Chapter - II

‘UNIVERSAL RELIGION’ IN MODERN INDIAN THOUGHT

Tagore as a Monotheist and Humanist

After registering its emphatic presence in medieval times, the idea of religious universalism became increasingly popular among the modern Indian thinkers – both Hindu and Muslim. Among these, the first to give a powerful voice was Rabindranath Tagore. He gave a new direction to Indian philosophy. He was a man who changed the thought of people about religious dogmas and superstitions. He was a mystic, humanist, poet, philosopher and the great follower of Brahmosamaj. Under the influence of Brahmosamaj he tried to remove the superstitions of Hindu religion. He visualized a version of Hindu religion which was a combination of some elements of Brahmosamaj and some elements of orthodox Hinduism. He mentions in his famous book Religio of Man that my conception of religion is basically that of a poetic religion. He believed in man’s self-realization and this belief was the center of his life and works. The basic idea of his religious thought is the realization of one’s kinship with everything and cultivate the feelings of universal love for mankind. Tagore believed in religion of man.

In modern times, everyone thinks for civilization of machines and modernity. But in the race of modernization man forgets his reality. Man has forgotten his rationality which is the essence of his being. He never thinks
about humanity and welfare of humanity. In a condition when a man completely forgoes his aim of life and forgets his duty as a human being, the one thinker who apprehended this problem in a rigorous way was Rabindranath Tagore. Tagore tried to rekindle the feeling of humanity in man. He says that worship of God means service of mankind.

According to Tagore, we cannot confine religion in any group, sect, nation, caste, colour or institution. He says that being Hindu, Muslim or Christian is a matter of chance. It is a fact that every man takes birth in a particular family and inherits thereby certain customs and norms of living in society. For example, if we are born in a Hindu family, we adopt those things which are around us, like customs, values, rituals etc. We try to sincerely perform and abide by them. But it is not the real religion because it is not the means of our self-realization. The aim of true religion is realizing the power of self, creating self-awareness, and exercising freedom of choice. Man has certainly the capacity of self-awareness and this awareness is not in the sense of physical or material well-being but the capacity to realize the spirituality that is above the physical and mental world. It means he has an inner power of knowing himself as a spiritual being. The realization of self is the realization of one’s manhood. As we know, by nature man is creative and his creative power is his dharma or true religion. The innate truth of man is expressed in the true religion of man. Now the question arises what is the innate truth of man? In Tagore’s own words it is that, “Man possesses an extra awareness that is greater than his material sense. This is his manhood. It is this abiding creative force which is his religion”. For this reason, if we adopt any religion without self-awareness that cannot be true religion.
Tagore often uses the Sanskrit word 'Dharma' to denote his idea of true religion. He uses it in a deeper and wider sense in comparison of the word 'religion'. Dharma is the innermost nature of the individual. It is implicit truth, real essence of all things. Dharma is the truth which is inherent in man. The true religion has the quality of freedom which everyman has. Freedom is the essence of man's nature because by nature man has a creative power which is inherent in him. Tagore says that every physical object has a religion that means every physical object has creative power.

Tagore says, "Dharma is the innermost nature, the essence, the implicit truth of all things". Again, he says, "In my language the word religion has a profound meaning. The wateriness of water is essentially its religion, in the spark of the flame lies the religion of fire. Likewise, man's religion is his innermost truth".

Tagore was a monotheist and anti-ritualist. He says that for the realization of true religion it is not important that we perform rituals like going to mosque, temple or churches, or follow priests. He said,

"We do not want nowadays temples of worship and outward rites and ceremonies. What we really want is an ashram. We want a place where the beauty of nature and the noblest pursuits of man are in sweet harmony. Our temple of worship is there where outward nature and human soul meet in Union".

It is a fact that in the world there have been many religious creeds and these various creeds have different forms and ways. These various practices mislead the believers and create conflicts. We can indeed say that conflicts
take place in religion because man takes up particular forms of religion. He does not see the holistic aspects although that alone is the essence of true religion. According to Tagore, the true religion of man is free from all such types of particular forms and should never be confused with the "institutional religion". He says,

"It should be remembered that religion and churches of religious organization are not the same. They are to one another as the fire is to the ashes. When the religions have to make way for religious organization it is like the river being dominated by sand breeds, the current stagnates and its aspect become desert-like".\(^5\)

Tagore truly believes that institutional religions have almost vitiated the real aspects of religion. Institutional religions give emphasis only on the superficialities of religion. They apprehend and spread out the external aspects of religion. The religious sects never touch the inner aspect of religion which is the essence of religion that is the freedom of soul. In institutional religion every institute takes religion as a slave and interprets religion in accordance with its own will that suits him. Institutional religion distorts the essence of true religion.

Tagore says,

"The same blindness which impedes them to rush to bathe in a particular stream, renders them indifferent to the suffering of their unknown fellow men. God does not appreciate this prostitution of his most precious gift".\(^6\)

Institutional religion or religion of communities is parochial and therefore away from the qualities of naturality and reality. It has a limited area. There are fixed limits around it. But the religion of man has the quality
of naturality and freedom. True religion cannot create any compulsion and give space to thoughts of every individual. According to Tagore institutional religion are rigid, dogmatic and false.

"In dogmatic religion all questions are definitely answered, all doubts are finally laid to rest. But the poet’s religion is fluid, like the atmosphere around the earth where light and shadow play hide and seek... it never undertakes to lead anybody anywhere to any solid conclusion; yet it reveals endless spheres of light, because it has no walls around itself".7

True religion has the quality to fulfill the cravings of our nature. According to Tagore, Religion is an attitude of love and unity. Love is the highest form of religion. Feeling of love existed in every human being and he should cultivate a universal feeling of love with every human being.

