CHAPTER VI

DIVERSITY OF RELIGIONS

6.1. The proper study of mankind is man. This study of man is incomplete if he does not include the study of religion for religion has wide spread significance in the history of mankind. Religion always implies an interpretation of the nature of reality involving interpretation of the meaning of the universe in terms of it's value for human life. Religion is a complex phenomenon and as such it is really difficult to explain how religion originated from the earliest period of human existence.

Anthropologically we may study religion in regard to it's historic or pre-historic origin - how religion first appears in time and place, how man expresses his religious nature first, what is the most rudimentary form of religion from which all other religions may be said to be developed. Psychologically we may study what is the source of man's spiritual nature not only at the beginning but also everywhere and always, what are the constant factors in their inner life of man which are in interplay with the environment that generate the religious attitude of man, what impulses or motives prompted man to apprehend the supernatural and to adjust his life in it.
These two sets of questions are inseparable. They need the help of each other. The anthropologist needs to have an insight into the psychology of the primitive mind before man can hope of reconstructing the religion of the primitive man. The task is purely psychological for there are no records of the oldest form of religion either in written documents or trustworthy traditions. We can not, therefore go back in history to the beginings and make a study of man in the process of becoming religious for at the dawn of history man was already religious. Our primary concern is to discover the root of religion in man's inner nature. Hence, to trace the origin of religion is simply a gues work.

Anthropologically it can be maintained that at a certain stage of culture man everywhere attributed a kind of soul to the phenomenon of nature. Man projected his own experience into the objects around him making conscious use of the principle of analogy. Religion arose as the animistic view of the world. Religion arose owing to the attempt of man to establish relationship between him and some of the spirits around him and he tried to propitiate the powerful spirits and to exercise the evil ones.
It may also be maintained that origin of religion was due to ancestral worship, ancestors appearing in the form of ghost. Some kind of fear of the ghosts of the dead prevails wildly among savages and they offered sacrifices to the spirit of the ancestors.

We may again believe in Totemism as the most important form of religion. A Totem is a species of animal or plant, a class of inanimate objects to which social group stands in an intimate relationship with the idea that these are the ancestors of the clan. This totem is not exactly God but a being and are to be respected. This view is appealing to those people who believe that religion is wholly a social phenomenon for they believe that all religious belief lies in the idea of a mysterious impersonal force controlling life and this sense of force is derived from the authority of the society over the individual.

Modern anthropology bends more and more to find the origin of religion in common with magic in pre-animistic stage where people by a sense of fear in the presence of indefinable mysterious power or powers, not regarded as personal.

Psychologically, it may be said that man is religious by nature because he has a religious instinct. Thus religion is
something innate in nature. One of the popular views of religion is that the attributes of religion is simple elemental emotion i.e. fear. It is believed that emotion of fear does an important part particularly in the lowest religions. We may also think that the sense of awe in the presence of mysterious potencies of the universe is the most fundamental religious emotion. But this awe is not to be identified with fear for fear is only an ingredient of it. In the developed stage emotion of fear is absorbed into positive emotions like wonder, admiration, love reverence etc. Hence, it may be said that religion had its origin in a sense of kinship with the Gods rather in fear of them as hostile beings. It is not the vague fear of unknown powers but with a loving reverence to unknown Gods who are knit to their worshippers by strong bonds of kinship, that religion in the true sense of the term begins. In the higher religious fear is sublimated by love into an adoring reverence. This is a favourite doctrine of the Old Testament, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of religion.

