CHAPTER -VI

CONCLUSION

This concluding Chapter is an attempt to gather various aspects of the subjects raised, discussed, and analysed in the previous chapters. This is also a summary of the major points and indicating their implications in the relation between religions.

In a context where religion plays a very decisive role in moulding the worldview of people, the question of an appropriate approach to religion is crucially important. Social thinkers, social scientists and religionists have increasingly realized the inter-relatedness of religion to social structures. In the Indian context particularly where religio-cultural values and socio-economic and political power structures are so closely intertwined, the question of an effective approach to religion and its interpretations is of great relevance. The most important question in the multi-religious context of India is how can people of different faiths live together in harmony and peace. The study has been analysing some of the crucial issues that arise from the contemporary context of India.

In the second chapter the researcher has made an attempt to survey of Hindu scriptures. This reveals how these different religious traditions responded and related to each other. The analysis shows that there were plural and complex responses. However, these responses categorized into three strands. The first kind of response was exclusive in maintaining that one’s own religion is true while all others are false. There were hostility and intolerance exhibited in the scriptures not only between Brahmanic
Hinduism and non-Hindu traditions like Buddhism and Jainism, but also between the different traditions or Sampradayas within Hinduism.

The second type of response admits that there are elements of truth in other religions, but the truth in them are partial, imperfect and incomplete, while perfect truth is in one's own religion. Other religions are tolerated and accommodated within one's own faith accepting them as preparation for one's own faith in which they need to find their fulfilment. This attitude does not promote harmony and concord among religions.

The third kind of response noted is the one, which regards all religions as equally valid and true. It affirms that all religions are equally different manifestations of the same Divine Truth. The difference is only in names and forms. In essence they are one. This position not only tolerates but accepts other traditions as genuine paths to the Divine Reality.

The modern responses are in a sense re-statements or re-interpretations of the past Hindu responses to similar situations, Swami Dayananda Saraswati is clearly an exclusivist, who seriously relied on the Orientalist interpretation of Indian History, and held that Vedic dharma alone is true. He affirmed that all other religions are dangerous and therefore they are to be replaced by the Vedic religion. The Ārya Samāj, which he founded, is clearly militant and not conducive to religious harmony.

Though one can find in Swami Vivekananda a passionate appeal for mutual tolerance and respect on the basis of the acceptance of the view that
all religions are true and valid in leading people to the supreme goal, one cannot fail to overlook, the exclusive claim he made for the absoluteness of Advaita Vedanta. He placed different religions in different grades, where he placed ‘Advaita’ at the top and claim it is final and absolute. He did not reject other religions but gave them only a subordinate position to Advaita, which he considered as the fulfilment of all religions. Therefore, other faiths are only preliminary stages or stepping-stones or preparation for Advaita. Thus, he looks down upon other faiths as inadequate and insufficient in themselves. However his apologetic and exclusive statements have to be evaluated on the context he was facing in India from the Christian missionary policy of conversion and their extra-ordinary claims that Christianity as the only true religion, universally valid, perfectly scientific and absolutely moral. His approach was to defend Hinduism from the attacks of other religions especially Christianity and Islam.

It has been noted that often Vivekananda inclined to exclusivism he envisaged a synthesis of Āstika, Nāstika and Semitic religions. He appreciated the values of all religions and stands for religious harmony which he maintained even while he was convinced of the superiority of Vedanta.

The study has been shown that the ideological stands of both Dayananda Saraswati and Vivekananda gave momentum to generate a religio-cultural renaissance in the Indian sub-continent. The militant Hindu organizations like V.H.P, R.S.S. Bajrang Dal derive their inspirations from Dayananda Saraswati, Vivekananda, Savarkar and
Golwalkar. The goal of R.S.S. to make India a Hindu Rashtra (Nation) is certainly not different from Dayananda’s slogan “India is for Hindus”. The writings and speeches of Savarkar and Golwalkar also gave impetus to the policy of Hinduising Indian statehood. According to Golwalkar non-Hindus should be wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, not even citizen’s right. The present promoters of ‘Hindutva’ by B.J.P. and Sangh parivar seek their roots in the traditions of late nineteenth century Hindu nationalism based on the assumption that India has a glorious Hindu past. They have rejected the composite culture of India and deemed the concept of cultural diversity. They are skillfully working for a cultural exclusivism by re-interpreting the History on the line of Orientalist thinking. They rejected the secular principles in the Parliamentary democracy by mailing that the present secularism as pseudo-secularism on the basis of minority rights. This has created suspicion, ill will and antagonistic feeling among the minority communities. Thus it is vivid that the present day communalism gives rise to a cultural exclusivism and climate of anti-minoritism resulting in increasing intolerance.