As we know, man also has brutish nature which requires the satisfaction of many physical needs. But only the satisfaction of physical needs is not enough. Because there is something inherent in his nature that he can realize by satisfying what is within him. “Religion has its function in reconciling the contradiction, by subordinating the brute nature to what we consider as the truth of man.”8

We can say that divinity is present in every human being and the aim of true religion is to realize this innermost essence of man that is divinity.

Tagore, in his famous book The Religion of Man, says: “Religion consists in the endeavour of man to cultivate and express those qualities which are inherent in the nature of Man, the Eternal, and to have faith in them.”9
Tagore rejected asceticism. A saint is a man who renounces the world, which means he renounces the action. He is totally detached from his Dharma. He cannot realize the nature of infinite soul or supreme soul. If we renounce the world, how can we perform our duty or Dharma, that is, cultivate the universal love and service to humanity. He says, “No my friends, I shall never be an ascetic, whatever you may say.... I shall never leave my hearts and home and retire into forest solitude...if its silence is not deepened by soft whispers. I shall never be an ascetic.”

Tagore had a firm belief in God and nature. Tagore was an aestheticist. He says God and man both are artists. God is designer of universe in a broad sense, and man is also an artist in the sense that he has the capacity of realization or creative power to understand the spirituality which exists in him. He says, “It is God, the artist who finds the final fulfillment in mankind”.

Man has two aspects in his nature. One is the individual or physical soul which is limited and the other is infinite which is a supreme self or God. The highest reality is universal man. The infinite self has the quality of ever-growing freedom. Infinite nature of man is in his spiritual freedom.

According to Tagore, finite and infinite aspects of man’s nature is the realization of universal in individual, because universal is the surplus of individual. Without finite or individual self we cannot realize the infinite. He says that as an artist man has creative power and this creativity in man represents his spirituality. Due to this spirituality man unites with God.
Tagore considered man like a ‘temple of divine’ where temple is body and divine is soul. Sometimes he considered man as the art work of God; sometimes he called him a co-worker with God, a friend and a playmate. In *Gitanjali*, he said: “The great pageant of thee and me has overspread the sky with the tune of thee and me; all the air is vibrant, and all the ages pass with the hiding and seeking of thee and me.”

Tagore always called God as Man, a Supreme Man or *Mahamanav*. He said in his book *The Religion of Man*: “For this can only be relevant to the God who is God and man at the same time; and if this faith be blamed for being anthropomorphic, then man is to be blamed for being man, and the lover for loving his dear one as a person instead of as a principle of psychology.” Tagore’s religion is realization of oneness of the individual soul with supreme soul. This we can realize in the realization of love and joy. Tagore’s religion is religion of love; love is the highest form of religion.

In the words of Charles A. Moore, “Tagore actually finds the ideal of religion in universal love and service to mankind, in the more humanistic and worldly sense of service to man as man and in world”.

Tagore tried to humanize religion; he says that worship of God means service of mankind. Thus, we can see say that the simple expression of love for all humanity is Tagore’s concept of religion.

**Gandhi’s Views on Religious Tolerance**

Gandhi’s name is the greatest among all the modern Indian thinkers. He achieved fame as a saint, a freedom fighter, humanist, social reformer and nationalist.
Gandhi grew up in a well balanced atmosphere. He imbibed religious and moral tradition of his family in his native place in Gujrat. He studied the Ramayana, Bhagavad-Gita and many other books of Jainism and other scriptures of world religions. The ancient Hindu tradition was, however, the base of Gandhi’s religious thought. He always confessed his faith in the Hindu religion and way of worship. His study of the scriptures of this religion gave him a moral sense and sharpened his religious insight.

Now before the discussion of Gandhi’s appeal to religious tolerance we will make a brief discussion on the basic character of Gandhi’s religious thought.

Gandhi’s concept of religion is very closely related with his concept of Truth or God. The basic belief of Gandhi’s religious thought is that there is only one reality, ‘God’ who is nothing else but Truth. On this basis it is clear that if truth existed God existed. His most famous statement ‘Truth is God’ meant that for him Truth was religion. Truth or God is the essence of true religion. He defines religion as devotion to some higher power or reality. In other words, devotion to truth is religion. The way of truth is the way which helps us to achieve spirituality. Explaining his idea of religion, he once wrote: “Let me explain what I mean by religion. It is not a Hindu religion... but the religion which transcends Hinduism, which charges ones very nature, which binds one indissolubly to the truth within and which ever purifies”. According to Gandhi, there are two aspects of man’s nature. One is brutish and the other divine. Brutish aspect of man’s nature is not permanent. It can be changed in some ways. Some ethical elements like goodness, righteousness, morality are present in every human being.
Religion is a way to purify the nature of man’s character. It means religion has the capacity to develop the sense of spirituality in man. When the sense of spirituality had developed in man, man achieves power which helps him to make or understand the difference between right and wrong, good and bad, moral and nonmoral, ethical and unethical, true and false etc. It develops the feeling of love and search for truth. Religion is the way to develop morality in man, because morality is the essence of true religion. “True religion and true morality are inseparably bound up with each other. Religion is to morality what tree is to seed that is sown in soil”.16 Or, again, “As soon as we lose the moral basis, we close to be religious. There is no such thing as religion overriding morality. Man for instance cannot be untruthful, cruel and incontinent and claim to have God on his side”.17 Morality, according to Gandhi, forms the essence of religion. Gandhi took the truth as a highest moral virtue. He identified religion with truth. To him, “There is no religion higher than Truth and Righteousness”.18

