Chapter 4
The Convergence of the East and the West in Swami Vivekananda's Ideas
Contents

1. Introduction
2. Elements of a New Future of Indian Society
3. Principle of Unity
4. Swami Vivekananda's Concept of Unity Through Education
5. The Impact of Westernization
6. Convergence of Tradition and Modernity in Religion
7. Social Change Through Religion
8. True Religion is Spirituality
9. Spirituality as Expressed in a Unique Way by Swami Vivekananda
10. Religion as Anubhava
11. Role of Religion in Social Development
12. Synthetic Approach to Religion
13. Conclusion
14. References
Chapter 4
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This chapter tries to bring out how the traditional elements of Indian society converge with the elements of modernization in the West, through the ideas of Swami Vivekananda.

1. Introduction:
The East and the West, the two halves of humanity have been brought together through technological and commercial expansion. The time when the two started coming together, was a time when history was being remade as it were. Every sphere of life was experiencing unrest. There were contradictions in aim, confusion of thought in every line. Our religion preached the highest philosophy but the people were victims of the worst superstition. We quoted Plato and Shankara, but believe in charms and amulets and offered sacrifices for passing examinations and winning prizes. The growth of national consciousness was retarded by communal separatism. The mass of poverty, the extent of illiteracy, the social obstacles in the way of improvement, the tangled undergrowth of vested interests – religious, political and economic revealed an infinity of problems. There seemed to be no shortcuts to their solution. There was a need for a scientific view of things. Swamiji saw this situation as one that required spiritual and human integration of the East and the West. There was a need to energetically initiate steps to bridge the gulf between man and man and between one culture and another. This was especially the need of Indian society after achieving freedom from colonial rule. The yearning for unity lies deep in the human heart which can be witnessed in the existence of
several movements and institutions in the East as well as in the West to achieve unity in different fields of life.

To cite an example of a case after the first world war – the League of Nations had a department added to it with the mission – the committee for intellectual co-operation. After the second world war, the UNO started the task of bridging gulfs between nations. It functioned through its general and specialized agencies, especially the UNESCO, which is one of the finest international organizations ever set up by man, with high objectives and constructive programmes. This organization has undertaken charitable work in cementing human unity.

The desire for unity tries to express itself even against thwarting obstacles because it is the-very spirit of life itself. Swamiji had seen that the Indian nation was being thwarted at every step for the past several centuries. The absence of political freedom was restricting the nation from expressing its spirit and its own ideas and ideals. These centuries of servitude had created a narrowness of outlook and a sense of defeatism amongst the people. Also, this slavery had engendered mutual jealousies and an appalling amount of social tyranny. Swamiji's wanderings as a parivrajaka through the length and breadth of India made him face to face with the servitude of the Indian masses. He saw India as few people had seen it before. His vision of the India of the past was that of a glorious India, as he had understood it through Sri Ramakrishna and through books. But what he saw before him was a humanity reduced to dwarfish dimensions, a population of three hundred million, "crawling like worms on the fair soil of India, trying to spit their venoms on each other", as Swamiji says in one of his letters. The India Swamiji saw was one that was passing through centuries of slavery, because of
which there was social immobility, resulting in the accumulation of social problems like untouchability, social injustice, neglect of the masses and of women and above all, the political fragmentation of India. The minds of people were filled with caste and other divisive loyalties. There was an utter lack of the a unifying consciousness among men.

Swamiji worked to create national awareness and a feeling of social urgency. Amidst India's problematic situation he saw a positive element and that was India's pure, undying soul. He experienced a significant realization, that the soul of India was sound and unharmed in spite of the sufferings of the centuries. He further realized that this soul had a message for man in the modern world. He felt that God had preserved the nation through all turbulations so that this message could be conveyed to the world. Swamiji had visualized that the world would be a witness to the Indian message about the reality of God and the truth about the divinity in man. This he felt is the undying legacy of the Upanishads to India and the world. Man's essential nature is his atman, which is of the nature of purity, knowledge, freedom and immortality. Therefore, man is the storehouse of immense constructive potential. Swamiji's task was to create the awareness about this great spiritual fact among men of the East and the West. This was the work of true religion, felt Swamiji. In the past this task was undertaken by the sages of the Upanishads, Sri Krishna, Buddha and Shankara. A large galaxy of spiritual teachers of the middle ages also undertook the same task. At the Parliament of Religions in Chicago, in 1893, Swamiji played the role of a spiritual teacher by reminding the august audience that man was not a sinner, nor a creature of circumstances, but he is a spark of the Divine. To quote Swamiji in this regard, "Allow me to you, brethren, by that sweet name... heirs
of immortal bliss. Yea, the Hindu refuses to call you sinners. Ye are the children of God, the sharers of immortal bliss, holy and perfect beings. Ye divinities on earth... sinners? It is a sin to call a man so; it is standing libel on human nature. Come up, O lions, and shake off the delusion that you are sheep; you are souls immortal, spirits free, blest and eternal; ye are not matter, ye are not bodies; matter is your servant, not you the servant of matter."¹

In this way Swamiji tried to infuse man with faith in his own self with faith in his potential, spirituality through which could be achieved the feeling of synthesis and unity in the consciousness of man. Thus, Swamiji made the immortal teaching of unity of the Upanishads the basis for achieving social unity and progress. On the basis of this teaching, he attempted a convergence of the better elements of the East and the West, as both these elements were necessary for the regeneration of Indian society.

The meeting of the elements of the East and West can be called the convergence of tradition and modernity. Swamiji himself actually lived a life of the synthesis between the East and the West. His personality, his outlook and his sympathies were international and human. There were no provincial limits to his sympathies. His heart embraced the whole of humanity. Swamiji attempted to show to the world that the all-embracing spirit of unity by which he lived and which is a universal human urge, came to him from his tradition— that is from the philosophy of the Upanishads. He has said, "The second great idea which the world is waiting to receive from our Upanishads is the solidarity of this universe. The old lines of demarcation are vanishing rapidly. Electricity and steam power are placing the different parts of the world in inter-communication with each other, and, as a result, we Hindus no longer say that every
country beyond our own land is peopled with demons and hobgoblins nor do the people of Christian countries say that India is only peopled by cannibals and savages. When we go out of our country, we find the same brother-man, with the same strong hand to help, with the same lips to say Godspeed; and sometimes they are better than in the country in which we are born... Our Upanishads say that the cause of all misery is ignorance, and that is perfectly true when applied to every state of life, either social or spiritual. It is ignorance that makes us hate each other. It is through ignorance that we do not know and do not love each other. As soon as we come to know each other, love comes must come for are we not one? Thus, we find solidarity coming in spite of itself. Even in politics and sociology, problems that were only national twenty years ago, can no more be solved on national grounds only. They are assuming huge proportions, gigantic shapes. They can only be solved when looked at in the broader light of international grounds. International organizations, international combinations, inter-national laws are the cry of the day. That shows the solidarity." 2

From the stated expressions it can be understood that the foundation of Indian culture, the philosophy of the Upanishads, springs from the ideal of unity or solidarity. Thus, the tendency to forge unity in the different fields of life, whether it be in the West or in the East, is not new or modern in its cultural origin, but was already present in Indian culture, in its age-old philosophy as the background and sustaining power of society. Differences alone cannot function as the sustaining power of a society. They are anchored by an ideal of unity. However, many a times, differences between individuals and groups stand out markedly, the spirit of unity may be present in a subtle manner and is therefore, not
obvious. Swamiji attempts to make obvious this unity between man and man and between the East and the West for the benefit of his own fellowmen especially, and also for the whole of human society.

Nations that are on the path of regeneration in order to progress are in need of leaders of vision, of broad sympathy and of great energy. India has been very fortunate in this field as in her age of great transition she had leaders of a great stature. They were leaders of mankind who guided India in her period of critical transition. Swami Vivekananda was convinced that the regeneration of Indian society can be brought about by a regeneration of the process of education and religion. These two together encompass the entire purview of man's life and therefore it was necessary to effect constructive changes in the two in order to have an enlightened and economically progressing society.

2. Elements of a New Future of Indian Society:
Swamiji's hope for a new India constituted three elements. The first element was, the strong points in the old Indian tradition, second, the strong points of the modern age, that is the tested and universal elements of the modern Western tradition, and third, the forging of new India as a growth from within, by the assimilation of her people of the strong points of the modern age with the strong points of her age-old national tradition. Though Swamiji was convinced for new education and of the need to accept from the West all that was conducive to the progress of Indian society, he was even more firmly convinced about the unfailing worth of the traditional, spiritual values of Indian culture. Thus, the assimilation from the West was to be accomplished without shaking the structure of the values of Indian culture. It was to be a constructive amalgamation, rather, than a desecration of anything.
The convergence of tradition with the modernizing influences of the West can be regarded as the result of new education. Through it people got exposed to new knowledge and ideas and also to new avenues of development. The improvement in education led to concrete social developments, like new spheres of employment and it created new social classes. There came a change in the social and economic conditions of the people bringing a change in their lifestyle – making people accept new lifestyles and corresponding new attitudes and values.

However, it is not possible that a society may be completely overcome by the influences of modernization. At the practical level it is not possible to separate tradition from modernity completely. The modern comes to the traditional society, as a particular culture with its own traditions. As a process, modernization has more elasticity of form than tradition. It stands for an open world-view. Observation has revealed that modernization does not replace or discard old traditions completely for social life depends on the persistence of traditions. To give the example of caste associations in India – they are typical symbols of tradition, but have increasingly been found to serve the purpose of political modernization. Thus, modernization has entered Indian society more through assimilation than through replacement. We can observe that traditional institutions like the joint family, kin-based entrepreneurial functions have co-existed and supported modern values and forms of social actions. Also, the modern means of transport and communication worked in two ways – it carried out the diffusion of cultural modernization, which accelerated the diffusion of traditionalism.
The nationalist movement, which later on changed into a movement for cultural, economic and political modernization, was also fully conscious of India's past tradition. Along with the growth in the forces of cultural modernization there was also the feeling of national identity and the identification with India's past tradition. Thus, in Indian society cultural modernization persisted along with the disemmanation of traditional values. Modernization never completely supplanted tradition. Thus, considering the elements of a new future of Indian society, it can be said that its essential element was the principle of unity at the social level.

3. Principle of Unity:
The impact of British rule on Indian society brought a very fine convergence between the East and the West in a number of ways. British rule produced changes that were radical and long-lasting. They had an element of novelty – new technology, institutions, knowledge, beliefs and values.

It was possible for the British to integrate the country as never before, on account of advancements in technology and the revolution in communications. The significant effect that the convergence with modernity produced was that Indian society was made to come out of its closed structure and open up to new influences. Books and journals, along with schools made the transmission of modern as well as traditional knowledge possible to a large number of Indians. Knowledge could no longer remain the privilege of few hereditary groups. Newspapers made the people in different parts of the country realize that they had common bonds and that events happening in the world outside influenced their lives for the good or bad. Thus, English education made the people aware of English literature and values, on account of which there
arose an interest in the values of one's own culture. And this in turn fostered a strong spirit of national dignity and an urge to establish a libertarian and egalitarian base for Indian society.

