CHAPTER - II
Vivekananda And Bankim Chandra----
Religious Standpoint
Whenever we find a devotion which makes the finite self seem as nothing and some reality to which it attaches itself seem as all, we have the essentially religious attitude.

Bosanquet

To establish the 'profound principles' of 'Religion', is the central issue of endeavor for both Vivekananda, the illustrious Indian sannyasin and Bankim Chandra the stalwart critic and a torch-bearer of the Bengali essayists, novelists and reformers of the 19th century. In this chapter we shall propose the religious perspectives of both the thinkers. It is the Vedantic philosophical tradition that has inspired both the oriental thinkers. But both of these thinkers have adopted their own way of analyzing religion.

A significant tenet in Vivekananda's philosophy is his belief in the unity of existence and the essential unity of every religions. Each religion is as one pearl on a string of pearls. Since they complement each other so in the heart of everything the same truth prevails. Vivekananda points out that we have to recognise unity by our very nature through variations. Truth may be expressed in a hundred thousand ways. But each of these ways is true as far as it goes. (1)

Bankim Chandra on the other hand upholds that the essence of religion is a philosophy of life in theory. In practice, it is the principle of conduct in harmony with that philosophy. If Hinduism is a religion, it must consist of a philosophy and principles of conduct. The theoretical or philosophical religion is consisted of doctrines. The principles of practical conduct must also find expression in a system of worship or rites and a code of religious morality. (2)

This observation of Bankim Chandra resembles the literal meaning of the term religion. Literally speaking the term religion refers to an institution with a recognized body...
of communicants who gather together regularly for worship. They accept a set of doctrines. For them offerings are some means of relating the individual to what is taken to be the ultimate nature of reality.\(^3\) Religion therefore is a complex phenomenon if we consider the literal meaning of the term ‘Religion’. It is the most comprehensive whole of human existence. Prof. G. Watts Cunningham is in agreement to this view. He observes that mankind is incurably religious because man commonly has his religious beliefs and practices at every level of civilization.\(^4\)

Vivekananda like Indian thinkers have never tried to separate religion from philosophy. Hinduism and Hindu religion are interviewed with each other like two sides of the same coin. *Religion for Vivekananda is Vedanta* \(^5\). In India the attempt has been made to reach a science of religion and philosophy. The Hindus do not separate these as is customary in Western countries. It is always grounded in reason and scientific \(\ldots\) Vedanta Religion is known as Hinduism. Religion is that science which seeks to see the Reality behind things and their constitutions. The only difference is that every science is mainly ‘Objective’ while religion represents the total ‘Subjective Science’. Vivekananda opines that real religion, rises above mythology. It can never rest upon that. Modern science has really made the foundations of religion strong. It is scientifically demonstrable that the whole universe is one. What the metaphysicians call ‘being’, the physicists call ‘matter’. There is no real fight between the two. Vedanta and modern science both posit a self-evolving Cause. In Itself are all the causes.\(^6\) This view of Vivekananda is akin to Radhakrishnan. To Radhakrishnan also the spirit of science leads to the refinement of religion. Religion is not magic or witchcraft, quackery or superstition. It is not to be confused with out dated dogmas and incredible superstition.\(^7\)

Vivekananda has a catholic and tolerant mind to discover the fundamental unity behind all the religions of the world. He considers that the possibility of religious harmony depends on the definition of religion itself. When man’s ideal of religion becomes broad and deep then only it can embrace every variety of religious forms and practices. Such a broad religion can satisfy every level of human possibilities. This spiritual renaissance of India encouraged him to cultivate the past with present and traditionalism with modernism.\(^8\) Since every individual is unique in his own possibilities, so a practical generalization becomes impossible.
Vivekananda an essentialist, holds that religion is essentially one but diverse are its manifestations. Diverse manifestations of this essence must be encouraged to multiply. Every religion is the expression of ‘Truth’. Truth stands on its own evidence. It does not require any other testimony to prove its truth. It is self-effulgent. It penetrates into the innermost of our nature and says, “This is truth”. Just as for the progress of society, variety on every plane is appreciable. So for better functioning of the ‘World of Religions’ opportunities suit us the best. Vedanta proclaims and wants to present before the world different methods through which every man can work. The Vedanta thus says, “Let each person in the world be separate, if you will; the one principle, the unity will be behind. The more prophets there are, the more books, the more seers, the more methods, so much the better for the world”. 

This is the practical side of all religions. The plan of Vedanta, is first to lay down the principles, map out for us the goal, and then to teach us the method by which to arrive at the goal, to understand and realise religion. Hence the need for ‘toleration’ and the value of ‘comparison’ have to be cultivated. This attitude of comparison will ultimately deter us from finding out the defects in religions other than our own. In amplifying this idea Vivekananda opines: “We Hindus do not merely tolerate, we unite ourselves with every religion, ....... So we gather all these flowers, and, binding them together with the cord of love, make them into a wonderful bouquet of worship”.