Gandhi says that Religion is nothing but a belief in moral order or Dharma because truth constitutes the essence of Dharma. The truth constitutes the highest religion. “Religion is belief in the ordered moral government of world”.19

Religion is not only the belief in moral order; it is the way of life also. That means it tells us how to live, eat and purify one’s self for attaining salvation or liberation. To quote his words, “You must watch my life, how I live, eat, sit, talk, behave in general. The sum total of all these in me is my religion”.20
Gandhi generally followed orthodox Hindu ways of worship. So the backbone of Gandhi’s thought was ancient Hindu tradition. In general, Hinduism is a peculiar religion having no essential tenets as found in other religions. It does not have any one founder, prophet, text, creed, specific rituals etc. In Hinduism there are various beliefs and practices. Among those you can pick up one way and call yourself a Hindu. Hinduism does not insist upon believing in the concept of one God. A Hindu can believe in one God or many gods. He would be a polytheist, monotheist or monist, or even an atheist. Hinduism is a vast religion and away from all types of complexities. Hinduism is like a tree which has several branches and you are free to pick up any one branch or way and achieve the goal that is salvation.

Gandhi says that every man is born in a family and each family has its own culture and traditions. That tradition is important for him. I am born in a Hindu family and therefore Hindu tradition and culture suit me. So I adopt Hinduism. In that sense birth is an accident. It is not a matter of human choice. But in case of the choice of tradition, culture, way of life and religion, everyone is free to choose his way which gives him satisfaction and suits him.

In Hinduism there are many ways of attaining the supreme end of life. Three ways are however more specifically mentioned, namely the way of knowledge (Jnana Marga), way of action (Karma Marga), and the way of prayer (Bhakti Marga). Man is free to pick up any marga or path and become a follower of Hinduism.
On this basis we can say that by nature of Hinduism is universal and liberal, and against rigid dogmatic rules of religion. Gandhi says:

"Hinduism is not an exclusive religion. In it there is room for the worship of all prophets of world. It is not missionary religion in the ordinary sense of the term... Hinduism tells every one to worship God according to his faith or Dharma and so lives at peace with all religions".\(^{21}\)

Further, "Hinduism is not a codified religion. We have in Hinduism hundreds and thousands of books whose names even we do not know, which go under the name of Shastras".\(^{22}\) Hinduism is free from all types of religious conflicts. Broadly, we can say that Hinduism is by nature liberal. Gandhi has a firm belief in Hinduism. There are a lot of valuable elements present in Hinduism and Gandhi was much impressed by them. He said that I felt proud being a Hindu. But it does not mean he avoided other’s faith. He always respected all other world religions. We can see how much Gandhi was influenced by Hinduism but also by Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Judaism etc.

Islam preaches a rigid faith in monotheism i.e. faith in only one God as expressed in its basic proclamation *La ilaha illallah* (there is no God but Allah). But, on the other side, it has many ethical principles which give new direction to Gandhi’s thought. Islam preaches brotherhood of man, kindness, universal love, peace for all and service to humanity. Gandhi says that Islam is a religion of love and peace and its conception of universal brotherhood is such as not to be seen in any other religion. In his own words, “the spirit of brotherhood is manifested in no other religion as clearly as in Islam".\(^{23}\)
Gandhi says that many misconceptions exist in human mind about Islam because of wrong interpretation of Quran. Islamic approach is universal and tolerant. We can see it in its attitude towards other religions and prophets. It opens gates for all and recognizes the other prophets such as Abraham, Moses, and Jesus etc. who came at different times to work for the spiritual welfare of human being.

The Qur'an declares, "The same religion has been established for you that he enjoined on Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus, namely that you should remain steadfast in religion and make no divisions therein".24

Gandhi was also impressed by the Islamic ethics. He says that as I understand the Islam, it is a peaceful religion which teaches real love and kindness for all and service to humanity. In the discipline of Islam, there are restrictions against drinking, illegal relation, murder, lying, cheating etc. If these evils are removed from the society, peace will prevail. The aim of the Islam is to establish peace in society and work for the welfare of humanity.

Gandhi was also impressed by Christianity and Judaism. He says that Christianity is one of great religions, which gives emphasis on absolute love. Love is the most important virtue in Christianity. No other religion gives attention to such pure love with God and universal love for whole humanity. We can indeed say that Gandhi’s conception of true religion and his ethical point of view as exemplified in his love with God and humanity are influenced by Christianity. Gandhi says,

“Christianity’s particular contribution is that of active love. No other religion says so firmly that God is love and New Testament is full of the word. Christians,
however as a whole, denied the principle with their works”.^25

Gandhi’s concepts of Ahimsa and Satyagraha are also taught by Jesus. Jesus’ whole life is a great example of love and sacrifice for humanity. We can see the reflection of Christianity in Gandhian thought.

According to Gandhi, simple Christianity is religion of love for whole humanity. Gandhi’s concept of Satyagraha, his message of non-violence, love and peace for all are so much similar to the teachings of Christ.

Buddhism and Jainism, according to Gandhi, are part of Hinduism and both were nurtured under its umbrella. He did not consider Buddhism and Jainism as separate from Hinduism. Hinduism as an all-inclusive and tolerant religion covered a wide variety of sectarian thoughts. We can especially see the deep impact of Jaina teachings on Gandhian thought. The many important elements of Gandhi’s ethical teachings like Ahimsa (non-violence), Satyagraha (fasting), Aparigraha (non-attachment), Asteya (non-stealing), Satya (truthfulness), Brahmcharya (celibacy) are also present in Jaina’s ethical teachings.