It can be said that education plays a very prominent role in a progressing society. There is diffusion of progressive ideas in an advancing society through liberal education. In a progressing society, education functions in a threefold manner. Its functions are apprehension, appreciation and creation. Education begins in growing individuals with the general apprehension of the physical and social environments. At later stages of acquiring education the growing individuals try to have critical appreciation for the history of human achievements in as many fields of human experience as possible. Individuals become incessant creators of novel and original values in the final stages of intellectual advancement. Creative education prepares individuals for social efficiency and for effectively directing the course of history. It has a very important function in a progressing society. In fact, Swami Vivekananda would opine that social progress is the manifestation of creative education. The best that is conceivable in human culture diffuses from the centres of creative education. Social progress takes place through creative education. It teaches people to find new ways of adjustments from time to time, in order to suit the changing needs of society. It also instills the sense of what is socially and morally right. Furthermore, it also inculcates a feeling of cohesion or unity in society. Diversity and inequality is naturally present in human society. A creative education aims at the achievement of bringing solidarity through the diversity and differences. Social cohesion promotes the sentiments of friendship and brotherhood in the members of a society. In a materially advancing society the masses of people stand united and consolidated for achieving the targets set
by them. For a society to progress, a certain degree of unity is necessary in spite of the differences among individuals. Social cohesion comes when the desire to unite and harmonize predominates over the sense of individual differences.

4. **Swami Vivekananda's Concept of Unity Through Education:**
As mentioned in earlier chapters, Swami Vivekananda sought to bring about social unity through the process of man-making education. According to him, our education must enable our students to achieve at least a fraction of the synthesis of East and West – that is a synthesis of science and spirituality of contemplation and action. The great importance of the instrumentality of education as one that brings about social synthesis is explained through the concepts of para vidya and apara vidya. Para vidya is recognised as the highest education that fosters ethical, aesthetic and spiritual values in man, along with the moral values associated with pure science. The harmony of all these values and the intrinsic harmony between para vidya and apara vidya was always upheld by the Vedanta. All branches of learning at the level of worldly life are sublimated at the level of para vidya. All the influences that came from the West through the process of education met their culmination by being assimilated into the para vidya of Vedanta. This can be called a unique convergence of the East and West through education. Swamiji wanted this convergence to engulf the whole of man's social life, that is he wanted that man should imbibe social, moral and spiritual values along with the acceptance of all that was conducive to the material progress of society.

Swamiji considered such convergence of moral and spiritual values with the forces of material progress as necessary to strike a
balanced development of man and society, at both the levels, inner and the outer. Ethical and spiritual values do not emerge from physical nature itself. They emerge out of the depths of the human spirit at a certain stage of evolution and after a certain measure of mastery of the environment is achieved by man. Such values cannot emerge automatically from industry or from technological manipulations of external nature and from the wealth resulting from such achievements. Bertrand Russell has pointed out – "The machine as an object of adoration is the modern form of satan, and its worship is the modern diabolism... "Whatever else may be mechanical, values are not, and this is something which no political philosopher must forget."\(^3\)

This implies that without a little of para vidya at the level of apara vidya, society can become a breeding ground of pride, selfishness, exploitation, violence on the one hand, and alienation, loneliness and psychic breakdowns on the other. These have afflicted societies in the past and led them to decay and death. Modern Western civilization is facing such a challenge at present since Indian society has been absorbing the energies of this modern Western civilization at a fast pace, it is also experiencing some of its distortions. The saving grace can come by opening up to the eternal message of adhyatma vidya. The distortions can be managed by generating a fresh capital of our spiritual energy resources, with the aim of digesting, assimilating and transforming the physical and mental energy and resources of our highly technical age.

It also needs to be remembered that physical science has its limitations. The very 'adjective' physical brings out the limitation. It cannot pronounce judgements on life or reality as a whole. If it does it becomes dogmatic. The absence of a parallel development of
It can be gathered from this that the errors of materialism can paralyse the energies and destroy the beauty of life. Materialism produces the forces of attachment and aversion which obstructs man from knowing his true self. Attachment and aversion are opposites which produce delusion. Man is capable of overcoming this delusion. To put it in Sri Krishna's words, as expounded to his disciple Uddhava - "Prayena manuja loke loktatta – vicak sanah: Samuddharanti hi atmanam atmanaiva asubhasyat."

 "In this world, human beings are generally capable to inquire into the truth of the (external) world; and they uplift themselves (through that) from all sources of asubha or evil."  

 "Atmano gurar-atmaiva pumsasya vise satah
Yat pratyaksa-a-numanabhyami srcyo sam anuvindatte-"

 "Specially in the case of man (unlike the sub-human species where nature does everything), one's guru or guide is, verily, oneself; accordingly man achieves his development and welfare through the
discipline of (his mind) in pratyaksa, direct sense perception and anumana inference (inductive and deductive) based on it." 6

Sri Krishna has explained that culture, civilization and all forms of political, economic and social security and freedom and welfare are the products of disciplined human intelligence, backed by faith in one's ownself and in the meaningfulness of the universe. Man achieves these through systematic scientific investigations into the external, natural and social environments. If the same systematic investigation is carried into the inner field of experience, it would result in a life of spiritual freedom and fulfillment. Sri Ram Krishna has also warned against worldliness. He has said about life in the world- "There is no harm. But allow not samsara, wordliness, to live in you, that will make for life stagnation. A boat will be on the water, that is the right place for the boat. But water should not be in the boat; that is the wrong place for the water; it will make the boat..... unfit for the purpose for which it is meant." 7

Thus, coming back to Swamiji's idea of regenerating the human personality and society by making manifest and active, the inner energy of man, in order to achieve a fine assimilation of the fine elements of scientific development with the life of man, a process of education that brings such overall development was necessary. Swamiji stood convinced about the Vedantic values of unity and assimilation. Great human achievements are possible when man stands in harmony with his ownself, and when a society stands in harmony within itself. Unity is a great positive force. Human excellence is the result of the integration of the positive energies of man and the channelizing of the negative energies in a positive direction. Man practices assimilation and differentiation in his social life. But he learns the eternal value of unity through
education. Thus, the conviction of Swamiji stands endorsed that it is through education and through the amalgamation of the fine elements of the two cultures – Eastern and Western, that the depravity of the Indian masses can be removed.

To unite the positive forces of society through education, it is necessary that our education process should have a discriminative grasp of the strong and weak points of our hoary national culture and tradition. The centuries long political subjection had led to social stagnation and fragmentation. It is not unknown that in spite of such forces of retardation Indian culture continued. This continuation has been attributed to the inner spiritual strength of Indian culture. It is the core of Indian culture which has saved it from utter annihilation by churning out enlightened personalities, who have been the saving grace of this culture from time to time. Swami Vivekananda is one such personality, along with Sri Ramakrishna and Mahatma Gandhi.

Just as our education must have a discriminative grasp of the strengths and weaknesses of our own culture, it must have a similar grasp of the similar elements of modern Western culture. After all, it was this culture which has acted as a stimulus to wake us up from long stagnation and made us creative. In the view of Swamiji, the way to accept and face the challenge of the culture of the West would be to throw our own cultural challenge to it. This implies that Indian society should understand the relevance of Western culture, as a force that can help to strengthen the material and social bases of our own culture. These are the areas in which Indian society has lagged behind the West. At the same time, the negative elements of Western society, the so-called afflictions of scientific and technological development, should not be allowed to
afflict our culture. Thus, it would be fair to accept science, but to reject materialism, to welcome technology to improve the material conditions of human life, but to reject such notions, that man has no spiritual dimension beyond his physical and organic levels, and that organic satisfactions are the highest end of human life. The convergence with the West should bring the realization that in contrast with the West, India's Vedantic philosophy presents an in-depth view of man-man as a physical, social, emotional, moral and spiritual existence.

To go on, our education must have a firm grasp of the realities of contemporary India, as envisaged by Swamiji. The Indian social scene was characterized by a thick majority of cultural have-nots and a thin minority at the top of those who were well-equipped in intellectual, social and cultural standards. This majority was completely unknown to the experience of human dignity and glory, as they lived in abject poverty and misery. Their neglect was a cruel one and it was the one cause of India's long political downfall. Our education was in need to inspire the minority at the top, that through the enlightened use of its social wisdom it must work for the upliftment of the have-nots.

Finally, to achieve a lasting synthesis between the East and the West, our education required that it help the people to understand the strong and tested elements of world-wide modern Western tradition and the similar elements of our own tradition, so that there could be a natural process of assimilation between the two. Such assimilation according to Swamiji was expected to complete the evolution of a modern Indian society. The foundation for such a national synthesis was already present in the national renaissance and in the ideas of Swamiji. Swamiji has expressed in a most
authentic, comprehensive and dynamic manner as to how to achieve a meaningful synthesis between the East and the West through the process of education. The all-round creative synthesis in Swamiji's personality, has been referred to by Romain Rolland in the following way - "In the two words, equilibrium and synthesis, Vivekananda’s constructive genius may be summed up. He embraced all the paths of the spirit; the four yogas in their entirety, renunciation and service, art and science, religion and action, from the most spiritual to the most practical. Each of the ways that he taught had been through them all and embraced them all. As in a Quad Riga, he held the reins of all four ways of truth, and he traveled towards unity along them all simultaneously. He was the personification of the harmony of all human energy."8

5. The Impact of Westernization

The convergence of the East and the West, brought Indian society under the impact of certain elements of the politico-cultural tradition of the West. Features such as formal rationality, experimentation, codification, verification and rational utilitarian orientation in behaviour and thought are some unique substantive qualities of the Western tradition. These elements did exist in the Indian social set up, but due to the absence of other requisite structural features these cultural traits failed to develop systematically.

The cultural tradition of the nineteenth century West, which overwhelmed the Indian scene was fundamentally different in ethos and structure from the traditional cultural patterns of Hinduism and Islam. Its basic tenets were in contradiction with most of the essential attributes of the then contemporary Indian tradition. Considering the form of legal rationalism on which the Western
tradition was based, it recognized a contractual relationship between man and society. In matters of legal justice and civil rights, it encouraged the values of equality, equity and universalism and those of status and hierarchy. In contrast with the familistic status allocation system of India, the Western tradition brought various bureaucratic structures – administrative, legal and military. Through educational and cultural innovations it introduced new criteria for social stratification, based on achievement, not on ascription and allocated status only on the basis of individual performance not on charismatic qualities.