Religion may have genesis in feeling as the core of psychical life. Religion is the soul's feeling of immediate contact and fusion with the infinite. The feeling that puts forth a claim to govern religious experience is mysticism.
A mystic desires to contact with divine reality through intuition and emotion of the heart. As feeling is purely private and does not account of itself, it declines to justify them rationally. It is the reason that can get rid of religion from privacy of oneself and give public status and universal right of way to deliverences. Religious feeling must pass through the crucible of will and of the intellect. Feeling must be not only thought out, but lived out. It must be translated into practice. This impels us to believe that religion is a kind of activity, a type of behaviour for intense emotion naturally issues in action. Religion as an inward feeling demands outward expression. It is a kind of behaviour controlled by purpose. Hence, religion originates in practical needs under the pressure of struggle for life and grows with the growth of these needs. The organisation of religious life in outward behaviour is responsible for the establishment of the cult or institutional religions. But religious behaviour is not confined to rituals alone. Religions services were there from the very early times and with the development of religion became more ethical to include conduct beyond the range of cult because such conduct was regarded as well-pleasing to the higher powers. Morality came to be placed more and more under the guardianship of religion. Duty towards
God widened to embrace the sphere of daily conduct, duty towards fellow men sanctioned by religion.

Can we then treat religion as Belief? It is seen that religion has its intellectual as well as emotional and volitional aspect. It does not indicate that religion had its origin in man's effort to seek intellectual solution of the problems of life and reality. Man's conscious reflective thought emerged in subsequent period and it emerged as the instrument of the 'will to live' than that of man's motiveless "will to know". "But religion is not a product of intellectual leisure, but of the grind of existence - a grind that ever seeks to transform itself into freedom and joy". Coe aptly remarked. Even in most elementary stages of religious life some element of cognition or belief is present. At this stage though thought was in bondage to instinct still some kind of judgement, some kind of belief for when an object is taken as real is qualified by the predicate of divinity. With the development of thought thought becomes free to soar on the swings of creative imagination and this is exemplified in mythology that we find in most of the religions of the world.

But the above mentioned concepts as to the origin of religion are not satisfactory. For example, Totemism which
is the most important ancient form of religion is also not adequate for there are large parts of the world wherein no trace of totemism can be found. Psychologically if it is said that religion had its origin owing to the presence of religious instinct in man, that religion is something innate in man then also we find that religion is a complex phenomenon and to attribute it to religious instinct is an act of over simplification, for religion is a synthetic organisation of elemental instincts and emotion of our being in the pursuit of an ideal Being.

Divine Revelation is also regarded as the possible reason for the origin of religion as we find in Jewish, Christian and Muhammedan theologies. It has taken the form of a belief in the primoval monotheism of the divine origin from which polytheism is a later relapse. Against this it may be said that as revelation is primarily an act of God and hence, it does not help us to understand how it was conditioned by the nature of experience of man and how it was psychologically mediated.

We may also prune to hold the view that religion finds its origin in human reason. The fundamental truths of religion can be established with the certainty of mathematical truths.
which constitute the natural religion and it is the common element in all the varied religions of the world. The religion of reason is natural to man and hence known to man from the beginning. But it is not correct to give much emphasis on reason as the originating source of religion ignoring the emotional and intuitional illumination as fruitful source of religious ideas.

From historical perspective religion is an empirical entity which can be forced historically and mapped geographically. It is a human phenomenon. Various historical religion like christianity, judaism, taoism, zoroastrianism/islam etc. are human creation whose history is a part of history of human culture. Religion is a clear and bounded historical phenomenon and its notion is far from being universal and self-evident. Religious life of humanity is a dynamic continuum within which some major disturbances were there from time to time and as a result set up new fields of force displaying complex relationships of attraction and repulsion, absorption, resistance and reinforcement. These major disturbances are the great creative religious moments of human history from which the various religions traditions sprang up. From theological standpoint these moments are seen as intersections of divine grace, divine
initiative, divine truth with human faith, human response human enlightenment. They made heavy impact upon the stream of human life so as to affect the development of cultures and the various religions like Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism are among the resulting historical cultural phenomenon. For example, Christianity developed through a complex interaction between religious and non-religious factors, the ideas of Christianity have been found within the intellectual framework supplied from Greek Philosophy and the Christian church was moulded as an institution by the Roman empire; it's systems of laws, the Catholic mind reflects Latin Mediterranean and protestant mind reflects Germanic culture. Hence, there is a connection between historical Christianity and continuing life of humanity in the west and what is true of Christianity, in their own ways of all other religions of the world. To be precise, the distinguishable religio-cultural streams within human history are nothing but expressions of the diversity of human types, temperaments or thought forms. The differences that we find between Eastern and western mentality that are revealed in Christianity different conceptual and linguistic, social, political and artistic forms underlie the contrasts between Eastern and Western religion. As regards to the meaning and end of the
religion the development of religion from its original religious ideas - be it the insight of Buddha or life of Christ etc; in each case the development stands in a questionable relationship to that original idea. Religious institutions equipped with their theological doctrines and the codes of behaviour that form the boundaries did not come about because the religion's reality required this, but because such a development was a historical necessity in the days of undeveloped communication between different cultural groups.

