Chapter VIII
COMPARATIVE EVALUATION

Comparative Religion:

Religion aims at making man happy and by bringing forth the best within him. Thus, different religions provide profound insights into the nature of man and the Supreme reality - God. Restricting the solution of the problem of evil to any one or other religion is untenable. For man is a complex creature, leading an inward and outward life. Again, merely to compare the principles of religions in abstract is not enough, but they have to be seen as to how far they are workable in life too.

This is to say that comparative religion is not confined to the level of phenomenology only. Interpretation and evaluation with reference to the depth of man's personality is also important. No doubt this selective approach does not need to account for all religious phenomena, except the problem of evil with which we are concerned. We have seen that different religions mention various avenues to satisfy man's higher spiritual search.

The varieties of philosophical and ethical principles are due to different sets of intuitive experiences. Comparative religion seeks to analyze the cognitive, the
affective and the conative attitudes in these religions. Man finds the innermost spiritual link between himself and mankind. It is, when we take into account this total personality of man in his quest of the object of the ultimate goal, then it is bound to appear as diverse and varied as the personalities of different followers.

We referred earlier that the supreme religious good appeals to man's profounder, more constructive and more permanent aspects, for it aims at his whole and healthy development of personality. This necessitates looking beneath the surface of man's beliefs and practices.

The method of handling the religious data is both deductive and inductive, and organization of which is due partly to some selection of assumptions and postulations as showed in the earlier chapter, and partly to some view which will be replaced later by other more developed 'weltanschung' and the vision of things themselves.

With the co-operation and mutual understanding, the religious life becomes more diversified. The pattern of a new change or finding solution to evil and suffering in the world today is co-existence, hopefully of a creative type. Recognition of pluralism is inevitable here. The effectiveness and significance of these faiths have to be examined through long process of empirical struggles of psycho-social dialogues.
No doubt evil and its sufferings are neither desirable nor justified. But then, this is a challenge to that which constitutes the best in the human spirit. In fact this all-pervasive problem has shown its bearing on our guilt and shortcomings, lack of social justice and brotherhood. Resolving and easing the problem of evil is a complex phenomenon. It calls for the varied human traits as mentioned both in self-realization and social-realization.

Thus, there is an interconnection of complex relations and responsibilities. Various religions put emphasis on various values and they all have something worthwhile to contribute. The problem of evil is multi-dimensional in itself. To bring out the various positive aspects and values of these religions of Indian and Semitic traditions would enable fairly to the quest of infinite good and happiness.

Origin of Evil:

For all religions the origin of evil and hence all unhappiness of man is generally due to egoism, an excessive sense of self-importance.

The dualistic principle of Zoroastrianism and by that means Jainism too, clearly appreciates the antagonism between good and evil. In this sense it is attractive, but misleading ultimately. For the common ground is sought, not
in the varieties of results, but in the unifying goal of contradictory fragments of experience. Thus, for instance, like light and darkness, good and evil also in fact, are two sides of the one and the same experience.

The doctrine of original sin in Semitic religions, especially in Judaism and Christianity, wherein the very first case of disobedience is an act of sin; militates against the conception of divine righteousness by attributing arbitrariness and cruelty to God. Again, the corporate guilt of these religions is not and cannot be experienced with the same force as personal guilt.

In this respect Indian religions are more lenient and compassionate, for they attribute all our spiritual ills in the fact of Avidya or ignorance of our supreme nature. In Semitic religions the sense of 'sin' is much diluted with the course of time, identifying it with just moral evil rather than alienation from God. Then, this is a worthless guilt with no living consciousness with God. It does not appeal rationally.

But any way, it is a hope in all religions that in spite of the fact of existence of ignorance or sin or evil power whose exact beginning and logical explanation is not possible, the certainty of their end is unquestionable.
Nature of Evil:

Semitic religions are revealed words of God, and so they are less tolerant of other faiths. For these theistic religions especially the biblical religions believe that the man in his present status has become so degenerated by nature, that he is incapable of saving himself.

But Indian religions and Zoroastrianism do not regard man as sinner. Inspite of all evil pervasiveness, there is a greater optimism in these religions. In fact, here too, the philosophic perspective of Indian religions is more appealing. For evil and suffering is indissolubly related with creation.