All through the history of Christianity different responses to other faiths can be noted, and the New Testament itself provides the basis for them. Thus there are exclusive positions that there is salvation in no other name but in the name of Jesus (Acts. 4:12). Though the early Christians absolutely committed to Jesus Christ as the only saviour of humankind, they never persecuted others, but themselves were persecuted for their faith in Jesus Christ. While they witnessed Jesus Christ as the only saviour, and
invited all people to Christ, they never resorted to force for converting others to Christianity. It must be noted that it is not the early Christians, especially the later religious leaders, who make religion militant and aggressive.

Different religions have responded to the religious pluralism at least in three attitudes, which generally seem to be held in the Christian theological circles also. They are namely exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism. From the above responses, absolutistic and inclusivistic standpoints affirm Christ is supreme, definitive and normative in the soteriological considerations. Thus for developing a genuine dialogical relationship both the exclusivist and inclusivist paradigm fall short in perspective. Further these approaches motivated Christian missionaries to plant Churches through personal and mass conversions.

The present turmoil in the Indian subcontinent is mainly centred on the issue of conversion and Christian missions. The missionary policy has been vehemently criticized by Hindu organizations.

The Pluralistic standpoint of Christianity has opened way to have a synoptic view of things to foster healthy relations among religions. It seeks to build bridges between religions by accepting the truth claims of each religion as valid response to the 'Ultimate Concern'. It has been noted that this approach holds all great religious traditions on an equal foundation. Hence this has opened way for inter-religious dialogue for co-operation and co-existence. Inter-religious dialogue is an imperative for our times. Recently A.B. Vajpayee has re-iterated the importance of dialogue for settling the problems we face in the Indian sub-continent
especially in the issues like Kashmir, and \textit{Bābri-Mazjid} – \textit{Rāma-Jañma Bhūmi} conflicts\textsuperscript{1}.

Islam entered India predominantly as a faith of ruling class with a well-defined worldview, values and ethos. During the course of their rule in India for centuries, they could not totally Islamize Hindus nor it was absorbed in the Hindu religious tradition as well. It has been noted that cultural uprooting or assimilation by any one group will create conflicts and tensions among such groups. Further when politics entered into religion, then the religious cleavages turn into political cleavages, and tension increase with acute forms. The imperialist rule in India further aggravated these cleavages and divided the country into communal line.

Since religion determines the sole source of values to the culture, and values are basic to culture, religion delimitates the culture of a community. From this premise it has been noted that the Islamic response to religious pluralism through theological, cultural and psychological standpoints is not cordial or congenial.

The absolutistic and inclusivistic interpretation of the Quran, Islamic concept of Holy War (\textit{Jihād}) and the policy of Islamization could naturally generate hostility and violence among religions.

The ideology 'Theodemocracy' by Maulana Syed Abdul Ala Mawdudi emphasizes both absolutism and inclusivism in shaping Islamic politics in Indian sub-continent. This was an antithesis to secular democracy. \textit{Jama-at-e-Islami} also advocates an exclusive religious nationalism in the Indian sub-continent. Any religion that does not accept nationalism,
democracy and secularism in a multi-religious society like India the coexistence of religions will not be possible. Theological and cultural exclusive claims of any one religion introduces an element of theological injustice to God’s creation.² It makes co-operation between different religious communities difficult, if not impossible to tackle common human problems in society. Since Christianity and Islam have worldwide connections with affluent nations, tensions within a country get easily internationalized and may threaten not only with internal problems like terrorism but also easily may affect world peace.

Though the Muslim elites have been successfully established the idea that Islam is alien to India and that it is absolutely contrary to Indian culture, yet there were instances of communal harmony propagated by Islamic thinkers especially from Sufism. They interpreted the Quran and its tradition with a view to promote a composite culture in the Indian sub-continent, by combining Indian Bhakti (love) tradition, Vedanta (renunciation) and Sufi mysticism.

It has been noted that Sufism incorporated the religious and cultural values existing in the other communities and it became the bearer of social and cultural revolution of that time. Sufism provided the key, necessary for opening the door to a true encounter with other religions. Sufism influenced great personalities of both Hindus and Muslims. Many scholars agreed that Guru Nanak, Ramanand and Kabir were influenced by Sufism.³ Sufism considered the adherents of other faiths are spiritual neighbours. It emphasizes that inner spirit in all religions is the same, though there may be variations outwardly. Sufism’s approach to the Reality and its
consideration on the various view points of Reality seems very near to the Jaina theory of *Anekāntavāda*. What is important, therefore is, how the authoritative texts of a religion is interpreted by its adherents and it is that determines the nature of the response of those people to other faiths.