Together, these new orientations posed a challenge to the two cardinal attributes of Indian tradition – hierarchy and holism. The cultural contact with the West infused a whole system of socio-cultural changes that were pan-Indian in character. They overcame regional and sectional boundaries. These changes were representative of a coherent normative system and they had their basis in an organizational structure which was far different from the normative structure of Indian tradition. Examples of such structures are – education, law, science and technology, new forms of politization, urbanization, industrialization and new transport and communication. These new institutional structures marked the process of cultural modernization in Indian society.

The contact with Western Culture also gave rise, as we know, to movements for reform within Hinduism and Hindu society. Movements such as the Brahmo Samaj, Veda Samaj and Prarthana Samaj were theistic movements in Hinduism. They propagated the discontinuance of harmful social usages and customs prevalent in the society. Though these movements were described as elitist and as not having a far reaching impact, their value was in the cultural
awareness they generated. However, these movements made an unexpected impact on the policies pursued by the British government in the early nineties they succeeded in carrying through many radical humanistic reforms related to the social practices of Indian tradition, such as sati, infanticide, stealing children for slavery, widow-remarriage. These changes in the social customs and institutions of the Hindu society were the forerunners of basic cultural readaptations which were to follow later. These changes were inspired by the values of humanism, universal equality, dignity and freedom of man. In this way, contact with the West ushered in a social set up based on modern liberal values breaking the hold of hierarchy and the idea of predestination. This was the beginning of the cultural modernization of Indian society. However, as it is known, the influence of these changes was restricted to the urban middle class, student population, as these changes did not have the institutional basis to reach far and wide. Their importance therefore, was more qualitative rather than quantitative.

The following section discusses the convergence of tradition and modernity in Swami Vivekananda's ideas on religion.

Religion, in societies almost all over the world, has often been equated with practices like magic, superstitions, nature worship, totemism and such other practices which are associated with primitive religion. Religion has also been equated with the worship of deities, as polytheism, and as the worship of a single deity, that is, monotheism. But religion is not so much a revelation to be attained by us in faith, as it is an effort to unveil the deepest layers of man's existence and get into enduring contact with them. It is an
experience to which the individual attaches supreme value, because it is a transforming experience rather than simply a notion of God. It is not simply an attitude of faith diverted to a power without. Real religion can exist without a definite conception of the deity but not without a distinction between the spiritual and the profane, the sacred and the secular. Even in primitive religion with its characteristic, phenomena of magic, there is religion, though not a belief in God. In theistic systems the essential thing is not the existence of the deity, but its power to transform man. Bodhi or the enlightenment which Buddha attained is an experience. There are systems of thought like the Samkhya and Jainism which do not admit God but affirm the reality of the spiritual consciousness. For a theist like Ramanuja spiritual consciousness is the only way in which God can be known. Thus, belief and conduct, rites and ceremonies, authorities and dogma, are the assigned place subordinate to the art of self-discovery and contact with the divine; and all are agreed in regarding salvation as the attainment of the true status of the individual.

Religions exploit the primitive hunger in man for fellowship. The fugitive character of life creates fond hopes in man, that his life is not an end with the death of the body, that it cannot be true that the suffering of the innocent meets with no reward and the victory of the wicked with no requital. It must be that man does count. Religious attempt to satisfy this fundamental need of man by giving him a faith and a way of life, a creed, and a community, and thus restore the broken relationship between him and the spiritual world above and the human world around. Man's relation with the spiritual world, which is not only above him, in heaven, but also within him, is that of unity. This relation exists between man and the human world around, and man's natural environment also. In
Swamiji's concept of true religion is that religion is spirituality. Following religion does not mean following a particular religion, a particular God. Religion is not associated with a particular name or denomination because it is an experience. In fact, Swamiji has pointed out that the particularistic tendency associated with religion has led to divisiveness and also conflicts in the name of religion. Though religion has been one of the most potent factors in the evolution of humanity which has from earliest times supplied the motive for social cohesion and social progress, and also along with satisfying the spiritual needs of individuals it has been the power to unite individuals and communities. It is a strange paradox that this same impulse has also been the cause of a lot of strife and disunion among mankind. Some of the most serious crimes and inhuman practices have been perpetrated in its name.

Swamiji observed that the religion practised by the people in Indian society of his time was a perversion of religion. He has said, "A country, the big leaders of which have for the last two thousand years been only discussing whether to take food with the right hand or the left whether to take water from the right hand side or the left... if such a country does not go to ruin, what other will?"¹⁰ "Think of the last six hundred or seven hundred years of degradation when grown-up men by hundreds have been discussing for years whether we should drink a glass of water with
the right hand or the left, whether the hand should be washed three
 times or four times, whether we should gargle five or six times.
 What can you expect from men who pass their lives in discussing
 such momentous questions as these and writing most learned
 philosophies on them!"[11] (Complete works... Vol. 3, Pg. 167). He
 goes on to say, "There is a danger of our religion getting into the
 kitchen. We are neither Vedantists, most of us now, nor Pauranics,
 nor Tantrics. We are just "Dont-touchists". Our religion is in the
 kitchen. Our God is in the cooking pot, and our religion is "don't
 touch me, I am holy." If this goes on for another century, every one
 of us will be in a lunatic asylum. It is a sure sign of the softening of
 the brain when the mind cannot grasp the higher problems of life,
 all originality is lost, the mind has lost all its strength, its activity,
 and its power of thought, and just tries to go round and round, the
 curve it can find."[12]

 From Swamiji's words it can be gathered that the Hindu religion as
 it was practised during the time of Swamiji, was superstition
 ridden, rigid in its practice of the caste system, with evil practices
 like sati, untouchability, seclusion of woman, illiteracy, all going on
 in its name. The Hindu religion as it were, had become a medium of
 oppression of the lower sections of society. This section of society
 could not have the satisfaction of practising their religion though
 they were born into it because of their low birth. The meaning of
 religion was sought in frivolous ritualism and the core of religion
 that is spirituality was left untouched. The outward manifestation
 of religion, that is, the religious practices made religion
 particularistic and divisive, in the absence of spirituality. True
 religion is close to the interests of man, in the sense that it is
 humanistic. A religion that harbours evil practices does not work
 for the spiritual development of man, but rather retards his
Religion has its essence in spirituality. Spirituality is the gradually unfoldment of the inner self of man. The self gradually tries to come out of the enclosures of individual differences and magnify itself in order to be able to identify itself with the interests of the whole of humanity. Spirituality is not simply the chanting of God's name or visiting temples or indulging in religious rituals, but it is the attempt to understand, in the true sense that one is God's creation by identifying oneself with it. It is the attempt to see God through His creation. To worship God is to work for man, especially the downtrodden and suffering, was the concept of true religion as envisaged by Swami Vivekananda. Religion is universalistic and all-embracing in spirit. It does not segregate society into divisions, but plays the role of a unifying force. Swamiji observed that the meaning of religion was obscured by outward rituals and by inhuman and unnecessary social practices. Swamiji even condemned the withdrawn attitude of the ascetic as a tendency to escape from one's duty towards one's fellowmen. Religion is not withdrawal from society but to indulge in social actions disinterestedly for its betterment. The progress of the individual is in and through society. Therefore, to work for the progress of one's own society is to work to bring about those conditions which will facilitate the progress of the individuals. Since the ascetic is a person whose will has hardened against the temptations of life, his disinterest in society can make him work wonderfully for its progress. On the other hand, the ordinary man's interest in society can become the driving force of his efforts towards social betterment.

7. Social Change through Religion:

Swami Vivekananda's vision of social change in Indian society was as much through education as through religion. He worked to restore the meaning of religion as spirituality from all the
perversions and modifications that it was ridden with. He has pointed out that - "Social change in the name of religion is a special feature of Indian society. Such changes revolutionizing society, have been happening in India again and again, only in this country they have been effected in the name of religion, for religion is the life of India, religion is the language of this country, the symbol of all its movements."\(^\text{13}\)

Regarding the importance of religion and the power to accomplish, Swamiji says, "Religion can bring eternal life to man. It has made man what he is, and it can make man into God. If religion is taken away from human society, society will become a forest of brutes. Sense happiness is not the goal of humanity. Wisdom (knowledge) is the goal of all life. We find that man enjoys his intellect more than an animal enjoys its senses; and we see that man enjoys his spiritual nature even more than his rational nature. So the highest wisdom must be this spiritual knowledge. With this knowledge will come bliss."\(^\text{14}\) Thus, it is clear how great a place religion occupies in the life of man, in the eyes of Swamiji. Swamiji valued religion greatly because of the great place it has always occupied in the lives of the Indian people. History tells us, that both, in point of religious fervour and the variety of its expression, India stands foremost in the world. This fact stands even today. The study of comparative religion tells us that the evolution of religious ideas has been to a great extent, identical throughout the world.\(^\text{15}\) Outside India this evolution is seen to have stopped at the tribal stage and the monotheistic conception, the Indian spiritual consciousness soared higher and discovered the unity behind all the Gods. This development is a great landmark in the history of religions in general, because it represents the stage at which religion functions as the messenger of all peace and all blessing to the whole of
humanity, instead of being partially good and partially evil. Swamiji has pointed out that this discovery has been momentous for India because through it she has been spared the trauma of religious wars and persecution. The idea, that all Gods are one, carries with it a certain universal outlook, being based on a highly rational philosophy. The later Vedic thought, especially the Upanishads, developed this idea into its logical conclusion by discovering the unity behind all existence.

