Vivekananda is one of the greatest Advaitins. For him Vedanta is the foundation of every religion. The significant tenets of such a religious philosophy are: (1) Unity of existence and (II) Essential unity of every religion. Bankim Chandra on the other hand is a religious scientist. He examines Hindu religion and Hinduism for the sake of intellectual satisfaction. Moreover he indentifies the value of science and dharma from the sociological standpoint. Just as science elevates social life of people so also dharma. Hence for Bankim Chandra creation of religion is necessary for the progress of society from the scientific perspective. Both Swami Vivekananda (12th January, 1863 – 1st July 1902) and Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (26th June 1838 – 8th April 1894) are the creative genius of the modern Bengal. Their unique thinking emerged due to the influence of the independent and free thinking of Europe, western education and culture of the second half of the eighteenth century. Vivekananda, a committed theologian overrides the principles that (a) religion is mere intellectual analysis and (b) religion is possible within the sense plane. For him religion is realization and belongs to the supersensuous plane. Religion is a vision and inspiration of the Reality from within. Bankim Chandra’s religious philosophy is a bold attempt to explore the necessity of Dharma from the natural standpoint. He justifies Hindu religion as against the attitude which tried to discard Hindu Religion totally. He adopts the alternative to save Hindu religion to make it free from the conventional belief, so that it can be elevated in the process of development. It is only after exploring the core, the true religiosity of the Hindu Religion can be arrived at.

Chronologically Bankim Chandra precedes Vivekananda. But from the standpoint of academic religious philosophy, Vivekananda can be looked upon as the more perennial ‘Rishi’ of modern social order than Bankim Chandra. The germ of the stupendous work to get the Vedantic religion readjusted with modern needs was set in motion by Bankim Chandra through the Vaishnava religious movement. Vivekananda in this regard well-knitted this religious consciousness through Advaita .......... the future religion of India. Vivekananda is undoubtedly the tyagi who could see Shiva in every Jiva. Bankim Chandra was keen in establishing National religion. But Vivekananda aimed for a
universal religion in which every principle of life can be well-adjusted. In his spiritual movement, the philosophy, that we are all moving from lower truth to the Highest Truth and never from error to truth is established. The goal of religion is to manifest the 'Divinity' from within, by controlling nature, both external and internal. Both the philosophers are least dogmatic and against so-called sectarianism.

Bankim Chandra’s contribution to our national movement is not confined to the National song ‘Bande Mataram’ alone. Being the Deputy Magistrate and Deputy Collector, his service to the British Government became a boon to the common people of Bengal. The Sahitya Samrat—the intellectual giant and the litterateur, Bankim Chandra published his works both in fiction and non-fiction writings. His writings first appeared in the monthly magazine Banga Darshan, edited and published by him between 1872 and 1876. Later in the eighties, Prochar was published under his guidance. His transition to the field of religion can be recalled as only natural. It is through his writings, he became the prophet of his people by a synthetic fusion of the modern and the medieval. In his blending of the east and the west and in the harmony of the spiritual life-force of the Indian culture lie the secret of his success. The present study The Concept of Religion ......... In the thoughts of Vivekananda and Bankim Chandra Chatterjee: A Study, will undertake as far as possible all the aspects of Vivekananda’s and Bankim Chandra’s religious philosophy so that an analysis from the Vedantic standpoint can be made.

Owing to the similarities of Vivekananda and Bankim Chandra with many classical and contemporary philosophers both of the east and the west, we have referred to them quite often. Such an attempt has been made to make the thinking of these two thinkers more clear and vivid. Inspite of certain dissimilarities in their approaches to understand religion, both agree to the essential and subtle truth that religion must become a living principle, — the principle of humanism. Full credit has been given to both Vivekananda and Bankim Chandra whenever we have found their interpretations more appealing in the approaches and applications of the 'Rationalistic Method' in justifying science, philosophy, and religion.

