CHAPTER-I

INTRODUCTION

Preliminary remarks

We live in an amazing but dangerous world. It is tragic that at a time when religious traditions are becoming more powerful, they have become major contributors to division, hate and even violence. Too many people of faith are intolerant and continue to teach hate, which is poison to our children and future generations. Various factors divide mankind, such as, race, ethnicity, colour, language, nationality, ideology and religion. Among these, religion is most emotive. Swamy Vivekananda (1863-1902) has said: of all the forces that have worked and are still working to mould the destinies of the human race none, certainty, is more potent than that, the manifestation which we call religion. Scholars propound that religion is responsible for making man a civilized being, spiritual growth and for taking mankind near to God. But is a sad fact that more people have been killed in religious conflicts and battles than in wars for conquest of territory. Religion has been misused for political personal gain cruelty has been inflicted on millions of human being and animals in the name of religion. Conflict resolution is an extremely challenging job. It requires not only correct understanding of the causes of conflict but also in enhancstible degree of patience. As in all religions of the world and its Holy doctrines and scriptures, the central theme and practice of peace has been repeatedly emphasized.

Religion preaches ethics, good character, virtues and values. But politics, distortions that cultures and limited human minds superimpose upon spiritual reality. Religion is a powerful constituent of cultural norms and values and because it addresses the most profound existential issues of human life. Religion is deeply implicated in individual and social conceptions of peace. To

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1 Swami Vivekananda, Complete works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol 2, Chapter I (The necessity of Religion)
transform the conflicts besetting the world today, we need to uncover the
conceptions of peace within our diverse religions and cultural traditions, while
seeking the common ground among them. The relationship between religions
and conflict is, in fact, a complex one. One of the main problems about religion
is its plurality or diversity, world population now stands nearly at 7 billion in
2010. Christianity with 2.1 billion is the majority religion in 100 countries, and
Islam with 1.5 billion in 60 countries. Hinduism has 900 million followers who
are the majority in INDIA and tiny Nepal. Buddhism has 500 million adherents
who are majority in 10 countries in the East, who coexist with other cultures
following the teachings of Confucius and Lao tse. Four religions were born in
west Asia - Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity and Islam. Four, though not
religions in the strict sense of the word, are followed in the East-
Confucianism, Taoism, Shintoism and zen. Four were born in India- Hinduism,
Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. The last three are considered to be off-shoots
of Hinduism, though they have separate identities with founders and holy
books. Each religion has its philosophy, mythology and ritual. Philosophy is
the systematic statement of a religion's conception. It consists of how we relate
ourselves to and explain the triple subject of God, soul and Universe.

Mythology is the treasure of stories of great men and women in a
religion handed down from generation to generation. It contains accounts of the
miracle and supernatural attributed to them.

Rituals are concretized philosophy, symbols, ceremonies, worship,
festivals, pilgrimage rituals have various forms. The different religions differ
from one another in many ways mainly at the level of rituals and mythology
and at the basic fundamental level they share the common ideals and
aspirations of the human mind and society. Each of them the outer cover, with
a prophet, a holy book a set of doctrines and beliefs, distinct customs and
traditions etc. But the inner core of religion is spirituality, where there is a great
deal of commonality. Also, ethical and moral codes are more or less common
though there are differences in emphasis and a few exclusive features. But each
religion claims to show the night way of life and claims to provide supreme peace and fulfillment to its follower consequently, today we have not only one kind of religious doctrine, ritual and experience, but almost every group has its own faith and rituals. That is why most of us, as religious beings in the contemporary world, claim to be a Hindu, a Muslim, a Christian or a Buddhist, much before accepting ourselves as a religious person. Therefore in practice religions divide due to lack of understanding of the purpose of religion. Also wrong interpretation by followers of the teaching of prophets and founders result in tragic consequences. For instance “Religions of the world have contributed to the loss of social harmony, often because there are simply so many of them and they seem at variance with one another. The distrust and conflict between religions is sad and strange”.\(^2\) Faith traditions other than one’s own are frequently seen as threats. Religions differences still unfortunately rankle and continue to produce disharmony, misunderstanding and mutual district consequently religious conflicts and communal disharmony have assumed serious proportions in present day world, basic harmony of religions has become a most important and vital concern for all people. We are aware that religious diversity is one of the main causes of contemporary social and political conflict. Followers of different religions have fought against are another for centuries. Today also they continue to fight and kill one another in many cases unfortunately in the name of religion.

However most of this fighting was and is for the sake of personal or national ambitions hidden under the pretend of religion. Wilfred Cantwel Smith, a renowned theologian, clearly explained the danger of religious diversity for the contemporary world “Religious diversity poses a general human problem today because it disrupts community. It does so with a new force in the modern world because divergent traditions that in the pat did could develop separately are today face to face. Different civilization have in the past either ignored each other, or fought each other; very occasionally in three ways

perhaps they met each other. Today they not only meet but interpenetrate; they meet not only each other but jointly meet joint problems and must jointly try to solve them. They must collaborate. Perhaps the single most important challenge that mankind faces in our day is the need to turn our nascent world society into a world Community”. ³

But we should observe that religious diversity is not merely a dangerous element. Instead, everything depends upon the manner in which we look at diversity; as a creative power or a destructive force. In other words, whether “unity in diversity” is achieved, or the unity of society is extinguished by religious differences, mostly depends upon how different religions groups perceive one another: whether as enemies or as friends.

Swamy Vivekananda, great Indian Philosopher:

Believes that plurality of religions is not only a fact but is necessary for the spiritual and material development of society. It is the clash of thought, the differentiation of thoughts that awakens thought and makes societies dynamic.