The idea of this unity comes from India's past, and Swamiji has rightly pointed out the value of learning from one's past by saying—"It is felt that looking back into the past only leads to nothing but degeneration. But the future is built out of the past. One must look back to learn about the elements of our being. We must have faith and a consciousness of our past greatness and build an India greater than what she has been. Periods of decay and degeneration are necessary, because a new birth, a new beginning takes place out of the decay, that is, the coming India of the future." [Complete works, Vol. 3, Pg. 285-286]. It can be seen that Swamiji wanted to infuse religion with the scientific spirit of the modern times without losing consciousness of the past, the foundation of the being of Indian culture. In this way Swamiji had conceived that religion should exist in consonance with the spirit of the modern times. He had foreseen that the religion for a new India cannot be one that is ridden with inhuman practices and rituals, but it must be one that is a force that touches the core of man's being, his inner self. It must be a force that touches the core of man's being, his inner self. It must be a force that operates through the boundaries of society within which man is accustomed to live. Thus, the sectarian spirit of religion was manifestly antagonistic to the very spirit of the modern times. Swamiji conveyed that if religion is to be
a living force in the modern world, and contribute its share for the bringing in of a future civilization of humanity, it requires to be restated and cast into rational and scientific moulds. Science has stood for the ideal of the solidarity of mankind. Scientific advancement holds the potential for the realization of the great hopes of poets and philosophers of the past ages. For their consummation a new spirit, a new outlook and new message with universal appeal is required, which will mediate between religion and religion on the one hand, and science and religion on the other. The new spirit and message then, ought to be that of the unity of all religions and of all existence. To express in Swamiji's words, he has said regarding the ideal of a universal religion – "What I want to propagate is a religion that will be equally acceptable to all minds; it must be equally philosophic, equally emotional, equally mystic and equally conducive to action."\(^\text{16}\) We can see that Swamiji attempted the convergence of an age-old, integral element of human society with the scientific spirit of the time, by giving the concept of a religion, that would appeal to the conservative as well as the modern spirit in the human personality. When he said that he wanted to propagate a religion that would be 'equally emotional and equally mystic', Swamiji was trying to create appeal to the conservative and age-old desire for emotional satisfaction through religious worship. And when he expressed that it must be a religion that was equally philosophic and equally conducive to action, he meant that this religion would be an integrating force operating to bring about social harmony amidst all the social differences. Religion has been the core of Indian society. If this core is cleansed of all unhealthy and unnecessary elements, it will become the seat of inspirations that are pure and universalistic. Thus, the ideal of harmony inspired by religion, can become the way for achieving social harmony, according to Swamiji.
The ideal of a universal religion that Swamiji desired to propagate has its roots in the ideal of religious harmony in Indian thought, when it is believed that God is one and all gods are His manifestations. This is the great idea embodied in the famous verse of the Rig Veda (1.164.46) : Ekam sat vipra bahudha vadanti – meaning "Truth is one; sages call it by various names; such as Indra, Mitra, Varuna, etc. Also, it is noteworthy that no new thought is known to have suffered suppression in India – be it science, religion or philosophy. Swamiji has pointed out that India is a place where all knowledge is held as sacred, how is it then possible to suppress any aspect of it! There isn't any aspect of experience or knowledge that is denounced. The all embracing spirit of Indian culture stands out through the Mundaka Upanishad, when it speaks of para and apara vidya (1.2.4) – Dve vidye veditavye iti ha sma yad brahmavido vadanti para caiva apara ca. All sciences, including even the holy Vedas are only apara knowledge. Apara vidya is knowledge that is derived from human experience in parts and aspects, but it is not inferior in kind to para vidya. Para vidya is the fruit of the study of experience of life in its totality. All knowledge of the apara kind is an expression of the para vidya. In this way, all aspects of experience are granted their place, as partial expressions of the one reality.

Swamiji shows that this ideal of unity is an expression of the famous Vedanta philosophy, which is the very kernel and core of Indian culture. It is the philosophy which has given Indian culture its distinctive character and uniqueness. It is in virtue of this Vedanta that the fundamental unity of India is conceived. Swamiji believes that the synthetic spirit of the Vedanta has moulded all forms of Indian life. It has mediated between sect and sect and has
Swamiji envisaged the fundamental unity of humanity itself on the basis of this Vedanta. Social change can be called progressive, when it leads not only to an improvement in the material quality of man's life but also leads to an improvement in the standards of social and human values. For Indian society, to achieve progress, it requires to practice religious harmony and national solidarity. Swamiji has said that if India was lacking in those virtues, the quickening impulse must come from this Vedanta alone, for it is the storehouse of all wisdom.

Vedanta teaches the essential divinity of man. The elements of strength, virtue and power in human nature, are the outcome of this divinity. The idea of man's divinity is to be found in every religion of the world. Each individual is trying his best to manifest this divinity. So, potentially, each individual has that infinite ocean of existence, knowledge and bliss. Therefore, the Vedanta believes in treating each person for not what he manifests but for what he stands. The duty of a teacher is to help man to call forth the divinity that is within him.

Swamiji was of the opinion that the disappearance of sectarianism will be the pre-condition for the inspiration of a universal religion. Sectarianism refers not only to religious sectarianism, but to divisive tendencies of any kind. The ideal of universal religion was considered to accord most with the modern spirit and temper. Through it would be possible to work for human welfare as cooperating parts instead of remaining as colliding units. Religious fellowship was envisaged to bring in the sense of human kinship and brotherhood and enable the collective wisdom and effort of man
to work towards the evolution of a complete human civilization and a world culture.

By emphasizing upon the divine nature of man and his oneness with the universal being, Swamiji desired to infuse a sense of religious practice which was neither oriented towards other worldly goals nor towards selfish interests, but towards a religion that taught first to care for man. By virtue of being a human being man's first duty is to have concern for man and his shortcomings. The purpose of religion and religious places like temples, is for giving strength to the people and making them grow spiritually. Their purpose is to generate the humanist impulses in our hearts and make them flow out into channels of love and service of beings. To put it in Swamiji's words- "To every man, this is taught: Thou are one. With this universal being, and as such every soul that exists is your soul and everybody that exists is your body; and in hurting anyone, you hurt yourself, in loving anyone, you love yourself. As soon as a current of hatred is thrown outside, whosoever else it hurts, it also hurts yourself; and if love comes out from you; it is bound to come back to you." 17

Regarding man's divinity he has said- "The idea of man's divinity is to be found in all religions, whether in India or outside. In some religions this idea may be expressed through mythology or symbology. The Vedanta claims that there has not been one religious inspiration, one manifestation of the divine man, however great, but it has been the expression of that infinite oneness in human nature; and all that we call ethics and morality and doing good to others is also but the manifestation of this oneness. There are moments when man feels that he is one with the universe, and he rushes forth to express it whether he knows it or not. This
expression of oneness is what we call love and sympathy, and it is the basis of all our ethics and morality. This is summed up in the Vedanta philosophy by the celebrated aphorism - Tat tvam asi - "Thou are that". 18

The emphasis on unity and universality shows that in the world of ideals the differences among religions become negligible and the agreements striking. Thus, it can be said that there is only one ideal for man to make himself profoundly human and perfectly human. The seeking for our highest self, our inmost self is the seeking for God. Self-discovery, self-knowledge, self-fulfilment is man's destiny. This self, whose fulfillment is sought by man, is man's spiritual nature.

8. True Religion is Spirituality:
From the very beginnings of our culture, the message of unity and harmony appears in our philosophy, in our Vedas. But in Swami Vivekananda's guru, Sri Ramakrishna, there was a unique development, that for the first time the world saw a person teaching and living the harmony of all religions. The convergence of human ideals in Swamiji's personality was not only the result of the influence of Vedanta philosophy, but the result of his experience of the convergence of religions in spirituality, in the personality of Sri Ramakrishna. Thus the firm conviction of Swamiji that religion is spirituality.

Two great ideas stand out in Sri Ramakrishna's life and message: One - the deepening of man's spiritual life, and the other, the harmony among the religions of the world. Swamiji says about Sri Ramakrishna, closing his famous lecture on "My Master" - "This is the message of Sri Ramakrishna to the modern world: Do not care
for doctrines do not care for dogmas, or sects, or churches, or temples; they count for little compared with the essence of existence in each man, which is spirituality; and the more this is developed in a man, the more powerful is he for good. Earn that first, acquire that, and criticize no one, for all doctrines and creeds have some good in them. Show by your lives that religion does not mean words, or names, or sects, but that it means spiritual realization. Only those can understand who have felt. Only those who have attained to spirituality can communicate it to others, can be great teachers of mankind. They alone are the powers of light... To proclaim and make clear the fundamental unity underlying all religions was the mission of my master. Other teachers have taught special religions which bear their names; but this great teacher of the nineteenth century made no claim for himself. He left every religion undisturbed because he had realized that, in reality, they are all part and parcel of the one eternal religion."

To understand Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, it is important to realize the spiritual dimension of our personality, and to show respect to every other path that human beings follow to realize this truth. Depth of spirituality and the breadth of understanding and sympathy must go side by side. According to Swamiji this is the only way to make religion a creative and dynamic force in human life. Man's spiritual nature makes him a unique product of nature, that in him nature seeks to exceed itself consciously, by a mental and spiritual effort. Man is a thinking and spiritual being set to shape his nature for higher purposes. He seeks to establish order and harmony among the different parts of his nature and strives after an integrated life. The sense of community is latent in the hearts of men. Even amidst all the artificiality of the temporal world, where intellect has imposed upon
us the restrictions of tribe, race and nation, the fundamental humanity of man shows up on occasions. When there is an earthquake in another country, or a famine or an explosion, our hearts turn sympathetic, for the victims. We salute spontaneously the great men of the world, without waiting to know their group or race.

In Indian society, the subject of harmony has been an integral feature of our religions and state policy from ancient times. To respect one's neighbour's religion and enhance the spirit of harmony among different religions has always been the spirit. India's great teachers, from the times to Sri Ramakrishna have taught us this lesson. Our saints and devotees have also exemplified it in their lives, and our political states have further upheld the same policy of harmony, the spirit of active toleration, of acceptance, in their dealings with the world of religions. In this regard, Swamiji has said, "The spirit of assimilation has been present in Indian culture right from olden times. Hindus are not known to have indulged in religious persecution. They sheltered a portion of the Hebrews, when they were driven out of their own country, and the Malabar Jews remain as a result. They received at another time the remnant of the Persians, when they were almost annihilated, and they remain to this day as a part of us and loved by us, as the modern Parsees of Bombay. There were Christians who claimed to have come with St. Thomas, the disciple of Jesus Christ, and they were allowed to settle in India and hold their own opinions, and a colony of them is even now in existence in India. And this spirit of toleration has not died out - This is one of the great lessons that the Vedanta has to teach. Knowing that consciously or unconsciously we are struggling to reach the same goal, why should we be impatient?"20 Swamiji, in this way points
out, that the capacity to sense the underlying unity behind the different religions is natural and easy to the Hindu from ancient times. Whereas the Semitic tradition has been exclusive and not inclusive like that of the Hindus.

Spirituality constitutes abhaya or freedom from fear and ahimsa or fellow feeling for all living things. These two are the marks of genuine religion. Abhaya is a condition of mind. It is not the acceptance of a belief or the practice of a rite. Dr. Radhakrishnan has said about abhaya - "Under the insight of such a faith our fellowmen become something more than creatures of time and place separated from us by the accidents of nature, set against us by the necessities of animal existence. To be religious is to apprehend the reality of other souls. The law of love is obeyed not because it is known or willed but because life which has been more fully revealed consists in loving."\(^21\)

Dr. Radhakrishnan echoes the conviction of Swamiji when he says that religiosity consists in apprehending the reality of other souls. Swamiji contends that to live as selfish individuals is to miscarry the purpose of creation. Dr. Radhakrishnan has said, "Ahimsa or fellow-feeling for all living things, enfolding in its merciful arms even the lowest forms of animal life, is the natural fruit of abhaya or spiritual life."\(^22\)

The emotion of fear is the pervasive element of consciousness in the present time. There is nervousness in man because of which he is always taking precautions, avoiding entanglements, where life is always on the defensive, where man has lost his community with nature and man. This condition could be another name for spiritual death. The world of today is ridden with bhaya or incessant fear.
and himsa or violence. It is a life of ignorance intensified and exaggerated and the tragedy is that perhaps we are not aware of our ignorance. Therefore, Swamiji feels inspired to say that religion is the conquest of fear. It is the antidote to failure and death. True religion leads to freedom from fear. So long as religions themselves remain an expression of fear, the security and protection they will afford us, will be purchased at a terrible price and this will end in distorting human life. The ideal elements of religion which make for universalism and the current beliefs and institutional practices, which make for narrow group loyalties, do not agree with each other. So, there is a need for a religion of freedom - A religion which stimulates faith, not fear, A religion which grows in abundant life and which is free from the monotony of the mechanical and the dogmatic mechanization of the mind. The contact with the universal source of life fills one with vitality and freedom from fear.

Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa has given the message that the true purpose of religion is to grow spiritually. Merely being pious is not enough because external piety is not spirituality. Saints like Surdas, Mirabai, Tulsidas, Guru Nanak have all taught us to be spiritual - to manifest the divine that is within man. External piety is meaningful if it brings you nearer to God. After spending five minutes at a temple, one should feel one step nearer to God and to one's own infinite self. That is - the pious act should help in manifesting the divinity within man at least a little. That is the criterion of spiritual growth says Sri Ramakrishna. In Swamiji's point of view, spiritual growth is significant when it is not simply a growth at the individual level, but it radiates to spread the human touch to the suffering humanity. The Hindu religion teaches that God is present in every human being. Sri Krishna says in the Gita
Therefore, if God is in the hearts of all beings we should manifest Him in our life and conduct. We should become aware of Him by seeing His presence in every other human being. And for Swamiji, to see God in the hearts of all beings means to love other people and to serve them and not to exploit them or fight with them or be jealous of them. Spirituality is manifested in spiritual acts, that is, acts of love, human concern and service. Religion, therefore, is not simply in the book, (scriptures) or only in the heart, but it is something to be lived. To say that religion is an integral aspect of human society is actually to have religion as the inspiration of our life. This means the bringing an end to the tendencies of exploitation, litigiousness, weakness, fear and inefficiency.

Swamiji emphasized that the practical relevance of man's inner spirituality is to pour out in love and service.

Religions fulfill their purpose through the methods of contemplation and service. They are intended to stabilize our nature and aid the systematic purification of our whole being. This is essential for an integral reflection and taking in of the divine reality. Our powers operate by a force of habit, adjusted as they are to a life of claims and counterclaims. To adapt them to a life of universalism a drastic process of change is necessary. When religion succeeds in making us spiritual, our conflicts are resolved, and we find ourselves in the great current of that particular group, but belong to humanity as a whole. We have the primary patriotism which is the love of humanity. We have respect for the diversity which is natural to the constitution of things and understand the unity underlying it all. In our deeper selves we feel our oneness with our fellow human beings.
and unity with life. India's poverty and degradation and her failure to progress as a nation have often been attributed to her inherent tendency towards spirituality. However, Swamiji has pointed out, that India has failed because she has not followed the spiritual ideal sufficiently. Man encounters failure when there is a gulf between his life and his spirit. This gulf should be bridged by making the spirit, the master of life.

A prevailing misconception about religion is that it is a flight from the world, an other-worldly pursuit. Swamiji has pointed out the seer does not abstain from the work of the world but does it with his attention fixed on the eternal. Religion is not a flight from the world, a taking refuge in the ordered serenity of heaven, in despair over the disorder of the earth. Man is connected with both the worlds – the one above him and the one in which he is. Therefore, man's religion is of this world. For Swamiji, religion is a life of action with a sense of mission in the world. The spiritual tendency has its grip on the actual and it embraces the complexity of thought and the richness of life. Body and mind are the conditions and instruments of the life of spirit in man. The inner spirituality is manifested through thoughts and actions.

The spiritual elements of Indian culture have infused this culture with the spirit of love, harmony and universal benevolence. The great men of India – Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Rabindranath Tagore, Gandhiji, Sri Aurobindo, Pandit Nehru, all had a universal outlook and sympathies, and this was their strength. Swamiji has pointed out that the unity in diversity of Indian society is the result of its strong spiritual attitude. Spirituality is the tendency to accept and assimilate with understanding and toleration. This social philosophy flows from the spiritual vision of the great sages of the
Upanishads, of the One behind the many, of the one divine atman in all beings. Dr. Radhakrishnan has said in this regard, "Toleration is the homage that the finite mind pays, to the inexhaustibility of the infinite."24

9. Spirituality as Expressed in a Unique Way by Swami Vivekananda:
Swami Vivekananda's expression of the concept of spirituality can be considered unique, in the sense that for the western world which was abundant in social and material amenities, he gave the message that it was lacking in something fundamental, and that was inner peace and richness, that is – spirituality. Swamiji saw that the modern man was in search of a soul in which his science and wisdom just failed him. Therefore, Swamiji came before the Western world as an authentic voice of the spirit in man and the spirit in the universe. As a teacher of Vedanta, he taught them active tolerance and fellowship and universal love. Swamiji was convinced that without the wisdom of the inner self material advancements are meaningless. There ought to be a balance in the development of man-between the outer self and the inner, was the idea which Swamiji emphasized again and again.

In the context of Indian society, Swamiji saw that the path to spiritual development lay through material and social amelioration. Swamiji saw the old glory of India against the then present background of decadence and degeneration of society. Swamiji was confronted by the sufferings of his countrymen – age-old starvation, ignorance and social disabilities. This situation moved him to the core of his self and from this arousal sprang abundant spirituality and a dynamic philosophy which translated into a stream of compassion and love and into a national message of renunciation.
and service. Out of the Vedanta he drew out a social philosophy which was both dynamic and practical. His dynamic philosophy translated into the task of a man-making religion and a nation-making faith and determination. He was firmly convinced about the practical necessity of the satisfaction of man’s basic needs, with hungry stomach, a person cannot think about God of individual and social development. Man learns to think about values other than the material ones, the higher values, at the level of practical life. And man’s practical life can generate the sense and appreciation of the higher values when it is not wanting in the satisfaction of basic needs, but has been able to rise above the level of the basic minimum requirements.

Thus, Swami Vivekananda’s dynamism proceeded in a wave of national awareness and patriotism, issuing great struggle to improve the conditions of the common man. India’s achievement of political independence, social awareness and national solidarity can be called, in a great way, the result of the orientation of the ancient message of India’s spirituality given by Swamiji.

For the people of the Western Society, who had the wisdom of scientific developments, Swamiji brought a convergence between their knowledge of science and the inward contemplative life. He imparted the message of the ancient rsis of India in keeping with the spiritual needs of the modern Western society. That is why Swamiji is respected in the West as a spiritual teacher and world thinker of a rare caliber. If man is a body and soul, then efforts to satisfy the body and senses alone cannot lead to integral development. The needs of the soul have to be cared for equally. For Indian society, Swamiji’s message was especially for the youth of the country. He taught them patriotism and national service. He
asked others to work for uplifting the vast millions of the country who were sunk in ignorance and poverty. To the nation at large, Swamiji stood as an emblem of purity, spirituality, love and energy through whose inspiration it hopes to regenerate its body and mind. In this way Swamiji brings a convergence between India's old ideal of spirituality with a new orientation given to it, as the integral development of man as the progressing of man towards the Divine, through the service of the suffering human beings of society. Swamiji brings a convergence of the ideal of spirituality with the whole of humanity by declaring the potential divinity of each soul, and by saying that therefore, service of man is service of God. The spiritual development of man is an expansion of his self to include the whole of humanity within its sphere of action. For the reconstruction of Indian society according to the needs of that time and the time to come, Swamiji was convinced that a convergence between all that was desirable for the material development of Indian society from the West was necessary. With the ideal of Indian spirituality Swamiji made Vedanta fertilize the fields of common life by bringing it down from its pinnacle, so that life may be raised to uncommon heights. Through Swamiji the message of the Vedanta was made to bring in human happiness and welfare. Swamiji could do this because of his keen conviction about the truth that the purer delights of spiritual life can be experienced only after man has been able to meet the demands of life's immediate and pressing needs. He has said- "Religion is not for empty bellies." It is a mockery to preach religion to a hungry man. Thus, he preached a man-making religion along with a man-making education. Man-making is the bringing out of the essential quality of man, that is manliness or humanness, which is synonymous with spirituality.
For modern Indian society Swami Vivekananda's expression of the message of spirituality can be called unique because of its practical utility. Swamiji brought out, through the fullness of his own realization, that spirituality was not a subdued feeling within man, or the quiet realization of the social recluse, but an active pursuit which has to be realized within the human self, but actualized in life through actions that express the humanity within man in the concern for his fellow beings. In Swami Vivekananda the nation got a teacher who could humanize religion and spiritualize its social purposes and activities. Swamiji conveyed that a religion befitting the human race ought to be rooted in the value of humanity. The essence of religion cannot be realized through external practices like rituals or by showing allegiance to a particular religious denomination or by the practice of quiet meditation. The meaningfulness of religion is justified when it can stand on par with the forces of human development in society. Its worth as an agent of man's progress, should never be less. The experience of the developments of modern science had aroused the acquisitive instinct of man by which he was driven towards the achievement of his welfare at the material plane. The dynamism of human nature was thus, directed towards the values of empirical life. Swamiji warned that such a trend was both, necessary and desirable but the pursuit for material welfare should never become an end in itself. The value of matter cannot be realized in the absence of consciousness, So that the activism of the modern society does not become directionless, Swamiji emphasized the need of a convergence in the development of man - a convergence between the development of man as a being of the empirical world and a self-conscious individual. Swamiji realized the practical worth of the material achievements, but at the same time he did not want the
acquisitive instinct of man to make him self-centered. Thus, he gave a living, dynamic religion, in keeping with the dynamism of its time.

If a society has to progress evenly it cannot keep aside the concerns of the poor and downtrodden. The progress of a society is measured in terms of the number or percentage of people living below the level of the minimum requirements of life, that is, below the poverty line. Therefore, it is imperative that social amelioration be achieved through serious measures to remove the disabilities of the have-nots. The process of progressive change must benefit the have-nots of society. The problems of society will not be solved if large numbers of people remained deprived of the basic necessities of life. It is well-known that conditions of want and poverty are the breeding grounds of many social ills.

