CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of The Problem

Indian society has been widely known for its religious plurality. India has given birth to religions like Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism. At the same time, it has also been hospitable to many other religions like Zoroastrian, Christian and Islam, which took their origin elsewhere. But today Indian society is severely subjected to ethnic rivalries and communal riots. The democratic and secular foundation of our country is being challenged and threatened by the growing canker of communalism all over India. Though there is communalism related to casteism, regionalism, linguism etc., communalism in the sphere of religion seems not only rampant but also aggressive.

The assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of the Nation soon after Indian Independence, the more recent demolition of the Babri Masjid at Ayodhya, with a demand to build a Rāma temple by the Sangh Parivar and the horrendous killings of the Christian missionary and leprosy healer, Stains Graham and his two sons in Orissa, have been described by the President K.R. Narayanan as the most tragic and black deeds in the history of Independent India. The Sangh Parivar strongly contempt the excessive missionary policy of vilification of the native religions. Their attitude of conversion has affected most in the pluralistic context of contemporary India. The present Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee has called for national debates on the issue of conversion and Bābri Masjid disputes shows the intensity of the communal problems in India.
Many scholars and national leaders thought of the whole communal problem as something created by British rulers and hence it was assumed that once they have left everything would be settled. But on the eve of their departure itself India was divided on the basis of religion, accompanied by the killing of thousands – both Hindus and Muslims. Recent studies has shown that there were nine thousand riots in the late Eightees with around eight thousand deaths after independence. Along with enormous destruction of property and immense suffering, the seeds of suspicion, hatred and revenge sown in the hearts of people have long time consequences. In India communalism seems far more dangerous than in any other country, because here the majority community (Hindus) form 83% of the total population, and any growth of communalism among them naturally gets associated with chauvinistic nationalism. Hence, B.G. Varghese has correctly said, “All communalism is bad, minority communalism can lead to isolationalism and separatism, Majority communalism spells fascism.”

The writings of Oriental historians identified the Vedic culture with an idealized culture of Indian antiquity, immensely influenced the Indian religious and social reformers and they laid stress on the Vedic culture as an ideal one. Whereas the Utilitarian historians interpreted the coming of British rule in India was a god-sent event. James Mill was severely critical of Hindu culture as backward and inimical to progress. It seems James Mill’s History of British India is in a sense laid the foundation of communal interpretation of Indian History. Sangh Parivar and its allies are against Mill’s interpretation and they inclined to comply with Oriental’s. Sangh Parivar’s interpretation of Hindutva and their demand for a Hindu rashtra seems typically a fascit combination of religio-
cultural exclusivism with nationalism. This ultimately promotes communalism. This has created suspicion, ill will and insecurity among minority communities like Islam and Christianity.

The minority community has taken seriously the Utilitarian interpretation and they began to inculcate and perpetuate their culture and religion in India. It seems their policy of conversion has become a serious threat in the eyes of the Hindu revivalists. Further, there emerge a tendency for each religion to establish its own identity through an aggressive assertion of its ideals by building fundamentalist organizations. Those organizations gave momentum to religious rivalries and conflicts.

**Communal Consequences In India**

Communalism has given rise to the growth of forces of disintegration and barbarianism in the Indian Subcontinent. For those who regard the growth and value of humanism, secularism and democracy these disintegrating forces will be priority items to be taken into account.

Firstly, communalism has become a hindrance to the task of nation building. Communal riots inflamed by religions have always been an unfortunate feature of multi-religious societies.

Secondly, in a multi-religious society, communalism is a threat to the secular, democratic character of the Indian State for the development of the nation.

Thirdly, it has global consequences. Indian people are not confined to India alone. There are Hindu Communities and their missions in other countries. The conflict between Hindus and Muslims, and Hindus and
Christians in India may naturally intensify the tensions among such nations and internal conflicts within them.

Fourthly, since the conflict is between an overwhelming huge majority (Hindus) and the minorities (Christians and Muslims), it is an extremely delicate and sensitive one.

These compelling factors necessitate a new urgency manifested in genuine concern for the study of this grave problem and in the conscientization of the masses with an emphasis on a democratic, socialistic and humanistic ideology.