Thus all throughout his life he tried to show to the world that Vedanta Religion is a symposium of all the faiths of the world. The whole world must be conquered by spiritual thoughts for a developed national life. The solution of every problem national and international lies in awaking of divinity of every soul from within. This is religion. Vivekananda holds the view that pursuit of spirituality is not only India’s interest but it is also the impending necessity for the western world too. Consequently he wants India to deluge the world with the message of her spirituality. In his nationalism there is no narrowness or exclusiveness. Intense was his love for the individuals of this world. There was nothing chauvinistic about his patriotism. His heart was large enough to take everything within the whole scheme of humanity. His ultimate ideal was internationalism and brotherhood of man. Vivekananda’s nationalism paved the path for his internationalism. For him nationalism and internationalism are like the two sides of the same coin. Every nation becomes
dynamic and harmonious by assimilating scientific and spiritual knowledge. Again every national ideals must be cultured with international out-look for the realisation of universal oneness. Such a view is found expression in the words of Isherwood.\(^{(14)}\)

Text torturing never benefits spiritual perception. The real want is in the heart. There must be a constant struggle, a continuous strive and control over our lower nature until the victory is achieved. Religion gives us nothing new. It only takes off obstacles and helps us to see our Self. Sickness is the first great obstacle; a healthy body is the best instrument.\(^{(15)}\) Without minimum economic self-sufficiency, spiritual happiness is impossible. Gandhiji like Vivekananda has showed keen interest for the upliftment of the common mass. Gandhiji, observed that it is impossible for a starving man to concentrate himself on spiritual principles. To seek for spiritual end, man must co-operate with each other form material aspect. In Young India. (13-10-1921) Gandhi observes that such an approach towards practical mission in life can only bring upliftment for the starving millions. He wants freedom for the soul. The intellect and every human faculties have to be devoted for the evolution of the soul.

Being the disciple of Ramakrishna, Vivekananda has preached to the world his Master’s doctrine that ‘direct experience’ of God ----is the alpha and the omega of religion. Religious practices are useless if they do not lead to direct experience. He concedes that all must struggle to be individuals. We must be strong, stand on our own feet, think our own thoughts, realise one’s own Self. Swallowing doctrines will never help in the journey towards perfection. Variation is the sign of life. Sameness is the sign of death.\(^{(16)}\)

To Vivekananda, religion belongs to the supersensuous and not to the sense plane. It is beyond all reasoning. It is a vision and an inspiration. It is a plunge into the unknown and unknowable making the unknowable more than known. This search for religion from the very beginning of humanity. Religious thought is in man’s very constitution. So it is impossible for man to give up religion. Searching outside can never find solution to the quarrels and miseries of the world. So says Vivekananda that we must turn our eyes inwards and find the truth. Religion lives inside.\(^{(17)}\)

The temperament of Vedanta revels that religion consists in realizing the divinity of the soul. When this divinity is demonstrable in the senses, then divinity can be realized.
and bliss is thus attainable. The soul that is in bondage can really become free. Absolute purity of body and heart, total renunciation of lust and gold and burning love for fellow – beings liberate the soul while still in body. This theory of evolution of the individual into a 'perfect man' is the clarion call of Vedantic 'spiritual growth in man'. Vivekananda’s message in this context is very significant. He has given to India and to the world a dynamic spiritual vision and an intense value in life. His philosophical teachings have culminated with spiritual and physical experience. He upholds the natural and harmonious development of the latent force in man. As he opined, "Behind everything the same divinity is existing and out of this comes the basis of morality ...... Love everyone as your own self, because the whole universe is one..... From this also springs that principle of Advaita morality .......... summed up in one word ...... Self Abnegation". Paramananda observes in his writing, ‘Spiritual Democracy’ : “The master was an untiring explorer in the realm of spirit. His mind was peculiarly bent upon practical demonstration in regard to what is ordinarily termed “the Unseen”. He never wanted to accept anything without definite proof ....... As a result of his exploration in spiritual realms, he brought back the definite revelation that each religion, sincerely lived and practised, leads to the same goal of Sat-Chit-Ananda, Existence Absolute, Knowledge, Absolute, Bliss, Absolute”.

Vivekananda’s teaching of service to humanity is in many ways related with Sri Ramakrishna’s teaching of personal illumination which is the essence of religion. Even the Great Master had never supported the sectarian and the orthodox Hindu religion. His life was the burning example of how to put the Vedanta philosophy of ‘Oneness’ into practice. To this we may cite the view of Ramakrishna when Vivekananda asked for personal salvation. Ramakrishna reprimanded him ; “Shame on you! You are asking for such an insignificant thing. I thought that you would be like a big banyan tree and that thousands of people would rest in your shade. But now I see that you are seeking your own liberation”.

