CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION
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Religion has been playing a vital role in society all these ages and even in the threshold of the twenty first century the relevance of religion is well acknowledged. Basically religion is a unifying experience and it is a principle of harmonisation. Though there are numerous definitions of religion, the etymological meaning of this word religion is ‘to tie or to bind’. But unfortunately religion which is supposed to bind us all together in a wholesome way is misunderstood, misinterpreted and misused by some. This has resulted in religious fundamentalism, fanaticism and extremism. To avoid such unpleasantness in human society people should be encouraged to develop a proper understanding of other religions too. The present day world is experiencing too many religions and a plurality of religious faiths is an accepted reality in the modern societies. This plurality of religious faiths has given out a diversity of communities with separate and distinctive identities.

Each religious community has developed its own pattern of living, culture, creed, socio-political interests and son on. This at times unfortunately results in rivalry and conflicts also. Conflicts between different religious communities are becoming serious problems within nation and between nations also. India too has suffered many such problems. But this should not be allowed to continue. The human society has to realise the fact that divisions in a society based on religious communities is an accepted reality of today and it cannot be ignored. So the best and the wise thing is to accept and respect
the diversity, try to understand the uniqueness of each religion, religious community. After all people of these various religious communities have to live together, live in peace and harmony with one another. J. Russel Chandran says, "Human Solidarity is the affirmation of the objective of the unity of the human community at all level, over coming the divisiveness of the diversity of identities, including the divisiveness of religious communalism". Though we belong to different religious communities we all belong to one humanity. As human beings we belong to one family. We all love peace and harmony and we all have to live together. Human solidarity is the binding factor that makes all these different religious communities to come together. This solidarity is based on humanness or humanism.

Humanism is another basic concept which tries to bring together all these different religious communities. Religious humanism tries to achieve this through the sense of tolerance. All religions, no doubt, have concern for human beings, their culture, welfare, growth, peace and so on. The modern trend in religion is to remove the inequality among human beings, to maintain equality of all, to help the poor, and to maintain social justice. Service to humanity is recognised as service to God. Swami Vivekananda has emphasised this in his teachings. Human dignity is given more importance than religious laws and rituals. There is relevance for religions even in the computer age of today because religions try to preserve the basic humanness and human feelings of humanity. Religions tend to cater to the basic needs of human beings first and

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then help them to achieve the higher spiritual needs. All religions have this approach in some form or other and so humanism becomes the common ground for all religions to come together forgetting their differences and serve the humanity. M.M. Thomas, a Christian thinker of today talks about New Humanism. He feels that there are many dehumanising forces and activities in this world to day. So people of all religions must encounter these forces first and then try to discover God, who is the foundation of humanity, through such encounters. Thus religious humanism tries to bring all these religions and communities closer, but yet each religious group tries to maintain its uniqueness, its freedom and tries to get equal protection in the society. This idea is reflected in the concept of secularism in Indian context.

In a religiously pluralistic society like India, this term ‘secularism’ gets the widest possible connotation, to primarily mean state neutrality to religion, equal protection for all religions and religious institutions. In this meaning secularism is not the anti-thesis of religiousness, but it is a sensitivity towards diversity and pluralism. As Asghar Ali Engineer puts it, "Unity in diversity and not in uniformity is the secret of our secularism". This spirit of secularism is not new to Indian thinking though it was given a constitutional status later only. According to our former president, Dr. Shankar Dayal Sharma, the principle of Sarva Dharma Sambhava, an approach to tolerance and understanding of the equality of all religions is in Indian ethos right from

M.M. Thomas, *Salvation and Humanisation*, p.3

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the Vedic age. This spirit of secularism is now more than a passive attitude of religious tolerance has developed into acceptance of all religions and equality of all religions. Thus the concept of secularism appears to be well entrenched not only in the Indian ethos but also in the Indian Constitution and in Indian Polity as well.