Hypothesis

The roots of communalism are partly as a result of religious fundamentalism, which is a conservative attitude of religious leaders who interpreted their religious scriptures tended to be a combination of religio-cultural exclusivism with nationalism without consideration of the demands of the people of the present time and milieu. Among the possible effects of fundamentalism and cultural exclusivism are pseudo religious revivalism and fundamentalism. The writer suggests that contemporary communalism in India is a manifestation of religious fundamentalism coupled with cultural nationalism and blended with politics. It seems Gandhian Hermeneutical approach may be a viable solution to the communalism in contemporary India.

The Ultimate Goal Of The Study

Religions are meant to establish Peace on earth. The Hindu prayers often conclude with “Om Shânti.” The Christian greets his brother “Peace be with you” and the very word Islam means ‘Peace’ and hence a Muslim greets his
brother with “As-Salamalaikum” means “Peace be on you.” It is paradoxical indeed that they cannot co-exist in peace. Yet their goal is the establishment of peace. It seems in India religions have always been a disintegrating factor having in them the very seeds of disharmony. Gandhi dealt with this problem in detail and in depth.

According to Gandhi, the problem is not with religions, but with their votaries and with their exclusive interpretations of scriptures. According to his understanding of religion, the differences will not divide mankind but will enrich it. Hence if we are to hope religion will play a role in bringing about unity and harmony it appears that we have to take Gandhi seriously and try to understand religion as he explicitly expressed through his interpretations with a view to have a trans-religious spirituality.

The present study attempts:

1. to examine the Hindu responses to religious pluralism and to analyse to what extend the religious scriptures exhibit the religious roots of communalism

2. to assess the modern Hindu responses to other religions i.e., (of Dayananda Saraswati, Swami Vivekananda, V.D. Savarkar and M.S. Golwalkar)

3. to examine the Christian response to religious pluralism

4. to assess conversion and its implications

5. to examine the Islamic response to religious pluralism

6. to evaluate the relevance of modern Islamic Hermeneutical approach to religious pluralism
7. to examine the Gandhian approach to contemporary communalism in India
8. to evaluate Gandhian hermeneutics of *Advaita* and *Anekāntavāda* for moulding a synthetic culture in India
9. to examine to what extent Gandhian interpretation has helped religions to retain their identity, while maintaining fellowship, complementarity and travelling as fellow pilgrims towards perfection.

**Scope And Content**

Though the present study is basically concentrated to the Gandhian approach to communalism in contemporary India, the study has tried to examine perspectives of different responses of each religion to religious pluralism especially among Hinduism, Christianity and Islam and analyze to what extent they are responsible for the communal problems in India. Since the contemporary communalism is centred among these three religions, the study is limited only to these religions.

Covering the whole scriptures of these religions is an unwieldy task. Hence the present research is restricted to, *Rigveda, Bhagavad Gītā, Upaniṣads, Purāṇas* from Hindu scriptures. From the modern Hindu responses it seems Dayananda Saraswati the founder of the Ārya Samāj, is the pioneer, for aiming militant organization, hence his original writings are considered. The writings of Swami Vivekananda, V.D. Savarkar and Golwalkar are discussed. It also studied the *Qurān* and the *Bible*.

Interpretation of scriptures is one of the thorny issues of inter-religious relations. Christians and Muslims take their Holy scriptures as the very backbone of their religion. They fall back on the Bible and the Quran for...
finding source and support for their beliefs, practices, values and attitudes. Since the Hindu religious tradition is a conglomeration of many religions, faiths, cultures and traditions with its large and enormous variety of literature, they have a variety of interpretations. But most of the interpretations are done by elite groups with a view to serve their interest. Therefore, these interpretations have exclusive connotations. It seems these exclusive interpretations give rise to communalism.

Gandhian approach to communalism in contemporary India is the crucial part of this study. Gandhi had approached the problem philosophically and pragmatically. Many have written on pragmatic approach of Gandhi to this problem. Therefore, the present writer is not looking into it. Though the research aims at studying the Gandhian philosophical approach for religious harmony, the study is limited only to Gandhian interpretation of Advaita of āstika religion and anekāntavāda of nāstika religion. Hence writings of Gandhi and Jaina Philosophy are considered with a view to revive the basic values for understanding and respect for religions. Hence the researcher is preparing Gandhian hermeneutics as an alternative paradigm to revive religious values for moulding a synthetic culture promoting Peace and Harmony.