Ramakrishna, a nineteen-century Indian Saint as master of Vivekananda also believes that diversity of religions is will of God. He explains that it is by God’s will that different religions and opinions come into existence. God gives to different people what they can relish and digest. He said “The mother does not give fish pilau to all children. All cannot digest it; so she, prepares simple fish soup for some. Everyone cherishes his own way and follow his own nature” ⁴

In view of the above, it can be claimed that there is no need to be afraid of religious diversity. Rather, diversity is the source of our religious survival

Swamy Vivekananda Proclaims “If there were not different religions, different world views, no one religion and survive”.

We have to observe that truth is one, but it comes filtered through the limited human mind that mind lives in a particular culture has its own experience of the world and lives at a particular point in history. The infinity Reality is thus processed through the limitations of space, time and causation and is further processed through the confines of human understanding and language manifestations of truth- scriptures, sages and prophets- will necessarily vary from age to age and from culture to culture. I think this is major cause of diversity in arena of religions. Light, when put through a prism, appears in various colors when observed from different angles. But the light always remains the same pure light.

Vedic seers discovered this truth and declare:

“Truth is one; sages call it by various names” (Rigveda)

“The one Glory manifests itself in various ways” (Atharva Veda)

Therefore need for religious harmony and interreligious dialogue, are assuming greater importance. All right thinking people, who wish to live in a peaceful world and leave behind a rich world for the generation to come, should go deeper into this issue and try to live it in life- individually and collectively. Elie Wiesel 1986 Nobel Peace prize winner, said that interreligious dialogue is “not only on the answers, it is the only answer”. Religious leaders who have devoted their lives to the study of religion and who can help us understand the incredible diversity of the world’s religion have a special responsibility to raise their voices and speak out against hate at every place of worship.

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6 Rig Veda 1.164.46
It is not possible to live an isolated life. As more and more people migrate to urban areas, an increasingly greater number of people of different faiths live side by side. Hence there is the need for greater understanding of each other’s aspirations, faiths and beliefs as well as practices. “Those who cultivate the fire of hatred and prejudice in their hearts are imprisoned in the narrow cells of their religions, or what they have interpreted their religions to be they observe the followers of other religions with distrust and even malice. Such attitude cannot be what the founders of the various great religions and intended as their gift to humanity. Hence we can claim that religion (dharma) which was given to humanity to provide a civilized path for the reformation of character in order that its adherents might reach the ultimate goal (God), has today seemingly lost track of its purpose”.  

According to Vivekananda, we need to renounce hatred and cultivate love compassion for all; only then can we begin to live in peace and harmony. In his historic address to the parliament of religions in Chicago on September 11, 1893, Swami Vivekananda clarified as follows “The Christian is not to become a Hindu or Buddhist, or a Hindu or a Buddhist or a Buddhist to become Christian; each must assimilate the spirit of the other and yet preserve individuality and grow accordingly” He says in other statement “you must express your sympathy with people of all sects”.  

In his lecture delivered in March 25, 1900, in San Francisco, he explains his attitude towards prophet Mohammad, founder of Islam, with these words “The characters of great souls are mysterious, their methods past our finding out, we must not judge them. Christ may judge Mohammad, who are you and I?”.  

In other Well-known and often quoted words, Swami Vivekananda following his master’s way, Ramakrishna, says

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7 Shri Santesvi Ji Maharaj, Introduction to Harmony of all religions. 
9 Ibid, II, P.482
“I accept all the religions that were in the past, and worship them all: I worship God with everyone of theme, in whatever form they worship him. I shall go to the mosque of mohammedan, I shall enter the Christian church and kneel before the crucifying; I shall enter the Buddhist temple, where I shall take refuge in Buddha and in his law. I shall go into the forest and sit down in Meditation with the Hindu, who is trying to find the light which enlightens the heart of everyone”.

Mahatma Gandhi who was the Leader of seeking liberty of Indian people’s movement, also had strode an effective step in the direction of unity creation and cleaning of schism among believers to various religions on the direction of effort in order to freedom of his people’s territory by emphasizing in Harmony of religions. Gandhiji had special understanding from Religion on understanding of Religion; he didn’t rely on merely on series of rules, specified and defined ceremonies and said:

My purpose of religion isn’t formal or common religion. But it is a religion which its foundation is all religions and put us face to face with our creator.

Doubtless Gandhiji was aware of case history of existent long religion’s hostilities and tragedies among Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs and other faiths.

Gandhiji never dressed as a religious Exponent, or talked as a professional missionary but because of the deep spiritual and pragmatic attachment to religion especially to Hinduism, he never neglected any struggle in the direction not support and materialization of moral and religious values. His defense of religion and viewpoint such as Harmony of Religions was not tactical defense, but it had root on his belief. We must pay attention to this point that the theories such as Harmony of Religions, transcendental unity of religions and religious pluralism have always been

10 Ibid, II, P.374
brought up by people like Gandhi and academic faces and is insisted on it. Religious scientist have never propounded such cases and supported it.

According to Gandhiji the prerequisite of understanding the Harmony of religions is honor to other beliefs, since to respect the others faith and religious beliefs is the first step on the direction of understanding the parallel or opposing religious thoughts. Gandhiji in reply to a Muslim person wrote: I respect to Moslems like other Indian people as my natural brothers who have equal rights and privileges.\textsuperscript{12}

In point of fact tolerance in relation to other religions on Gandhi’s mental structure is a method against fanaticism and dogmatism. According to Gandhiji fanaticism on religion usually has root on ignorance towards religion’s reality. Prejudiced person not only doesn’t have clear understanding on spiritual essence training about his/her belief, but also he or she presumes his or her own shallow understanding. Prejudiced person doesn’t need to think about his/her belief and doesn’t stand enough to listen to contrary opinions on his/her viewpoints.

In accordance with this viewpoint the sympathetic look at other religions conveys us to such an awareness level which we can have a better understanding of our faiths.