To develop a better understanding of religions, to maintain peace and harmony among people of different religious communities, a very effective method, of recent origin, is Inter-Faith Dialogue.

This method is very much needed in the context of Ayodhya like incidents, religious intolerance, violence based on superiority or inferiority of religions, majority and minority in terms of number of followers of religion, wrong understanding of other religions and so on. To avoid tension, enmity among people of different faiths and to promote harmony and peace among them a proper understanding of each other's religions becomes a necessity. Inter-faith dialogue attempts this only. Dr. Karan Singh says, "Inter-Faith ecumenical dialogues are also extremely important, so that the religions are no longer in conflict, but as harmonised in a joint endeavour to save the human race from destruction" What Inter-faith dialogue is capable of doing to the modern approach to the study of religion is to help it rediscover the

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communities of other faiths not as rivals and strangers but as partners and fellow - pilgrims in the journey of life.

All these concepts like religious pluralism, religious humanism and the method of inter-faith dialogue discussed so far very clearly indicate to us that a proper understanding of religions is the need of the hour to avoid unnecessary misunderstanding, violence and so on. So a systematic study of religions is very much needed to day. Comparative study of religions is a systematic study of religions.

1.1 COMPARATIVE STUDY OF RELIGIONS

A comparative study of religions is a systematic study of the various aspects of different religions in a comparative perspective. This is an attempt to study religions independently and along with other religions. This study is a wholistic study of each religion in its historical, philosophical and other social dimensions. Comparative study of religions is also known as a science of religion because it is a rational enquiry of the truths and the contents of religion. This sort of scientific study of religion helps to remove the irrational and unjustified beliefs from religion.

The aim of comparative study of religion is not to praise any one religion or the other, but it is to find the common good in all religions. The history of different religions may offer much material for parallel study also. Myths and dogmas of different religions may be similar. Thinkers of different religions may have a common base in their contemporary interpretation of various
aspects of religions. While explaining the aim of comparative study of religions, Gilmore observes that, "the study includes the collection, collation and explanation of religious phenomena in order to discover the nature, genesis, development and laws of religion". In this way, comparative study of religions aims at giving an unbiased, realistic explanation of the different aspects of religions.

The scope and function of comparative study of religions is to bring a proper understanding of religions, a better co-operation among people of different religions and this further helps to promote religious tolerance and acceptance among people. This in turn would help very much for the peaceful co-existence of people of different religions and promote religious harmony. By analysing the different concepts of religions, comparative study of religions not only discovers the common basis of all forms of religions but also gives a scientific temper to religion. The scope and function of a comparative study of religions is to widen the area of religion by giving rational explanation to the dogmas and rituals of religions.

The scope of Gandhian approach to comparative study of religions is to appreciate the best in every religion, to promote tolerance of other faiths and to co-operate with one another in the promotion of spiritual life. Dr. Radhakrishnan feels that comparative study of religions facilitates each religion to learn more from other religion. He says, "Religions by working on

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each other should help them all to attain a great vision of human fellowship".⁷ The main function of comparative study of religions, to Radhakrishnan, is to pursue truth in an atmosphere of freedom and fullness. According to A.J. Bahm, Comparative study of religions as an "Objective Science" should be based on "Objective standard" and he says, "Comparisons of religions are based upon virtues common to all of them"⁸ As Parriender rightly observes, in comparative study of religions, "Comparison, however to be justified seriously, must not imply judgement, and still less depreciation of any faith"⁹

Comparative study of Religion as a Philosophical discipline according to Srivastava is concerned with values also. So the function of such study "is to accelerate the process of human evolution and to infuse in man the growing sense of religious sensitivity thereby furthering the inwardisation of the religious values in human society".¹⁰

In comparative study of religion there is scope for the delicate task of evaluation of religions also. As K.M. Tiwari observes, "evaluation must be made with an open mind such that standards derived from one’s own religion are not imposed upon others"¹¹ The comparisons between religions should be based on rational and ethical criteria. Comparative study of religions analyses various concepts of religions and remove the irrational and unjustified beliefs.