Gandhi does not believe in ritualistic religion. He always gave preference to moral and spiritual elements in religion. Buddhism that came in existence almost at the same time as Jainism was also against ritualism and caste distinctions.

After this discussion, we can see clearly the impact of different religions on Gandhi’s thought. He says there are many religions in this world and they are all different paths leading to the same goal.
Radhakrishnan's Emphasis on Hinduism as an All-inclusive and All-embracing Tradition

In philosophical tradition of India, Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan has a great place among modern Indian thinkers like, Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore, Swami Vivekananda, Iqbal etc. He is considered as a great intellectual teacher of philosophy and religion.

The root meaning of religion as we understand the word, is 'binding force'. But, in the world, many religions exist and each religion claims that its scripture is unique and its God is superior than other Gods. So, because of their claims of perfection and absoluteness there has been a change in the real meaning of religion. Now the general attitude of religious people is to think that the one religion is opposed to another. But the reality is that no one can claim to perfection and absoluteness about his religion and think derogatively about other religions.

Radhakrishnan emphasises this when he says: “Religion should not be confused with fixed intellectual conceptions, which are all mind-made. Any religion which claims finality or absoluteness, desires to impose its own opinions on the rest of the world, and to civilise other people after its own standards”.26

Religion, according to Radhakrishnan, is discipline and practice not theology. It touches the inner core of man and creates the power of conscience to understand difference between good and evil, right and wrong, moral and nonmoral values. It gives us power to escape from greed, lust,
hatred and non-ethical acts. It discovers the essential power in human being to unite his relation with spirituality or ultimate reality of this world.

“Religion is the discipline which touches the conscience and helps us to struggle with evil and sordidness, saves us from greed, lust and hatred, releases moral power, and imparts courage in the enterprise of saving the world. As a discipline of mind, it contains the key and the essential means of coping with evil which threatens the existence of civilized world. It implies the submitting of our thinking and conduct to the truths of spirit”. 27

Religion helps us to change ourselves in our personal and interpersonal lives. It helps us in resolving the conflicts which exist in our own nature and diminish the hateful feelings. It always increases the feeling of love and morality in our life. The true religion always generates the feeling of likeness to divinity or spirituality. Religion is the bridge between God and man and its function is to unite them.

All religious practices like meditation, worship etc. are disciplines which purify the mind. It does not only help in developing an insight to see the reality but it helps us in direct experience of reality with the help of religious insight. We can perceive the divinity and identify ourselves with it through religious discipline.

Radhakrishnan, in his famous book Religion and Society, says that

“The religious man transcends the limitations imposed on him by his material nature or social conditions, and enlarges the creative purpose. Religion is a dynamic process, a renewed effort of the creative impulse working through exceptional individuals and seeking to uplift mankind to a new level”. 28
Religion is identified with feeling, emotion, sentiment, instinct and faith. The aim of religion is to provide spiritual fulfillment to all the individuals.

Religious experience does not create conflict or disturbance in the human life; it brings peace in this world. Radhakrishnan uses the word 'Shanti' for it. He defines it as “A positive feeling of calm and confidence, joy and strength in the midst of adversity and defeat, loss and frustration”.

Now the question arises why this experience is called religious and what is peculiar in it in comparison with other experiences? It is called religious because it is a sort of inner satisfaction and has the capacity of realizing spirituality. It discovers eternal truth. Its peculiarity we can see in its effort to discover the life-spirit that unites individuality with higher levels of its own being. Radhakrishnan says that, “However much we may quarrel about implication of this kind of experience, we cannot question the actuality of this experience itself”.

Religious experience has the capacity to diminish the sense of separation and discover the feeling of love and harmony. He says that men are not divided on the basis of religion but many times conflict is the cause of this division. He says that the aim of true religion is spiritual fulfillment. It can be realized when we understand the inner forms of religion or the essence of religion through religious experience. He also says that conflicts take place in our life when we apprehend outer forms of religion without religious experience.
Religion, according to Radhakrishnan, is identified with higher instinct, reason and love. It has deep faith in morality. It is way of life.

"Religion signifies faith in absolute values and way of life to realize them... Religious faith gives us the passion to persevere in the way of life and if it declines obedience degenerates into habit and slowly withers away".^^

Different religions, according to Radhakrishnan, are different expressions or modes of one truth. Every religion is the mode of human effort in the direction of spirituality. They all prepare us for struggle and encourage us to achieve the supreme goal of life. In his own words, "the different religions should be regarded comrades in joint enterprise in facing common problems of peaceful co-existence of the peoples, international welfare and justice, racial equality and political independence of all peoples. Different religions are to be used as building stones for development of a human culture in which the adherents of different religions may be fraternally united as the children of one supreme".^^

The true religion is not polluted by creeds, dogmas, caste, colour or superstitions. But if this is so, the question arises what is the main cause of the religious differences and how it vitiated true religion? For Radhakrishnan what vitiated the religion was the conflict itself though it cannot affect the essence of true religion. Conflicts are the main cause of religious differences. Conflicts and differences disappear when we begin to think that all religions are the expressions of one truth that is ultimate reality. He, in this context, quotes Muslim Sufi philosopher, Ibn al-Arabi who wrote: "My heart has become capable of every form; it is a pasture for gazelles and convent for Christian monks, and a temple for idols, and the
pilgrims’ Ka’ba, and the table of the Tora and the book of the Quran. I follow the religion of love, whichever way his camels take. My religion and my faith is the true religion.”