In the presentation of our study it may appear that we have identified the terms natural science and science of religion. To Vivekananda Science is concerned with the objective truth while science of religion represents the total subjective truth. But the goal
of these two approaches is to discover that Unity which holds in itself all the varieties in Nature. The Atman is the potency of the universe which reconciles with the unthinkable, invisible whole potency ‘Atom’ of the physicist. From this standpoint Vedanta and modern science are not antagonistic to each other. The Atman has to be perceived in order to make every religious practice meaningful. This is the reason why we can call Vivekananda a theologian and not simply a religious philosopher. Even for Bankim Chandra there is no real fight between science and religion. Science is the cause for social progress while Dharma guides world progress. Both the glory of the name of Hari and of science, are just one. Dharma for Bankim Chandra is culture or anusilan which is the true means to acquire happiness. Religion for Bankim Chandra consists in belief. To that extent he is a religious philosopher. So we have made a study of the two thinkers who have made a liberal approach towards Hinduism.

There are some puritans who have tried to distinguish Religion from Dharma as well as Philosophy from Darsana. But such an attempt is baseless. In this work attempt has been made to use the English word Religion as being the equivalent to the Sanskrit word Dharma. Such an attempt is possible because both the words share the same etymological meaning i.e. ‘To hold that which is Real’. So from this standpoint, Religion is the synonym of Dharma. Though there are certain subtle differences in the socio-cultural values and the linguistic use of the two words yet the differences are real only within the sense plane. Beyond that the meaning of both the words transcend the limitations of the empirical knowledge. It aims for the inner experience of the reality. In this work, the word ‘Dharma’ is used only with reference to the views made by the Indian thinkers like Bankim Chandra, Rabindranath Tagore, S. Radhakrishnan and many others from the Indian context.

While reflecting on the religious approaches of both Vivekananda and Bankim Chandra we have divided the present work into six chapters. The first chapter is introduction. In it we have tried to show the necessity of religion in modern scientific and technological advancement. In the midst of every material progress man is in constant crises. It is only religion with its impact of spirituality on every sphere can make the material progress a living principle and more meaningful. So today compelling necessity has aroused to re-examine the validity of spiritualism in the aggressive march of materialism.
In the second Chapter Vivekananda and Bankim Chandra ——— Religious standpoint an attempt has been made to propose the religious perspectives of both the thinkers without any prejudice. The central issue of endeavor for both Vivekananda and Bankim Chandra is to establish the profound principles of ‘Hindu Religion’, in particular and Hinduism in general. The Vedanta philosophical temperament is the fundamental underlying principle which has inspired both Vivekananda and Bankim Chandra. Spirituality is the string which has united every existence.

The third chapter is Vivekananda’s View on Religion. In this chapter we have made hairsplitting analysis to throw light on Vivekananda’s assertion that religion is man’s very constitution. Religion makes direct spiritual discovery of fact of experiences and not a mere speculative thinking. It reveals an immediate feeling of Reality. Like the classical thinkers Vivekananda has identified Hinduism and Hindu religion which resonate the Upanisadic dictum ‘So Ham’ —— I am Brahman, I am Brahman. Strength and fearlessness is the quintessence of the Vedas and Vedanta religion. It is just at this juncture religion becomes a living principle —— a practical spirituality i.e. practical Vedanta. Our delusion makes to think of two ultimate realities — phenomena and noumena. Otherwise there exists just one Reality —— the quintessence of the Advaita philosophy. Every duality persists only from the sense plane, the phenomenal nature of reality. But from the supersensuous plane i.e. the noumena, each phenomenal diversity gets identified with reality i.e. the Brahman. The God in one is the God in all. The significance of his Universal Religion represents the survival of every religious approach in its bosom and not the exclusive survival of any particular principle.

The fourth Chapter is again Bankim Chandra’s View on Religion. Bankim Chandra used the word Dharma i.e. ‘to bind together’ as synonym of religion. Dharma holds that ‘Force’ which is real and is the essential quality of humanity. His intellectual approach towards religion made him to explore the true religiosity of Religion from the natural standpoint. Dharma is eternal and brings happiness through Culture which has to be laid at the adored feet of God as explained in the Bhagavadgita. An attempt is also made to arrange the extent of Hindu ethics depending on the Gita, as a gospel of action. It is in the Puranic religion, absolutely free from every allegory. Bankim Chandra asserts that there is much worship of Sat, Cit and Ananda. Hence it becomes fit to be the
National Religion. Bankim Chandra, being a qualified monist, finds every meaning in a personal Pantheistic God where he contributes to the debate of the 19th century religious thinking. Hinduism is a product of nature and inspires the union of Nature and Soul. This union explains the principle of love for all. It constitutes the Hindu's Religion. The essential truth of his 'Rational Hinduism is explored through the principle of its kernel without its husk'. Intellectual superiority can enable a man to bite at the husk but it is belief which can make us to reach the kernel. These are the basic points of religion which are to be discussed in the trend of giving religion an independent status.