⁹ G. Parriender, Comparative Religion, p.22.  
¹⁰ R.S. Srivastava, Comparative Religion, p.11.  
¹¹ Kedar Nath Tiwari, Comparative Religion, p.7.
from religions. This function of comparative religion is otherwise known as "Science of Religion".

Thus, comparative study of religions proves to be a very useful attempt in understanding religions and especially during these days of unrest in the name of religion such study becomes a needed one to promote harmony among people of different faiths. The present study is an attempt in this direction only.

In each religion there are many important concepts and salvation is, no doubt, one of the very important concepts in religions. Each religion may term salvation as either mokṣa, release, liberation, mukti, nirvāṇa or the ultimate destiny of man and so on. But every religion gives atmost importance to this concept and explains this concept of salvation in their own special ways. When all religions give this much importance to this concept of salvation, it is proper for us to study in detail about this concept so as to develop a better understanding of salvation. What exactly is the meaning of salvation? How was salvation viewed in the ancient traditions? and how is it viewed to day? Is there any change in man's understanding or interpretation of salvation in the present from his understanding of it in the past? Is this concept of salvation purely spiritual or social or both? What is the relevance of this concept in the scientifically developed world of today? These are the basic questions which come naturally to our mind when we think about this concept of salvation. The present study attempts to probe into such basic questions about salvation in the light of the historical development of this concept and the contemporary
reaction to the question of salvation with regard to two world religions, namely, Christianity and Hinduism.

1.2 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To find out the meaning of salvation in the ancient religious traditions.

- To trace out the meaning of salvation in Christianity and Hinduism in the light of the historical development of these religions.

- To analyse the views of few contemporary Christian and Hindu thinkers on salvation.

- To observe the views of some present followers of Christianity and Hinduism on salvation.

- To attempt a comparison of the concept of salvation in Christianity and Hinduism wherever possible, so as to enable better understanding and closeness of these two religions.

1.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

A brief account of the historical development of Christianity and Hinduism only is attempted in this study to trace out the development of the concept of salvation in these two religions.
There are so many contemporary Christian and Hindu thinkers who have dealt with the concept of salvation, but for the present study the views of two Christian thinkers, Paul Tillich and M.M. Thomas, and two Hindu thinkers, Aurobindo and Radhakrishnan are only considered.

To observe the views of the present followers of these two religions under study, a small sample is taken into consideration.

The comparison attempted in this study between Christianity and Hinduism, in the concept of salvation, is not an eye to eye or an exact comparison but a comparison in general or a broader context.

The English translation of the scriptures of Christianity and Hinduism are accepted as authentic primary sources in this study.

1.4 METHODOLOGY

The present study is a descriptive study and library research method is adopted here. Primary and secondary sources of each religion and each thinker, under study are explored. In order to observe the views of contemporary followers of Christianity and Hinduism, survey method, by using questionnaire, is adopted.

1.5 THE SCHEME OF PRESENTATION

The present study, "Current Trends in the concept of salvation in Christianity and Hinduism - A Comparative Study", starts with a justification
of a comparative study of religions of this nature and proceeds with an analysis of the concept of salvation as found in many ancient traditions. The growth of the concept of salvation in Christianity in its historical development is traced next. Then the view of two contemporary Christian thinkers, namely Paul Tillich and M.M. Thomas on salvation are presented. The treatment of the concept of salvation in Hinduism is analysed next and then the views of two contemporary Hindu thinkers, namely, Aurobindo and Radhakrishnan on salvation are discussed. A comparison attempted in this study between Christianity and Hinduism in the concept of salvation wherever possible so as to develop better understanding of the two religions is presented. As conclusion, the possible areas of comparison, exact concepts which can be compared, relevance of such comparison, methods of comparison are explored. The views of some of the contemporary common followers of Christianity and Hinduism are elicited in this study to give a conclusion on the relevance of the concept of salvation in today's world of technological advancement.