In Hinduism every group of religion has a right to follow the truth through its own tradition, symbols, and modes of worship. They have complete choice because each religion has its own historical background and grows up with that. Hinduism is called all-inclusive because it gives every kind of support and spiritual freedom to all creeds. According to Hinduism, creeds are different, ways are different but goal is one and same.

Radhakrishnan in his book, *The Hindu View of Life* says that “the differences among the sects of the Hindus are more or less on the surface, and the Hindu as such remains a distinct cultural unit, with a common history, a common literature and a common civilization”.34

Hinduism has universalistic approach in this sense. It is not bound up with a creed or a book, a prophet or a founder: Hinduism always searches for truth. In Hinduism there is no end of prophecy and no limits of religious scripture. It always welcomes new experiences and new expressions of truth. “Hinduism has no common creed and its system of worship has no fixed form. It has bound together multitudinous sects and devotion into a common scheme”.35

Hinduism is a practical religion because it is a way of life. It gives liberty to every individual to enjoy any code or practice. It never insists on religious action but it always insists on spiritual and ethical approach in life of every individual. Hindu way of life always gave emphasis on moral life and the fellowship for all who accept the law of right and seek for the truth.
Hinduism has rationalistic approach. It studies the facts of human life in scientific spirit. But Hinduism is not only to study the facts but also try to obtain victory over facts. “Religion is not so much a revelation to be attained by us in faith as an effort to unveil the deepest layers of man’s piety and get into enduring contact with them”.36

The religions of the world can be distinguished into two classes. In the first class are religions for whom it is an attitude of faith. In the second class are religions for whom it is an experience to which an individual attaches supreme value. Hinduism and Buddhism fall in this second class of religion. For Hinduism real religion can exist without a definite conception of deity but it cannot exist without distinction between the spiritual and unholy, truth and falsehood. We can see it clearly that in the Hindu theistic system the basic thing is not the existence of deity, but its power to transform man. In Hindu systems of thought like Sankhya and the Jaina, there is no belief in God but yet they affirm the reality of spiritual consciousness.

“Belief and conduct, rites and ceremonies, authorities and dogma, are assigned a place subordinate to the art of conscious self-discovery and conduct with the divine”.37

So the Hindu attitude of religion is to have a universal outlook. Because it never sets for itself any limits. According to Hinduism, religion is the outer expression to the inner realization of God. It is not celebration of ceremonies. It is a kind of experience, the experience of ultimate reality.

In Hinduism experience is self-certifying. Hinduism is the religion of progress. According to Hinduism, religious progress is possible through
tradition, logic and enrichment of life. There has been a continuous development of new forms and ideas through racial and religious interactions that happened in the course of India's chequered history. It started in most ancient times and continues up to modern era.

“The first impulse of progress came when the Vedic Aryans came into contact with native tribes. A similar impulse contributed to the protestant movements of Jainism and Buddhism when the Aryans moved out into the Gangetic valley”. 38 Again, “The reform movements of Ramananda, Chaitanya, Kabir, and Nanak show the stimulus of Islam. The Brahma samaj and the Arya samaj are the outcome of the contact with western influences, and yet Hinduism is not to be dismissed as a mere flow and strife of opinions, for it represents a steady growth of insight, since every form of Hinduism and every stage of its growth is related to the common background of the Vedanta”. 39

Vedanta is not a religion but religion itself in its most universal and deepest significance. There are three divisions of Vedanta. These are Upanishads, the Brahmasutra and the Bhagavad-Gita. These are three stages of faith, knowledge and discipline. So all the sects of Hinduism attempt to interpret Vedanta in accordance with their own religious views. It means different sects of Hinduism are reconciled with common standard and regarded as modified expressions of one truth.

As the Mahabharata, one of the great epics, says, “The Veda is one; its significance is one, though different Vedas are constructed on account of misunderstanding. The acceptance of common authority by the different
sects helps to purify them. Those parts of the new faith which are not in conformity with the Vedic canon tend to be subordinated and gradually dropped out. While no creeds and no scruples were forced to disappear as outworn or out of date, every one of them developed on account of influence of the spirit of the Vedanta, which is by no means sectarian”.

So the Hindu method of religious reform is basically democratic because it permits each faith to get the truth through its own ways. Each group has its own historical tradition and change, the condition of its growth of spirit.

Toleration is the most basic tenet of universalism which is accepted by Hinduism. Hinduism does not refuse any religious belief. For example, Christian’s description of personal, immediate dogmatic faith in Jesus and His authority as God is self-certifying. “Christian theology becomes relevant for those who shared and accepted a particular kind of spiritual experience, and these are tempted to dismiss as illusory other experience and scriptures as imperfect”.

But Hinduism was not betrayed into this situation. The Hindu thinker readily admits other points of view than his own considering them to be just as worthy of attention. If the whole race of man, in every land, of every colour, and every stage of culture, is the offspring of God, then we must admit that, in the vast compass of his providence, all are being trained by his wisdom and supported by his love to reach within the limits of their power a knowledge of the Supreme”.

Radhakrishnan knows about criticism of Christian missionaries against Hindu beliefs and religious practices. With deep and clear religious
sense, he removes all criticisms. He says that all such criticisms are due to the lack of understanding. He says we can completely remove them by the understanding of true religion, because only it can stop the complete annihilation of human race. So there is need to understand the true meaning of religion to every individual of world.

