by people from different corners as a saint, a sannyasin, a spiritual thinker, a philosopher, a social reformer, a religious reformer and so forth. But above all he was a true sannyasin, a real man, a true religious man, a man of man- making religion etc. Vivekananda uses to say that the human mind, at certain moments, goes beyond the limitations of the sense and the power of reasoning, and realizes facts which are the basis of all religions of the world. The facts are an abstract presence, an omnipresent Being, an abstract Personality called God, a Moral Law or an abstract essence that underlies every existence. Men struggle to reach this ideal, the ideal of infinite powers and the ideal of infinite pleasure. Vivekananda says that true
religion is the ‘sense and taste for the Infinite’. Religion consists not in a
theological system but in man’s soul. The primacy of Vivekananda’s religious
urge behind all his religious and spiritual activities was nothing but self-
realization or the realization of the infiniteness in the finite self. He called upon
all men to cultivate to realize that divine nature from within and the very non-
difference between the self and the Absolute Reality. He took the principle of the
service of the helpless, i.e., needy poor, weak with a view to uplifting them to the
general level of living. It was his chief concern as he believed that only through
the real development of the poor and the down-trodden of the society, the destiny
of religion can be achieved. Vivekananda kept a firm belief that one can realize
God through the selfless service offered to who are really needy, week, helpless
i.e., ‘Daridra Narayana’ in his own words. He possessed a very practical religion
in his own. An attempt has been made to discuss Vivekananda’s philosophy in
relation to Adiguru Sankaracharya in detail in the next chapter.

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