The central doctrine of Vivekananda's mission in life is the oneness of all creation i.e. the metaphysical philosophy of the Vedanta. He has extracted the ‘religious core’ of this doctrine which was veiled by the metaphysical cobweb by a handful of mystics. This spiritual oneness is the corner stone of the religions of the Hindus. For Vivekananda
“none was foreign or alien. There existed only Humanity and Truth”. Religion is the realization of spirit as spirit. The reality in nature is spirit. It is the Reality itself which moves, speaks and does everything. It is the energy of the spirit that gets actualised in different ways by matter. But the greatest blunder that we are doing is realizing the spirit as matter. Out of the dead dull matter we are manufacturing spirit. To this view Vivekananda asserts that the spirit is the cause of all our thoughts and body – actions. But it is untouched by all the dualism of nature.

In ‘Man The maker of his Destiny’, Vivekananda opines that we have to reject anything that makes us weak physically, intellectually and spiritually. Truth is purity, all knowing and strengthening. ‘Strength, Strength’ is what the Upanishads teach. We want muscles of iron and nerves of steal. Nikhilananda, on this view of Vivekananda states that behind everyone, high or low, there exists the Infinite soul. This soul has the infinite possibility and capacity to become great and good. Hence the clarion call of Vivekananda is, as the Veda says, “Wake up, stop not until the goal is reached” . The spirit, my boys, the spirit, the love, my children, the love; the faith, the belief; and fear not! The greatest sin is fear.

The Vedantic notion of Brahman as Sat-Chit-Ananda is echoed in Vivekananda’s conviction that God is pure Spirit. He is not a God outside but He is inside. He is in the heart of man, ‘the soul of our soul, the Reality in us’. Thus opines Vivekananda “ The old religion said that he is an atheist who did not believe in God. The new religion says that he is the atheist who does not believe in himself.” This reminds us that he expounds his indebtedness to his Guru Ramakrishna Paramahamsa. Vivekananda claims that the concept of God is a fundamental element in human constitution. The Vedantic principle of impersonal God is Being in itself. It is the highest conception of God possible to the human mind. It is the essence of knowledge and is by its nature, the essence of bliss. Isvara is the Atman as seen by mind. His highest name is Om. So we have to meditate and think of its wonderful nature and attributes to realise the essence of this Om. We have to repeat the Om continually as it is the only true worship. It is God Himself.

Vivekananda’s advaita makes the ethics of love for every beings, a necessary
principle of the Vedantic creed. With the introduction of this philosophy, he has made the
'Vedanta Creed' available to people from every work of life. The monopoly enjoyed by
the mystics was questioned? In reply Vivekananda points out that only when we apply this
eternal notion of unity to our moral human experiences, we can achieve the 'Unity of
Oneness' ....... the Vedantic principle. It is through this selfless love we can go beyond the
desire of return. This is how the Vedantic monism of Vivekananda has become a creed of
universal acceptability and applicability in our normal human sphere of life. "No action
can touch me. I have no desire for the results of action. Whosoever knows me thus
knows the secret and is not bound by action. The ancient sages, knowing the secret (could
safely engage in action). Do thou work in the same fashion." (28) This is renunciation, the
essential truth of vedanta.

To Vivekananda, life is a struggle to achieve one's own salvation. It is possible
through service of mankind. He has socialised the doctrine of personal illumination by his
doctrine of personal illumination by his doctrine of Practical Vedanta. Through this
'Practical Vedanta', Vivekananda has attained the truth of 'Humanitarianism'. "Therefore
never asks the question what our religion is, whether we are Deists or Atheists, whether
Christians, Jews, or Buddhists. We are human beings; that is sufficient. Every human
being has the right to ask the reason, why and to have his question answered by himself.
if he only takes the trouble." This is one of the 'expression' which has been reflected all
throughout his writings. (29) He also tried to draw attention of every person in position for
the upliftment of the pitiable conditions of the masses. Vivekananda thus expressed this
feeling as, "May I born again and again, and suffer thousands of miseries so that I may
worship the only God that exists, the only God I believe in, the sum total of all souls,
and above all, my God the wicked, my God the miserable, my God the poor of all races
of all species, is the special object of my worship". (30)

Through the path of spirituality the material and social development of the Indian
mass have become the mission of Vivekananda's life. But he is not an 'arm - chain
idealist'. Like his master Vivekananda has developed the man - making religion for this
purpose. "It is a man-making religion that we want. It is man-making theories that we
want. It is man-making education all round that we want ...." (31) In order to make the
East more dependent on its own strength and inspiration he also has tried to reconcile the
Spirituality of the East with the material progress of the West. This give and take policy will diffuse the global crisis. Nothing will come of crying day and night before them. They will do everything out of their potentiality. (32)

Dualism and other 'isms' are very good as means of worship. They may be very satisfying to the mind, and may help the mind onward. But if man wants to be rational and religious at the same time ...... Advaita is the one system in the world for him. Vivekananda thus remarked that all religions will receive a new orientation from the non-dualistic doctrine to spread good will among men. While recognizing the true nature of the individual, people will help in rectifying the inequality amongst all. He thus proclaimed : 'I believe it (Advaita) is the religion of the future enlightened humanity'.