The fifth chapter Comparative Study and Estimation analyze and highlight the supernatural and the natural approaches as propounded by the two thinkers who tried to reconcile both the east and the west. Though there are gulf of differences due to their initial differences in their approaches yet both adhere to the essential truth that religion comes from within. Both have objected to the speculative aspect of religion. Religion is a way of life which can give every meaning in attaining spiritual strength. Material progress is achieved only when we can cultivate the essentials of humanity and religion.

The last chapter is the Conclusion Chapter where attempts have been made to assess the findings of the third and the fourth chapters. Here we have tried to find out the essence of religion at the backdrop of Hinduism and Hindu religion. Religious experience is characterized by directness, holiness, joy and spiritual discovery. Religion is an inner experience which ultimately helps in one's transformation in the Atman both external as well as internal. This is spiritual transformation. And when genuinely experienced, one feels the impact of Reality the Unknown, the reserve of truth which the intellect cannot comprehend. Thus the element of mystery in all religion an incomprehensible certainty, has to be experienced and felt only intuitively.

I now turn to putting on record my unqualified gratitude to all who stood by me in my earnest endeavour to prosecute my Research Work The Concept of Religion in the thoughts of Vivekananda and Bankim Chandra Chatterjee: A Study - which would otherwise, would not have seen the light of the day.

I take great pleasure in expressing my heart-felt gratitude to my revered teacher and supervisor, Professor Sibnath Sarma, Gauhati University, who has guided me in this
work. But for his able guidance my effort and ambition would not have materialized and my dream come true. His suggestions churned out of sundry religious and discursive topics have goaded me on to pursue my mission with unswerving determination. His hair-splitting-analysis of knotty problems has come to me as a fillip to my strenuous enquiry from its potential conception to meaningful completion.

I cherish a deep sense of indebtedness to Professor Dilip Chakraborty who has infact, propelled, enthused and steered me on to embark upon a scholastic exercise on Swami Vivekananda, the great illustrious Indian monk of the 19th century. Subsequently my endeavour has been supplemented by my supervisor who has been kind enough to advice me to work on Bankim Chandra Chatterjee. I also owe to Dr. Bhabatosh Datta the same sense of grateful thanks for his good will and keen interest he elicited from my work.

I further extend my hearty thanks to Professor Girish Sharma, Dept. of Philosophy, Gauhati University and to respected Dr. Rekha Deka, Principal B. Barooah College, Guwahati, for pains they took to guide me as also to help me acquire the Research Fellowship Award under the ‘U.G.C. Teacher Fellowship Scheme’.

I am much too obliged to the librarians and staff of the following libraries

1. K. K. Handique Library, Gauhati University, Guwahati.
3. Cotton College Library, Guwahati.
4. B. Borooh College Library, Guwahati.
5. The Asiatic Society Library, Kolkata.
8. Library of Centre For Studies In Social Science, Kolkata
My heartfelt thanks are due to the Asstt. Librarian Ms. Preeti Chandra (ICPR) who has immensely helped me sort out materials for my thesis.

Respectfully do I also extend my gratitude to the faculty members of the Dept of Philosophy, B. Borooah College, Guwahati, for their unstinted help and unsparing cooperation in completing my assiduous undertaking. I also whole heartedly thanks Rajkumar Sen who has taken the trouble to print this thesis. Last, but not the least, I put on record my hearty thanks to all my friends and members of my family in general and to my loving parents in particular who have unwaveringly stood by me all along helping me all and sundry in all possible means and manners and enthusing me to proceed towards my goal with unfaltering and resolute strides.

(Sucharita Dey)

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