We can easily see the Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi were not only good exemplars of this great attitude for us, but also have done a great service by accepting different religions as different raths leading to the same foal, undeniably they helped people of different religions to understand their respective holy tents much more clearly than before, at least with regard to diversity.

They endeavored to show a means of escape towards their own nations and today’s mankind, while they were observing new world’s increasing day

\textsuperscript{12} Mahatma Gandhi, In Search o the supreme, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad 2003, P.3
to day’s crisis and using schism’s tools by colonizer among religions followers for their authority’s continuation.

So, we should pay attention to this point that “It is possible to view every religion of world as an expression of the transcendent aspect of religion. The truth every religion represents is an expression of the absolute truth. It is the transcendent aspect of religion that can be called the religion with a capital “R” or the Religion beyond all religions. It not only transcends every religion but also pervades every one of them. It is the totality of religions”. 13

1.1. CONCEPT OF HARMONY

In our present day system of values, harmony enjoys only a very restricted meaning; for centuries however this concept occupied central position in antique ideas. There is scarcely a concept in the western history of Ideas, which is a all embracing as that of harmony. It includes Theology, Philosophy as well as the Arts and even reaches into the field of Natural Sciences.

The word “Harmonia” has its roots in the Greek language and means the adaptation, combination, association and joining of two different or opposite things to an ordered whole.

The word ‘harmony’ was first used in Homer’s (8th century BC) (The poet Homer in Greek, Homers) stands at the beginning of ancient Greek Literature. He was the author of the two most important ancient Greek epics, the Iliad and the Odyssey, and founder of the oldest literary genre) works to mean “something that binds a unite”, in both the active and the passive sense. Materially it was synonymous with a “Strap” or “Lash” (used in the construction of Odysseus raft); and in the intellectual sense it meant a “contract” or “pact”

13 Swami Tyagananda, “Harmony of Religions” Harvard University 8 April 2000.
There are various definitions of harmony

Some definitions of this term, according to Webster dictionary are as follows:

Think following definitions of harmony clearly explain nature of harmony, peace, compatibility, agreement, concord, balance, unanimity are common concepts in all these definitions.

A. Harmony is the just adaptation of parts to each other, in any system or combination of things, or in things, or things intended to from a connected whole; such an agreement between the different parts of a design or composition as to produce unity of effect; as, the harmony of the universe.

B. Harmony is concord or agreement in fact opinions manners, interests, etc., good correspondence; peace and friendship, as good citizen live in harmony.

C. Harmony is compatibility in opinion and action n

(In well-known and often quoted words, Mahatma Gandhiji, says:

However we have to bear in mind that harmony does not mean compromise. It means to use a higher understanding to find a true reconciliation between the opposites we encounter, for all opposites are portions of the oneness that seeks expression through the diverse play of their opposition.

Harmony is rich in connotation and fall of profound philosophy of great wisdom. It advocates, first, diversity and second, balance and arriving at the same destination by different routes, reaching unanimity after taking many things into consideration.

It encourages the virtue of magnanimity, promotes the broad and profound spirit of great virtue carrying substance with it, featuring tolerance, compatibility, and honesty and moderation.
In fact gathering different things together and making them balanced is called harmony.

There is a very close relation between peace and harmony at personal and societal levels.

Peace creates concord, balance, consistence, unanimity, compatibility and stability at individual and collective levels and helps to effect accord in facts, views and it acts and helps in making sympathetic relationships, and mutual similarities the focal point of human concern.

When peace and harmony is achieved in this real inter-related manner, the expectation for a trustful, promising, secure, and faithful existence of human beings becomes possible which, in other words, can be called hope in harmony and peace so “harmony is a precondition for peace and peace opens the door to joy, all of us know this from our own experience. In matters of health or study, work or worship, harmony is what we strive to achieve. When harmony is lost, the result is stress and anxiety, pain and sorrow”. 14

Harmony has a wide function in different arenas.

When ‘harmony’ is used in interpersonal relations magnanimity will win over the public when one treat other liberally, he or she will win others confidence.

When ‘harmony’ is used in politics, then there can be “logical administration and harmonious people’, historical development can be promoted, and prosperous culture can be achieved. “Harmony” can promote the birth of new things and new thoughts.

If we used “harmony” in economy, we can promote the development of production and prosperity of economy.

14 Ibid.
“Harmony” we use in diplomacy can make all nations live together in peace”, by doing so, we have both safeguarded our own national independence and refrained from practicing external expansion; we do not invade other countries and absolutely not allow other nation to aggression out country.

When ‘harmony’ is used in the relations between man and nature, then “each of them can live in peace respectively and can accomplish something through respective support”. Humanity can develop itself only by making rational use of and maintaining harmony with nature, maintain and develop the civilization itself has created, satisfy intergenerational demand, realize intergenerational fairness and enjoy mutual growth and mutual prosperity with nature and develop together with nature in harmonious way.

“Harmony” when we use in realm of religions, this term emphasize the common ground of all religions- the oneness of the Ultimate reality, unity of goal, unanimity with regard to divine nature of the soul and the common virtues the practiced by all and considers doctrines and dogmas secondary details.

Harmonious look in religions has the unique privilege of fulfilling the desires of all concerned without raining anyone’s faith. Harmony respects religious diversity. It treasure the characteristic identity of religion and struggles to find a way through which all religions can join hands to salute the diversity while, simultaneously, granting the unity that brings them together.

In the present situation, “Harmony” is the prime value. All values are important “But it should be amply clear that harmony, as a value, stands distinct from all the rest at this juncture of history, for due to its absence, even the whole human civilization may be lost either due to a nuclear catastrophe or through world-wide environmental calamities or through racial, ethnic, regional linguistic or other kinds of strife and these as has been explained are due to disharmony in inter-national and inter-communal relations or in man’s relation with nature and ecosphere. So, harmony becomes the first priority because the
very existence of human kind is threatened by forces of disharmony. It should further be seen that though Harmony seems to be on single value, yet, in truth, it is the group name or corporate name given to a set of values. For ‘Harmony’ has love, unity, concord, amicability, sociability, friendliness, spirit of co-existence and reconciliation, proper communication, openness of mind, self-control, non-violence, sweetness, tolerance, consensus, etc., as its essential components. Without these values, there cannot be an enduring the holistic harmony”.