To this view of Vivekananda, Vijoy Lakshmi Pandit writes, ........

"The humanistic tradition of Indian culture was once again emphasized by Vivekananda. To him there was no Hindu or Muslim, Brahmin or untouchable, rich or poor. In every human he saw the divine and the service of God was identical in his eyes with service of man". (34)

There are two aspects of the study of Hindu Philosophy. We can study it for the philosophical knowledge which it yields as well as for the sake of the light it can throw on the past history of India, ...... on the great social changes. It often becomes the cause and the consequence of a situation. So the principal value of Hindu Philosophy consists in its bearings on history and on sociology. The great causes which shaped the destiny of India and have moulded the national character, taught her people (1) to despise the blessings of existence and (2) to look upon in action as the ideal of human happiness. But still we cannot overlook the importance of the philosophical doctrines of India. Bankim Chandra agrees that though the Hindu Philosophy is insignificant in compared to the science and the philosophy of Europe regarding the knowledge of Nature yet we cannot ignore its importance. So writes he 'The trace of European footprints must encourage us in any journey we undertake; we lack the courage ...... not the ability ...... to venture upon an untrodden path. There is always present to us a morbid dread of failure which itself is a powerful cause of failure'. (35)

Moreover in India the relation between theology and philosophy has always been peculiar. He writes that in every other religious system the theology is never borrowed:
from the philosophical teachings. But in India religious dogmas and philosophical tenets have influenced each other in the process of development. They are intertwined with each other like the two strands of a rope. Bankim Chandra further busied himself in defining the words Hindu and Hinduism and confesses it to be a hard task. The word Hindu is used in two different senses. There are (I) Hindus by birth and (II) Hindus by religion. Ethnologically the signification is vague as the term is applied to Aryans as well as to non-Aryans. The Europeans in the early stage of their acquaintance with India have applied indifferently the term ‘Hindu religion’ to the different sects of India. The term Hinduism is not at all religion. It is purely secular. (36)

Here Bankim Chandra asserts that we must take the trouble of studying Hinduism separately as distinct from Hindu religion. Modern scholars have swallowed the ‘Lex non scripta’ as the essence of Hinduism. “When talking of Hinduism, he entirely forgets that there is such a thing as secular Hinduism. Everything Hindu is merged into that whirlpool of things ..... the Hindu religion.”(37) Hinduism is studied under the name of the Hindu religion. Hinduism is accepted to include all Hindu religions past and present. It is the inclusion of everything that are Hindu by nature .......... whether religious or secular. It also includes that which never has had any connection with anything Hindu, religious or secular. Bankim Chandra agrees to such a view and opines “Let us free it also of all that is not properly religion but social polity or domestic morality, the unwritten law of the country or general culture. Something of this no doubt will have to be included in Hinduism, if you conceive religion, as I think you do, to be a system of social culture ..........”. (38)

But amongst all these varieties and divergences, there are certain common features and fundamental principles which form the basis to constitute a religion. This religion is Hinduism. Hinduism, says Bankim Chandra that it is all-embracing dharma. The substance of all God, man and every creatures of the world are related to dharma.(39) Dharma is the true means of acquiring happiness. This dharma is the Natural Law or principle which can be coined as ‘Natural Religion’. Bankim Chandra also observes that modern interpreters of religion fall into two classes. According to one group, religion is God-given or Divine Sermon. Christians, Brahmans, Muslims and Hebrews fall under this category. To such a view Bankim Chandra writes, “Their purpose ends simply with stating that the
God-given advice (sermons) are available in such and such books and such and such is
their significance".  

The other class of exponents say that there is no reason to believe that religion
comes from God. Buddhists, Comtists, Brahmos and the new interpreters of the Hindu
dharma fall into this class. They recognise the natural basis of God-made Religion. As
opposed to revealed theology, natural theology holds that every assumptions is fit to serve
as premises in its arguments to things naturally knowable by human beings. Many people
hope that natural religious knowledge can be universally communicated. It tries to justify
the forms of religious practices as appealing to mankind because of its rationality. Such a
religion will be a natural religion. Closely connected to such a view in ‘Kon Pathe
Jaitechi’, Bankim Chandra has expressed a revolutionary force in the history of Hinduism:
I do not consider any religion as authored or revealed by divinity. All that I would
accept is that religion has its foundation in nature. Religion imbedded in nature is called
natural religion. But this natural basis of religion is not an imaginary non-entity. Bankim
Chandra puts it, “I (for myself) do not consider any Religion to be God – made or God
sent. I only admit that Religion has got a natural basis. Nevertheless, I admit that the
Hindu Religion is the best of all the Religions”.