In the second chapter, the researcher has made an attempt to analyze Hindu responses to religious pluralism. This chapter tries to answer some pertinent questions such as:

What do the Hindu scriptures say about the relationship between various religious traditions? How did Vedic Brāhmanism respond to various non-vedic religions and cultural traditions in its evolution to classical Hinduism? How did Hinduism react to heterodox (nāstika) religions like Jainism and Buddhism. How
did the philosophical schools and *Sampradāyas* within Hinduism view each other? What is its attitude towards non-indigenous religions like Christianity and Islam? Since this research is mainly concentrated on the contemporary communalism in India, it is necessary to pay attention in the modern Hindu responses to other religions. But the modern responses are in a sense re-statements or re-interpretations of the past Hindu responses to similar situations, it tries to look into the past Hindu responses from the scriptures, especially *Veda, Bhagavad Gītā, Purāṇas* etc.

Among the modern Hindu reformers and religious thinkers only four are selected in this work. They are Swami Dayananda Saraswati, Swami Vivekananda, V.D. Savarkar and M.S. Golwalkar. They are selected as representatives of certain different models or tendencies in modern Hinduism with regards to its attitude towards other faiths. Dayananda Saraswati and his *Ārya Samāj* are taken because he was the man who seriously relied on the Orientals’ interpretation of Indian History suggesting its importance to *Vedic* culture. Further he was the first man, who propounded the theory of *Śuddhi* and *Sanghathan* which in response to other religions.

Swami Vivekananda became the symbol of religious awakening of India, since the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893. He made Hinduism to a missionary religion and presented *Advaita* as the only universal religion, in Europe, America and else where in the world.

V.D. Savarkar and M.S. Golwalkar have been taken because they played a very significant role in the process of re-vitalization and self-conscientization of Hindu society. V.D. Sarvarkar’s concept of ‘*Hindutva*’ and Golwalkar’s books, ‘Bunch of Thoughts’ and ‘We or Our Nationhood Defined’ immensely
influenced the Hindu organizations such as R.S.S., V.H.P., Bajrang Dal etc., to
counter other religions with a spirit of militancy and cultural exclusivism.

Hence the present study seeks to investigate the response of the above
exponents of Modern Hinduism and the implications of their positions for inter-
religious relationship in the contemporary India.

In the Third Chapter, an attempt has been made to analyse the Christian
response to Religious Pluralism in three sections. The first part concentrates on
the absolutistic standpoint of Christianity, with its exclusive and inclusive
attitudes, which creates suspicion, ill feeling and hatred from other religions.
This is one of the causes of communalism. The present turmoil in the Indian
subcontinent is mainly centred, on the issue of conversion and Christian
missions. This has been vehemently criticized by Hindu organizations. The
present Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee has called for a national debate to
discuss the religious conversion issue and he reiterated to missionaries to
abandon the policy of conversion. Hence the second section is concentrated on
Christianity and Conversion. The third section deals with the pluralistic
standpoint of Christianity and its way to open 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'. Pluralistic standpoint holds all great religious traditions
on an equal footing. This approach does not renounce uniqueness of Christ but
makes it relative. Hence this approach ponders the viability for inter-religious
dialogue.

In the Fourth Chapter, an attempt has been made to analyse the Islamic
approach to Religious Pluralism. Through the advent of Islam in India, there
emerged two types of social groups with specific cultural interests and with definite cultural boundary. They are polemical in their worldviews.

Since culture is the collective memory of the people and collective heritage handed down through generations, cultural uprooting or assimilation by a dominant or powerful culture will always create tension and turmoil. When politics entered in the area of religion it transformed religious cleavages into political cleavages. The nexus between religion and politics with a view to have hegemony over other religions promoted cultural exclusivism. Cultural exclusivism is a threat to religious pluralism. This section discusses how the cultural exclusivism of Islamic vision responds to religious pluralism. It demands us to search for the theological, cultural and emotional standpoints in moulding the Islamic community and its response to other religions.

The absolutistic and inclusivistic interpretation of the Quran, Islamic concept of Holy war (Jihād) and the policy of Islāmization have been discussed in this chapter and have come to the conclusion that, while emphasizing ‘Theodemocracy’, these were undermining the secular democracy of the country. Hence the co-existence of religions may not be possible. This also introduces theological injustice to God’s creation. However, in the midst of this propagation of cultural exclusivism, a group of Islamic thinkers especially from Sūfism, interpreted Quran and its tradition with a view to promote a composite culture in the Indian subcontinent, by combining Indian Bhakti tradition (love), Vedanta (renunciation) and Sūfī mysticism. Thus Sūfism provided the key, necessary for opening the door to a true encounter with other religions. They considered the adherents of other faiths are spiritual neighbours. It emphasizes the inner spirit in all religions is the same, though
there may be variations outwardly. Therefore, the writer is inclined to say that the Sufism’s approach to the Reality and its consideration on the various viewpoints of Reality seems very near to the Jaina theory of Anekāntavāda.