**Sir Syed’s Views on Religious Tolerance**

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan has a unique place in the history of modern Indian taught. He played a vital role in the educational and social upliftment of Muslim community of India. He had a critical mind and rational outlook. He is also well known as a social reformer, a religious thinker, a humanist and rationalist.

He was much influenced by the spirit of nineteenth century ideology of science and reason. His family background and early religious education played a role in the development of his religious thoughts. He was the founder of Islamic modernism. But before he could grapple with the disciplines of modern knowledge and get a grip on the issues of modern concern, he acquired a deep knowledge of Quran and Hadith on his own. Surprisingly, it was on the basis of his early training in the traditional theological sciences that he could develop a catholic and tolerant outlook towards other religions and other communities.

Sir Syed’s religious outlook was liberal and free from all types of sectarian conflict. He followed his religion very sincerely. He believed in God and Quran. He says that Quran is source of all knowledge and the Prophet Muhammad is the messenger of God.
Sir Syed wanted religion to be a unifying power. He says that religion affects the whole life of man. Religion is an institution in which man learned to model every aspect of his life. He says all great religions were based on high ethical principles which were beneficial for cultured society. Every religion had two aspects: one is its moral part and the other, its belief part. Moral part presents ethics which exists in every religion. There are so many religions and every religion has its own system of beliefs. The plurality of religions creates controversies because every one thinks that his own religion is the only true one.

Sir Syed writes: "But strange is to say that in every age, each clan, tribe and nation, nay almost each separate individual, formed an idea of religion, or rather of the object of it, more or less different from that of others, each moreover being convinced that his own idea was the only true one". He quotes the Quran where God says: "I am with each individual in the appearance which he forms of me in his own mind".

According to Sir Syed, religion is innate in man's nature. There are two aspects of man's nature: one is rational and other brutish. Reason is the element which helps man to choose good and right deeds. It is the most important element which differentiates man from animals. He, thus, writes:

"Of all the innumerable wonders of the universe, the most marvelous is religion, the foundation of which lies in the distinction between the acts of men, distinguishing into good, evil and indifferent; for if there is no such difference, there can be no religion".

He defined religion as that valid principle which decides all intentional deeds, emotional impulse and spiritual sensivities of man. True
religion is based on absolute truth so true religion should be free from any fault. Religion conforms to law of nature. Nature is the best teacher to guide us for true conduct. Nature itself is the creation of creator who is ultimate truth or reality.

Religion is the path to know the reality which is the centre of all religions. We can see the self-expression of this reality reflected in whole universe in the form of love and love is appreciation of beauty. Beauty is perfection. So the concept of reality or God is present in every religion of world. Creativity, love, beauty and perfection are same in every faith.

Sir Syed says that Islam also accepts this conception of God which is acceptable to every man of reason. He has universal outlook about religion. His aim was not to assert the superiority of his own faith in Islam over other's faith. But he wanted to prove that Islam was not an alien religion. It had some valuable elements which are also present in Christianity and Judaism. The aim of Islam is to spread peace and brotherhood in whole world.

Sir Syed was so sincere in his belief that he started to learn more about other religions. He studied Bible deeply. He wrote commentaries on it. In order to understand Judaism he learned Hebrew. His aim was to minimize the existing differences of different faiths. In this way, he introduced the study of comparative religions.

Sir Syed said that religions arouse different feelings in different hearts but they all wanted to know about the mystery behind this universe. He believed that true religion was one where there was no room for contradictions. He said that we must try to define religion rationally.
"Neither an atheist nor a believer can deny the fact that man's constitution is such (or, we may say, God has bestowed upon him the power) that he is able to do certain works and not able to do certain others, and therefore, he must choose for himself a most suitable vocation in life wherein his internal qualities render the service for which he was born. So the only touchstone of a true religion can be this: if that religion is in conformity with human nature or with nature in general, then it is true. It would be a clear proof that this religion is from the hand of God, the Author of Nature both in man and outside".46

Sir Syed further said in a similar context:

"If that religion is against human nature and constitution, and against his power and the rights which follow from these powers, and stands in the way of putting them to useful purposes, then undoubtedly that religion cannot be claimed to issue forth from the hands of the Author of Nature, for religion after all, is made for men. I am fully confident that the guidance which He has given us is absolutely in conformity with our constitution and our nature and this is the only touchstone of its truth. It would be clearly absurd to assert that God's action is different from His words. All creation including man is the work of God and religion is His word, so there cannot be any contradiction between the two".47

Coming to Islamic religion itself, Islam was not a new religion started by Muhammad in Arabia. Islam had laid emphasis on the singleness of God but multiplicity of prophets and scriptures. Sir Syed tried to demonstrate the truth of Islam, because Islam has had universal guidance, appeal to peace and universal brotherhood for whole humanity. Concept of God is the common idea of all religions, since God is the creator and the sustainer of whole world or whole humanity. All people had equal rights to salvation.
Sir Syed felt a great need of presenting Islam in its true form. He tried to explain its universality in terms of reason and nature.

Besides being a rationalist, Sir Syed was also a Naturalist. He totally rejected the authority of traditionalism which was expounded by ulama of that time. Sir Syed did not believe in any type of miracles, because these are against the law of nature. Whatever is against the law of nature cannot be true religion.

Sir Syed was influenced by the nineteenth century naturalism. He says that true religion must be in accordance with the law of nature. Islam is the best example of true religion because it equates with the law of nature.