The modern exponents of Hinduism opine that we can prove the superiority of
Hindu religion even without accepting its Divine nature. Usually Hindu religion is
accepted as God – spoken. It is based on the Vedas. The Vedas are the basis of our entire
religious and social organisation. The ‘Vedic Religion’ is like the root of the Hindu
religion. But it is not the main tree. A tree is distinctly different thing. Branches and sub-
branches (twigs), leaves and flowers that a tree is adorned with are wanting in its root.
But if we fail to be acquainted with the attributes and defects of the root, we will not be
able to assess well the tree either. Bankim Chandra further asserts that we can claim that
the Hindu religion is established on the natural basis that religion possesses. So even
without admitting the God-made religion, the truth and superiority of the Hindu religion
can be admitted. Religion is the expression of Truth. That which is untruth is irreligious.
Untruth even if it is found in Manu – Samhita or Mahabharata or in the Vedas, must be
forsaken as untrue and irreligious. In ‘Mill Darwin and Hinduism’, Bankim Chandra
writes that our main aim is to enquire into the natural foundation of Hindu Religion.
In the opinion of Bankim Chandra, Hinduism is consisted of three parts. They are:
(I) doctrinal basis or the creed (II) worship or rites and (III) code of morals. The doctrinal basis consists in dogmas formulated, explained and illustrated the philosophical literature. The legends contain the subjects of the Puranas are inferior to philosophy. It is in the depths of which are laid the broad and solid foundations of modern Hinduism. The whole of Hindu religious philosophy is probably post-vedic. It marks the separation between the ancient and the modern religions of India. To this Bankim Chandra asserts that each Hindu sect, have their own system of philosophy. But they agree amongst themselves regarding the general conclusions of philosophy. Among all the dogmas there is one particular aspect which has influenced in shaping the destinies of India. It is the relation between soul and matter i.e. Purusa and Prakriti. In this context Bankim Chandra puts it “......... Hinduism a living organism which has grown, and not a collection of dead formulae lumped together by finest craft”.

Bankim Chandra takes the pain in highlighting that how the legends have shaped the Sankhya Philosophy of ‘the Great Duality' .......... Nature and Soul, which pervades over all as the basis of worship. Krishna is understood as soul and Radha is nature. Their union is the ‘love for all that exists' which constitute the Hindu religion. The Sankhya philosophy in spite of its great conception of ‘Nature and Soul' ends in gloomy pessimism. It lays down that the supreme human bliss consisted in the dissociation of Soul and Nature. Sankhya advocates that in every life there are miseries and sufferings. Only knowledge can give relief to all problems of life. This pessimism of Sankhya has been protested by many writers. The best cited poem is Kumar – Sambhava which received a remarkable development in Kalida’s writings. The perfection of Existence is the result of the union of Nature with Soul. It is union of Beauty with Truth and Goodness, of the Human with the Divine. But this union is possible only through a sacrifice of Desire. This is the Destruction of Kama. In the poet’s view, Nature and Soul are the two complementary parts of one Great Whole, and in their union consists the perfection of existence. Bankim Chandra observes here that the Hindu worships the illicit union of Purusha and Prakriti. Man worships it with truer insight than the philosophers. In this union of the Soul with nature lies the source of all beauty, truth and love.
To this view, Bankim Chandra makes the most significant remark, "This doctrine strikes at the root of all true religion. It is (in) the union of Soul with Nature ... in the harmony of man with all that is outside himself ... that lies true religion. For here alone lie the sources of the Beautiful, and Truth, and Goodness. Here alone is true Culture.

And the lofty instinct of Hinduism, which is pre-eminently the religion of Culture, ... Again his argument in this regard involves that the legends furnish two different ways of analysis. One set has taken the shape round the mystic Radha i.e. Nature with the historic Krishna representing Soul or the Purusha. The other set represents Nature in Sakti and Purusha in Shiva. They have elaborated and finally systematized in the Tantras. Bankim Chandra thus puts it, “The Radha myths represent the Religion of Love; the Sakti myths the Religion of Discipline. With both Religion is Culture". (50)

Philosophy while proceeding on a more rational basis to reach a loftier ideals, discarded the motion of sin. To the theologians those actions which offended divinities, to the philosophers it appeared as omnipotent but natural causes of human misery. The sense of ‘Suffering took the place of Sin’ in philosophy. Consequently sense of suffering and sin run side by side throughout Hindu philosophy and Hindu Mythology respectively. The philosophers in all the different systems of thought like Buddhism, Sankhya, Yoga, Vedanta, laboured under an overwhelming sense of human misery. They directed all their effort against it. Hence “The vast field over which these two leading notions, the notion of sin and the notion of suffering, have spread, giving rise to asceticism, to fatalism, to apathy in politics and to sensuality in poetry .......” (51)