Gandhian approach to communalism in Contemporary India is the core part of this research. When Gandhi entered in the national scene, it has been noted that, he had to face four kinds of defiant forces competing one another in the National Movement. They are: (a) Indian National Movement (b) Hindu National Movement (c) Muslim National Movement (d) Subaltern Movement.

Among the Hindu National Movements, the Extremists glorified the *Vedic culture* and presented Indian culture as exclusively Hindu culture and encouraged the growth of militant nationalism in India. The British policy also widened the breach between Muslims and Hindus. Savarkar's treatise of 'Hindutva' influenced the Extremists and established R.S.S. Their demand for a Hindu *Rashtra* and maintenance of racial unity of Hindus created an atmosphere to demand for a Muslim nation by the Muslims.

The Subaltern leaders were against the upper caste Hindus and their interpretation of scriptures and Indian History. The Subaltern leaders provided a vision for an alternative cultural identity of the people based on *non-Āryan* and low caste perspectives. They were against the theory of *Vedic* culture as the basis of Indian culture. Hence their movement was for a revival of the values of the *non-Āryan* religion and culture of the
pre-Vedic period, which has been distorted by the illegitimate interpretation of upper caste Hindus.

Gandhi observed that the concept of nationalism, national identity and national loyalty has turned into group egoism, sectarian identity and religions loyalty consecutively. Religion has become a divisive force through its exclusive dogmatic interpretation rather than a spiritual force for synthesis of various cultures and faiths. Gandhi firmly believed that since religion is the matrix of culture, providing values, religion gives impetus to cultural change and subsequently dispenses room for a social revolution. Hence Gandhian approach to communalism in contemporary India is for a cultural transformation by providing religious base in the real sense of the term ‘religion’ through new hermeneutics of scriptures. Hence he preached the doctrine of equality of religions.

Gandhi was a synthesizer of Āstika, Nāstika and semitic religions. In order to synthesize these religions Gandhi has taken religious literature from these religions supporting for a pluralistic approach to religions and cultural diversity. Thus for example the researcher has taken two concepts, i.e., ‘Advaita’ from Āstika religion and Anekāntavāda’ from Nāstika religion from a couple of significant statements, Gandhi made in Young India.

Gandhi interpreted ‘Advaita’ as a universal religion (dharma) not as a customary religion. In ‘Advaita’ he could see a universal religion, all comprehensive, all embracing and all-inclusive rather than exclusive. Advaita holds that the entire universe has been emanated out of a single divine source. Therefore there is a spiritual unity of mankind. Hence there
is no room for any kind of discrimination on the basis of religion. Further it has been discussed that according to ‘Advaita’ there is no individual salvation is possible, but that one has to wait until the whole world is ready for salvation. Therefore ‘Advaita’ promotes the doctrine of the greatest good of all, i.e., Sarvodaya or the doctrine of Universal Welfare, which is also implicit in the first verse of the Isavasyopanisad i.e., ‘Isavāsyam idam Sarvam’. What attracted Gandhi to ‘Advaita’ was not its religions prescriptions or the mystic experience, but its propensity to accommodate the positives and eliminates the negatives of different religious persuasions. Hence Gandhi finds the Hindu concept ‘Advaita’ has unique qualities of tolerance and synthesis. Gandhi firmly believes that the Indian civilization built on the Advaitic worldview and value system was always receptive to every new culture and was prepared to shed its dogmatism and rigidity in order to work out a new synthesis.

Gandhi believes along with Gaudapada and Vivekananda that the conventional theism is exclusive, which will create conflict in the society. Gandhi believes that in order to see the unity of religions one should go beyond the conventional theism, and at least conceptually or intuitively have a vision of Advaita. Advaita educated all a technique of ‘looking at all religions with an equal eye.’

Gandhi preached universal brotherhood and fatherhood on the basis of his interpretation of the Advaitic principle. Hence Gandhi finds Advaita could accommodate not only the religions proposed by Dayananda Saraswati, Vivekananda, Savarkar, Hedgewar and Golwalkar, but the religions of antiquity of the Subaltern leaders. This religion has a
universal worldview comprised the values of *Satya, Ahimsa*, self
determination autonomy, self-knowledge, self-discipline, social co-
operation and community relationship of universal brotherhood and
fatherhood. Gandhi believes that the above worldview, value system, and
community relationship would bring a new culture and civilization. It is a
synthesis of different cultures. This *'Hindutva'* culture also provides equal
opportunities and equal rights to all citizens of India. This is same as
Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee spoke during his recent visit in Kerala:
"India belongs equally to all her citizens and communities not more to
some and less to others." Only this synthetic culture of *'Hindutva'*
promote secularism enshrined in the Constitution, which is appropriate to
our tradition of religious harmony and inter-religious co-existence.