In studying historical necessity of plurality of religions in the past we must take into account the broad course that has been taken by the religious life of humanity. Man is naturally religious being expressing an innate tendency to experience the environment as being religiously and naturally significant and to feel required to live in it as such. This tendency is universally expressed in the culture of ancient people and this has been shown by them in their belief in sacred objects endowed with mana, in numerable spirits needing to be carefully propitiated. They apprehended divine reality as quasi-animal forces. In subsequent period the ancient people combined together and formed Tribes and started believing Gods. These tribal gods were then ranked in hierarchies dominated. For example, in the
middle east, by great national gods such as Sumerian Ishtar, Anu of Thebes, the Greek zeus and in India Dyas, Varun etc. These gods were treated by them to be martial and cruel and sometimes required human sacrifices. All these prove that the state of humanities awareness of the divine at the beginning of human history. This kind of religions may be regarded as natural religion which started with primal spirit expressing fear in unknown forces of nature and subsequently that gave rise to regional deities. This shows that prior to any special intrusion of divine revelation humanity had a religious life. So some kind of religion existed with the very dawn of human civilization. But that religion has been undergoing changes adjusting with new circumstances to suit the needs of man with the onward march of time. Dr. Radhakrishnan also observes - "Religion in everywhere a historical growth and a new system has always to begin by adjusting and adopting what it can from older systems. All great religions indicate features which they have inherited from their civilised predecessor so the elements of the roots of religion were there as back as we can trace the history of mankind".

A golden age of religious creativity dawned after 1000 B.C.E. In this age a series of revelatory experiences occurred
in different parts of the world and which helped a lot in deepening and purifying people's conception of divine and that religious faith can only attribute to the divine reality upon human spirit. At the beginning of this period some of the great Hebrew prophetic individuals like Elijah, Amos, Hosea Jeremiah etc. were born, and they claimed that they had heard the word of the Lord claiming their obedience and demanding a new level of righteousness and justice in the life of Israel. The prophet Zoroaster appeared in Persia, Greece and produced Pythagoras, Socrates Plato etc. In China there were Confucius, and the authors of the Taoist scriptures in India formation of the Upanishads, the lives of Gautama the Buddha, Mahavir, the founder of Jainism and around the end of this period the writing of the Bhagavad Gita. Both Christianity and Islam have their roots in the Hebrew religion of the Axial age. But during this period the revelatory communication was so limited between different groups humanity that these different groups were unknown to each other. And as a result a number of local religious came into existence with certain local civilization Hence, divergent religions developed separately within different historical and cultural atmosphere.

In addition to what has been said above in order to dig out the possible causes for the development of different
religions of the world, it is essential to make distinction between human encounters with the divine reality in various forms of religions experiences and at the same time theories and doctrines that were developed by various religious thinkers to conceptualise the meaning of these encounters. These are the most important components of religion which are distinguishable but not separable. Both of them continually reacting upon one another in a joint process of development, experiences giving the basis of our beliefs but these ultimately influence the forms taken by our experiences. The divergent religions are various streams of religions experience each of these began at a different point within human history and each having formed its own conceptual self-consciousness with a different cultural atmosphere. All the great religions of the world at the very experiential roots are in contact with the same ultimate divine reality and their differing experiences of the divine reality interacting over centuries with the different thoughts, forms of different cultural atmosphere led to the growth of divergent religions of the world.

To be precise, there are three aspects which led to the growth of divergent religions of the world. They are (1) Differences in the modes of experiencing the divine reality (II) differences of philosophical or theological theories
regarding the implication of religious experiences and (III) differences in the revelatory experience that unify a stream of general life.