To Bankim Chandra the Hindu Religion that sprouted in the Vedas, meets its perfection in the Puranas and the histories. The Europeans and their disciples believe that these Puranas and histories are all stupidity, sub-religionism and hypocrisy. In fact, the Puranic religion is superior to the Vedic religion just as a tree is to a sprout. The phrase “Polytheistic monotheism” may appear to be a paradoxical view. But Bankim Chandra opines that the Puranic religion has convinced him that the Puranas in reality teaches monotheism. He writes as, ‘ ...... that the Puranas, has convinced me that the Puranic religion is in reality a monotheism, and that the Puranas never lose sight of the great central idea in Religion that there is only one God, and that the hundreds of objects of worship whose merits they celebrate are only anthropomorphic representations of His
various attributes'. The Puranic religion reflects that this Infinite .... "the eternity and
the eternal entity, eternal, material tradition and endless biological tradition ...... this Aditi
(The Infinite in time, space and existence) herself is the begetter of one and all. And
because of this, she is the begetter of all that is luminous, beautiful, glittering, great and
might ...." Religion in the broadest and most legitimate sense is Culture. The most
perfect religion supplies the basis for the most complete development of culture. Hinduism
is most compatible with the retention of the basic development of culture. Hence it is a
perfect religion.

For Bankim Chandra **Hinduism is a product of nature. It has sprang out of the
necessities of primitive life. It has grown with the growth of culture.** Religion is that which
helps in the elevation of mankind. The worship of idols is not the basis of religion. In this
regard Bankim Chandra's application of the method, 'Rational Hinduism' is remarkably
significant. The rationalistic approach to religion has acknowledged the 'pure hindu
sources': It has also offered answers to all the skeptical questions of religion put forward
by the 'Western educated' Indians i.e. 'its kernel without its husk'. The controversy
between Reverend W.W. Hastie and Bankim Chandra is the evidence of his approach
towards Hinduism. He asserts that intellectual superiority can help man with essential
conditions of life. But without faith the highest value becomes mere dead formulae.
"Intellectual superiority may make a desperate bite at the husk, it cannot arrive at the
kernel without the necessary native guidance .......... there is an additional reason why the
native alone can be a competent teacher; it is, that he is a believer in them......." 

In two elaborate letters Bankim Chandra has tried to establish the irrelevance
contribution of the European missionaries and all their considerations about Hinduism.
W.W. Hastie affirms that Hindu idolmaker can only draw the forms of his imagery out of
himself. His images can only be the best representative of his own subjective moods of
feeling or aspiration. As Hastie writes in the Statesman, "...... truer and profounder
philosophy is demonstrating the all important fact, that is only Christianity, with its
revelation of the Divine Personality...... reconcile the sons of India, in a pure and blessed
life, .....". But this is not the religious worship of idols of the Hindus. The idols do not
acquire sanctity till the 'prana-pratistha' Ram Chandra calls the idolatrous rites and
ceremonies of Hinduism its husks, not its kernel.
To the view of the European scholars, Bankim Chandra further asserts that adoration to the 'bad -character gods'\(^{(59)}\) signifies the Hindu Religion, then revival of the Hindu Religion is certainly not desirable. But Hinduism is not so. The great principles of Hinduism are good for all ages and all mankind. They are based on what Carlyle calls the 'Eternal Verities'.\(^{(60)}\) Principles are unchangeable but their applications vary according to time and circumstances. Bankim Chandra writes in this context, "Hinduism is in need of reformation; not an unprecedented necessity for an ancient religion. But reformed and purified, it may yet stand forth before the world as the noblest system of individual and social culture available to the Hindu even in this age of progress. I have certainly no serious hope of progress in India except in Hinduism in Hinduism reformed, regenerated and purified".\(^{(61)}\)

With the publication of Darwin's work, in the 18th century, Religious interpretations underwent a tremendous change. In India too we find such trend in philosophical thinking. It is possible due to the introduction of English education. The design in the creation is understood to be a work of evolution not by the intervention of any 'Supernatural Existence'. The rationalistic method of Bankim Chandra too has followed the post eighteen century.\(^{(62)}\)

Indian philosophy is never restricted within certain principles. Philosophy has a co-extensive meaning with the knowledge of Nature. *Philosophy is often included in science.* In 'The Study of Hindu Philosophy', Bankim Chandra writes that Law is recognized as supreme in all the advanced systems of Indian Philosophy. Mill's exposition of the 'Law of Causation' is almost akin to the Hindu Naiyayikas. With this no divine interposition, no special providence, no miracle, not even the initial 'Creative Act' is recognized. "Indeed after the great law of causation has once been seized in a true philosophical spirit, the recognition of the Reign of Law must supersede all theological conceptions. So it did in the superior systems of Hindu Philosophy."\(^{(63)}\)

*Further Bankim Chandra asserts that religion is simply reformation.* He opines that a reformer of a religion is 'seldom found out, but nowhere its Creator. There is no created Religion as such, all the Religions are traditional, rarely reformed'.\(^{(64)}\) He cites the e.g. that the scientists have never accepted 'the Divine Theory of Creation'. Therefore neither in the case of the question about the creation of life, nor of Religion, this answer
Bankim Chandra differs from the western rationalism. Through this method of rationalism, he has appealed only to the essence of basic religious beliefs. His rationalism is guided by ‘Bhakti’. The condition in which all the human faculties without any exception turn to God or follow God, is devotion. Devotion to God must be properly developed to attain maturity. He starts from the basis of experience. Instead of concentrating on the traditional doctrinaire theology he has concentrated on conduct which conduces to lasting happiness. Dharma being the means of happiness is eternal. It brings happiness in the next world as well as in this one. We have to practice dharma and will be happy in this world and in the next one. The highest happiness of man requires in the fullest development of all his faculties ...... physical, intellectual action and aesthetic. Thus religion is a philosophy of life and the principles of conduct follow from it. This conduct has to be distinguished from the principles themselves.