Harmony does not imply absence of diversity, this is very important point about harmony, ‘the word ‘harmony’ implies concordance, agreeability and a pleasing bled of diverse colours, divers musical notes or divers designs; it does not imply negation of diversity. All the colours of rainbow are different and yet their pattern is harmonious . . . . . similarly, there may be flowers of different kinds and colours in a garden and yet their arrangement in the garden may create a harmonious and a beautiful design Similarly, people may live in different parts of the globe, have different colours of their skin and different facial features, yet they can live with a spirit of amity and in a state of harmony there may be certain kinds of diversity which create discord but all kinds of diversity are not inimical to harmony. So, harmony in human relations in the present day world is possible to a great extent if the basic components of harmony, namely, love goodwill, proper communication, spirit of co-existence, tolerance, sweetness, etc., are there.

Now for this important question that ‘How to achieve harmony?’

One way that we may achieve harmony within is by removing conflicts, arguments and imbalances from within our system. As we achieve inner harmony we are not separate from the whole. Therefore, our connection to the whole must become balanced to fully experience harmony. The balance starts

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15 B.K. Jagadish Chander Hassija, Harmony, Published by Prajapita Brahma Kumari’s Ishwariya Vshwa - Vidyalaya 1995, P.3
16 Ibid. P.5
from within and moves outward to greater realigns or domains of our lives. I wonder how we struggle for harmony and peace while ignoring the conflicts within our own soul, our own families, and our own communities. Once we begin to experience inner balance, harmony way then be achieved our families and societies. On a larger scale harmony is achieved in our job settings, cultures, religions, and expands to nature and the environment. To experience harmony, it must be achieved within and with each level of life as we live in the world.

Each of us should to take a stand and do our part each of us can in each moment of each day to be a shining example of peace, love and compassion open to ourselves and allow ourselves to feel with our heart, listen with our heart and lead from our heart.

1.2. The role of religions in the creation of Harmony and Disharmony

History points to the central role of religion in social and political change. Religion and society are closely linked, with individuals, communities and even nations basing not only their beliefs but also their daily activities around their religious convictions. Therefore, it is important in the shaping of one’s view on life, their output during any particular day, and the way in which they interact and deal with others.

According to his Holiness the fourteenth Dalailama, today’s reality is a little bit different from the past reality. In the past, people from different traditions remained more or less isolated. The Buddhists stayed in Asia; the Muslims in the Middle East and some in Asia; and in West there were mostly Christians. So there was very little contact. But now the times are different. There are many new waves of immigration taking place; there’s economic globalization and also the growing tourist industry. So much information is now available, because of these various factors, our world community has become like on entity: a multi-cultural, multi-religious, singular entity. There are two possibilities of what can happen. The first one is that because of close
contact between different traditions, sometimes there’s a little sense of insecurity about our own tradition. The other traditions come into more contact with us, so we feel a little bit uncomfortable. That’s a negative possibility. The second possibility is that because of this reality of more communication, the opportunities to develop genuine harmony between traditions have grown. This is more positive possibility and so now we must make effort to establish true harmony. If we leave aside the religions that do not have any philosophical basis, but just faith in worshipping the sun or moon or these type of things, if we leave those aside but look at the major world religions, Christianity, Judaism, Islam, different Hindu and Buddhist traditions, Jainism, Daoism, Confucianism, and so on – each of these has its own specialty. Therefore, through close contact, we can learn new things from each other; we can enrich our own traditions.  

Therefore religions have made both positive and negative contributions towards the development of social harmony. Although religious organizations have built educational institutions and hospitals and at their best, have encouraged the spirit of love and charity, many of them have also caused human suffering by the intolerant of those who did not accept their dogmas or creeds. Unfortunately, some misguided religious organizations have been fanatical and repressive, narrowing human hopes, limiting aspirations and spreading religious conflicts and violence. The narrow interpretation of religion creates hate between people instead of uniting them. When interpreted correctly and practiced seriously, every religion can become a cohesive force to focus the best energy and potential of humanity utilizing the sense of shared strength among its followers.

Comprehensive understanding of the profound historical, social cognitional and psychological causes for the birth and existence of religion; an objective reality for the long-term existence of religions in societies, is very significant issue.

During year after year religion has been serving as a survival tool and technique for many human groups. Our hunter-gather primitive ancestors were able to win their way to civilization after they learnt to cultivate, ending their nomadic life.

In those ancient times our ancestors felt the need to have a common code of conduct for uniting and disciplining people. They conceived and nurtured the concepts of religion and politics. The concept of religion was then quite uncomplicated; whereas the present day religions are interwoven with factors in politics, economics, culture and ethnicities; and the social phenomena with a relatively big influence on the part of a fairly large group of people.

We must pay attention to this point that our human minds, being of different callable and disposition, need different approaches to peace and happiness. Thus, the point is clear; humanity needs all the words religions to suit the way of life, divers’ spiritual needs, and inherited national traditions of individual human beings. It’s everyone’s responsibility to promote peace and harmony and harmonious society is enjoyed by all. I am convinced that social harmony will not come by fighting between followers of different religions. Fear, suspicion and hatred are the fuel which feed the flame of communal disharmony and conflict and once the social fabric is torn it cannot easily be sewn together again.