"He expounded the theory that the true religion must be in conformity with nature. He also asserted that God's action could not be different from His words. There cannot be contradiction between work of God and word of God and all of this therefore, should be in conformity with each other". 48

We know that law of nature is made by God and Islam is also the word of God. There is an agreement between the two. No ordinance of Islam and no law of Shariat can be against the law of nature. Whatever Islam has called good is good according to Nature and whatever Islam has called evil is evil according to Nature as well. In a word, Sir Syed said: "Islam is nature and nature is Islam".

Sir Syed firmly believed that neither the Quran is contrary to the law of Nature nor law of nature is contrary to religion, there is nothing which is against Fitrat Allah. He declared in an essay entitled, 'Islam is Nature and Nature is Islam':
"Islam is such a simple and useful religion that even irreligiousness is included in it. What minimum belief an irreligious person may hold, must be the basic creed of Islam. Every religion has certain special ritual and creeds on account of which it is differentiated from other, and anyone who doesn't believe in and follow these rituals is called irreligious, though we have no right to call him so. Religion pure and simple is above all these rituals and formalities with which it comes to be unfortunately bound up, and that is true Islam and Fitrat".49

In the same spirit of universality, the Quran invites the people of the Book to "Come and unite on the principle which is common between you and us that you will not associate any other being with Allah in belief and worship".50

According to Sir Syed, Islam is a religion without dogmas, without mysteries, without superstitious beliefs and without miracles. The Quran says: "So set thy face to real religion (of the unity of God after Abraham); it is the nature of God on the pattern of which he made the nature of man that is the real religion".51

The Prophet of Islam once said: ‘a child is born with a pure nature; it is his parents who make him a Jew or a Christian or a Magian’.

The Quran refers to this universal aspect of religion, the minimum demands of belief in the unity of God, generally associated with the name of Abraham. It mentions that his true religion (din-hanif) was creed of the unity of God and not of polytheism.

The second basic element in Islam presented by Sir Syed was reason and commonsense of man as ultimate source of judgment. Sir Syed emphasized that the Quran never taught blind faith in any basic principle of
the religion. In Quran it is always said that one should use his reason in understanding the problems of faith and life with open eye and open heart.

Sir Syed’s ‘reason’ was of course the empirical reason of nineteenth century, a reason to which the Quran also appeals. According to his own definition, the reason was, "that inherent capacity in man by which he draws conclusions on the basis of the observation of objective phenomena or mental thinking processes, and which proceeds from particulars to generalizations or vice versa... It is this capacity of man which has enabled him to invent new things and led him on to understand and control the forces of nature. It is by this that man is able to know things which are a source of his happiness and then tries to get as much profit out of them as possible; it is this which makes a man ask the why and wherefrom of different events around him...".52

Man is distinguished from animals for his rationality. The Quranic term "names", in the story of Adam (11, 29), should be taken "to mean the same power of reason by which man understands the nature of things, thinks new thoughts and arrives at both synthetic and analytic consequences from the given premises and thought".53

Islam and reason go together and since reason is universally accepted so should be Islam. Reason of one man can be corrected by the other. It means the reason of one age may be corrected by the reason of the other age. So without reason nothing can be achieved. But despite this, reason is also universal and belongs to whole humanity.
Tawhid is the central belief of Islam because faith in God is the supreme value of life. Tawhid means unity of God. The essence of Tawhid as a working idea is equality, solidarity, brotherhood and freedom. Islam demands loyalty to God because it is the ultimate basis of spiritual life of everyone. Loyalty to God means man's loyalty to his own ideal nature. Islam presents a simple creed which is not difficult to follow. Its striking features in social code are two; one is equality and other is brotherhood. It attempts to break the barriers of caste, colour and class and bring peace for all human beings. Islam has practical ethics. On this basis we can say that Islam fulfills the criteria of universality.

Concept of God is the basic tenet of Islam which is acceptable to any man of reason. Another important tenet is freedom of opinion in Islam. Everybody has right to express his opinion on religious matters. The spirit of Islam is much liberal in comparison with other religions like Judaism, Christianity etc.

Citing the rigidity in Judaism, Sir Syed said that it followed blindly whatever was written in their scriptures. In Christianity this freedom was so liberally used that there was no end to splitting of Christianity into several denominations. But Islam reconciles these two things. Islam rejects rigidity and offers consensus that means 'Ijtehad'. According to him,

"First priority was to follow the injunctions of the Quran; if the solution is missing in it, go to the saying of prophet, or Hadis, if the matter remains yet unresolved, the collective reasoning or 'ijtehad' was the answer. When such step by step provision exists to meet exigencies, it was not right to blame Islam".
Islam has no distinction of caste, colour, religion etc. It is open for all humanity. It gives equal status to all. The law of Islam is one and same for all human beings, for example, the women don’t enjoy a higher status in any other religion than Islam.

Islamic ethics is another universal point. We can see it in the discipline of Islam in the form of restrictions against drinking, illicit relationships, lying, cheating etc. If these evils are removed from the society, peace will prevail which is the aim of Islam as well.

Sir Syed held the view that the religion has been created for mankind rather than mankind has been created for religion. Hence his perception of Islam is not confined to Muslims alone; rather it is much wider and extends to all human beings.

**Iqbal on Islam as a Universal Religion**

In the history of modern India, Iqbal may be counted among those thinkers who have a great place in world literature. He was a religion-oriented poet. He was a vitalist who believed in a dynamic approach towards life and its problems. His work was not inspired by national or communal motives. The aim of Iqbal’s life was the renaissance of Islam and to achieve the salvation of whole mankind. He gave message for Muslim community in particular and to all mankind in general. He tried to make man conscious of his power, improve his personality and make a peaceful living in this world. He tried to transform the life of people of his own nation and mankind when he perceived that whole mankind has gone on wrong path.
Iqbal had strong faith in Islam and Islamic values of life. We can see his deep respect for Islam and its prophet in his life and works. His Urdu and Persian works reflect his love for Islam and prophet of Islam.