The most important difference that we find in various religions of the world is centring round the question — whether the divine is personal or non-personal. While Judaism, Christianity, Islam and theistic Hinduism apprehend the ultimate as personal goodness, will and purpose under the different names like jehueh, God, Allah etc. Advaita Vedanta and Theravada Buddhism apprehend it as non-personal.

In regard to the differences of Philosophical and theological theory considering the reality they are part of the still developing history of human thought and they belong to the historical culturally conditioned aspect of religion and is subject to change.

Each religion has its holy founder or scriptures or both, in which the divine reality has been revealed — the Buddha, the Christ and the Bible, Muhammad and the Quran etc. wherever the Holy revealed, each claims an absolute response of faith and worship which may be incompatible with a like response of any other kind.
In the great religions of the world a distinction is recognised between the Real or ultimate or Divine in and Real conceptualised by human beings. The common assumption is that Reality is infinite and hence beyond the grasp of human thought and language. The describable and experienceable objects of worship are not ultimate but the ultimate in it's relationship to finite perceivers. For example: In Advaiya vedanta Sankara's concept of Nirguna Brahman belong to the first category and Saguna Brahman belongs to the second. Similarly in christian religion mystic Eckhard drew a parallel distinction between the God Head (Deitas) and God (Deus). In Taoism the Tao Te Ching says - the Tao that can be expressed is not the Eternal Tao. The Jewish Kabbalist mystics made a similar distinction absolute Divine Reality beyond human distinction and divine experienced. The Muslim sufis also maintained that the Real appears to a similar concept to En-soph as the deep (abys) of God head underlying the self-revealing Allah. In modern time paul Tillich has expressed the view that the God above the view of theism. If it is admitted that Real is one and our human perceptions are plural there is every reason to believe that the various streams of religions experience represent diverse awareness of the same transcendental Reality perceived in different ways by various human mentalities.
forming and formed by different cultural histories. In this regard Immanuel Kant provided a philosophical framework where in such a hypothesis can be developed. Kant made a distinction between the world as it is and the world that appears to human consciousness, namely phenomenal world. His view can be interpreted in such a way that the phenomenal world is the phenomenal world as humanly experienced. According to Kant the innumerable sense data are brought under human consciousness with the help of a system of rational concepts or categories in terms of which we are aware of our environment. It indicates that the environment perceived by us is a joint product of the world itself and selecting, interpreting and unifying activity of the perceiver. Though Kant was interested in the psychological contribution to our awareness of the world yet his basic principle can be seen in the physiological level. As for instance our sense organs can respond only to a minute proportion of the full range of sound and electro-magnetic waves that are impinging upon us all the time. As a result when we experience the world it represents human selection from the innumerable complexity and richness of the world as it is and the world as it appears to us. Now, if this broad Kantian distinction between the 'world-in-itself' and the 'world as it appears to us' in applied to the relation
between the ultimate reality and our human awareness of reality then we may form the hypothesis that the Real 'in sich' is experienced by human beings in terms of two basic religious concepts - (i) Concept of God, the Real conceived as personal which we find in theistic form of religion (ii) The concept of the Absolute, the Real experienced as non-personal that we find in non-theistic religion. Each of these basic concepts is made more concrete (Schemata) as the range of particular images of God or particular concepts of the Absolute. These images of God are found within the varied religious histories.

In the previous paragraph though attempts has been made to discover the origin and development of historical religions. But Hinduism is not to be placed within the fold of historical religion. One of the obvious reasons is that all the religions derived their inspiration to the personal insights of their prophet founder. But Hinduism in its pure form never leaned as strongly as other religions do on authority. It is not 'founded' religion and it does not centre round any historical events. Hinduism has certain distinctive characteristics and it always insists on the inward life of the spirit. It's very aim is to know, possess and to be spirit in the physical frame and to convert an obscure mentality into
clear illumination, to build peace and self-existent freedom in the stress of emotional satisfactions and sufferings, to discover and to realise the life divine in a body subject to sickness and death. The Hindu turn-back to the Vedic period as the epoch of their founders. The Vedas, the wisdom is the name for the highest spiritual truth to which human mind is capable. The Vedas are the work of the Rsis. The truth of the Rsis are not evolved as the result of logical thinking or systematic philosophy; but they are the products of intuition, drsti or vision. They are not the authors of the truths written in the Vedas as the seers who are able to know the eternal truths by raising their life spirit to that plan of the universal spirit. The Rsis were the pioneers researchers in the realm of the spirit who saw more in the world than other fellows. The utterances are based not on impermanent vision but on a continuous experience of resident life and power.