Now many noteworthy questions appear before us: Is religion really involved with conflicts and hatred? Again, is it true that no religion teaches violence or encourages hatred towards others? If this claim is true, then why have religious hatred, conflict and enmity prevailed and still prevail throughout the world? Should we condemn religion as a trouble maker or threat to social harmony and world peace? Or, should we hold that religion can play a vital role in conflict prevention, mitigation and resolution or in peace making and post conflict peace building? Should we ignore that the religious traditions of the world, offer a rich abundance of insight and guidance for the phenomenon of peace and social harmony? These are some of the questions which have been
haunting many people of conscience throughout the world. However sometimes religion has also caused inequalities in society and led to conflict and social disharmony in and towards other societies but it is undeniable that arbitration about the role of religions in the creation of harmony and disharmony depends upon the manner in which we look at phenomenon of religion: as a creative power towards social harmony or a destructive force for social harmony. For example Marxism a conflict theory sees religion as a force of harmony. It claims that society is in constant conflict between the proletariat and the Bourgeoisie through an unfair economic system, however the church is controlled by the Bourgeoisie and used to enforce their conservative ideals. The church is the opium of the people and help stops the revolution therefore promoting harmony. This helps keep the upper classes in power by promoting a false collective identity. The Marxist view of the church is very negative claiming it legitimizes social inequality and keeps the workers passive, therefore seeing it as a conservative force of harmony in a conflict setting with negative aims. However many neo-Marxist disagree with this evaluation and see religion as a reactionary force which can be used for the benefit of a Marxist revolution, helping spread ideas of conflict against the Bourgeoisie. As evidence of the church being used for social change they use Martin Luther King and the civil rights movement. The struggle for social and economic equality in the black community of America was actively helped and because of the church. This shows that the religion can be used to spread social change.

Feminism is other example of the role of religion in the creation of harmony and disharmony. However Feminist has a very different view of religion compared to Marxists. This is because in Marxism although organized religion does enforce social inequality it does it in a subliminal way while teaching pro-poor messages, yet the traditional scriptures teach openly negative views of women (men and women must be separated during prayer in Islam and Judaism, Bride burning in Hinduism, and no divorce in orthodox Catholicism). Therefore there is an active oppression in religion as identified by feminists such as Armstrong, Holm and De Beauvoir, this active decimation
is not evident in the traditional Marxist view of the church as all discrimination is done in the economic system. Therefore Feminist, unlike Marxists, do see the church as an active form of conflict, evidence for this is that where the rest of society has become more Liberal (Abortion and working women with the same pay as men is now cultural norm) Religious practice is only changing extremely slowly with women being able to become vicars 1994 in the church of England (Although there is reported to still be a lot of discrimination, also female priests have still not been allowed in other denominations of Christianity). Therefore feminist, see religion as a form of conflict because of its active discrimination in sacred tents and the teaching if leading religious figures. However there are many feminists who would disagree with the view that religion causes conflict and social disharmony. They claim that problem is not with religion or religious practice, it is those scholars who interpret it.

Religion is a main part of Herbert Spencer’s Organic Analogy, which sets moral frameworks, passes on vital norms and values during socialization and giving people comfort and support throughout their lives.

Durkheim claims that religion promotes harmony by causing social solidarity, which unifies society, which is essential for it to survive. Malinowski claimed that religion helps an individual through various ‘Life Crisis’ including death and puberty; this helps him recover quickly and become a healthy part of society.

This prevention of change to the status quo shows that religion is very useful to society as an institution of harmony. However the functionalist view is often described as being naively utopian in the sense that it ignores social inequalities and the churches role in helping spread an ‘us and them’ culture fuelling hatred and conflict.

Margaret Chatterjee About Gandhi’s view respecting linkage religion and social harmony said:
“I believe that Gandhi’s way of relating religion and social harmony was to see in the sense of aspiration that there is in religion an impetus of priceless value that could be enlisted to bring about social harmony. This human endowment was not set apart from the ethical sense or core, the will to non-violence when he locates his fundamental ontology in Satya (Truth), he virtually overturns the familiar vocabulary of being and becoming, putting in their place an understanding of dharma which makes it both the presupposition and goal of endeavor. The selfless individual would be an instrument of service, such service would resonate and this would bring about social harmony. Music, after all was the art form which appealed to him most. The world dhvani, a key term in the Indian aesthetic music, means resonance.” 18

1.3. Concept of Religion and Different Approaches to Definition of Religion

An important part of the religious diversity’s problem is the very concept of religion. What is religion? If we look at many ways and approaches religion is defined, we find the term covers so wide an area that virtually anything can be called a religion. There are also varying ideas of what it means to be religious.

It is too obvious today that there are different religions, churches, dominations and sects. So it is necessary to respond these two important question; what is “religion” and what does it mean when we say that a person is “religious”.

Religious scholars generally agree that writing a single definition that applies to all religions is difficult or even impossible, initial reason is that people examine religion with some kind of critical eye, and the term is therefore fraught with ideological consequences for anyone who might want to construct a universal definition. Throughout history religion has been abused

18 Margaret Chatterjee.
and misunderstood. Some people use it as means of exploitation and suppression, as pretent for prejudice. Some other people use it as a source of power and domination over the elite and masses alike. In the name of religion unjustifiable wars have been launched, freedom of thought and conscience has been oppressed, science has been persecuted, the right of the individual to maturity has been denied, and man’s dignity and honor have been flagrantly debased. And in the name of religion an injustice has been inflicted upon humanity with the result that religion itself has suffered many losses.

These are historical facts which no one can deny. But is this the proper function of religion or the right approach to religion? Could this be purpose of religion? The indisputable answer is an emphatic no. There are many religions in the world, and each one claims to be the one and only true religion. Each religion is supposed to have come from God for the right guidance man. But these claims contradict each other and have caused dissensions among people and vehement reactions to religion- instead of welding mankind into one universal brotherhood under the one universal Benevolent God. This situation makes any neutral observer confused and perhaps avers to all kinds of religion.