It has been discussed that religions often make different truth claims,
combined with different historical cultural back grounds shape different
identities which not only make it often difficult for people to understand
each other, but also contradict and exclude each other, so that it is difficult
to create a common worldview with common structures and goals
acceptable to all. Thus religious and ethnic differences have been the
source of many divisions and conflicts, of blood shed and war. But Gandhi
affirms his position with the Jaina Philosophy of *Anekāntavāda* pointing to
its relevance for an alternative paradigm to counter the absolutistic truth
claims of certain religions. Gandhi believes that the theory of
*Anekāntavāda* has the capability to synthesis different perceptions on
reality; it may be an alternative to counter exclusivistic and inclusivistic
interpretations of religious leaders.
Gandhian interpretation of *Anekāntavāda* may be looked as a shift from unawareness and insouciance to the new recognition of our global interdependence in spiritual matters. Hence, Gandhi finds, religious plurality can become an important source for mutual enrichment rather than a cause for communal tension. Therefore, Ursula King rightly says that if we honestly seek to answer the contemporary challenging questions of how we can meaningfully recognize and learn from each other in mutuality and trust, we must begin to explore together the specific insights, moments of revelation, spiritual treasures and teachings which our respective cultures and faith traditions have accumulated and handed down from one generation to the next.\(^5\) It is by religious faith that the lives of countless people in the past have been nourished, sustained, and transformed. Further Gandhi finds Indian civilization has been dominated by the spirit of synthesis, absorption, assimilation and co-existence. In Young India Gandhi says that Indian civilization was a ‘synthesis of different cultures that have come to stay in India, that have influenced Indian life and that, in turn have themselves been influenced by the spirit of the soil.’\(^6\) It was not wholly Hindu, Muslim, or Christian, but a fusion of all of them. Therefore, Gandhi firmly believed that India has the heritage of a “unique spirit” of tolerance, synthesis, and co-existence which has received from the religions of antiquity promoted to develop a ‘faculty for assimilation’ and ‘amazing tolerance of opposite ideas.’\(^7\) Thus if the adherents of any religion imbibe and follow this ‘spirit’ in the interpretation of religious literature, the existing experiences of division, strife and violence would be swept away.
Gandhi also finds a synoptic and many-sided outlook in *Anekāntavāda* epistemology. Therefore, he acknowledged that truth could be gathered by *Samvāda* or dialogue. It offers the possibility of not only gathering the truth, it also de-absolutises and relativises truth. Gandhi firmly believes in the importance of dialogical relationship for a peaceful living. More often, he attributed the synthetic culture of India to India's pluralistic epistemology. Since it sincerely believed that truth was infinite, all human perceptions of it were necessarily limited and partial, and that every individual should live by the truth as he saw it. From this pluralistic epistemology India developed the spirit of not just tolerance but also mutual respect, curiosity and dialogue. Therefore, the Gandhian interpretation of *Anekāntavāda* of Jainism offers a paradigmatic significance in a pluralistic context. Since this concept comes to us from one of the oldest living religions of India, which developed, out side the pale of *Vedic* religion, it seemingly accommodates the position of *Vedantic* (Āstika) and *Buddhistic* (Nāstika) conceptions of reality in a harmonious synthesis. Therefore, Jaina concept of *Anekāntavāda* epistemology can promote a non-violent culture in the Indian sub-continent, for culture signifies cultivation of mind, body and spirit.

Values are the dynamic forces that control and guide human actions. Mankind is passing today through an all-encompassing crisis, which is in true sense a cultural crisis, i.e., crisis in values in human life or some call it as the crisis of the conflict or struggle of values between different civilizations. But Gandhi affirms that since religious resources are common property of the whole humanity, *Anekāntavāda* interpretation
encourages gathering values from all religions to have a spiritual progress of humanity, which is the principle of synthesis for a true civilization. Gandhi so well articulates this in his idea of "cultural rootedness" or the principle of Swedeshi. He is well aware that 'no civilization can live and flourish in exclusion. No culture can live if it attempts to be exclusive.