To Bankim Chandra, supernaturalism is not essential to religion. According to him any system of religion which does not believe in God may be regarded as religion but it is only imperfect religion. God in his conception is not the external God but an all pervading Personal Being. He opines thus, “I do believe that there is one God and Hinduism does not accept more than one God. Hinduism is a monotheistic religion, in spite of its polytheism, and does not suppose the existence of a number of deities subordinate to or co-ordinate with the Great Author and Ruler of the Universe.” With the advances of culture polytheism loses all its ground. When science has accepted that physical cause produces invariable effect, it naturally denied the invention of any supernatural Intelligences. “This was the cause” remarks Bankim Chandra, “why the revolt against Vedic polytheism, instead of forming the later religion into a simple and homogeneous monotheism like Mohammedanism led to the development of an immense complicated system, embracing within it every variety of belief, monotheism, pantheism, even atheism, and ultimately to that highly elaborated eclectic religion which absorbed them, and which is modern Hinduism”.

The Vedic sacrifices, which is associated with desire, is not true worship, observes Bankim Chandra. Vedic religion had been a worship of the powers of Nature—a theory of the government of the Universe by the interposition of Supernatural Will As
culture advanced, people supported the existence of an Order of Nature. It is fixed and immutable laws governing the very phenomena which otherwise had been believed to be controlled by the Will of a Supernatural Being or Beings. Even from the midst of Vedic hymns shines forth the conception of a great Rita. This principle binds fast the actions of gods and men. The Nyaya philosophy, like John Stuart Mill and many others propound the great law of Causation. ...... the invariable antecedence and sequence of events as the sole possible explanation of the production of phenomena. Worship is a means and culture is its end. We worship God because it promotes our culture. Nature is God. Hence worshipping of Nature is also worshipping of God. True worship consists in adoration paid to Him through work. This is the new interpretation of the Gita as gospel of activism.

"O Arjuna ! The person who can restrain his senses with the strength of his mind, and does his duties with his organs of action indifferently, the person is the greatest". (7-The Gita/3)

So Bankim Chandra finds the real expression of Dharma in work. He conceives of a religion which is a product of human experience. He also acknowledges the Hindu conception of God as the ‘soul of the world’, is the very essence of Hindu religion. This is the Humanistic approach of Hinduism. It is the love that embraces the whole world. He is also introducing a ‘non-human’ element in his Humanistic religion. His God is a ‘Supremely Perfect Personal Being’. This ‘Personal Being’ is not the God of the Christian theology. It is the ‘Pantheistic philosophy’ of Hinduism. Bankim Chandra’s exposition of a ‘Naturalistic Ethics’ upholds Utilitarianism as a part of Dharma. One seeks good because he loves good. He is a worshipper of the good. Religion entitles our love and worship. (72)

In Bankim Chandra’s Manava –Dharma, asceticism has no room. He does not consider asceticism, at least not a complete religion. Anusilan belongs to desire (Prabrittmarga), Sannyas to denial (Nibriti marga). Sannyas, is an incomplete religion. Anusilan is one of practice (‘Karmatmak’). Moksa is achieving the nature as God upholds as the ideal and follows Himself. In the Gita we find the Jnana Khanda as the cream of different Upanishads. This is the fundamental idea of Bankim Chandra. In his opinion people believing in Vaishnava Dharma must understand the essence of the Gita. They must not
restrict themselves within the limitations of the Veda which is under the three gunas.

Hence Vaishnava dharma is the best of all religions. He alone is a Vaishnava, observes Bankim Chandra, who has known the omniscient and blissful ‘Supreme Intelligence’. “As the inner spirit of all the creatures, who has no sense of distinction, or who makes efforts to attain such a condition, is a true Vaishnava and true Hindu.“ For him, after exploring the real core, the cream, the true religiosity of the Hindu Religion, we must accept it as real human religion. This will ultimately constitute the National Religion. Religion is that which ensures all sorts of promotion (Anusilan) physical, mental and social. The cream of all the religions is constituted of this sort of promotive theories. This sort of promotive theories are more predominant in the Hindu Religion than in any other religion. They have their real perfection in the Hindu Religion itself. This constitutes the essence of the Hindu Religions.”