In regard to the existence of diverse religions Vivekananda opined that all religions are only different expressions of the Eternal Religion and these expressions are neither contradictory nor antagonistic to each other. He said - "... the truth that religions of the world are not contradictory or antagonistic. They are but various phases of the
eternal religion. That one eternal religion is applied to the opinions of various minds and various races. There never was my religion or yours, my national religion or your national religion, there never existed many religions, there is only one. One infinite religion existed all through eternity and will ever exist and this religion is expressing itself in various countries in various ways. All religions starting from the lowest fetishism to the highest form are nothing but so many attempts of the human soul to grasp or realise the Infinite. Each religion is determined by the conditions of its birth and association and each of these a stage of progress. Each religion is true and authentic in its own way. Hence, no man should change his religion for another. Ideally clinging to one's own religion one should absorb the best elements of other religions. Religion, he said, is realisation. It is only at this stage of transcendental experience which is what religion is really all about. To him Religion is a total concept. All the religions of the world together constitute one whole. To have religious consciousness of mankind not a single religion should be left out. He once said - "Each religion as it were takes up as part of the great universal truth and spends its whole force in embodying out
Vivekananda also opined that to assimilate the spirit of other religions one must preserve his own individuality and in doing this he needs proper understanding of the spirit of his own religion as well as that of for every religion has a behind it a soul and that soul may differ from the soul of another. Every religion has the capacity to take it's followers to supreme peace, perfection freedom. And hence he was averse to proselyzation. He said - "Do I wish that the christian would become a Hindu ? God forbids. Do I wish that Hindu or Buddhist would become a christian ? God forbid The christian is not to become a Hindu ... But each must assimilate the spirit of others and yet preserve his individuality and grow according to the law of growth". Vivekananda wanted that man must make conscious effort to see the thread connecting all religions, forming as it were, a beautiful garland adoring the supreme Being who is neither a Hindu, nor a christian ....... not belonging to any religion whatsoever. All belong to Him but He transcends all. 

Vivekananda believed - unity in diversity is the very plan of nature. So there and will be diversity of religions contributing towards the understanding of the proper spirit
of religion to lift human race from momentary meaningless provincialism to the significance of the eternal, to transform the chaos and confusion of life to that pure and immortal essence.

According to Mahatma Gandhi also all great religions of the world though in certain points are absolutely one. All religions are one in regard to their fundamental principle and it is man who is responsible for the different religions of the world. It is the failure of man to grasp the very spirit of religion that has led to the appearances of many religions. He said - "Even as a tree has a single trunk but many branches and leaves, so there is one true and perfect religion but it becomes many as it passes through human medium." To Gandhiji all religions are God given and also necessary for the people to whom these religions are revealed. He was not in favour of religions conversion. He only exhorted the people to realise his own religion truly and sincerely for every religion has it's own precious grains. He believed that the end of all religions is realisation of God in soul. This is the universal realising. Man must be conscious of the fact that though the ideas and methods of various religions differ yet, all religions coverage to the same centre. Religions
are given to mankind so as to accelerate a process of realisation of fundamental unity.