Many of modern scholars of religion also have commented on the difficulty of defining what religion is over the centuries, influential thinkers have offered their own definitions, with greater or lesser degree of assurance, but virtually all of these definitions have been found wanting by the majority of scholars. In some cases the definitions are too narrow, defining religion in terms of the speakers’ religious beliefs or those of his or her culture and tending to exclude the religious beliefs of other cultures. In other cases the definitions are so vague and inclusive that they do not sufficiently delimit religion from other areas of human thought such as psychology, law, economic, physics, etc.,

In the first instance, we can analyze religion as a collection of cultural systems, belief systems, and world views that establishes symbols that relate humanity to spirituality and moral values. Many religions have narratives,
symbols, traditions and sacred histories that are intended to give meaning to life or to explain the origin of life or the universe. They tend to drive morality, ethics, religious law or preferred lifestyle from their ideas about the cosmos and human nature. The word religion is sometimes used interchangeably with faith or belief systems, but religion differs from private belief in that it has a public aspect. Most religions have organized behaviors, including clerical hierarchies, a definition of what constitutes adherence or membership, congregation of laity, regular meetings or services for the purposes of veneration of a deity or for prayer, holy places (either natural or architectural) and / or scriptures. The practice of a religion may also include sermons, commemoration of the activities of a god or gods, sacrifices, festivals, feasts, trance, initiations, funerary services, matrimonial services, meditation, music, art, dance, public, service, or other aspects of human culture.

At the sometime the development of religion has taken different forms in different cultures. Some religions place an emphasis on belief, while others emphasize practice. Some religions focus on the subjective experience of the religious individual, while others consider the religious community to be most important. Some religions claim to be universal, believing their laws and cosmology to be binding for everyone, while others are intended to be practiced only by a closely defined or localized group. In many places religion has been associated with public institutions such as education, hospitals, the family, government and political hierarchies.

Therefore we can allege that religions unique in the broadest sense of the word and we should observe that religion is not only a spiritual and intellectual necessity but also a social and universal need. It is not to bewilder man but to guide him. It is not to debase him but to elevate his moral nature. It is not to deprive him of anything useful, or to burden him, or to oppress his qualities but to open for him in enhancement treasures of sound thinking and right action. It is not confine him to narrow limits but to haunch him into wide horizons of truth and goodness. In short, true religion is to acquaint man with
God as well as with himself and the rest of universe. When the purpose of true religion is carefully examined, it will be found that religion satisfies the spiritual and moderate maternal needs of man. It unties his psychological knots and complexes, sublimes, his instincts and aspirations, and disciplines his desires and the whole course of life. It improves his knowledge of God- the Highest Truth in the universe, and his own self. It teaches him about the secrets of life and the nature of man and how to treat them, about good and evil, about night and wrong. It purifies the soul from evil, clears the mind from doubts, strengthens the character and corrects the thinking and convictions of man. Moreover it provides man with peace and security and makes his life meaningful. That is some of what religion can do for humanity.

The earliest definition of religion is from Johnson’s dictionary, which simply calls it “a system of faith and worship”. Friedrich Schleiermacher, German theologian and philosopher, in the late 18th century defined religion as “das schlechthinnige Abhängigkeitsgefühl” commonly translated as “a feeling of absolute dependence”. His contemporary Hegel disagreed thoroughly, defining religion as “the divine spirit becoming conscious of himself through the finite spirit.” Clifort Geertz, American anthropologist, defined religion as a “cultural system”. This definition was dominate for most of the 20th century and continues to be widely accepted today.

Sociologists and anthropologists tend to see religion as an abstract set of ideas, values, or experiences developed as part of a cultural matrix. For example, in Lindbeck’s Nature of Doctrine, religion does not refer to belief in “God” or a transcendent absolute, instead, Lindbeck defines religion as, “a kind of cultural and/ or linguistic framework or medium that shapes the entirety of life and thought.

But we know religion is not mere intellectual assent to certain propositions about the nature of life. Rather, it involves what people do in their lives, accordingly “religion” has been called ‘enacted tradition” or ‘embodied belief’.
It originates in humanity’s tendency to seek to maximize the meaning and value of our life-experience by (re-)laying that life-experience with a higher or deeper reality, with “an unseen order” that somehow transcends ordinary human existence. That alignment can serve to integrate diverse aspect of our lives (individually and collectively), and to imbue our lives with a sense of purpose and direction.

Nevertheless, if we dig a little deeper in the various religions of the world, we come up with a number of problems about definition and accurate comprehension of religion. For example there are many problems to identify the one thing that all religions are and must be, perhaps we can find something that all religion have in common, like praying, lighting candles or prostrating there the differences are all too clear well, in a sense they all do, but only highly selective ways. For example Christians are told to “turn the other check”, but Islam values a somewhat tougher attitude. Some problems are about classification of religions. There are many ways to classify religions. One way is to distinguish between local, national and universal religions. The local religion is limited in terms both geography and missionary intent. Usually one is born into a local religion; it is the faith of one’s family, tribe or clan and one has little interest in extending it to others. On the contrary, since the religion is the source of the group’s power and therefore its means of survival, one should be careful not to divulge too much of it to outsiders. While this type of religion is most common among “Primal” communities, remnants of it remain even in modern societies- witness the secrecy that surrounds quasi-religion groups such as the freemasons.