(74)
REFERENCE AND NOTES

2. Letters on Hinduism, Letter IV (ed) Shri Jogesh Chandra Bagal P 241
4. Problems of Philosophy P 399
5. C.f. Vivekananda once commented this principle to Alasinga(Episte, dated 6th May, 1895 (U.S.A.) In this letter Vivekananda clarifies with certainty that worldliness and realization of God cannot go together. All our fighting day and night regarding various sects ends in Vedanta itself. Dvaita, Vishishtadvaita and Advaita; one comes after the other. Each one is necessary. This is the essential of religion: the Vedanta, applied to the various ethnic customs and creeds of India, is Hinduism.
7. S. Radhakrishnan Religion and Culture P 419
8. This view is well supported by Nehru. He writes, Vivekananda was one of the prominent exponent of the spiritual renaissance of India. In his plan for future modern India, he encouraged the culmination of past with present and traditionalism with modernism. To quote the words of Nehru, “Rooted in the past and full of pride in India’s prestige, Vivekananda was yet modern in his approach to life’s problems and was a kind of bridge between the past of India and her present”.
9. The Discovery of India P 510
11. Ibid, Quoted Vol. 6. P 146
12. Ibid Vol. 1, Intro X
14. Cf. His disciples observe that this urge of spiritualism made Vivekananda the ‘Patriot and Prophet in One’.
15. Eastern and Western Disciples: The life of Vivekananda P 254
16. Cf. Isherwood writes that we can not understand Vivekananda’s nationalism in the smaller sense of the term. It is a kind of super nationalism, a kind of internationalism sublimated.
17. Isherwood Christopher, Swami Vivekananda Centenary Volume P 536
To this view we can quote the view of Vivekananda. "This infinite power of the Spirit, brought to hear upon matter, evolves material development, made to act upon thought, evolves intellectuality, and made to act upon himself, makes of man a God. Manifest the divinity within you; and everything will be harmoniously arranged around it.

To quote the words of the Great teacher: "You may not accept the views of these seers. But how can you abuse them or limit God’s infinitude? Go on praying to the God of Truth and believe in any aspect of His that He revels to you". Eastern and Western Life of Swami Vivekananda, Vol. 1, P. 96.

Cf. In one of the epistles to Alasinga this view of ‘Practical Vedanta is expressed. (Breezy Meadows, Metcalf, Mass 20th August, 1893.)


"I believe that by this cultivation religion and the wider diffusion of Vedanta, both this country and the West will gain enormously. To me the pursuit of politics is a secondary means in comparison with this."

Complete Works, Vol. 6, P. 449.
"I have said that the Hindus never sought to distinguish between religion and other departments of thought and feeling; and as a consequence the same principles, the same considerations, and even the same authorities guided them in their religious and their secular life. That however is no reason why, now that we are able to distinguish between the two, we should take to be religion all that (which) without being such, happens to be connected with religion as parts of one whole .........."

Op cit

P. 233

Bankim Chandra writes that the European critics because of their intellectual superiority have treated the magnificent legend 'love for all that exist', as the grossest and most revolting story of crime. Bankim Rachanavali

PP. 214-15

Letters on Hinduism-IV Sahitya Samsad

P. 246

Bankim Rachanavali

Vol. 2 P. 716
54. Detailed analysis is done in the Sub-division ‘Concept of Religion’ in the thoughts of Bankim Chandra.

55. Bankim Rachanavali  
   PP. 210-11

56. Op cit The Ultimate Philosophy of Brahmanism,  
   The Statesman, Sept. 29, 1882

57. Detailed analysis is given in the Sub-division ‘Concept of God’ in the thoughts of Bankim Chandra.

58. Ibid P - 217

59. C.f. ‘Indira’Bankim Rachanavali

60. Op cit P - 236

61. Op cit P - 235

62. Bankim Chandra proclaims here “........... Pantheism and polytheism, philosophy and mysticism, all lent and hand; and out of this hold eclecticism rose the beautiful religion which I do not believe to be of Divine origin, but which I accept as the perfection of human wisdom”.

Bankim Rachanavali (ed.) Shri Jogesh Chandra Bagal. P - 214

63. Op cit P - 148

64. Bankim Rachanavali Vol. II P - 734

65. Loc. cit.

66. Dharmatattwa Chap. ‘What is Dharma’

67. Analysis is made in the Chapter ‘Concept of God’ in the thoughts of Bankim Chandra Ref : Bankim Chandra’s Letter III, Sahitya Samsad.

68 Polytheism First Stage.  
   Sahitya Samsad. P - 263

69. Op cit P - 266

70. Letters on Hinduism Sahitya Samsad. P - 252

71. Bankim Chandra’s view regarding worship reflects, “Worship of nature have each legitimate effect on the culture of feelings...........”.

Bankim Rachanavali  
   Sahitya Samsad P - 265

72. Op cit P - 235

73. Bankim Rachanavali Vol. II P - 735

74. Op cit P - 705

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