Realising the very true spirit of religion. Both Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi opined that the need of the present day world is not one religion on earth but mutual respect and tolerance of the devotees of divergent religions. Man should not attempt to root out tradition, effects of heridity, climatic and other surroundings which are responsible for the appearance of divergent religions of the world. The crying need of the hour is the conversion in the sense of self-purification and self-realisation to ensure peaceful co-existence of human race. Harmony and not dissention was the motto of both Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi.
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 use the words of Vivekananda - "of all forces that have worked and are still working to mould the destiny of the human race, none certainly is more potent than that the manifestation of which we call religion .......\(^8\) He also remarked that "the goal of all religions is also the same in essence. The ultimate goal of all mankind, the end of all religions, is but one - reunion with God or what amounts to the same with the divinity which is every man's true nature\(^9\)." There are so much similarities in different religions that suggest the idea that the particulars of different religions have been copied from one another. Realisation of self in all 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 it's 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 religious 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 use Vivekananda's words - "Religion is of the soul and finds expression through various nations, languages and customs. Hence, it follows that the difference between the religions of the world is one of expression and not of substance, and their points of similarity and unity are of the soul, are intrinsic, the language of the soul is one in whatever peoples and under whatever circumstances it manifests itself. The same sweet harmony is vibrant there also, as it is on many and diverse instruments." 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 as various ways and it suggests different paths to perfection. In fact, no founder of a religion does preach absolutely new truth. That there is no difference in regard to fundamental truth and different prophets preach the same fundamental truth in varied languages at different times is found in almost all religions of the world. In the Bhagavad Gita, the Lord Krishna
says to Arjuna - "The royal saints, the kings, the philosophers of ancient days from one unto the other did pass this wisdom from age to age, that same eternal yoga, ancient vision. Here I declare to this day to strengthen they mind and heart of life's perpetual strife". \(^1\) Buddha and Jain speak respectively of the past Buddhas and Tirthankaras and they admit that they have vivified and 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". \(^1\) Similarly in Islam Muhammad says - "This that I now telling unto you, the Holy Quaran it is to be found within the ancient seers too". \(^1\) (Kung-pen-Tu (confucious) declared - "I could hand on, I can not create new things". The Sufis declared that - "just it is lustre 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". \(^1\)

In all religions we find that each religion appears to an ethical ideal. Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism, all of them advise their followers to be aware 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 - "He who avoids extremes in food and fast, on sleep and waking and in work and play. He winneth yoga had once peace and joy". Taoism also teaches five moral principles and puts much importance as moderation. "Continuing to fill pail after it is full, the water will be wasted . . . . He who possesses moderation is lasting and enduring. Too much is always a curse, most of all in wealth". Shintoism teaches it's followers certain moral offences for it leads to the displeasure of God. Zoroastrianism is ethical and it asks it's followers to follow three principles- "Think God, speak God and do good". It teaches '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 are good and safe to do the golden mean which studyingly pursue.20 Sikhism asks to have simple faith in God and to have plain living with high moral spirit. All religious believe - "Every question has two inevitable sides. Wisdom consists in reconciling the two, by just compromise between them in accord with requirements time-place circumstance".21

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 the 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".22 It is concept of universal salvation is a testimony to this. Bhagaban Das points out that - "all these religions aim at binding together a new again the hearts of all to each other and back again to God".23 Jaina's conception of Ahimsa is nothing but another name for universal love. Zoroastrains believe that - "the souls of the faithful of both sexes in the Aryan countries - in all countries all these do we venerate".24 Islam and Christianity teach the brotherhood of man under the common faith in God. In fact, all religious teach us to rise above selfishness and to develop a spirit of universal love.
Every religion advises its 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 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 spirit 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 is in all human thought. The realisation of soul alone as eternally present in oneself and in all selves brings 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 give 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 life. For Hinduism liberation ultimately means the union with God or God realisation. The Upanishads 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".25
The idea of salvation is bound up with Christian conception of God. It regards "the spirit of man as candle of Lord and which is to be lit up with divine flame, "and advises its followers" Be ye perfect even as your heavenly father is perfect". Islamic religion also declares "Every child is born in Islam, it is their parents who make them jew or christian".