Swamiji wanted to reinvigorate Indian society by making it appear fresh and energetic before the modern world. For that purpose, he wanted India to assimilate the spirit and technique of modern science coming from the West. But prior to this convergence he wanted the energizing of the national tradition in the minds of his countrymen. Without this strengthening of the national tradition, India's response to the West, he thought, would result in a patchy imitation instead of a healthy assimilation. He envisaged a new India in which there would be a happy blending of the spirit of equality, social awareness and practical efficiency of the modern West with the mature gentleness and tolerance of Indian tradition, with its deep spiritual awareness and passion, which has made Indian history a saga of spiritual aspiration and realization. He wanted India to be a youthful, vigorous and progressive; and yet he wanted all these to be achieved as the fulfillment of the spiritual ideal and purpose. To achieve this goal, India needs- "... muscles of
iron and nerves of steel, gigantic wills which nothing can resist, which can penetrate into the mysteries and the secrets of the universe, and will accomplish their purpose in any fashion even if it meant going down to the bottom of the ocean and meeting death face to face. That is what we want, and that can only be created, established and strengthened by understanding and realizing the ideal of the Advaita, that ideal of the oneness of all." 25

Swamiji also says- "None can regenerate this land of ours without the practical application and effective operation of this ideal of the oneness of things." 26

"The truths of the Upanishads are before you. Take them up, live up to them, and the salvation of India will be at hand." 27

In Swamiji's conviction spirituality was interwoven with life and so he gave the message of nation-building based on spirituality. All improvements in society should flow out from fountainhead of spirituality and also lead to it. What is called progress at the social level is the fruit of the strengthening of the nation's spiritual character. Swamiji warned against the tendency to relegate religion to the second place or even to treat it as an enemy of social progress. He was against the attitude of wanting to lead India on absolutely secular lines. He was of the view that this kind of a tendency may rob the nation of its spiritual stamina. Swamiji warned that if India gave up her spirituality and age-old way of life, she would perish. Unlike other great civilizations which have passed away, Indian civilization has continued owing to its spiritual foundation. Taking lessons from the history of the world, Swamiji pointed out that if India gave up spirituality and took to any other ideal of life, she would be an extinct culture in three generations.
Ancient Greece and Rome and some of the European states which had flourished for a time are nowhere to be seen in the world today. Swamiji had found through his experience, that even some nations of the then contemporary world, though were lacking in nothing in respect of material advancement and worldly power, were finding their foundations shaken and were struggling to discover spiritual values to stabilize themselves. They could feel the absence of something fundamental in the edifice of their civilization which was based upon the mere intellect of man and the achievement of science and technology. But India had long ago realized that if there is to be stability in a civilization, it shall have to come from forces other than the forces of muscle or brain or intellect. In spite of having an abundance of material prosperity and social improvements, there are forces that can destroy a civilization, if it is based on sense values. It is spirituality which imparts the strength of sustenance to a nation and to an individual through the sufferings of time.

When the long continuity of Indian culture is attributed to its foundation which is spirituality, it is a reference to a religious feeling which is not associated with any particular religion. Spirituality is not the feeling of exclusion, when a devotee experiences the feeling of unity and synthesis with God, with the whole of mankind and with his environment. This feeling takes man beyond the boundaries of his particular religion to feel as a member of humanity. Therefore, spirituality is the feeling of inclusion. It is feeling of care, concern and respect for mankind. There are no differences in feeling, in the sense that the feeling of spirituality in a Hindu devotee is not different from the same feeling in a Muslim or Christian devotee. Therefore, spirituality makes man secular. It makes him impartial in matters of religion and infuses him with a
feeling of respect for all religions, because he has experienced that differences are superficial and unreal. The reality preached by religion is that of synthesis – of man and God and of man and his environment.

Today, we can see efforts to forge unity in the concern for the preservation of the environment and in the process of globalization. In the march of human society towards progress, man has desecrated the unity between him and nature, and this has resulted in irreparable damage to the environment. Erratic monsoons and global warming are some of the damages. The concern for the environment however, is not new, it has been expressed in our ancient scriptures.

Even globalization is an effort to forge unity among men and nations. The modern facilities of communication are an expression of man's urge to reach out to his fellowmen across the world. In today's world there is more give and take among nations. Nations find it beneficial to work in co-operation in order to achieve knowledge in new areas and for progress. It is considered desirable to work in unity through alliances than to work as isolated units for the achievement of progress.

What we understand as globalization, can be said to have been present in the Indian society of the olden times, but in a different form. We know that kings used to forge alliances with other kingdoms through marriage. The bond of marriage between two people was considered to strengthen the political relations between two kingdoms. Even in the case of war between two kingdoms, marriage alliance was considered to be a step that would help to overcome enmity and forge a permanent friendship between the
kingdoms. Such alliances were considered desirable for the establishment of peace, prosperity and mutual benefit. One prominent reason for the fact that the kings of yesteryears had many wives, was the formation of such alliances.

This shows that the trend of social progress the world over is towards assimilation and amalgamation rather than isolation and conflict. Thus, the contemporary trends of development stand in conformity with Swamiji's ideal of unity, which he sought to achieve through the practice of a universal religion. Swamiji has said about the essential elements of the modern state – "One must admit that law, government, politics are phases not final in anyway. There is a goal beyond them where law is not needed."28

"Christ saw that the basis is not law, that morality and purity are the only strength."29

He further says- "You have the saying that man cannot be made virtuous by an Act of Parliament;... And that is why religion is of deeper importance than politics, since it goes to the root and deals with the essentials of conduct."30

In this way Swami Vivekananda thought of a religion that would be in agreement with the trends of development in his time and in the days to come.

Modern man was learning to overcome the barriers of his social existence, such as that of caste, community, language, religion and nationality, for the achievement of economic progress. Swamiji considered it most necessary to overcome the barrier of religion because religion is integral to the consciousness of man and acts as
a powerful force. It has been the cause of cohesion among men and that of conflict. Some of the bloodiest acts are said to have been committed in the name of religion. But Swamiji focuses on the positive aspect of religion, inspired by which, men have also indulged in great selfless acts of service to men and animals, irrespective of individual differences. Swamiji was interested in the expansion of the cohesive powers of religion because the inner craving of man for inner richness and fullness, which is a basic urge in man, can be satisfied by religion. Swamiji felt that a civilization which did not take note of this fact and provide for it, was building itself on sand. He was against the idea of keeping religion out of the so-called secular affairs of man, because it was considered to be a divisive force. He has said – "I claim no destruction of religion is necessary to improve the Hindu society and that this state of society exists not on account of religion, but because religion has not been applied to society as it should have been. This I am ready to prove from our old books, every word of it. This is what I teach, and this is what we must struggle all our lives to carry out."31

"Every improvement in Indian requires first of all an upheaval win religion. Before flooding India with socialistic or political ideas, first deluge the land with spiritual ideas."32

"After preaching spiritual knowledge, along with it will come that secular knowledge and every other knowledge that you want; but if you attempt to get the secular knowledge without religion, I tell you plainly, vain is your attempt in India, it will never have a hold on the people."33
Swamiji's ideas reveal the extent to which religion was thought as integral to the process of social improvement in Indian society. To quote him further, "I am sorry to say that most of our modern reform movements have been inconsiderate imitations of Western means and methods of work; and that surely will not do for India."34

"All the reformers in India made the serious mistake of holding religion accountable for all the horrors of priest craft and degeneration and went forthwith to pull down the indestructible structure and what was the result? Failure!"35

"All healthy social changes are the manifestations of the spiritual forces working within, and if these are strong and well-adjusted, society will arrange itself accordingly."36

"Meddle not with so-called social reform for there cannot be any, reform without spiritual reform first."37

Swamiji's ideas reveal that he did not consider social reform and social progress to be individualistic activities but an expansion of the energies of man. When man reaches out to acquire new knowledge and new comforts available through the developments in science and technology, it is an expansion of his personality. Thus, he feels if man is infused with true ideas of religion, along with the concern for economic progress he will also think of working for the downtrodden masses of his society. In this way man's consciousness comes out of the enclosure of self-interest. This marks the beginning of the practice of a universal religion. And
Swamiji is convinced that this concept of a universal religion is in the Vedanta, as he has said, "All the social upheavalists, at least the leaders of them, are trying to find that all their communistic or equalizing theories must have a spiritual basis, and that spiritual basis is in the Vedanta only."\textsuperscript{38}

Regarding the integral nature of religion he has said, "The Hindu theory says that religions do not come from without but from within. Religious thought is in man's very constitution, so much that it is impossible for him to give up religion."\textsuperscript{39}

In this way, Swami Vivekananda gathers up the great spiritual ideas and inspirations, to make them a powerful force for harmony and good will in the world of religion. Swamiji's message combined man-making religion with man-making education. This he called "Practical Vedanta". Our experience of Vedanta is as Vedanta in our books, Vedanta in the lives of the great sages and saints of our country; but the experience of Vedanta as the sheet-anchor of nation-building, of a dynamic social policy, by which the masses become transformed into dynamic centres of all-round social development, was new. Swami Vivekananda's unique contribution was the practical application of Vedanta, which the country saw for the first time. His was a life-giving message of the Vedanta to one and all. He has said in one of his letters, "To put the Hindu ideas into English and then make out of dry philosophy and intricate mythology and queer starting psychology a religion which shall be easy, simple, popular and at the same time, meet the requirements of the highest minds... is a task only those can understand who have attempted it. The abstract Advaita must become living – poetic - in everyday life; out of hopelessly intricate mythology must come concrete moral forms; and out of bewildering yogi-ism must come
In his lecture on 'Vedanta and its application to Indian life' Swamiji has said in the same line of thought, "These conceptions of the Vedanta must come out, must remain not only in the forest, not only in the cave but they must come out to work at the bar and the bench, in the pulpit and in the cottage of the poor man, with the fishermen that are catching fish, and with the students that are studying. They call to every man, woman and child, whatever be their occupation, wherever they may be. If the fisherman thinks he is the spirit, he will be a better fisherman, if student thinks he is the spirit, he will be a better student, if a lawyer thinks, he is the spirit, he will be a better lawyer, and so on. If you teach Vedanta to the fisherman, he will say, "I am as good a man as you, I am a fisherman, you are a philosopher, but I have the same God in me as you have in you." And that is what we want, no privilege for anyone, equal chances for all; let everyone be taught that the Divine is within, and everyone will work out his own salvation."41

Thus, it can be said that Swamiji brought a convergence of humanity by uniting the East and the West through the thread of divinity running through all existence. But, at the same time Swamiji saw that economic and social maladjustments were thwarting the expression of spirituality, of the national will and purpose, so he became the first monastic to advocate, that he called 'a toned-down materialism' for Indian society. He had full faith in the people of his country to assimilate moral and spiritual ideas. He had faith that the assimilative power of the people will gather momentum and that they will be able to gain composure gradually over the distractions of the scattered body-politic. It was Swamiji's
ardent hope that the India, which will confront the world with a challenge of good will and sincerity, fellowship and peace, will be an India that is physically healthy, socially stable and strong and morally and spiritually resurgent.