In the Fifth Chapter, an attempt has been made to analyse Gandhian approach to communalism in contemporary India. This chapter is divided into two parts. The first section is an over-view of communal landscape of Gandhian era. When Gandhi entered in the national scene he had to face four kinds of defiant forces based on socio-political cultural nationalism, fleeting one another in the national movement. They are:- (a) Indian National Movement (b) Hindu National Movement, (c) Muslim National Movement (d) Subaltern Movement.

Moderates and Extremists have different views on proper end and means of the national movement. While the moderates envisioned a modernization of India with the western liberal ideas, the Extremists glorified the Vedic culture and they were against modernization. Thus they reflected a Kshatriya worldview 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. Thus the Muslim league was formed in 1906. As a result of the intensification of Hindu Muslim tensions, a new influential militant organization, R.S.S. was established in 1925 by Hedgewar. Savarkar’s treatise of ‘Hindutva’ influenced to promote one culture, one nation with one race. The demand for the maintenance of racial unity the Hindus argued that the non-Hindus should merge fully into an original national race. This created an atmosphere to demand for a Muslim nation.
The Subaltern leaders were against the upper caste Hindus, for their notion of Hindu national culture as the extension of *Vedic* culture. They provided a vision for an alternative culture and identity of the people based on *non-Āryan* and low caste perspectives. The Subaltern leaders were critical not only of the oppressiveness of the dominant Hindu Caste society but also of its claim to antiquity. Hence subaltern movement was a revival of the values of the *non-Āryan* religion and culture, which has been encrusted by the crude interpretation of upper caste Hindus.

Gandhi found the above ideologies linked with oppressive structures and exclusive interpretations were a real hindrance to social change and development in the country.

He observed that the concept of nationalism, national identity and national loyalty has turned into group egoism, sectarian religious identity, and religious 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. Since religion is the matrix of culture, by providing values, it 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’. In order to counter communalism Gandhi preached the doctrine of equality of religions.

The second part of this section is the core part of this research. This is an attempt to analyse how Gandhi as a synthesizer of *Āstika, Nāstika* and *Semitic* religions, promotes an inclusive culture for peaceful living. Gandhi found cultural exclusivism and subsequent cultural nationalism based on exclusive
interpretation of theology and philosophy as the root cause of communalism in India. In order to counter this Communalism, Gandhi was in favour of having a new hermeneutics of Scripture and Philosophies.

Gandhi observed that there are ample religious literature both in Āstika and Nastika religions supporting for a pluralistic approach to religious and cultural diversity. This section is an attempt to discuss and analyse on such two concepts, 'Advaita' of Āstika religion and Anekāntavāda of Nāstika religion, Gandhi has taken and interpreted for an integral approach to religious pluralism.

In a couple of significant statements Gandhi affirms his faith in Advaita Vedanta. He says "I believe in the Advaita, I believe in the essential unity of man and for that matter of all that lives."^6

Again Gandhi affirms, "I am an anekāntavādi. This is the most important thing that I have learnt from Jain philosophy. It is implicit in Vedanta philosophy."^7

Gandhi interpreted Advaita as a universal religion (dharma) not as a customary religion but that religion which brings us face to face with our maker. Gandhi even went to the extent of calling himself a Sanātana Hindu. He comes to the conclusion that whether his theory is correct or not untouchability is repugnant to reason and to the instinct of mercy, pity and love, which are the divine attributes of God. And as we are the children of God, we should love and treat one and all equally. Gandhi says that, "I believe in the rock bottom doctrine of Advaita and my interpretation of Advaita
excludes totally any idea of superiority at any stage what so ever. I believe implicitly that all men are born equal.\(^8\)

In *Advaita*, Gandhi could see a universal religion, i.e., *(Dharma)*, all comprehensive, all embracing and all-inclusive rather than exclusive. It could accommodate and assimilate *Āstika, Nāstika* and *Semitic* religions. Hence Gandhi preached universal brotherhood and fatherhood on the basis of *Advaitic* principle. It can accommodate not only the religions proposed by Dayananda Saraswati, Vivekananda and Savarkar, Hedgewar, and Golwalkar, but the religions of antiquity of the subaltern leaders like Phule / Periyar / Ambedkar / Narayana Guru etc.