According to Vivekananda various expressions of religion have only one common central point and that is preaching of freedom and to find the way out of this world. These religions never came into existence to reconcile the world and religion but to cut the gardian knot, to establish religion in its own ideal, and not to compromise with the world. This is what each and every religion preaches. He also believed that all the religions of the world help their respective followers in gradual development towards the realisation of truth. He said - "Holy, perfect and pure men are seen in all creeds, therefore, they all lead to the same truth for how can nector 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 sectorian sense. He said - "All of religion is contained in the Vedanta. There are three stages
of Vedanta Philosophy, the Dvaita, Visista-advaita and Advaita. One comes after another. These are the three stages of spiritual growth in man. Each is necessary. Vedanta applied to the various ethnic custom and creeds of India is Hinduism. The first stage i.e. Dvaita applied to the ideas of the ethnic groups of Europe, is Christianity, as applied to Semitic groups, Mohammedanism, and the Advaita as applied in it's yoga perception form is Buddhism etc.  

Religion, 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 benefitted. Religion should help in the development of humanitarian values. He said - "It is man making religion that we want. It is man-making theories that we want." To Vivekananda 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 sad and sickness of the world.

Amidst the variety of religions, Vivekananda found the universal element in God conceived as a generalised entity. He said "It is through this generalised entity that I see you as a man or a woman. So it is with this universal religion which runs through all the various religions of the world in the form of God, it must and does exist through eternity. I am the thread
that runs through all these pearls and each pearl is a
religion or even a sect thereof. This God may be concieved
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 preaches
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 the religion to divide the masses, break soliderity
and unity mankind. Various religious altars like masque, church
temple etc. are the centres of worship for unifying our invisible
spiritual links.

Similar to Vivekananda Mahatma Gandhi also opined that
belief in one God is the corner stone of all religions. In
theory there is one God no doubt, but thereby we can not 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 religions answering to different tempa-
raments and climatic conditions. Still the teachings of religions
are the same. No religion can stand on injustice, untruth or
violence. He said - "Religions like nations are being weighed
in the balance. That religion and that nation will be blotted
out of the face of the earth which pins its faith in injustice, untruth or violence.\(^31\) According to him the central teachings of all religions can be realised only if only we could all of us read the scriptures of the different faiths from that standpoint of the followers of those faiths, we should find that there were at the bottom all one and were helpful to one another.\(^32\) From all these it is clear that by religion Gandhiji did not mean formal religion or customery religion but the religion which under lies all religions which brings us to face with the Maker. To Gandhiji at bottom all religions preach the same maxim - struggle to realise the truth. Refering to divergent religions existing he said - "... Each one of them, in my judgement embodies a common motivating force, the desire to uplift man's life and give it a purpose.\(^33\) Prophets of various religions are not the exclusive property of any religion, they belong to all. He said - "... Jesus has the significance and the transcendency to which I have alluded, I believe that He belongs not solely to christianity, but to the entire world, to all races and people - it matters little under which flag, name or doctrine they may work, profess a faith or worship a God inherited from their ancestors.\(^34\) To Gandhi all religions preach the same gospel of peace and universal brotherhood. He said - "I do regard
Islam to be a religion of peace in the same sense as Christianity, Buddhism and Hinduism are. No doubt there are differences in degrees but the object of these religions is peace.\(^35\) Gandhiji opined 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, Isaiah, 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 needs all the wisdom of all human traditions as manifest the entire compass of its spectrum.

From the above discussion it follows that the new religious are only re-proclamations of the same essential truths in different languages, new forms a midst new settings and new conditions of life. They are new in the sense that after each reclaiming reform his followers have gradually built up new faiths, new rites, ceremonies, forms around the core teaching in consequence of new conditions of time.\(^36\)
REFERENCES


6. Ibid. p.p. 70.


10. Ibid. p. 297.


12. Ibid. p.p. 54.


15. Das Bhagaban - "Essential Unity of all religions" p.p. 32.


17. Ibid. p.p. 31.

18. Chatterjee P. - "Studies on Comparative Religion"

19. Das Bhagaban "The Essential Unity of all religions"
   p.p. 32.

20. Ibid. p.p. 32.

21. Ibid. p.p. 34.


25. Das Bhagaban "The Essential Unity of all religions"


32. Ibid. p.p. 97.

33. Ibid. p.p. 91.

34. Ibid. pp. 103.


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