10. Religion as Anubhava:

As Swami Vivekananda says, that religion is spirituality and also that religion is anubhava, it implies that spirituality is anubhava, as just discussed. In Swamiji's interpretation of religion, there is nothing narrow, exclusive or negative about it. But Swamiji had observed that in his time religion had acquired a very narrow meaning, in contrast to the understanding of religion as anubhava, as expounded by the great teachers of India, the Upanishads and the teacher of the Gita. Religion as anubhava is spiritual realization. Religion is being and becoming, said Swamiji. It is not embedded in doctrines and creeds, dogmas, churches and temples, but it consists in a struggle to realize the Divine. Religion is this struggle and its end-achievement. It is because of this broad view of religion, the Upanishads taught the practice of toleration in the world of religion. Toleration was necessary because different religions were simply the different paths leading ultimately to the same goal. They were not opposites or contradictories, that is, they were not the causes of conflict, but of co-operation. Each religion, whether it talked about God or did not, did not differ in its basic principles that guided life. The experience of the unity of religions was lived by Swamiji's guru, Sri Ramakrishna.

What Sri Ramakrishna did can be discovered even at the level of ordinary experience by studying the teachings of the great religions of the world. Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Jainism, Buddhism,
each may be different from the other in matters of practice, but there is an essential unity in respect of their teachings.

Hinduism believes in the unity of all beings through the teaching of Vasudaiva Kutumbakam – that the whole of humanity is the child of God. In the West, ancient Greek religion has talked about the significance of beauty, the vastness and greatness of life and the achievement of perfection which is not limited in anyway, but is manyfaceted. Christianity and the life of Christ teaches and exemplifies the values of divine love, mercy and kindness. Christianity proclaims – 'love thy neighbour as thyself', in which the word 'neighbour' refers to every other human being. Buddhism and the life of Buddha has shown the path of compassion and friendship for all living beings. Jainism has preached ahimsa as the highest ideal. Positively it implies respect for all that exists and the duty of man to preserve it. The universal brotherhood of man in Islam and the principle of love in Christianity, suggest the universal character of their ideals. Sufism in India is a unique synthesis of the religious ideals of Islam with Vedantic monism and Hindu metaphysics.

All these ideals are very noble and aim at the unity of mankind. Therefore, differences in religious practice, which are relative to time and place, should not be allowed to distort the aim of religions at forging unity among men. Religions evolve and take shape in different parts of the world and at different times. Religious practice is therefore, naturally going to be affected by the existing social realities. This does not mean that religious value or religiosity is different in different religions. Religions are diverse, the feeling of religiosity is unitary, it is of a spiritual nature. Spirituality is the
highest form of religious experience. It does not differ from time to time or from place to place.

In this connection it would be enlightening to know the views of Gandhiji on religion. He advocated the ideal of sarva dharma sambhava. This means cultivating an attitude of equal respect for all religious, one's own as well as the religion of others. The essentially conservative nature of Indian society makes religion an almost indivisible aspect of the average Indian's life. By and large Indians are deeply attached to their religion. Gandhiji felt that for a multi-religious society like that of India, a secular attitude towards religion can be inculcated in the minds of the people through the ideal of sarvadharma sambhava. Thus for a people whose attitude towards religion was traditional, Gandhiji was not in favour of secularism as a totally detached attitude towards religion.

Like Swami Vivekananda, Gandhiji also identified religion with the ethics of services. Ahimsa was the greatest religion according to him. He has said that ahimsa "is not a cloistered virtue, confined only to the rishi and the cave-dweller. It is capable of being practiced by the millions... because it is the law of our species."42

The service of the suffering in society – the poor and downtrodden was the positive side of ahimsa. And truly, if ahimsa had not been the principle of human existence no human achievement would have been possible. Creativity thrives in an atmosphere of peace and harmony. Since creativity has manifested itself in the various spheres of our culture, we can say that construction and not conflict is the rule of human existence.
The great idea expressed in the RigVeda "Ekam Sat Vipra bahudha vadanti' – "Truth, is one, sages call it by many names, has rolled down the centuries. It has gained strength, expanded and reinforced by the contributions of subsequent teachers, the greatest of whom can be said to be Sri Krishna. When he has said in the Gita has been like the Magna Carta in the world of religion,

"Ye yatha man prapadyante tamastathaiva bhajamyaham.
Mama vartmanuvartante mansyah patrtha sarvasah.."

(Gita (IV.II)

that is "Through whatever paths men come unto me, I receive them through those very paths, all paths O Arjuna, eventually lead unto me only."

This utterance proclaimed the absolute freedom of each religion to work and develop in its own way, and to take its follower to the highest realization. Furthermore, this idea of unity of religions has appealed to people the world over and that is why the Gita has been translated into almost all the languages of the world.

Therefore, religion as anubhava, as being and becoming is religion that is not abstract, but concrete. In its concrete, dynamic form, religion is the worship of God through the service of man. Advaita or non-dualism is the realization of unity with the suffering masses of society, of feeling their misery as one's own and working for the removal of their sufferings as one would work to remove the sufferings of one's own life.

11. Role of Religion in Social Development:
From the perspective of social development religion acquires the importance of a social and moral institution. What is of concern is its role in social development, that is, in the achievement of the
fulfillment of the individual and of society. From this perspective religion is not a set of dogmas but it is a dynamic force which has a definite role in the social cohesion and integration of human personality.

Religion voices man's urge and aspiration for the supernormal. It has its roots in man's tendency to look upwards. It builds character and cures degeneration. Every regenerating activity in society which is based on faith in goodness and the divine possibility of man, gathers strength by its alliance with religion. Hence, if man has to progress, religion must live. The spirit of religion has often been enclosed in inadequate and even repulsive forms but it has again and again broken through these forms to rebuild everything all over again. It has been observed that the cause of persecution and fanaticism in the name of religion, the background of crusades and cruelties, is not religion, but the suppression of the infra-rational by ascetic tendencies, the political alliance of the clergy with the state machinery. Religion has often been a refuse for escapism due to social causes. Even if religion has been temporarily an escape, it was through religion that the desire for future regeneration was kept alive in pure hearts, which ultimately led to revolts against oppressing tendencies.

In society religion is rarely found in its pure form. Everywhere it has been permeated by social and cultural ideals. For religion to contribute to the social development it should not be based on negative feelings of fear, want, guilt and hatred, but on positive feelings like fullness of life, joy and freedom. Religion undergoes transformation with the transformation of social ideals. It is an index of man's aspirations for and a guide towards the future. It is a power which may be utilized both for good and for evil. The more it
approaches spirituality, the more it serves fulfillment and culmination. The concept of God also becomes wider and deeper as man ascends in the ladder of mental and spiritual development. Religion evolves in correlation with the social evolution, the evolution of thought, culture and spirituality. As this process becomes more and more diffused, religious differences between men and communities also vanish. This demonstrates the social basis of religion. Religion is social in the sense that the individual is social. The social aspect of religion is only a secondary and outer form, though a necessary form. All religion is primarily individual and personal. A diminution or subordination of this personal aspect by the socio-religious system of churches, priesthood, rituals and ceremonies has often crushed the spiritual element in religion. All improvements through nature's method always proceed from individual to social. It is because this lesson has often been forgotten that we find a degeneration of religion, leading to a division of life and spirit. It is because of this fundamental weakness that great religions have failed to uplift mankind in the past, though they have done much good to mankind. We know that Christianity gave mankind a vision of divine love and charity. Buddhism gave the noble path to be wiser, gentler and purer. Judaism and Islam gave us religious faith in action and zealous devotion to God. Hinduism opened as it were, the largest and profoundest spiritual possibilities. What is needed for social development, is a creed or dogma, but one that attained through a sustained, all comprehending effort at spiritual self-evolution. The spiritual aim cannot be realized through a religious movement, which at most leads to a temporary uplifting, which is partly spiritual and partly dogmatic in its nature. The drawback of churches, dogmas and institutionalized forms of religion is that, though they are meant to bind the faithful persons, they ultimately
subordinate spirituality to intellectual belief, to outward forms of conduct and to external rituals. Sometimes even ethical principles become subordinate to a business like relation with God.

Religion manifests itself in a man’s social tendency. Human beings learn to love each other in the form of children of the same father. It is known of many saints that they licked, clean the wounds of lepers out of the conviction of serving God through them. In the Gita, the worshipper of God has been ordered to engage in the service of living beings. Similarly love and service are accorded considerable importance in the Christian religion. Christ is known to have served the poor convalescing and sorrowing people throughout his life, which culminated in his crucifixion. Islamic religion has encouraged the tendency of brotherhood. Buddhist religion has preached non-violence, compassion and sympathy. Also, in ancient tribal religions, the people recognizing the same totem or God were well-organized. It can be said that religion has generated a sense of belongingness in society.

Apart from service to mankind and living beings, religion has served society in other ways also. It has served humanity through the spreading of education. In almost all places in the world, the spread of education has had an important place in all religious campaigns and the activities of religious institutions. Priests in Christian churches and their contemporaries in Islamic mosques, Hindu temples and Buddhist monasteries, have long been engaged in the spreading of education. While Nalanda and Taxila were the centres of Buddhist religion, they were at the same time the seats of knowledge and consummate mastery. Men of different communities made serious efforts to diffuse education among the members of the community.
Religion breeds benevolence, which is seen exemplified through the tradition of medical service in society in the name of religion. The fundamental reason for such a practice is that the religious person treats the service of helpless and ill as part of worship to God. Out of a feeling of service and the desire to stock up virtue, it has been a tradition among rich people to open hospitals, distribute medicines and necessary clothes. An important aspect of the daily life of saints is service. This aspect of religion has been amply exemplified through numerous utterances of Swami Vivekananda. He has proclaimed, "The secret of religion lies not in theories but in practice. To be good and to do good – that is the whole of religion. 'Not he that crieth 'Lord', "Lord", but he that doeth the will of the father."44

"If you want any good to come, just throw your ceremonials overboard and worship the living God, the man-God-every being that wears a human form - God in His universal as well as individual aspect. The universal aspect of God means this world and worshipping it means serving it – this indeed is work, not indulging in ceremonials.. Millions of rupees have been spent only that the temple – doors at Varansi or Vrindavan may play at opening and shutting all day long! Now the Lord is having His toilet, now He is taking His meals, now He is busy on something else, we know not what... And all this, while the living God is dying for want of food, for want of education! The banias of Bombay are erecting hospitals for bugs – while they would do nothing for men – even if they die! You have not the brain to understand this simple thing – that it is a plague with our country, and lunatic asylums are life all over.."45

The service of man, according to Swamiji, should be done in the spirit of utter humanity. He has said in this regard, "Look upon
every man, woman and everyone as God. You cannot help anyone, 
you can only serve: serve the children of the Lord, serve the Lord
Himself, if you have the privilege. If the Lord grants that you can
help any one of His children, blessed you are; do not think too
much of yourselves. Blessed you are that that privilege was given to
you when others had it not. Do it only as worship. I should see God
in the poor, and it is for my salvation that I go and worship them.
The poor and the miserable are for our salvation, so that we may
serve the Lord, coming in the shape of the diseased, in the shape of
the lunatic, the leper, and the sinner."46

He also says, "The first of all worship is the worship of the Virat – of
those all around us – Worship it. Worship is the exact equivalent of
the sanskrit word, and no other English word will do. These are all
our Gods-men and animals; and the first Gods we have to worship
are our countrymen. These we have to worship, instead of being
jealous of each other and fighting with each other."47

Alms-giving is a very noble aspect of religion, which is also an act of
benevolence as well as of duty. Christianity, Buddhism, Islam,
Hinduism, Jainism, all have accepted the importance of alms-
giving. The Hindu belief is that a person who consumes without
giving alms is a thief. In Islam, it is a part of religious duty to give a
part of one's income as alms. The purpose of alms-giving is
economic assistance to the needy members of society.