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 that have come to stay in India and influenced Indian life and the spirit of the soil has themselves influenced that, in their turn. Hence Ram Jethmalani has rightly says, that this is the *'Hindutva'* culture, not the *'Hindutva'* of Sangh Parivar. This synthetic culture shall be a powerful shield, which protects our minorities.

The last part of this section has been dealt with the Gandhian interpretation of *Anekāntavāda*. It is an analysis and evaluation, pointing to its relevance for an alternative paradigm to counter the contemporary communalism in India.

The researcher has also attempted a thorough discussion on the non-Absolutistic standpoint of *Anekāntavāda* and its respects for all opinions. Gandhi believes that the theory of *Anekāntavāda* may offer a paradigmatic
significance by providing an axiom that truth is many sided and relative. Hence, Gandhian interpretation of *Anekāntavāda* is a methodology to counter exclusivism or absolutism propounded by many religious interpretations. Since *Anekāntavāda* affirms any perception on reality and knowledge can only be partial and relative, it has the capability to synthesis different perceptions on reality. In Gandhi’s view Indian civilization was essentially dominated by the spirit of “Synthesis.” This spirit is absorption, assimilation, co-existence and synthesis. This energetising spirit of accommodation and adaptability Gandhi finds in the concept of *Anekāntavāda* or *SVādvāda*, which directly promote a mingling of cultures represented by the different faiths. The doctrine of manyness of reality (*Anekāntavāda*) also vividly expresses an integral organism of spatio-temporal process. This view envisages a relational convergence of religions.

*Anekāntavāda* interpretation also maintains that the reality can be seen from number of perspectives, and any religious claim from one perspective is erroneous. Hence, proselytizing activities certainly violate the right of a person to follow the truth, as he understands it. Therefore, proselytization is against the doctrine of manyness of reality, *Satva* and *Ahimsa*.

*Anekāntavāda* Epistemology also offers a synoptic and many-sided outlook and acknowledges that truth can only be gathered by *Samvāda* or dialogue. It offers the possibility of not only gathers the truth, it also de-absolutises and relativises truth. Therefore, Gandhi affirms that religious resources are common property of the whole humanity on an equal footing because the essence of religion is the same. Gandhi firmly believes in the importance of dialogical relationship for a peaceful living. Therefore, he
emphasizes learning from other religious scriptures, will enable people to keep their religion pure and rid it of blemishes. The Anekāntavāda interpretation also emphasizes the spiritual progress of humanity depends on the capacity to assimilate or synthesis the spiritual values from other religions and cultures. This will ultimately perpetuate lasting peace. Anekāntavāda provides a new paradigm to mould a synthetic culture in India.

In the concluding chapter researcher makes a review of various aspects of the subjects raised, discussed and analysed in the previous chapters. The contemporary communalism gives rise to a culture and climate of antiminoritism resulting in increasing intolerance. To counter these subversive forces it is necessary to understand and revive the pluralistic interpretation of religious scriptures as Gandhi did when he interpreted Advaita, and Anekāntavāda concepts. Thus a new hermeneutic is necessary to transcend conflicting issues by providing the new categories of non-difference, non-identity and non-duality with a view to have a reconciliation, Peace and Harmony among religions and in the society. Mahatma Gandhi died for this cause.

Methodology

The method is neither historical nor sociological. It is a conceptual analysis of religious controversies. Hence descriptive/ analytic method has been followed in general. This descriptive method is followed mainly because the subject demands the study of the various religious texts and to relate that to modern organizations and analyze their influence in the contemporary communalism.
When dealing with the writings of Gandhi, there arose some problems. One of the reasons is the voluminous nature of his writings on almost every topic. Another is that his writings are mostly fragmentary, scattered, and contextual. However, Gandhi's writings are logical and coherent. Hence all his 'statements' on the concepts "Advaita" and "Anekāntavāda", often repeated by Gandhi himself or by others are taken for consideration. Mostly anthologies and compilations of Gandhi's writings have been used for collecting his views on the topic. Whenever required, his articles published in Young India and Harijan are referred to.