Iqbal is basically a Muslim philosopher. For him religion is most important in the life of every individual, as he says:

"Religion, in its more advanced forms, rises higher than poetry. It moves from individual to society. In its attitude towards the ultimate reality it is opposed to the limitation of man; it enlarges his claims and holds out the prospect of nothing less than a direct vision of Reality."^5

Religion is a dynamic force in Iqbal’s thought. We can see a remarkable expression of this dynamic outlook in his philosophy of ego (Khudi). Through it he presents the basic progressive and practical outlook of Islam. With its philosophy of action, Islam presents a striking difference to other religious system of Indian and semetic traditions.

Iqbal presents his views in his famous poetic books Asrar-e-Khudi and Ramuz-e-Bekhudi. He uses the term Khudi to mean self-recognition, self-awareness, self manifestation and self-articulation. The specific meaning of self used by Iqbal is ‘I’ or ‘Ego’ or personality of a person. Iqbal wants that every man should assert his or her being. He should feel that God is only a greater ego, the supreme ego of the universe which has been created by Him.

Iqbal says that various kinds of abilities and capacities have been present in every human being. The first duty of a person is to know himself
or herself; it is also the duty of man that he should use his inherent capabilities by working for the welfare of community or nation as well as whole humanity.

Iqbal has laid greatest emphasis on the realization of one’s self. In one of his famous Persian verses he says,

“One who denies the existence of God is an infidel in the eyes of Mullah. But one who denies one’s own existence is greater infidel in my eyes”.

As we know every man has two aspects to his nature – one is his individual self and the other the social self. Every human being is an individual as well as a member of the society.

Iqbal’s concept of ‘self’ concerns with individual self-affirmation and selflessness both. He gave emphasis on self-knowledge and self-awareness. He says that when an individual establishes his relation with society or nation he moves from individual to society.

He says that for the welfare of society or nation, first of all man should know his or her inherent power because without knowing or understanding self it is not possible to bring any change in the society. To have the knowledge of one’s self is the religious requirement of every human being. The life of self-affirmation and selflessness can be most authentically lived if one followed the teachings of Islam. For in Iqbal’s view the teaching of Islam is “the most evolved, the most scientific, and the
most natural among world religions”. In one of his interviews, he further said:

"Islam in my opinion is the only positive system that the world possesses today provided the Muslims apply themselves to it and rethink the whole thing in the light of modern ideas".  

Now the question arises why Iqbal considers Islam as a most scientific religion among world religions to be accepted by the entire humanity. To answer this question, one must consider the fact that in Islam the God is the God of entire world, its prophet is blessing for whole humanity and its message is for the whole humanity. It embraces all human beings and there is in it no distinction of caste, colour, religion etc. It opens its gates for all without the consideration of one’s status. There is no room for regional and national prejudice. Indeed universalism and internationalism are the hallmarks of Islam. It wants to see the entire mankind happy, prosperous and at peace.

Islam has taught that man is the architect of his own destiny. According to Iqbal, God has never taught man to sit idle, because creative action of man discloses what the secrets of his predestination have kept hidden. Through action man can prove the capacity and power to liberate himself from the claims of predeterminism. So, in this manner, Islam has universal outlook because the claim of predeterminism relates to the whole humanity. Human action is the necessary element of human progress.

Religion is a cultural force and Islam has a distinct approach towards culture. In the light of Quran, Iqbal says, Islam encourages cultivation not
only of individual or group of individuals but the whole humanity. Cultural force in Islam moves towards a universal brotherhood in which “the leader is prophet, the guidance is the Holy Qur’an and the Goal is ‘Allah’”. It guarantees the continuous progress and betterment of whole mankind.

Iqbal quotes one of the Quranic verse to explain the real character of the law of Islam. “And to those who exert we show our path”.59

Islam has a realistic approach towards life and its problems. It deals with both material and spiritual aspects of man. Islam has an organic and humanistic outlook which was against the mechanical rationalism of Greek philosophical thought.

Islam is not an ordinary religion. It represents a definite progress over Judaism, Christianity and other religions. It combines the most prominent features of all religions and its principles are in complete harmony with reason and moral intuition of man. It is not simply a system of moral rules. It is based on true conception of human progress. It established certain principles and transformed the whole human race. It has a reformative spirit.

The dynamic approach of Islam towards life is a central point of discussion in Iqbal’s philosophical and other writings. He finds great cultural value in the institution of prophethood. The appearance of prophets at different stages of historical evolution is in keeping with the continuous progress in all fields of human civilization. It gives new thought, new way of enquiry and new way of knowledge and action. Prophethood in Islam represents the developing process of human intellect. In this context, Iqbal gives the example of the prophet of Islam who, he says, stands between ancient world and modern world.
“In so far as the source of his revelation is concerned, he belongs to the ancient world; in so far as the spirit of his revelation is concerned he belongs to the modern world. In him life discovers other source of knowledge suitable to its new direction. In Islam prophecy reaches its perfection in discovering the need of its own abolition.”

The spirit of Islam is to make all human beings responsible for their action. Man must solve his problems by his own efforts.

Islamic system of life has the capacity to erase the conflict of caste, colour and race. It gives the equal right to all human beings. It teaches to man the lesson of self-sacrifice, love and respect to man.