Religion stands for non-violence. All the founders of religion the
world over have preached love and non-violence. The positive aspect
of the principle of non-violence augments the sense of world
brotherhood. As far as a religious person is concerned everyone has
been made by God and all worship him in different forms and

190
names. In this way religion generates a sense of the world as a family. The principle of unity is the highest and most ennobling value preached by religion. We can see it exemplified in the monism of the Upanishads, ahimsa of Jainism, compassion and friendship of Buddhism, the doctrine of universal brotherhood and the equality of all men before God, in Islam, and the concept of love thy neighbour as thyself; in Christianity. When we give a close look at each of these principles we can understand that in essence ahimsa, monism, compassion and friendship, universal brotherhood and the ideal of love are saying the same thing. Thus, in essence, all religions are unified. At the highest level of experience religions cease to exist as this or that religion. The highest form of religious experience is not of any particular religion. It is a spiritual experience where the religiosity or the religious spirit which lies within man is aroused.

Thus, the social functions and aspects of religion need to be clarified time and again to assert the true meaning and purpose of religion in society. Many immoral practices go on in the name of religion because of which society has been harmed. The history of religions shows the association of certain unhealthy elements with the practice of religions, such as dogmatism, exploitation, the tendency towards laziness and fatalism, violence and war, despise and hatred.

Religious dogmas often make people cling to outworn and inhuman practices in the name of religion. The fear of God and the next world keeps religious people away from breaking ancient traditions and customs. In Indian society it was because of this negative tendency, that religion had become the most serious obstacle to widow
remarriage and to the negation of child marriage and sati. Religion has acted as a handicap to social progress.

The exploitation of women has also been practised in the name of religion. Religious priests had stripped the woman of all her rights, to live as a slave of man. Also, the principle of karma prevented the poor and injured from revolting against exploitation.

The tendency of religion to encourage fatalism made many people addicted to laziness, leading a parasitic life in society.

Violence and war is sometimes glorified in the name of religion. Bloody wars are known to have been fought both, in the East and West, in the name of religion. History gives us accounts of the crusades and jihads. In Europe alone, in medieval times, some four hundred men and women are known to have been burnt alive in the name of religion. In India, such religious fanatics like Aurganzeb wielded cruelty against the people of other religions. In this way, religion has been responsible for the currents of hatred and despise which keep pulsating in society, and leading to inhuman acts. Inhuman acts in the name of religion makes one wonder sometimes whether religion makes man a saint or a devil.

In spite of all the wickedness known to be associated with religion, religion cannot be just condemned because similar deeds have been known to have taken place in the name of politics, science, race, country and state. It is a matter of observation that whenever ideals and thoughts are transformed into institutions in society, their life energy becomes petrified as they get entangled in external limitations and the essence of religion gets destroyed. The entanglement of religion with scriptures, priests and methods of
worship has been called 'religionism' by Sri Aurobindo. In his view, all defects attributed to religion are the defects of religionism. Religionism has been considered as false and harmful as racism, casteism, groupism and narrow nationalism.

12. Synthetic Approach to Religion:
The thoughtful thinkers of Indian society, who envisaged India as a modern nation had realized the importance of adopting a synthetic attitude towards religion. A synthetic attitude to religion means perceiving the fundamental unity that exists in all religions, maintaining an attitude of religious tolerance and benevolence, and realizing that each religion tries to achieve the same objective by a different route. We know that all the great religious figures from Jesus, Mohammad, Buddha, Mahavir, Guru Nanak and Kabir to the modern day thinkers like Sri Ramakrishna, Tagore and Gandhiji have adopted a synthetic approach to religion.

According to Rabindranath Tagore, all the religions of the world are only different forms of a basic human religion. It is this which has caused similarity in the teachings of the saints and deities of different religions. Each religion is a different way of attaining the highest reality.

To mention Gandhiji again, he is known to have respected every religion of the world and he felt that the religiosity of an individual known by the respect in which he holds religions other than his own, since the basis or essence of each religion is one, the difference lying only in the view point. People belonging to different religions quarrel because they fail to distinguish between what is of primary interest and what of secondary importance. In the more superficial respects we differ from one another, but in respect of
fundamentals we are all one. Gandhiji had made it a practice to read the religious texts of different religions and respected their deities, but he persisted in calling himself a Hindu as he objected to conversion of religion. In this way Gandhiji gave expression to his own synthetic approach to religion.

The synthetic approach helps one to perceive and understand the fundamental unity that lies at the root of each religion. Whether a religion accepts God or not, this unity can be discovered in the following aspects of religion – every great religion lays stress on self-control, self-sacrifice, non-violence, truth and the laws of purity. Secondly, despite differences of prayer, place of worship, mode of worship and religious texts, every religion holds the worshipper's piety, truth, purity and devotion above every other quality. Thirdly, every religion advocates tolerance towards other religions.

Fourthly, saints of each religion have advocated importance of love for human beings, service, self-control, purity, high character, tolerance, self-sacrifice, giving of alms, piety, prayer and meditation on God.

Fifthly, all religions have imparted strength, courage and illumination to man. The object of every religion is to increase a feeling of brotherhood in order to have peace on earth and to bring on earth the kingdom of heaven.

And finally, all religions have contributed to the unity, peace, hope and happiness of human society.

From this account it is evident that all religions exhibit a fundamental unity. If this fact is understood it can help human beings to adopt a more tolerant attitude towards religions other
than their own. It is this attitude that can form the basis of permanent peace in the world. This is the idea of universal religion. We can say that the spirit of religion aims at making the life of man more purposeful and integrated. This integration of man within his own self as well as with the diverse elements of his society goes in accordance with the modern-day spirit of a democratic and welfare state. The modern welfare state also aims at integration. In the modern time social reformers have drawn their inspiration from the liberal and humane values of religions and expounded them to make their appeal more comprehensive. In this way, the synthetic approach to religion did not remain simply with saints and devotees of God, but it also became the basis of political and state policy. In the past toleration and acceptance became the principle and policy adopted by the great emperors and kings of India. The great King Ashoka has propagated the idea of religious toleration in his famous Rock Edict XII - “King Priyadarsin, the beloved of the gods, reverences persons of all sects, ascetics, and householders, by gifts and various forms of reverence.

But the beloved of the Gods does not value either gifts or reverential offerings so much as that of an increase of the spiritual strength of the followers of all religions. One who reverences one's own religion and disparages that of another from devotion to one's own religion and to glorify it over all other religions does, by so doing, injure one's own religion more certainly.

It is verily concord among religions that is right and proper, as persons of other ways of thinking may thereby hear the Dharma and serve its cause.” King Ashoka proclaims, samvaya or concord is alone sadhu, that is, right and proper, in his edict. Years later Swami Vivekananda proclaimed the same message of concord at
the Chicago Parliament of Religions by saying "I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both toleration and universal acceptance. We believe not only in universal toleration, but we accept all religions as true. I am proud to belong to a nation which has sheltered the persecuted and the refugees of all religions and all nations of the earth. I am proud to tell you that we have gathered in our bosom the purest remnants of the Israelites, who cause to southern India and took refuge with us in the very year in which their holy temple was shattered to pieces by Roman tyranny. I am proud to belong to the religion, which has sheltered and is still fostering the remnants of the grand Zoroastrian nation."49

13. Conclusion:
This is how Swamiji presented the undying spiritual heritage of India – the Sanatana Dharma. This spiritual heritage is ancient, but it has not remained static and finished. It has been strengthened and reinforced in the modern age by the experiences of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. Swamiji has taught us to create unity and strength out of the diversity which is India. He felt the urgency to reinforce India's ancient heritage in a new mould because he saw his nation asleep for centuries, involved in all sorts of political and social bondages, embracing all sorts of social injustices and content with political subjection, economic weakness and social backwardness. He was pained by this situation and so he envisaged an India that was awakened, free, strong and marching in step with the advanced nations of the modern world. Hence, he gave the clarion call "Arise, awake, and stop not till the goal is reached."

India's march towards progress was to be on both fronts – material and spiritual, because man is both, body and soul. Progress is real
when it comes through a consistent balance between the outer and inner realms of existence. Indian thought has given recognition to an important fact, that the world in which we are living is a necessary milieu through which we can realize our goals. For goal realization to be possible harmony is essential. Though material progress is there, it works to unite men only for further material benefit. Real progress and harmony of a society depends upon the inner, moral and spiritual progress of its members. Swamiji envisaged the upliftment of the Indian masses through the practice of religion, because religion is an essential integral aspect of an individual's life. Swamiji pointed out that this integral aspect was a beautiful idea, with tremendous discipline of the human mind by which man could achieve the infinite and the immortal, and it was reduced to the meaningless status of a kitchen religion – to a religion of 'don't touchism'. Therefore, Swamiji attempted to liberate religion from all kinds of falsehood, by reasserting the universal values of religion and its essential spirit, that is spirituality. Spirituality was envisaged as the expansion of the creative forces within the human self, making religion dynamic and positive function of society.

To live as selfish individuals was to miscarry the purpose of creation. The natural fruit of spiritual life is a fellow feeling for all living beings. Genuine religion expresses itself in harmony, balance and perfect agreement between body and soul. Spirituality expressed through the service of man is a significant method of religion because it intended to stabilize our nature and aid the systematic purification of our whole being. Our powers are by force or habit adjusted to a life of claims and counterclaims. It is necessary to adapt them to a life of universalism. When religion succeeds in making us spiritual, our conflicts are resolved and we
find ourselves in the great current of life, belonging to humanity as a whole. We feel in our deeper selves our oneness with our fellow beings and unity with life.

In his ideas was the forceful attempt to bring about a convergence of religion with religious practice, so that religious practice becomes meaningful, an attempt to bring about a convergence within the individual self, between the physical energies and the spiritual energies, an attempt to converge the East and the West by advocating the synchronization of the advancements in science with the spiritual background of Indian culture. Through such an effort, Swamiji felt that the Indian men and women had to be educated into the values of citizenship, of social awareness, into the capacities for practical efficiency and organized co-operative efforts. Through the spread of man-making education and man-making religion, he sought the creation of free and self-disciplined citizens.

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