Therefore, Gandhi proposed a synthetic culture to curtail contemporary communalism in India. In order to have a synthetic culture, Gandhi adopted a methodology of dialogical approach among religions. Gandhian āshram atmosphere clearly depicts a synthetic culture. Some of the āshram vows are dialogical nature. Āshram prayers are settled to have a growing experience of inter-religious relations. Further he firmly believes that any hermeneutics of religious scriptures and concepts within the cultural context is essential to have a dialogical approach. This is a sign of growth in maturity.

The life of people in India has been nourished for thousands of years not only by one scripture of a religion but also by different scriptures, i.e., for Hindus have their Prasthanā trya of Upaniṣads, Brahma Sūtra and Bhagavad Gītā. The Buddhists have Tripitaka, Christians have Bible and Muslims have Quran. Over and over again in the history of Indian people, powerful renewal movements emerged; somehow they have been nourished by profound re-interpretations of scriptures. It is bhāsyas (commentaries) that have pointed out new directions to the movements in India. Gandhi firmly believes that, only through a non-violent movement, supported by the pluralistic interpretations of scriptures, India can be freed from the communal clutches of religious legitimation. Therefore, Gandhi whole-
heartedly worked for rescuing society from the religious legitimation through a pluralistic interpretation of scriptures, thus provides religious values, and is sources of inspiration and encouragement to people who wish to transform the communal culture.

Gandhi finds, *Anekāntavāda* proposes that reality is complex in nature and consists of innumerable characteristics. Therefore, different scriptures are the responses of the one reality in different existential questions and aspirations of people in different situations. One cannot therefore, approach the scriptures of our neighbours with absolute notions of the ‘exclusive’ inspiration from reality. Therefore, Gandhi firmly believes that the scriptures of other religions should not be subordinated to any scripture but regarded as valid and authoritative to those who accept them because they are based on their own particular ‘faith experience’. Hence no hermeneutics by itself will yield Truth in its fullness. Therefore, in a pluralistic context, Gandhi finds the theory of *Anekāntavāda* offers a standpoint, which ushers healthy reciprocity among religions to assimilate and adopt whatever may be good and capable of assimilation. This views well across with the Indian spirit of synthesis, that is, the principle of unity in diversity. In the words of Ashis Nandy “permeability of boundary which allows new influences to flow in and be integrated – one may call the process of traditionalization – and for some cultural elements as it were to flow out and get detraditionalised ...”8 This process of synthesis in Indian culture is described by Dr. Radhakrishnan as “Conservative liberalism.”9 Gandhi does not want his house to be closed without windows. He wants the cultures of all the land to be flown about his house
as freely as possible. He wants to build a new culture with the values of all religions and traditions. Therefore, Gandhi preached all religions are equal and they all lead to the same goal.

Today movements are launched with communal violence and quelled with more violence. Bloodshed is continuously unabated, communal riots erupt on the flimsiest of provocations. This is more important in the sense that, we have been unable to overcome or stop violence-by-violence or forcible methods. Gandhi had opposed and rejected the theory of return-a-blown-for-a-blow or bullet for a bullet, which was not the solution of any of our problems. Communal violence does not see or escape a Hindu or a Muslim or a Sikh or Christian or anybody else. Communal virus creates undesirable and unethical values such as anger, hatred, suspicion and spirit of revenge. Therefore, communalism cannot be removed until and unless we all, irrespective of our caste, colour and creed, cultivate in us higher values and virtues such as liberal attitude, truthfulness, humanity, compassion, tolerance and love in kindness, which Gandhi preached through out his life. Culture is the symbolic system that people construct to make their world, life and society meaningful. Gandhi believes since religion is affirmed as the sole source of values, it is tantamount to affirm that religion determines the whole culture of a community.

Gandhi as a staunch man of religion firmly believes that religion has an identity and autonomy within culture. It is the perspective of the ultimate that provides values that not only governs action but also challenges some aspects of the worldview and value system.
We have to go further for glorious future, not by negating other religions and cultures but by recognizing, accepting and imbibing eternal values from different religions with a synoptic view as Gandhi had shown.

Thus Gandhian approach to communalism is a meaningful step in the proper direction, but this single step should not be considered as a panacea or a single pill or tablet course for the eradication of serious disease of communalism. However, this one step of humility, tolerance, liberal attitude of self-restraint, self-purification, love, compassion and kindness can show as the proper way to go ahead for the second step to reach our destination – communal harmony, peace and amity.

In the new millennium if we follow the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi, we may sure that this country of ours will survive as it has survived for centuries, for many more centuries and his philosophy will make a healing of nations and bringing of people together.

Notes and References:


7. CWMG, Vol. V. p. 49; Young India, 11 August 1927


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