The catholic and tolerant attitude is indispensable in today's world. Dogmatism regarding the origin of evil and the nature of evil is forbidden. The crux is this that the one-sided assessment of these, is not fruitful and it is questionable.

Solution of Evil:

Emphasis on spiritual experience.

Indian religions emphasize inner quest or direct spiritual experience as the means of realizing the supreme God. Generally the Indian religious tradition is far more pantheistic and monistic. The way to realization is mainly
through renunciation and the life above action is overstressed.

Now this perfect renunciation requires not only compassion and purity, but also intelligence and awareness. It is to be conscious of one's own internal resources and from this view Indian religions are more helpful today.

Still, 'desire' in man cannot be rooted out or killed. It is the fountain of life, its denial is the denial of life. Only 'desire' is to be cultivated properly, for it is what makes possible the progress in worldly life. But the ethics in Indian religions press more the subjective self-control to the utmost at the cost of self-expression through right actions.

Spiritual concentration:

A methodical cultivation of the inner life is must for an enlightenment. Concentration is the religious method of self-education. For Indian religions, spiritual meditation is an approach to supreme spiritual life. It helps consolidate and strengthen the will uniquely.

Indian religions seem to present the methods for stilling and pacifying the turbulent passions and desires and obtain inner peace in return. Thus, Jainism and Buddhism do aim at self culture and perfection. They offer some original and unique way out instead of dogmas
and creeds. Those who have difficulty with the belief in God, could still benefit from the spiritual techniques of these religions.

The spiritual concentration leads one to the realization of one's identity with the supreme God. He rises beyond personal and dualistic concepts of good and evil. But then this self-realization is not to be mistaken as submerging one's identity. From another angle it is a creative use of the freedom of thought, feeling and imagination.

This view that God could be approached directly by any person, without the need of prophets, enlists more recognition and conviction rationally. In reality, such an approach can unite mankind much more than alienate, which is a possible case with dogmatic conceptions.

**Rationalism versus Mysticism:**

The concept of sin in Semitic religions is due to high theistic outlook. Man-God relationship is mainly personal one where God observes man's actions, grants justice to man's progress, and even speaks directly to His messengers. Thus, when one believes in the otherness of God, grace becomes much effective.

Semitic religions are more rational than mystic. Their response to the problem of evil is in practical rather than theoretical terms. Their approach is humanitarian.
The fact is that the Semitic God acts in history. The individual and social efforts of every activity are interwoven. It is not possible to think of an individual person separate from some sort of corporate society. In fact it is a historical treatment of religion.

But in Indian religions and Zoroastrianism, historical events are not that noteworthy, in reality they ignore history altogether. So here, Semitic religions have an edge, for the full awareness of historical tradition presupposes a unique responsibility of its progress. It is a search of doing away evils in concrete measures.

But Indian religions incline more towards the supernatural and supersensuous aspect of man. Unlike the Semitic emphasis on faith, they have a philosophic quest. This in fact, enables Indian religions to strengthen and consolidate the ethical teachings and quest of truth and wisdom.

Ethical Approach:

If we put aside the differences in doctrines of various religions then the ethical front presents a good picture. All the religions show a fair measure of identity and agreement on what is right and what is wrong. Notwithstanding all interpretations, it can be said that all religions inculcate the essentials of good conduct. These
actions is the thought of the great and terrible day of judgement. This naturally leads towards the tendency of the morality of rewards. In reality, the dread of punishment and retribution cannot be taken for granted as higher ethical motives. Again, this theory seeks the root of sin to ancestors' misdeeds, especially in biblical religion, which seems untenable insofar as justice is concerned.

Now, while rationalistic ethics insists on a righteous life and theistic ethics insists on a faith in the redemptive will of God, ethical religion like Zoroastrianism reconciles the claims of both by the synthetic view that righteousness is climaxed in redemption. It is the spiritual faith that righteousness is fulfilled in redemption. One could though differentiate these two rationally, but they are one and undivided spiritually. In fact this dualism between the righteous action and the grace of God is a knotty problem in ethical religion which can be resolved by an appeal to spiritual insight only.