National religions usually have to do with the common bonds of a shared language, culture, ethnic background or a shared history. Orthodox Judaism is a good example of this, while it is not impossible for an outsider to join a national religion. The universal religions, on the other hand, have divorced themselves specific society to such an extent that they have become “Portable”. They can adapt themselves to almost any society in which they find
themselves. Universal religions are clearly oriented towards converting people of other faiths, Baha’s I, Buddhism Islam and Christianity, are the most often quoted examples of universal religions. But there is a problem with this classification system, useful as it is if we are looking for essence of religion. It simply classifies traditions according to their missionary zeal, or lack of it. For example, in terms of this system, classical Marxism-Leninism with its drive to “World communism” would have to be classified as a “universal religion”. Indeed, it incorporated many of the usual trappings of a universal religions such as sacred tents and ritual, infallibility of the founders, utopian fantasy etc. In other words, using this classification to define religion as something that tries to convert other people is not widely accepted. Another approach for classification is look at the basic beliefs of the various religions one common outcome of this approach is to divide religion into atheism, agnosticism, theism and non-theism. Atheism is the assertion that there are no supernatural beings and nature is not devoted to our existence. Agnosticism can be roughly defined as the attitude that the existence of supernatural force is unknowable, unknown, and /or irrelevant to life. Theism is the belief in supernatural intelligence with an interest in Man, and can be divided into monotheism and polytheism. Non-theism can be defined from a theistic perspective as the opinion that belief in a divine being is not necessary for the functioning of a religion, but it may envision some type of humanistic moral force in nature. Examples of theism include Christianity and Islam, examples of non-theism include Buddhism and Taosim. We should not that this classification hinges on the idea that the acceptance or non-acceptance of a personal god is a very important aspect of religion. This is itself a theistic idea. If a Buddhist scholar of religion were to classify the world’s religions according to their basic beliefs, it would make more sense for him or her to classify them according to whether or not these traditions accepted the impermanence of phenomena, the nonexistence of an enduring soul or self in human beings and the unsatisfactoriness of all experience. In Buddhism, the existence of God is non-issue and certainly does not contain the kernel of the meaning of “religion”. All these examples speak
of that religion is not a single thing. To understand religion, we must accept that it is a composite. We cannot isolate a single aspect such as belief or worship or prayer and set that apart as “the essence of religion”. Compare in this respect the work of the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein in his later years. What, he asked, is a game? Many games are played with balls and sticks, but chess is a game, yet it involves neither. Games are played for fun, unless you happen to be a professional sportsman who does it for the money even when you are injured. Games can involve competition, but some others stress cooperation. And so on. In the end, he decided that “game” could not be reduced to one single defining attribute. Instead, it was the sum total of all its attributes. In a specific instance, if one looked at a human activity and saw that the majority of its attributes complied with the list that together made up the definition of “game”, then one would be justified in saying that particular activity was a game. I think we can apply easily thing manner in this respect.

In last analysis we can refer to some aspects of definitions of religion.

There are two important aspects of definitions of religion. The first involves the underlying metaphysical assumptions about the nature of religion (what is being defined). The second involves the type of definition that is to be used (how the term is defined).

A) Assumption about the Underlying Nature of religion

A definition of religion necessarily involves assumptions about its underlying nature. Each and every definition of religion implies at least some theoretical conclusions . . . . . one of the many difficulties, encountered in reaching a consensus on a legal definition of the term is that at root “no convincing general theory of religion exists. Three of the principal theories about religion are: first, religion in its metaphysical or theological sense (e.g., the underlying truth of the existence of God, the Dharma etc.); Second, religion as it is psychologically experienced by the people (e.g. The feelings of the religious believer about divinity or ultimate concerns, the holy, etc.); and third,
religion as a cultural or social force (e.g., Symbolism that binds a community together or separates it from other communities). Definitions of religion typically begin by assuming one of these three different theoretical approaches of course, even within each of these three approaches there will be widely different assumptions. Sigmund Freud and Rudolph Otto, for example, both focus on the psychological dimension of religion, though Freud saw religion as a set of false beliefs while Otto saw it as a powerful feeling of the other.

B) Types of Definition: Essentialist or Polythetic

Once the underlying theoretical assumptions are identified, there still remains the difficulty of the form that the definition will take. Two of the most important forms of definition may be characterized as the “essentialist” and “polythetic”. An essentialist definition identifies the elements that are necessary for something to be designated as “religion”.

The second type of definition, the polythetic, does not require that all religions have specific elements in common. The most widely known illustration of a polythetic approach to definitions generally is Ludwig Wittgenstein’s explanation of the meaning of “game” (Gunn, n.d) that I have referred to it.19

At the end of this section I will mention some suggested definition by celebrated philosophers and sociologists and psychologists as follows:

Immanuel Kant: Religion is the recognition of all our duties as divine commands.

Ludwig Feuerbach: Religion is a dream, in which our own conceptions and emotions appear to us as separate existences being out of ourselves.

E.B. Tylor: Belief in spiritual things.

Emile Durkheim: a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden. . . . Beliefs and practices which unit into one single moral community a church all those adhere to them. And: Religion is only the sentiment inspired by the group in its members, but projected outside of the consciousness that experiences them, and objectified.

James G. Grazer: Religion is a propitiation or conciliation of powers superior to man which are believed to direct and control the course of nature and of human life.

Alfred North Whitehead: Religion is what an individual does with his solitariness.

William James: The very fact that they are so many and so different from one another is enough to prove that the word religion cannot stand for any single principle or essence, but is rather a collective name.

Rudolph Otto: Religion is that which grows out of and gives expression to, experience of the holy in its various aspects.

Sigmund Freud: Religion is comparable to childhood neurosis

Karl Marx: Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature. A protest against real suffering it is the opium of the people. The illusory sun which revolves around man for as long as he does not evolve around himself.

Paul Tinich: Religion is the state of being grasped by an ultimate concern, a concern which qualifies all other concerns as preliminary and which itself contains the answer to the question of the meaning of life.

Friedrich Schleiermacher: The essences of religion consist in the feeling of absolute dependence.