Owing to the contemporaneous nature of the subject of the thesis, the writer visited the disputed place of Rāma-Jaśma Bhūmi – Bābri-Mazjid site in Ayodhya and acquired primary source materials. He also visited Faizabad and Delhi and interviewed a few prominent persons who are directly, or through their writings involved in the Hindu-Muslim controversy.

Definition And Clarification Of Terms

According to the Chambers Dictionary the word "communal" means any thing pertaining to a commune or a community or shared between members of a group or community. According to Oxford Universal Dictionary, it means concern for the welfare of the community instead of individual self interest. The word "communal" therefore means belonging to a community. But the word communalism has acquired a special meaning in Indian usage, and is associated with religious communities.9

Geertz views communalism in India as 'religious contrasts.'10 According to D.E. Smith, communalism in India is the functioning of religious
communities or organizations which claim to represent them in a way which is considered detrimental to the interests of other groups or the nation as a whole.\textsuperscript{11} So communalism in Indian context has come to mean hostility or animosity towards persons belonging to another religious group.

However, communalism is not synonymous with fundamentalism. V.M. Tarkunde defines "Fundamentalism as a strict maintenance of traditional orthodox religious beliefs and practices."\textsuperscript{12} A fundamentalist may not have any hostility towards persons belonging to another religion. The fundamentalism of an individual is not anti-social by itself, but it has a communal potential. It becomes anti-social when it is accompanied by an element of co-ercion or force, which seeks to extend itself into secular domains (economic, political and cultural). Fundamentalism becomes harmful when the orthodox belief and practices of one community are imposed on another religious community with a coercive power for securing "secular" interests. Then there arises communal violence. Hence, communalism as an ideology emerges from a specific historical context and is inherent in the fundamental belief of a religious group (community) are made to believe that their interests and beliefs are not only different from those of other religious communities but are also antagonistic to one another.\textsuperscript{13}

For the purpose of this study communalism is taken to mean interpretations of scriptures on different truth claims or towards an ideology that has emerged from a specific historical context, from any one of the religious belief of Hinduism, Christianity and Islam with a clearly defined identity and cultural interest, which inflicts its interest upon other religious sects with the intention of either exterminating them or assimilating or
accommodating them as subservient peoples and thereby establishing its own supreme identity. Different truth claims which often contradict and exclude each other, so that it is difficult to create a common worldview with common structures and values acceptable to all. Hence, competing and even contradictory religious worldviews with their absolute, mutually exclusive claims to truth are a genuine source of profound tensions and conflicts, which can lead to violence and war.

**Religious Pluralism**

Pluralism is a part of God's design and purpose for humanity. Due to the unprecedented development of science and technology, information media has developed to utmost level, and the whole world has become like a global village. Today religious diversity is far more greater and much more noticed by humankinds. Religious pluralism is certainly an inconvertible fact in the contemporary India. Indian society has been religiously and culturally pluralistic for more centuries than any other country in the world. Besides being a fact of social life, pluralism also describes a specific theological approach towards the plurality of religions in the world, arising from the premise that each of the major faith represents a culturally conditioned human response to a single ultimate reality.

The term ‘religious pluralism’ is generally used in two senses. Firstly, it signifies a state of religious diversity within a society, a situation in which various religions exist and develop side by side. Secondly, it refers to a particular kind of attitude or response of a believer of one religion towards other religions. In this sense it signifies the view that recognizes, while holding one’s own religion as true and valid, other great religions also, in some way or other, true and valid paths to
the Supreme and hence effective ways for salvation. Thus it differs from exclusivism, which maintains that only one's own religion is true and all other religions are false. In this perspective there is no room for mutual enrichment between religions. It also differs from inclusivism, which recognizes elements of truth in other religions, but they are partial and imperfect. The truth in other religions are included and fulfilled in one's own religion. This affirms the salvific presence of God in other religions. But it rejects other faiths as not being sufficient for salvation.

The pluralist perspective maintains that other religions are equally salvific paths to the one God. It accepts the religious resources as the Common Property of Humanity. This also offers a relational convergence of religions, hence an adherent of a faith has to consider as a pilgrim in quest of Truth.

**Notes and References:**

3. B.G. Varghese, “The Lost Road to Ayodhya”, Indian Express, 13 January 1991
5. Ibid., p.5
6. Young India, 4 December 1924
7. Complete works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. 35. p.1


12. V.M. Tarkunde, op. cit., p.2

CHAPTER - II

HINDU APPROACH TO

RELIGIOUS PLURALISM