In short, semitic religions seek justification of moral life from divine revelation. Whereas in general, though not perfectly but fairly, Indian religions give independent and minute rational reflection to this ethical issue. However it must be said that from the social perspective, semitic morality is more convincing.
Ontological nature of the self occupies a central place in Indian religions. Here the soul is uncreated and immortal. This by itself gives more significance to it in relation to God. It is to realize the perfection inherent in the soul. The metaphysical knowledge of the soul possesses saving capacity within it.

For Semitic religions and Zoroastrianism, not all souls last after death. It is only those who have achieved a certain moral status remain, and they too, have to continue this moral struggle further. It is a conditional immortality. For others it is eternal damnation of hell or bliss of heaven. Semitic religions believe that immortality, whenever it comes, is graced by God.

But the problem of conditional immortality in Semitic religions and Zoroastrianism is as to how much moral efforts are needed after death? Again, how one is to know that enough action is done or not towards this? In reality immortality should be unconditional. All souls have the right to survival, and such a hope is essential in the issue such as evil and freedom from it.

In this context the resurrection of the body is more of a pointer to distant and future expectation than the
indestructibility of an immortal soul in Indian religions.

The stand-point of Indian religions is, on the whole, individualistic on the question of salvation. The salvation it speaks of is salvation only for the individual. It is not cosmic salvation as upheld in semitic religions. But then the point against this is that the scheme of cosmic salvation smacks essentially utopian in character rather than of rigorous philosophical thinking. But this does not mean to be indifferent to the sympathetic understanding and action to the sufferings of others.

Again, in Indian religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism, liberation is possible even in this very life. It only requires to correct the short-sightedness of the temporal existence which emphasizes on 'here' and 'now' only. This is an additional dignity of the human soul, due to its immortal nature. This spiritual climax results from one's own resources of knowledge and detachment.

The nature of Supreme Being:

Strict dualism of reality, such as in Zoroastrianism, seems to resolve the problem of evil. But then, philosophically it creates more problems than clarity. For it considers evil as a permanent and lasting aspect of the world. This issue of the co-existence of two totally opposed orders in the world, is in itself a puzzling premise.
On the other hand from another view-point, Jainism, while looking at the problem of evil dualistically, postulates an uncompromising dualism between reason and feeling. Thus, if hedonism is infra-human and rationalism is supra-human, then the entire animal sensibility is to be avoided. This is untenable psychologically, for it leaves apart the very essence of morality and mistakenly identifies it with intellectual and speculative life.

The basis of Semitic religions is theistic. These religions are types of pure monotheism. They are anti-ascetic and admit the moral strife of the secular world. They also justify moral purity, struggle for justice and the life of labour. To them the worldly existence is to be faced squarely.

When these Semitic religions consider God as a person, then personal values are regarded as the highest values. The belief and emotional attachment to personal effects in good ends. As a corollary of this comes the enormous over-valuation of the individual ego. Still, it must be said that these religions do suggest the need to transcend personality.

But monotheism and dualism more or less equally elevate the status of satan to a very high stature which distorts their monotheism. Still no doubt, God wins over
the satan ultimately. The satan is the supreme of all
demons, and only God could defeat such a mighty force. The
existence of evil and sin as a factual experience in these
religions is advantageous in that they do not explain away
evil and suffering in dialectical reasonings of knowledge
and ignorance, reality and appearance which is beyond the
relativity of good and evil.

Still, the devil theory leads one to think as if God
is finite. Because God is fighting against the evil forces
with a will to victory and with the cooperation of human
beings.

From what follows as the logical analysis of the
concept of Supreme Being God, as the one all pervasive
reality i.e. the monistic outlook and which is normally
evidenced in Indian religions, seems better equipped
philosophically for the solution of the problem of evil.
In polytheism and dualism one of the realities must
necessarily restrict or obscure another. It is only the
concept of the unity of God that gives harmony to the
intellectual and moral realms.

Again, the monistic and non-dual aspect of the Supreme
Being possesses deeper implication in context of plural
and multi-dimensional aspects of evil and suffering as seen
before. Unlike dualism wherein the enjoyment is the ideal,
it is the freedom and liberation which is the ideal in non-dualism. Here, the man is the master of himself.

The problem is the synthesis of the various aspects of evil and suffering felt conatively, cognitively and affectively. Harmony of the varieties of evil in one single system is found in the unity of one supreme being - God. No doubt this is not an abstract reality, but it is a concrete absolutism which unfolds in various degrees and orders.