Hick: Religion constitutes our varied human response to transcendent reality.
1.4. Religious diversity

Many theologians consider religious diversity to be one of the most important issues of our time, it is now nearly fifty years since the distinguished theologian and historian of religion Wilfred Cantwell Smith spoke these words concerning religious diversity: “This is really as big an issue, almost, as the question of how one accounts theologically for evil but Christian theologians have been much more conscious of the fact of evil than of religious pluralism.”

Since that time, numerous Christian theologians have struggled to arrive at a Christian theology of religious that would be consistent with the new awareness of religious diversity. Therefore there seems to be some major concerns as to how we are to approach the issues or fact that there is a great plurality of religions and religious views. The differences are great and much religious diversity exists most noticeably at the level of basic theistic systems. For instance, while within Christianity, Judaism, and Islam it is believed that God is a personal deity, within Hinayana (Theravada) Buddhism God’s existence is denied and within Hinduism the concept of a personal deity is, in an important sense, illusory within many forms of Christianity and Islam, the ultimate goal is subjective immorality in God’s presence, while within Hinayana Buddhism the ultimate goal is the extinction of the self as a discrete, conscious entity.

However, significant, widespread diversity also exist within basic theistic systems. For example, within Christianity, believers differ significantly on the nature of God. Some see God as all controlling others as self-limiting, and still others as incapable in principle of unilaterally controlling any aspect of reality. Some believe God to have infallible knowledge only of all that has occurred or is occurring, others claim God also has knowledge of all that will actually occur, while those who believe God Possesses middle knowledge add that God knows all that would actually occur in any possible content. Some believe the moral principles stipulated by God for correct human behavior flow

Cantwell Smith, The faith of other men, newyork: The new American Library, 1965, P.121
from God’s nature and thus that such principles determine God’s behavior, while others believe that God acts in accordance with a different set of moral rules, that for God what is right is simply whatever God does. Some believe that only those who have consciously “given their lives to Christ” will spend eternity in God’s presence. Others believe that many who have never even heard the name of Jesus will enter God’s presence, while others yet do not even believe subjective immortality (a conscious after life) to be a reality. Muslims also differ significantly among themselves on these same divine attributes. Or consider the wide variety of Muslim perspectives on such issues as the autonomy of the individual when interpreting the Quran, how best to apply core Islamic values to modern life and the status of women.

While it is still somewhat popular in philosophical circles today to focus on diversity among basic theistic systems, there is a growing awareness that the same basic questions (and responses) that apply to inter-system diversity (for example, to differing perspectives on the most accurate basic theistic conception of God) apply just as clearly and in exactly the same sense, to intra-system diversity (for example, to differing perspectives within Christianity over the extent of God’s knowledge) and there is increasing awareness that the practical import of intra-theistic diversity is just as significant as is that of inter-theistic diversity. For most Christians for instance, the practical significance of retaining of modifying beliefs about God’s power or knowledge is just as great as retaining or modifying the belief that Christianity is a better theistic explanatory hypothesis as is Islam.21

There are at least three general ways to view the this issue, and resolve the issues of religious diversity and these are: (1) the exclusivist belief: or the belief that one’s religion is the only true religion, for example Christians, like believers of many others faith concerning their religion, have seen Christianity as the only true path to salvation and all other paths as false. (2) Inclusivism:

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this is the belief that one’s religion is truer than others. The inclusivity view is more positive about other religions. According to this approach, the grace of God is present in other traditions; therefore, members of other religions may attain salvation. (3) Pluralism: the belief that each religion has some truth that can bring souls to salvation. Pluralism takes an even more expansive view of other religions within this realm of study and though come some major questions. (1) What are the epistemological implications of the fact that there’s a plurality of different and competing religious views points? We can call this the epistemic question. (2) What does diversity imply for salvation? We can call this the stereological question (The theological study of salvation is called soteriology)

Each of these approaches has their own specific response to these questions and I will yet those responds on next chapter.

1.5. IDENTITY OF RELIGION AND TRUTH OF RELIGION

Goethe says “those who know only one language indeed do not know any language”. Likewise MaxMiiller adapts this saying into religions and says “those who know just one religion indeed do not know any religion”. All these conferences make it possible for the believers to know each other more and consequently develop common values that will encourage them to act together in order to overcome the contemporary problems. Although religions emerged in different geographical and cultural settings, they messages addresses to the very nature of the man with their common values. This commonality turns geographical differences into intellectual unity. It goes without saying that in a time when all ethnic and religious identities interact we need much more common elements unifying us. . . . . Believing in one God and creating an ethical ground for our beliefs are among leading similarities. This common ground causes us to think that human kinds have a rational and intellectual capability of understanding and then constructing what is good for the people aside from divine authority, it is this rational and intellectual capability that makes it possible for human kind to question the truth- claims of religions.
In the realm of religions, we always deal with the two concepts of ‘truth’ and ‘identity’. Religions have a ‘truth’ and an identity, the latter of which originates from the former. The formation of religious identity is a secondary phenomenon which, very much like the linguistic and national identity, is impossible to erase. The point to be borne in mind is that ‘truth’ of religious have no conflict and tension with each other and is invariably associated with peace and negotiations. On the contrary, identities, as independent personalities, are in constant conflict with each other and try to stabilize and prove their individual positions through conflict. It might be safe to claim that most of the religious disputes in the history have been caused by highlighting religious identities and neglecting the ‘truth’ about them. The emergence and spread of different religious, national and ethnic fundamentalism have their roots in paying too much attention to the identities of different religions and heeding too little or no attention to the common truth of an religions. We can keep our religious identity and maintain a harmonic attitude. We are not betraying or diluting our respective religious traditions if we follow harmonic approach.

In the last hundred years and in the minds and hearts of many enlightened people for thousands of years, humanity has become painfully aware that without religious harmony, religious peace, wholehearted tolerance, mutual religions respect and sincere openness to the other we cannot survive as a human race, nor can the individual lead a truly human existence.